

Can The Cyclic Meditation Intervention Help To Manage Job Stress Effectively? A Qualitative Study on Indian Information Technology Professionals

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Abstract: *Enormous increase in opportunities in Information Technology industry in India also resulted in increase of job stress among its professionals. Coping techniques employed by professionals is of paramount importance as job stress caused by informational technology industry sector has enormous health complications starting from musculoskeletal disorders to cardio-vascular diseases. In-effective management of job stress by professionals would impact their employability as well as personal lives. Yoga is an ancient science which can give comfort to body/mind complex of human being in any context of life with a disciplined practice. Here a study was done to pursue the effect of yoga based cyclic meditation practice to cope up with job stress for Indian information technology professionals. A qualitative research method was employed to gain deep insights into effects of the practice. A, 8 work week duration intervention was administered to the participants. Based on the findings derived from written experience from participants, Cyclic Meditation has potential to be chosen as one of the coping techniques for Job stress management among Indian Information Technology Professionals. Though these findings are derived for Indian context, the results are worth pursuing for international information technology professionals as well.*

Keywords: Cyclic Meditation, Yoga, Job stress, Information Technology Professional, Qualitative

1. Background

Post 1991 economic reforms, India attracted lot of private and foreign investment in business. The impact of the economic reforms were started to be seen in big way in late 90s where more number of foreign industries set up its development and manufacturing units in India, creating thousands of jobs for Indian nationals. India, having advantage of premier educational institutes of research as well as considerable percentage of English speaking population, attracted investments in information technology business sector from both Indian business firms as well as foreign business firms. In this web connected world, information technology (IT) based companies need to cater to the needs of the global market trends to stay competitive. Global Competitive markets demand IT professionals to be innovative, cost effective as well as deliver “customer liked” products on time, all the time. It all boils down to “do more with less every time on time”. This creates lot of stressful situations for IT Professionals like ever changing customer expectations, squeezed project schedules, availability of skilled professionals, availability of talented leadership pool etc. As Robbins (2001) mentioned, an individual goes through stressful condition when he/she needs to deliver on any opportunity where the perceived outcome is essential and un-predictable. Research also shown that excessive job stress can cause enormous health complications ranging from musculoskeletal disorders to cardio-vascular diseases. Indian IT professionals are more prone to Job stress related health complication due to the nature of the job they have to perform.

Though job stress is mainly governed by work-overload, role conflict and role ambiguity, any professional’s ability to withstand job related stress also depends on physical well-being, psychological wellbeing and personal life well-being. An individual who can with stand job related stress, can also turn areas of problems in the organization/industry into areas of opportunity for success. Yoga based practices are gaining

popularity in India and abroad among IT professionals. This study investigates the effects of cyclic meditation (A yoga practice based meditation technique) on Indian IT professionals. Qualitative method was used to find out the experiences from the participants` perspective.

2. Cyclic Meditation

Cyclic Meditation (C.M.) was used as an intervention for this qualitative study. Cyclic meditation was developed by SVYASA (Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samstahana), Bangalore, India. Cyclic Meditation could be shortly referred as C.M here after. C.M is inspired by a verse from Mandukya Upanishad (SanjibPatra, Shirley Tells.2009). C.M.is a set of stimulation and relaxation combine involving cycles of body postures followed by supine rest relax poses. Body postures are yoga based body postures like ardhakatichakrasana, Taadasana , Vajrasana and Ardhavustrasana. Supine rest relax posture followed is shavasana i.e dead corpse pose. Participants going through this intervention need to make their body movements very slow and continuous. Idea here is by controlling the speed of the body movements, participants can feel the energy impulses flowing in the body. While in supine rest position, participants are made aware of their body parts and asked to relax the tension if any. This is over all 40 minute practice.

3. Research Design and Methods

Qualitative methodologies could be considered to be used in cases where large range of unknown variables effect an area (Creswell, 1998). There are large range of variables like organisational variables, environment variables and individual variables which play significant role in job stress perceived by IT professionals. Hence qualitative design method was adopted for this study. Key advantage with qualitative case study is that it helps to get deeper insight into participant experiences without any prior hypothesis (Patton, 1990). Participants were selected from Bengaluru,

India office of one of the leading Multinational European Company (MNC). This MNC has its headquarters in Germany and has research and development office in Bengaluru since 1999. This company also has research and development centres in Munich (Germany), Villach (Austria), Bristol (U.K) and in Singapore. Along with that, this company has marketing presence in all continents of the world.

A,8 work week intervention was administered to the participants during working days. Participants were mix of both male and female employees. 45 employees of the selected company participated in the study which ended in Nov 2014. All the participants were not having any serious illness or were not under medical treatment during the intervention period. The age range of employees varied from 24 years to 42 years. This is a post only study. At the end of intervention period, participants were encouraged to provide their experience which they believed happened due to C.M. practice honestly. Participants were requested to provide their experience in a written format honestly without any bias or apprehension. 15 participants volunteered to share their experience in a written format. Average age of the experience sharing volunteers is about 28.9 years. A written format was provided to the volunteering participants to share their experiences.

The written format provided, has guiding questions like “describe the impact of cyclic meditation at physical level, if any”. Written format provided also left room to share any remarks which participants wanted to express freely and honestly.

4. Data Analysis

As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain, data analysis begins after collecting the data from the participants in qualitative research. Written experiences from participants were studied carefully by the researcher. By looking into the obtained data, researcher looked into pattern of experiences so that the experiences could be grouped into conceptual categories. Written data provided by volunteered participants, was grouped into four major categories of information. First one was effect of Cyclic Meditation (C.M.) on physical well-being, second one was effect of C.M. on psychological well-being, and third one was effect of C.M. on personal life and the last one being effect of C.M. on work place. As part of last category of effect on workplace, responses from participants were also carefully examined to see the effect of C.M on job stress for IT professionals.

Effect of C.M. practice on physical well-being

Due to the nature of the Job, IT professionals need to be seated in chairs before the monitors for long hours in a day. Most of the times, IT professionals might not adapt most healthy pose for the backbone which can potentially cause back bone problems. Due to regular use of mouse and key board with the computer, IT professionals are more prone to wrist pains, shoulder joint pains etc. Also due to less physical nature of the job, IT professionals are also prone to obesity issues as well body laziness issues. As IT professionals work under cool air conditions constantly, IT

professionals might also get exposed to breathing issues. As the job requires more of mind share than body share, I.T professionals might be exposed to sleep issues as there is a possibility of imbalance in effort done between body and mind in a day. Below are experiences as expressed by some of the participants.

“Usually, I do not get proper sleep in the night. Also if I sleep longer hours by chance, I use to feel tired and sleepy all the time following wakeup. C.M. sessions helped me to get proper and continuous sleep for 6 hours, which is good enough for the body to relax. (Participant#7).”

“I often used to get head-aches (sinus problem) at least thrice a week which got drastically reduced after practicing cyclic meditation. (Participant#10). “

“I use to have back pain on daily basis. When I use to get up in the morning, I use to feel the pain a lot. After I practice cyclic meditation, I have no more back pain and feeling relaxed. (Participant#12). “

“Conscious breathing as part of the meditation practice is helping to cure nasal related discomfort (Participant#5)”

Effect of C.M. practice on psychological well-being:-

As IT jobs demand more of professionals’ mind share, it is possible for IT professionals to experience un-comfortness at psychological level due to demands from work-place. Challenging projects and ambitious targets also add to impact the psychological well-being. Psychological well-being can be felt by self-awareness, self- confidence and listening capabilities. Below are experiences as expressed by some of the participants.

“I feel confident about self being and feel easy in decision making. (Participant#10)”

“I have become aware of my thoughts and body movements post Cyclic Meditation practice. (Participant#1). “

“I am able to take decisions well after analysing all the pre & post actions of decisions post Cyclic Meditation practice(Participant#2).”

“I became more patient in listening to others. (Participant#12).”

Effect of the C.M. practice on personal life:-

With ever increasing demands of I.T jobs, I.T professionals are spending much more time at workplace than at home. It would not be un-natural to say that working professionals are becoming weekend partners and/or weekend parents .This could potentially also be one of the reasons for the rise in the family outings as well as family shopping in the weekends in India, compared to earlier times. Many a jobs, demand professionals to work for the tasks even after reaching home in working days, if not in weekends. As quality time spent at home for professionals is decreasing day by day, any disturbance at home/family would disturb the work efficiency of professionals and make those

professional more prone to job stress situation. Below are experiences as expressed by some of the participants.

"I am able to manage multiple tasks without feeling anxiety and stress. (Participant #9)."

"Cyclic Meditation practice has obviously increased the patience and it helped to handle the situations and relations effectively with family and friends (Participant#3)."

"Also I must say, I am able to spend quality time with my family every evening. (Participant #15)."

Effect of C.M. practice at workplace

Some of the common challenges for Indian Information Technology sector projects are, lack of sufficiently skilled resources availability, need to execute multiple projects simultaneously, ambitious project timelines, role ambiguity for employees, ever demanding customer expectations (which can also result in canning of projects), non-availability of sufficiently experienced leadership and cross cultural communicational challenges. Due to the challenges listed, I.T professionals may have challenging times in handling work related discussions/risk management/schedules which can potentially impact work efficiency, resulting in job related stress. Support from sub-ordinates/peers as well as supervisors, is also crucial for performing assigned tasks efficiently. Responses from Participant experience sharing document were also examined to assess the impact of Cyclic Meditation at workplace. Below are experiences as expressed by some of the participants.

"I feel relaxed and able to solve problems in a better way without getting tensed. (Participant #1)."

"I am able to focus on work with greater intensity and am able to manage work schedules more effectively (Participant #7)"

"I feel effectiveness in my way of approach in handling discussions which helped to increase my productivity (Participant#3)."

Effect of C.M on Job related stress management

Participants' responses were also carefully examined to assess the effect of C.M. in handling job related stressful situations. Ability to work with cool mind is the key for stressful job situations. It is also important to respond appropriately for work place discussions else it would have negative spiral effect on Job stress. Ability to complete tasks even under stressful situations is key for professional's success. Below are experiences as expressed by some of the participants.

"Compared to before, Under stress situations, I can work easily with cool mind and complete the tasks successfully without errors. (Participant #10)."

"It helped to reduce tensions at work place and I feel relaxed in taking decisions compared to before. (Participant #12)."

"Earlier due to more stress, sometimes I tend to react to situations hastily. With a relaxed body and mind, I am able

to appropriately respond to situations at work place.(Participant #15)."

5. Result Discussion

Results due to C.M. practice are encouraging as expressed by participants. Participants experienced positive effects at physical well-being as well as psychological well-being due to C.M. practice. Practice helped some participants to reduce uncomforness due to body ailments like sinus problem and back pain issues. All participants who had quality sleep issues, experienced a good quality sleep due to practice of Cyclic Meditation. C.M. practice also helped to reduce the nasal related discomfort for some participants. Some Participants reported more of self- awareness and self-confidence as expressed in written experience. C.M practice also has positive effect on decision making capability as well as on listening capability as expressed by few participants. Some participants experienced positive effect in personal lives in terms of handling situations and relations effectively. A quality time spent in personal time helps to tackle work related issues as well as job stress effectively. Most of the participants experienced positive effect at work place in terms handling discussions, risk forecasting and in adopting systematic problem solving. Some of the participants also experienced ability to handle job stress effectively and able to deliver on the tasks without errors under stressful conditions. Some participants also expressed enhancement in their ability to respond appropriately in work related situations.

6. Limitations

The average age of the participants under this study is around 29 years. Also to generalize these finding more number of participants to be covered bringing the average age of the participant close to 40 years. This study is currently done in one I.T , M.N.C company. Doing similar study in more I.T, M.N.C companies would give more promising outcomes which might support existing findings more robustly or modify some of the findings. Triangulation might be helpful to generalize these current findings by using a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods. However present study gives a solid platform for future studies on job stress management in I.T professionals using yoga based interventions like Cyclic Meditation. To enrich this study, future research can also consider women specific job stress as well as, study on IT enabling sector like B.P.O industry

7. Conclusions

Cyclic Meditation practice helped IT professionals for enhancing their physical and psychological well-being. Cyclic Meditation also helped to spend quality time in personal lives of IT professionals. This intervention also helped to manage work related tasks effectively .Though organization and environment variables play significant role in impacting job stress for Indian IT professionals, a well thought through and relaxed attitude from individual also plays positive effect in alleviating the Job stress for Indian IT professionals to greater extent. Cyclic Meditation practice

would help modify IT professional response to job stress so that, not only he/she would not become scape-goat to health complications due to job stress, but it also enables the IT professional to perform efficiently at work place despite of stressful work conditions.

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