

Yoga intelligence in function of the alleviation of burnout syndrome

Predrag Nikić*, Bosiljka Janjušević
*International Society for Scientific Interdisciplinary Yoga Research
Belgrade, Serbia*

Abstract: *This paper analyzes the extent to which yoga practice can help to increase the ability of stress management (yoga stress management) and alleviation of the burnout syndrome at work using the concept of yoga intelligence as a tool for management of the employees' potential. Yoga is seen as a form of intelligence, bearing in mind that it integrates the capabilities that help to establish a balance between the physiological, emotional, cognitive and motivational processes. Yoga concept is based on the existence of latent potentials and possibilities for their recognition, understanding and usage. Preventive management of employees' potential by practicing yoga increases stress resistance and relieves the causes for the occurrence of burn-out at work. Managing stress with yoga practice was used in order to verify the extent to which we can alleviate burn-out syndrome at work, bearing in mind that the primary factor in the appearance of burn-out syndrome is stress. There were assessed 60 patients who were diagnosed with burnout syndrome. They were assessed before and after the six-month program of yoga practice by the burn-out assessment questionnaire (Shiro-Melamed Burnout Questionnaire, 1992) and yoga intelligence questionnaire (Nikić, 2011). Alleviation of burn-out syndrome was observed in all four indicators (fatigue, mental fatigue, indifference and tension) as well as statistically significant difference in most indicators of yoga intelligence in all patients who managed stress by practicing yoga.*

Key words: *yoga intelligence, stress, burnout at work, stress management by yoga practice (yoga stress management)*

Introduction

In this paper, stress management by yoga practice is aimed at ensuring readiness to stressors, especially overcoming the occurrence of chronic stress in order to improve daily functioning and alleviate burnout syndrome at work. Stress produces many symptoms that vary depending on person, situation and demands. Stress usually accompanies the decline in physical health and burnout syndrome at work occurs frequently, as well. The process of stress management can improve the quality of life but also affect the performance at work. Previous studies indicate that application of the combination of individual and organizational strategies is the best prevention of the burnout syndrome at work. Changes in individual factors are related to coping with the challenges through learning the skills (yoga relaxation, yoga meditation, yoga breathing).

Stress is normal generalized psycho-physiological activation reaction to the threats that come from the environment and to the demands that come from the working environment. The state too intense, frequent and long-term stress that employees cannot successfully manage represents a problem for the employee and the organization. Working and living environment is full of excessive mental and physical demands.

* Corresponding author: nikic.predrag@gmail.com

Employees in the organizations are affected by constant tension, short deadlines, isolation, conflicts, mobbing and unpleasant working atmosphere. Stress primarily affects the health and safety of the individual, but also the organizations whose employees work under the stress. The organization is largely responsible for the induction of stress in employees and more frequent occurrence of burnout syndrome at work.

Burnout syndrome

Burnout Syndrome is a mental condition that is defined as an individual's exhaustion of the energy resources as the result of continuous and long-term exposure to stress, primarily associated with psychosocial factors at work place (Shiromi et al, 2006). Maslach and associates originally defined burnout as a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced efficiency or personal achievement, which makes this scale multidimensional construct (Maslach, 2001). Melamed and associates perceive burnout also as a multidimensional construct that consists of emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue and cognitive fatigue, which together constitute the basic components of burnout (Melamed et al, 1992). The tenth revision of the International Classification of Diseases (World Health Organization, 1992) involves burnout syndrome as a condition of vital exhaustion (Z73.0). The diagnostic criteria include the presence of excessive and persistent fatigue, emotional instability and cognitive fatigue as a result of long-term exposure to stress.

Burnout syndrome at work occurs in the employees who were exposed to emergency psychosocial stress in the workplace. It occurs when a person dedicated to their work they realize that their employment was not enough or good quality in order to achieve the desired objectives.

Burnout syndrome at work is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment. It occurs as a delayed response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors associated with the workplace. The reasons for its appearance are unreconciled relationships between employees on the one hand and the working environment on the other. It occurs more often in people who perform tasks related to work and communicate with people. Professional tasks and problems influence the appearance of emotional fatigue. The ambivalent attitude toward working tasks, lack of the support of associates and reduced work capacity strengthen the sense of reduced self-evaluation and low personal accomplishment. Burnout syndrome is common in people who tend towards perfectionism, who have high expectations and estimations related to themselves and their own work. The combination of high demands of the workplace and low autonomy of employees who perform business tasks, as well as expressed emotional exhaustion are the most common reasons for appearance of the burnout at work syndrome.

Burnout syndrome at work is present in about 28% of the people in the countries of the European Union, excluding the states of Eastern Europe. Bearing in mind that the primary cause of the burnout at work syndrome is stress, one should know that stress is at the second place on the list of the most frequent health problems in the EU. The number of people suffering from stress and burnout rises. European Agency for Safety and Health at Work indicates that stress at the workplace is present in one third of employees in the European Union. In the EU, stress at work includes 28% or 41,2 million workers. Approximately 5 million accidents at work are caused by the presence of stress. The data indicate a financial loss of at least 20 billion euros annually. In 50-60% of cases, stress is the cause of lost working days. Lack of readiness to stress and effects of stress in employees cost the US economy 150 billion dollars annually.

The causes of burnout syndrome at work

Among the most common causes of burnout syndrome at work are: long-term exposure to stress, frustrations caused by the efforts of everyday life, ineffective strategies of employees in their work with

clients, conflict of double roles, emotional exhaustion due to over-ambitious tasks, unsupportive working environment. The presence of burnout syndrome at work among employees is visible in appearance of impersonality (indifference) in relation to colleagues and work (alienation), decreasing of working efficiency, reduction of personal engagement and tendency to self-depreciation. In employees for whom important becomes unimportant, significant becomes insignificant, where the energetic turns into exhaustion, commitment to cynicism, and efficiency in inefficiency, we can talk about the first symptoms of burnout. The factors of the situation indicate that burnout syndrome at work can result out of workplace characteristics, overload with working tasks, length of working hours and workload, frequent conflicts and lack of support from colleagues, characteristics related to clients (contacts with clients, frequency of contact), work that involves dealing with death, relation work - emotions (emotions management - suppression or expression - compassion), organizational characteristics.

Individual factors indicate that the appearance of the burnout syndrome at work can be affected by demographic characteristics: age (immanent to younger population), gender (not identified differences), marital status (more common among unmarried), level of education (more common in people with the lower level of education), personality traits (less brave, with decreased self-esteem, an employees who avoid facing the problems), relation toward the workplace (high expectations). Clinical picture of the burnout syndrome at work is characterized by emotional exhaustion, fatigue and depression, more pronounced psychological symptoms and behavioral disorders than physical symptoms, relation of the symptoms with workplace, decrease in work efficiency and success in work, negative attitude towards work. Burnout syndrome at work has the following symptoms: physical - long-term presence of malaise, fatigue, chronic undefined physical disabilities and pains like headache, back pain, stomach problems, insomnia; symptoms related to behavior: anxiety, irritability, nervousness, anger, impulsiveness, explosiveness, the use of opiates, problems with relations in family, marriage or at work; cognitive and affective symptoms: hypersensitivity, closeness, emotional rigidity, sadness, pessimism, helplessness, a sense of loss, a sense of hopelessness, low mood, lack of attention.

Burnout syndrome at work is manifested in four stages: working enthusiasm is the first phase in which the employee is dedicatedly committed to the tasks, he/she meets the needs of colleagues and clients he/she works with and doesn't allow himself/herself too much of a daily rest. The engagement is accompanied with high level of expectations of themselves, organization and clients. The second phase is characterized by disappointment. Due to the unmet expectations, they are transformed into disappointment and dissatisfaction. There is visible stagnation in interpersonal relationships with co-workers, family and friends. Employee manifests emotional vulnerability and distrust. The next phase is characterized by emotional withdrawal and isolation. The work is experienced as worthless and meaningless. For the first time, there are visible signs of physical exhaustion. The fourth phase is characterized by apathy and loss of everyday interests. It represents a kind of defense against chronic dissatisfaction at work. Self-confidence and initial enthusiasm turn into cynicism and indifference along with the occurrence of the loss of confidence in themselves and their abilities.

Stress management by practicing program of yoga as prevention of burnout syndrome at work

Strategies to overcome the burnout syndrome at work recognize two types of interventions. The first one is repairing the syndrome – when the burnout syndrome is already present. Another form of intervention is related to the implementation of prevention programs. The goal is to assist employees who experience the burnout syndrome at work to find new skills that could reduce it. Two strategies are recommended - one is focused on cognitive functions and the other one is focused on physical activities and relaxation. Both programs lead to prevention of psychological problems and fatigue. Our research indicates that the factors of situation (organizational) and individual factors (adoption of new skills) have the same role in prevention of the burnout syndrome at work.

The employees experience stress when there is an imbalance between the demands addressed to them and the necessary resources, which should answer close the loop. Employees working stimulans lose when you do not confirm their high expectations. Managing Stress with Yoga is a response (set of procedures, techniques, and organizational solutions) to present an unwillingness to stress, in order to reduce the stress to an acceptable level and reduce side effects. Organizations carefully perform professional selection of implementing the principle of "the right man in the right job," because then the inconsistency of work and its perpetrators smallest.

Preventive implementation of yoga training in the organization can increase personal and professional skills of employees, because the greater abilities contribute to the greater harmony and better adaptability of employees. The following yoga procedures and techniques are part of the training conducted in organizations: *asanas*, yoga meditation and yoga relaxation and lectures about yoga as a lifestyle. The organizational culture and quality of interpersonal relationships in the organization significantly influence the prevention of stress and burnout syndrome. The organizational culture that is fostered on the principles of trust, openness and mutual respect reduces social pressure in employees. In such an organizational culture, there are created conditions for employees to express their fears, insecurities and talk about specific problems. Practicing yoga can be a good mechanism for adoption of the proclaimed values and norms that make the culture of the organization. The prevention of stress can also be influenced by having more information about the plans and requirements of the organization, difficulties at work, the ambitions of the organization as well as the possibility of participation in making decisions and setting common goals by employees. Organizational harmony can be encouraged by the activities aimed at linking organizations and families of employees. The common practice of yoga, joint family yoga excursions, yoga camping can affect better connections between employees, better communication, better interpersonal relationships, increase the sincere interest of managers for employees and prevent burnout syndrome.

Yoga in preventing the burnout syndrome at work

Preventive yoga stress management involves a set of techniques and procedures aimed at improving individual and organizational health, with the goal to eliminate the adverse effects of stress and to alleviate burnout syndrome. Organizations are engaged in detecting stress and finding the prevention programs, but also rehabilitation of employees who have been exposed to stress for a long period of time and factors that may affect the appearance of burnout syndrome. Managing stress by yoga practice focuses on the employee as an individual, although it is often present in programs aimed at the organization, with the goal of harmonizing relations between employees and organization.

Programs of stress management by practicing yoga focused on employees

The program is linked to individuals - employees and it equally applies to all human resources in the company. Managing stress with yoga practice helps employees to solve their personal problems related to stress and they are often focused on the symptoms and effects of exposure to stressors. Employees are not equally exposed to stressors nor are they equally resistant to stressful situations.

Managing stress with yoga practice is equally applied at the individual level to relieve stress as a way to help employees and as the training programs for stress management which enables individual to manage stress independently.

Stress management programs focused on organization

Stress management programs aimed at organization influence the environment that produces stress, they reduce stressful conditions. These programs are characterized by the focus on eliminating sources of stress and the fact that they effect a large number of employees.

Key determinants of these stress management programs are: changes in the organizational structure with clearly defining working roles and organizational expectations, properly identified and visible criteria for measuring working performance, successful management of changes, direct communication, teamwork, decentralized decision-making.

Yoga in function of the lifestyle changes of employees in organization

Promoting a healthy lifestyle is one of the tasks of human resource management in the organization. Intellectual work increasingly requires long stays with a personal computer which affects less physical mobility of employees. Practicing yoga in organizations is conducted in different modalities: before or after business hours. It is increasingly implemented during the break as the form of active rest. *Asanas* (yoga postures) that are conducted in the working premises or in the hall prepared for that, influence the greater muscle blood flow, increased vital lung capacity but also improve concentration and employees' satisfaction. Management of the organizations increasingly provide facilities for yoga practice for human resources at all levels. For the management team, there is implemented a special program of stress management that complies with the specific challenges that they are exposed to.

Stress management by practicing yoga techniques

Yoga has many techniques that can help increase the readiness for stress and alleviate the burnout syndrome. *Yama* and *niyama* are the corpuses that allow the creation of life philosophy and humane system of values. *Asanas* (postures) as the most famous yoga techniques ensure the vitality of all physiological systems. Corpus of the breathing techniques (*pranayama*) provides psycho-physical health but also affects the increased oxygenation of vital organs. Relaxation and meditation techniques enable users to connect more deeply with their potentials. The task of the yoga techniques is to help the human resources to relieve stress. By practicing yoga human resources find emotional relief and source of strength for readiness for the future stressful challenges.

Yoga intelligence

Yoga in direct translation means unity. Thus, yoga means fragmentation, disunity offering their methods for connecting into the unit. Absence of the contradictory tendencies is to be realized by focusing (*ekagratachita*). This kind of composure stops abiding of the consciousness in fragments by offering a new comprehensive and immediate perception.

Yoga practice allows reaching the interlocking, i.e. calming down the parts of the turning consciousness (*yogash chitta vrtti nirodha*¹. I: 2, *Patanjali*) and abiding of the practitioner in his/her essential being, i.e. authentic I.

Regular yoga practice encourages the development of specific psychological set of capabilities that is unique to yogis. This insight was the basis for creating a concept that combines the abilities that characterize yoga practitioners. This unique set of abilities is called yoga intelligence.

¹ Nirodha – suspension

We can perceive yoga intelligence as a complex adaptive system that encourages the constant transformation of the elements within the system. Yoga practice transforms our perception of reality. Yogi searches for the deeper meanings. Yoga practice enables individual to integrate all fields of the life activities through the discourse of the purpose and meaning. Yoga intelligence integrates important abilities that make human life. We should not forget that emotions are experiences of our evaluation and subjective relations to things, events and our own actions. Therefore, yoga intelligence is the ability to manage one's own development while searching for the purpose in the process of making aware, understanding and management of cognition (knowing), affects and motivation (Nikić, 2011).

The concept of yoga intelligence

The conducted researches were aimed to determine whether the practice of yoga strengthens specific skills in practitioners over the course of the time for which it is possible to scientifically confirm that they have achieved stability and durability. Perception in yoga practitioner changes on multiple levels (Nikić, 2011): in awareness, understanding and managing energy movements; physiologically - increasing the level of vital capacity; emotionally - in recognizing, understanding and expressing one's feelings, compassion, mental clarity, creative outbursts in the form of the need for realization of ideas in creative enthusiasm, strengthening the sense of security that arises from the strengthening of support within and ability to realize the meaning. These developmental changes appear as the result of approaching the authentic "I" or "core". More specifically, there is an expansion of perception (perceptual field) as response of the core after yoga practice.

Yoga intelligence can be defined as the ability to use potentials as a whole, the ability to recognize, understand and manage the deepest meanings and goals while searching for the meaning, the ability to recognize unpredictable living circumstances as milestones for development and maturation, mainly relying on the depth of yoga experience, i.e. insight, with the aim of achieve unity - the state of *samadhi* and freedom (*moksha*), i.e. unconditionedness.

Yoga intelligence as the model of ability

People of equal education and equal practice achieve various successes in carrying out certain activities. This difference in success is attributed to the abilities. If there is invested an equal effort to carry out the activity and there is equal motivation, the success in realization depends on two factors: the hereditary basis of (innate disposition) and experience (exercises and previous activities). The capabilities are personality traits that affect the difference in successfully carrying out certain activities, if there is already a similar experience and equal motivation to successfully complete the activity.

Table 1. Yoga intelligence construct

YOGA INTELLIGENCE	
AWARENESS	MANAGEMENT
1. ENERGY PROCESSES 2. PHYSIOLOGICAL PROCESSES 3. MOTIVATIONAL PROCESSES (SELF-MOTIVATION) 4. EMOTIONAL PROCESSES 5. CREATIVE PROCESSES 6. SOCIAL RELATIONS 7. CONATIVE PROCESSES 8. FOCUS OF ATTENTION (CONCENTRATION) 9. REALIZATION OF THE MEANING	

It has been presumed that yoga practice includes awareness of the harmonious activity of all physiological systems (nervous, respiratory, cardiovascular, muscular, digestive, urinary, skeletal), the ability of daily care (regulation), as well as managing some of the processes.

Subject and purpose of the research

The subject of this paper is to explore the extent to which yoga intelligence can be an instrument of stress management in organizations. There was set the goal to examine the differences in yoga intelligence of the employees who practiced the program “yoga stress management – YSM” and employees who are not practicing yoga program (control group). We analyzed the possibility that long-term practice of yoga techniques improves the ability to respond adequately to the stress that is an essential part of the working environment and reduces the level of burnout.

We consider the assumption that practicing yoga (YSM - yoga stress management) leads to a better tolerance of the stressful life and business situations and easier overcoming of the lack of balance and a sense of powerlessness, which allows the better view of the problem and its resolution, the possibility of renewal of energy and efficiency in everyday life.

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 people, aged between 35 and 45 years, in whom there was diagnosed burnout syndrome, who worked on similar working tasks in six financial institutions in Serbia. There were 10 employees from each organization who have worked on similar working tasks. Respondents were randomly divided into two groups. The first group consisted of 30 employees (19 men and 11 women) with whom there was implemented the program of YSM during the period of 6 months (twice a week for 1 hour and 30 minutes there were conducted: *asanas* (postures), full yoga breathing as well as *pranayama: ujjayi, kapalabhati* and *bhastrika*, *ekagrata* (concentration exercises), *pratyahara* and physical and mental relaxation (yoga relaxation and meditation). Once a week, participants had attended one-hour lectures on yoga as a healthy lifestyle. The control group consisted of workers, 30 of them (20 men and 10 women) - who have never practiced yoga. The respondents of the control group attended the program of recreational physical exercise, three times a week for an hour. Employees (practitioners of yoga and non-practitioners) filled out questionnaires before and after the program. Among the groups there were no statistically significant differences in gender, age, yoga intelligence coefficient and index of burnout at the moment prior to the implementation of treatment/program (Table 2). The survey was conducted in 2014, represented both sexes, different education, 35 to 45 years old.

Table 2. Median and minimal and maximal values of age, coefficient of yoga intelligence and index of burnout before the treatment/program

Group	Age	YI	SMBQ
Employees who participated in the program of YSM	37 (35,25)	396,5 (340, 419)	4,73 (3,95; 4,96)
Control group	37 (35,25)	398 (390, 417)	4,57 (3,89; 4,96)
p-values*	p= 0,881	p=0,672	p=0,203

*Man-Whitney U test, $\alpha < 0,05$

Method

This paper is a research in which there was used experimental method of studying the differences between employees - yoga practitioners and employees who went through the program of recreational physical exercise, and who have never practiced yoga. For the purpose of processing data, there were used quantitative and qualitative statistical techniques. Statistical analysis was performed in SPSS version 21. T-test for independent samples and Man-Whitney test were used for estimation the coefficient differences between groups, t-test for paired samples and correlation analysis were used to analyze the variance within groups.

Measuring instruments

For measuring the magnification of the level of capabilities that are characteristic for yoga practitioners we used the instrument YI (Nikić, 2011). The burnout level was measured by the questionnaire Shiro-Melamed Burnout Questionnaire (SMBQ) (Melamed et al, 1992).

Results of the research and discussion

The research results indicate demonstrated differences in the groups in favor of employees who practiced yoga (YSM).

After the program was conducted, there was noticed a significant difference ($p \leq 0.001$) in the coefficient of yoga intelligence between groups of employees who went through the program of yoga practice (YSM) (employees - yoga practitioners) and employees who didn't practice yoga, but the program of recreational physical exercises (Table 3).

Table 3. Values of the coefficient of yoga intelligence after the treatment (median, minimum and maximum) and analysis of variance between the groups

Group	Coefficient YI	Probability (P value)
Employees who participated in the program of YSM	459 (409, 478)	$p \leq 0,001$
Control group	402 (390, 419)	

*Man-Whitney U test, $\alpha < 0,05$

There was noticed statistically significant difference ($p \leq 0.001$) in the burnout index between groups of employees who practiced yoga (employees – yota practitioners) and employees who didn't practice yoga, but the rogram of recreational physical excercises (Table 4).

Table 4. Values of the burnout index (SMBQ) after the treatment (means and SD) and analysis of variance between the groups

group	burnout index SMBQ	probability (P value)
Employees who participated in the program of YSM	$2,69 \pm 0,76$	$p \leq 0,001$
Control group	$4,48 \pm 0,12$	

*Man-Whitney U test, $\alpha < 0,05$

In the group of the employees who participated in the YSM program there was noticed statistically significant difference before and after the treatment for both parameters – coefficient of yoga intelligence ($p \leq 0.001$) and burnout index ($p \leq 0.001$), while in the control group there were not noticed statistically significant differences ($p = 0,43$, $p = 0,21$). In 24 respondents (86,7%) from the group of employees who participated in the YSM program, there was noticed reduction of the burnout index below the limiting value 3,75 that indicates existence of the burnout syndrome, while burnout index was reduced in 4 respondents (13,3%), but it remained above the limiting value of 3,75 (Table 5).

Table 5. Percentage of successful treatment in the group of employees who went through the YSM program

Employees who participated in the program of YSM	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Success in therapy	26	86,7
Failure in therapy	4	13,3

Table 6. The values of the coefficient of yoga intelligence and burnout index within the group of employees who went through the YSM program

Employees who participated in the program of YSM	Coefficient YI	Burnout index SMBQ
	Mean and Standard Deviation	
Respondents who succeeded in therapy	457,96±15,34	2,46±0,5
Respondents who didn't succeed in therapy	415,25±5,56	4,21±0,14

Within the yoga group there was a significant negative correlation between the coefficient of yoga intelligence and burnout indexes, as well as between the coefficient of yoga intelligence and all four domains of burnout index: physical exhaustion, listlessness, tension and weariness (Table 7).

Table 7. Values of Pearson's coefficient of correlation between yoga intelligence and burnout indexes after the treatment for employees who went through the six-month Yoga Stress Management program (YSM)

Domains of the burnout index	Pearson's Correlation
SMBQ after	-,431*
listlessness	-,488**
exhaustion	-,324
tension	-,341
weariness	-,396

The research results indicate that there is a correlation between the YSM program and reduction of the burnout symptoms in employees who went through the YSM program. Within the group of employees

who went through the YSM program, better effects of treatment were achieved in respondents with a higher coefficient of yoga intelligence (Table 6), which indicates that the coefficient of yoga intelligence can be an important factor that contributes to the effectiveness of the YSM program.

Conclusion

By practicing yoga one gains greater insight into one's perception, reactions and behavior in the everyday situations which makes it easier to overcome stress. The observed difference in the values of yoga intelligence between groups of employees - yoga practitioners and employees who didn't practice yoga is expected and hypothesis was confirmed because the yoga practice develops very specific capabilities that enable employees to amortize stress more skillfully thus preventing the possibility of burnout syndrome. Yoga practice can help prevent the appearance of burnout syndrome because in all six organizations there were recorded 64 regular practitioners of yoga, out of which nobody had visible consequences of stress nor the presence of burnout syndrome. However, we should emphasize the importance of achieved results of yoga stress management in the function of the rehabilitation of burnout syndrome.

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