



7 Workplace Challenges You Overcome With Yoga

EMPLOYEE WELLBEING INSIGHTS



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7 WORKPLACE CHALLENGES YOU OVERCOME WITH YOGA

There is much scientific evidence, and millions of yogis across the globe will confirm it, too: Yoga helps you feel better and tackles your joint pain, back pain, and stress symptoms.

But how can yoga help you deal with workplace challenges, advance your career and even be a better leader? I have gathered some of the recent research, and what I found, is astounding: **If you want to have a great career and want to be a better leader, yoga can help you!**



Yoga and Employee Motivation

Motivation is a desire, need or drive inside of you, to change, either yourself or your environment.

There are many facets to the psychological concept of motivation. It's something that makes you get up in the morning, it makes you do what you need to do to achieve a goal. Motivation at work is the secret juice that leaders want to tap into.

Motivated employees are more open to learning, doing, innovating and achieving for themselves, and the organisation. Research shows that exercise has a positive impact on motivation (1), and yoga specifically, has a significant effect on brain areas involved in motivation, and higher executive functions (2). The same study shows that yoga increases grey matter volume, aka the size of your brain! **Result: Yoga increases your employees' motivation.**



Yoga and Employee Productivity

Productivity means mobilising energy and attention effectively over a period of time, and getting an outcome from this effort.

A 2018 study in India analysed the impact of yoga on employee productivity (quality of work improves over time, eagerness to learn, customer satisfaction improvements, reduced service cycle times, deadlines met, ability to deliver results under imperfect conditions). The study showed that yoga had a significant positive impact on these measures (3). **Result: Yoga increases your employees' productivity.**



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Yoga and Employee Innovation & Creativity

Brain cells create ideas, stress kills brain cells. Yoga is highly effective in stress management (4), making it one of the best interventions to rejuvenate brain cells (5) and restore them for creativity and innovation.

Dance-like exercise and Hatha Yoga have both shown to improve divergent thinking (generating creative ideas to find solutions for problems) immediately after the exercise, and with a lasting effect hours beyond ((6) and (7)).

Creative thinking is key for your organisation if you want to innovate and problem solve, so you can not only survive as a business, but thrive! A key characteristic in unicorn startups is disruptive innovation: bringing disruption to the industry they operate in, elevating them beyond existing measure. It's their employees' creative, innovative, problem solving behaviour that gets them there.

Result: Yoga increases your employees' divergent thinking capabilities and creativity.

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Yoga and Teamwork & Conflict Resolution

There is not a lot of scientific research yet on the effects of yoga on teamwork, or conflict resolution. Whilst I can attest to yoga building community, I had to think a little bit outside the box, and consider what teamwork and conflict resolution come down to: the relationship to oneself and others.

In 2019 researchers at the Arizona State University looked at how yoga impacts connections with oneself and others, and they demonstrated that yoga has an effect on both compassion and social connectedness through increases in mindfulness within each yogi, between them and other people (8).

Yoga practice makes you a nicer person to be around, and, thus, yoga practice at work can influence on the relationships between your staff. Eugene Harry, MD says that "Yoga involves not just movement, but it also really focuses on mindfulness and breath. It's like a meditation in motion. If you're able to think more clearly, be more goal-oriented, and remove negative thinking, that makes you a nicer person." (9)



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Suramya Mathai, Assistant Professor at St. Joseph's Training College, Kerala, and working with the Ghandi Peace foundation states that "yoga helps to develop qualities like positive thinking, inner peace, compassion, skill for non violent conflict resolution, respect for the self and others, which are regarded as components of peace behaviour." (10)

There is every reason to believe that a regular yoga practice will help create a culture of positive team relationships and conflict resolution. **Result: Yoga helps team relationships and conflict resolution.**



Yoga and Employee Engagement

Gallup's simple definition of employee engagement is that "engaged employees are involved in and enthusiastic about their work and workplace" (11). Employee engagement is key to performance and satisfaction measures:

- 56% of leaders say their organisation has achieved positive ROI from its investment in employee engagement (12).
- 92% of leaders believe that organisations with engaged employees have happier customers (12).

There is a bi-directional link between positive employee engagement and wellbeing. "Employee engagement is foundational to improving the wellbeing and resilience of a workforce because it contains elements of communication, caring, development, involvement and collaboration. These elements set the stage for developing trust -- which opens the door for addressing overall wellbeing." (11)

Employee engagement affects every important aspect of your organisation, including commercial success, customer experience, employee turnover, and many more. I could not find any scientific research that looked at the link between yoga and employee engagement, but looking at the characteristics of engaged employees, they seem familiar!

Engaged employees are innovative, good team players, and motivated (13), and have an impact on organisational excellence. **Result: Through fostering employees' creative, relational and motivational skills, yoga helps them to engage.**



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Yoga and Employee Happiness

Happiness may sound just a little too soft, too unprofessional for some business leaders - but it is possibly the magic bullet you have been looking for:

- Research by the University of California shows that happiness promotes career success and positive workplace outcomes (14)
- Oxford University's Saïd Business School has found a conclusive link between happiness and productivity: "happy employees do not work more hours than their unhappy colleagues, they are simply more productive within their time at work" (15)
- Extensive research at the Bond University School of Business concludes that "happiness at work is likely to be the glue that retains and motivates the high-quality employees of the future" (16)

You intuitively know that it is imperative for your organisation's success to have happy employees. But how does yoga make people happier?

For thousands of years, yoga practitioners have known the benefits of practicing yoga. I see yoga's impact on our students' happiness every single day. Not leaving it up to hearsay and anecdotal evidence, though, there are many recent studies that have shown yoga can make you happier, I have pulled out two for this article:

- Just one hour of yoga changes a neurotransmitter in the brain called GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid). Higher GABA levels associate with lower levels of anxiety and depression, and an improved mood (17).
- Several studies have shown that the ability to regulate the breath and become aware of it is vital in lowering stress. Being able to regulate emotions and stress leads to feeling happier (18).

Result: Yoga makes your employees happier and happy employees are more productive and engaged. It does not take years of yoga practice either.



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Yoga and Organisational Leadership

Leadership plays a twofold role in addressing organisational challenges with yoga.

Firstly, there has to be a top down belief that yoga isn't woo mumbo jumbo psychobabble pushed upon you by hippies. That's why I have included many respectable research resources in this article (and there are many more where these came from).

Secondly, your leadership style can be influenced by yoga. There are many modern and hyper successful business leaders that preach empathy, compassion and kindness as key leadership skills, above all other skills, Gary Vaynerchuk being a current prominent example. Many leaders rely on the "quiet rituals" to calm and de-stress them, to give them space for their best thinking (19).

Leila Naderi focused her PhD research paper on the question of the effect of frequency of yoga practice on authentic leadership, and her findings showed that leaders who practice yoga consistently have significantly higher self-reported authentic leadership characteristics. Self-awareness, balanced processing, reasoning all were positively affected by regular yoga practice (20).

Result: Yoga can make you a better leader.



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How can you and your organisation benefit from yoga?

Whether you are a sole trader, a micro-business, a small SME or a large global organisation, the above challenges are reoccurring across the board.

I want to highlight the significant positive effects of yoga on organisational challenges, and show that a yoga programme is not only highly effective, it is also easy to put in place and cheap.

Yoga combines movement, breathing and meditative elements, offering a unique way to not only build physical health, but also offer mind breaks, community building and positivity.

Professor Alex Edmans from the London Business School notes that businesses with positive cultures and satisfied employees outperform their competitors (21).



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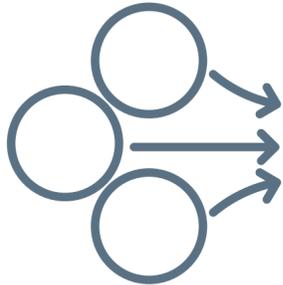
TL; DR

Yoga can help your organisation by having a positive effect on your employees:

- Yoga increases your employees' motivation, productivity and creativity.
- Yoga helps team relationships and conflict resolution.
- Yoga helps people to be engaged employees.
- Yoga makes your employees happier and happy employees are more productive and engaged.
- Yoga can make you a better leader



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About the Author: Sandra has years of experience not only as a yoga teacher working with organisations and leaders, but also as a senior manager in global organisations, where she experienced every aspect of organisational pressure and challenge for over two decades. Sandra has postgraduate qualifications in Education (MEd), Management Information Systems (MSc), Marketing (PGDIP), Employee Engagement (PGDIP), and Positive Psychology (PGCert). She qualified as a yoga teacher in 2018, and trained further in the practices of Yin yoga, Mindful Meditation and Mindfulness Based Flourishing. Sandra founded Unwind Yoga Studio, Maidenhead in 2020.





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