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Kavallerie Wellness Story: Trust, Performance Feedback and Workforce Design in a Growing Startup

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Abstract. Kavallerie Wellness, founded by former army officer Kartik Dutt, evolved from pandemic-era pro bono classes into a high-demand online yoga business. To scale his interactive methodology, Dutt implemented a workforce model built on four pillars: gig-based revenue sharing, restrictive non-competes, developmental socialisation, and a partnership-oriented culture. However, this structure created a severe internal rift. While keeping costs flexible, it caused financial insecurity, emotional strain from customer feedback, and reduced trust, leading to very low trainer engagement. With India's yoga market projected to reach $12.6 billion by 2030 and 70% of practitioners seeking relief from burnout, Dutt faces a critical juncture. Having exhausted his initial talent network, he must decide whether to retain his gig-revenue model or pivot to a redesigned workforce structure that sustains trainer commitment, trust, and long-term growth.

Keywords: workforce models, job demands – resources, areas of work life, employee engagement, employee retention, gig working, startup scaling.

Disclaimer: This case study is intended for educational purposes and for classroom discussions only. The scenarios described in the case are disguised. While based on realistic organisational dynamics, the events described do not represent any factual account of any specific entity, and any resemblance to real people/entities is purely coincidental.

1. Introduction

Kartik Dutt, a Software Engineer and certified Yoga and Pilates instructor, former army officer, and the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Kavallerie Wellness Pvt. Ltd., glanced once again at the engagement diagnostics study that he had commissioned through Marian Carr, a Human Resource Management Consultant. The report was very disturbing. It highlighted income and job insecurity, emotional stress from customer feedback, low trust in leadership, limited say

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within the organisation, and declining motivation. Still, Kartik was focused on further growth, and the commitment of yoga trainers was essential to the high-tech, high-quality wellness instruction.

Kartik realised he had to decide fast. Within the next few weeks, Kavallerie would have to finalise a 'people model' for its next phase of growth. He could continue the present revenue-sharing arrangement with a 'non-competition' clause unchanged. He could relax this clause and allow trainers to work across multiple studios, as is industry practice. He could introduce a modest fixed retainer fee, with variable pay, to reduce the sense of insecurity among the Yoga trainers. Alternatively, he could build a trainer pipeline from participants and other prospective trainers who were more inclined towards Kartik's vision, thought process and methodology. Each of the above choices had implications for costs, service quality, Yoga trainers' commitment, customer experience, and the organisation's future identity.

Kavallerie Wellness, a start-up founded by Kartik Dutt in 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic was at its peak, had grown at a fast pace. Two of his Yoga trainers had recently resigned in rapid succession. Joyce Sinha, with excellent references, resigned to accept a regular salaried job outside the wellness industry. Earlier, Rishabh, another Yoga trainer like Joyce, had left after just one month on the job, citing personal reasons. This prompted Kartik to question the model that he believed was efficient and empowering.

2. Background

Kartik, a former army officer and Software Engineer, developed serious health issues while pursuing his studies in information technology at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi. He consulted many doctors, but the complete cure was elusive. "I felt frustrated as I could not focus on my studies much. I was worried that I would not be able to cope," he shared. One of the doctors advised him to try out Yoga. So he started getting instructions from a well-known local yoga teacher. The yoga practice worked for him, and he was able to overcome health issues with a combination of Yoga and medicines. It also paved the way for his selection into the Indian Army as a Cavalry Officer on a short-service commission. He continued his yoga practice during his army commission and later, as a successful software consultant, despite heavy work pressures; "Yoga improved my well-being."

Kartik carved out time from his busy schedule to continue his Yoga education and become a certified instructor. "I felt the need to understand the relevance of various yoga postures, i.e., asanas, their sequence for performing, and their impact on overall mindfulness and wellness." Kartik completed his certification as a yoga teacher from the Yogavidyalaya, a renowned yoga training centre in Pune, India, in 2005. He also intermittently started giving free Yoga lessons to