

An Economic and Sociological Analysis of Workplace Stress Relief

Xinyi Xu

Room 201, Building 40, Xianxia Renjia, Wuyi County, Jinhua City, Zhejiang Province, China
xxu37382@gmail.com

Abstract: Under the context of involution and overwork in China's workplace, contemporary office workers experience heavy work pressure and sub-healthy status, and work-life imbalance. This thesis uses literature review and comparative analysis, using theories including leisure economics, opportunity cost, diminishing marginal utility and game theory, to investigate the significance of painting and dancing as regular leisure activities. After a comparison between their cost, utility and long-term benefits with other entertainment like going to bars, karaoke singing and short-video viewing, it can be found that painting and dancing as leisure choices are low-cost and productive in nature, contributing towards physical and psychological exhaustion recovery, regulation of emotions, enhancement of personal temperament, and generating implicit values such as social capital and extra income. On the contrary, traditional collective entertainment has a high cost and cannot generate any sustainable advantages except for temporary pleasure. With the foundation of the prisoners' dilemma of involvement in the workplace, light art leisure can enable people to think out of utilitarian mindsets, enrich personal values and reduce competitiveness pressure. Limitations of the research include a lack of sufficient empirical data and a limited research scope. Suggestions have been raised for further academic research and daily leisure management.

Keywords: Leisure Economics, Painting, Dancing, Stress Relief, Work-Life Balance.

1. Introduction

Under conditions of continuous social marketization, involution in workplaces has gradually become a widespread social phenomenon in China. According to the official statistics, the total weekly working hours of Chinese corporate workers reached 48.1 hours, surpassing the legal requirement of 40 hours [1]. In the big four cities, the 996 working system has become commonplace among the internet, finance, and consulting sectors, resulting in a significant reduction of their leisure time [2].

Long-term intense work may induce a sub-healthy bodily condition and psychological disorders like emotional depression and professional fatigue. With the improvement of the quality of material life, contemporary workers seek mental relief and diversified life beyond income increase and career advancement [3]. Painting and dancing belong to low-barrier amateur activities that can be integrated into spare time well for stress relief and physical release. Based on the principles of leisure economics and sociology, this paper will apply economic theories to investigate the multifaceted benefits from different aspects [4].

2. Literature Review

Work-life balance and leisure therapy are mature research domains for scholars. Leisure economics considers time, money, and energy as limited personal resources, and all decisions regarding leisure are opportunity cost-based [5]. Diminishing marginal utility theory illustrates that the endless overtime involvement of labor decreases the efficiency of workplaces while increasing mental exhaustion and occupational burnout [6].

From the sociological standpoint, workplace involvement is regarded as a game theory prisoner's dilemma [7]. Workers are forced to take overtime work to survive in their

workplaces, leading to collective physical and mental exhaustion without any competitive edge. Varied leisure hobbies have been proven effective in promoting individuals' social identities and easing competition anxiety [8].

The current literature acknowledges that artistic leisure is valuable for people emotionally and humanly [9]. Nonetheless, existing studies concentrate on general leisure activities rather than providing specific analysis on painting and dancing, comparisons in costs to bar and Karaoke entertainment, and implicit advantages of short-video side income generation and workplace promotion. The current study bridges these gaps.

3. Methodology

This article employs literature review and comparative methods, which organize interdisciplinary literature to create a theoretical system to support the empirical study and measures designed [10].

This research compares paintings and dances to traditional forms of leisure such as bars, karaoke, and short videos, analyzing the economic and time costs involved, as well as the short-term gains and long-term value. With government data on working hours, it explores the practical significance and challenges of artistic leisure for urban white-collar workers.

4. Result

The current domestic workplace is plagued by long working hours and inadequate leisure time. The average weekly working hours of employees working at Chinese firms amount to 48.1 hours, and the popularized 996 working mode among first-tier city enterprises means that their employees have only bits of leisure time rather than consecutive leisure time [1]. The pressure brought by continuous high-intensity labor results in widespread physical sub-health, psychological

friction, and imbalance in their lives, thus lowering their sense of well-being [11].

Second, painting and dancing exhibit better cost efficiency compared to most forms of mass entertainment. Bars and Karaoke are classified under the category of high consumption and zero accumulation types of leisure activities, providing momentary relief without any form of personal gain, resulting in a double loss of time and money [12]. While watching short videos is a form of entertainment that does not entail any form of monetary expense, it is highly addictive and can quickly lead to mental fatigue with a gradual decrease in enjoyment [13]. On the other hand, painting and dancing involve relatively lower monetary expenses with no need for much professional training and special equipment.

Additionally, both paintings and dances make up an integrated set of static and dynamic activities that are effective ways of restoring body and mind among people with stressful jobs. In terms of their static properties, paintings can help to relax people's minds through their focused energy and soothing rhythm; while in terms of dynamics, dancing is an appropriate way of releasing tension in the muscles due to sedentary work and pent-up negative feelings for health improvement [14].

Finally, cognitive biases commonly exist in today's society, which hinder office workers from cultivating healthy leisure activities. Under the prevailing competitive pressure in workplaces, many office workers are reluctant to engage in any non-utilitarian hobbies, because such activities are viewed as a useless expenditure of energy. Burdened with the prisoner's dilemma created by involvement in their jobs, most individuals choose not to spare more time from their work since it would leave them lagging behind others [15]. Moreover, overestimation of costs involved in the two activities prevents people from pursuing healthier lifestyles.

5. Analysis

With the application of the principle of opportunity cost, it is clear that time, energy, and money are the scarcest resources available for the contemporary worker who is involved in a 996 working style [5]. Each activity performed after work has its opportunity costs that cannot be overlooked. Working overtime consumes all the personal leisure time and deprives people of adequate rest both physically and psychologically, eventually deteriorating the health of employees and their productivity [16]. The frequent visits to bars and other entertainment events involve spending personal funds and time; however, these activities do not provide any sustainable development opportunities but just entertain an employee momentarily. Moreover, watching

short videos does not contribute much to a person's personal life. It takes a lot of time and leads to the development of restlessness instead of relaxation at the end of a hectic day [17]. In turn, engaging in such creative hobbies as painting and dancing costs little money and goes well even in small fragments of the day.

With the law of diminishing marginal utility, the evolution of the workplace environment for a long time and its homogeneity cause evident utility decline [18]. The continuous work and competition bring increasingly lower marginal gains in salary increase, promotions, and professional skill improvement, whereas the marginal loss incurred by one's physical exhaustion, psychological pressure, and job stress keeps growing. Such an imbalanced relationship between inputs and outputs results in common work fatigue and discontentment with life among urban office workers [6]. However, the positive utilities brought about by painting and dancing activities exhibit an ascending curve in the process of marginal utility. Short-term exercise immediately eases muscle and mind tensions created by office jobs and fierce competition. With long-term practice, painting and dancing will continuously improve people's aesthetic awareness, attention span, emotion regulation, and personal demeanor [19]. In addition, there are diverse implicit utilities provided by such artistic hobbies. For example, the related artwork could be displayed on social media platforms, generating financial gains and fame from internet traffic, whereas the artistic abilities enable people to develop unique personal images within social networks at their workplaces, building social capital [20]. Unlike the consumption-oriented traditional entertainment, artistic leisure is productive leisure.

According to game theory, the competition in today's workplace is a typical example of a zero-sum prisoner's dilemma [21]. Under the widespread involution environment, employees involuntarily engage in continuous overtime competition under the survival necessity of fear of becoming less competitive when decreasing their working hours. However, such extensive collective overtime does not benefit the industry as a whole or individuals, but only leads to the overdrafts of both mental and physical energy on the part of everyone, making a vicious circle of a zero-sum game [21]. In this situation, painting and dancing become very effective means for an individual struggling with involvement in the workplace. Firstly, such activities isolate personal identity from occupational identity of an employee, helping people change their identities out of the workplace and allowing individuals to break away from the purely utilitarian approach of work-related tasks, thus helping release accumulated negative energy and excessive fatigue of the body, restoring a person physically and mentally [22].

Table 1. A comparative cost-performance analysis of bars, Karaoke, short videos, painting and dancing

Leisure Method	Single Cost (USD)	Annual Cost (USD)	Core Attribute & Value
Bar Socialization	90-140	2160-5040	Repeated purchases; immediate gratification, no lasting personal value Repeated purchases
Karaoke Gathering	65-105	1560-3780	For fun, no skill acquisition Single low investment
Home Painting	15-25 (one-off)	15-30	One-time low investment; improves concentration and aesthetic literacy
Painting Course	35-45	1680-2160	Low recurrent investment; sustainable artistic skill accumulation
Home Dancing	0-5	<10	Near-zero cost; relieves sub-health and workplace stress
Dancing Course	40-55	1920-2640	molds personality and office competitiveness

6. Limitation

The interdisciplinary research builds up an integrated theoretical framework with rational logical relations; however, it has some shortcomings as follows. First, this study primarily uses documentary research and comparative analysis based on public statistical data, but no empirical questionnaire survey and field interviews for collecting individual data. The findings are theoretically derived, instead of being data-driven, and lack practical relevance [23].

Second, there is a generalization of the research subjects. Individuals in different age groups, from different sectors, having different incomes and different intensities of work, have diverse leisure resources, different financial situations, acceptance of arts, and varying levels of stress. Therefore, it is impossible to produce different healing effects through paintings and dances [24]. However, this paper lacks the comparison analysis among those segments.

Lastly, the scope of research is narrow. While this study analyzes paintings and dances, it does not compare horizontally the two with other forms of healthy leisure activities, including fitness, reading, crafts, and musical instruments [25]. Moreover, the analysis in this paper covers only those individuals who pursue light artistic activities but not professional ones.

7. Recommendation

From the research limitations discussed above, optimization recommendations on both academic and practical aspects are put forward in this chapter. Generally, there is a lack of evidence from current theoretical derivations, while generalized research subjects make the research outcomes less pertinent [26].

7.1. Academic Research Optimization

In future research, a survey and semi-structured interview method can be used, focusing on the working stress in urban offices. Survey research can assess the level of work pressure, leisure cost perception, and artistic leisure value among different samples. One-to-one interviews can provide more insight into the actual barriers, subjective understanding, and real-life experiences when fostering artistic interests in the face of demanding working conditions, thereby overcoming the deficiency of empirical evidence in this study [27].

7.2. Practical Suggestions

From an employee's personal perspective, what is needed is to give up their utilitarian thinking about leisure, and consciously engage in light painting and dance as leisure activities, substituting expensive offline leisure and meaningless passive short videos [28]. Low-budget arts practice not only helps reduce job-related burnout and unhealthy physical conditions but also enhances people's spiritual life, which will provide them with some covert competitive edges in the workplace. On the other hand, from society's perspective, public channels must promote diversity and well-being, dispel involution concepts, and promote the benefits of arts practice [28].

8. Conclusion

Work overload and the zero-sum game at the workplace result in extreme work-life imbalance and cognitive conflict. As opposed to expensive and valueless traditional

amusements, painting and dancing can be considered as inexpensive yet effective investments in the public's leisure time. From an economic perspective, the mentioned activities involve lower opportunity costs and offer increasing marginal benefits, such as emotional recovery, fitness enhancement, and additional income.

Although there are some cognitive and social obstacles to overcome, light artistic activity becomes the means through which modern office workers can cope with occupational stress and manage to find balance in life and work.

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