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How to improve the office workers’ lifestyle with emotional design

by

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Abstract

Nowadays in China, nearly 83% of office workers have to work overtime and 94% of them have physical health conditions due to work schedules. Physical stress increases mental stress while working. Nonetheless, many office workers ignore this stress, resulting in severe injury. This thesis explores on phenomenon of office workers in China giving up their health for work. It discusses their working condition and psychological status, and how it affects their balance of work and entertainment. Finally, it suggests a possible way to alleviate this problem- using the emotional design to give users a comfortable and enjoyable experience to make them unconsciously balance work and relaxation.

Keywords: Office workers, work condition, emotional design, user experience, office design
**Introduction**

Office workers are under great pressure at work. The long-term high-pressure work has a great impact on their mental and physical health. Office workers, though want to live healthily, hardly have time or mood to maintain a healthy lifestyle. There are many so-called methods for people to lead a healthy lifestyle but few can last for a long time. People often end up going back to the old unhealthy lifestyle. This paper explores the primary reasons for office workers’ health problems. Besides, instead of simply giving a mandatory or straightforward plan, the paper aims to find a way in which health problems can be realized by people themselves and lifestyle can be thus improved step by step. Only when office workers pay attention to the problem themselves, can they live a better lifestyle and stick to it.

**I. Poor health condition of office workers**

The hard work of office workers is key to China’s rapid economic development. In 2017, nearly 83% of these workers have to work overtime in China. What’s more, 60% work has a length of more than 8 hours per day, 25% work more than 10 hours per day and 15% work more than 12 hours per day. This group sits in the office for a long time, staring at the computer. They suffer a severe lack of movement, which directly affects their physical health.

Nearly 94% of the respondents had physical fatigue symptoms such as pain, weakness, the stiffness of neck and shoulder, dizziness and back pain.

In addition, mental distress will also be caused due to pain, depression and personality changes. Continuous pain will lead to neurological, endocrine, cardiovascular and other system dysfunction, and may also cause low immunity and induce various complications.
II. The tremendous pressure they are under

In the past year, only 20% of office workers have been promoted, while 85% of them have worked overtime, 40% have sex less than once a month, 33% have not taken annual leave, 46% do not exercise and 37% of people barely read books. Although office workers in Shanghai and Shenzhen hold the highest salary in China, their level of happiness is not so high as that of office workers in Haikou and Chongqing. [4]

The great pressure is a representation of the major factors that contribute to poor health conditions. Especially for those foreigners who working in first-tier cities, they are constantly under pressure from the outside world in order to survive in these cities.

A. Pressure from life

House renting is the main way for office workers living in the city. According to statistics, 45.1% of office workers rent houses, 11.8% of them living with their parents, 11.2% living in corporate quarters. Only 28.7% of office workers own their own homes (whether full or loan). [5]

At the same time, non-local workers working in first-tier cities have more pressure than local workers. In a society with rapid development, more people choose to work and live in first-tier cities. As a result, renting costs go up, accounting for 30%~60% of the wages. Office workers do not have enough money and time for other entertainment. [6]

Buying a house also seems to be unattainable, with a down payment equivalent to their 5-10 years income and a mortgage of the two or three decades. However, Chinese people are very family-oriented, for whom a sense of belonging to the city they live can never be built without buying a house there. Thus, a job is essential for non-local workers. They have to work as hard as they can to earn a house here.

B. Pressure from family
After working in a big city for five years, the basic age of office workers has reached 27-30 years old. Most of them will get married and have children. In addition to the pressure from the mortgage, the maintenance of the family makes their lives more difficult. They usually can only go back home once a year and things are getting harder after having a child. Raising a child consumes lots of time, energy and money. In China, the investment in a child is at least 940,000 yuan, from baby products to education. Many workers don’t even dare to get sick or generate other expenses. Working hard to keep the job is the very choice the breadwinner have to make, and some will even choose to find a part-time job at night.[7]

C. Pressure from work

The development of society is rapid, and the pressure of competition is growing. Just like Alibaba CEO Jack Ma said, “The employee Alibaba needs is the one who can work more than 12 hours every day instead of a “lazy” person who works 8 hours a day”. When everyone around you is working hard and working overtime, a little slack can be a reason for losing jobs. The rule of survival of the fittest is particularly evident here. In order to survive in the first-tier cities, working harder is the only thing need to be done. From the perspective of the annual vacation time, 33.3% of office workers have no vacation and 25.5% of them have less than five days of vacation time.[8] Many office workers fail to keep the balance of work and life, spending most of their time in working and too tired to do anything else but sleep at home.

III. The way they treat life and work

As can be seen from the above, the pressure of non-local office workers living in first-tier cities is extremely high. Buying houses, marriage and children's education are the main sources of their stress. At the same time, the unscientific lifestyle and lack of health awareness speed up the aging of human organs, reduces the disease resistance, and increases the long-term psychological stress. The chance for diseases is increasing year by year. China's third hypertension survey showed that the incidence of hypertension was 11.19%, and the incidence of hypertension in adults increased by about 33% in 10 years, 80% of whom did not know that they had high blood pressure. In the past few years, more people have realized the health problem, and some office workers have gradually left the first-tier cities and worked in the household registration area. However, the proportion of migrants in first-tier cities is still very high. More opportunities, better resources, and broader space are the most reasons attracting countless young people. Thus, there are
still a great number of office workers who choose to stay for themselves, their families and their children. This is why they stick to live in first-tier cities even they are under so much pressure.

IV. How can designers use emotional design to affect the office workers to balance work and relaxation

The pressure from work and life constantly affects the emotion of office workers and this emotion will continue to squeeze their physical strength and energy. They suffer from it but still have to keep working because they know the result of losing a job. This chapter wants to explore an emotional design method in the office to help them balance their work and health as well as alleviate their psychological and physical stress consciously or unconsciously in a reasonable way.

Emotion affects how people perceive and make decisions. Most behaviors are subconscious, and usually, individuals cannot feel or perceive the effects of emotions on behavior. These reactions and emotions are divided into three levels: the visceral, behavioral, and reflective levels. The designer and author hope to find a method to alleviate the problem from the three emotion levels.[9]

A. The visceral level

The moment individuals enter the office, the visceral emotion will affect and even determine their first impression of the objects and the environment. This feeling will last for a long time and the positive emotions can relax muscles, inspire their curiosity and creativity, and even make them better at dealing with problems encountered at work. Therefore, the first impression becomes crucial because it is likely to determine the mood of office workers in the subconscious, which will affect their follow-up work and personal life. Accordingly, taking advantage of some sentimental information that affects emotion to provide positive emotions, which is of importance to be taken into consideration at the beginning of the design. Similar examples are warm colors, sweet scent, comfortable temperature, beautiful singing, rounded and smooth surface, bright and clean environment, well-ordered visual effects, green plants, eye-catching but not extremely gorgeous matters… These sub-modules that generate positive emotions are arranged in an orderly manner, which will give a comfortable first feeling in theory. Meanwhile, designers ought to know they are
designing for whom because different people in different jobs have different preferences. Every item should fit in the scene.

B. The behavioral level

The function of the product is often one of the most important factors people take into consideration when doing judgment. After entering the office, the function of each product will interact with office workers unconsciously. A product with pain points will increase the difficulty of their work, and even bring them a lot of negative emotions. Thus, designers should be widely aware of the different behaviors and reactions of different people at work when preparing to design an office product.

For example, if designers want to design a table, will the height and width of different tables affect the efficiency of a job (Counter receptionist & Clerk)? A large table will give people a feeling of open-mindedness but will it cause things to be placed indiscriminately and affect the work? A narrow table with bezels on three sides can give workers a sense of security and make them keep concentrated for a long time, but what if this kind of table is used by some works requiring frequent conversation and cooperation?

FIG. 1 Table for counter receptionist & Clerk
An appropriate office chair can make office workers comfortable and focus on their work, they may even forget its existence when it is extremely excellent for sitting on. The behavior becomes exceedingly natural so that users can concentrate on their work and have a greater possibility to be in a good mood. Because if designers want to take advantage of emotional design to affect users, the first point is to ensure users love this product. Only then, the chair can give users a positive emotion, which is crucial to the reflective level.

C. The reflective level

The reflective behavior is the thoughts and emotions after repeated use of the product. This behavior links users and products together. If these two create a long-term bond, users will have a strong sense of trust and enjoy the product every time they use it.

Positive reflections can make office workers enjoy the using process. Even the small problems will be forgiven and the defect may be overshadowed by the charm of the product. For example,

![FIG. 2 GOROS Leather Bracelet](image)

bungee jumping will cause instinct fear. However, under the premise of absolute safety, though instinctive behavior will win in the bungee jumping process, the sense of pride that overcoming fear can make this experience very meaningful and proud. Under the basis of achieving the first two levels, what kind of
products can produce positive reflections? Maybe something can link user’s personal memories or something has strong relationship with him (GOROS Leather Bracelet/ an old photo)/ something very attractive and can give users a sense of pride (Pie watch)/ Absolute trust from users that they believe the experience of using it is definitely better than other similar products…. This strong sense of feeling allows users to keep in mind that using it will make them enjoyable.

If designers can use this kind of emotion to make office workers subconsciously realize that their bodies need a little bit rest after a busy day, every time they are tired, this emotion can have a chance to “tell” the rest is necessary and affect the behavior or thoughts of their personal life to some extent. For example, a very comfortable massage chair will make them feel the joy of rest massage all the time. They will be reminded that if their bodies are always lack of enough rest and exercise, their health condition will get worse. Besides, compared to the comfortable part which is no sore, the soreness of the massage can better remind them that your physical condition is not good. Is the wrist so sore that makes the user hard to work when working without an ergonomic mouse pad? Then the mouse pad achieves the function of keeping reminding the users of their wrist problem.[11]
V. Conclusion

In summary, while the office environment or the product meets the three emotional levels which can bring users a sense of pleasure, if the experience can point to some hints of health problems, office workers may be affected consciously or unconsciously. But the hint must be tempered rather than mandatory.

If you want to change a person's life attitude or a certain idea, a better way is not to simply and directly propose a solution (such as telling people working overtime is bad for health and let them don’t do it anymore or let people work out several times because it is good for them), but to change them through the influence bit by bit. Only when people are in a relatively good mood at work, will they have more energy to think and change themselves. This article uses a method of emotional design to provide a relatively comfortable working experience for office works, which can not only reduces work stress but improve work efficiency. Such a virtuous circle can gradually affect their psychological feelings. At this time, if they are affected by the corresponding hints of healthy living, they will improve their lifestyle consciously or unconsciously to some extent.

There are various jobs, and people with different thoughts and experiences. No matter how good a method is, the pressure to live in a big city will never eliminate. Only through a psychological suggestion method which is soft and gentle, can office workers set up positive emotions and face the problem. In this way, they can better resist the stresses and start to balance their life and work.
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