

An Analysis of the Binary Opposition and Social Causes of Contemporary Youth's Professional Mentality

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Abstract. In today's society, young people's attitudes towards careers are becoming increasingly polarized. Some choose to work hard to achieve higher success, while others hold a negative attitude towards work. In recent years, discussions about the "involution" and "lying flat" among young people have been frequent on the Internet. The "996" work schedule and "performance involution" are widespread in the workplace, while the "lying flat generation" and "Buddhist-style employment" phenomena have emerged, presenting a binary opposition in the professional mindset of contemporary youth. In order to explore the binary opposition of today's youth career mentality, this paper comprehensively summarizes the various influencing factors of youth career mentality in today's society, rationally analyzes how these factors affect the physical and mental health and value orientation of young people, and proposes suggestions for balancing lying flat and involution from three aspects: individual youth, enterprise, and society. For example, for individual youth, they can improve their work efficiency through some wise methods; for enterprises, they can adopt more efficient office software and refuse to send work messages outside of working hours; for society, adopting welfare measures tailored to the lives of young people is a good choice. This paper proposes corresponding measures to help young people improve their work efficiency while ensuring their own sense of happiness in life through analysis and suggestions from three aspects.

Keywords: Involution, lying flat, young people, binary opposition, social causes.

1. Introduction

Now days, the two opposing states of involution and lying flat have become common phenomena in contemporary youth careers, the phenomena of "996", "performance competition", and "lying flat group", "Buddhist style employment" coexist and gradually emerge in the workplace, the attitudes that youths treat to their work are gradually polarized and tends towards extremism, and behind these attitudes and values towards careers lies the subtle influence of the current society. This paper will firstly analyse the causes and value orientation of the two states of involution and lying flat and then explore the binary opposition of contemporary youth's professional mentality from the perspective of social causes. From the economic, structural, and cultural aspects of society, multiple analyses will be conducted, and finally, the impact of this binary opposition on individuals, society,

enterprises, etc. will be summarized, as well as how to deal with these issues from the perspectives of individuals, enterprises, and society.

2. The binary opposition between "involution" and "lying flat" in the professional mentality of contemporary youth

The youth occupational mindsets of "involution" and "lying flat" in today's society have consistently drawn significant attention and heated discussions, prompting extensive discourse on this phenomenon from both media and academic perspectives. For the performance of binary opposition between "involution" and "lying flat", it requires a more multi-dimensional understanding and analysis fundamentally.

2.1. Career goal dimension

In the career goal dimension, comparing the mentality and purpose of involution and lying flat can better highlight their respective characteristics and pursuits "involution" pursues success while "lying flat" seeks for stability. For youths with the mentality of "involution", they always focus their goals on explicit success-pursuing higher salary, faster promotion, entering the top positions in the industry, equating their "career achievements" with "life value", so they will invest more energy in their work and put in more time and effort for their careers. However, some youths choose more stable careers because of high unemployment rate among global youth, they are more willing to shift their career goals more towards implicit stability-they will give up high-paying but high-pressure positions, unwilling to bear competitive pressure. These youth are more willing to choose non-staff positions within the "nine to five" system, with flexible employment options such as part-time e-commerce, video editing, etc. Some of them even choose to stay at home instead of finding a job, they just view their work solely as a means of livelihood rather than a way and pathway to realizing their own life value [1,2]. In this way, it can be seen that young people with an "involution" mindset view their careers as a way to realize their own life value. In contrast, the "lying flat" youth see their jobs merely as a means to make a living rather than an essential tool for self-actualization.

2.2. Behavioral pattern dimension

In the behavioral pattern dimension, youth who have the mentality of involution and lying flat will present different performances and attitudes. Youth with the mentality of involution will always present high-intensity engagement in their behaviors, they will choose to work overtime proactively, exceed their Key Performance Indicator (KPIs), package their resumes, and even sacrifice their health in order to improve their career achievements. For example, they may have chaotic schedules to improve their performances, such as staying up late, not eating three meals on time, and so on. These youth tend to be more obsessed with work efficiency and performance than ordinary people, often at the cost of sacrificing their health. For youth who choose lying flat, they will choose to have reservations about their profession and exhibit bounded dedication in their behavior-they strictly clock in and out according to work hours, only complete basic work, refuse unpaid overtime, work beyond capacity, refuse meaningless socializing, and focus more on one's own physical and mental health, experience rather than pursuing professional achievements.

2.3. Value orientation dimension

Youth with the mentality of “involution” and “lying flat” also have completely different value orientations. Young people with an introverted mentality tend to prioritize competition in terms of value. They believe that if they are not introverted, they will be eliminated, and as long as they are willing to put in effort, there will definitely be rewards. They regard working overtime frequently and earning high salaries as proof of their own ability and even hold a negative attitude towards those who choose to “lying flat” and do not strive for success. However, the “lying flat” group does not share this view. In contrast to the negative attitude of the “involution” group towards the “lying flat” group, the “lying flat” group holds more of a questioning or sympathetic attitude towards the “involution” group. They focus more on stress relief, they refuse to agree with the single logic that work achievements are equivalent to success. What they value more is the balance between work and life as well as the satisfaction of their personal interests [3]. Compared to professional success, lying flat individuals are more concerned about their quality of life and physical and mental health. Therefore, in terms of value orientation, the competitive mentality of the involution group is in sharp contrast to the life-oriented mentality of the lying flat group.

3. “Involution” and “lying flat”, an analysis of the social causes of binary opposition

The appearance of involution and lying flat groups is not an accident, all of this is influenced by society. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze and summarize the behavior and characteristics of the phenomenon of involution and lying flat from the economic, structural, and cultural levels of society, in order to comprehensively explore the social causes.

3.1. Economic aspect

From the economic perspective, comparing the “involution” with the “lying flat” can help analyze the causes behind their polarized mentality is a good way. Due to the continuous increase in the number of college graduates year by year, the supply of popular positions with high salaries, stability and promising prospects is limited. This has led to an imbalance between supply and demand, and the growth of positions lags behind the pace of educational advancement. In order to compete for a few high-quality positions, young people are forced to constantly engage in internal competition and stand out from the interviewees in order to have a chance of obtaining their ideal positions [4]. In this case, involution group will work harder and harder and sacrifice the rest of the time and even physical and mental health ultimately in order to get a better opportunity. There are always people who are more competitive or more outstanding, which leads to some young people putting in a lot of effort but getting almost no return. This imbalance between the investment and the actual return in the internal competition makes young people feel that the cost-effectiveness of their efforts is very low, and thus they choose to lying flat to avoid risks. Therefore, some young people do not choose to lying flat by focusing on the quality of life from the very beginning. They just choose to lying flat because they have failed in fierce competition or are disappointed by the huge gap from the expectation. As a second choice, they are no longer willing to focus on their careers.

3.2. Social structure aspect

The change of social structure influences youth’s mentality a lot. In recent years, family background and social resources have more and more influence on development of youth’s careers. This phenomenon makes ordinary young people feel that even if they are highly competitive, it is still

very difficult for them to outperform those who have resource advantages. Therefore, some young people, in the face of these background gaps, choose to confront reality and give up. They are also filled with disappointment in this situation where background is the top priority and no longer hold the illusion that efforts will be rewarded. Among the young people who are in a state of intense competition, a large proportion have been hit by life. In some cases, their competitors are not as excellent as themselves but gain more because they have resources. Therefore, there are more and more people who are just lying flat. Ordinary young people do not have a strong background or high-quality resources. Compared to competitors with strong backgrounds and abundant resources, their upward mobility has narrowed, and the industry's head effect has intensified, which is very unfavorable for the career income and prospects of young people [5]. In this way, young people will easily see their own limits and feel that their career ceiling is low, losing the motivation to be competitive and choosing to lying flat instead. Social structural factors often have a significant impact on young people, causing them to turn more towards lying flat and be unwilling to engage in useless or low return internal competition.

3.3. Cultural aspect

The choice between involution and lying flat among young people is deeply influenced by social and cultural factors. The mentality of comparison in face culture is doubly amplified in the context of acquaintance society and online society. The fruits of competition, such as wealth and status, have become the "face" for measuring an individual's value. In order to maintain or enhance their "face", individuals are forced to get involved in an endless competition [6]. Therefore, this pressure of consumerism forces young people who desire a refined life to engage in an internal competition in order to catch up with their consumption desires and demands. The mainstream discourse in society still defines "high salary, high position, and high social status" as the criteria for "success", lacking tolerance for "ordinary professions" and "low desire lives", resulting in some young people shifting from "seeking recognition through internal competition" to "lying flat and avoiding judgment" due to "not meeting the criteria for success". Young people who adopt a laid-back attitude are often the result of choosing to seek negative freedom. The philosopher Isaiah Berlin divided freedom into "positive freedom" (to do...) Freedom (from...) and "negative freedom" (from...) "Lying flat" [7]. "Lying flat" is more like pursuing a kind of "negative freedom"-that is, the freedom from being kidnapped by social expectations, family responsibilities and fierce competition. They gain limited control over the time and space of their personal lives by reducing their desires and needs. Therefore, young people choose a laid-back career mindset, focusing their efforts on life rather than work, viewing work merely as a means of making a living rather than a way to show off and compete. From the cultural perspective, it can be analyzed that due to the competitive mentality of face culture in society and the pursuit of negative freedom, young people hold completely different attitudes towards their careers. One is to be able to show one's success in front of others, and the other is to satisfy one's control over life and time.

4. "Involution" and "lying flat", the influence of binary opposition

Both involution and lying flat can have positive and negative impacts on youth, businesses, and society. Balancing on this basis can enable young people to make more rational decisions, enable businesses to adjust their management models to balance employee efficiency, and curb the occurrence of insufficient motivation and declining labor quality in society.

4.1. The impact on young individuals

Both involution and lying flat can affect the physical and psychological well-being of young people. The fierce competition among young people in their careers is demonstrated by working overtime and exceeding their performance targets. However, behind these achievements, they often come at the cost of exhausting their physical and mental health. In order to meet and exceed performance targets on time, the nerves of those who are overly competitive are often on edge all the time. They need to constantly think to maximize their own efficiency. At the same time, they also keep an eye on their colleagues' progress and achievements, thus constantly putting pressure on themselves. Therefore, those who are overly competitive are prone to anxiety disorders. Working overtime can also affect the physical and mental health of young people, such as prolonged and repetitive work leading to physical illnesses, and high-intensity overtime affecting mental health [8]. Lying flat individuals only complete their own tasks and do not compete with others or showcase their abilities. Therefore, when seeing colleagues who are introverted exceed their performance targets, they may label themselves as "useless," "incapable," or "not striving for progress," leading to a lack of self-worth. Although involution and lying flat can lead to physical and mental disadvantages, they also have potential positive impacts. Because various problems always arise at work, those who are overly competitive often try all kinds of ways to solve them in order not to delay their progress. And by handling these problems well, it can help them make up for their shortcomings and improve their skills and abilities.

For those who lying flat, they only see work as a means of livelihood rather than a way to prove themselves, which will prompt young people to reflect on the meaning of work and life, and whether they should focus a part of their energy on work instead of blindly rejecting it. Therefore, there will be a portion of young people who find a balance between the two states of intense competition and lying flat. They will rationally allocate their tasks and handle their stress management well to maintain a healthy state. They reserve sufficient rest time for themselves every week to ensure they get adequate rest. Moreover, they do not define their rest as laziness. Their rest is to allow their brains to rest and empty their minds in the numb work. Thus, it can provide more lasting creativity and contribution in subsequent work [9]. At the same time, they will also choose to abandon perfectionism, striving for excellence in their key work or important affairs, while holding the standard of meeting the standards for secondary matters. They will also set a challenging but not overly oppressive work goal that they can strive to achieve without excessive physical and mental consumption and break down large tasks into multiple small tasks to complete them with higher quality and efficiency. In a career view of moderate commitment, these young people will pay attention to expressing their time limits, refuse to work overtime all the time, and at the same time, they will skillfully say no selectively and refuse to increase their tasks without limit. Society should also promote education to shift from a score-based approach to the assessment of comprehensive qualities and practical abilities, and redefine the values of success, advocating for the inclusion of personal happiness, physical health, and other considerations in the definition of success.

4.2. The impact on society

For society, excessive internal competition will gradually cause young people to lose their innovative ability, largely reducing the quality of the labor force, and to a certain extent, it will also slow down or even inhibit the development speed of society. However, excessively lying flat will make young people increasingly resistant to their profession and work, resulting in fewer and fewer people willing to take the initiative to work, which also leads to a shortage of labor supply and

affects the development of society. Therefore, measures should be taken in areas such as young people's college entrance examination and job hunting, innovation and entrepreneurship, marriage and dating, and child-rearing to reduce their worries when they are striving [10]. Reducing the excessive media coverage of elites and academic achievers and focusing more on those who create value in ordinary positions is necessary.

4.3. The impact on enterprise

For enterprises, the existence of an internal culture can lead to increasing work pressure and negative emotions towards work among employees, which in turn can cause them to be unwilling to continue working in the company. Furthermore, due to the continuous internal competition and hard work among employees, they have moved to better platforms rather than staying in their original companies. Therefore, the culture of internal competition will lead to an increasing number of employees quitting their jobs in enterprises, raising the employee turnover rate. A lying flat mentality can make employees unwilling to exceed or complete work too early, as well as unwilling to complete tasks beyond their own, resulting in low work efficiency. Therefore, enterprises need to adjust their management models to balance work efficiency and employee experience, such as avoiding sending work information during non-working hours and holidays, and respecting employees' rest time. Provide efficient and easy-to-collaborate work software to reduce information costs and make work smooth. Encourage employees to take on challenges while decoupling them from performance appraisals, enabling them to understand the significance of their work, stay focused, and at the same time not be afraid of failure and dare to innovate.

5. Conclusion

For the binary opposition between contemporary youth's involution and lying flat mentality, this article adopts a comparative analysis method to compare and analyze at three levels: individual youth, enterprises, and society. Different strategies are proposed for young individuals to balance involution and lying flat mentality, improve work efficiency while ensuring sufficient rest time, and enable young people to have a healthy body and good mentality. While maintaining health, they can have more innovation to promote the development of enterprises and society. Enterprises should respect employees' rest time, enhance communication efficiency and reduce communication costs. They should encourage employees to take on challenges and not link performance evaluations to encourage employees not to fear failure and dare to innovate. At the societal level, excessive media coverage of elites should be reduced, and emphasis should be placed on comprehensive education rather than solely relying on scores. The definition of success should be reconsidered, taking into account personal happiness, physical health, and family harmony. For the future, it is hoped that young people can better balance their work and rest, contribute their share to the development of enterprises, and thereby promote social progress.

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