



Unsustainable Working Conditions in the Animation Industry

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Abstract

An examination of the detrimental effects of institutional corruption on various sectors with a focus on the animation industry, highlighting working conditions, demand, overtime, exploitation, and health risks faced by animators due to excessive workloads and inadequate compensation. By comparing cases like Simone Biles' withdrawal from the Tokyo Olympics and the mismanagement of Indian Trust Funds, parallels are drawn to the systemic issues within animation studios. Proposed solutions include establishing labor unions, revising production timelines, and improving financial compensation to ensure sustainable working conditions. These measures aim to promote equitable revenue distribution, increase wages, and enhance overall well-being and productivity among animators, prompting the need for comprehensive reforms to address these challenges effectively.

Keywords: Working conditions, animation, animators, institutional corruption, demand, overtime, labor unions, financial compensation, inadequate

Introduction:

Institutional corruption significantly provokes discontent in organizations. Consider gymnast Simone Biles who withdrew from the Tokyo Olympics and "named herself a sexual assault survivor", sacrificing her performance as sports culture holds her to the standard of powering through mental stressors (Thompson 43). Research highlights mismanagement of Indian Trust Funds, exemplified by tribal activist Elouise Cobell's lawsuit pursuit, stressing departments have "never given Indians accounting of their royalty payments", prompting a century of incompetent housing from financial instability (Janko 26). This echoes employee stagnation in the animation industry as animators face exploitation due to

extensive hours. Computer scientist Josh Morgan recognizes this resulting in 'Karoshi-Jiatsu' or death by overwork, heart attacks, and suicides, affecting 78% of animators (7). Likewise, DreamWorks animator Ken Morrissy notes that overworked animators face declining productivity due to unfeasible schedules, with assistants clocking over 200 hours overtime monthly, during weekends and holidays, leading to health issues requiring hospitalization (9). Profit-driven exploitation persists as studios prioritize budget over animator welfare, risking poverty and humane connections (Mōri 4). This poses the question: In what ways can unsustainable working conditions effectively be addressed to cater to animator compensation? To understand this

adversity, it is pivotal to inspect it through the view of psychological, environmental, and economic lenses. Establishing labor unions and time modifications for animation schedules and financial compensation are the most effective strategies to address unsustainable animator working conditions, to promote equitable revenue distribution, increase wages, and avoid exploitation, guaranteeing prosperity and eased career paths.

High Demand

Experts examine the dreadful risks tied to high consumer and production motivated demands. Many identify animation demand as an influence of “crunch time”, especially in the realm of Japanese anime. Expert in animation development, Tetsuya Akutsu, presents compelling statistics that overwork drove 89% of animators into health detriments as 86% of these cases resulted in deaths at their own desks from lack of sleep and nutritional deprivation, urging hospitalization (4). Statistics project ignorance regarding employees' increased laborious efforts directors implement. In concurrence to this, Reki Kawahara, designer for anime ‘Sword Art Online’, insists talent shortage is also an ongoing problem with “200 animated TV series alone made in Japan each year, there aren't enough animators to go around” due to insistent audiences (14). Kawahara depicts the impossible requests of early releases of animated television to raise publicity in projects. Psychologist Simona Stanzani, adds that the anime industry is notorious for brutal tolls on employees, as Japanese series, ‘Jujutsu Kaisen’ holds “43.9 times the demand of the average TV series in the United States in the last 30 days of season two episodes” causing many animators to quit from finishing single episodes in a day (9). This animator endurance reflects the normalization of consumer culture belittling operative welfare. Akutsu, Kawahara, and Stanzani collectively establish the setbacks of the industry audiences' praise with underlying expectations leading to health disadvantages by productions fulfilling consumer demands for popularity and profitability, refusing conditional improvement for pressured animators.

Excessive Workload and Overtime

Extensive schedules by bigtime Japanese animation studios have struck animators with overtime influencing fatigue and under fatal circumstances, death. MAPPA animator Henry Thurlow, living and working in Japan, reveals his experience, telling BuzzFeed News of his eight hospitalizations from illnesses by exhaustion and tight deadlines set by productions (6). This suggests complications are prompted by the toll overtime can take on one's physical well-being. Corresponding with this disservice, Japanese animator Douga Koba adds onto Thurlow, announcing studio Madhouse, was recently accused of violating labor code with employees working nearly 400 hours per month and 37 consecutive days without a day off (7). This lack of rest presents unreciprocated disputes by organizations. Motion graphic creator Ryosuke Hirakimoto reinforces this, noting a male animator suicide in 2014 was classified as a work-related incident after investigators found he worked “600 hours a month leading to his death by overwork or ‘Karoshi’” (10). Not only have unsustainable conditions led to sicknesses and psychological deterioration, but they also prompted loss of life, giving the industry a misleading reputation. Analyst Kanaga Rajan of the World Health Organization responds to Hirakimoto, finding 745k people died in 2016 from strokes & ischemic heart disease from 55 hours overtime (17). Kanaga detected these fatal health impediments to be caused by exploitation from ignorant commissions by managers. Thurlow, Koba, and Hirakimoto signify that overwork serves as a dismissal of time management complications from various burdens, increasing death tolls Kanaga inspected through the World Health Organization.

Inadequate Payment

Analysts acknowledge animators from Japanese anime illustrators to Disney graphic designers deal with nerve-racking lifestyles from escalating poverty by low wages. Based on the satisfaction of employers, cultural economist Hikari Hida, conveys the cause of cheap labor in bigtime production studios MAPPA, Madhouse, and PIXAR stem from employment on a piecework system that only

allows animators payment based on how many frames they can create (19). This piecework system is a recurring issue within the industry for various projects where animators receive minimal credit for grueling hours. Motion designer Ryosuke Hirakimoto, sympathizes with Hida, claiming that years in the business of MAPPA, animators made just "\$2 a day, pushing them into sheds for housing from debt after working long, unsupported hours" (7). Examinations project financial debt prompting struggles to afford basic housing expenses. From a more economic standpoint, financial struggles are bringing about resignation. Corporal animator, Diane Wei Lewis, further expresses that animators are "deprived of more than 92% of a \$171,000 producer salary" (8). Consequently, highly demanded anime 'Chainsaw Man' director striked out of MAPPA, starting his company, E&H Productions (29). As monetary disputes continue, it is evident that organizations disregard income dispersal. Animators face invasive exploitation with Hida focusing on decreased payments and Hirakimoto highlighting prosperity struggles. The corresponding perceptions ultimately follow Lewis seeing it as a systemic issue with studios taking advantage of animators' abundance, urging reformation.

Financial Compensation & Modification

To effectively combat deterioration in the animation industry, the utilization of labor union organizations and reduced overtime for animators will lift the burden of the strain and stressors within multiple productions. Under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRB), industries have the right to establish unions through various means within the NLRB union election and opportunities with voluntary recognition being the most effective method in combating unjust productivity (Hikari 10).

Bargaining Power & Unions

Labor unions empower animators to pool their resources and leverage collective bargaining power, advocating improved welfare for animators' futures. Unification by streaming programs and other contributors, animators, artists, etc., can negotiate better wages, conditions, and job security (Emmett 17). Union organizer Gavin J. Blair addresses this, proving streaming program Crunchyroll

provided "more than \$100 million royalty payments to Japanese animation industries just in ten years of operation" (20). Essentially, unions will be supported by supplied services accumulating promising funds. Evidence by MAPPA employees also exhibits crowdfunding as a method allowing individuals to make monetary contributions by funding projects through direct donations or shared profit (9). MAPPA, well-known for their brutalities amongst employees relating to extended hours, make profitable exchanges by royalty payments easily distributed throughout all sectors of the animation industry so producers and animators amass equal wages. Agreeably freelancer Arielle Emmett stresses wage increases, sick leave with pay, extra overtime pay and guaranteed adequate production by unions (2). The actions of the union set the stage for strikes against productions (3). Following this, Fleischer Studio employees embarked on a five-month strike that led to the first union contracts. The contracts directed a strike at Disney, animation companies, and groundbreaking new works from frustrated employees who left organizations (7). Unified strikes have been fruitful, and will be influencing union contracts that provide animators with overtime compensation.

Financial Aid

Unions coupled with financial strikes bring a sense of authority, reducing hourly shifts by collective contributions easing burnt out for animators. Expert professor Masahiro Yamada discloses support systems and counseling services previously "alleviated burnout by 71%" (10). This reveals the industry's strategic actions in forming alliances to gain medical and psychiatric support, preventing further psychological tolls on animators. This aligns with the conflict of systemic demand gymnast Biles faces when she realized she was "fighting demons" and "the mental [was] not there" (Janko 42). Hence she backs out of the Olympics. In correspondence, contemporary artist Takashi Muramaki finds Sino Centre organization policy reforms mitigate financial hardships, giving animators compensation fees for basic necessities in studios" (Sasongko 12). A great deal of prosperity will be elicited as noticed in

multiple areas of expertise. The Cobell settlement guaranteed this prosperity by including “\$60 million for a college scholarship fund for Indian youth” (Janko 29). As a result, it is the largest government settlement ever awarded in the history of the United States (29). For instance, entrepreneur Gareb Shamus reveals mid-priced DVD initiatives “enhance 88% of animator hourly wage” (7). This improves conditions by confronting renovation (8). Owned production companies allow animators to be in direct ownership of their labor and make production decisions through democratic processes addressing 90% of issues in the entertainment industry through capitalist instruments (Kondo 9). As strikes commence, groundbreaking new works are being promoted by frustrated employees who left animation shops to set out on their own (Hayashi 11). Financial suppliers will indisputably grant animators with substantial individuality.

Standardized Production Timelines

To address overproduction and strain on animators, transitioning towards a demand-driven approach projects commissioning within the anime industry (Verge 1). Assessing audience interests, studios can strategically plan projects that align with market demand, avoiding crunch time (Verge 4). By implementing industry-wide timelines, “94% of animators have benefited from more reasonable deadlines, reducing tight schedules and lowering burnout” (19). This creates a more humane work environment, providing rejuvenation between work periods by reducing hours. Professor William Ouchi says these benefits would be achieved by Theory Z to alleviate employee turnover, increase commitment, improve morale, and drastically expand productivity. Theory Z helps workers become generalists, rather than specialists, reducing competitiveness that prompts negative stigmatization” (17). Reduced hours spur a sense of relief in knowing that health complications and death rates would decline. Suggested by MAPPA employee Steve Goodrich, industry-wide guidelines for maximum work hours and equitable pay “provide sliced hours minimizing adverse

effects of overwork and underpayment” (2.)

This remarkably reduces overwork by collectively implementing less hours agreed amongst authorities. Prioritizing employee welfare will improve performance as they will not feel as obligated to release content worked on through hours of exhaustion.

Limitations and Implications

Previous laws and ideals go against labor unions as employers find they make workplaces less empowering and discourage individuality. Despite evenly distributed labor costs benefitting survival, labor laws faced deregulation in the past ten years. While on the surface it seems more “freedom of choice” is allowed in schedules, changes have made exploitation easier for employers (Yoon 7). Authorities unable to enforce unions due to fan satisfaction boasting production led to protests against regulations preventing compensation for “100 hours of monthly work” (10). Reduced employment for animators may result in no overtime pay, limiting labor supply and raising living costs, prompting employers to hike prices to cover high labor expenses (Yuko 2). Despite strong opposition by labor unions and other analysts, it appears overwork deaths will not be reduced. However, exploitation of workers in Japan decreases from hiring people on a temporary contract basis (Ristola). Combatting this, global governments began projects for labor unions and committees to reduce suicide relapse (Gunning). By the propelling statistics of unions, it is a double-ended resolution as it can only be effective through authority approval.

Conclusion

By supporting unions and advocating for advanced and more open labor regulations, comprehensive economic action must be taken to address the harsh working conditions faced by animators in the industry by the National Labor Relations Act. The act will establish unions through the NLRB union election process (Margolis 9). Achieving this will involve innovative financing by crowdfunding through streaming platform Crunchyroll ensuring humane work conditions. It is imperative that production companies and streaming services prioritize animator well-being to cultivate a thriving industry for all employees.

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