

THE ART OF LEADING FREE TIME. LEADERSHIP LESSONS IN RECREATION

GUȚĂ EDUARD LEONARD

PHD. UNIV. LECT. UNIVERSITATEA „CONSTANTIN BRÂNCUȘI” DIN TÂRGU JIU

e-mail: leonard_eduard_85@yahoo.com

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7288-531X

Abstract

Free time is a fundamental element in ensuring the balance between professional and personal life, being essential for both mental health and individual performance. In the specialized literature, free time is defined as the interval in which the individual can carry out voluntarily chosen activities, without professional or social constraints, with the main purpose of relaxation, recreation and personal development. Its benefits are multiple, including reducing stress, preventing professional burnout and increasing general satisfaction in life. Moreover, free time contributes to the development of cognitive and social skills, stimulating creativity, critical thinking and collaboration skills. Therefore, effective management of free time becomes not only a recreation tool, but also a determining factor of professional performance and personal development.

Personal leadership involves the ability of an individual to organize, motivate and guide themselves effectively, including in the management of their free time. This highlights the importance of self-discipline, taking responsibility and setting clear goals for recreational activities. People who practice personal leadership prioritize their tasks, allocate time for relaxation and personal development and manage their internal resources, such as energy and motivation. Thus, self-leadership becomes an essential tool for transforming free time into an active factor for increasing productivity and well-being.

It highlights how personal leadership influences effective leisure management and the impact on individual performance and well-being. The main objectives include identifying leadership principles applicable to oneself, exploring strategies for planning and prioritizing leisure time, and evaluating the effects of recreation on personal and professional performance.

Keywords: *free time, leadership, planning, organization, management,*

Classification JEL : *MI, L83*

1. Introduction

The concept of personal leadership is closely related to the individual's ability to set clear goals, prioritize activities, and effectively manage personal resources.[6]

Self-leadership is not limited to the professional environment, but also has significant implications in personal life, influencing the way individuals manage their time, resources and energy. By applying the principles of self-leadership in everyday activities, including leisure time, individuals become more aware of their own needs and desires, being able to make deliberate decisions that support the balance between personal and professional life. This approach allows the transformation of leisure time from a passive interval of relaxation into an active period of regeneration, learning and personal development.

For example, strategic leisure planning can include setting clear goals, such as participating in activities that develop cognitive or emotional skills, practicing physical exercise to maintain health, or engaging in hobbies that stimulate creativity and reduce stress. In this way, leisure time becomes not just a means of escape from routine, but a tool for strengthening personal resources, increasing resilience, and improving professional performance.

Another essential aspect of self-leadership in the context of leisure is the capacity for self-reflection. By periodically evaluating how one spends one's leisure time, one can identify the activities that generate the greatest satisfaction and impact on one's well-being, adjusting one's behaviors and priorities accordingly. At the same time, self-discipline plays a central role, helping to avoid procrastination and maintaining a healthy balance between work and leisure time.

Thus, extended self-leadership in the personal and leisure spheres contributes to the development of authentic autonomy, in which the individual does not just react to circumstances, but actively shapes his experiences, investing in his own growth and well-being. In the long term, this approach favors a balanced lifestyle, reduces stress, increases overall satisfaction and supports professional performance, demonstrating that leadership applied to the self is an essential component of a fulfilled and effective life.

Planning and prioritizing activities are essential components of personal management, contributing to the efficient use of time and increasing productivity. Planning techniques include setting short- and long-term goals, allocating resources according to the importance and urgency of tasks, and using organizational tools such as agendas, to-do lists, and digital applications. Prioritizing activities allows for the optimal integration of free time, avoiding conflicts between professional responsibilities and the need for recreation. By applying structured methods, such as the Eisenhower matrix or the Pomodoro technique, individuals can simultaneously manage professional and personal activities, maximizing satisfaction and efficiency in both areas.

Personal effectiveness depends on the individual's ability to manage their internal and external resources, especially time, energy and motivation. Time is a limited resource, and its organization must be achieved through strategic planning and careful allocation between professional tasks, personal and recreational activities. Energy, both physical and mental, can be maintained by adopting a balanced lifestyle, including physical exercise, proper nutrition and regular periods of rest. Motivation, a central element of personal leadership, can be stimulated by setting meaningful goals, recognizing progress and constant self-reflection. By effectively managing these resources, individuals can achieve sustainable performance and can capitalize on free time as a source of personal development and regeneration.

2. Organization of free time

Self-discipline is an essential component of personal leadership, being closely linked to effective free time management. People who develop self-discipline are able to prioritize their recreational activities, avoid procrastination, and focus on personal goals of relaxation and development. Taking responsibility involves being aware of the fact that the choice of recreational activities influences well-being, energy levels, and performance in professional activities. Therefore, effective leaders apply the principles of personal leadership, setting clear goals and constantly tracking their progress.

Intrinsic motivation is an essential factor in maintaining commitment to recreational activities and for strengthening personal balance. According to psychological theories, especially self-determination theory, satisfying the fundamental needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is important for supporting internal motivation.[2] In the context of personal leadership, individuals who effectively manage their free time choose activities that allow them not only to relax, but also to develop cognitive and emotional skills, thus contributing to restoring the resources necessary for professional and social performance.

Regularly integrating hobbies and recreational activities has multiple effects on overall well-being: it stimulates creativity, reduces accumulated stress, and improves concentration and resilience. Also, maintaining a balanced routine between work and recreational activities favors the creation of an optimal cycle of psychological and physical recovery, an essential element for leaders who practice personal leadership and want to maintain long-term performance.

Leisure leadership is not limited to individual activities; involvement in social and group activities develops coordination, collaboration and communication skills. People who exercise leadership in social contexts facilitate the organization of recreational events, the distribution of responsibilities and the maintenance of a positive and motivating environment. Effective management of social activities includes: setting group objectives, clarifying the roles of participants and monitoring progress to ensure the satisfaction and involvement of all members. Thus, leisure

time becomes not only a source of relaxation, but also an environment for the development of leadership and social skills.

The experience of free time contributes to the development of personal identity and the restoration of psychological resources.[3]

3. Leadership in recreational activities

Self-discipline is a central pillar of leisure time management, being the individual's ability to organize themselves, to respect established schedules and to pursue personal goals in a constant and efficient manner. In the context of recreational activities, self-discipline allows to maintain a commitment to hobbies, sports or other forms of relaxation, even in the face of daily challenges or professional pressures. By applying the principles of personal leadership and self-control, individuals can integrate leisure time into their daily routine, avoiding procrastination and reducing the risk of imbalance between professional responsibilities and the need for recreation.[1]

Taking responsibility for leisure time involves more than just planning: it involves making deliberate decisions about how time is allocated, choosing activities that support the restoration of physical and cognitive resources, and monitoring the results to adjust future behaviors. This responsible approach has positive effects on overall well-being, reducing stress, preventing professional burnout, and stimulating a state of personal satisfaction. Self-discipline also facilitates the development of a balance between short-term and long-term goals, allowing the individual to optimize their resources and achieve personal performance in a sustainable way.

Moreover, self-discipline is not limited to free time management, but correlates with essential personal leadership skills, such as strategic planning, self-reflection, and developing an effective routine that supports personal progress. Thus, people who cultivate self-discipline in free time management increase their ability to make conscious choices and optimally value each moment, contributing to increased performance, creativity, and overall well-being.

Intrinsic motivation is a central element in maintaining commitment to recreational activities, having a direct impact on the quality of the experience and the benefits obtained. Continued involvement in recreational activities is supported by the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the individual's ability to choose activities that correspond to their interests and values; competence involves the feeling of efficacy and progress within the chosen activities; and relatedness involves building and maintaining meaningful social connections, even in the context of hobbies or recreational activities.

Choosing recreational activities that generate personal satisfaction and development opportunities helps stimulate creativity, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being. Activities that allow for the exploration of personal passions, the acquisition of new skills, or social interaction provide individuals with the psychological and emotional resources needed to cope with everyday challenges.

Also, setting personal goals within recreational activities becomes an effective mechanism for monitoring and evaluating progress. Clear, realistically formulated goals contribute to maintaining long-term motivation and allow the individual to adjust their strategies to maximize the benefits obtained. In this regard, the principles of personal leadership play an essential role: self-discipline, strategic planning of leisure time and self-reflection support the decision-making process, helping individuals to prioritize activities with a significant impact on personal development and well-being.

Therefore, intrinsic motivation is not just an abstract psychological factor, but a practical tool for organizing leisure time, which facilitates the balance between relaxation, recreation and personal development, thus contributing to the overall performance and mental and emotional health of the individual.

Recreational activities carried out in a group or community context represent a valuable opportunity for the development of social skills and for the strengthening of interpersonal ties.

Participation in such activities requires not only individual interest and motivation, but also specific coordination and leadership skills, which allow the effective integration of each member into the group dynamics.

The management of social recreational events involves several essential dimensions: careful planning of activities, allocation of responsibilities, establishment of clear objectives and effective communication between participants. Leaders responsible for organizing these activities must be able to stimulate cooperation and active involvement of group members, prevent or manage conflicts and create an inclusive and motivating environment. Through these actions, each participant can contribute to the success of the activity and the achievement of the common goals of the group.

Furthermore, social engagement through recreational activities has positive effects on overall well-being and leisure satisfaction. [7] Participants who experience success and satisfaction in social recreational contexts develop intrinsic motivation for continued involvement and enhance their sense of personal and social worth. Thus, effective group activity management and recreational leadership are key factors in maximizing the psychological, social, and emotional benefits of recreation, demonstrating the interdependence between organization, motivation, and the positive experience of participants.

4. The impact of leisure time on well-being performance

Free time is essential, being recognized at all levels, because it contributes to employee relaxation, satisfaction and performance, bringing benefits to both them and companies.[4]

Leisure time plays an essential role in maintaining psychological balance and preventing the negative effects associated with professional stress. Numerous studies in the field of organizational psychology and human resource management highlight the fact that regular involvement in recreational activities contributes to reducing stress levels, restoring cognitive and emotional resources, and preventing burnout.[5] Recreational activities offer the individual the opportunity to temporarily detach from professional tasks, facilitating the mental and physical recovery necessary to maintain long-term performance.

By reducing psychological stress and improving well-being, leisure time has a positive impact on productivity and professional efficiency.[8] Employees who manage their leisure time appropriately demonstrate a higher level of concentration, problem-solving ability and involvement in professional activity. In this context, recreation should not be seen as a waste of time, but as a strategic investment in psychological health and individual performance. Integrating recreational activities into daily or weekly routines contributes to creating a sustainable work rhythm, reducing the risk of overload and promoting work-life balance.

In addition to its effects on health and productivity, leisure time plays a significant role in stimulating creativity and developing social skills. Recreational activities, especially creative and social ones, provide a favorable framework for exploring new ideas, free expression, and divergent thinking. By detaching from the constraints specific to the professional environment, individuals can generate innovative solutions and develop alternative perspectives on problems, essential skills in dynamic professional contexts.

Recreation carried out in a group or community also contributes to the development of communication, collaboration and social leadership skills. Participation in social recreational activities facilitates interaction, the strengthening of interpersonal relationships and the development of empathy, fundamental elements for the effective functioning of teams and organizations. In this sense, leisure time becomes an informal space for learning and development, in which individuals can practice their social skills in a relaxed and non-competitive context.

Therefore, the impact of leisure time on performance and well-being is complex and multidimensional. Recreation contributes not only to reducing stress and increasing productivity, but also to the development of creativity and social skills, supporting the formation of a balanced, adaptable and performing individual both personally and professionally.

5. Conclusions

Free time, when planned and used consciously, is not just a break from daily activities, but a strategic resource for personal development, restoration of psychological resources and increased overall performance.

Personal leadership is manifested through self-discipline, the ability to self-motivate, planning and taking responsibility for one's own choices, including in terms of recreational activities. The study of the relationship between leadership and free time shows that individuals who apply personal leadership principles manage to integrate recreation effectively into their daily routine, reducing stress levels, preventing professional burnout and supporting long-term well-being. Thus, the management of free time becomes an indicator of personal maturity and self-management capacity.

Conscious planning of leisure activities is recommended, by allocating regular intervals dedicated to relaxation and personal development, similar to planning professional activities. This approach contributes to the creation of healthy routines and the prevention of overexertion.

It is important that leisure activities are chosen according to individual interests and needs, in order to stimulate intrinsic motivation and long-term involvement. Physical, creative, social or educational activities can be combined in such a way as to meet both the need for relaxation and that of personal development. Also, setting realistic goals within leisure time and monitoring progress can support the maintenance of motivation and the efficiency of its use.

6. Bibliography

- [1] Baumeister R., F., Vohs K., D., Tice D., M., *The strength model of self-control*. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(6), 2007, p. 351–355
- [2] Deci E., L., Ryan R., M., *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being*. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 2000, p. 68-78
- [3] Kleiber D. A., *Leisure experience and human development*. New York: Basic Books, 1999
- [4] Lazăr A., G., *Timpul liber – Indicator evaluativ al calității vieții*, *Revista Știința Culturii Fizice*, nr. 33 (1), 2019, p.136
- [5] Maslach C., Leiter M., P., *Burnout*. *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management*, 2016
- [6] Neck C. P., Houghton J., D., *Two decades of self-leadership theory and research*. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21(4), 2006, p. 270–295
- [7] Northouse P., G., *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2019
- [8] Sonnentag S., Fritz C., *The recovery experience questionnaire*. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 12(3), 2007, p. 204–221