

# Flow

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'Flow' is the term given to a state of mind<sup>1</sup> in which a person becomes totally absorbed in an activity, losing the sense of time and self-awareness. The flow state may not seem particularly 'pleasurable' at the time – indeed, it tends to be empty of emotion – but afterwards, when you think back to it, you realise how profoundly satisfying it was and wish it would happen again. One way of guaranteeing yourself a sense of fulfilment is to build into your everyday life as many opportunities as possible for experiencing 'flow'.

A key to achieving the flow state is to engage in challenging activities that call on your strengths and skills. The 'activities' do not have to be physical, but anything that requires concentrated attention and the use of your skills. There is a balance to be drawn between the challenge and a person's capabilities. If the challenge is too great, anxiety and frustration prevent flow. If the challenge is too small, the result is boredom.

Other conditions needed for flow are:

- *concentration* on the tasks in hand
- the activity has clear *goals* – you know what you are trying to achieve
- there is immediate *feedback* – so you know how successful you are being.

When you are in the flow state, you feel that

- your involvement is *effortless*, despite requiring considerable skill
- you have the resources to *control* what will happen, even if there is possible danger and risk
- *time* stops.

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of 'flow' is the brain-child of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced 'cheeks sent me high'), who has devoted much of his life to the study of what makes people happy. See his book *Flow – The Psychology of Happiness* (1992).