

Preface

The book is addressed to researchers in the field of psychology as well as interested readers of social sciences like sociology, education, sport, and economics. It provides an overview of flow research in an intentionally balanced and scientific manner as well as details on central topics of research into flow. The book can also be used as a textbook for advanced courses on motivation, attention, flow experience, intrinsic motivation, optimal motivation and excellence, daily experience, well-being, and similar topics. Students will appreciate that the book will take different theoretical perspectives rather than advertising a single point of view. A preceding abstract to each chapter offers an overview of the topic. Text boxes provide more details and figures are used to illustrate the topic. Study questions at the end of each chapter can help students to test their knowledge.

In the introduction, we will talk about the definition of flow, draw the historical lines, and present a short review of current flow research, which is becoming more complex and is following different lines. Flow research could be regarded as a mission to understand enjoyment in human life, and many researchers have joined in the study of flow experience in an effort to understand the conditions and consequences in more detail. The mission drives researchers forward but sometimes leads to a less rigorous analysis on methodological grounds. Therefore, the book takes the time to present methodological aspects in flow research in order to qualify empirical work (Chap. 2). Following this, the focus will be on the conditions of flow experience (Chap. 3) and on the correlations and consequences that have been found in the research on flow (Chap. 4).

Flow can be experienced not only in typical “flow activities” but in nearly any kind of activities. As flow in nonachievement situations has some special aspects and conceptual difficulties, an entire chapter will be devoted to this (Chap. 5). It will be proposed that personal preferences will structure the situation and subsequently support the experience of flow.

At the heart of flow research is the motivational aspect of this experience. Flow motivates people to carry out the activity again and to seek challenge and thereby improve their skills and abilities. Chapter 6 focuses on the comparison of another

prominent theory of intrinsic motivation—the Self-Determination Theory—and flow theory. It will be argued that the two theories hold explanatory power in contrasting, largely nonoverlapping contexts. This contrasts with the prevailing understanding that each theory represents different levels of analysis of the same contexts.

The fact that flow experiences might have negative consequences has been almost neglected, but some researchers have begun to discuss and study this finding (Chap. 7). One vein of research is investigating whether flow might be experienced in antisocial activities as well. Second, it is examined whether flow experience is so rewarding that activities are still executed regardless of the negative consequences, as it is the case for addiction or in high-risk activities.

Along with the intensely emerging psychological view, neuropsychological considerations and empirical correlates of flow experiences will be presented (Chap. 8). It seems evident that the neurological aspect will be very important in understanding flow, and new insights and questions will arise. The next chapter reflects on the search for “flow personality” or “autotelic personality” (Chap. 9). This is a lingering question in flow research, which is awaiting a theoretical framework and more empirical research. The chapter tries to resolve this lingering question in a discussion on personality aspects and by providing a measurement of the “autotelic personality” as well as offering a dynamic perspective on personality and flow.

The book will end with a theoretical integration of the different paths being taken within the increasingly more complex field of flow research. It will also examine what has been learned since the beginning of flow research, what is still open, and how the mission to understand and foster flow experience should continue.

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