

## Exploring Flow Experiences

### Happiness

Exercise

10-15 min.

Client

No

*Flow can be defined as a psychological experience where one is performing an activity and is fully immersed in an energized focus. In some professions, such as in the case of athletes and musicians, flow is also known as “being in the zone”, characterized by full absorption in what one does.*

*According to flow theory, flow contributes to people’s well-being and personal fulfilment (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). In line with this, research with adolescents has shown that increased flow experiences are associated with increased intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and time spent doing school work (Hektner & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This tool can help to gain more insight into personal flow experiences and provide a useful starting point for experiencing an increasing amount of flow in daily life.*

### Goal

The goal of this exercise is to bring awareness to the moments of experiencing a flow-state.

### Advice

It is possible to use a daily variation of this exercise. In this daily version, the client recalls activities that caused him/her to experience flow at the end of the day. Preferably, the client keeps track of these experiences (either digitally or using pen and paper), so that they can be discussed during the next therapy or coaching session. Together with the client, the practitioner can then look for characteristics that are shared by the activities and explore potential ways to increase flow experiences.

### Suggested Readings

Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, I. S. (Eds.). (1988). *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Hektner, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *A longitudinal exploration of flow and intrinsic motivation in adolescents*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City.

Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2009). *Flow theory and research*. In C. R. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 195–206). New York: Oxford University Press.

## Tool Description

### Instructions

1. Explain the concept of flow to your client. You can mention the characteristics of flow according to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009) for this purpose:
  - There is intense focused concentration on the present moment and a loss of relative self-consciousness.
  - There is a sense of deep focus and effortless involvement that makes other needs negligible.
  - The experience that action and awareness are merged.
  - The activity is intrinsically rewarding.
  - There is immediate feedback on the progress as the participant engages in the activity, and the belief in potential success.
  - The goals are clear.
  - There is no concern about the judgment of others.
  - There is a sense of personal control or agency in the activity.
  - There is a sense of distortion of time (e.g. time seems to slow down or pass quickly).
2. Invite the client to think of a time where he/she was completely absorbed and focused on what he/she was doing. A time when your client felt positive and strong about his/her abilities, and was not worried about failing. Allow your client some time to recall this event.
3. Have the client write about the experience on a piece of paper. Have them write down their thoughts, feelings, and impressions of the experience. Alternatively, discuss the experience with the client. Guide the participants with the following questions.

What was going on? When was this? Where were you?

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Who were you with?

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What was happening?

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How or what did you feel?

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How did the experience start?

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How did you feel after the experience was over?

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4. Evaluate the exercise. You may address the following questions:

How did it feel to do this exercise of recalling your flow-state?

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Are there more examples of activities that you recognise as flow states in your life? If so, what are these activities?

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Is there a characteristic that is shared by the examples that you mention? For instance, creativity may be involved in all or most of the examples. Or the activities are always carried out alone/with others.

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Would it be possible to do these activities more often?

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If so, what could be a first step to do these activities more often?

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