COMS30029 Human-Computer Interaction

Week 5 Practical Exercise: Flow States

We're going to dig deeper into flow states this week. Flow as a theory hits an interesting sweet spot between empirical validity, easiness-to-understand, and applicability to design. As such by focusing on flow we can quickly get some insight into what it means to work with a theory of positive user experience in various ways. The various sections of this week's exercise target different aspects of the use of Flow theory:

1. Measuring user experience with validated questionnaires

2. Thinking about consequences for business, user, society

3. Theory as a source of design ideas

All the documents mentioned are in this week's folders. If it helps you can refresh your memory about flow by skimming over FSS_intro.pdf. Read no more than the first couple of pages at first (up to b The Flow Dimensions). The rest of the document should be a useful reference for later activities.

As a quick reminder, Flow states are positive, task-engaged experiences, with the following properties:

- **You feel "in the Moment"**

- **You have the experience of your awareness merging with the performance of the action**

- **You have some loss of reflective self-consciousness**

- **You feel "in control" and self-driven**

- **You lose track of time**

- **The activity feels intrinsically rewarding (you enjoy doing it for its own sake)**

We're going to use some of this discussion to contrast Flow and Self Determination Theory. Depending on your tastes we have provided two

Comparison Templates in the folder this comparison. Open one of these templates and add details to it as you go through the exercise.

1 Flow Questionnaires

Look at the long flow questionnaire

Think about the work (or non-work!) you did in the last hour. Individually complete the "Long Flow Questionnaire (general).pdf" for this activity. Then mark it using the information at the end of the document

When you have done this, discuss the following questions

1. **What were you doing in the last hour** (all judgements suspended!)

2. **How did you score on the different subscales of the FSS** Do you agree with this score. Do you have any thoughts about it?

3. **What did you think about the questions?** Were any difficult to answer? Did any seem out-of-place? What do they tell you about the process of measuring "flow"?

Now discuss the following questions:

1. **How might this be useful to someone studying your activity and experience?**

2. **Are there situations where you might use this alone to understand technology experiences?**

3. **Are there situations where you would *not* use this scale at all?**
   Or cases when you would also want to understand other things not captured? What else would you want to know?
   Think about SDT and other theories we have introduced so far.
   Think about things not covered by any theories we have studied.

Validated questionnaires are very carefully calibrated. Researchers capture results from hundreds, or thousands of respondents under controlled conditions, and run statistical analysis on the results to test the validity of individual subscales, and the overall scale. The questionnaires themselves often build on previous questionnaires which are thought to accurately capture particular features of behaviour.

(Ideally, in your group) look at the **Long Flow Questionnaire (Physical)** and compare it to the General version:

1. **What do you notice that is different.**

2. **Do you think these differences really matter? Why?**

3. **Can you think of situations where you might want to measure flow, or understand flow experience, but neither of these questionnaires would be appropriate? How would you approach these situations?**

Think about the comparison to SDT. Note down differences in the comparison sheet you opened at the start of the exercise. You can go back to lecture slides, or look at resources online to remind yourself about SDT

2 FLOW, What is it good for?

Discuss in your groups:

Almost any variety of experience can be more or less good or bad depending on the context and goals. And a person's experience is not only of value to themselves - experience can be monetised, and it can encourage particular kinds of behaviour, meaning other people can benefit from your experience. When is a flow experience with technology more or less good/ bad for the following stakeholders

1. The owners of a technology
2. The users of a technology
3. Other people around the users of the technology

Again,

Think about the comparison to SDT. Note down differences in the comparison sheet you opened at the start of the lecture. You can go back to lecture slides, or look at resources online to remind yourself about SDT

3 Design a Flow Experience

Together in your groups discuss how you can use the idea of Flow to design a game, or a social media application.

1. Decide in your groups quickly which you will focus on

2. Quickly remind yourselves of the dimensions of flow. You can look at the FSS_intro pdf in the session files if it helps. From the Bottom of page 2 there is a description of the dimensions.

3. How can you target these dimensions in your game or app. Some dimensions will be easy to target directly, some dimensions may be hard to target directly. For Autotelic experience you might also think about what we said about Self Determination Theory.
   Make a list of dimensions in a shared document and note down from your discussion how you might target these ideas

4. Convert these ideas into a rough outline for the interface or game. Just use quick sketches and notes to capture the idea

5. Finally think about the kind of design ideas that ideas of Flow have pushed you towards. What's missing? What kinds of good design ideas would flow not encourage?

Important: Please post your design on Teams/General channel together with a short description of your design rationales

Again, *Think about the comparison to SDT. Note down differences in the comparison sheet you opened at the start of the lecture. You can go back to lecture slides, or look at resources online to remind yourself about SDT*

4 Optional Extra - Flow Disposition

It turns out, weirdly, that people like filling in "psychological" personality questionnaires. Lots of them are not especially valid, but perhaps fun, and maybe sometimes they're useful scaffolds for self reflection. The Flow questionnaires are pretty well validated and have a decent theoretical and empirical basis - and there is a flow-based personality questionnaire. If you have time it might be fun to have a look.

Flow is an experience, but psychology also suggests that some people have a greater disposition towards flow states than others: that is some people are more drawn to such states and find it easier to enter such states. The Flow Disposition questionnaire helps us understand the degree to which people are drawn to such states, and find themselves inhabiting flow states.

If you're up for it, fill in the flow disposition score. If you do it as a group, discuss your scores in your group, and what it might mean.