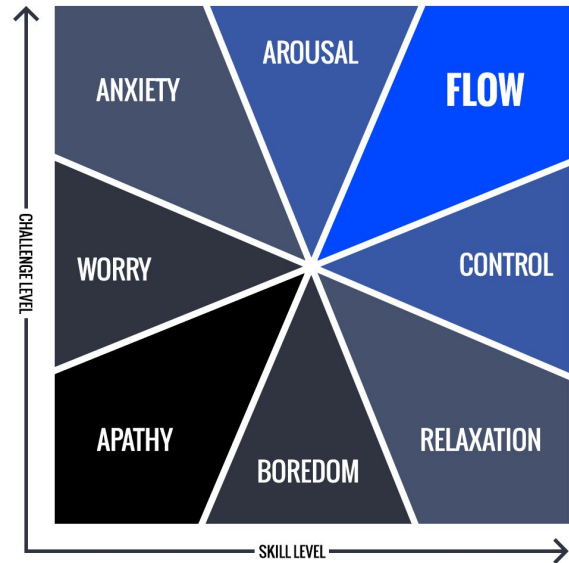


The Flow State

Imagine looking at a hill and seeing the divots, nooks, and crannies where the water has flowed through. Water moves so fluidly, so naturally. When it encounters resistance, it moves to the side and finds another way. This is the description that inspired Mihaly Csikszentmihályi to study the concept of the flow state. The flow state is the peak human experience, the place where your skills and your challenge are balanced to such a point where the challenge is neither too easy nor too hard, and you are perfectly challenged and fully immersed in the task at hand. The result: a feeling of focus so all-encompassing that you can lose your sense of self.

So how does this state come about? Well the amazing thing about flow is that it is absolutely everywhere. I first learned about flow in my freshman year of college in a very unexpected place: a Computer Game Design class. My professor introduced the concept of flow in video games and showed the above image. Make a video game too easy and the player will lose interest and experience boredom; there is no challenge nor is there a reason to improve. Make a game too hard and the player will be too frustrated and anxious to continue. The secret is to create a game that is right in the middle: not too easy and not too hard, just challenging enough such that the player can learn and increase their skill at the level of the game ("Cognitive Flow: The Psychology of Great Game Design."). By finding this point, you can induce flow in the mind of the player.



By tapping into these states, it is almost as if one taps into another part of themselves, a part of themselves that acts on instinct, acts without second guessing, acts exactly how physics wants them to act. So how exactly can one go about entering the flow state? Well according to Marelisa Fabrega (Marelisa), the most important steps are to **identify a challenge** that interests you, and **developing your skills** to meet that challenge, and **focusing completely at the task at hand**. This will allow you to find the balance between skill and challenge and completely immerse yourself in that task. Anything that you can set your mind to and develop the skills for, you can flow with it.

Extensions of this idea have been used in very creative ways by big companies like Google. Google is very familiar with the concept of “group flow”, simply a group of people working together at peak productivity. Using Burning Man as a test, company founders brought along a prospective CEO and observed how he behaved on the hectic desert playa of Burning Man. Longtime Burners and Google founders knew that Burning Man “alters consciousness in a very

particular way and it drops people into a state of group flow.” (Reilly) So watching how a prospective CEO behaved in a powerful group flow environment would reveal a lot about whether or not their prospective hire could let go of his ego and merge with a team. At the end of the week-long event, they had their answer: Sundar Pichai was going to be the new CEO of the largest tech company in the world.

I could go on and on, but at this point the message is clear: flow is a powerful tool for working in all walks of life. If you want to improve yourself, work better with others, or even just experience overall satisfaction with life, flow is for you.

Works Cited

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