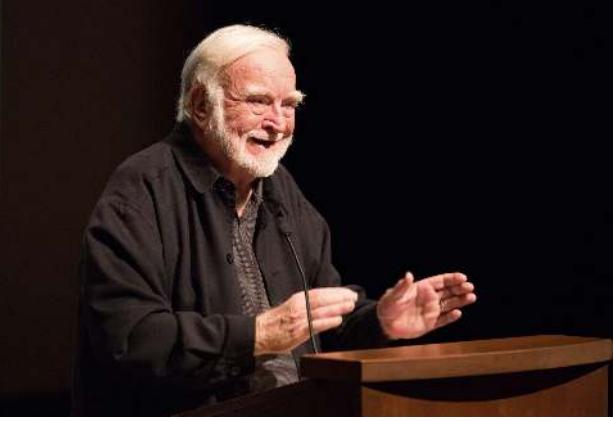


Flow

Peak experiences
Psychological and neurological correlates



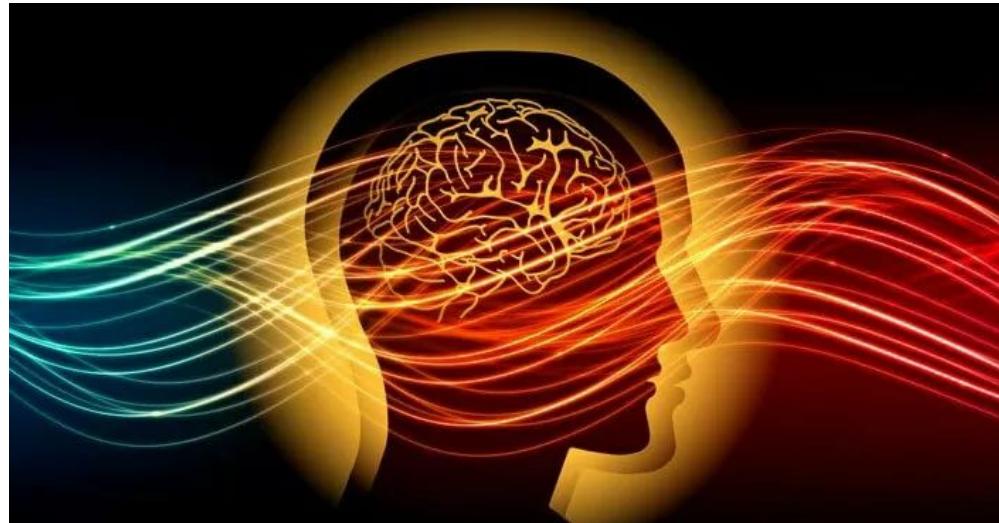
“The happiest people spend much time in a state of flow – the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”

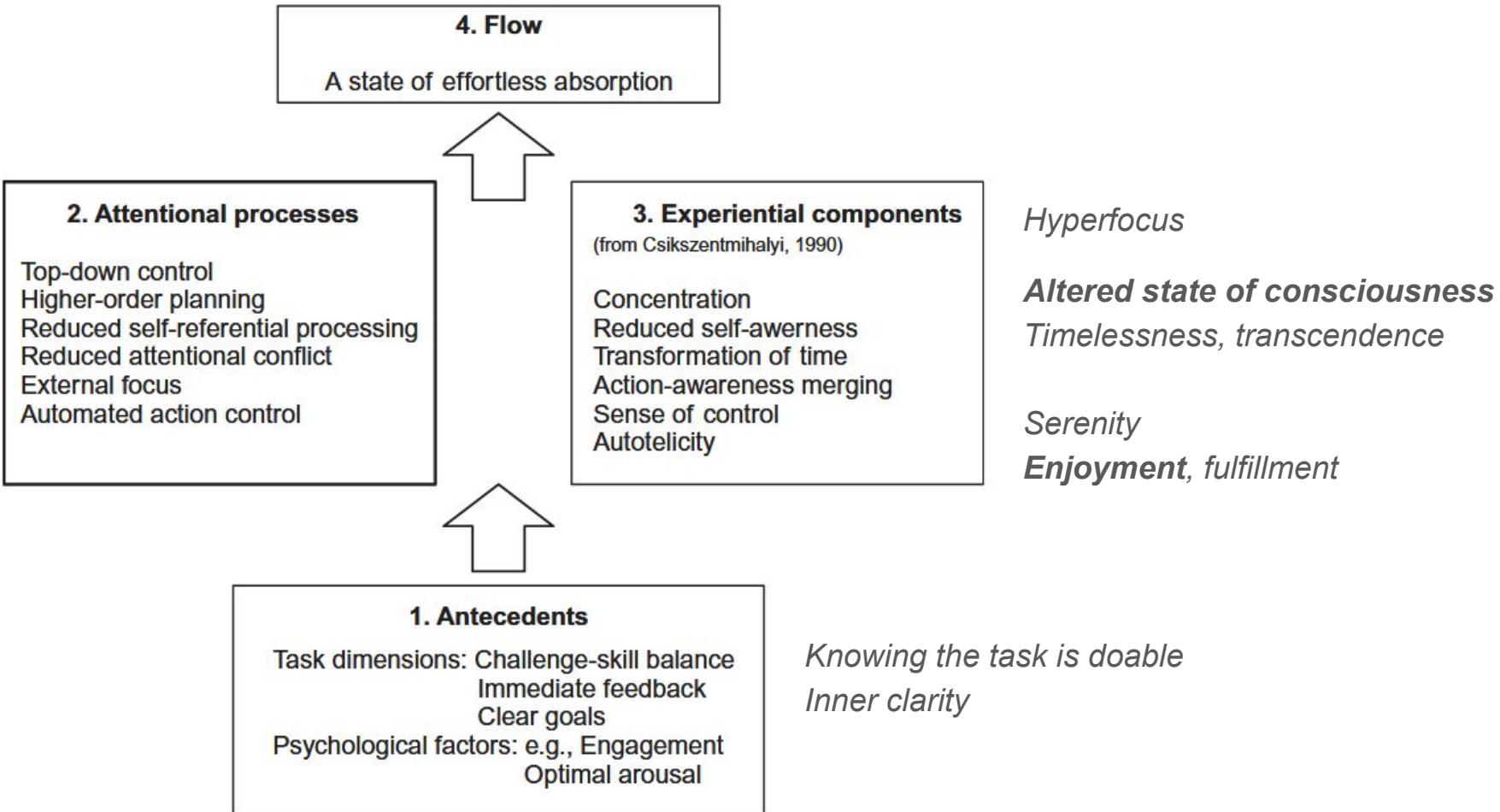
– Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

What is flow?

State of optimal experience denoted by smooth and accurate performance with a **complete absorption in the task** to the point of time dissociation and dissociative tendencies

Effortless, spontaneous,
“automatic” action → FLOW







vevox

19

1. How often do you experience "flow"?

19 responses

I do not recall experiencing it.



0%

Less than monthly



31.58%

Regularly (>1/month)



36.84%

Quite often (>3 /week)



31.58%

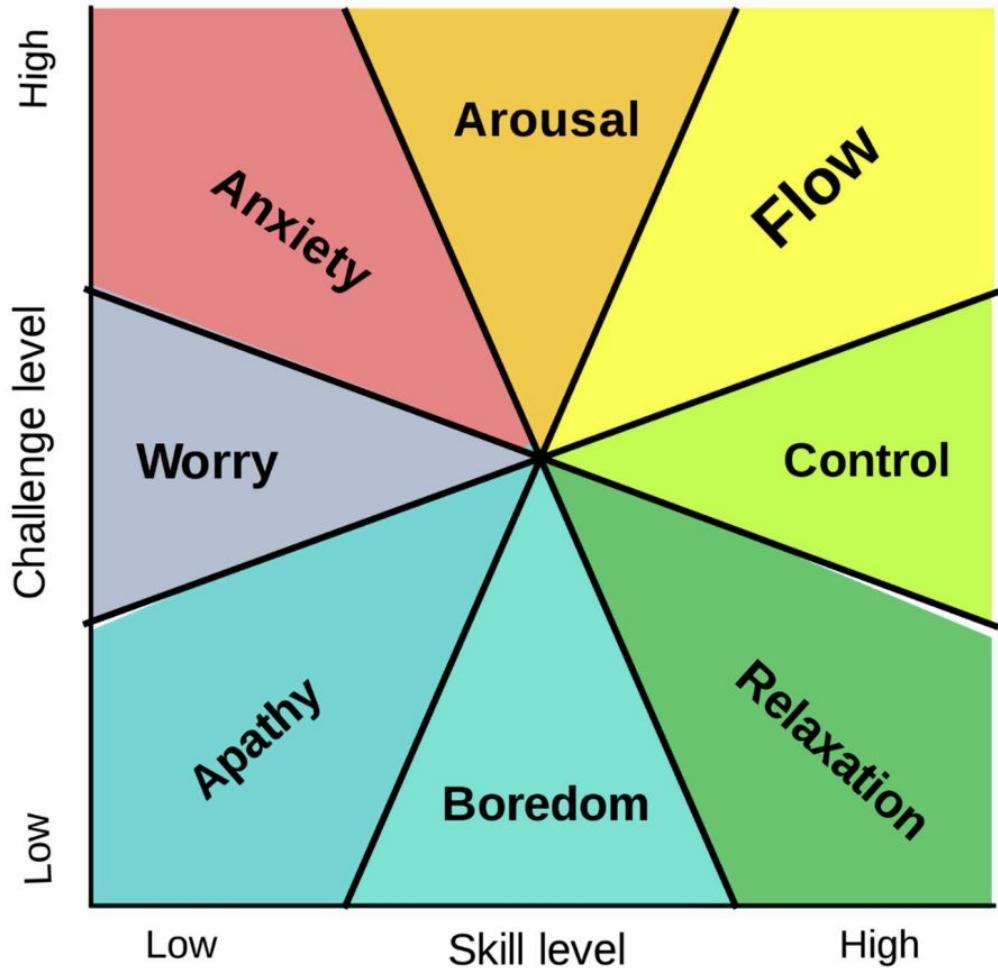
Allowed selections: 1



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Skill-challenge match
“Golden rule” of flow

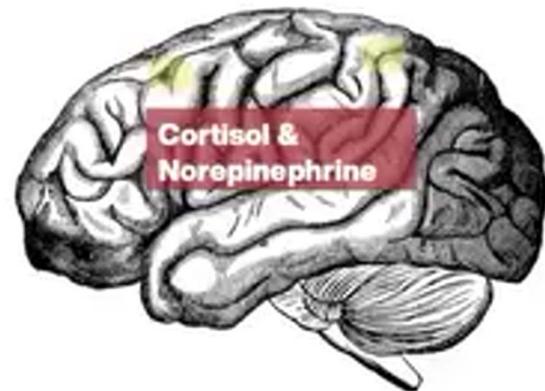
“Enjoyment appears at the boundary between boredom and anxiety, when the challenges are just balanced with the person’s capacity to act.”

The flow cycle: 1 - Struggle

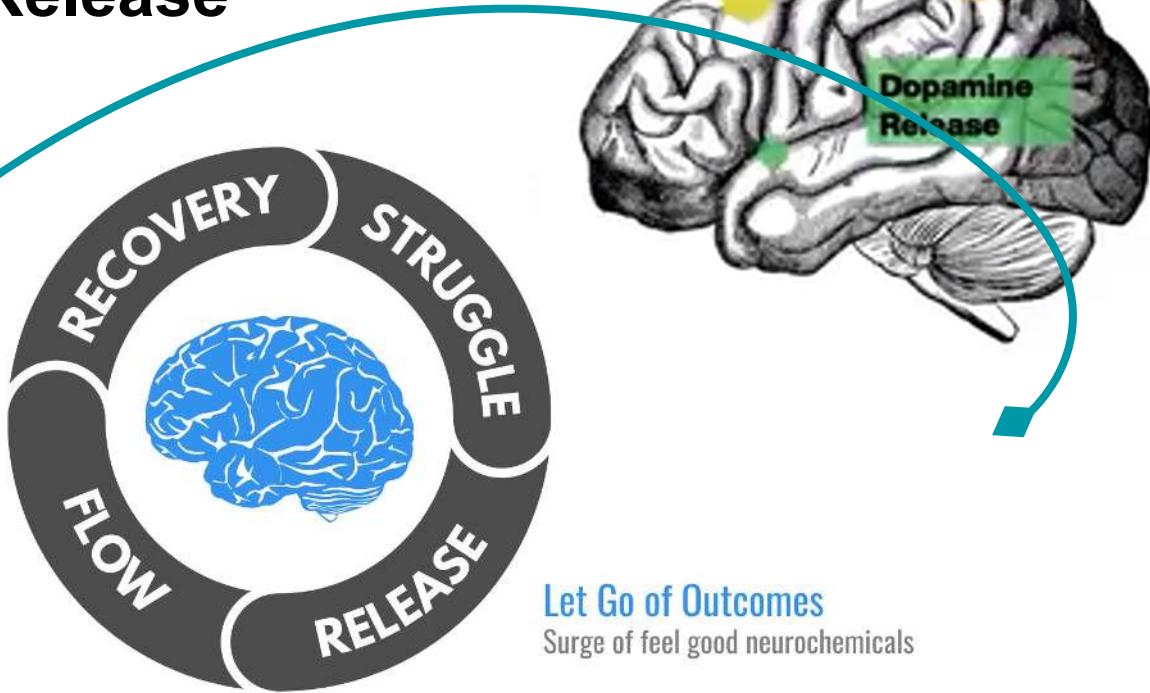


Overloading The Brain
Release of stress neurochemicals

Cortisol
Norepinephrine



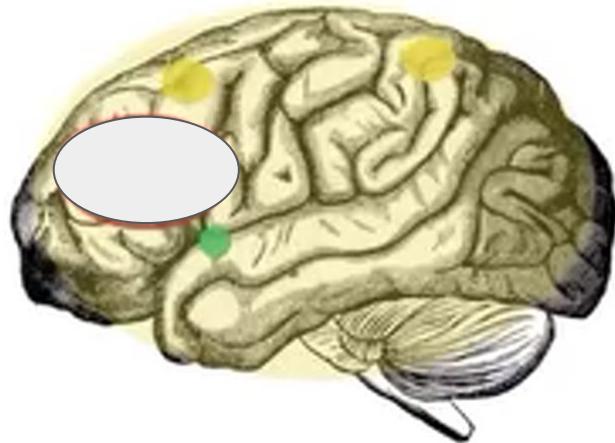
The flow cycle: 2 - Release



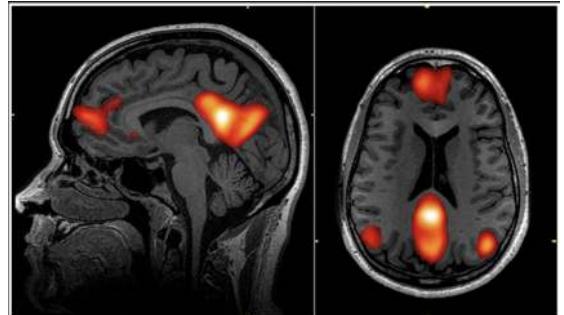
- Self-talk / Reframe
- Task focusing
- Diaphragmatic breathing

The flow cycle: 3 - Flow

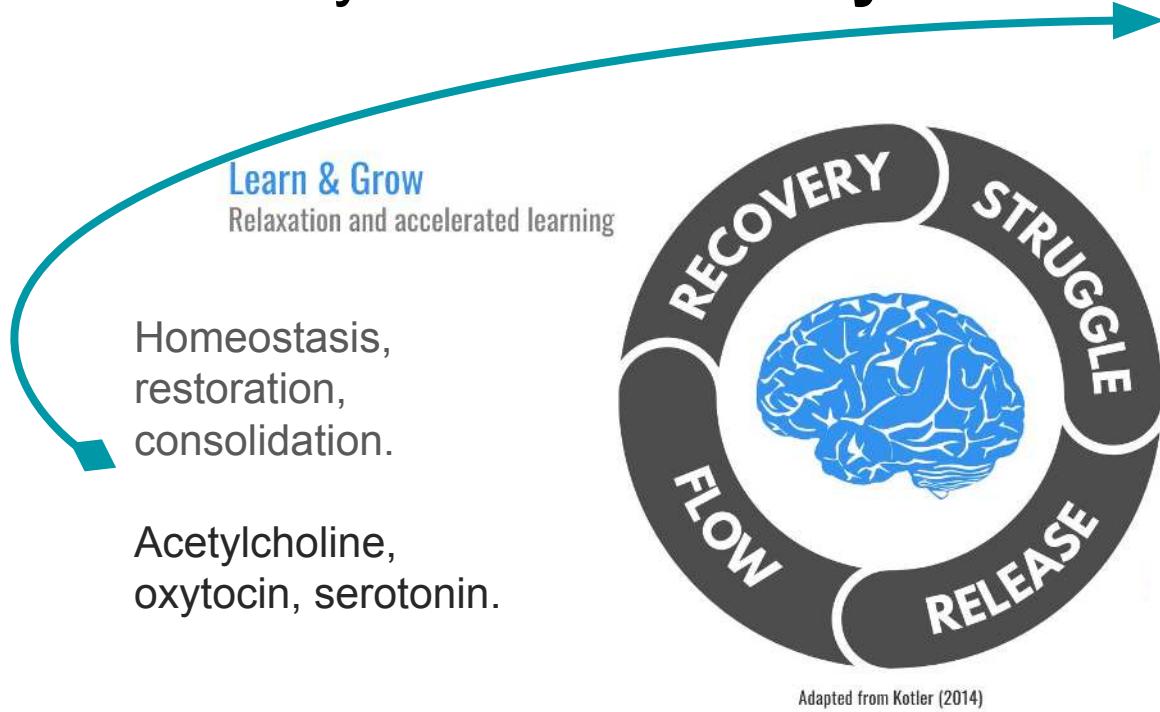
Present in the Process
Heightened awareness and efficient action



Endorphins



The flow cycle: 4 - Recovery



- Sleep / Nutrition
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Mind wandering / Mindfulness

Building flow

1. Goal clarity
2. Immediate feedback
 - a. Eg. video games, improv theater
3. Skill-challenge balance
 - a. Failure once every 3-4 attempts

“Some individuals have developed such strong internal standards that they no longer need the opinion of others to judge whether they have performed a task well or not. The ability to give objective feedback to oneself is in fact the mark of the expert.”

Building flow

Autotelic personality

- Intrinsic motivation
- Persistence
- Low self-centeredness
- Resilience
- Disinterested interest

☒ Exotelic (extrinsically motivated)

Intrinsic motivators: **curiosity, passion, purpose, autonomy, mastery**

"The most important step in emancipating oneself from social controls is the ability to find rewards in the events of each moment."

More flow triggers

- Concentration
- Dopamine&attention triggers:
 - Novelty
 - Unpredictability
 - Complexity
 - Awe
 - Risk taking
 - Competition
- Separation from everyday reality

F 2. In which settings do you experience flow?

On my own, doing creative or intellectual in-depth tasks

95.65%

Around people, interacting, cooperating or performing

43.48%

In intense, stimulating and adrenaline-driven physical activities

34.78%

In activities with consistent, endurance or rhythmic movement (eg. surf, yoga)

43.48%

Allowed selections: 4

Poll in the meeting on 13th Feb 2026



Join at:
vevox.app

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Flow profiles



DEEP THINKER



HARD CHARGER



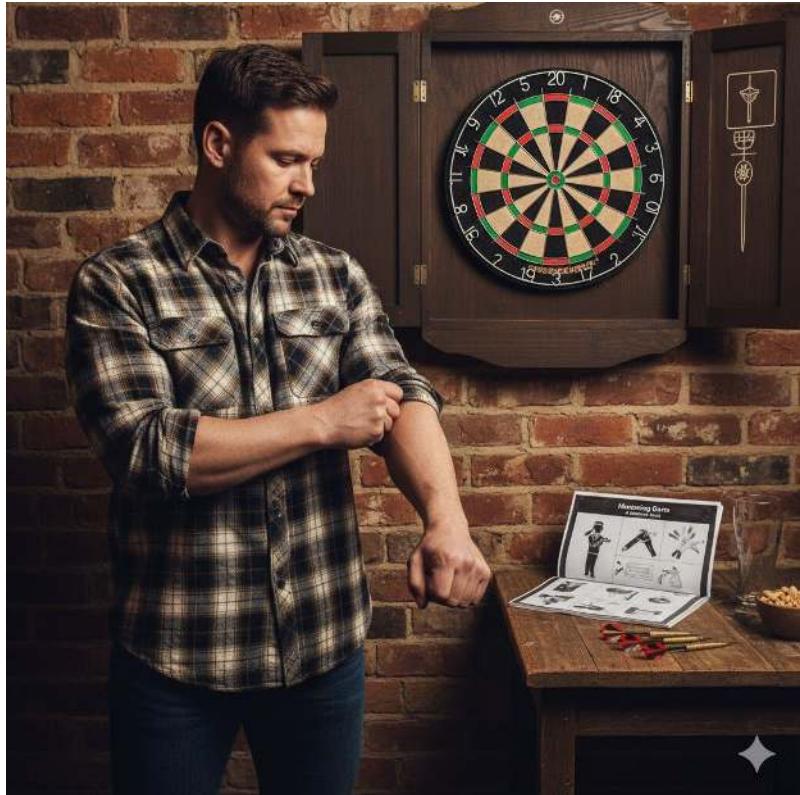
FLOW GOER



CROWD PLEASER

How to cultivate flow

1. Set a clear goal
 - a. know exactly what to focus on
(why)
 - b. Find what you like / care about
2. Fine tune your challenge
 - a. **Match activity to skill level** -
challenging but not too difficult
 - b. Progressive overload
3. Flow ritual
 - a. Deep breathing, a song, a clean
workspace, warm up task...
 - b. Instrumental music/white noise
 - c. **Separate from everyday life**



How to cultivate flow

5. Commit to min. 15 min of deep work
6. Enhance flow
 - a. Give yourself objective feedback
 - b. Curiosity
 - c. Competition / gamification
 - d. Hope for success
7. Avoid flow killers
 - a. Eliminate distractions
 - b. Overthinking / doubting
 - c. Perfectionism / the right moment
 - d. Conversations / Lyrics in songs
 - e. Fatigue, hunger/thirst
 - f. Fear of failure



Possible downside of flow state

- Neglecting oneself
- Neglecting responsibilities
- Post-flow crash / purposelessness
- Addiction
- Detachment from other aspects of life
- Doing without thinking



- Eat / sleep
- Timers / breaks
- Meaningful goals
- Accept boredom / arousal / frustration
- Thinking about doing



"Repeatedly we question the necessity of our actions and evaluate critically the reasons for carrying them out. But in flow there is no need to reflect, because the action carries us forward as if by magic."

Take home message

- Happiness isn't a matter of luck but something that can be cultivated
- Flow happens in the right gear, right now

“One cannot lead a life that is truly excellent without feeling that one belongs to something greater and more permanent than oneself.”

– Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Topics for discussion

1. What is your personal experience with flow?
 - a. In which contexts /activities do you experience flow?
 - b. What are your flow triggers/enhancers and your flow “kryptonites”?
 - c. How do you optimize for flow at work / in leisure time?
2. What do you think about the dichotomy between
 - a. deep work/deliberate practice as a necessary struggle vs.
 - b. pursuit of flow /automatic action as means to well-being/happiness?
3. How do you see the balance between benefits and downsides of pursuing and experiencing flow?

References

- Book “Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life.” by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi
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- Harris D, Vine, Samuel JV, Wilson MR: “Neurocognitive mechanisms of the flow state” Prog Brain Res. 2017;234:221-243. doi: 10.1016/bs.pbr.2017.06.012.
- Book “The Rise of Superman, by Steven Kotler, 2014
- TED Talk “Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: Flow, the secret to happiness” -
<https://youtu.be/fXleFJCqsPs?si=kxGnHcFLitsto-CH>
- This presentation was also inspired by a talk by Rico Alokuzyay - Achieving flow states, Psychology and active development