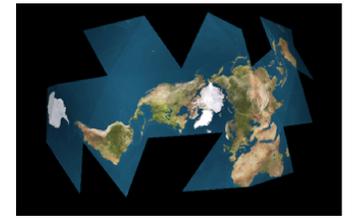


Flow– The Optimal Experience: Predicting Daily Well-Being

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BACKGROUND

- Intense concentration and focus during a pleasurable experience is likely to explain individual and within-person variations in affect and psychological well-being.
- This study looked at the effect of engaging in an optimal experience, also known as Flow overtime. Flow is defined as: ‘a pleasurable experience of focused concentration, one of intense involvement that is characterized by a balance of skill and challenge where one can lose the sense of time and self consciousness’
This state requires no intervention to occur, it happens naturally when deeply involved in an activity.
- Recent studies have reported the following:
 - Students who experience Flow report higher scores of psychological well-being, happiness and relaxation on average (Clarke & Haworth, 1994).
 - Older adults reported higher levels of positive affect, psychological well-being across time when experiencing Flow (Collins et al., 2008).
 - In a study of office workers, work related well-being was reported higher in all dimensions and correlated with Flow experiences (Bryce & Haworth, 2010)

Objectives

- Evaluate the impact of experiencing Flow daily and across time, as well as the quality of the Flow experience as it relates to positive affect, negative affect and psychological well-being.

METHOD

- At the end of each day, for 7 days, participants reported the occurrence of Flow and rated its dimensions on a 1-6 Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 6 = Strongly Agree) as part of the daily survey
- Examples of questions asked:
 - “Experience was extremely rewarding”
 - “Challenge and Skill Equally High”
 - “Things Happened Automatically”
- A series of multilevel modeling analyses were conducted in Mplus to evaluate between-person and within-person effects of Flow on well-being.

RESULTS

Table 1. Between-Person and Within-Person Effects of Flow on Dimensions of Well-Being

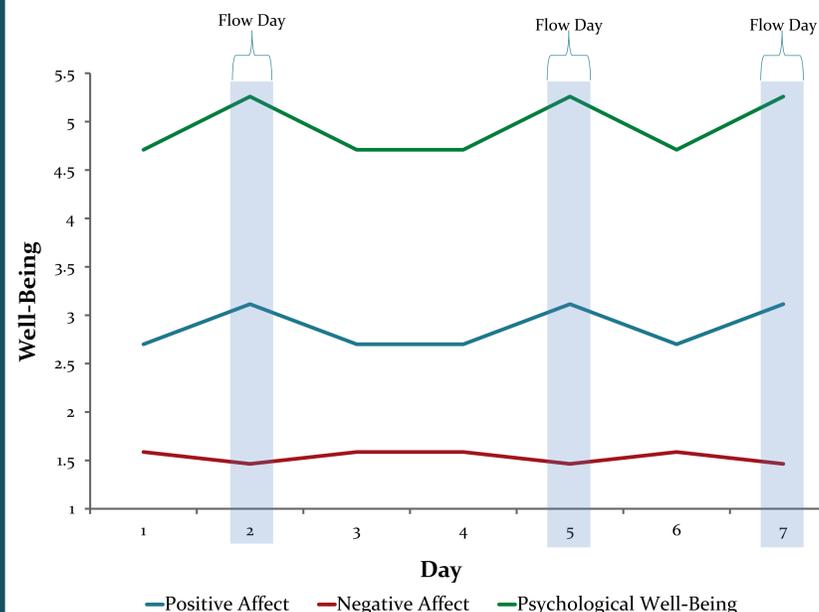
	PA		NA		PWB	
	WP	BP	WP	BP	WP	BP
Flow -						
Flow Experienced	0.41***	0.29	-0.12**	-0.24	0.55***	0.67
Global Flow (All Dimensions)	0.51	0.51**	0.10	-0.05	0.18	0.69**
Autotelic Experience	0.13	0.40**	0.18	-0.03	0.02	0.41*
Clear Goals	-0.06	0.09	0.03	-0.01	0.10	0.02
Challenge-Skill Balance	-0.10	0.50**	0.01	0.00	0.10	0.46*
Concentration on Task	0.05	0.40***	-0.03	-0.04	-0.01	0.58**
Paradox of Control	-0.12	0.10	0.03	0.03	-0.08	0.20
Unambiguous Feedback	-0.08	0.40***	0.01	-0.01	0.12	0.27
Action-Awareness	0.04	0.10	0.12	0.02	-0.11	0.17
Transformation of Time	0.04	0.10	0.05	-0.02	0.05	0.27*
Loss of Self Consciousness	0.07	0.20	0.01	-0.06	0.03	0.41*

Note. PA=positive affect, NA=negative affect, PWB=psychological well-being, WP=within-person, BP=between-person.

*p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 1 provides estimates of between-person (BP) and within-person (WP) effects on well-being for a one-unit change in the Flow measurement scale.

Figure 1. Estimated trajectory for an individual who experienced Flow on day 2, 5, and 7.



DISCUSSION

Flow and Well-being

- Different aspects of Flow had a positive association with individual differences in positive affect and psychological well-being.
- Based on person means across the seven day testing period, participants who experienced Flow reported higher levels of positive affect and psychological well-being. — This is congruent with findings for positive affect and psychological well being for older adults across time (Collins et al., 2008)
- Within-person variation in Flow Experienced was consistently related to daily variation in positive affect, negative affect, and psychological well-being. While within-person effects of other Flow experiences was not found, it may be that the benefits of experiencing Flow develop over longer periods of time.
- Based on research by Jackson & Eklund (2002), Flow was also tested as a multi-dimensional construct. Of the nine dimensions of Flow tested, six were related to between-person differences in well-being:
 - Autotelic Experience
 - Challeng-Skill Balance
 - Concentration on Task
 - Unambiguous Feedback
 - Transformation of Time
 - Loss of Self Consciousness
- Positive affect was higher in individuals reporting higher Autotelic Experience, Challenge, Concentration, and Unambiguous Feedback. The Concentration on Task and Transformation of Time dimensions were related to higher psychological well-being. Participants who were drawn in by their Flow experiences and lost track of time felt greater psychological well-being.
- None of the specific dimensions were related to well-being on a daily level, suggesting that the benefits of Flow develop over longer periods of time.

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