

CHAPTER FIVE

MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: FLOWING INTO CREATIVITY

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ABSTRACT: Csikszentmihalyi may be best known for his theory of flow, a highly focused mental state, (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) but he has contributed to the field of psychology and creativity in so many other diverse and unique ways. This chapter will explore his early background, summarize his most influential work and vast array of contributions in the field, and focus in on a handful of his most compelling concepts that has made him one of the leading pioneers in the field of positive psychology and creativity. Csikszentmihalyi portrays creativity as an interaction between the three factors of the individual, the field and the domain (System's Model) and stresses the importance of the concepts of flow, self-discovery, an autotelic personality and intrinsic motivation in the pursuit of happiness.

Keywords: Creativity, flow, autotelic personality, Systems Theory, intrinsic motivation, positive psychology, happiness, self-discovery.

Introduction

“Happiness does not simply happen to us. It’s something that we make happen”

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2004, p. 34)

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian-American psychologist, has impacted the field of psychology and creativity in profound ways. His best-selling book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990) reviews how this highly focused mental state is not only conducive to productivity but allows an individual to enter a place where they feel a sense of great enjoyment, purpose and meaning. His intentions in writing *Flow* were to offer insight on cultivating happiness that he learned from researching when individuals felt the most enjoyment. Today,



his book has sold over 4 million copies and it continues to draw much attention among both the public and professional audiences.

Csikszentmihalyi also has several other publications in the field of positive psychology and is acknowledged for his work in highlighting human strengths such as optimism, creativity, and intrinsic motivation. He continues his research and teaching as a Claremont Graduate University's Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Management and his work as the founder and co-director of the Quality-of-Life Research Center (QLRC), which is dedicated to research in these most significant areas of self-discovery.

Early Signs of Flow and Optimism

The Encyclopedia of World Biography (2006) gives a brief yet important summary of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's early life including pivotal events that clearly had an impact on his future research and teachings. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was born September 29, 1934 in Rijeka, Croatia (which was then part of Italy). His family was Hungarian and his father was a career diplomat who was appointed Hungarian Ambassador to Italy shortly after World War II before resigning to avoid working for communists who took over Hungary in 1948.

During the time of the war, Mihaly was a child and his life became quite disruptive as he was held in an Italian prison camp. Although an obvious difficult and challenging time, it was there that he was introduced to the game of chess and he found the game to be an excellent way to divert attention away from the challenges around him. In an interview, Csikszentmihalyi related:

Although maybe not aware of it at the time, but Csikszentmihalyi's introduc-

"I discovered chess was a miraculous way of entering into a different world ... for hours I'd just focus within a reality that had clear rules and goals" (Sobel, 1995, January). Interview: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Omni*, 73-90).

tion to the game of chess under those challenging circumstances probably constituted one of his early representations of experiencing his most influential and future concept of flow. Furthermore, as he moved into young adulthood, Csikszentmihalyi found yet another activity to be of high interest and that was painting. He discovered that painting was an addictive and enjoyable activity where creative work could be produced; another example of flow rearing itself early in his life. Influenced by his artistic interest, many of his observations and studies around creative individuals involved artists.

Another pivotal event in Csikszentmihalyi's young life was a chance interaction with Carl Jung at the early age of sixteen. Csikszentmihalyi met Jung at one of Jung's speaking events in Switzerland and this interaction had a profound impact on him. Just as Csikszentmihalyi was trying to find a system to better organize his life Carl Jung was speaking about the importance of more positive aspects of human experiences. This interaction no doubt im-

pacted many of Csikszentmihalyi's future interests in positive psychology including his work around self-discovery, optimism, and the pursuit of happiness.

Learning that the field of psychology was more established in American universities, Mihaly focused on applying to an American institution where he could further his education. He immigrated to the United States at age twenty-two and began his college degree at the University of Chicago. Soon after he graduated from the same university with his B.A. and Ph.D. (1965) degrees in Psychology and became a U.S. citizen in 1968. He returned to the University of Chicago in 1969 as a professor and remained at there until 2000. During his time as a professor, he continued to focus on his research and teaching in positive psychology (Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2006).

The Flow State

“Whenever the goal is to improve the quality of life, the flow theory can point the way.”

- Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p. 5)

Csikszentmihalyi used the term “flow” in a 1988 collection of essays, *Optimal Experiences: Studies of flow in consciousness* that he co-edited with Isabella, his wife. On the heels of that collection of essays, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* was published in 1990. Although Csikszentmihalyi did not have a goal to become well-known and famous, that changed quickly when his book appeared on the bestseller list and has now sold over 4 million copies. The impact of his book on the concept of flow was incredible and demonstrated an increasing impact outside the academic arena – moving into the realms of popular culture, professional sports, business and politics (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Flow can best be described as a peak experience, losing one's self or being in the zone (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is the intrinsic reward for going after a challenging goal where there needs to be an optimal match between the challenge of the problem and an individual's own skills. He further characterized flow as the balancing of boredom and anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993).

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) also concluded that there are individuals who have developed their flow to such a great extent that they are even able to translate potential threats into an enjoyable challenge, all while maintaining an inner tranquility of the mind. This person can be described as an autotelic self which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Csikszentmihalyi spent a significant amount of time investigating the nature of enjoyment and the concept of flow by interviewing several individuals (chess players, rock climbers, dancers) who stressed enjoyment as the main reason for pursuing and persisting in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The conclusion of his findings was that there were general characteristics of optimal experience and similar conditions were present across both work and play environments.

The flow conditions that were present in Csikszentmihalyi's finding included:

Further studies in the arts and sciences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), aesthetic experiences (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990), sport (Jackson 1995, 1996) and literary writing (Perry, 1999) confirmed the original account

1. Perceived Challenges
2. Clear Goals & Immediate Feedback
3. Intense & Focused Attention
4. Merging of Action and Awareness
5. Loss of Reflective Self-Consciousness
6. Sense of Controlling One's Actions
7. Distortion of Temporal Events – Experience of timelessness
8. Being Involved in an Intrinsically Rewarding Experience

of the flow state that Csikszentmihalyi described and the experiences were found to be the same across lines of culture, class, gender and age (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Csikszentmihalyi also asserted that flow does not necessarily require extensive commitment such as in a sport or musical or artistic endeavor, but can also be achieved by many other activities such as reading, eating or even having a conversation with a friend. What does seem to be required is: Intense concentration and attention and these are defining qualities of flow. Remaining in flow requires attention be held and intrinsically rewarding, leading to the individual to continue to identify and progressively engage in complex challenges in order for deepen enjoyment to be present (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

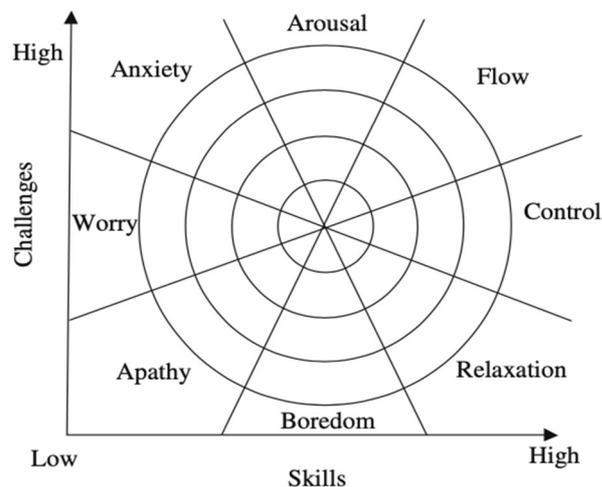


Figure 1: Adapted from Csikszentmihalyi (1997)

The model of the flow state is where flow is experienced when perceived challenges and skills are above an individual's average levels.

Csikszentmihalyi's research on flow continues to contribute knowledge to several topics that are of significant importance to positive psychology and highlights the phenomenology of optimal experience and long-term happiness which will be explored later in further detail. Still today, after several decades of being introduced, the concept of flow remains highly visible among many diverse audiences, including academia and the public sector. One thing is clear and that is whenever the goal is to improve one's quality of life, the flow theory can point that way.

Flow and the Autotelic Personality

“Autotelic persons are attracted to goals that require effort to achieve; those that prefer relaxation are not”

- Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi
(2002, p. 257)

Csikszentmihalyi described a personality type found within an individual who possesses flow as one with an autotelic personality or a person who “generally does things for their own sake, rather than in order to achieve some later external goal” (Csikszentmihalyi (1997, p. 17). These individuals have competencies such as a general curiosity and interest in life, persistence, and low self-centeredness; all of which enable an individual to enter and stay in flow.

Csikszentmihalyi felt that a good life was characterized by complete absorption in what one does and his flow research and theory originated in the desire to understand this phenomenon of intrinsically motivated or autotelic activity: Activity rewarding in and of itself (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). This experience stood apart from any extrinsic reward that an individual may receive or be motivated by.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) related that a successful creator was almost obsessive in their perseverance and defined this individual with an “autotelic” personality (two Greek roots: auto – self and telos – goals). He further related that because creative individuals direct themselves toward a goal, they have incredible amounts of energy for their work with great perseverance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). It is inevitable that creative individuals will encounter obstacles when working towards their objectives and at times they have to work against the popular vision and what everyone else is doing. This is where perseverance is noticed and has an obvious connection to the concept of flow

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) summarized five main ways in which an individual is able to cultivate one's self into an autotelic person and it is clear how these five components relate closely to the ingredients needed for flow.

1. Setting goals that have clear and immediate feedback
2. Becoming totally immersed in a particular activity
3. Paying full attention to what is happening in the moment
4. The enjoyment of an immediate experience
5. Considering one's skills to the challenge at hand

The Systems Model

Creativity occurs in an interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural content.

- Csikszentmihalyi (1997)

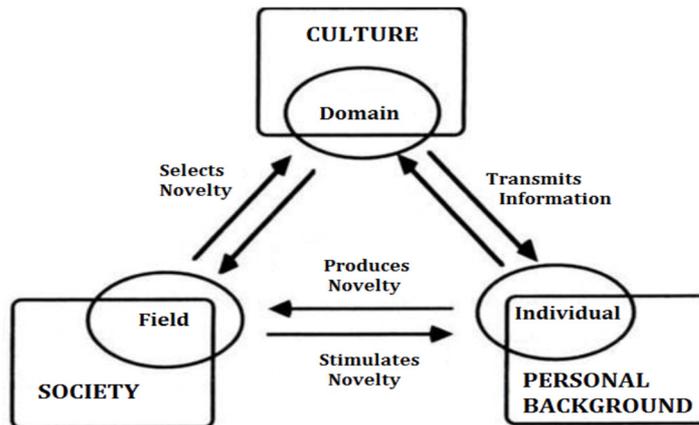
Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, and Gardner (1994) were all interested in the interactionist orientation of the social context of creativity. Their framework, the Domain-Individual-Field Interaction (DIFI) indicated that there are three important subsystems that must interact to generate a creative product. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) referred to "flow" when each component of the DIFI system was found to be synchronized with the other two.

The domain in the system's model is "a formalized body of knowledge that is associated with a given field" (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, and Gardner (1994; p. 20) and the framework focused on the *individual* who created something of permanent significance to a specific domain. Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi (2006) expand the definition and related that the *domain* consisted of information or a set of symbolic rules within a society and culture and combined the area of expertise within which an individual is present. In addition, they described the *field*, the third component, as the gatekeepers in the domain who have a significant impact on whose individual's work rises to the top of the domain and gets recognition for their contributions.

A domain may be art and the individual the artist. In this particular example, the field would include all of the members within the art domain who act as the gatekeepers and who judges the quality and creativity of an individual within the domain. However, in the study of creativity, "art" may be considered too large to be considered a single domain and one of its branches, such as painting, might be considered a more appropriate domain (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, and Gardner, 1994). In the domain of art, the field "selects what new works of art deserve to be recognized, preserved and remembered" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). In this example, it is evident how the three components of the individual, the domain and the field work together for optimal creativity to take form.

In the systems model, creativity takes place when an individual makes a change in the information contained in a domain and this change or new expression of creativity is chosen by the field for inclusion in the domain. If an artist produced artwork that is not accepted or does not fulfill the needs of the field, the artist would be ignored (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). The continued need for the interactionist orientation re-

mains evident and as Csikszentmihalyi (1988) asserts, the individual is part of a system of mutual influences and information.



(Csikszentmihalyi 1999, p. 315)

Figure 2: The merging of the three factors of the individual, the domain and the field. These three factors must come together for creativity to result.

The overview of the system's model clearly suggests that the nature of the creative individual is dependent on the nature of the domain and field in which the individual operates. Unlike the more traditional view of creativity as a mental process or insight of an individual, the system's model proposes that creativity can only be made up of an individual, a domain and a field (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006) and can only work in sync as a triad with circular causality. Csikszentmihalyi's researched this triad with great intensity and vigor and his work has made a significant impact in the field of creativity.

The Pursuit of Happiness

"The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something we can make happen."

- Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p. 3)

How individuals seek optimal happiness has been a question asked for over twenty-three hundred years dating back to Aristotle (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Despite all of the many advances in our world, achieving happiness still remains a topic of high priority today and Csikszentmihalyi, as one of the lead-

ing pioneers in the scientific field of happiness, has researched this question in great detail to provide some answers.

Csikszentmihalyi's intense exploration in this area for many decades has uncovered some very powerful discoveries. To start, he ascertained that happiness is not something that just happens nor is the result of good fortune or random chance. It also does not depend on outside occurrences, but rather on how those events are interpreted.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) noted that happiness is a condition that needs to be carefully prepared for and independently developed by each individual. Being able to control one's inner experiences and responses to life around them is key. He also explained that happiness should not be consciously sought after but instead act as an ongoing force of inner control in one's daily life. This has to deal with each individual's perceptions of their own unique personal life. There are many factors outside of a person's control but one's perceptions of events – good or bad occurrences – can have a huge impact on the level of happiness experienced.

Csikszentmihalyi went on to claim that when individuals are feeling a sense of control with their actions in life, they in turn feel a sense of mastery of their own fate. This often brings a feeling of great exhilaration and enjoyment, leading to the ultimate feeling of happiness. Furthermore, it was added that this does not exclude the instances in life when faced with unfavorable or challenging circumstances. Even during challenging ordeals, individuals were found to have experienced extraordinary epiphanies or what one may see as achieving flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The work of Csikszentmihalyi in this area gives hope and a sense of self-control to each individual who seeks a happier and more fulfilling life. For each individual there are thousands of opportunities and challenges to expand oneself and it is up to each individual to decide how they will respond and perceive those situations. To state it simply, happiness comes from within and something that individuals have control over and make happen despite any and all external factors swiveling around. Getting control of one's life is not always easy but in the long run optimal experiences add up to a sense of mastery or a sense of participation in determining the content, perception and result of one's life. That is how Csikszentmihalyi (1990) best explains happiness.

Csikszentmihalyi further relates that all individuals have the potential to find genuine satisfaction and happiness during the flow state. However, as earlier described, this doesn't just happen automatically. It has to be carefully prepared for and nurtured by each individual and occurring when challenges are carefully set (neither too demanding nor too simplistic). It involves an honest perception of an individual's personal level of challenge and their perceived level of skill.

Self-Discovery

“Every flow experience contributes to the growth of the self.

- Csikszentmihalyi (1993, p. 237)

How do individuals discover moments in their lives that create who they really are and that fulfill a life of meaning? Csikszentmihalyi has explored the topic of self-discovery in several of his published works which have invited readers into a deep dive exploration of how to grow oneself to the fullest potential.

As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) explained, the self is a complex entity – containing everything that has passed through consciousness, including memories, actions, desires and pains, and represents the hierarchy of goals that we have built up over time. Following a flow experience, the organization of the self becomes even more complex and is said to grow.

This complexity that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) referred to is the result of two broad psychological processes: differentiation and integration. Differentiation refers to a movement towards uniqueness and can be seen by separating oneself from others. Integration on the other hand refers to a union with other people, forming ideas beyond the self. Combining these opposite tendencies is where Csikszentmihalyi indicates we find our complex self. Furthermore, the self becomes more differentiated as a result of flow because conquering a challenge inevitably leaves an individual more skilled, capable and confident. When individuals chose a goal and invest themselves in it to the limits of their attention, whatever is accomplished will be enjoyable. Once this state is experienced, it is thought that individuals will strive to repeat it and this is the route to self-growth and discovery.

In Csikszentmihalyi's (1993), *The Evolving Self*, he claimed that every system tends to keep itself in an ordered state and in the case of human beings, most of what is called life consists of efforts to ensure self-preservation and self-replication. However, to reach a flow state, individuals first must recognize opportunities for action or challenge and then acquire the skills needed to conquer them. Unfortunately, many individuals find themselves attached to goals that lead to stagnation rather than growth. Csikszentmihalyi related this may be due to the fear of losing control over one's psychic energy as people strive to defend the self and remain oblivious of their full potential. Evolving to one's fullest potential challenges individuals to take risks but with great intrinsically sought out rewards. This may not be the goal of every individual, but for the people who strive to optimize their full potential and reach flow in the process, creativity can emerge.

Looking to the future with self-discovery, Csikszentmihalyi (1993, pp. 289-190) discussed four basic tenets or recommended principles to follow in life:

1. *You are part of everything around you: the air, the earth, and the sea: the past and the future.* Bringing disorder to any of these, brings harm upon your own self as well.
2. *You shall not deny your uniqueness.* Your thoughts, feelings and actions should be rooted in your personal knowledge and experience.
3. *You are responsible for your actions.* You are likely to increase order around you if you achieve control over your mind, desires, and actions.
4. *You shall be more than what you are.* The self is a creative construction. No one is ever complete and finished. It is what you will do in the future that determines who you are.

The Unfolding Lives and Influencers of the Creatives

“A creative life is still determined, but what determines it is a will moving across time – the fierce determination to succeed, to make sense of the world, to use whatever means to unravel some of the mysteries of the universe”.

▪ Csikszentmihalyi, (1996, p. 182)

Creativity: Flow and Psychology of Discovery and Invention (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013), gives a glimpse of what can lead up to these creative and monumental events of self-discovery. It is said that creative people differ from one another in many ways however in one regard they unanimously love what they do. Unlike others who put fame and fortune as their top priority, creative individuals strive for the opportunity to do the work that they enjoy doing. The question is: How did they acquire this autotelic personality? Were there things in their childhood or early adult life that fostered this type of creativity or flow state? This question is not clear cut in any case but there are some important conclusions that Csikszentmihalyi found in his research and creatives as children along with their parental influences and social class are worth highlighting.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) indicated that some children who later became remarkable adults in their field were early identified with great talent. However, many others showed no signs of early creativity. He found in his research that being a child prodigy is not a requirement for later creativity however high curiosity about one’s surroundings appears to be (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Being open to the world and interested in finding out more about it is what seems to be a key component of development of future creativity. This notion can support educational goals and strategies in school at a young age such as a tolerance of questioning and time for further exploration of high interest items.

Turning to the influence of parents, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) found that treating the child as a fellow adult contributes immensely to a child’s intellectual development along with the entire family’s supports of the child’s interest or area of expertise. Building a child’s sense of strong personal standards and self-confidence was also found to be impactful, in addition to having a sense of self-respect and discipline.

However, parental influences were not always perceived as positive and sometimes even fraught with tension especially if their child’s future direction (ie artist) was not what they envisioned. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) indicated that perhaps the most important contribution was in shaping character and how important a father or mother figure was in teaching certain values, especially honesty or the virtue of seeking truth in one’s work. Although there are always exceptions, it appeared that by and large parents were the main source of curiosity and involvement with life that is characteristic of future creatives. Another aspect in terms of the family upbringing was found to be the social class of parents. Some future creatives came from very poor origins and others from the upper or professional class but interesting enough, the research indicated that few were from the middle class.

Csikszentmihalyi also looked at the education, or schooling, of creatives and surprisingly it was found that these components had little effect on an individual's future creativity. That is not to say, however, that there were not some exceptions and there have been exceptional teachers that have been found to have a huge impact on future creatives. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) related that two teacher characteristics or factors can make a difference and they are: A teacher that notices and believes in the student's abilities and a teacher that challenges (and gives additional work) to the student. Some students in the studies conducted were known to especially recall extracurricular activities (and the teachers of these subjects) and saw these in a more favorable light than the main subjects. These subjects may have indeed been tapping into their high interest curiosity. The research that Csikszentmihalyi also summarized indicated that although the future creatives did not perceive themselves as popular in school, they rather saw themselves in a marginal position or being on the outside.

As the future creatives entered their adult lives, their creativity is noted to have begun to become more defined. The years in college tended to be a high point and where they often found independence and their own voice and where their future vocation became clear. Teachers also were found to appreciate their uniqueness and acted as mentors. Csikszentmihalyi made clear that creativity and the pursuit of self-discovery is rarely the product of a single moment or specific pattern. It is instead the result of a long-term commitment to a domain of interest that starts somewhere in childhood, proceeds through many years of schooling and ends in a career of personal high interest where flow can be achieved.

The kind of pattern – or lack of pattern – that has been explored by Csikszentmihalyi suggested an explanation of development that is quite different from the typical deterministic one. Instead, it appears that future creatives are not shaped by early events in their life but rather as they moved along in life, they had to adapt to whatever they were faced with. “Instead of being shaped by events, they shaped events to suit their purposes” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 181). The creatives appear to have a fierce determination to succeed and make sense of the world.

The Impact of Intrinsic Motivation

“To be successful you have to enjoy doing your best while at the same Time contributing something beyond yourself.”

- Csikszentmihalyi (2004, p. 28)

Since the flow concept was first introduced back in 1975 by Csikszentmihalyi, research on the flow experience has given a view into the phenomenology of intrinsic motivation. In extensive studies that have followed, Csikszentmihalyi has demonstrated that flow is highly associated with intrinsic motivation and enjoyment.

A key dimension of intrinsic motivation is interest, a positive effect that occurs in the interaction between a person and an activity and Deci

(1992) went on to suggest that the experience of interest results only when the needs, desires, and capacities of the individual line up with the attributes of an activity. Deci named two characteristics of tasks – optimal challenge and novelty – that make an activity interesting. Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) has presented evidence that for any activity, the optimal level of challenge is that which balances with an individual's level of skills in that particular activity. When this balance occurs, a flow experience can emerge.

An important longitudinal study conducted by Hekner & Csikszentmihalyi (1996) explored flow and intrinsic motivation in adolescents. Although prior research by Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) had shown that adolescents are typically not intrinsically motivated to do school work and the question of how to promote intrinsic motivation has been extensively studied, including several studies linking intrinsic motivation to “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi (1990), less was known about the intraindividual changes in flow and intrinsic motivation in adolescents and how these changes related to the development of self-directed learning.

The result of this important study expanded on earlier findings and suggested that those who increased in flow also increased in intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, time spent doing school work, and in the relevance in their activities to their future career goals (Hekner & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). These findings showed that positive change in adolescence is possible and that helping teenagers find the right balance of challenge and skills is necessary so they don't fall into the trap of passivity that can continue into adulthood.

Csikszentmihalyi has noted (1990) that many individuals give up on learning after they leave school because extrinsically motivated education is still a source of unpleasant memories and they have counted graduation as the first day of freedom. However, the individual who forgoes the use of their symbolic skills can never really be free as their thinking will be directed by the opinions of others or by the appeals of television. This relates back to the system's theory and how the three components of the individual, the domain and the field (or gatekeepers) work together. It also related to the flow perspective and how the perceived challenge and skill level of the individual is considered.

Csikszentmihalyi discusses how in an ideal situation, the start of a good education is one that is motivated intrinsically where the goal of studying and learning is no longer to make a grade and find a good job but rather to understand and develop a meaningful sense of what one's personal experience is all about. Only from this, will come the joy of a true thinker or an individual who can fully discover the flow of the mind.

No matter if it is an educational, work or an environment of leisure, the goal for most individuals is to find enjoyment in what they are doing. To do this, intrinsic motivation has to be part of the equation. It is up to the individual to take charge and be in control or the results can be disappointing. As Csikszentmihalyi has pointed out (1990) most jobs and even leisure activities – especially those involving passive consumption of mass media – are not designed to make individuals happy. Individuals have to set up their lives to be happy and learn to enjoy their work and their free-time so they can end up feeling that their lives as a whole are more enjoyable and worthwhile. When

this happens - when individuals can find their flow and work toward their full potential – they are on the path to living a fulfilling and meaning life.

Concluding Remarks

The field of psychology as a discipline often focuses on areas of human and group dysfunction rather than on activities that result in satisfaction, joy and happiness. Csikszentmihalyi's work and research has changed this. His theories and concepts impacted this change in a more positive direction and his research was based on academic methodologies that brought his uplifting concepts to the forefront. These concepts including flow, the autotelic personality, self-discovery, intrinsic motivation and the pursuit of happiness, were all discussed in this chapter, bringing in the research and supporting examples not only from Csikszentmihalyi but also from his colleagues, past students and other researchers and well-known authors in the field of psychology and creativity.

What is paramount is that creativity needs to be cultivated and is necessary for the future of our world and Csikszentmihalyi's gives us many examples of this. Creativity is a central source of meaning for everyone and most of the things that are interesting and important in life are the results of creativity. Furthermore, as Csikszentmihalyi indicated (1996), when individuals are involved in creativity they are living more fully as compared to others and leaves to an outcome that adds to the complexity and richness of our future society. Through better understanding the concept of flow, and all of the other essential topics in this chapter, all individuals in every society can learn how to live in better harmony and return to an increased state of happiness.

Author's Personal Impact

I personally felt extremely fortunate to have been asked and able to write this chapter on one of the most influential pioneers in creativity and positive psychology – Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. As I underwent this incredible and amazing journey, I found myself emersed into my own sense of personal flow in the process. Most days while reading and writing, I found myself in a highly focused state, entrenched in the information where time and my surroundings seemed to have been lost. I didn't want to get up from my chair nor even look away from the words being read or constructed on the computer screen. I was intrinsically motivated by some force inside me to continue to investigate the research and organize and re-organize my thoughts onto paper all while feeling deeply connected to the work at hand.

I found myself in a focused tunnel with keen attention and persevered at great lengths to gain more and more knowledge about Csikszentmihalyi and his many contributions to the field of positive psychology and creativity. My goal was to do good work at great lengths as I sought to highlight and brought attention to some of Csikszentmihalyi's most important concepts and theories over the past several decades.

Who couldn't be enthralled with such learning of positivity? Even while I was not in an active state of reading and writing about Csikszent-

mihalyi's concepts of flow, happiness and self-discovery, I often found my brain wondering off in that direction during both my waking and dream state. Interesting enough, the first thing I thought of during my initial waking hours was some concept of positivity and a new connection I was finding related in my own life. Grateful and blessed was always the feeling during these moments. It was a challenging yet fascinating experience and as the research indicates it seemed to be the perfect proportionate match between skill and challenge.

Csikszentmihalyi is not just a remarkable professor, researcher, author and leader in his field, he is a true creator and positive visionary. He has indeed impacted the lives of his students, friends, family, and colleagues with his important contributions of his concepts and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has no doubt made his mark on millions of individuals around the world and will continue to influence many more for years to come.

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