



Flow among music teachers and their students: The crossover of peak experiences[☆]

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Received 13 May 2003
Available online 4 February 2004

Abstract

This study among 178 music teachers and 605 students from 16 different music schools examined the peak experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). On the basis of the literature, it is hypothesized that job resources, including autonomy, performance feedback, social support, and supervisory coaching have a positive influence on the balance between teachers' challenges and skills, which, in turn, contributes to their experience of flow (absorption, work enjoyment, and intrinsic work motivation). In addition, using emotional contagion theory, it is hypothesized that flow may crossover from teachers to their students. The results of structural equation modeling analyses offer support for both hypotheses. These findings are discussed in light of theories about crossover and emotional contagion.

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Keywords: Job resources; Flow; Crossover; Emotional contagion

1. Introduction

Flow is a state of consciousness where people become totally immersed in an activity, and enjoy it intensely. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), such a peak experience can emerge in any situation in which there is activity, and researchers have

[☆] I thank Korine Scheeres for her help with data collection, and Joy Oliver for her valuable comments on a previous draft of this paper.

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indeed found evidence for flow during the execution of a large number of different activities, including sports, work, and playing music (Catley & Duda, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Jackson & Marsh, 1996; Kowal & Fortier, 1999). In the present study, the phenomenon of flow is investigated among music teachers and their students. The main research questions addressed whether job resources facilitate flow at work, and whether this experience may crossover from music teachers to their students.

2. Flow at work

What is flow? The literature reveals a laundry list of definitions of the concept. Csikszentmihalyi (1990), who coined the term flow, describes the concept as: “The state in which people are so intensely 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.” In addition to the pleasure in the activity and the intrinsic motivation to continue doing it, the total immersion in an activity seems to be a central aspect of the flow-experience. For example, Lutz and Guiry (1994) describe flow as: “. . . a state of mind sometimes experienced by people who are deeply involved in some event, object, or activity. . . they are completely and totally immersed in it. . . Indeed, time may seem to stand still and nothing else seems to matter while engaged in the consumption event.” These scholars emphasize the idea that time flies during a flow experience. Ellis, Voelkl, and Morris (1994) define flow as an optimal experience that is the consequence of a situation in which challenges and skills are equal. According to these researchers, such a situation facilitates the occurrence of flow-related phenomena, such as positive affect, arousal, and intrinsic motivation (p. 337). Furthermore, Ghani and Deshpande (1994) particularly emphasize the total concentration and the enjoyment people experience when in flow: “The two key characteristics of flow are (a) total concentration in an activity and (b) the enjoyment which one derives from an activity. . . There is an optimum level of challenge relative to a certain skill level.” (p. 383).

The most prominent definitions of flow seem to have three elements in common, namely absorption (“the total immersion in an activity”), enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation. These three elements are indeed the core components that are usually included in studies by many flow-researchers (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Larson & Richards, 1994). Accordingly, when flow is applied to the work situation, it can be defined as a short-term peak experience at work that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment, and intrinsic work motivation. *Absorption* refers to a state of total concentration, whereby employees are totally immersed in their work. Time flies, and they forget everything else around them (cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Employees who *enjoy* their work and feel happy make a very positive judgment about the quality of their working life (cf. Veenhoven, 1984, 1996). This enjoyment or happiness is the outcome of cognitive and affective evaluations of the flow experience (cf. Diener, 2000; Diener & Diener, 1996). Finally,

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