

## The Flow of Creativity

Jon Kolko  
Savannah College of Art & Design

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 1

## Overview

- Big Ideas
- Commonalities of Flow
- Flow for Interaction Designers

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 2

## Big Ideas

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is pronounced "ME-hi CHIK-sent-me-hi-ee"

### Creative persons all love what they do. Why?

Reading, mountain climbing, chess ...  
What do they have in common?

"Designing or discovering something new".

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 3

## Big Ideas

### Entropy vs. Creativity



We all have both.

*"However, unless enough people are motivated by the enjoyment that comes from confronting challenges, by discovering new ways of being and doing, there is no evolution of culture, no progress in thought or feeling" (110).*

Entropy: "the tendency towards conserving energy"

Creativity: "the tendency towards using energy constructively"

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 4

## Big Ideas

The act of pursuing creativity and discovery, which ultimately provides enjoyment, can be thought of as flow:

*"This optimal experience is what I have called flow, because many of the respondents described the feeling when things were going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness" (110).*

**When have you experienced flow?**

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 5

## Commonalities of Flow

Nine main elements, describing how it feels when an experience is enjoyable:

1. There are **clear goals** at every step
2. There is **immediate feedback**
3. There is balance between **challenge and skill**
4. **Action and awareness** are merged
5. **Distractions** are excluded from consciousness
6. There is no worry of **failure**
7. **Self consciousness** disappears
8. **Sense of time** is distorted
9. Activity becomes **autotelic** [*an end in itself*]

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 6

### 1: Clear goals at every step.

*"the more creative the problem, the less clear it is what needs to be done"* (114).

our design process starts with determining the real goal; it isn't always (ever?) the original problem!

muse  
user-research  
brainstorming & mind mapping  
competitive analysis

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 7

### 2: Immediate feedback.

*"Many artists give up because it is just too excruciating to wait until critics or galleries take notice and pass judgment on their canvases ..."*

*the poet who keeps enjoying writing verse is the one who knows how good each line is, how appropriate is each word chosen"* (116).

rapid ideation sketching  
self critique  
group critique

our feedback is often from our peers, or our self

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 8

### 3: Balance between challenge and skill.

*"The pursuit of a creative solution is rarely easy. In fact, in order to be enjoyable it should be hard, and of course so it is, almost by definition"* (116).

hard work  
internal problem solving model  
take risks  
sometimes fail

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 9

### 4: Merging action and awareness.

*"You've lost .. You're not an ego at that point. It's not competitive. It's .. I would use the word pure. You know that this is right .. It's right in this place."* (118).

intense  
exhausting  
pure  
right

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 10

### 5: No distractions.

*"Distractions interrupt flow, and it may take hours to recover the peace of mind one needs to get on with the work."*

*... the more ambitious the task, the longer it takes to lose oneself in it"* (120).

eccentric  
sometimes secluded  
sometimes in-depth with peers

distractions don't need to be physical  
interruptions: they can be (and often are) your thoughts, too.

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 11

### 6-8: Forgetting self, time & surroundings.

6. There is no worry of failure
7. Self consciousness disappears
8. Sense of time is distorted

*"The idea is to be so .. So saturated with it that there's no future or past, it's just an extended present in which you're making meaning"* (121).

**Has this ever happened to you?**

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 12

### 9: An autotelic experience.

*"... All of the respondents placed the joy of working ahead of any extrinsic rewards they may receive from it" (121).*

Not for money (although that's important)  
Not for fame (although that's nice)  
Not for other's praise (although it makes us feel good)

**We design as an end in itself:**

**To make things right**  
**For satisfaction**  
**For happiness**

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 13

### Flow for Interaction Designers

**Why are we reading this in this class?**

Hint:



IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 14

### Summary

- Flow is an automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness
- Commonalities of Flow
- Use Flow to your advantage in your designs!

IDUS317 - Interactive Product Design | 15