

Achieving Flow at Work: An Experience Sampling Study to Comprehend How Cognitive Task Characteristics and Work Environments Predict Flow Experiences

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Abstract : For many decades, scholars have aimed to understand how work can become more meaningful by maximizing both potential and enhancing feelings of satisfaction. One of the largest contributions towards such positive psychology was made with the introduction of the concept of 'flow,' which refers to a condition in which people feel intense engagement and effortless action. Since then, valuable research on work-related flow has indicated that this state of mind is related to positive outcomes for both organizations (e.g., social, supportive climates) and workers (e.g., job satisfaction). Yet, scholars still do not fully comprehend how such deep involvement at work is obtained, given the notion that flow is considered a short-term, complex, and dynamic experience. Most research neglects that people who experience flow ought to be optimally challenged so that intense concentration is required. Because attention is at the core of this enjoyable state of mind, this study aims to comprehend how elements that affect workers' cognitive functioning impact flow at work. Research on cognitive performance suggests that working on mentally demanding tasks (e.g., information processing tasks) requires workers to concentrate deeply, as a result leading to flow experiences. Based on social facilitation theory, working on such tasks in an isolated environment eases concentration. Prior research has indicated that working at home (instead of working at the office) or in a closed office (rather than in an open-plan office) impacts employees' overall functioning in terms of concentration and productivity. Consequently, we advance such knowledge and propose an interaction by combining cognitive task characteristics and work environments among part-time teleworkers. Hence, we not only aim to shed light on the relation between cognitive tasks and flow but also provide empirical evidence that workers performing such tasks achieve the highest states of flow while working either at home or in closed offices. In July 2022, an experience-sampling study will be conducted that uses a semi-random signal schedule to understand how task and environment predictors together impact part-time teleworkers' flow. More precisely, about 150 knowledge workers will fill in multiple surveys a day for two consecutive workweeks to report their flow experiences, cognitive tasks, and work environments. Preliminary results from a pilot study indicate that on a between level, tasks high in information processing go along with high self-reported fluent productivity (i.e., making progress). As expected, evidence was found for higher fluency in productivity for workers performing information processing tasks both at home and in a closed office, compared to those performing the same tasks at the office or in open-plan offices. This study expands the current knowledge on work-related flow by looking at a task and environmental predictors that enable workers to obtain such a peak state. While doing so, our findings suggest that practitioners should strive for ideal alignments between tasks and work locations to work with both deep involvement and gratification.

Keywords : cognitive work, office lay-out, work location, work-related flow

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