

THE PHENOMENON OF FLOW AMONG COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY:  
A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OPTIMAL EXPERIENCE AND VARIABLES IN  
THE WORK ENVIRONMENT.

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Based on Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) flow theory, also called optimal experience, this phenomenological study examined flow experiences during work of community college faculty and whether specific variables under control of academic leaders contributed to flow experiences. Flow, a psychological state found to occur when high skills match highly challenging activities, has been associated with greater satisfaction and productivity (Larson, 1988). Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (1988) claimed flow, "tends to occur when a person's skills are fully involved in overcoming a challenge that is just about manageable. ... Because of the total psychic demand on energy, a person in flow is completely focused" (p. 30). This quantitative study examined whether variables other than a subject's skills, when matched with highly challenging activities, also resulted in flow. The seven independent variables studied were a subject's perception of administrative support, authority, autonomy, clarity of goal, expertise, physical tools/space, and time. This study sought to answer the questions- do community college faculty experience flow at work, do specific controllable factors of the work environment contribute to the occurrence of flow, and is the quality of experience dependent on the

variables involved. The study linked faculty flow experiences as a potential management tool under the rubric of individualized consideration, one of four basic tenets of the transformational leadership model of Bass and Avolio (1994).

The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) was used. Subjects (n=33) wore a pre-programmed watch for five days. The watch signaled subjects four times each day, at random intervals, to complete a questionnaire. The population for the study was all full time faculty at Portland Community College-Sylvania Campus, a comprehensive associate degree institution in Portland, Oregon (N=203).