

# Self-determination & Flow

Kowal and Fortier (1999) examined the relationships between different types of situational motivational (perceptions of [autonomy](#), [competence](#) and [relatedness](#)) and [flow](#). 203 Canadian master's-level swimmers completed a questionnaire immediately after a swim practice. It was found that situational [self-determined](#) forms of motivation ([intrinsic motivation](#) and [self-determined extrinsic motivation](#)) and perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness were positively related to flow, while [amotivation](#) was negative related to flow.

This may mean that self-determined motivation facilitates flow or flow facilitates self-determined motivation. Thus, one can engage in sports or exercise for intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic reasons instead of non-self-determined extrinsic reasons so as to facilitate the flow experience. On the other hand, one can also seek to achieve flow so as to become more self-determined or intrinsically motivated.

## Practical Implications:

### Engage in sports or exercise for self-determined reasons so as to facilitate the flow experience.

For example, take part because you

- love the feeling of doing it (intrinsic)
- enjoy learning something new from it (intrinsic)
- enjoy the challenge (intrinsic)
- feel that you are an active and sporty person (self-determined extrinsic – integrated)
- believe that sports or exercise can make you fitter and perform better in your game (self-determined extrinsic – identified)



### Engaging in sports or exercise for non-self-determined reasons does not facilitate the flow experience. For example, doing it because you

- want to lose weight (non-self determined – external)
- want to win something (e.g. medal, competition, prize money; non-self determined – external)
- are forced by someone or something (non-self determined – external)
- feel guilty if you do not do it because of someone or some reason (non-self determined - introjected)



### Tips on achieving flow so as to become more self-determined or intrinsically motivated:

- Strike a balance between challenge and skill by creating challenges and believing in your skills (see figure 1).
- Flee from negative self-talk and doubts. Instead, engage in positive self-talk.
- Recall previous experiences where action and awareness merge and you become totally absorbed in the task.
- Forget yourself and focus on the process.
- Accept the environment as given.
- Lose the sense of effort
- Be self-aware.
- Set clear and specific goals.
- Keep it simple.
- Plan for competition.
- Make back up plans.
- Practice concentration.
- Direct your attention to the present – “here and now”.
- Have fun, turn competition into play.

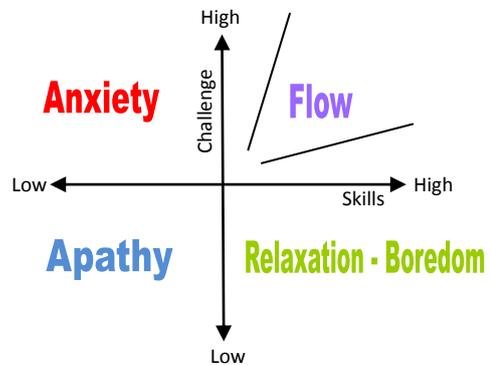


Figure 1 Model of flow state (adapted from Csikzentmihalyi and Csikzentmihalyi, 1988)

(Jackson & Csikzentmihalyi, 1999)

### Key Definitions:

<b>Amotivation</b>	Perception that no worthwhile reasons for pursuing an activity exist and hence a complete absence of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2002).
<b>Autonomy</b>	The degree of volition one feels in pursuing the activity and the need to feel congruence between an activity and one's values (Deci & Ryan, 2000). E.g. "I feel like I can make a lot of inputs in deciding how my job gets done"
<b>Competence</b>	The desire to interact effectively with the environment and to attain valued outcomes (White, 1959) e.g., "People at work tell me I am good at what I do"
<b>Flow</b>	Highly enjoyable psychological state that refers to the "holistic sensation people feel when they act with the total involvement (in an activity)" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).
<b>Intrinsic motivation</b>	Pursuing an activity out of interest and enjoyment and without external contingencies (Ryan & Deci, 2002).
<b>Relatedness</b>	The desire to feel connected to significant others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). E.g., "I get along with people at work"
<b>Self-determination</b>	Self-determination theory assumes that different motivational regulations exist, each reflecting varying levels of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Beginning with the most self-determined, <i>intrinsic motivation</i> involves pursuing an activity out of interest and enjoyment and without external contingencies (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Secondly, <i>extrinsic motivation</i> refers to partaking in an activity to attain an outcome separate from the activity itself. Extrinsic motivation can be further divided, in a descending order of self-determination, into <i>integrated</i> (pursuing an activity because it is congruent with other aspects of the self), <i>identified</i> (undertaking an activity because one accepts the value of the activity), <i>introjected</i> (partaking in an activity because of internal pressures such as guilt or shame), and <i>external</i> (doing an activity because of external pressures or incentives) <i>regulations</i> (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Finally, <i>amotivation</i> refers to a perception that no worthwhile reasons for pursuing an activity exist and hence a complete absence of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2002).
<b>Self-determined extrinsic motivation</b>	<i>Extrinsic motivation</i> refers to partaking in an activity to attain an outcome separate from the activity itself. Extrinsic motivation can be further divided, in a descending order of self-determination with the more self-determined ones as follows - <i>Integrated</i> (pursuing an activity because it is congruent with other aspects of the self) - <i>identified</i> (undertaking an activity because one accepts the value of the activity) (Ryan & Deci, 2002)

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