

Paolo Inghilleri, Giuseppe Riva, Eleonora Riva (eds.)

Enabling Positive Change: Flow and Complexity in Daily Experience

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Preface By Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Managing Editor: Aneta Przepiórka

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Preface

It is with great pleasure tinted with a touch of pride that I am sitting down to write an introduction to this collection. I can safely say that of the many books written on positive psychology in the 15 years since its inception, this one provides the best evidence that the perspective has matured into a coherent and fruitful conceptual domain, offering fresh directions for theory and research, and the promise of becoming a major sub-field of psychology.

I became involved in positive psychology because of an increasing unease with the image of man that has emerged in the last century. Following the lead of the other sciences, psychology in the 20th century tried to break the reality it was studying into the smallest possible units of analysis. The great success of physics had been the discovery of sub-atomic processes; biology became a serious science after it evolved into microbiology; even philosophy tried to reach wisdom by the analysis of “protocol sentences”. Not surprisingly, psychologists followed the trend – even while it was becoming increasingly clear that analytic precision in the other sciences was coming at the price of a loss of synthetic understanding. So from Wundt’s labs in Leipzig to Skinner’s mazes at Harvard, behavior was broken down into its smallest units, and then put back together as the scientific representation of what mice and men were like. So psychology provided us with a picture not unlike what is given to a customer who wanders into a hall of mirrors at an amusement park: here he looks like a skeleton, next he looks like a hippopotamus . . . all the pictures are sharp, they are real. But we know they are not true representations of ourselves: it is the way that the mirrors were built that creates these phantoms. Unfortunately, this realization has not yet dawned on many who read the accounts of who we are, based on some of the research psychology has spawned. They do not realize that just as the mirror in the amusement park distorts our true image, the conditions in the laboratory experiments often distort what our thoughts, values, and behaviors are truly like. This is why reading a volume like the present one, which tries as much as possible to describe and interpret human behavior in its real complexity, and in realistic contexts, is so invigorating.

This volume also makes a unique contribution in clarifying what Seligman has called the “third pillar” of positive psychology: namely, positive institutions. Thus far, institutions have been studied mainly in terms of what they contribute to the first two “pillars” – to positive experiences or to character strengths. The editors made a wise decision in focusing the volume on *positive change*. By so doing, they have foregrounded an aspect of positive psychology that rarely appears in the literature. Currently institutions – family, schools, workplaces – are seen as providing experiences that produce either positive or negative affect in people. The research questions are of the type: why do children dislike schools? Why do lawyers hate their jobs? Of course, these are important questions, but if pursued exclusively they narrow the scope of our

understanding until we risk validating the caricature of our critics, and turn positive psychology into “happiology” – a search for hedonic well-being, with a short and shallow future.

In their magisterial introduction, the editors outline a much broader view of the relationship between the “three pillars”. The relationship is not all one-way, they point out. How we feel about them determines the future of institutions just as much as we are being affected by them – by the technology, economy, and social arrangements into which we are born. This perspective, first articulated by Professor Fausto Massimini at the University of Milan, and built upon by Paolo Inghilleri in his powerful book translated into English as *From Subjective Experience to Cultural Change*, is clearly articulated in the Introduction of this volume, and serves as the theoretical foundation for most of what follows.

The two chapters following the Introduction also make an indispensable contribution to the emerging domain of positive psychology. Those who write in this new field (myself included) spend a great deal of effort reassuring their readers that positive psychology is not developing as an antithesis to the existing field, but rather builds on and tries to enrich previous knowledge. Yet we rarely bother to show how the synthesis between general and positive psychology could be accomplished. Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume are exemplary first steps in that redressing this unfortunate state of affairs.

Each of the remaining ten chapters opens up a new window showing different vistas of how an understanding of flow and optimal experience interacts with some fundamental aspect of the human condition, ranging from technology to the environment, from politics to psychotherapy, from sports to business, from everyday experiences to the intergenerational transmission of values and skills. Each of these vistas promises an exciting intellectual adventure for the interested scholar to embark on. I wish I could go on and on, exploring the ideas that these chapters present. But my role in this venture is similar to that of a curator introducing an exhibition of contemporary art to a visiting audience. The visitors have not come to hear the curator, but to experience the art directly. To do so all you have to do is turn the page.

Paolo Inghilleri, Giuseppe Riva, Eleonora Riva

Introduction: Positive Change in Global World: Creative Individuals and Complex Societies

Modern society offers, day after day, challenges of increasing complexity. The global citizen is constantly stimulated by demand from the world of work, family and the social environment. Simultaneously they realize how necessary it is, in a busy and hectic life, to find some time for themselves, to cultivate their own physical and mental health, and to carve out spaces for leisure, hobbies, friends, family, and in general to what gives meaning to life (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). It is becoming more and more important to develop the ability to select activities, relationships, needs and desires in a creative and evolutionary way, and give these a privileged space, making them emerge from an offer that becomes gradually more and more extensive and varied. This book offers a possible interpretation of the many human experiences that emerge successfully from the challenges of modern complexity. The authors of the twelve chapters outline a vision of human experience as a close connection among personal characteristics, everyday experience, psychological well-being and elements of the socio-relational and environmental context. It is a correlation of elements originating from each one of these four areas that enables the development of positive changes, and allows their stabilization in the experience of individuals or groups, making them increasingly complex and creative. In this vision of the human experience, Flow, meant as a driving force for the subjective development, is a central element Csikszentmihalyi (1975/2000; 1990). In the various chapters of the book, from the more general to the more specific ones, it clearly emerges that there are many new areas where the application of Flow Theory can be stimulating and produce innovative readings and new models of research. The Flow is seen as an experience that can be assessed and fostered in very different contexts, using different methodologies and approaches, and its function is highlighted in promoting change not only in the individual but also in relational situations and social contexts.

In the first two chapters there is an excursus of the characteristics and experiences which promote and permit positive change in socio-relational and individual perspectives. The Flow model is combined with other contemporary approaches, theories and intervention models, in order to envisage its use as a key to understanding the positive psychological experiences implied by the various approaches to reading psychological experience. Paolo Inghilleri exposes the theoretical background of the Optimal Experience Theory, highlighting the connections between Flow, subjective experience and social and cultural development. In the first chapter the author defines Optimal Experience, its relation with cultural artifact and cultural transmission, and with the development of autotelic characteristics of personality. After a socio-cultural collocation of the concept, Inghilleri proposes connections and parallels with classic and recent concepts of social and clinical psychology, like James

and Kohut's *empathy*, Bion's *negative capability*, Stern's *present moment* and Siegel's *mindfulness*. In the second chapter Giuseppe Riva focuses on the concept of personal change, considered as a complex process depending on the person, the issues and the situation. The author centers his attention on the capacity of Flow to allow the individual to consider the long-term personal goals from a different point of view, facilitating generativity and behavioral flexibility. This is related to the sense of Presence, considered as an experience of self-engagement that brings the individual to put their intention in action and provide the self with a feedback about the status of the activity. Riva proposes an analysis of cognitive change in which Presence and Flow collaborate in order to find creative solutions to emerging problems: Presence allows the individual to perceive the experiential conflicts, and pushes the cognitive system to resolve them, while the way to find a solution to the perceived conflicts is often shown by past experiences of Flow.

The following three chapters are dedicated to new approaches and research models that use emergent communicational and relational instruments to promote the Flow experience and consolidate positive change and psychological well-being. In the third chapter Riva G. & Gaggioli address the issue of cyber technologies as a means for promoting optimal experience and well-being. They present an overview of researches in which cyberpsychologists, while studying the different processes of change related to the use of new technologies, show that digital instruments of communication and other related technologies can be used to improve personal development and well-being. In this order of ideas, the authors introduce the concept of Positive Technology, detailing three different uses of technological instruments to perform personal changes: *Hedonic*, that qualifies daily life introducing positive and pleasant experiences; *Eudaimonic*, that supports the individual in reaching engaging and self-actualizing experiences; *Social/Interpersonal*, that supports and improves social integration and connectedness with other individuals. Gaggioli & colleagues, in the fourth chapter, deepen the opportunities provided by new technologies for the development of well-being experiences. They propose the concept of Networked Flow, in which they hypothesize that participation in social networks promote creativity as a product of the group, intended as a virtual and intellectual community. In Networked Flow group creativity materializes in the production of artifacts that are immediately shared and used in or applied to the network's group itself, increasing its complexity and its faculty to develop further occasions of shared Flow and creativity. In chapter five, Riva E. & colleagues propose a new model to use Flow in clinical settings, to promote positive change, well-being and the development of a more complex and flexible Self. While cognitive-behavioral therapies have developed various instruments derived from Positive Psychology models and theories, the contamination with psychodynamic psychotherapies has remained minimal. The authors consider the Flow Experience as a psychodynamic construct, and propose to insert the analysis and promotion of Flow in psychodynamic medium and long term psychotherapies. Three ways to approach Flow in a clinical setting are described in

the chapter: to *investigate* it in past experience; to *promote* its development in daily present experience and to *develop* Flow situations inside the psychotherapy sessions. These concepts are described in short case studies.

Chapters from six to ten propose the application of Flow in different social contexts, some of them facing new frontiers, such as the environment or politics, others describing the current developments in areas of interest such as education, work or sport. Rainisio & colleagues, in chapter six, describe an application of Flow Theory to environmental psychology. In literature both the environmental preference and the psychological restoration due to interaction with natural landscapes are justified referring to biological legacies or universal psychological characteristics. In this contribution the authors define the concept of *Flowability* as a subjective criterion -developed during daily cultural experience- used to evaluate a place and consider it as potentially regenerative. Transcultural data are reported in support of this. In chapter seven Boffi & colleagues explore the implication of the use of the Flow concept in political participation. Just as well-being has been considered, in literature, one of the central indicators for social development, often the indicators used to detect the presence and evolution of well-being have taken into account more material aspects than subjective experience. The authors propose that an eudaimonic perspective can fruitfully explain the link between individuals' well-being and participation, and Flow can be used as a referential theory to describe the mechanisms affecting both personal growth and social context, resulting in an inspiring notion to design participative settings: if those in charge of promoting participation policies were informed of such a distribution of flow-generating activities in each community, it would be possible for them to design new forms of participation more sensitive to people's preferences and more likely to succeed. Cavanagh & Shernoff, in chapter eight, explore the relationship between the school learning environment and psychological positive theory and experience. Specific attention is addressed to the influence of Flow in classroom experiences and of optimal learning environments reported by scholars in compulsory education. Two empirically validated construct models are presented that incorporate the Flow Theory and classroom learning environment constructs: these are the *Capabilities-Expectations Model of Student Engagement in School Learning* and the *Environmental Complexity Model of Optimal Learning environments*. Each of them enables experiences and the respective conducive conditions to become operational and foster research besides giving essence to design of positive change in schooling. Transcultural and transnational comparisons are reported. In chapter nine Muzio & colleagues discuss the role of optimal experience in sports psychology. The authors deepen the tools and strategies available for trainers and instructors to activate positive change in athletes and teams, and present research data on Flow in sports, both in regard to the evaluation of subjective experience and the interventions that can increase the chance of finding Flow. Inghilleri & Cesaro face the work environment from a new perspective: their contribution concerns a research on small enterprises ruled by single families. In this context, which constitutes the lifeblood of the Italian

commercial substrate, family relationships and job roles merge and mingle, creating potentially explosive situations but also rich in terms of investment of emotional and psychic energy. In chapter ten the authors present the impact of training on the relationships and good management based on Flow Theory and its applications on family enterprises.

The last two chapters of the book regard persons or situations that can promote the subjective ability to detect and foster Flow experiences. In chapter eleven Nakamura develops a model of mentoring which relies on the environment built through relational dimensions. Her analysis shows how a true mentor transmits knowledge and skills together with values supporting a sense of professional responsibility. In this perspective we can observe, from an individual point of view, the development of an autotelic personality, and from a cultural point of view, the transmission of excellence. In the chapters second half the author deepens the model proposed through the presentation of a case study taken from the martial art of *aikido*, in which the relation among individual involvement, mentors features and environmental characteristics clearly emerges, allowing for the promotion of subjective complexity and multiple experiences of mentoring and cultural transmission. In chapter twelve, through the exposition of research data, Fishman & Barendsen describe the impact of “quality” of everyday time and of the subjective perception of “time well spent” in the development of a style of life that may foster the encounter with subjective optimal experience. The authors investigated how people use time, what they consider to be a waste of time, and demonstrated, through the interaction of the Flow Model with other constructs, how time well spent with family and friends is paramount in terms of what they think about quality and the prioritization of quality in their lives.

The wide array of disciplines and applications described in the different chapters strengthens the idea of the importance of positive change in the experience of individuals or groups. As the field continues to grow, we eagerly expect extensive on-the-field trials as well as comparative results with existing methods of practice, supporting the continuous growth of new applications.

In the end, we hope that the contents of this book will stimulate more research on the social, cognitive and human factors connected to the experience of “positive change” and on how to make the best of it in the different fields discussed in the chapters. We thank all the authors for their great work in making this book what we believe it to be – a significant contribution to understanding the roles and importance of positive change in a range of personal and interactive situations. In particular, the book aimed to underline the role played by Flow in promoting change not only to the individual but also in relational situations and social contexts.

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Paolo Inghilleri

1 Phenomenology of Positive Change: Social Growth

Abstract: This chapter exposes the theoretical background of Flow of Consciousness Theory, underlining the connections between Optimal Experience and the process of social change. The concept of cultural artifact is revised. The relevance of Flow for the individual, social and cultural development is stressed. Discussion is devoted to letting the presence of the experience of flow emerge (both explicitly admitted or implicitly assumed) within theories and models not belonging to Positive Psychology domain.

Keywords: Cultural artifacts; Cultural change; Flow of consciousness; Theoretical implications.

1.1 Introduction

A mother, in the United States of America, is playing with her daughter in the living room; a Chinese father is on his way to enroll his child in school; an Italian worker is walking into the factory; an Iranian young man is planning an evening with his friends; a Filipino girl is dancing with her friends at a disco; a Brazilian elderly man is praying in a church. Our daily life, all over the world, flows, characterized by thoughts and emotions, in various contexts of our culture, in the places we go to, among the groups that surround us and to which we belong. Psychological sciences have long since been studying the mechanisms of this complex interaction between the inner and the social world. The so-called Cultural Psychology (Cole, 1996; Inghilleri, 2009; Shweder, 1991) and the so-called Positive Psychology (Kahneman, Diener & Schwarz, 1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) have, in recent years, developed and highlighted a direction of research not altogether new in the behavioral sciences, namely the need to study humans in their real-life contexts (rather than in laboratory) and to develop interpretative models starting from the study not of pathological situations but of virtuous situations and situations of development.

At the basis of this theoretical approach, which finds its roots in the early pioneering work of William James (1890), is a vision according to which the individual actively builds their own identity and does so in a harmonious way with the context, starting from their own biological basis and through their interaction with the culture. The inner Self is achieved by way of cognitions, motivations, and affections occurring in the course of everyday life, as well as through specific experiences. The

quality of subjective experience is central for the construction of the personal Self and of personal behavior. The way we feel is related to a variety of causes: to our past; to the immediate experience; to the ability to connect the immediate experience with our intentions, our profound purposes, our own individual projects. It is therefore important that the relationship between the past, present and future be orderly and complex. The focus of our knowledge and of our affections thus depends on the possibility that a specific mind/culture relationship provides an experience that the subject perceives as making sense and being organized insofar as it is connected to the existing situation, to the core of personal identity (which derives from past experience), to future purposes.

In this sense, the concept of *subjective experience* appears central. It may be defined as the sum of the information, originating either from the outer world or the inner world, which enters in the psychic system at a given point in time and its comprehensive interpretation by the consciousness. More precisely experience is meant as the focusing of the process of attention on the interrelationships of the data in the consciousness or, in other words, the set of cognitive, motivational and emotional information capable of producing discriminable changes (and therefore selectable by the attention) in our subjective state. For Csikszentmihalyi (1982, 1988), the focus on the interrelationship of the data in the consciousness produces experience. This is an orderly process that requires energy. The consciousness becomes disordered when the information entered is either too simple or too complex. This may be due to either external factors (environment contains too many or too few stimuli) or to the malfunction of the processes of attention that allow excessive or insufficient information to reach consciousness. This conceptualization is important because it highlights how psychological processes (consciousness, attention, emotions) and cultural processes (social environment, the others) are part of a single system which the inner state of the individual and its development depend on. In other words it is not possible to understand the psychological functions without considering the external culture as well.

1.2 Cultural Evolution and Individual Psychological Selection

In the first place, it must be emphasized that the relationship between the individual and culture gives rise to two processes that interact while being distinct from each other: the Cultural evolution and the Individual psychological selection (Inghilleri, 1999).

The *Cultural evolution* is a historical cross-generational process (i.e. passing from one generation to another) for the transmission of cultural information stored in extra-individual locations, that is in the products (or artifacts) of culture. The *Individual psychological selection*, on the other hand, is a process that relates to the single individual, therefore lasting a lifetime, and represents the selective internalization in the central nervous system of a part of the external cultural information.

This internalization is associated with elaboration processes, construction of meanings, and affective experience (Delle Fave, Massimini & Bassi, 2011). We could say that the different theories of individual psychology have historically sought to define the mechanisms of the psychological selection. Of utmost importance, though not always considered by the various psychological theories, is that cultural evolution and psychological selection are in a continuous relationship of reciprocal causality, in the sense that one influences the other. Culture, as it is realized, in a certain context and at a particular historical period, co-determines (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) the construction of the individual Self (think for example of all the educational and socialization activities): but it is the actions of individuals, their decision-making processes, the focus of attention and of behavior on certain purposes, the experiences and the emotions that make the different areas of our lives attractive or unpleasant, that cause certain elements of culture, and not others, to be transmitted in time.

1.3 The Artifacts and Their Relationship with the Subjective Experience

Secondly, referring to authors such as Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1990) or the aforementioned Cole and Shweder, a basic concept will be discussed that has characterized those authors and that is particularly interesting in the understanding of the mechanisms of psychological selection: the concept of artifact.

The term artifact has been widely used in cultural psychology: it defines any entity not present in nature but constructed or produced by human beings. Artifacts are therefore the very constituents of the cultures. The category of artifact thus includes objects (such as the furniture in a house, clothes, a car, a flag), material structures (such as buildings or a city district), as well as ideas, artistic products such as music or poetry, technologies, institutions, political views, religions, rituals, daily practices, and so on. It concerns therefore both tangible and intangible entities.

Artifacts are key elements from the point of view of the relationship between individual psychological processes and culture, by reason of a number of characteristics. They have in fact a double status: they are in an intermediate situation between the world of the “living” and the world of the “non-living” (Monod, 1971). To explain this property of the artifacts, the following discussion involves a closer examination of some features of the living world that may be pertinent, as we shall see, to the artifacts.

In 1971, Jacques Monod, a molecular biologist who was awarded the 1965 Nobel Prize for Medicine, highlighted the three general traits by reason of which the living organisms are, as a whole, different from any other entity in this universe.

The first characteristic is the so-called *teleonomy*, according to which living organisms are entities with a project, which is represented in their structures and at the same time realized through their actions. Consider the genetic information contained in the DNA of the first zygote of the embryo, the result of the union of ovule and

sperm: it represents the project that will be manifested in the structure of the whole adult organism and will be realized through its operations.

The second characteristic is the *autonomous morphogenesis*, the living organism is a “machine that builds itself”, does not depend on forces applied from the outside, but has an autonomous determinism implying a virtually total freedom with respect to outside agents or conditions, which are capable of impeding this development, as well as guiding it (Monod, 1971).

The third characteristic is the so-called *reproductive invariance* which is the ability to reproduce and transmit unchanged the information corresponding to the structure (the genetic heritage). The genes are in fact a highly complex organization that manages to be preserved in its entirety from one generation to the other.

To continue our reasoning about the properties of artifacts it is necessary, at this point, to introduce another concept, namely the distinction between *entropy* and *negative entropy* or *negentropy*. The physical, inorganic world, the so-called “non-living nature” (i.e. the material of which many artifacts of our everyday lives are made of, such as objects of domestic use or a building) follows the second law of thermodynamics, in other words tends to entropy. This principle states that each energetically isolated system evolves in a single direction, that of the degradation of the order that characterizes it. It follows a specific relationship between entropy and information: the more a system is entropic, the less information is present (Monod, 1971). In concrete terms, the second law of thermodynamics can be exemplified by the following case: if we leave an artifact in the open air under the influence of atmospheric agents, after a certain time it will disintegrate and turn into rust, dust, inert matter: that artifact, abandoned, without maintenance, undergoes a process of entropy, losing order and information.

On the other hand, historical theorists of complexity, such as Miller (1970) and Prigogine (1976), have long since shown that living systems tend, instead, to negative entropy (or negentropy), namely to heterogeneity, to the progressive complexity of structures, to the continuous differentiation of functions.

The artifacts, as non-living entities, are therefore per se devoid of autonomous morphogenesis and self-organization; they are subject to the second law of thermodynamics and therefore tend to disorder, to homogenization, to the loss of information, to entropy: if an object is not kept with care, in time this artifact will be ruined, and gradually disintegrate.

There is one further point in this reasoning. The artifacts are the result of the application, to the materials that constitute them, of outside forces originated by the author, that is, from the living world, from human beings: men and women who decide to create artifacts, to give them a meaning, to transmit or modify them. Artifacts therefore are a reflex of and can accept the trend towards complexity, organization, order and information typical of the living world itself, that is to say, proper to the people who choose them, use them and give them meaning. Hence they can also tend to negentropy. We can therefore observe the possibility of increased complexity

of artifacts: from the first arms of obsidian to modern war machines; from the earliest computers to the latest laptop models and so on.

The artifacts, however, include not only material objects but also intangible entities: ideas, worldviews, rituals, social practices, norms, values, and institutions such as a family or a political party. The tendency to entropy or negentropy applies to these institutions as well: a family (considered from a social point of view and not from a biological one) can develop and grow, or dismantle (consider divorce); a family type (such as our nuclear family) may disappear (entropy) or spread throughout the planet (negentropy); a political party or a religion may arise and spread rapidly or exist for decades and disappear in a few years.

We are thus faced with the *dual nature of artifacts*, which depends substantially on *the application or not of individual psychological processes upon them*. An artifact is maintained over time, we could say survives and spreads, if it manages to draw upon itself the psychic energy, the cognitive, affective, motivational processes and subsequent actions of individuals: otherwise it tends to disappear from the cultural system.

What matters, in other words, is the relationship between individual psychological selection and cultural evolution, as handled at the beginning of the chapter: the concepts of artifact and the dual nature of artifacts bring forward the fundamental importance of human subjectivity and mental processes in the reproduction and changes of culture, and, conversely, the latter's action in the construction of subjective experience and subjectivity.

The dual nature also applies to complex and intangible artifacts, such as a family, a community, an institution, an ideology, a political system, a legal code, a movement or an artistic style. If I don't take care about an institution or a group to which I belong and I don't participate actively in its activities, if I don't keep my attention and my support to an idea alive, if I don't practice a religion genuinely, if I don't apply or conform to the laws day after day, and if the others too will do the same, all these artifacts will tend to lose meaning and internal information. That group, that idea, that religion, that State with its laws, could possibly disappear, following a direction which we have defined above as entropic. If, on the contrary, we invest our attention, our motivation, our behavior towards those artifacts, then they will remain and will tend to grow, to develop and be transmitted in time, even to future generations: what happens then, is an increase in the complexity of the artifact with a negentropic process. In general terms, this is the basic mechanism for the maintenance of cultures, of their change or, on the contrary, of their eventual disappearance. Culture is transmitted if there is an investment of psychic energy by the people on the artifacts of society and if these can produce *positive subjective experience* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, Damon, 2001). Artifacts are not produced and maintained by themselves. They are originated from the application of psychic processes of individuals: we actively seek and use an object to achieve personal goals if the relationship with that object allows a good quality of the experience, both from a cognitive and an emotional point of view. An element of culture draws our psychic energy (and

so it will be adopted and kept) if it gives a good experience. The possibility of having positive states of experience is therefore the basis of the process of cross-generational transmission of human cultures. In this sense, the Flow of consciousness theory has long since taken on a specific significance within the explanatory models of subjective experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Massimini & Csikszentmihalyi, 1985; Inghilleri, 1999 Massimini & Inghilleri, 1993).

1.4 The Flow of Consciousness

The experience of *Flow of Consciousness* conceptualized by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990, 1993a, 1997), is also called Optimal Experience. It is a psychologically optimal state from three points of view: from the cognitive perspective as there is the possibility of understanding; from the emotional perspective as there is the possibility of positive emotions; from the motivational perspective as there is the possibility of engagement. This theory, as pointed out above, is optimal also from the point of view of cultural transmission as it highlights the close relationship between the past life of the individual, their motivations, cognitions, current emotions (experienced in the *here and now*) and the development of material culture and ideas.

As is known, the Flow of Consciousness is a specific state of consciousness that occurs when cognition, emotions and motivation work in an integrated and interactive way, responding to requests from both the outer and the inner world. In the Flow of Consciousness all the psychic energy is invested in the ongoing experience (and thus on the artifacts of culture within that context) and the person experiences a state of competence (resulting from past life), self-determination, meaning and well-being that will lead the person to search the situations, contexts and activities (in other words, artifacts) that allow such positive inner states.

Considering the extensive literature on this theory (see the work of Csikszentmihalyi already mentioned, and among the more recent works, Delle Fave, Massimini & Bassi, 2011; Engeser, 2012), we shall only briefly describe its main aspects. For the Flow of Consciousness to occur a series of elements must be active simultaneously without conflict between them. These are:

- Concentration and full cognitive activation on the ongoing situation: the irrelevant stimuli disappear from consciousness, all the attention is focused on what is happening at that moment, the cognitive processing of plans for the future or conflict is temporarily suspended.
- Clear goals: the situation is clear, the person knows clearly and without cognitive effort what must be done.
- Immediate feedback: the situation provides feedback and clear signals, allowing the accurate perception of how things are going.
- Absence of self-observation: the individual does not modulate their behavior, as if observing themselves from the outside.