



A Guide to Flow at Work



people first


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Flow Explained

People First helps us achieve and maintain flow in our work. But what is flow? And why is it important?

Think of flow as being 'in the zone'. It's that state when you're so immersed in something you lose track of time. The outside world falls away, and all that exists is the task at hand.

The concept of flow was conceived by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He found that people were at their happiest and most productive when in a state of complete focus. He went as far as to call it the secret to happiness.

He also found that achieving a state of flow is dependent on the relationship between the difficulty of a task and the skill level of the person.

If the task is too difficult in relation to the person's abilities, they quickly become anxious or stressed. Likewise, if the task is too easy, they soon become bored and complacent.

Flow is achieved when the level of challenge is enough to keep us engaged and motivated.

The theory of flow has been embraced by the gaming industry as a central tenet in game design. Successful games are designed in a way that keeps the gamer engaged in that flow sweet spot from start to finish.

Why is Flow Important in the Workplace?

No doubt you've experienced moments of complete focus in your work. You might be lucky enough to spend large parts of your day in the flow or, like many of us, you may find it difficult to maintain flow for long periods.

You may have noticed the time you spend in the flow is when we you at your most engaged and productive. Given that engagement and productivity are two of the biggest issues facing businesses today, this is no small matter.

Flow has enormous psychological benefits too. Being in the flow helps us feel in tune with our work, giving us a sense of ownership, belonging and achievement.

You could say it's the secret to improving employee engagement and productivity.

“ The happiest people spend much time in a state of flow – the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi

Barriers to Flow

In the modern workplace, we have to deal with endless distractions. Most often, technology only adds to the problem by demanding our constant attention.

Flow is personal and different for everyone. So to help their people achieve flow, employers should structure the work environment to best suit the individual.

Some jobs are more conducive to achieving flow than others. For example, due to the nature of the work, those in customer-facing roles or manufacturing jobs may naturally spend more time in the flow than people who work at a computer. But flow is achievable for all of us. All we need are the right conditions.

To achieve flow, we need the following:

1. Work that is intrinsically rewarding. That means the motivation for doing the task comes from the task itself, not from any external rewards such as pay or recognition.
2. Clear goals and a sense of progress. It helps if employees have a say in setting their own goals.
3. Clear and immediate feedback. This helps employees know that they are on the right track.
4. The optimum balance between challenge and skill. Working in the sweet spot.
5. Intense focus on the present. This can only be achieved in the absence of external distractions

Flow at People First

It's fair to say that employee disengagement is the business issue of our time. And yet despite all the talk, very little is actually happening to rectify it.

At People First, we recognized the need for a new approach. So we looked for ways to address engagement in a practical way through technology. Once we explored the concept of flow, we knew it had the potential to fix the engagement issue.

Here's how it works

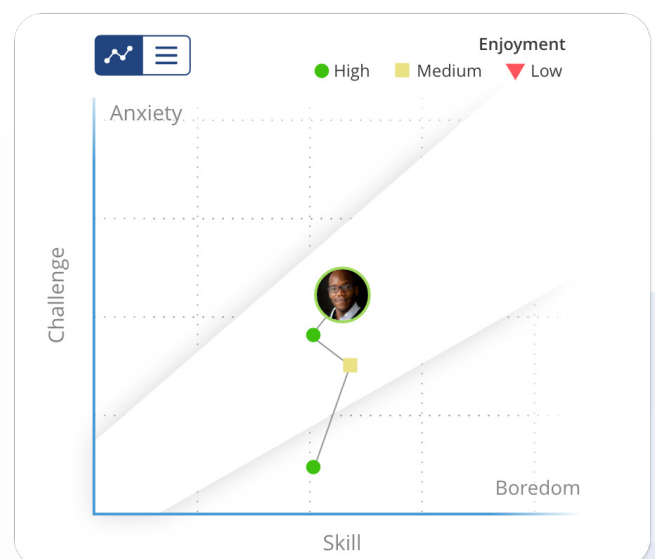
Each day, the digital assistant prompts the employee to reflect on their day by answering a simple question. The employee then has the opportunity to add notes to offer some context to their answer, much like a daily diary entry. This helps the employee understand what makes them tick and what acts as a barrier to productive work.

Ultimately, this knowledge helps the employee to work with their manager to shape work in a way that allows the employee to spend more time in the flow.

This data remains private to the employee, meaning they can express themselves honestly, safe in the knowledge that there can only be good outcomes from the process.

People First uses employees' daily inputs to create data points that model flow. This allows managers to see individuals and whole teams plotted against a graphical chart. The manager then has the opportunity to step in and schedule check-ins with those who are struggling to maintain flow, ensuring that issues are resolved as they arise.

To help employees maintain flow, Focus Mode in the digital assistant automatically intercepts incoming emails so that the employee is not disturbed. The employee can opt to receive emails from VIPs when in Focus Mode, but this decision is in the hands of the employee, not the manager.





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