

# ***FLOW***

***What Is It & Why You Want More of It***



Wicklow Artist Salon

6<sup>th</sup> February 2024

# ***FLOW: What Is It & Why You Want More of It***

- 1. What is 'flow'**
- 2. What's going on neurologically when you're in flow**
- 3. Benefits of flow**
- 4. How to get more flow**
  - Eliminate flow blockers**
  - Master the flow cycle**
  - Adopt flow triggers**
  - Train your grit**

## WHAT IS 'FLOW'?



**Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**  
(1934 – 2021)

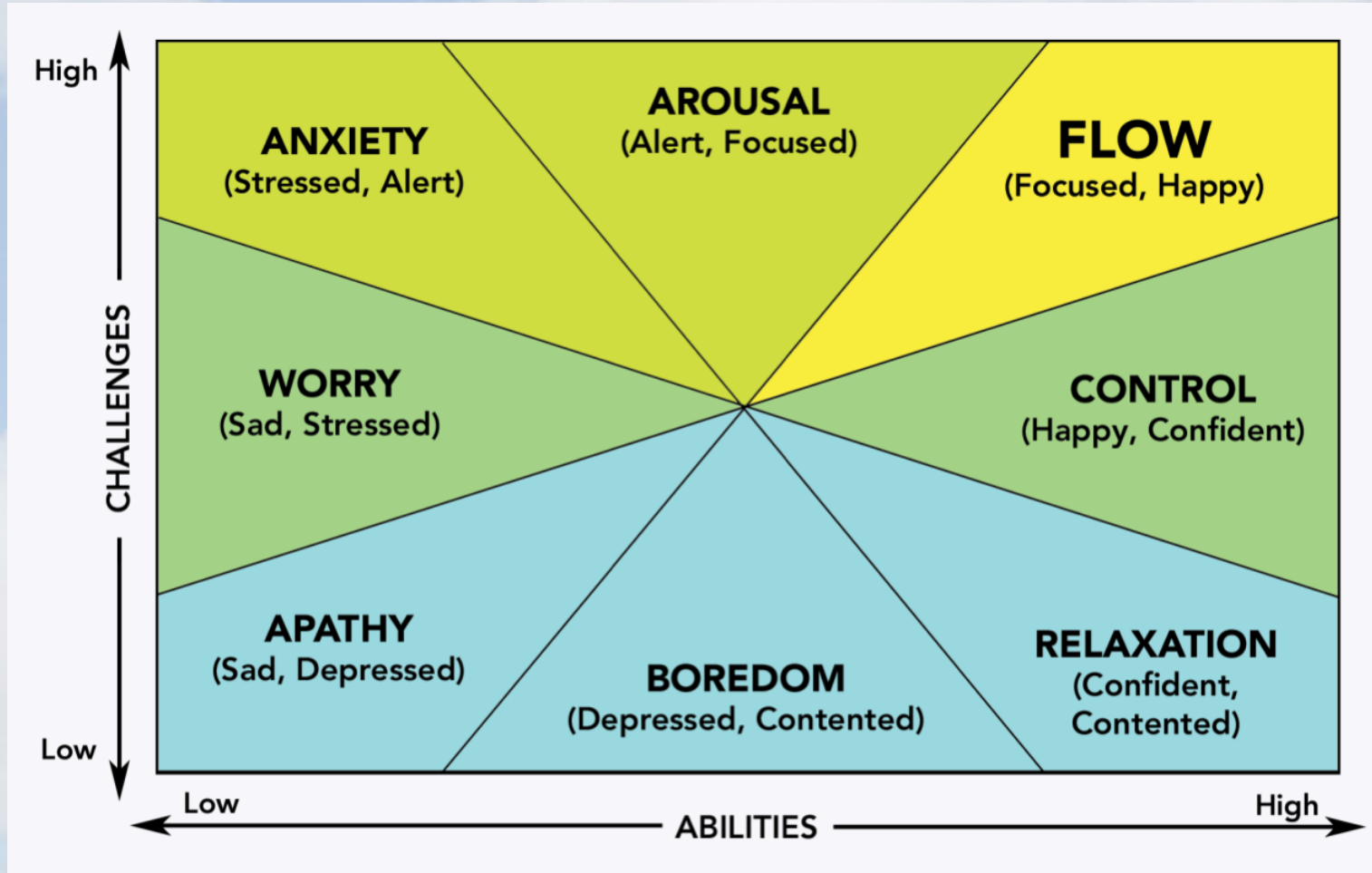
*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, 1990*

## WHAT IS 'FLOW'?

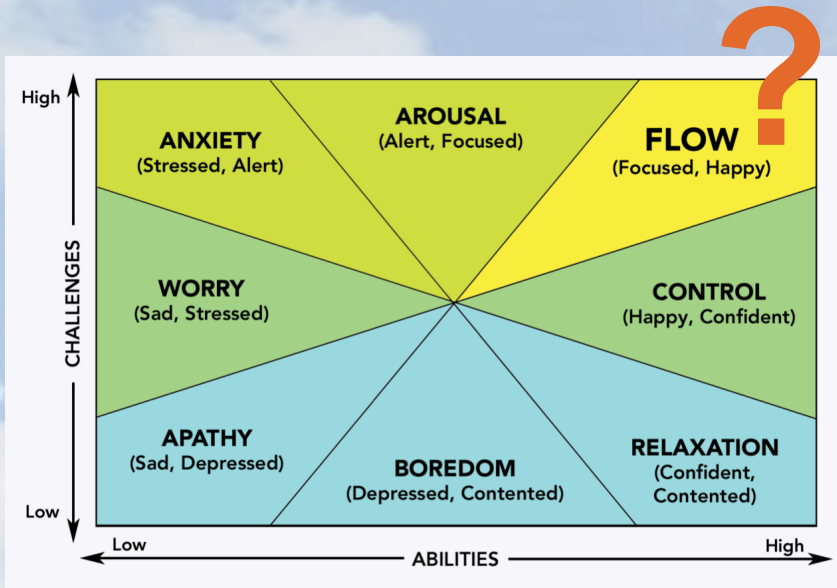
FLOW: That sweet spot between challenge and ability that enables us to operate at our best.

*I'm in the groove!*

*I'm in the zone!*



# WHAT IS 'FLOW'? (Cont'd)



## CHARACTERISTICS OF FLOW

1. Complete focus
2. Great inner clarity
3. Know tough, but doable
4. Sense of serenity
5. Action and awareness merge
6. Intrinsic motivation – autotelic experience
7. Altered sense of time
8. Ecstasy

## FLOW IS A SPECTRUM

# WHAT'S GOING ON WHEN IN FLOW?



## Neuroscience of Flow State

Neuroanatomy – where

Neuroelectricity – binding during *Aha!* moments

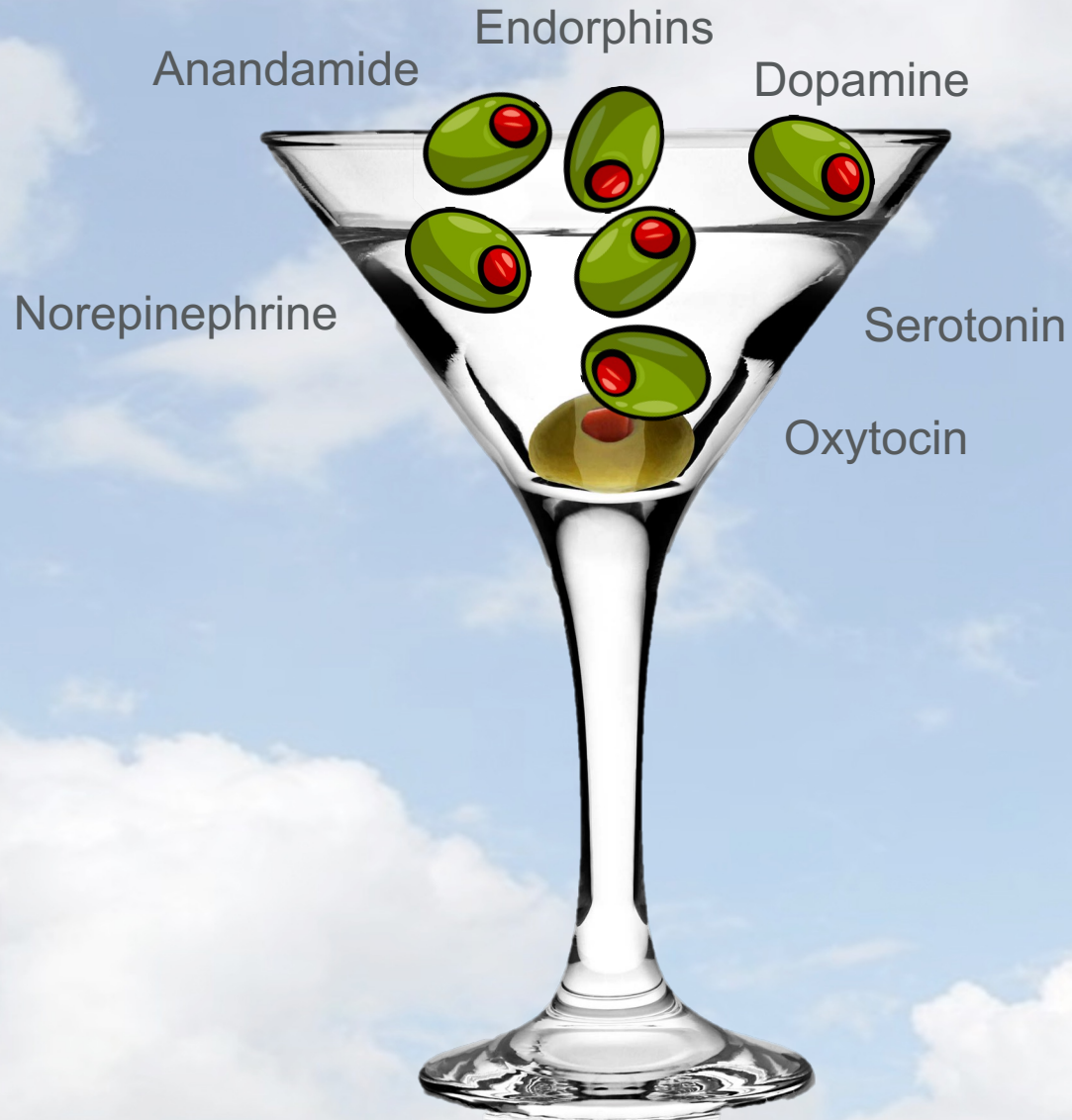
Networks – involvement + formation

## Neurochemistry

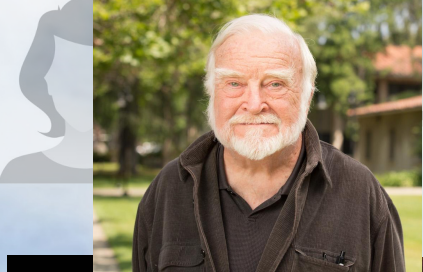
- Anandamide
- Endorphins
- Dopamine
- Norepinephrine
- Serotonin ?
- Oxytocin ?

# WHAT'S GOING ON WHEN IN FLOW? (Cont'd)

## Neurochemistry



# BENEFITS OF FLOW



- Focus
- Serenity
- Clarity
- No Ego, no inner critic
- Ecstasy
- Creativity
- Autonomy
- Problem solving
- Risk-taking, courage
- Learning
- *Team flow*
- ...





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PEAK PERFORMANCE

and

*off-the-charts*

WELL-BEING, MEANING, SATISFACTION





**WHEN HARRY  
MET SALLY**



**I'll have what  
she's having.**

# HOW TO GET MORE FLOW

- 1. Eliminate flow blockers**
- 2. Master the flow cycle**
- 3. Adopt flow triggers**
- 4. Train your grit**

# #1 ELIMINATE FLOW BLOCKERS

## HOW TO GET MORE FLOW



### Mindset

I don't believe I can do what I know I need to do. I'm not good enough.



### Distraction

I'm constantly distracted and it's blocking me from flow.



### Burnout

I feel totally fried, cynical and exhausted. The idea of continuing work is painful to bear.



### Exhaustion

I'm wrecked. My focus is shot. I often feel the need to nap.



### Overwhelm

I've got too much on my plate. I'm juggling balls and can't keep up.



### Clarity

I don't know where I'm going or what my next steps are.



### Motivation

I feel OK physically, but I just don't really feel like doing what I know I should be doing.



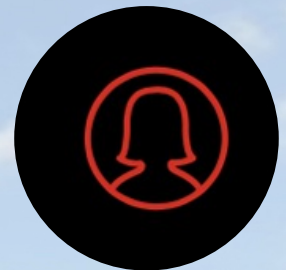
### Time

I'm stuck for time, no matter how fast I move I can't get it all done.



### Stress

I'm either underwhelmed with how much stimulation there is and feel bored, or I'm overstressed and don't feel like I can cope with what's in front of me.

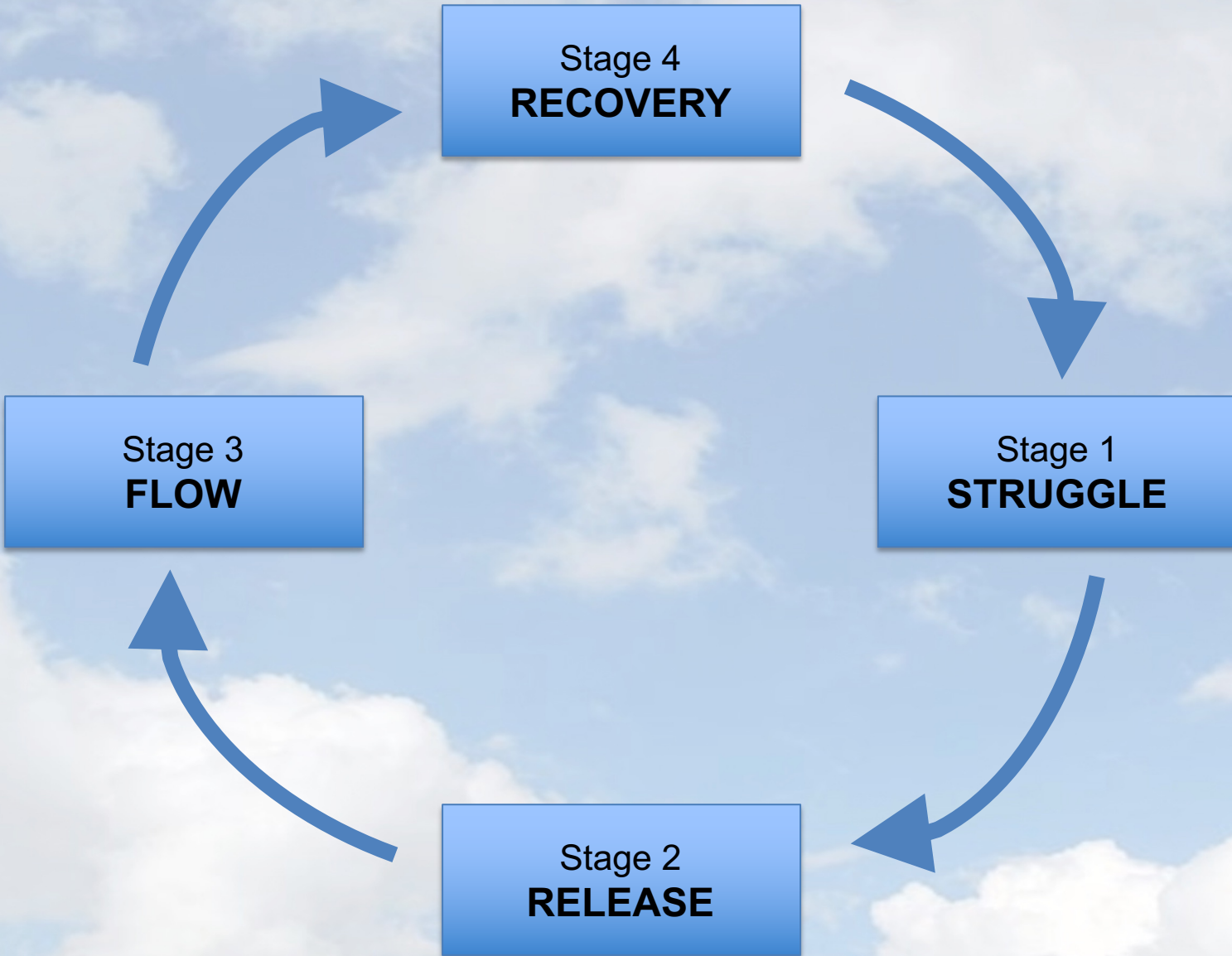


### Self Sabotage

I just keep getting in my own way and throwing myself off track.

# #2 MASTER THE FLOW CYCLE

## HOW TO GET MORE FLOW



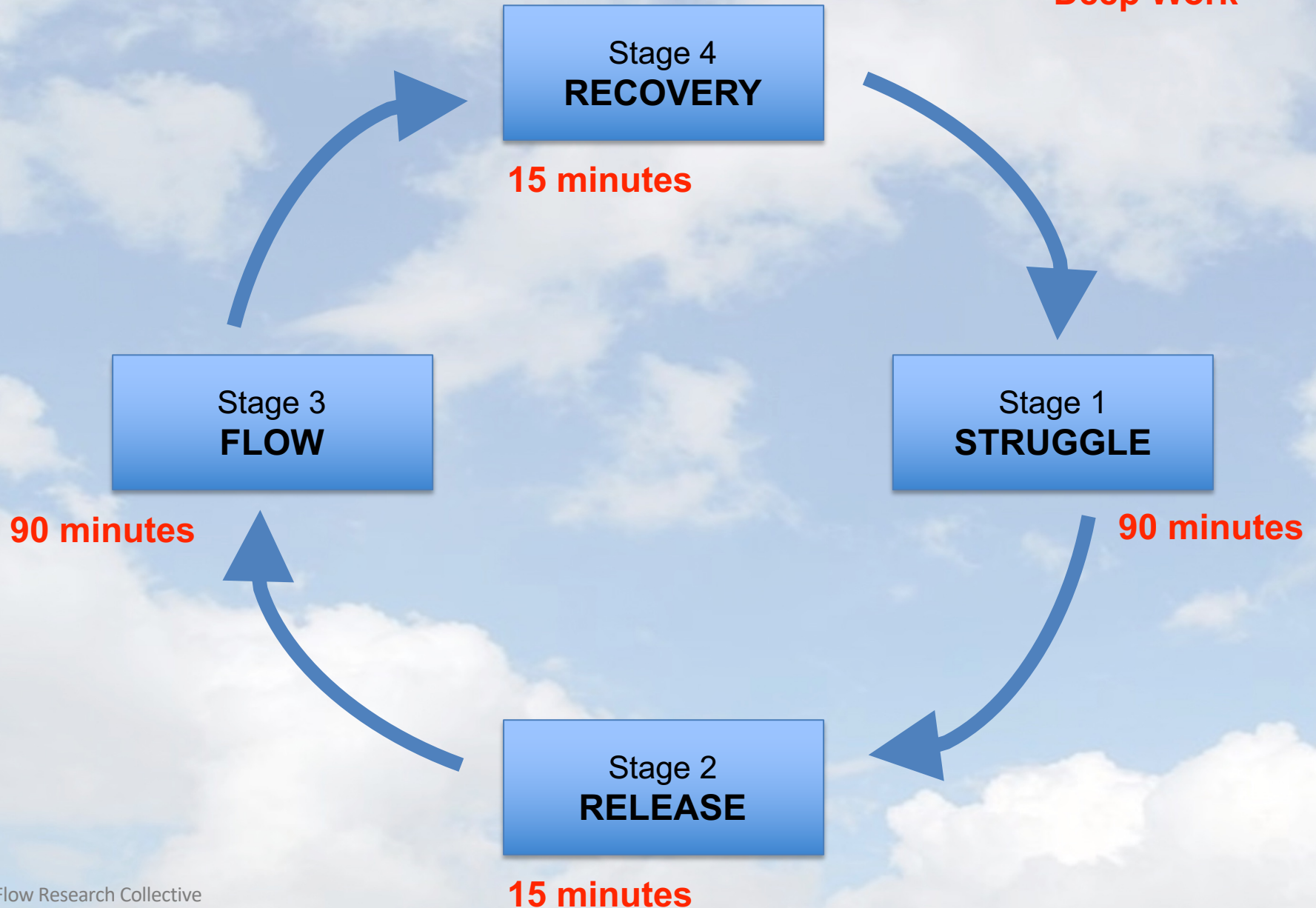
Source: Flow Research Collective



## #2 MASTER THE FLOW CYCLE

HOW TO GET MORE FLOW

Example of a typical  
**4-Hour Block of  
Deep Work**



# #3 ADOPT FLOW TRIGGERS

## HOW TO GET MORE FLOW

### FLOW TRIGGERS (partial list)

#### **Clear Goals**

Specific goals that direct brain exactly where to put attention and when

Goals are broken down into even smaller chunks until all uncertainty about the next step is eliminated

#### **Focus**

Complete concentration on the task at hand. Everything else filtered out

Clear the PFC stage to lower cognitive load

Enter into 'deep now'

Initial stage may not be enjoyable



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#### Correct Imbalance: Challenge-Skills

Task is in the 'flow channel': Difficult enough to make you stretch, but not so hard to make you snap

Continually reset the challenge to 4% greater than your perceived skills

Moderate the 4% imbalance based on:

- Confidence
- Optimism
- Mindset
- Tolerance for anxiety
- Ability to delay gratification
- Societal values
- Actual skills

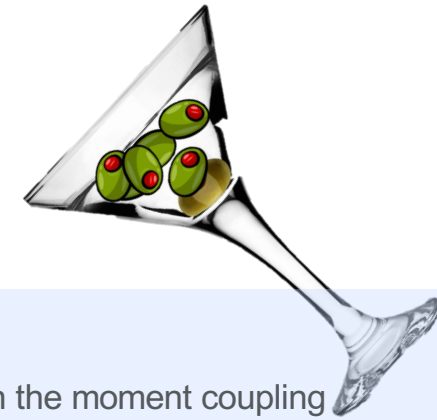
#### Freedom

Activate egoless, judgment-free state  
e.g., set permission timers

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#### Feedback

Immediate: In the moment coupling between cause and effect

Tight feedback loop

Specific

Defined by you

As frequent as possible

#### Rich Environment

Enrichen your environment to drive dopamine (that catches and holds attention like risk) with:

- Novelty
- Unpredictability
- Complexity

#4 TRAIN YOUR GRIT  
HOW TO GET MORE FLOW



## #4 TRAIN YOUR GRIT

### HOW TO GET MORE FLOW

GRIT: The passion, mindset, and willpower to sustain performance and persevere when the going gets tough.

# Grit

[grit]

(*n.*)

~~a personality trait~~ characterized by perseverance and passion for achieving long-term goals. Individuals high in grit are able to maintain their determination and motivation over long periods despite experiences with failure and adversity. Grit is typically a better predictor of success than intellectual talent.

# #4 TRAIN YOUR GRIT

## HOW TO GET MORE FLOW

### 6 GRIT STRATEGIES

#### Know & Control Your Thoughts

A.N.T.S.: Self-aware  
Positive self-talk  
Gratitude practice  
Daily mindfulness

#### Persevere

Willpower: Difficult first  
Mindset: Learning  
Passion: Drives goals  
Embody the principle of compound interest: Set – check – rinse - repeat

#### Train Your Weaknesses

PCQ<sup>©</sup>

- Psychological capital
- Social capital
- Performance Capital

But, delegate all but required

#### Master Fear

Take risks  
Exposure 'therapy'

#### Be Your Best When You're At Your Worst

Train-up when at your worst  
Recruit quicker when at your best

#### Recover

Sleep  
Active recovery  
Total resets – step away  
Stay in front of potential burnout



# ***No grit, no diamonds!***

# What 1 thing could YOU do to get more flow in our artistic practice?

1. Eliminate flow blockers
2. Master the flow cycle
3. Adopt flow triggers
4. Train your grit





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