



Manager's Optimal Mental State

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Abstract

There has been discussion about peak performance and particular mental states in relation to achieving it in sports. However, these things have not been discussed very often as related to the business manager's duties. There has been discussion about flow-state at some level but discussions that look deeper into the optimal mental state and from different points of view are rare. This paper uses different theories and models from different sciences such as psychology, sport psychology and eastern philosophy in order to describe the optimal mental state that leads to peak performance in a manager's work. This paper also brings into light different methods that a manager can use in order to achieve the optimal mental state and also how he/she can help his/her staff to achieve the same mental state. Working in the optimal mental state allows people to better use their potential and really flourish. This paper is a literature review.

Keywords: *peak performance, optimal mental state, flow, mindfulness, manager's work*

INTRODUCTION

In sport athletes, sport psychologists, coaches and researchers have tried to find out for decades what is the optimal mental state to achieve peak performance in competition. Researchers have developed several different theories and models concerning optimal mental state. (For example Kabat-Zinn 2006; Csikszentmihalyi 2005; Hanin 1994) In this article some of these theories are applied to business and management context. Certainly sport and management context are different. In sport competition performance usually only lasts quite a short time and is also very intense. In the business context there is usually more time to think about and plan things beforehand compared to an athlete's intensive competition performance. However managers might do many decisions and meet many people during their work day and in many cases they don't have much time to think before decision making or communication with personnel. Athletes and business managers share the same goal: peak performance. In sport and management context, the individual's mental state plays a critical role when trying to reach peak performance. (Jones 2002)

It is important that managers know and use their strengths, have passion towards work and understand how to best serve the organization as a whole (Whitmore & Einzig 2007, 120-121). But in order to achieve peak performance there



are also mental and spiritual aspects that are relevant in discussing peak performance. (See Chopra 2011; Barrett 2010; 1995; Csikszentmihalyi 2007; 2006; 2005; Kabat-Zinn 2006; Gallwey 2005; 2001; Hanin 1995.) This article's focus is on the last ones.

The purpose of this article is to describe different approaches that can be used in order to achieve the optimal mental state at manager's work. The idea is that the optimal mental state helps the manager perform at his/her best. This paper uses different theories and models from different sciences such as psychology, sport psychology and eastern philosophy in order to describe the optimal mental state that leads to peak performance in manager's work. This article is a literature review.

The article begins with a background theories section including a presentation of some well known theories that have often been related to peak performance. The next section sums up the theories main findings and similarities. The article ends with a conclusion section.

BACKGROUND THEORIES

1. IZOF-model

Emotions play an important part of human functioning. (Hanin 2000a; Davidson & Cacioppa 1992). Emotions can either enhance or weaken performance, especially under conditions of competitive stress (see Hanin 2000a; 2000b). Emotions influence motivational processes by directing action tendencies toward (for example excitement) or away from (for example fear) a situation or stimuli (Jones 2003; Vellerand & Blanchard 2000).

The individual zones of optimal functioning (IZOF) -model is based on athletes' research (Hanin 1994; 1993) but it can also be applied to other professionals (see for example Kenny 2011). The IZOF -model presents an analysis of functionally optimal and dysfunctional patterns of athletes' positive and negative emotions. The model is designed to describe and predict the effect of emotions on performance and to provide an explanation of the emotion-performance relationships (Hanin 2000a.) Context as an environmental characteristic includes situational, interpersonal, intragroup antecedents or consequences that determine the intensity and consent of emotions (Iso-Ahola 1995; Hanin 1992).

According to Hanin's (2000a) IZOF model there are certain individual emotions which are optimal for certain tasks. This means that for certain people, in order to accomplish a task well, certain emotions are more optimal than other emotions. On the other hand some people may feel other emotions are more optimal. Emotions that are non-optimal reflect a demobilization of energy and misuse of skill and are dysfunctional for performance. The link between emotions and performance is very personal. This means that there are no certain emotions that apply to every individual which affect performance positively or negatively. (Hanin 2000b) Firstly, for a

manager, to be aware of one's emotions is important. Emotions affect perceptions and functionality. Secondly, managers can apply Hanin's (2000a) IZOF model and try to affect their emotional state before and during a certain task.

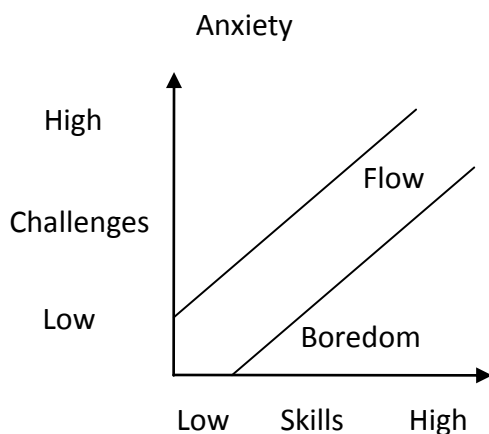
2. Flow

Basic elements of flow

Flow is a state of mind where an individual is completely focused on the task that he/she is doing. Focus on this task is so high that it seems that nothing else matters. When a person is at flow state it seems that he/she does not know what other things are happening around him/her if those are not related to the task itself. Also, the person wants to continue doing the task as it is interesting. The individual is not doing the task because of possible external rewards. Instead the individual is doing the task because the experience of doing the task itself gives joy. (Csikszentmihalyi 2005, 88-89; 107-112.)

To achieve flow state there should be a balance between the individual's skills and the task's challenges (figure 1). (Csikszentmihalyi 2005, 83-89, 114-121). A balance between challenges and skills creates a feeling that the individual is in control of the task. Challenging tasks and circumstances force individuals to do their best (Csikszentmihalyi 2005, 114-121).

Figure 1. Flow state (Csikszentmihalyi 2005, 88-89)



During the flow state a person is so focused on the doing that the doing becomes spontaneous, almost automatic and the person stops being aware of him/her. The person feels that he is one with the doing. (Csikszentmihalyi 2005, 88-89.)



One of the most common elements in flow state is that the concept of time changes. Time seems to fly, it feels like hours become minutes. However, sometimes it is the other way around, when it feels like the individual has all the time needed to do the necessary tasks. It feels that time becomes slower. (Csikszentmihalyi 2005, 105-106.)

Csikszentmihalyi (2005, 94-105,299-306) mentions key things that help individual achieve flow state:

1. *Focus on the task itself.* This means having a clear mind, not thinking about other things but concentrating on the task.
2. *Focus on skills that are the most relevant to the task.* Once the individual feels that the most important area is working, then he/she can add other elements to the performance.
3. *Not being aware of self.* Once an individual is at flow state, there is no space for paying attention to oneself. The individual is one with everything. Once the awareness of self disappears, it can lead to a feeling of transcendence meaning that the limits of who the individual is spread. For example once a person is working on a computer he can feel that he is one with the computer. Key elements are joy and using one's skills. He/she just does the right things.
4. *Trusting oneself.* Feeling in control of the situation without the need to control. This also means not being afraid of failure.
5. *Clear goals and getting feedback.* Getting feedback also includes noticing it by him/her. This means that the person can see if he/she is going towards the goal and can make adjustments to achieve the goal.
6. *Enjoying the current experience.* Seeing everything as source of joy.

According to Csikszentmihalyi (2006, 282) once a person has transcendent goals, this allows that person to combine his/her own goals to larger goals like family, community, human kind, the Planet's or Universe's well being. Manager can think how his/her work helps himself, the organization, customers and stakeholders.

For a person who is worrying about how others see him/her and who is afraid to give wrong impression to others, it is challenging to achieve flow. Also for too self centered persons flow state is hard to achieve. This kind of person evaluates everything according to how useful it is for him/her. He/she is focused only on his/her own goals, how he/she can benefit from different situations and people. Both of these personality types lack the interest to be involved in just the task itself and really feel that the task is rewarding itself. (Csikszentmihalyi 2005, 131-132.)



The way of seeing work

In general people experience flow more often at work than during free-time. (Csikszentmihalyi 2005, 228-229.) According to Csikszentmihalyi (2006, 252- 253) managers who experience more flow are more motivated, committed and happier, especially once working. People who experience more flow express in general more self-confidence. Managers who experience stressful life situations like family problems, changing work place or emotional loss have more health problems. But if they experience flow then they don't have as many health problems even though the circumstances are the same.

According to Csikszentmihalyi (2007, 35) people really enjoy doing what they do best. Csikszentmihalyi (2007, 50-51) points out that enjoying work, having fun and inspiration are important elements in manager's work. So instead of thinking about a work task as something that has to be done, manager can think about work as something like play, fun and a source of inspiration.

Building flow at a company

One of the key manager's task is to make sure that employees work effectively together. The manager can create an atmosphere where employees want to do their best. The most important is to help employees grow as persons which is one way to increase happiness.

It is important to create the right circumstances for flow. The manager makes sure that every team member knows the company's mission and the team's mission. The manager makes sure that the team can work smoothly. The manager gives clear feedback and challenging work tasks that stimulate the workers. (Csikszentmihalyi 2007, 135.)

Mindfulness

Sethi (2009) points out that it is important that the manager is mindful because that is one way to achieve peak performance. Mindfulness is an age-old way of being. It has been linked to Buddhism but various forms of practicing concentration and awareness existed well before Buddha.

According to Kabat-Zinn (2006, 11, 21-24) key elements in mindfulness are focus on the present moment, being aware, accepting the presence as it is. An important element is also appreciating every moment instead of taking life for granted. Another key element is to have connection to oneself and accept oneself unconditionally. Once a person is committed to perceive things with an open mind,



without opinions, expectations and reactions then he/she is more open to new opportunities. Then that person is able to see things as they are. It is also important to listen to intuition.

Tolle (2002, 77-78, 199-209) points out that whatever an individual does, he/she should feel joy and lightness. The key idea is to be present in the moment. It is important how a manager does his/her work. This means that focus should be at the doing itself instead of worrying about the end results. It is about surrendering to the current moment instead of resisting it. This does not mean that the manager does not take action, instead it is an inner phenomena, accepting the situation as it is, beingness. The same thing has been mentioned in Hinduism book: Bhagavad Gita. In Taoism the concept “wu wei” has the same elements: being, non-doing, and that at this state doing is effortless (Xing & Sims 2012). Kabat-Zinn (2006, 25-26, 54) points out that in non-doing, beingness state, nothing is forced. Then doing becomes automatic. There is no “my”, “mine”, “to me”-way of thinking that would require certain end result but still there is nothing that is left out of doing. Non-doing state is the base that all skilful action is based on.

One key element in mindfulness is to stop. It is moving from doing state to being state. Stopping makes doing more live and rich. It helps to see worries from a larger perspective. Once a person stops – he is present. Things become simpler. The idea is to accept the present moment as it is – emotions, situations and thoughts. One thing that a person can do in order to be present is just to pay attention to his breathing. For example, a person takes a couple of deep breaths focusing on it. After that he does what his heart guides him to do. (Kabat-Zinn 2006, 28-29, 36.)

Kabat-Zinn (2006, 65-66) emphasizes letting go. This means not attaching anything. It is the conscious decision to surrender fully to the present moment as it is. Letting go of control, resistance and struggle. Once a person lets things be as they are without feeling affinity or resistance towards them he can see something more powerful and solid. It is important to notice that it is the mind that gets attached to things.

Inner Game

Gallwey’s (2001) model of peak performance is a so called Inner Game. He uses the concepts: Self 1 and self 2. Self 1 is the so called me and Self 2 is self. Self 1 tells what to do and self 2 is the doer. The idea is to choose to give energy to self 2 and avoid self 1's mental state that also can be called ego.

Inner game is related to trusting the real self (self 2). This means that the manager has natural talent to perform well and learn new things naturally. The biggest opponent for success is the person itself (self 1). It is important to have



harmony in mind. The key element is to allow performance to happen instead of trying to control it. (Gallwey's 2005)

Gallwey (2001, 17-18) shows the formula: Performance = potential – interference. This means that the manager's ability to do the task is how well he/she can use his/her potential and interference is decreasing the use of potential. Interference is for example self doubt, self critique and fear. So basically manager has two games going on: inner game that happens inside him/her and outer game that is related to the external world. It is important to notice that once a person is at the flow state there is no self 1 present. (Gallwey's 2005.)

Key elements in inner game are:

- a) Non-judgmental awareness. This means seeing things as they are without judging them.
- b) Trusting the real self. Trusting that performance and learning comes naturally. This means that there is no "should" or "should not" – way of thinking.
- c) Choice. Setting goals by oneself. Understanding own responsibility for performing tasks and learning. (Gallwey 2001, 10-15.)

Other key elements in inner game are focus, willingness to learn and enjoying the task. In this case it is not a question of the manager forcing himself/herself to focus on the task. Instead it is a question of giving full attention to what the manager is doing. Then self-interference is neutralized and there is no room for fear and doubts. If there is some self-critique then the manager can just observe it in a non-judgmental way and then focus again on key elements of the task. Being interested in whatever the manager is doing in each moment. (Gallwey 2001, 49-77, 82-106.)

2.5 Soul & management

Chopra (2011) and Barrett (2010; 1995) write about soul and management. They emphasize on the importance of creating a connection to one's soul. Chopra (2011, 10) defines soul as expression of field of consciousness. It is like a wave in a limitless sea. Barrett (1995, 122-141) mentions things that help to live in alignment with one's soul. These include meditation, giving up limiting beliefs, trusting the Universe, valuing oneself, accepting situations as they are, feeling gratitude and joy, having inner harmony, forgiving everything unconditionally and being honest to oneself and others.



According to Chopra (2001, 52) once a manager has a connection to his/her soul he/she starts to

- a) have peace in the middle of action.
- b) have the ability to see things and people more clearly.
- c) have more reasons to appreciate others and less reasons to criticise them.
- d) have less need to control.
- e) trust that right answers come in time.
- f) have deep connection to his/her feelings.

Chopra (2011) points out key things that are related to leadership and soul:

1. Being aware without preconception. This means being open and being objective. (Chopra 2011, 19-36.)
2. Increasing consciousness. Chopra (2011, 57-80) points out the importance of increasing consciousness in order to better use one's potential. The thinking mind is just the top of iceberg in consciousness. The mind cannot calculate the best solution in every situation. But once a manager listens to his/her intuition, he/she can have solutions that he/she did not see before. Several studies (for example Baron & Cayer 2010; Strang & Kunert 2009; Harris & Kuhnert 2008; Bartone et al. 2007; Harung 1996 et al.; Harung 1995 et al.) point out that higher levels of consciousness help to be effective in leadership practices. For managers it is important to develop their technical skills related to leadership but also to help them develop their consciousness (see Baron & Cayer 2010; Kegan & Lahey 2009).
3. Non-doing based action. Once the manager has a connection to his/her soul, then doing becomes effortless. Then it can be called non-doing, which means that the manager lets his/her soul operate through him/her without struggle, worry or resistance. The manager gives up the need to control things and trusts that his/her soul knows what is best for everybody. It seems that the manager is doing a lot but he/she feels beingness, allowing the Universe to organize things. Instead of being just momentarily this way, this can be practised as a way of life. (Chopra 2011, 81, 92-100.)
4. Understanding the real power. The manager understands that his/her power does not come from his/her ego, so it is not about a "me, to me, mine"



-way of thinking. Instead the manager inspires others to connect to their souls. (Chopra 2011, 101-123.)

5. Feeling synchronicity. Jung (1973) popularized the concept: synchronicity. Synchronicity is the ability to create good luck around oneself and find support that helps a person beyond results that can be forecasted. The manager trusts that his/her soul organizes things so that results will be the best ones. Things happen even though odds are minimal, for example the manager meets a business person by coincidence that is just right for his/her organization's situation. (Chopra 2011, 151-169.)

Chopra (2011, 13-14) points out the importance of the role of spiritual needs that come from the soul-level. Once these are understood then leadership steps to a whole new level. Then the person starts to better use his/her potential.

SUMMARY

The first peak performance theory presented in background theories section was the IZOF model, which emphasizes the importance of an individual's emotions. After that, flow, mindfulness, inner game and connecting ones soul theories were presented. Those theories go a little bit deeper and have many similarities between each other such as being present, enjoying the task, effortless performance and harmony in the mind. Mindfulness, inner game and connecting one's soul point out the importance of accepting the current moment and situation as it is.

Table 1. Summary of optimal mental state approaches

Approach	Key elements
IZOF-model	-Certain emotions have a more positive / negative effect on performance - Emotions influence on performance is personal
Flow	- Match between person's skills and task's challenges - Effortless performance - Joy - Focus on the task - Being present - Clear mind - Not being aware of oneself - Clear goals
Mindfulness	- Being present - Being aware - Accepting the present moment as it is - Beingness - Non attachment - Intuition
Inner Game	- real self vs. Ego - Being present



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focus on the task- Harmony in the mind- Non judgemental awareness- Own responsibility related to performance and learning- Joy- Learning
Connecting ones soul	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Going beyond the mind- Intuition- Harmony in mind- Connecting to other people- Non-doing- Accepting the situation as it is- Gratitude- Joy- Forgiveness- Expanding one's consciousness- Trusting the Universe- Synchronicity

Connecting one's soul goes deeper than other mentioned approaches, even though mindfulness is also one way of seeing things more clearly and develop one's consciousness. Not to mention that in flow there is discussion that person feels being one with the task. So also in flow state there can be some deeper level point of views.

Connecting one's soul includes synchronicity and trusting the Universe point of views which means that the manager is not alone. Instead of that, he/she is connected with the Universe. The question is not anymore that the manager uses more of his/her potential, but it is a question of more than one individual's potential.

All in all, every approach has this element of effortless doing. What is considered natural? If for example we take the word: "human being" – it is not human doing. So it is more of a question of allowing one to be what one is, accepting oneself and everything as it is.

CONCLUSIONS

There are different strategies the manager can use to achieve an optimal mental state to achieve peak performance. The more the manager focuses on the task and he/she is present, the less there are inner obstacles, such as fear of failure. It is important to let go of limiting beliefs about oneself. Other key things are a clear and open mind and enjoying the work. These allow the manager to better use his/her potential. Performing at one's best level is more than just using a logical mind. Instead it can be said that also following one's intuition is important and trusting the Universe from which the manager is not separated. Then it can be said that miracles can happen some of which can be put under the concept of synchronicity.



Based on these peak performance theories mentioned above “PEAK”-model was created. It includes managerial guidelines to achieve optimal mental state for peak performance:

P – Present moment focus. Having harmony in mind and focusing totally on the task’s key elements.

E – Enjoy. Enjoying whatever you are doing, feeling joy and being grateful for each moment.

A – Accepting yourself, others and the current situation as it is. Appreciating each moment as it is.

K – Keep the connection to your true self. In beingness the action is effortless.

The manager can help employees achieve optimal mental state and to really flourish by using the “FLOURISH”- model:

F – Feedback. Give feedback so that employees know how they have done their work.

L – Learning. Create a learning environment. Value quality so that people want to do their best.

O – Optimize. Make sure the employee’s skills match the task’s challenges, so that they can use their strengths.

U – Understand employees’ needs. Be interested in employees.

R– Remind employees to enjoy work and focus on the task itself. It is also important that the person doing the task trusts that it will go well and also trust the Universe.

I – Inspire. Have connection to your true self and help others to connect to their true self. In other words help others to be in spirit.

S – Synchronicity. Feel and help employees to feel synchronicity.

H – Harmony. Create harmony in mind. This can be done by showing example and for example by mindfulness training.

This article presented different approaches for optimal mental state in manager’s work. As further research it would be interesting to find out how many business managers use these approaches in their work and what their experiences have been.

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