



# UNBLOCKING

enabling flow in software development

David Harvey

Warburg Dillon Read

[dihharvey@cix.co.uk](mailto:dihharvey@cix.co.uk)

[www.fttech.net/~honeyg/](http://www.fttech.net/~honeyg/)

# Timetable

Section	Time	Checkpoint
Introduction	5	0
Group work 1	10	5
Review	5	15
Talk	5	20
Group work 2	10	25
Review	5	35
Group work 3	10	40
Gallery	10	50
Voting/Counting	10	60
Conclusion	5	70
Total	75	75

# Process

- Groups of 3
- Individual and group reflection (3 passes)
- A brief talk
- Review
- Final proposals and voting
- Conclusion
- Follow-up

# Goals

- Concrete proposals for improving the experience and productivity of software development
- Ranked according to benefit
- Commitment to change

# In the groove...

I find problems draw me into them. When they draw me in, I get into flow. I find it hard to design without that. It is a state of balancing ideas and arguments and program flow and the state of objects.

All I need is a bit of quiet and the knowledge that I am going to have the next two hours to immerse myself. Often I only need half an hour to address a particular problem, but I need to think I am going to have 2 hours. Other times I sit, think and type until 2 a.m.

*Alistair Cockburn*

# When did you feel most alive?

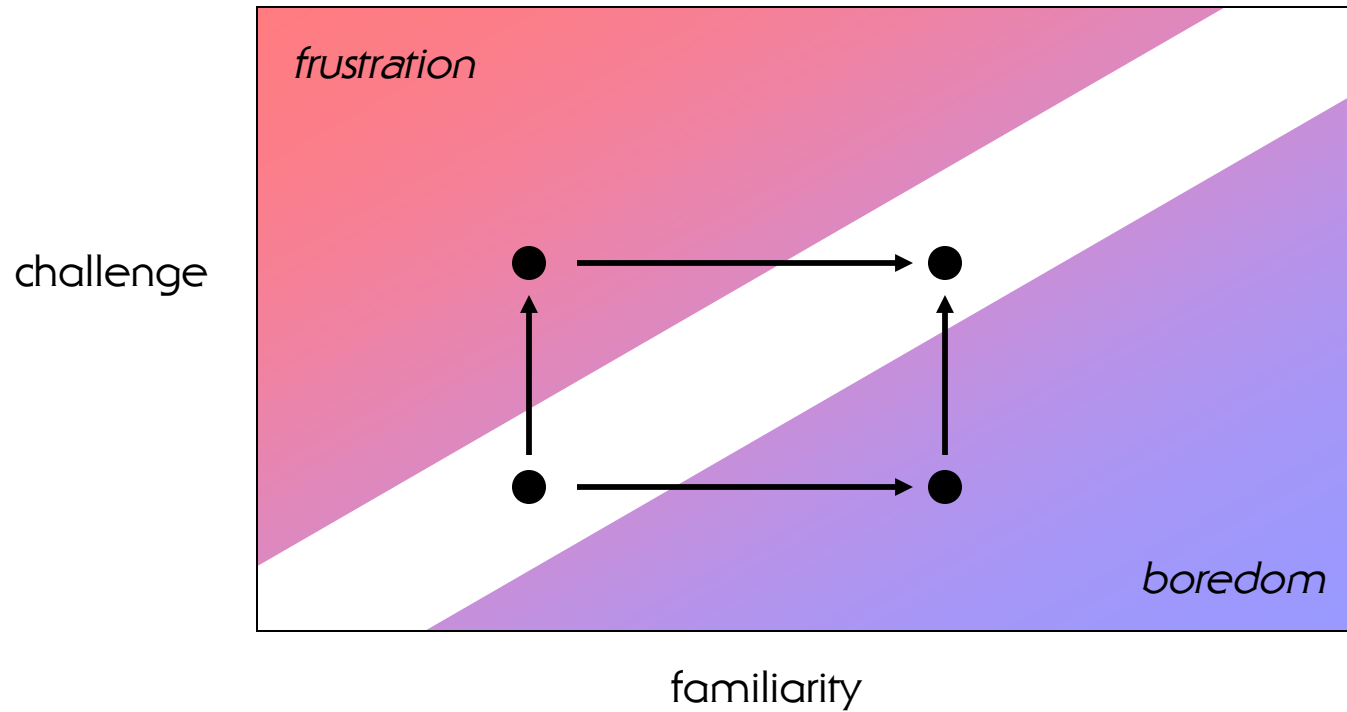
---

- ...absorbed...productive...
- Individual reflection (1-2 minutes)
  - write a sentence describing such an experience
- Group reflection (7-8 minutes)
  - read to each other
  - what is in common?
- Review (5 minutes)
  - one from each group

# Flow

- Mental state characterised by
  - absorption
  - attention
  - unselfconsciousness
  - accomplishment
  - feedback
- Challenge and constraints important
  - so sports, games, programming...

# The flow zone



# Flow research

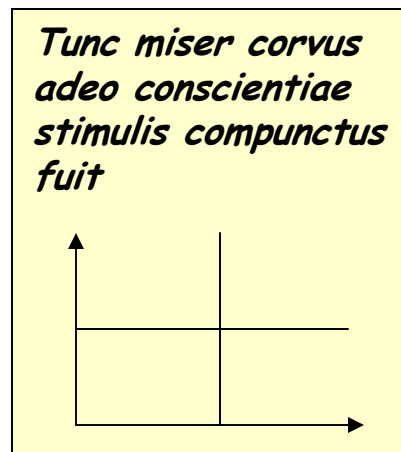
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
  - the De Bono of Flow
- Experience Sampling Methodology
  - random sampling of participants' activity
  - tens of thousands of records of daily experience
- Growing interest in neurological underpinnings

# What prevents flow?

- Individual reflection (1-2 minutes)
  - what prevents flow from starting or continuing?
- Group reflection (7-8 minutes)
  - character, activity, environment
- Review (5 minutes)
  - one from each group

# How can we promote flow?

- Group discussion (10 minutes)
- Focus on flow at work
- Two or three specific recommendations
- Write each on a separate prepared poster

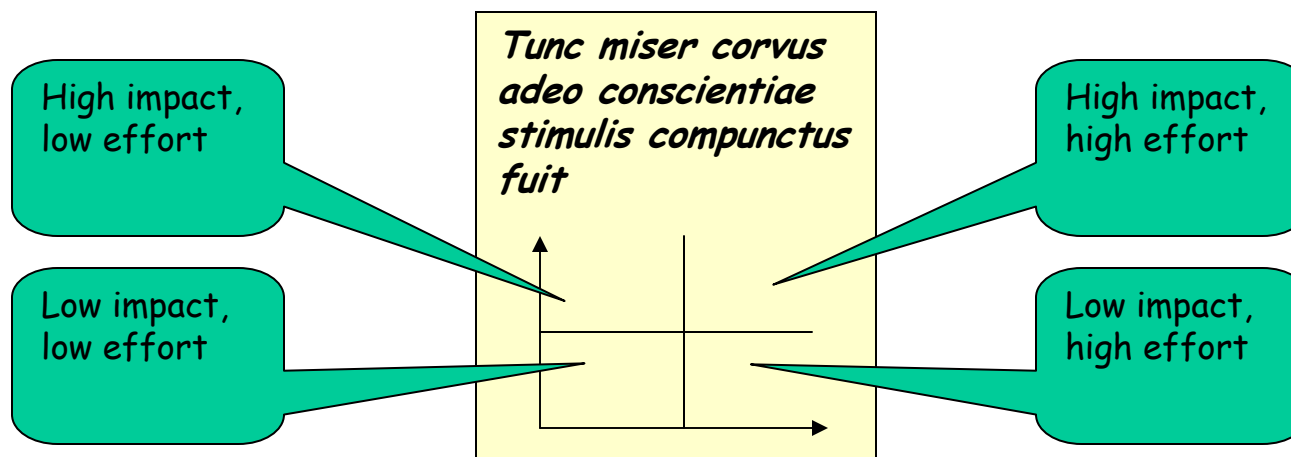


# Gallery

- Display posters
- 5 minutes to read them all
- Identify duplicates, staple duplicates together
  - anyone can do this

# Voting

- 5 minutes
- 10 votes each (one sticker, one vote)
  - no constraints on distribution
  - use quadrants as below



# Counting

- 5 minutes
- 1 person per poster
- Write the number of votes in each quadrant
- Then 4 piles (per quadrant, determined by highest score)
- Sort by score

# Conclusion

- The top 3 high-impact low-effort proposals
- A look at the others
- What next?
  - write-up on a website near you...
  - take one proposal, implement it
  - feedback welcome

# Resources

- [www.flownetwork.com](http://www.flownetwork.com)
- <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?MentalStateCalledFlow>
- *Flow: the Psychology of Optimal Experience*  
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi ISBN: 0060920432