
UNIT 11 FLOW AND MINDFULNESS*

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11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you would be able to:

- *Explain the meaning of flow and describe its different components;*
- *Describe the benefits of flow;*
- *Define mindfulness and describe its components; and*
- *Discuss various mindfulness-based interventions and how they impact the well-being of individuals.*

11.2 INTRODUCTION

Rita loves dancing and has performed on stage in many functions in her college. When she practices in her dance class in the evening, she becomes so engrossed that she forgets all the tiredness after her college classes. She gets immersed in her dance and loses the track of time. Have you ever felt that time has flied while doing anything, e.g., reading a favourite novel or playing a game.

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Rahul has gone for a movie in the evening with his college friends. They dined out and it was quite late by the time he returned home. His father got angry and scolded him for being so irresponsible and staying out so late into the night. Rahul also got angry and was about to retort back saying that he is grown up now and can take care of himself. But then he thought that he is not going to ruin his sleep and the enjoyable experience he had by getting into an argument with his father so late in the night.

Have you ever found yourself in situations similar to the cases described above? These examples depict two important constructs in positive psychology, namely **Flow** and **Mindfulness**. The field of positive psychology focuses on such aspects which make one's life more flourishing, meaningful and worth living. It aims at finding out what is good in life and how we can enhance our life?

The process of engagement in any activity and in life refers to the process of immersing oneself and getting absorbed in the work we do or task at hand. Engagement and particularly the concept of 'flow', is important in making life worth living and promoting a profound sense of well-being for people who have flow experience. Mindfulness also contributes to living a balanced and enriching life by paying attention to the present moment experiences.

In the present Unit, we will discuss about these positive psychology constructs of flow and mindfulness.

11.3 FLOW: THE OPTIMAL EXPERIENCE

The concept of 'Flow' originated from the works of Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1975, 1990), a Hungarian-American psychologist, and a Professor at Claremont Graduate University, California, who first recognized and coined the term. He studied people from creative field or artists where work is integrated with leisure like dancers, painters, athletes, etc. based on which he propounded the concept of flow.

The flow state was defined as the one where a person is fully engaged or immersed in the activity they are doing. It is a feeling which is characterized by a state of concentration, fulfillment, complete absorption, engagement and competency, and a disregard of the sense of time, ego, bodily needs during the activity. According to Csíkszentmihályi (2005), flow involves being fully present and engrossed in the activity and utilizing one's skills to the fullest. The characteristic feature of flow is a deep involvement in the moment-to-moment activity.

In his popular work, 'Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience', Csíkszentmihályi has proposed that when, in a state of flow, people feel the happiest. It is a kind of involvement and focus in one's work that nothing else seems to matter (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). In 1996 he added, flow is "extremely enjoyed optimal experience in which total concentration and enjoyment with great interest for the activity is experienced" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996). This flow experience can be felt during play, games, creative pursuits, spiritual experience, and other contexts, however, it is not limited to these. Maslow's (1962, 1971) concept of 'peak experiences' and de Charms (1968) idea of 'origin' state share many commonalities with flow.

Based on the interview findings of artists, sportsmen etc., Csíkszentmihályi has underlined certain elements of flow experience.

11.3.1 Components of Flow Experience

- **Merging of action and awareness**

One of the most defining features of flow experience is the merging of action with its awareness. Here the individual is very much aware of his/her actions, but do not reflect on that awareness itself. For example in a chess game, the player has undivided attention on the game on its every move but is not perceptive of that awareness. For this kind of merging between action and awareness, the activity carried out must be achievable i.e., the person doing it must be confident about his/her ability to perform.

- **Centering of attention**

The flow experience is achieved when one's attention is undivided and centered on a single stimulus field. This focusing of attention involves keeping out of attention the unnecessary, irrelevant, or distracting stimuli. It is also named as the 'narrowing of consciousness'.

- **Loss of ego**

Loss of ego here denotes, a temporary loss of self-consciousness or one's identity, and individuality. It is a brief forgetfulness of one's self and becoming one with the activity.

- **Control of action and environment**

Another element of flow is a feeling of sense of control over one's actions and one's environment. It is not as much a feeling of mastery, as it is a state of not being bothered about by the likelihood of loss of control.

- **Demands for action and clear feedback**

The demands for action which results in flow experience have the characteristics of being clear, consonant or coherent. In addition it involves explicit and clear feedback to the person for his actions. The task is defined clearly and the person is required to do things which are coherent or compatible with the goals. In other words the goals and the means are aligned with each other.

- **Autotelic in nature**

One of the most defining characteristics of flow is it is autotelic in nature meaning it is self-rewarding and the activity does not require any rewards external to itself. Most or all of flow activities like play, dance, games, artistic drawing etc. are inherently rewarding to the person doing those activities. Although external rewards can be there in most of the above-mentioned and other flow activities yet the people experiencing flow are primarily motivated by the experience and not the external rewards attached.

- **Altered sense of time**

We all have experienced at some point or other how time seems to fly

very fast when we are enjoying something, and it seems to standstill in periods of boredom, agony or stress. In the flow, attention is focused on the moment to moment activity, the person is not at all oriented towards the mental processes that signals the time duration. As a result the person fully engaged in an activity feels that time has passed too quickly (Conti, 2001).

It is important to note here that for the optimal or flow experience the challenge or opportunities for action needs to be consonant with perceived capabilities. When the demands are experienced to be more than what one can handle, it can lead to stress or anxiety. On the other hand, if the skills are perceived to be greater than the demands of the situation, it can result in boredom. Therefore, flow is experienced when there is a match between the opportunities for action (challenges) and the perceived skills of the person.

There are *other conceptualizations of flow* as well by different researchers. Most of them derive from Csíkszentmihályi model of flow. Jackson and Eklund (2002) proposed that the optimal experience can be explained by nine dimensions: consciousness-action fusion, complete concentration, lack of awareness, balance-skill challenge, time distortion, feedback, target clarity, and autotelic experience.

Thus the flow experience consists of a number of elements as described above. Various other factors such as clarity of goals, optimal challenges, high achievement motivation, and importance of activity for the person also influence the extent to which the person engages in an activity and finds it intrinsically rewarding.

11.4 FLOW AND ENGAGEMENT: ARE THEY SAME?

Flow is often used interchangeably with engagement. Many find the two terms overlapping, or an extension of each other. There is a very thin line differentiating the two. Due to the commonalities between the two concepts, and the manner in which they are conceptualized, there are different perspectives in the literature about which causes what, i.e., if flow leads to engagement or engagement results in flow? There is no consistent empirical evidence in one direction.

Kahn (1990) contended engagement to be one of the elements of flow. Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Rokmá and Bakker (2002) suggested that flow is climax experience of engagement. They argued that engagement is a positive psychological state of work that can be described by vigor, dedication and absorption. Engagement can be a reflection of one's internal motivation at work, it can be referred to as a more persistent cognitive-affective state, as compared to flow which can be a specific, transient, peak experience. The most common difference cited between the two is temporality. While flow is a slightly more complex concept and includes various elements, it signifies a particular, time bound, transient 'peak' experience, as compared to a more consistent, and extensive psychological state such as engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The absorption dimension of engagement comes very close to flow. Furthermore, engagement is generally referred in work context and "indicates

one's identification with one's work" (Schaufeli et al., 2009), while flow can be experienced in any of the activities or unlikely situations.

11.5 FLOW: AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

The concept of flow has parallels in the Hindu philosophy of Karma Yoga, underlined in the Hindu's sacred text Bhagavad Gita. Both Flow and Bhagavad Gita propound enjoying the journey or process of work itself, rather than being focused about the end goal, in order to experience inner satisfaction and peace. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna instructs his disciple Arjuna to follow this principle:

deZ; o/f/kdkj Lrs ek Qy\$kdnpou A
ek deZygrqkZrs l 3 xk LRdeZ k || 47 ||

Invest your energies in doing your duty in the best possible manner, but do not concern yourself with the results. Let the motive of action be the action, and not the hope of reward.

cñ) ; äk t gkrhg mHs l q-rnñ-rsA
rLek| kxk ; T; Lo ; kx: deZ qcdk\$kye~ || 50||

Shree Krishna explains - by getting rid of the attachment to the results of the work, one can attain excellence in the work we do. This excellence in work is Yoga. Shri Krishna clarifies that working without personal interests, does not dampen the spirit of work or quality of work; contrary to this, we become more skillful in comparison to when we work with an eye towards personal rewards.

Flow can be experienced in any kind of work. To quote the Gita "the one devoted to his duty (work, action) attains perfection" [18.45].

Csikszentmihalyi's conceptualization of flow and how to achieve the highest form of fulfillment- enjoying the moment-to moment activity without aiming at the end goal, is very similar to the path of peace and self-realization prescribed by Lord Krishna – the elimination of desire for rewards and detachment from fruits of actions.

11.6 BENEFITS OF FLOW

Although flow can be a very personally and internally rewarding experience, it has broader positive consequences. The two direct consequences of flow often discussed in literature are enjoyment and pleasurable absorption. These two in turn can lead to a number of benefits for the person and in the work context. The pleasurable absorption experienced in the leisure and sports activities has been associated with many crucial outcomes in the work arena like enhanced interest in task (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993), positive mood (Eisenberger et al., 2005), in-role and extra role work behaviors (Demerouti, 2006), organizational spontaneity (Eisenberger et al., 2005), and overall physical as well as psychological well-being (Steele, 2006).

A number of studies have highlighted the positive effects of flow in creative fields like journalism. Flow was found to influence enjoyment at work and sense of professional efficacy in journalists (Burke & Mattheisen, 2004). Studies

are abundant in the positive effects of flow in sports and creative activities. However, there is a dearth of studies of flow in the other work context like academics. Flow can have many relevant outcomes in the workplace such as improved performance and organizational citizenship behaviour. Additionally, it can be promoted by various job characteristics like leadership, freedom, autonomy, open communication channels etc. at work; thereby making flow an empirically modifiable variable, which can be enhanced by changing specific job characteristics. Therefore, pleasurable absorption and enjoyment resulting from flow, can lead to positive work outcomes in diverse fields and have the potential to reduce stress at work and promote well-being. Although studies in the domain are limited, it has been found that flow can be concluded by work characteristics in the academic context and brings about better physical and psychological well-being in students (Steele, 2006). Findings from flow experience can be utilized in aiding institutional practices to enhance students' involvement in studies and academic work in general.

Exercises to trigger a Flow Experience:

- *When faced with a challenging situation, try taking not a standard route instead a different approach, stretching your imagination.*
- *Think outside of the box and look at the problems from an unconventional angle.*
- *Try taking part in activities that you never took part in, explored or never thought to be a possibility for you like playing a new sport, exploring a new place etc.*
- *Practice immersing yourself in new experiences and environments*
- *Chalk your personal mission statement – identify your competencies and write your personal goals and ask yourself, “What do I want to achieve?”*

Flow is thus an internally rewarding experience, when individuals are completely immersed in any activity, to the extent of forgetting their identity, self, sense of time, and everything else in their background but the activity itself. People can experience this at the time of writing a novel, dancing, participating in sports, playing a musical instrument, and all other kinds of activities where a person feels involved and skillful. There are many dimensions to it, however the defining characteristics of flow include deep involvement at the moment, challenge and skill balance, and autotelic in nature. This functioning at one's fullest capacity is rewarding in itself and gives a feeling of bliss and the need to relive the experience again and again. The flow experience can be assessed by using a variety of methods, which can be qualitative, quantitative or both. Interviews are the most popular means to attain qualitative measures of flow.

Self Assessment Questions 1

1. Who has contributed to the concept of 'Flow'?
2. Name a few characteristics of flow experience.
3. The concept of flow has parallels in which Hindu philosophy?

11.7 MINDFULNESS

What most of the respondents in Csíkszentmihály qualitative interview study experienced in the state of flow was a feeling of connectedness (mind, body and action), bliss and peace resulting from intense focus and concentration in the act being performed. One wishes to be in this state again and again. What is actually causing this bliss in action is mindfulness. This brings us to another related topic of mindfulness, defined by heightened awareness or being in the moment.

Mindfulness, an attribute of consciousness, plays an important role in improving the psychological well-being of people. One of the major stressors of life for most of the individuals is worrying about future or getting stuck in the past leading to negative feelings like guilt, regret, resentment, grievance, anxiety, bitterness etc. A healthy state of mind requires one to focus one's attention in the present. However, day-dreaming, worries, excessive planning cause individuals to act mechanically without conscious awareness, thus develop behavioral patterns which are unhealthy and mindless.

A disconnect between mind, body and heart is a very common and accepted way of being in the world for so many of us. People of all age groups can be prone to this and particularly those who have to balance and manage multiple roles, responsibilities and relationships at a given time. However, this can have serious effects on individuals' physical and mental health, particularly their emotional well-being.

A number of psychological, philosophical and spiritual schools of thought have underscored the relevance of development of consciousness for the presence and improvement of well-being. An aspect of consciousness that has been much discussed and studied with respect to well-being is **Mindfulness**. In simple terms it is construed as the state of being attentive to and aware of what is going on in the present. It helps one to train its mind to stop being bothered about what has happened in the past or can happen in future and respond effectively to what is happening in the moment - not only to the events outside, but paying close attention to one's inner states like thoughts, sensations, feelings and emotions. This can promote well-being by facilitating self-regulatory behavior and positive mental health.

11.8 MEANING OF MINDFULNESS

The term mindfulness is a translation of the word Sati in Pali language, and has its roots in Buddhist traditions, though its origin dates back at least as far as the third millennium B.C.E. as part of the Brahmanic traditions in the Indian subcontinent, from where emerged the Buddhism (Cousins, 1996, cited in Lomas et al, 2017 p. 133]. Mindfulness is generally used to indicate both: (i) a state or quality of mind; and (ii) a form of meditation that helps one to bring up and nurture this particular state/quality (Lomas et. al., 2017).

Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as “the consciousness that comes through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the flow of experience moment by moment” (Lomas et. al., 2017, p. 133). The main attributes of mindfulness involve a ‘pre-conceptual awareness’ and

‘acceptance’ of one’s experiences; flexible control of attention; a detached or unbiased openness to experience; and an orientation to be ‘here-and-now’ (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007a; Howell, 2008, p. 773).

Nyanaponika Thera (1972) called mindfulness “the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception” (Brown and Ryan, 2003, p. 822). Hanh (1976) defined mindfulness as “keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality” (Brown and Ryan, 2003). However, ‘paying attention’ here indicates concentrating on what one is doing, at the same time being aware of one’s affective state, thoughts, and memories that arise in that moment, and also observing when the mind digress so that it can be refocused (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006).

According to Siegel (2014), there are three components of mindfulness: awareness, present experience and acceptance. Mindfulness requires training to devote our focus to what is occurring at the moment, with open-minded inquisitiveness and approval (Kabat-Zinn 1996, in Weare, 2014, p.4). Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman (2006) specified three components of mindfulness: intention (i.e., motivation for paying attention in this way); attention (i.e., the cognitive mechanisms through which said attention is enacted); and attitude (i.e., the emotional qualities with which one imbues one’s attentive focus, like compassion) (Lomas et. al., 2017, p. 133).

As a meditational practice, mindfulness meditation, specifies a diversified realm of activities relating to mind, with a common purpose of teaching the self-regulation of attention and awareness (Lomas, Ivrtzan, & Fu, 2015), with the aim of improving one’s control of mental processes, leading to enhanced sense of wellbeing (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006, in Lomas et al 2017, p.134). Its foundation lies on conventional mindful meditation but as a psychological concept is separate from spiritual beliefs and Buddhist practices (Kabat-Zinn 1982, cited in Khan and Zadeh, 2014, p.70). Mindfulness meditation is often used reciprocally with Vipassana, a form of meditational practice that derives from Theravada Buddhism (Gunaratana, 2002; Young, 1997). Vipassana is also a Pali word for insight and clear awareness and carried out in a manner to gradually enhance mindfulness (Gunaratana, 2002 in Davis and Hayes, 2011, p. 199).

Mindfulness meditation came to be popular in the western world owing to the efforts of Kabat-Zinn (1982), who utilized it for a novel “mindfulness-based stress reduction” (MBSR) programme. There are number of interventions based on mindfulness meditation that we will discuss later on in this unit.

Dimensions of Mindfulness

Based on the above discussion on the meaning of mindfulness, Shapiro et al., (2002) outlined the following qualities of mindfulness, which a person can experience during the ‘moments of mindfulness’.

- *Non-judgmental*: Witnessing the passing thoughts and the present moment without evaluating or putting them in any categories.
- *Non-striving*: Not trying to achieve any specific goals, not getting attached to desirable outcomes.

- *Acceptance*: Being open and accepting of things as they are in the present. It does not indicate passive resignation or unwillingly accepting, but recognizing one's experiences with awareness and openness.
- *Patience*: Having a composed mind to let things unfold at their own pace. Being patient with ourselves, people around, situations and present moment.
- *Trust*: Having trust in one's body, one's feelings and that whatever is happening in life it is supposed to be like that
- *Openness*: Receiving everything as it is happening for the first time. Recognizing possibilities by being fully in the present moment.
- *Letting Go*: Not getting attached to any thought, feeling or experience
- *Gentleness*: Quality of being soft, tender and considerate.
- *Generosity*: Being and giving in the present with love and compassion without getting attached to gains in return.
- *Empathy*: Trying to understand other person feelings, perspective and situation in the present
- *Gratitude*: The quality of appreciating and feeling grateful for the present
- *Loving-Kindness*: The feeling of forgiveness, compassion and unconditional love

11.9 BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

Research has shown a number of benefits and positive effects of mindfulness in different facets of people's life.

(a) Mindfulness and Well-being

Keyes (2005) regarded well-being as constituting of three domains: *emotional well-being*, involving the combination of positive emotions and life satisfaction; *psychological well-being*, involving contentment with one's achievements and believing in having a larger purpose in life and developing as a person; and *social well-being*, including the quality of one's proclivity toward others. (Howell, Digdan & Buro, 2010, p. 419).

Researchers have contended that mindfulness not only has a direct effect on well-being, but it is also an indirect predictor of wellbeing through its impact on enhanced self-regulated functioning (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007b; Shapiro & Schwartz, 1999, 2000 in Howell, Digdan & Buro, 2010, p. 420). Shapiro et al. (2006) propounded that re-perceiving/decentering can have a beneficial impact upon wellbeing (in Lomas et al, 2017, p.134). Mindfulness is regarded to be leading to increased levels of well-being; particularly, mindfulness is believed to be directly enhancing well-being by making any experience more richer and fuller. Mindfulness can indirectly promote well-being by boosting healthy self-regulation, including a heightened focused attention to, openness and approval of one's personal needs or values and an enhanced ability to act in accordance to them (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown et al., 2007a, in Howell et al, 2008, p. 773).

(b) Mindfulness and Physical Health

Research studies indicate that mindfulness meditation results in number of health benefits like enhanced immune functioning (Davidson et al., 2003; see Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004, in Davis and Hayes, 2011, p. 201). Randomised control trial methodology (RCTs, involving comparison of two groups, one who receives the intervention and the other does not, with randomly distributed participants) indicate that mindfulness leads to a decrease in varied physiological problems including chronic pain, fatigue, heart disease, type-2 diabetes, cancer etc. both in adults and youth (Baer 2003; Mental Health Foundation, 2010 in Weare, 2014, p.6). Mindfulness is associated with better heart functioning through a reduced degree of cigarette smoking, greater physical movement, and a healthier body mass index (Loucks, Britton, Howe, Eaton, & Buka, 2015). Furthermore, mindfulness is also positively related with improved blood pressure (Tomfohr, Pung, Mills, & Edwards, 2015), successful weight loss for obese adults and improved eating behaviours (Rogers, Ferrari, Mosely, Lang, & Brennan, 2017 [cited in Ackerman, 2017].

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) has been carried out for patients with a vast variety of chronic clinical ailments, as well as among groups of comparatively healthy individuals who have made efforts in the direction of developing their capacities for coping with stressors of day-to-day life. Initial reports have indicated significant improvement for individuals suffering from chronic pain, fibromyalgia, cancer, anxiety disorders and depression (Arcari, 1997, Astin, 1997, Baime, 1996 in Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004, p. 36).

(c) Mindfulness and Cognitive Functioning

To be able to function and perform to the fullest capability, one requires optimum cognitive functioning like attention, memory, thinking, reasoning, decision making, language etc. When we engage in multitasking, it becomes difficult to carry out focused attention when it is required. Focused attention is not only important for better performance but also for one's sense of psychological well-being. Low level of focused attention can also result in experiencing greater anxiety as our thoughts get us to worry about the future (Cabrera, 2016). The practice of mindfulness meditation can help people to pay focused attention to the present moment and enhance their sense of well-being by reducing stress levels.

Corcoran et. al. (2010) propound that mindfulness meditation develops metacognitive awareness, reduces rumination by way of disconnection from persisting cognitive activities, and promotes attentional abilities through improvement in working memory; these cognitive benefits, consecutively add to effective emotion regulation strategies (in Davis and Hayes, 2011, p. 200).

Mindfulness-based interventions diminish those mechanisms that produce and cause cognitive distortions (Ong, Shapiro, & Manber, 2008; Yook et al., 2008 in Howell et al, 2010 p. 419).

Thus it is helpful to healthy sleep-related functioning.

(d) Mindfulness, Emotional Well-Being and Psychological Health

Mindfulness can help individuals to attain and maintain a positive state of mind, an acceptance of one's self and being comfortable with it. Mindfulness as a trait perspective assumes some people to be more mindful than others; thus people can be trained to be more mindful. Studies have shown dispositional mindfulness (the extent to which a person is mindful) to be associated positively with self-esteem, and self-acceptance (Thompson and Walz, 2008 in Weare, 2014, p. 14). Research has also shown that when mindfulness is improved with the help of interventions like meditation training, it results in subsequent increase in well-being (Falkenstrom, 2010; Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Zautra et al., 2008 in Shutte and Malouff, 2011, p. 1116). Other research studies point out that higher levels of mindfulness are linked with more adaptive emotional functioning, termed as emotional intelligence (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003 in Shutte and Malouff, 2011).

Weinstein, Brown, and Ryan (2009) proposed that the more mindful individuals gave more positive stress appraisals and displayed a lower use of avoidance coping, resulting in higher subjective well-being (SWB). Studies have also showed that mindfulness has the capacity to lower negative emotional outcomes resulting from neuroticism (Barnhofer et al., 2011; Feltman et al., 2009). Neuroticism is believed to lead to mood spillover effects because of its association with rumination (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Considering mindfulness intervention programs can reduce ruminative thinking (Deyo, Wilson, Ong, & Koopman, 2009), it seems possible that mindfulness will lower the effects of neuroticism on well-being. (Wenzel et al, 2015, p. 69).

An experimental study by Manas et. al. (2011) examined the effectiveness of mindfulness training to lower the levels of stress and sick leave taken by 31 secondary teachers, wherein 16 were there in the experimental group and 15 were kept in the control group. Findings indicated significant decrease in stress levels of teacher and the duration of sick leave, in addition to decrease in feelings of pressure and feelings of being demotivated and better coping in the experimental group as compared to the control group (Weare, 2014, p. 12).

(e) Mindfulness and Social Well-being

A healthy relationship with one's family, society and community is integral to experience a sense of well-being. Studies have also revealed mindfulness to be effective in relationship building, and predictive of a higher sense of relatedness and interpersonal proximity (Brown and Kasser, 2005; Brown and Ryan, 2003 in Weare, 2014, p. 14). Many scholars in the field are trying to find the link between mindfulness and interpersonal behavior and are examining concepts like "mindful relating" (Wachs & Cordova, 2007), "mindful responding" in couples (Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007), and "mindfulness-based relationship enhancement" (MBRE) (Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2006) [in Davis and Hayes, 2011, p. 201].

There is research evidence to support that trait mindfulness predicts a number of interpersonal issues and behaviors such as ability to manage relationship stress constructively, competence in identifying and expressing emotions to partner,

relationship satisfaction, frequency of relationship conflict, level of negativity, and empathy (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007; Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Barnes et al. (2007) report that individuals with better dispositional mindfulness expressed low level of emotional stress when faced with relationship conflict and reported low level of anger and anxiety during conflict discussion. Studies also show that mindfulness is conversely related to 'distress contagion' and positively linked to the tendency to be aware in one's actions in social situations (Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leyson, & Dewulf, 2008 in Davis and Hayes, 2011, p. 201).

The above mentioned benefits relating to physical, psychological and social well-being is achieved and maintained by a number of mindfulness based interventions, some of which are discussed below.

11.10 MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Mindfulness meditation has been popularized in the West by Kabat-Zinn who has conceptualized and developed a mindfulness-based stress reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre in 1979. In 1995, he came up with 'The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society'. The beneficial effects of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in the area of physical and mental health are supported by a plethora of research and have been discussed above. Some of the most popular mindfulness-based interventions are outlined below:

(a) Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

MBSR was the first mindfulness-based program for relieving stress and advancing physical-mental health and well-being of individuals. It involves an 8-week course structured in a group format in order for participants to learn and benefit from their collective experience. It is designed to be both education-based and experience-based, combining conventional Buddhist mindfulness meditation techniques (where participants learn to center their focus on the breathing and moving it towards a heightened awareness of other objects of attention like sensations, feelings, thoughts), simple yogic and muscle stretching exercises, practices like the 'body scan', whereby participants concentrate on their bodily parts with mindful awareness and journal tasks to help them integrate mindfulness into daily practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

The program was conceptualized with the purpose of determining the possibility of mindfulness and relaxation exercises to benefit people with chronic health issues like BP problems, anxiety disorders and chronic pain. The intent is to promote overall well-being by helping individuals to focus their attention on their thoughts, feelings and internal states in the present (Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, 2011).

During the meditation, participants try to do (a) body scanning, which includes nonjudgmental awareness of sensations and feelings in different bodily parts; (b) meditation while sitting, where participants concentrate on their breath, at the same time having a nonjudgmental awareness of any thoughts that crop up; and (c) Hatha yoga involving stretching exercises for strengthening and easing the musculo-skeletal system. (Cabrera-Caban et al, 2016).

MBSR can be better discerned through the four processes suggested by Hölzel and colleagues (2011): (a) attention regulation, (b) body awareness, (c) emotion regulation, and (d) change in self-perspective (cited in Cabrera-Caban et al, 2016, p. 122). Generally, participants first learn *attention regulation* by the way of focused meditation, wherein they are cognizant of and pay attention to a given thought, feeling, or object. Over a period of time, with practice, participants are able to focus attention for a longer duration and are better equipped to filter out distractions of the mind. Another technique, *body awareness*, entails focusing attention on sensory experiences and breathing to help individuals to align their thoughts and feelings with the outside world. This is expected to result in better clarity (Marianetti & Passmore, 2009) and emotional intelligence (Keng et al., 2011). The third process, *emotion regulation*, refers to the modification of emotional responses from impulsive reactivity to reflective thinking assisting participants in recognizing their experiences in an accepting, non-judgmental manner. At the last, *change in perception of the self* refers to a transformation from a feeling of static-rigid self-perception to a more dynamic self-image. The belief here is when people feel less static about self, they become more liberated and experience a more positive self-image (Flaxman & Bond, 2010, cited in Cabrera-Caban et al, 2016, p. 123).

(b) Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

MBCT has its roots in the collective-based, eight-week programme MBSR, but was developed by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale (2002) to be used by individuals who were suffering from or had experienced multiple incidence of depression in their lives. It combines characteristics of cognitive therapy with mindfulness practices. MBCT is different from cognitive therapy as it involves non-judgmental acceptance of one's thoughts and emotions, instead of making an attempt to assess or modify the content of thoughts. This idea of perceiving the mind as a place of 'being' rather than 'doing' reduces rumination and helps depression-prone individuals to prevent relapse. In their book *Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy*, Segal, Teasdale and Williams (2002) proposed that:

'The ultimate aim of the MBCT program is to help individuals make a radical shift in their relationship to the thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that contribute to depressive relapse'. It also aims to 'help participants choose the most skillful response to any unpleasant thoughts, feelings or situations they meet'.

(c) Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) was given by Marsha Linehan, as a cognitive-behavioural and mindfulness-based therapy for Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). It was the first psychotherapy propounded to be effective in successfully treating BPD in controlled clinical trials. The essential dialect is between the contradictory forces of change and acceptance, i.e., accepting the things as they are, at the same time working towards their improvement. In DBT mindfulness is learnt as a skill set with the help of systematic exercises. These involve observing, comprehending and engaging in one's present moment experience in a non-judgmental, singular focus and effective way. DBT trains one in how to make use of the 'wise mind' – the latent ability to have clear awareness of

one's thoughts and feelings. DBT currently has a substantial research support and is regarded as one of the most effective therapy for BPD as evident from the documented success rates.

(d) Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a psychological intervention, based on observations and experience, which aims to improve 'psychological flexibility' in individuals by combining acceptance and mindfulness strategies, with commitment and behaviour change strategies. It is regarded by American Psychological Association as an empirically validated intervention for treating depression. 'Psychological flexibility' here means complete engagement with the present moment having full consciousness and, based on what the situation entails, modifying or persisting with the behavior aligning with the person's preferred values. The therapy draws heavily from cognitive-behavioral framework but diverge in its dominant application of mindfulness exercises to help individuals in attaining flexibility.

The effectiveness of MBIs is undeniable based on the outcomes of meta-analytic studies. However, there are a number of methodological rigor issues that interferes in the global acceptance of MBIs as established psychotherapeutic interventions. The validity of MBI studies gets limited by factors such as wide variations in MBI program design; lack of adequate control for probable confounding factors; paucity of long-term follow-up data assessing the maintenance effects of MBIs; over-dependence on self-report measures etc. Questions have also been raised about the trustworthiness and competence of MBI facilitators. Despite these criticisms mindfulness has witnessed a tremendous increase in popularity over the years and has carved a powerful niche in mainstream psychotherapy (Shonin, Gordon, Griffiths, 2013).

Various assessment tools and psychological tests have been constructed to assess mindfulness. This is important for those interested to work in this area, and also to gain an insight about one's own mindfulness. Mindfulness is not limited to meditation exercises, it can be practiced in each and every action of ours in daily living including day to day activities like speech, listening, walking, eating, exercise etc. Some of the common practical applications of mindfulness are given in the boxes below.

Mindful Eating

- Is an increased awareness of what, how, why and when one is eating
- Involves eating slowly and focusing on food while eating, avoid distraction activities like watching Television or seeing mobile etc.
- being aware and able to distinguish between physical and psychological hunger cues and triggers for eating
- Paying attention to the taste, colour, smell, flavors of the food being eaten
- Is beneficial when trying to make changes in one's diet, or lose excess weight, avoid binge eating

Mindful Stretching Exercises

- Involves stretching body muscles, strengthening exercises and simple yoga poses done at slow pace with increased awareness of one's breath at each moment
- Help reduce stress and calms one's mind
- Helpful in connecting with one's body

Mindful Breathing and Meditation

- Involves deep breathing and heightened awareness of one's bodily sensations at the here-and-now
- Choose any comfortable space to sit
- Can choose to place or not place a timer
- Focus on breathing, and each passing breath in and out of your nostril
- Witness the passing thoughts, watch them from a distance as an observer
- Do not get bothered by wandering thoughts, come back again to focus on breathing
- Attention can be focused on any object, sound, image, sensation, thought

Self Assessment Questions 2

1. The term mindfulness is a translation of which word in Pali language?
2. According to Siegel (2014), what are the three components of mindfulness?
3. What is 'Vipasana'?
4. Name certain dimensions of mindfulness.
5. Who developed the mindfulness-based stress reduction program?
6. What is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)?

11.11 LET US SUM UP

In the present Unit, you learned about flow and mindfulness, two important positive psychology constructs. The meaning of flow was explained and it was differentiated from engagement. Mindfulness was described in detail and the benefits of mindfulness on our physical, mental, emotional and social well-being was discussed. Research is abound with the positive impact of mindfulness on different aspects of an individual's being: physical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, cognitive and other aspects. Various mindfulness-based interventions were described such as MBSR, MBCT, DBT, and ACT. People of all age groups, gender orientation, and societies can benefit from mindfulness based programs. Mindfulness based approaches represent an emerging area in the field, one with much potential promise.

11.12 KEY WORDS

Flow is a feeling which is characterized by a state of concentration, fulfillment, complete absorption, engagement and competency, and a disregard of the sense of time, ego, bodily needs during the activity.

Autotelic refers to the activities like play, dance, games, artistic drawing etc. which are inherently rewarding to the person doing those activities.

Mindfulness is the state of being attentive to and aware of what is going on in the present.

Non-striving refers to not trying to achieve any specific goals, and not getting attached to desirable outcomes.

Loving-Kindness refers to the feeling of forgiveness, compassion and unconditional love.

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) trains one in how to make use of the 'wise mind' – the latent ability to have clear awareness of one's thoughts and feelings.

11.13 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Answers to Self Assessment Questions 1

1. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1975, 1990)
2. A few characteristics of the flow experience are altered sense of time, merging of action and awareness, centering of attention, loss of ego etc.
3. Hindu philosophy of Karma Yoga

Answers to Self Assessment Questions 2

1. *Sati*
2. The three components of mindfulness are awareness, present experience and acceptance.
3. *Vipassana* is a form of meditational practice that derives from Theravada Buddhism.
4. Non-judgemental, non-striving, acceptance, trust, patience, openness, loving-kindness etc.
5. Kabat-Zinn
6. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a psychological intervention, based on observations and experience, which aims to improve 'psychological flexibility' in individuals by combining acceptance and mindfulness strategies, with commitment and behaviour change strategies.

11.14 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Explain the meaning of 'Flow'.
2. Differentiate between flow and engagement.
3. Discuss mindfulness as a meditational practice.
4. Explain how mindfulness contributes to our well-being.

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11.16 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Mindfulness meditation Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4gZgnCy5ew>