

While "flow" (or flow state) is different from peak performance, athletes (and other individuals including visual/performing artists) experiencing peak performance tend to also be experiencing a state of "flow"; "flow" may be an antecedent of peak performance (Krane & Williams, 2010). Psychological theories trying to describe the ephemeral mind-body-spirit (MBS) experience of peak human performance (and all that it encompasses) through models/frameworks are relatively new and "young". Such theories seek to answer the questions: what is the optimal MBS state in human performance; how do athletes arrive at and sustain this optimal MBS state; is this optimal MBS state coachable?

### **What is the Optimal Mind-Body-Spirit State in Human Performance?**

"Peak experience", defined by Harmison (2006), is "intense joy or a moment of highest happiness" (p. 233). Peak experience is a construct describing optimal the positive emotional state of optimal MBS performance. Such emotions include a high sense of fulfillment, significance, and spirituality (Harmison, 2006).

While "flow" (or flow state) is a complex multidimensional construct, Harmison (2006) mentioned two key attributes: flow is intrinsically rewarding; and flow is the optimal balance of challenge and skill (or the athlete's skill and capability to meet the challenge). Krane and Williams (2010) described nine dimensions of flow: challenge-skill balance; merging of awareness and action; clarity (in goals and in purpose); unambiguous feedback; total involvement and concentration on the task; paradox of control; loss of self-consciousness as related to self-evaluation of the performance; transformation of time; and autotelic experience (Krane & Williams, 2010). Flow is associated with the intrinsic values of the activity/performance (Anderson, Hanrahan, & Mallett, 2014). While an athlete may achieve a flow state, a flow state does not automatically give way to peak performance.

"Peak performance" (PP) is a construct addressing the "functional" side. Privette described it as "superior use of human potential" and a "superior use of human potential" (as cited in Harmison, 2006, p. 233). Kimiecik and Jackson described PP as a "release of latent powers to perform optimally within a specific competition" (as cited in Harmison, 2006, p. 234). PP is associated with "personal bests", "the upper limits of performance" (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 318), the athlete's level of functioning, and the outcomes of the performance (Harmison, 2006; Krane & Williams, 2010). PP is momentary and not a steady-state (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014). Hallett and Hoffman (2014) defined PP as a "psychological state of optimal functioning that originates from the process of being fully focused on a task or activity while simultaneously having an acute awareness of the self as an active agent" (p. 214).

A model capturing the full essence of "optimal human performance" (OHP) with regards to the total MBS experience would incorporate the constructs of peak experience, flow, and peak performance. Additionally while many OHP experiences may share descriptive commonalities, the OHP experience is also very individualistic. The Individualized Zone of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) model's iceberg athletic profiles would be very useful as a discovery tool (Harmison, 2006; Krane & Williams, 2010).

## **Cultivating the Conditions that Promote OHP**

The challenge aspect of a performance introduces a pressure situation (e.g. audience, comparison with other competitors, challenge-skill evaluation where the perceived challenge may push the upper limits of skill). According to the Conservation of Resources Theory, stress arises when a person tries to retain, protect, and build resources (e.g. self-esteem, reputation, extrinsic rewards) while perceiving that the threat poses a risk of loss of these resources (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014).

The athlete may perceive the challenge as "good" (eustress or challenge-stressor, constructive, promoting growth) or "bad" (distress or hindrance-stressor, destructive, inhibiting growth/achievement). A hindrance-stressor will cause maladaptations which could negatively impact not only the current performance-challenge but future performances as well. Stress-coping and stress management are vital skills to develop for the athlete as stress can negatively impact the cognitive, emotional, and physiological dimensions of performance (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014).

It is possible to cultivate the cognitive factors of OHP--mindfulness, attention/concentration, problem solving, positive attitude, and decision making (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014). Hallett and Hoffman (2014) noted that developing mindfulness (internalization, athlete's thoughts/emotions/sensations) was key to successful and optimal performance. Increasing positivity and learning to recognize and minimize negative self-talk were skills Hallett and Hoffman (2014) found helpful not only to athletes but managers as well.

Emotional components of OHP are important because athlete's channel emotions to efficiently allocate/organize energy to accomplish the task (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014). Developing greater self-efficacy and confidence while reducing/managing anxiety will positively impact performance (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014).

Physiological factors of OHP include (but not limited to) specific sports skills; strength and conditioning; rest/recovery; and nutrition (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014). Rest and recovery are often overlooked. It is possible to develop all of these factors in an athlete in order to cultivate and promote OHP.

## **Putting Into Practice: Coaching OHP**

O'Moore (2012) introduced the PEAK (Purpose, Engagement, Ability, Know-how) collaborative model for performance coaching. Each of the four categories (which impact performance) may exist on a continuum ranging from low to high per category (O'Moore, 2012).

The "P" for understanding the coachee's purpose for what and why (locus of motivation) he/she wants to achieve (O'Moore, 2012). The coach and coachee should explore general goals and appropriate types of motivation, and arrive at some specific performance goals (O'Moore, 2012).

"E" for engagement refers to the coachee's investment into goal-attainment (O'Moore, 2012). The coach should identify the coachee's commitment level, stage of change, and encourage the coachee to increase engagement levels (O'Moore, 2012).

"A" for ability (both objective and subjective/self-efficacy aspects) refers to both knowledge and skill proficiency (O'Moore, 2012). The coach should discuss with the coachee aspects of the challenge and how to refine skills to better meet the next challenge (O'Moore, 2012). The coach should also work on identifying the current and needed skillsets, build self-efficacy, and problem-solve (O'Moore, 2012).

"K" for know-how is the strategy/approach needed to reach the goal. The coach should develop an action plan with the coachee and emphasize initiative to problem-solve (O'Moore, 2012). The PEAK outline is cyclical and the coach/coachee should always reassess. The PEAK model is a helpful procedure to open/begin a performance dialogue. The model certainly is not the only method.

### **Conclusion**

When considering optimal human performance, the importance of the mind-body-spirit connection must be acknowledged. The performance experience, flow, and peak performance all make significant contributions. At the same time, OHP is extremely individualistic and cannot be reduced to a tidy formula or equation of variables. However, the IZOF iceberg profiles do help to visualize each athlete's "zone". While coaches/coachees can cultivate skills and try to engineer the "perfect climate" to promote OHP, there still is that unknown element of "magic" that science may not ever really be able to pinpoint.

## References

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