



Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention

By Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

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The classic study of the creative process from the national bestselling author of *Flow*

creativity is about capturing those moments that make life worth living. Legendary psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi reveals what leads to these moments—be it the excitement of the artist at the easel or the scientist in the lab—so that this knowledge can be used to enrich people's lives. Drawing on nearly one hundred interviews with exceptional people, from biologists and physicists, to politicians and business leaders, to poets and artists, as well as his thirty years of research on the subject, Csikszentmihalyi uses his famous flow theory to explore the creative process. He discusses such ideas as why creative individuals are often seen as selfish and arrogant, and why the "tortured genius" is largely a myth. Most important, he explains why creativity needs to be cultivated and is necessary for the future of our country, if not the world.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Based on interviews with 91 internationally recognized creative people—among them Nobel physicist John Bardeen, arts administrator-performer Kitty Carlisle Hart, writer Denise Levertov, jazz musician Oscar Peterson, electronics executive Robert Galvin—this book offers a highly readable anatomy of creativity. As Csikszentmihalyi (*Flow*) argues, creativity requires not only unusual individuals, but a culture and field of experts that can foster and validate such work. Most creative people, the author suggests, have dialectic personalities: smart yet naive, both extroverted and introverted, etc. Expanding on his previous book, Csikszentmihalyi suggests that complex and challenging work exemplifies fully engaged "flow."

Synthesizing study results, he reports that none of the interviewees was popular during adolescence; while they were not necessarily more brilliant than their college peers, they displayed more "concentrated attention." Later, they kept a consistent focus on future work. The author reminds us that while individuals can make their own opportunities, a supportive society offering resources and rewards can foster creativity. His advice may sound like homilies—"Try to be surprised by something every day"—but is often worthy.

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From Library Journal

Bringing together 30 years of research, Csikszentmihalyi (psychology, Univ. of Chicago) describes this book as "an effort to make more understandable the mysterious process by which men and women come up with new ideas and new things." Utilizing the interviews garnered from 91 respondents (ranging from philosopher Mortimer Adler to biologist Edward O. Wilson to politician Eugene McCarthy), the author of the best-selling *Flow* (LJ 3/15/90) demonstrates the processes that these acknowledged creative thinkers and doers go through and the characteristics that make them stand out. He deals with what makes them and others like them "creative"?which he defines as "a process by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed"?and how the conduct of their professional and personal lives illustrates these traits. Csikszentmihalyi also deals with creativity and aging and ways to enhance one's own personal creativity. Although the benefits of this study to scholars are obvious, this thought-provoking mixture of the scholarly and colloquial will enlighten inquisitive general readers, too. A welcome addition to both academic and public libraries.?David M.

Turkalo, Suffolk Univ. Law Sch. Lib., Boston

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From Kirkus Reviews

A mostly fascinating look at what makes creative people who they are, gleaned largely from interviews with 91 individuals from a wide variety of fields. Despite the subtitle, social psychologist Csikszentmihalyi, who invented the idea of "flow" and authored a book with that title, writes relatively little about the enjoyable, ego- and time- transcending absorption in a task that is conducive to creativity and high achievement. Rather, he focuses on the interplay between culture, the creative person, and the "domain" (sociologese for "field"), including the receptivity of experts to new ideas and inventions. He quotes extensively--too much so--from the subjects he and his research team interviewed, but there are some gems among these passages, such as writer Madeleine L'Engle's observation that to produce good literature, "your intuition and your intellect should be working together . . . making love." Csikszentmihalyi's weakest section consists of detailing ten personality polarities that supposedly distinguish creative individuals, but that are also applicable to "balanced" or "fulfilled" individuals. His best sections consist of longer profiles of individuals as varied as poet Anthony Hecht, ecologist Barry Commoner, and astronomer Vera Rubin. Also valuable is a concluding prescriptive section with some helpful advice to the average person on how to make his or her thinking and

way of living more creative, particularly a passage on how to rethink and use a disappointing experiences, such as being passed over for a promotion. Unfortunately, redundancies make the work too long by at least a third, and some meaningless or fatuous generalizations also mar the presentation (e.g., ``Recent studies suggest that the amount of dalliance, marital infidelity and sexual experimentation [among creative people studied] is much less than earlier estimates had suggested''). Still, the rich anecdotal material Csikszentmihalyi has mined and analyzed make this an important study of a vital topic. (\$40,000 ad/promo)

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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