

DL838 Creative Music Production, Thesis

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## **How Flow can be utilised to adopt an 'intentional-Work-Play' for a Music Production Project**

An Active Research Investigation

[Declaration of Academic Integrity signed by Dylan Boland](#)

Declaration

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I felt it necessary to thank all the people who've gotten me through this chapter of my life, as without them I wouldn't have been able to complete my degree; to all my lecturers, especially Thom and Brian, Fred in the learning support centre, Colm in assistive technology, Alex in the Disability Support service, everyone at IADT and STC, my life's mentor Tim, my dear friend Shane, my siblings Chris, Les, Philip, and Karl, my brother-in-law John, my sister-in-law Caitriona, Ella, my nephew and niece Jack and Laila, and everyone in Gheel Autism support services, especially Shauna. And finally, my late mother and father, who both supported my passion for music and dream to study at third level. Not many have been as fortunate as I in having so many people to rely on and so many role models who make me want to be a better person. Thank you all.

“In normal everyday existence, we are the prey of thoughts and worries intruding unwanted in consciousness. Because most jobs, and home life in general, lack the pressing demands of flow experiences, concentration is rarely so intense that preoccupations and anxieties can be automatically ruled out. Consequently, the ordinary state of mind involves unexpected and frequent episodes of entropy interfering with the smooth run of psychic energy. This is one reason why flow improves the quality of experience: the clearly structured demands of the activity impose order and exclude the interference of disorder in consciousness.”<sup>1</sup> - Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi.

## Abstract

This investigative research project examined the utility of flow in a music production project. ‘Flow’ is understood to mean ‘total involvement’ as is characterised by psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi. Moreover, this project is an investigation into what strategies adopted by the participant induced involvement and seeks to understand what the most common interference is preventing a ‘flow-state’ for the participant. Interference has come to define the antithesis of flow with reference to academic research for this project. The project's deliverables are three recorded

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- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi. ‘Flow: the psychology of Optimal Experience.’ published by Rider, 2002. Page no. 85 on ‘order in consciousness’.

songs. The production process has been documented by the participant to compare experiences of flow in the case of each to find common interferences to flow. Additionally, this project seeks to investigate the utility of flow in the context of project management as it relates to an agile and contingent project plan and compares collaborative quality reviews with intuitive judgement by the participant to see which is more effective.

It should be stressed; that the individual human experience and coinciding unique circumstances to the individual person is necessary to be understood for the reader to conduct their own experiment with their own milestones, goals and objectives, as well as their own value measurement of progress; however this may look to the reader, so long as the data can be analysed. In testing out what strategies might negate interference and in documenting those moments where the flow-state is induced – that is to say, the reader and participant is fully involved in what they are doing; the author encourages the reader to be a participant and to identify the particular conditions which help to induce flow and what strategies are helpful for the reader to negate the interference, becoming more present in their practice, and being able to enjoy the present moment.

## Authors Note

Something worth mentioning as a preface for this thesis as recommended to consider for inclusion by the project supervisor, is the authors own diagnosis as being on the autistic spectrum. Without going into extensive personal experience with what this diagnosis means for the author they will instead include brief notes from world renowned expert on autism Professor Tony Attwood as cited in his seminal work: 'the Complete Guide to Aspergers Syndrome'.<sup>2</sup> The author felt this could be insightful as to how being an autistic person may play a role in incorporating a flow-based approach to one's own project and attainment of flow for with an ASD diagnosis who wish to evaluate their own project progression; included in a footnote here.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that 'Aspergers syndrome' is a term previously existing in the DSM-5 by the American Psychiatric Association in their describing of what is in the currently revised DSM (diagnostic statistical manual of mental disorders) to pertain to someone with an ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder). A diagnosis of Aspergers syndrome today would mean someone diagnosed as being level 1 and perhaps level 2 autistic of the 3 levels of functioning which are identified. These levels are used as an indicator for individuals with varying support needs. Level 1 may require little support needs and level 3 would generally require intensive support needs, as explained in-depth in Dr Attwood's work.

<sup>3</sup> On Restricted, Repetitive patterns of Behaviour, Interests of Activities:

"There is an insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualised patterns of behaviour... the person who has Aspergers syndrome may show great agitation if prevented from imposing or completing a particular routine or ritual. There

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is a determination to maintain consistency in daily events, and high levels of anxiety if routines are changed. From my clinical experience, the imposition of routines and rituals may actually be a mechanism for coping with high levels of anxiety as they are soothing and relaxing. Specific events may have been associated with, or perhaps have led to, anxiety and are to be actively avoided, hence the tendency to insist on sameness." - Attwood, Tony PhD. 'The Complete Guide to Aspergers Syndrome'. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008.

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## Introduction

This thesis involves the production, and documentation of the process of producing three musical artefacts, both using a combination of 'Flow-based' and 'Action-based' approaches. This thesis as distinguished from other analyses of music production approaches will investigate the adoption of a flow-based approach to prove its compatibility with a traditional music production process as evidenced by the development of the three musical artefacts which accompany this paper as well as the participants qualitative data which support the research presented in this paper. The adoption of flow-based strategies is supported by research across many areas of disciplines, and it is the participant of this project's aim to bring this information to the reader in a coherently compiled manner from across these disciplines and make it

relevant to a music-making context to inform a holistic approach to music production within the recording practice of the music industry. As differentiated from the initial project charter as described in the Interim Thesis: each musical artefact will be a means for investigative research into the implementation of 'flow' in a creative practice. This will be supplemented with an agile and iterative project management methodology that is contingent on updated quality reviews, and updated issue logs and planning. The purpose of these processes being the creation of an effective project 'workflow', which Oxford Dictionary defines as "the sequence of industrial, administrative, or other processes through which a piece of work passes from initiation to completion." Understanding workflow on its own however, is not sufficient to understanding the creative process, and therein lies the purpose of this thesis, to take into account the more psychological and oftentimes elusive part of the creative process – and perhaps if we try to understand this it could inform a more holistic practice in the recorded music industry. This thesis will explore what practices best facilitate the state of flow in the music production process, with the assumption that it is optimal for both a creative and focused project.

## Literature Review

To begin, we should first attempt other define flow. Here is a transcript of a conversation with Dr Quinlan on trying to define flow held at 14:30 recorded from home in-person on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October:

**Dylan:**

What is your understanding of flow?

**Tim:**

'...we all have a saying, and even my father had it, to go with the flow, and I think, even that in folk memory was tapping into what Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi saw in flow...he looked at flow from a psychologists point of view, and saw that it was about the complete absorption of a person in whatever pursuit they were following. Now... a good example of that is a child at play - or children at play, or even adults at play... flow is about the complete absorption in an activity.'

Supporting what Dr Quinlan states in his book, 'Flow: the Psychology of Optimal Experience', Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow can be found succinctly in the preface: "this book summarizes...decades of research on the positive aspects of human experience- joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life I call flow."<sup>4</sup>

Flow, therefore, it can be deduced, according to Csikszentmihalyi, is the process of total involvement of a person in each moment in their life, which is further described

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<sup>4</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi. *Flow: the psychology of Optimal Experience*. Rider, 2002. Pg 101.

as joyful and creative in its expression, and a decidedly positive experience. Supporting this definition of flow, Professor and neuroscientist and researcher into creativity, Dr Anna Abraham, explains the phenomenon of flow further in episode 233 of the Blind Boy Podcast: “Flow experiences in general have a number of things in common, it’s *losing a sense of time and space, being extremely focused, finding something rewarding in and of itself. It is effortless. It usually occurs when there is a perfect balance between your abilities at that point and the challenge experienced at that point.* Creating music is fun but somehow there’s something about creating music while experiencing flow that is magical, it is that sense of transformation that people want. It’s the sense of transportation that people want. Where they feel that they’re reaching inner parts of themselves that would be inaccessible if they were trying to go about it consciously. And there’s something revelatory about it. In the case of creativity of course, *it’s about creating a response, or generating an idea - by which could be a musical sequence or phrase or any kind of expression that is novel, it’s about uniqueness to yourself,* and ultimately there is a feeling that is extremely satisfying. *It’s something that all creative persons aspire to get to, that phenomenology of flow where you are at one with yourself at that moment.*”<sup>5</sup>

As Dr Quinlan previously suggested, a good example of flow can be given through the phenomenon of play, which has come up continuously in the research literature in association with flow. For instance, In actor John Cleese’s lecture on creativity in management, he describes the most creative people as being subject to a way of operating which he characterises as an ability to play.<sup>6</sup> Further stating that the most creative people when engaged in this state often appear childlike, an association with childlike experience was brought up repeatedly in the participants interview with Dr Quinlan in describing the flow state. Producer Rick Rubin makes this association in his book ‘the Creative Act: a way of Being’: “As artists we seek to restore our childlike perception: a more innocent state of wonder and appreciation not tethered

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<sup>5</sup> Professor of Neuroscience in creativity Anna Abraham at 8 minutes and 17 seconds into episode 233 of the Blind Boy podcast titled; ‘talking to a psychologist about creativity’.

<sup>6</sup> Video Arts. “John Cleese on Creativity in Management”. YouTube, uploaded by videoarts.com, 21 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pb5oIlPO62g>.

to utility or survival.”<sup>7</sup> An example of this childlike disposition is perhaps most clearly visible by the persona of music legend Michael Jackson, who - as author Mike Smallcombe points out, recalling a conversation he had with actress Jane Fonda, where she told the author: “Michael had always identified with Peter Pan – the boy who never grew up.’ She recalls being in a car with Jackson when she told him; “I just realised ‘you’re Peter Pan!’” to which she says: “He started to cry and said, “All over the walls of my room are pictures of Peter Pan.... I totally identify with Peter Pan, the lost boy of never-never land.”<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps a leap, albeit an assumption from the author that this childlike persona embodied by the artist might have contributed to his incredible creative capacity,

Furthermore, actor John Cleese’s states that the playful state, which he goes on to describe further as an ‘open state’, is reached not by an object in mind but *for the sake of play in and of itself*, this is also a feature of flow that has come up repeatedly in the research literature for this project, as it is also a feature of Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of optimal experience – which he has previously stated as being synonymous with the flow state: “we have seen how people describe the common characteristics of optimal experience: a sense that one’s skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. *An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult, or dangerous.*”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rubin, Rick. *The Creative Act: a Way of Being*. Canongate/ Penguin, 2023, page no. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Smallcombe, Mike ‘Making Michael’. 2015. Clink Street Publishing. Chapter 5: the Thriller Phenomenon”. Page no. 78.

<sup>9</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi. *Flow: the psychology of Optimal Experience*. Rider, 2002. Page no. 101.

This experience described by actor Cleese, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Dr Anna Abraham, is what is known as an 'autotelic' experience and is a feature common across all flow experiences<sup>10</sup>

Further discussing play as an expression of the flow state in his lecture, Cleese references McKinnon who described two distinguished modes of operating: open and closed. Importantly, Cleese states that creativity is not possible in the closed mode. Noting that it is an anxious mode, and has a lot of tension and stress, and by direct contrast, the open mode is relaxed, expansive, though with the potential drawback of being less purposeful. He also asserts that it is a mode which facilitates humour and play.<sup>11</sup> Cleese's description of the open mode, appears to correlate with Robert Wilkinson's description of the concept of 'the Tao' in his introduction to the foundational text, Lao Tzu's Tao de Ching.<sup>12</sup>, in which he characterises it as "a way of doing something", describing its nature: "receptive, passive & indefinite". Another author who asserts this interpretation of the nature of 'the Tao' is Alan Watts, who similarly describes it as '*flowing everywhere...and having done anything; is always escaping*'. Watts further explains Taoist philosophy as emphasising 'non-action' and goes on to describe a concept called 'Ziran' which sounds remarkably similar to the foundational concept in flow of autotelic experience; he explains this further: "Wu' in Chinese means 'not to be', and rather than the western reliance on the idea of cause

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<sup>11</sup> Video Arts. "John Cleese on Creativity in Management". YouTube, uploaded by videoarts.com, 21 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pb5oIIP062g>.

<sup>12</sup> Tzu, Lao. Tao de Ching. Wordsworth Classics, 1997. Introduction by Wilkinson, Robert. Translation by Waley, Arthur. Page 8 & Page 10 of Introduction: "The term 'Tao' is very widely used in ancient Chinese philosophical texts. Its literal meaning is 'way' or path; and it is a short step from this towards it to mean 'way of doing something'. In Taoism 'Tao' is used to mean all this and, crucially, more."

"The Tao is described...as Not-being rather than being (chapter 40). 'Not-being' is used here to mean not absolute nothingness, but rather that which is wholly indefinite having no definable properties in contrast to being, which is the mode of existence of definable individuals. the Tao is described as elusive, rarefied, and infinitesimal (chapter 4).it is also described as being like water (chapter 8 and 78), and all these things are meant to indicate passivity, receptivity and indefiniteness."

and effect, the Tao instead asserts that everything arises mutually alongside its opposite. The method of the Tao is *to be so of itself*. This is called 'Ziran'. Which could be translated as 'spontaneous'. The purpose of which is to allow things in yourself and in your surroundings to take place as they will, and naturally they will bring about their own order."<sup>13</sup>

A common interference experienced by artists that is entirely non-conducive to flow, potentially because it appears to foster a 'closed' disposition or induces fear, or 'anxiety' as described by actor Cleese, is a concept known as perfectionism. This interferes with accessing what Cleese describes as 'the open mode', (which appears to facilitate the flow-state). Oxford dictionary defines perfectionism as "a refusal to accept any standard short of perfection". Interestingly, this was brought up in an interview held with artist Celia Nguyen as the antecedent to her Series 'Song From Scratch' in which she is open to spontaneous ideas in her musical practice, and as a result she insists that she enjoys the process more, as can be observed from a transcript taken from a conversation held on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2025, 8:30 am over Teams on the topic of flow, in which she describes in detail how letting go of perfectionism allowed her to be more open:

Dylan:

"How did your series 'Song from Scratch' come about?"

Celia:

"The song from scratches came about when I got really into making my own music and starting to produce it, I had quickly realised, that I was bad at music production. I was realising that there's a *gap between where I wanted to be and where my*

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<sup>13</sup>"Ep. 1 - 'Following the Taoist Way'. From Alan Watts Being in the Way, from Ram Dass' Be Here Now Network, published on Spotify on 7 June 2021, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0OehbLHoMhM3iitYvgkvtE>. Excerpts taken from 20:43 minutes on in describing the nature of the tao in Taoism."

*skillset* was, and that really *discouraged* me...there was *no enjoyment* there, there was so much battling with myself because I wasn't making anything that I liked the sound of, I just stopped being able to enjoy it because there was so much expectation there... for me, anyway I realised that the bar in my head was so high... I felt in my head if something I make doesn't reach a standard then it shouldn't exist. That's *perfectionism* basically, if this doesn't represent all my skill then I don't want anyone to see it."

Addressing Celia's point in which she describes a creative process which was not conducive to flow, she identifies perfectionism as the hindrance, which is a recurring form of interference for artists in the literature on flow as referenced by producer Rick Rubin later, and is antithetical to the *total involvement* which necessitates flow as previously described in Csikszentmihalyi's definition of the flow-state, which by its nature necessitates the absence of psychic entropy which anxiety-inducing hindrances such as perfectionism appear to interfere with. In 'the Psychology of Optimal Experience', Csikszentmihalyi asserts the preconditions for the flow-state which happen to support Celia's observation as well as the conditions mentioned previously by professor Anna Abraham, in which both psychologists state that *skill must match opportunity for action*, as according to Csikszentmihalyi: "The optimal state of inner experience is one in which there is order in consciousness. This happens when psychic energy—or attention—is invested in realistic goals, and *when skills match the opportunities for action*. The pursuit of a goal brings order in awareness because a person must concentrate attention on the task at hand and momentarily forget everything else."<sup>14</sup> A condition to trigger flow as mentioned by Csikszentmihalyi, is the balance between a task or activities difficulty and the ability of the participant. The skill necessary to complete the task and the challenge of the task must be so that it is not too difficult but not too easy, and the participants abilities are required yet there is potential for upskilling. Later in the same chapter, in observing preconditions for the flow state, Csikszentmihalyi further states that if the initial psychic entropy found from a mismatched skillset and an activity can be

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<sup>14</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi. Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience. Rider. 2002. Chapter 1: Happiness Revisited page no. 19.

attenuated psychologically, then there is much room for potential rewards in personal wellbeing: “There is no inherent problem in our desire to escalate our goals, if we enjoy the struggle along the way. The problem arises when people are so fixated on what they want to achieve that they *cease to derive pleasure from the present*. When that happens, they forfeit their chance of contentment.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, attenuating her expectations and evaluating her source of enjoyment from her personal creative process, producer Celia Nguyen had derived satisfaction through a more *present* and *playful* approach to her music-making, as discussed at further length:

“One day I was doing some journalling on how I can start *enjoying producing* again because it is something I love. I asked how can I start enjoying this again, and I thought that I should just sit down and film myself making whatever, without having any expectation of what’s going to happen or worrying about what the end product is going to sound like, and it doesn’t have to be a three minute song and it could just be a bit of a song, and it doesn’t even have to have a structure and the lyrics don’t have to make sense....and that process ended up really helping me to enjoy it again...it helped me fall back in love with the process of creating things again... it’s a process of discovery and you’re *open* to the adventure and anything could happen...”

Supporting Celia’s discovery for inducing flow through her song from scratch series and her approach to creating music as a means of negating interference in the form of perfectionism, music producer and podcaster Blind Boy discusses a similar strategy for inducing flow in his conversation with professor Anna Abraham on his podcast: “The biggest barrier to entering flow is fear of failure. If I engage with play for the sake of play with the attitude I had as a kid playing with Legos, just playing with Legos for the sake of playing with Legos, with no ego or fear of failure I can access the state of flow. a strategy for this I use is I try for failure, sometimes I will start writing a bad idea and then the failure is my friend, and all a sudden this failure is something I’m very happy with.”<sup>16</sup>

In his book, ‘the Creative Act: a way of being’, producer Rick Rubin similarly describes this perfectionist tendency as a form of *interference* shared by many of the artists he’d worked with. In his chapter on ‘Setting’, he first suggests exploring new

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<sup>15</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi. Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience. Rider. 2002. Chapter 1: Happiness Revisited page no. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Blind Boy’s quote was taken from minute 11:17 of ‘Talking about Creativity with a Psychologist.’ The Blind Boy Podcast, Episode 233 on Spotify, published on 9 March 2022, featuring professor guest neuroscientist in creativity Anna Abraham.

places to take creative influence from different physical settings, the author then goes on to describe an internal *interference* in the creative process which is very similar to that described by artist Nguyen above:

*“Interference may also come from the voices within. The ones in your head that murmur you’re not talented enough, your idea isn’t good enough, art isn’t a worthwhile investment of your time, the result won’t be well-received, you’re a failure if the creation isn’t successful.”<sup>17</sup>*

Upon review of this projects Interim Thesis, it has been brought to the attention of the author that defining creativity would be useful in exploring its relationship to flow within a creative practice. The most relevant definition discovered by the author is producer Quincy Jones’ definition of creativity, whereby he defines creativity as a juxtaposition between what he coins ‘the science’, which he asserts can be practiced, and ‘the soul’, which he deems as inherent to the individual's expression of their own lived experience. This definition of creativity is an important basis for the participants own understanding of how to foster creativity through cultivating flow. Supporting the assertion that the scientific aspect of creativity can be cultivated by practice; researchers Daehyun Kim and Mark Runco have proven a relationship between creativity and a concept called ‘cognitive flexibility’ in the context of a study done on bilingualism:

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<sup>17</sup> Rubin, Rick. *The Creative Act: a Way of Being*. Canongate/ Penguin, 2023, page no. 70.

“Findings indicated that bilingualism was not statistically associated with creativity, but that ‘cognitive flexibility’ mediated the relationship between bilingualism and creative ideation (i.e., fluency, originality and flexibility), indicating that the relationship of creative ideation with bilingualism depended on cognitive flexibility. Also, cognitive flexibility played an important role in the relationship between multicultural experience and two indices of creative potential (i.e., fluency and flexibility, but not originality). Bilingualism was the most accurate predictor of cognitive flexibility”<sup>18</sup>. It is important to note upon critical analysis of this paper that correlation does not equate causation; as the authors of this paper note the influence of multicultural experiences versus monocultural experience are a factor not measured by this study as well as potential cultural biases that may exist within this study that could not be accounted for. Nevertheless, the concept of cognitive flexibility is one that appears congruent with Quincy Jones’ assertion that creativity has a practical element, which can in fact be fostered through iteration, which touches on a concept described by researcher Daniel Levitin on how active practice can influence learning and adaptability through neural plasticity<sup>19</sup> as posited in his work; ‘This is Your Brain on Music’ in his chapter ‘Expertise Dissected’:

“Studies of Violin players by Thomas Elbert have shown that the region of the brain responsible for moving the left hand – the hand that requires the most precision in violin playing – increases in size as a result of practice...we do not know yet if the propensity for increase pre-exists in some people and not others.”<sup>20</sup> Additionally: “The evidence against the talent account – or rather, in favour of the view that practice makes perfect- comes from research on how much training the experts do...experts in music require lengthy periods of instruction and practice to acquire

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<sup>18</sup> Daehyun Kim ,Mark A.Runco on the Role of Cognitive Flexibility in Bilingualism and Creativity, featured in the Journal of Creativity, 2022, Southern Oregon University, United States.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Neural plasticity is the brain’s ability to learn, remember, and change when it is appropriate for the circumstances’. Jennifer Fischer MMSc, ‘Tips to Leverage Neuroplasticity to Maintain Cognitive Fitness as You Age’, Harvard Medical School, published April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2025. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/tips-to-leverage-neuroplasticity-to-maintain-cognitive-fitness-as-you-age>

<sup>20</sup> Levitin, Daniel. This is Your Brain on Music. Penguin Books. Chapter 7 Expertise Dissected - what makes a musician? page no. 195.

the skills necessary to truly excel. In several studies, the very best conservatory students were found to have practiced the most, sometimes twice as much as those who weren't judged as good...in another study students were secretly divided into two groups (not revealed to the students so as not to bias them) based on teachers' evaluations of their ability, or the perception of talent. Several years later, the students who achieved the highest performance ratings were those who had practiced the most, irrespective of which "talent" group they had been assigned to previously. This suggests that practice is the cause of achievement, not merely something correlated with it...The emerging picture from such studies is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert – in anything. In study after study, of composers, concert pianists, and what have you, this number comes up repeatedly Ten thousand hours is roughly equivalent to three hours a day, or twenty hours a week, of practice, over ten years. No one has yet found a case where true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems it takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery. The ten-thousand hours theory is consistent with what we know about how the brain learns. Learning requires the assimilation and consolidation of information in neural tissue. The more experiences we have with something, the stronger the learning trace for that experience becomes. Although people differ in how long it takes them to consolidate information, it remains true that increased practice leads to a greater number of neural traces, which can combine to create a stronger memory representation: The strength of a memory is related to how many times the original stimulus has been experienced."<sup>21</sup>

The author posits that although Quincy Jones suggests that creativity is made up of 'science' which he asserts can be practiced, as evidenced by our understanding of cognitive flexibility and neuroplasticity; he importantly states that 'soul' as a feature of creativity is something unique to the person and not something that can be

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<sup>21</sup>Levitin, Daniel. This is Your Brain on Music. Published by Penguin books. 2019 Edition July 4. Chapter 7: 'What Makes a Musician? - Expertise Dissected' Page no. 196 and 197.

necessarily improved upon. The author disagrees with Jones' assertion to an extent, as it has come to the participants attention that through cultivating what is known as 'openness to experience' through engaging with exploratory aesthetic experiences for instance, the participants capacity for insight and hence ideational potential has noticeably improved. Supporting this observation, in their doctoral dissertation, Carolyn Gregoire and Scot Kaufman suggest that there are at least three major forms of cognitive engagement making up the core of 'the openness domain' which, while it can be characterised as "intellectual engagement" which can be understood as "a love of problem solving, and drive to engage with ideas", there is another component of cognitive engagement which the participant is interested in for cultivating openness as a means of accessing creative flow more readily, which is "affective engagement", which has to do with "*exploration of the full depths of human emotion*" and is associated with a preference for using "*gut feeling, emotions, empathy, and compassion*" to make decisions." Gregoire and Kaufman further state: "it was found that intellectual engagement is associated with creative achievement in the sciences, while affective and aesthetic engagement were linked with artistic creativity."<sup>22</sup> This appears to the author to be what Jones 'defines as the feature of creativity which he characterises as 'soul' and as asserted by Kauffman and Gregoire, this can be cultivated through similar means of cognitive flexibility and neural plasticity; that is to say, repetition, practice and iteration. Therefore, it is the participants assertion that his supervisor's observation is correct regarding creativity in which he recalls being told that practicing creativity in any specific area improves creative capacity in all other areas, even those not simply adjacent to the targeted area of practice, but even unrelated disciplines. It is the authors informed belief that this is through the means of utilising cognitive flexibility and neural plasticity; and cultivating an openness to experience which can enhance creative potential.

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<sup>22</sup> Wired to Create: 'Unravelling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind'. By Carolyne Gregoire PhD and Scott Barry Kauffman. Published December 2015 by Penguin Publishing Group. Page no. 98.

## Methodology

The participant adopted for this paper's methodology an agile project management approach which was contingent on quality reviews primarily by the project supervisor in the case of all three artefacts and in addition an external project stakeholder in the case of the practice-approach artefact. An iterative project charter was used and updated accordingly by assessment of risks and issues that arose throughout the project. Emphasis was placed on the execution of project tasks by documenting and logging action items in the project hours document available in the project management folder of the supplementary evidence for this project thesis. This coincided with project-hour milestones which provided a sense of feedback in seeing the progression of duration spent on the project. Inspired by Csikszentmihalyi's assertion that a condition for flow is indicative progress and a goal which to be oriented towards; although this seemingly conflicts with the notion of an autotelic experience, it nevertheless has proven effective in a measure against interference and as a source of motivation for the participant.

Coinciding with the adoption of flow-promoting project management concepts were self-coined 'flow-inducing' strategies which in retrospect can more accurately be

defined as 'interference-negating' strategies, as although they did not guarantee a state of flow in the participant, they decisively were effective in negating interference to executive project tasks.

The most effective 'interference-negating' strategy was documenting instances of interference and using Shaolin master Shi Heng Yi's 'RAIN' method in negating the interference; which is to 'Recognise, Accept, Investigate & Non-Identify.' with the interference. Examples of interferences can be seen in the 'journal entries' folder for this project. The most common interference was anxiety stemming from unhelpful thoughts of a self-critical nature, targeting the participants skills, efforts and abilities. It was discovered in the research for this project that such self-criticism is a common experience among artists, as noted previously by interviewee Celia Nguyen and in the example of interference given by producer Rick Rubin. Interestingly, before being able to identify these unhelpful thoughts as the root of the interference the participant first recognised, oftentimes; uncomfortable physical symptoms, particularly felt in the participants chest, which were most commonly described as a 'shooting' sensation. It was through the act of journalling, or as Shi Heng Yi describes 'Investigating' that the participant became cognisant that the interference stemmed from unhelpful thought patterns. Examples of these thoughts can be read via the journal entries folder for this project as supplementary evidence.

The greatest predictor of flow for the participant was collaboration, as remarkably in each instance of collaboration, be it in partnership with a project stakeholder or artist, the participant was in flow, or 'totally involved'. This was likely both a result of an absence of prevailing interfering thoughts and the demands of collaborative feedback whereby presence is a necessity with other stakeholders. Supporting Csikszentmihalyi's observations in discussing order and disorder in consciousness in his seminal work on flow, he coins the phrase 'psychic entropy', which he characterises as 'disordered consciousness', which he crucially notes is more prevalent when a person is in isolation and less prevalent when they are in the

presence of others. It is perhaps for this reason that the participant found that collaborative quality reviews opposed to intuitive judgement was conclusively the more effective way of critically analysing their work and progress. In addition, play being one of the easiest identifiable hallmarks of flow may be another reason why flow experiences were more common across collaborative sessions as opposed to working in solitude. Although this may appear obvious to the reader a revelation had by the participant in active research was how play necessitated the participation of more than one person to occur. This realisation made the project manager keenly aware of the lack of opportunities for collaboration in the project, although a positive outcome of this is to make networking a key activity going forward for the participant for the future of this project so as to have more data collected as to the role that play features in flow experiences.

Another crucial interference-negating strategy adopted by the participant was in cultivating 'openness to experience' which the participant employed later in the projects practice from reading the work 'Wired to Create' by Carolyn Gregoire and Scot Kauffman, which alongside rigorous project practice and research, was seen as a means to improve creative capacity through affective engagement, explained by Gregoire and Kaufman as "*exploration of the full depths of human emotion*" and associated with "*gut feeling, emotions, empathy, and compassion*" to make decisions." Gregoire and Kaufman further state: "affective and aesthetic engagement were linked with artistic creativity." Evidence can be seen in the journal entries folder as well as in the supplementary research evidence folder accompanying this paper, evidence of experiences which had a positive effect on the participant in their capacity for empathy and compassion. Oftentimes these experiences themselves induced flow, as documented by the participant, which further proves the relationship between flow and the open mode as previously asserted by John Cleese. Such activities which cultivated openness in the participant included sightseeing and visiting novel places, interacting with and meeting new people and accepting invitations to events with spontaneity. The participant should caution that although these novel experiences are found to be conducive to widening one's openness to experience, if, as in the case of the participant, the reader is more introverted, and/or is also on the autism spectrum, this openness to experience can be incredibly exhausting, albeit rewarding. The participant has found that mediating one's own sense of comfort and going outside one's comfort-zone in moderation is something that should be practiced with careful consideration and iteration.

Another practice adopted by the participant which came later was distraction. This distraction was in the form of doing something often removed from practice and

sometimes adjacent to the creative practice, with the precautionary measure that these activities should not induce anxiety and should facilitate in some way a sense of feedback which evoked a sense of progression. As noted by Carolyn Gregoire and Scot Kauffman in 'Wire to Create': "as creative people stuck in offices know well, your best ideas don't usually come to you when you're sitting in front of a computer straining to think up a solution to a problem or make a project come together-but when you get up for a bathroom break or a walk around the block to clear your head – precisely when your attention wanders away from the task at hand – the missing link pops into your mind. Often, the elusive Aha! Moment comes when you give the intensely focused mind a little break and let your thoughts wander free, uninhibited by critical thought."<sup>23</sup> For example; this technique was found useful in hitting a creative block on the initial flow-based artefact 'Swear to You Babe' which was first intended to be the sole artefact of the flow experiment; in finding inspiration wane for the project as the collaborator could not continue participation for personal reasons; the participant grew increasingly frustrated as their own efforts on the piece did not seem to go anywhere. The participant decided to go for a walk and suddenly in an experiment to test the utility of distraction. While walking their dog they could hear in their head, a variation on the established rhythm as it relied on syncopation akin to bossa nova style, taken inspiration from one of the tracks references, the participant felt a wave of inspiration hit and taking the advice of his project supervisor 'when in flow get as much done as you can' he decided to hurriedly go home and began rerecording the song with electric guitar, bass, shaker, frog, triangle and voice. The session commenced with a flow state where the participant lost track of time and after initiation had an autotelic experience and continued recording from the joy of doing so. The reader should be cautioned as to the usefulness of distraction; as a distinction is made by dr Anna Abraham in her discussion with Blind Boy cited previously whereby she distinguishes two types of flow experiences which she categorises to be 'active 'and 'passive'. Dr Abraham notes that while someone can have an autotelic experience or be totally involved watching television, for example, the nature of the flow experience is limited as to its rewarding effects as it is a passive flow experience, whereas with an active flow experience, as they demand more participation of the participant physically and mentally, the rewards of rejuvenation are in proportion to the effort that is exhausted. A way the participant tried to foster an active flow experience in an auxiliary practice of distraction to replace an otherwise passive experience in their daily life for instance was to implement playtime with their dog Sammie alongside their daily walk. How the participant implemented this was to use every instance whereby him and Sammie come across a stick on the ground as an invitation to play, whereby a game would be initiated of running away from Sammie with the stick and letting her catch him and then chasing after her once she acquired the stick and so on. This has fostered

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<sup>23</sup>Gregoire, Carolyn. Kauffman, Scott et al. Wired to Create: Unravelling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind. Published by Penguin publishing group, 2015. Page no. 61.

more involvement in an otherwise passive daily experience and serves as an Analog to fostering flow in other areas as it adopts Csikszentmihalyi 's conditions of a rule-bound action system which offers sense of achievement through feedback in a series of acquiring the stick from Sammie and trying to keep it. Following from Dr Abraham's distinction, active and passive distractions should be clearly distinguished in the mind of the practitioner when utilising distraction to implement flow in a creative project and in other contexts.

Another instance of cultivating openness to experience which helped for the production of the flow-based artefact was in gaining different perspectives for the narrative of the piece; such as the imagined plight of a neighbour after attentively listening to neighbourhood gossip, or taking inspiration from direct experiences as documented in the first tracking day for the practice-based artefact whereby an experience led to lyrics for the proceeding flow-based artefact with the lyrics: "my shoes are drenched my soles are caving in".

Making a song from scratch without expectation or self-imposed rules was a helpful exercise in exploring compositional, recording and sound design choices that the participant otherwise would not have made. Examples of these can be heard in the supporting research evidence folder and 'flow-based contender' folders. By making spontaneous decisions and temporarily negating critical analysis the participant was able to work faster and generate more ideas, actively discouraging a critique of their quality.

As a result of the participants qualitative investigative research it was found possible for the participant to cultivate an openness to experience which resulted in an expanded capacity for empathy and connection to the outside world and even theory of mind capacity and idea generation, supporting Kauffman and Gregoire's thesis that cultivating openness as a disposition or trait can deepen and strengthen creative capacity through promoting affective engagement, as evidenced by both flow-based artefacts which are informed by experiences which necessitated openness such as in the case of the inception of the original flow-based artefact which was composed in collaboration, or in the case of the contingency flow-based artefact which was composed both by consulting a friend who is a member of the target demographic

listener group, or indeed by taking influence from the endearing qualities the participant admired in the experience of dating someone who is also a member of the target demographic listener group, as documented in the journal entries folder for this projects deliverables.

Another aim of the project was to decide definitively for the participant; of which two opposing approaches to conducting quality reviews; *which method best circumvents 'paralysis from analysis'* (or keeps the project 'flowing' smoothly if you will), which was discerned and measured by '*the Goosebump Test*', a judgement method coined and explained by prolific producer Quincy Jones' as an essential tool for gauging whether the quality of a product is good enough to move onto the next step in the creative process<sup>24</sup>, which is supported by fellow producer Rick Rubin in his suggestion for honing-in on objectivity instead of being too critical towards ones' own work through cultivation of awareness or 'pure connection' before the process of analysing itself is underway.<sup>25</sup> The participant would like to stress that although collaborative quality reviews were definitively more effective in the progression of the production process; the 'goosebump test' has found to coincide with practitioner Celia Nguyen's philosophy with music creation in her song from scratch series <sup>26</sup> and

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<sup>24</sup> Jones, Quincy. 12 Notes on Life and Creativity. Abrams Image, 2022. Chapter 7, page no. 95. "Creativity is informed by what you feel, not what you think, and learning to tune into those feelings is what is ultimately going to carry you through when distractions come. I've 100 percent relied on my instincts throughout my career, without doing so, I know I wouldn't have been able to create the art that has stood the test of time. I recognise that it's easier said than done, but the next method I'm going to share with you is without a doubt the best way to do it.

And that method is 'the Goosebump Test'.

If the music I'm creating gives me goosebumps, odds are it'll do the same for at least one other person on this planet. But if it doesn't move me at all, and I'm trying to do it for the sake of getting a reaction out of someone else, I'll get stuck in a never-ending cycle of mediocrity. It doesn't work. On every project I've done, from the highest selling to the least, I simply started with a desire to make the best music possible - music that touches the soul and mind. Music and art as a whole is a strange beast. You can't see it, taste it, touch it, or smell it, but you sure can feel it. I can never predict the outcome, or how people will react, but I can tell when a piece of music gives me goosebumps."

<sup>25</sup> Rubin, Rick. The Creative Act: a Way of Being. Canongate/ Penguin. 2023. Pg 20 on 'Awareness'

<sup>26</sup> Nguyen, Celia. "idk what I'm doing but it's very fun (making a song from scratch)". YouTube, uploaded by Celia Celia, 14 November 2025, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p\\_dGsxIM7r4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_dGsxIM7r4).

was found to be an effective tool for the composition process, though not necessarily useful for critical analysis of a production. *Quality reviews with project stakeholder Guillermo Gonzales took place throughout the project as evidenced in the 'practice-based quality reviews' folder for this project informed the traditionally 'action' or 'practice' based artefact.* Alongside journaling as an 'interference-negating strategy' it should be pointed out that there have also been other strategies devised in the project preproduction plan document to accompany the flow-based process which details briefly other tools such as the following strategy as suggested by Dr Quinlan which is visualisation meditations, in which the object is to revisit positive experiences which made a lasting impression on the participant to cultivate control of conscious awareness and in turn regain a more regulated state, with the object of choosing a more productive path forward. The 'Action-based' methodology was especially contingent on regular quality reviews with the project supervisor early-on in the production process as well as reviews with project stakeholder singing coach and teacher of piano at Blanchardstown school of music Guillermo Gonzales. Feedback from which informed the contingent planning documents as evidenced in the 'project management' folder featured in the supplementary supporting evidence for this thesis, which was in adherence to a production timeline agreed with the project supervisor. It should be said that action items and project milestones have been informed by the executive tasks observed as necessary within each identified project phase of a music production project as deemed necessary in studying advanced studio engineering and recording in the previous semester of the creative music production programme where the participant saw through the development of an idea from preproduction through to postproduction and mastering, and became appreciative of the work required to complete such an undertaking. The flow-based schedule was more open by design, although crucially shared the same milestones and deadlines as the action-based plan for the execution of each project phase to keep both projects in alignment regarding progression and completion. This has been decided as a precautionary measure in accordance with Csikszentmihalyi's observation on optimal experience stated previously in the Literature review, which necessitates goal-directed, rule-bound action systems and clear clues as to how well one is performing. The openness of the flow-based schedule also required iteration alongside the project management plan which further cemented the utility of adopting an agile project management strategy in adopting flow into this project, as the project supervisor pointed out given the various setbacks of the initial flow-based artefact that contending with such issues and risks that may occur to impede progression were a great indicator of the utility of having a flow-based approach and indeed an active role towards the project managers responsibilities yet passive response to the roles of collaborators, recognising that the responsibility of seeing the project through lied solely with the project manager and also that a more laidback approach to collaborators was found conducive to them expressing openness to engage in the creative process as evidenced by journal entries of instances of collaboration in the projects supporting evidence folder. Notable supplemental

strategies adopted by the participant for a flow-based approach for this study included implementing healthier daily habits and discarding others which were found to be more unproductive; such as changing media consumption habits in the form of replacing daily consumption of podcasts related to current affairs such as the popular 'Joe Rogan Experience' podcast with podcasts related to mindfulness, such as Alan Watts' 'Being in the Way' podcast published by the Ram Dass foundation. The effects of this were a noticeable increase in overall wellbeing and motivation which has definitively decreased the prevalence of negative emotion of the participant when working in isolation such as working from home. Another healthier consumption habit of the participant was in replacing social media apps with word-game apps such as replacing YouTube with the New York Times games app, inspired by discussions on improving creative capacity with the project supervisor whereby he noted divergent and convergent thinking as both useful ways of approaching ideas which could be cultivated through auxiliary practices. This encouraged the participant to play games like wordle, connections and spelling bee and the language learning app Duolingo<sup>27</sup> which made the participant more critically engaged rather than passive in their media consumption. As such, the participant has come to agree with the project supervisor's assertion that increasing cognitive performance in both convergent and divergent thinking capacities in a different context can improve overall cognitive flexibility, a feature which was identified as a characteristic of creative capacity previously mentioned in a study by Dr Daehyun Kim et al. affirming the supervisors assertion that strengthening creativity in one field can improve the creative capacity of a participant in an auxiliary practice.

A discussion which lies outside of the scope of this project, although will be mentioned briefly in an experiment conducted by the participant, is the differing executive and generative roles required of creativity and how flow can be facilitated through each. This will be another key activity the participant will study for the future

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<sup>27</sup> Kim, Daehyun, Runco, Mark. 'Role of Cognitive Flexibility in Bilingualism and Creativity'. *Journal of Creativity*. 2022. Southern Oregon University, United States.

of this project to better understand the role that flow plays in these juxtaposing roles of the producer in a music project.

A short experiment was conducted whereby the participant compared the ideational and executive roles(s) shared in creative practice as a way of identifying whether a convergent' or 'divergent', or rather 'open' or 'closed' disposition was useful, using Cleese's definition of the open and closed modes aforementioned in the literature review. On this, the participant discovered that gamifying time was an equally useful technique for both flow and time management and helping to make the experiment successful. In treating time differently depending on the tasks demanded as to their nature being ideational or executive necessitated measuring time differently. For example; in approaching the task of writing as many different guitar improvisational riffs as possible for a section in a song could be thought of as an ideational task; and therefore the participant treated time in the following way; set a stopwatch and do not check it until concentration wanes – and each time see how long you can sustain concentration and how many guitar riffs you can come up with versus set a timer and play the same guitar riff and subtract what is not needed until the participant gets to what is the core constituent melody or phrase or motif. This was inspired by the project supervisor's guidance on the lead guitar part for the practice-based artefact 'Mental Breakthrough', whereby through the various Logic save session in the supplementary evidence folder it can be observed that the guitar part has changed overtime drastically.

An Example of ideational and executive roles of creative practice being compared can be found in Logic save 39 'two guitar riffs' of practice-based artefact in supporting evidence folder of the participant and then compared with the guitar riff featured on the final practice-based artefact in the artefacts folder for this project.

The original Flow-based artefact 'Swear to You Babe' has changed three times throughout the project. Initially it had been composed while absorbed in a complete flow state in collaboration with another artist. Afterwards it had undergone a transformation in practicing a concept of 'beginners mind. The flow-based piece

became a Bossa Nova song after a helpful experiment of distraction previously mentioned in the methodology section with a new demand on rhythm. The participant tried alternate solutions when the original collaborating artist could not follow up on their involvement on the project due to personal reasons, to which the participant responded by composing trumpet for the vocal parts after unsuccessfully trying to sing the song with his single voice. The participant additionally opted to supplement the artefact with an additional flow-based piece which is also featured in the artefacts folder for this project and is referenced in supporting materials as the contingent flow-based artefact.

## Analysis

## Evaluating Involvement versus Interference – Preproduction

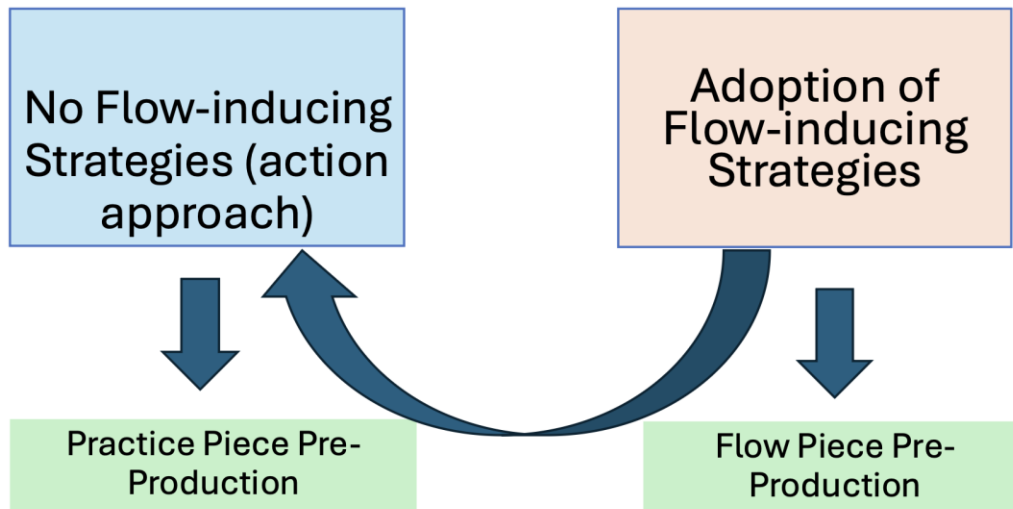


Fig. 1 Preproduction Flow-based versus Action-based Findings indicate that the adoption of flow-inducing strategies was superior to their absence during project practice as they were necessary to negate interferences on multiple occasions documented in the projects' journal entries, particularly in the initiation phase of the project.

## Evaluating individual versus Collaborative Quality Reviews - Tracking

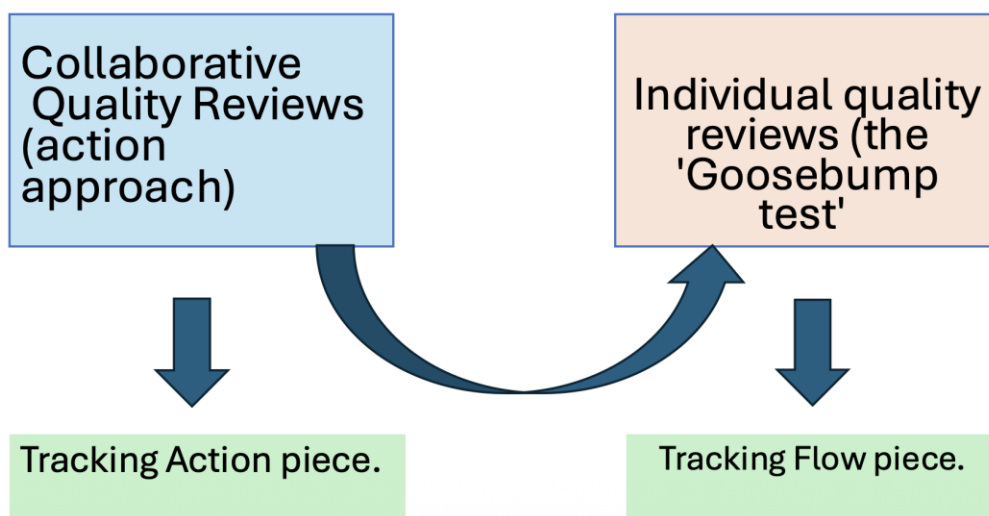


Fig 2. Flow-based versus Action-based Findings indicate that collaborative quality reviews as opposed to individual and 'intuitive' quality reviews were superior during project practice, a potential reason for this is that feedback is a condition which is conducive to flow experiences which the participant found more present in working in collaboration than working in solitude.

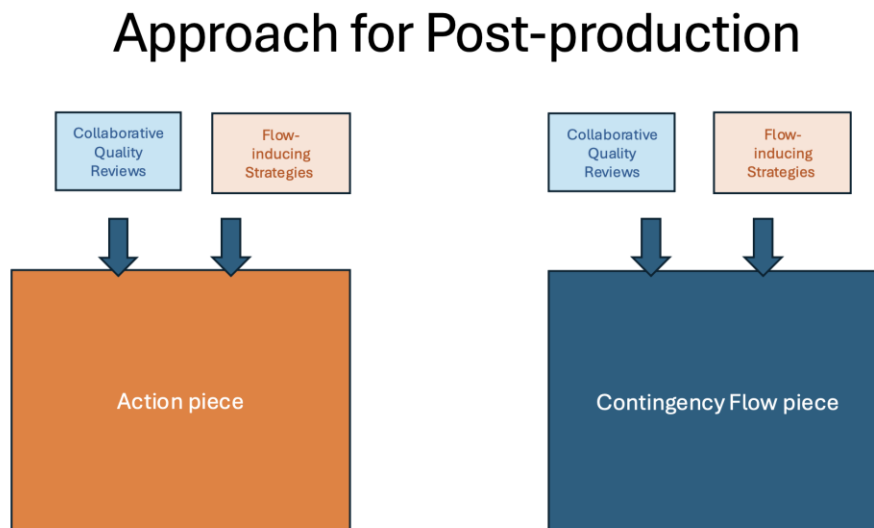


Fig. 3 Combining Flow-based & Action-based Approach from findings for the Postproduction process.

In summation; the main features of a 'flow-based' approach which have been found effective in incorporating with a traditional music production process are as follows:

1. Developing an Openness to experience in all areas of life such as exploring new places, new media, and talking to new people can be a transformative way to cultivate an open approach towards different ideas and can be effective in engaging with empathy in collaboration with other artists and stakeholders.
2. Mindful strategies such as journalling and meditation were deemed to be helpful to negate instances of interference in the form of inward unhelpful thoughts for the participant were effective in negating psychic interferences.
3. Measuring progress alongside individual goals and objectives and milestones was an effective tool for providing feedback while working in isolation in the production process. This was found helpful through logging work hours for

each action item performed for the project and evoked a sense of progression which helped to cultivate flow and a sense of purpose to the participant, especially when the participant could see the results of the work put in when reviewing milestones throughout each phase of the project.

4. Treating time differently depending on the nature of a project task may be a way to cultivate flow for various purposes, in conducting action items of an executive nature for this project; the participant found that setting a timer which counted down was an effective tool to break an idea down to its constituent elements whereas setting a stopwatch while developing new ideas and hitting stop once a creative block was reached was an effective exercise in cultivating ideation for the participant as they could view many divergent ideas to work from. This was outside the scope of the project charter but is something the participant is keen in exploring for the future of this project.

## Discussion

Certainly, when the participant initiated this project, he did not expect to come out of it with three artefacts, ranging from a pop-structured, soulful, cinematic piece, heavily influenced in collaboration with the project supervisor and project stakeholder; as well as an instrumental bossa nova track, and even a disco-inspired piece celebrating neurodiversity. This, the participant credits to the utility of flow in a music production, and moreover to the effective guidance of Thom McDonnell as project supervisor and Guillermo Gonzales as Project Stakeholder. The participant also must credit his two interviewees who were open and insightful about their human experience, which inspired the participant greatly, including artist Celia Nguyen and Dr Tim Quinlan, the latter whose conversation inspired one of the artefacts titles 'Mental Breakthrough'; named in homage to his own championing of open conversation to mental health struggles, as the interviewee was incredibly insightful in disclosing his own experiences with depression which he discusses in our interview featured in the interviews folder of the projects supplementary evidence, recounting his mental breakdown retrospectively as his 'mental breakthrough'.

Feedback is emphasised again as being a condition for flow as well as a means through which openness can be cultivated as the participant noticed that it was a means by which an isolated idea could be transformed in a way that the original writer often could not anticipate. The writer was unintentionally closed by preconceived unconscious ideas about what the song meant to him, as an example in particular for the practice-informed artefact, the participant recalls an assumption that the lyrics: “Thank you mother for the life you gave me, thank you father for your mistakes I won’t repeat, I’ve learned to be grateful for what I have, I’ve learned to let go of the past” were to the most important lyrics to the song, which can be heard in the supporting evidence folder of this thesis in project artefact bounces as an early demo titled ‘very early Mental Breakthrough before first supervisor review’. After the supervisor recognised a lack of a definitive chorus in these early auditions, the participant reflected on this need for a definitive chorus. Led by the supervisor's judgement, we had decided ‘I’m letting go’ was what resonated most. Upon reviewing and discussing what the participants intentions were with the song, the participant felt that this could be a universal theme, and thus left out some of the lyrics which pertained to their individual experience, which may alienate listeners as not being relatable, which in hindsight was the correct decision on part both stakeholders; albeit, it is important to stress, this was a gentle recommendation rather than a steadfast one on behalf of the project supervisors recommendation. Encouraging critical engagement with these ideas, for which the participant is grateful.

## Conclusion

Flow had been found on its own to not be purely reliable in achieving a project stated aims but can decisively promote motivation and facilitate engagement towards a projects practice in the case of the participant.

The Preproduction phase of the Project Practice concluded officially on Monday 16 February 2026 with a sign-off email containing preproduction deliverables to the project supervisor at 22:21.

Taking a step back from the projects practice and journalling the physical sensations featured in the journal entries log provided in the supplementary evidence folder for this project, another area of research the participant. is keenly interested in exploring is about psychosomatic stress, As previously noted, the participants most consistent form of interference had been anxiety which expressed itself physically and upon investigation derived from negative thoughts. In researching the apparent stress experienced by the participant, a discovery into psychosomatic symptoms related to anxiety had been discovered by the work of David R. Hawkins in his book *Letting Go*, in which he states: "The body has three nervous systems...the acupuncture system, (is an) energy system described as having twelve main channels over the surface of the physical body, down the twelve major acupuncture meridians: from these channels, there are many tributaries leading into the body's various organ systems. Abnormal distribution of energy into these meridians results in dysfunction of the affected organs...this *vital bioenergy is the very flow of life itself*. It is very quickly reactive to stress. "This bio-energy reacts from instant to instant due to fluctuating factors in our lives, which are the changing patterns of our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings."<sup>28</sup>

With the conclusion of the Preproduction programme for both musical artefacts and the following can be ascertained:

- Interference versus involvement: In facilitating a production process, the utilisation of flow-based techniques can induce a more relaxing practice, the utilisation of flow-inducing strategies have proved helpful for the participant in overcoming psychological hindrances during project practice as well as facilitating open communication and inducing flow with collaborators.
- For The preproduction stage of the flow-based artefact the participant found it increasingly difficult to progress with a lack of external quality reviews as in the case of the practice-based artefacts with external stakeholder quality reviews. Another feature of the projects success has been the logging of action items alongside an open schedule and tracking hours worked on the project, this was found to give a sense of progression for the participant in

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<sup>28</sup> Hawkins, David R. M.D. Ph.D. 'Letting Go' Published by Hay House inc. 1<sup>st</sup> hay house edition in November 2013.

contrast with prior musical projects, supporting Csikszentmihalyi's concern that for an activity to induce flow over time a sense of progression with clear milestones must be presented, as is apparently the case in a music production project for sustaining flow. There are both coinciding executive and generative operative roles required during a project practice. To put this another way, as brought to the attention of the project's supervisor; convergent and divergent thinking is necessary. This has proved difficult to balance in producing the flow-based artefact, with the participant finding it challenging to reconcile these seemingly contradictory states of operating which in Cleese's view can be characterised as open and closed modes of being. Additionally; it has been identified that time allocation with an emphasis on convergent or divergent thinking tasks required would be helpful for discerning whether a more open or closed approach is important for a task's completion. For instance, as recommended by the participants engagement with Fred from learning support, and with his consent; a shared idea for time allocation was given to separate these tasks with 2 hours for convergent thinking and 2 hours for divergent thinking and an hour inbetween for mental reset....As of Saturday 28 February 2026 this practice in the tracking phase of time-blocking to distinguish when to take a more executive or generative approach has been found to be helpful in matching the necessity of both, although further research is necessary to make definitive findings, as such this is currently considered out of the scope of the project for the time being but will be a feature of this project in the future.

- Quality Reviews versus independent reviews was found to be conclusively more beneficial for the participant to engage in a consultation for quality reviews with an external stakeholder in addition to the project supervisor, with the additional finding that collaboration was more conducive to experiencing the flow-state during the projects practice. As in each case of collaboration a flow-state had successfully occurred for the participant.

In conclusion, the participant hopes that this paper and its accompanying artefacts make clear, that adopting what the author has coined, an 'Intentional-Work-Play', is a worthwhile consideration for approaching music production, emphasising the utility of the flow-state as being an interplay between critical analysis, executive decision-making, open ideation and free interaction, these appear to highlight what was discussed previously to mean an 'autotelic experience', defined by actions performed in, of, and for their own sake, being a hallmark of a flow-experience. This free interaction can be understood by the Freudian concept of 'free association' in that its purpose is to negate pre-conceived judgements or expectations, it can also be thought of as a curious state, often referred in the artistic lexicon as 'beginners mind'. The author hopes that they've displayed to the reader that this flow-based practice is a tenable one to adopt in the recorded music industry.

## Future for this Project

The next development stage for this project will be in collecting additional data in the context of a collaborative project whereby the participant will produce an external client and will adopt the research and qualitative findings of this project to adapt to the clients project in a collaborative setting whereby the project manager and producer will facilitate what the researcher has come across to be a 'person-centred' workflow, a concept originating in therapy by Carl Rogers, whose research is now outside of the scope of this project but will be a feature of this project as it continues in the future, as many of his ideas appear to be compatible with this 'Intentional-Work-Play' approach to music production.

In the next project the participant will be the project manager and producer to an external stakeholder and client whose musical work will serve as an accompanying case study of 'intentional work-play' and additionally an investigative study on how to adapt a person-centred workflow in addition to a flow-based approach to a music production project by a professional in the music industry for a holistic project practice.

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