

Is "Tea × Blissful Immersion" What We Need in the AI Era?

What Is the Surprising Relationship Between Flow State and Green Tea?

The 11th ITO EN Wellness Forum

Does Having Flow Experiences Affect Life Satisfaction and Sense of Purpose?

Young People with Limited Flow Experiences:

What Does "Creating Environments for Learning and Work" Mean in the AI Era?

ITO EN, Ltd. (President: Daisuke Honjo; Headquarters: Shibuya-ku, Tokyo) held "The 11th ITO EN Wellness Forum" (hosted by Central Research Institute, ITO EN, Ltd.) on Monday, February 16, 2026, in Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, and simultaneously streamed it on ITO EN's official YouTube channel.



This forum, titled "The Arrival of the AI Era: New Human Possibilities Brought by Flow State," discussed the new potential of green tea and its impact on society, based on research findings jointly announced in August last year by Central Research Institute, ITO EN, Ltd., Department of Human, Information and Life Sciences, School of Health Sciences, University of Occupational and Environmental Health, and Graduate School of Science and Technology, Chitose Institute of Science and Technology, which showed that "drinking green tea beverages quickly enhances work performance and flow experience (particularly the sense of immersion)."

In modern society where AI adoption is accelerating, achieving both individual performance improvement and well-being has become an urgent challenge. Therefore, from the unique perspective of "tea × immersion," we are exploring clues to solving social issues through "flow state" from physiological and psychological aspects, including methods to enhance learning efficiency, work productivity, and quality of daily life.

*Archived streaming available here (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZP_G0IHbCWQ)

What is Flow: The flow state, which is the theme of this research, is a psychological state that occurs when one becomes fully immersed in an activity,

a term coined by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. It is said to lead to elevated levels of productivity and satisfaction, and one of the key conditions for experiencing flow (a deep sense of immersion) is that the difficulty of the task and one's abilities are well balanced at an elevated level.

■ About the ITO EN Wellness Forum

Central Research Institute, ITO EN, Ltd. conducts research primarily in the areas of "health and deliciousness," utilizing a wide range of innovative technologies. We have been proposing solutions to health issues through "tea" while disseminating information that contributes to wellness (physical, mental, and social health). We have been holding the "ITO EN Wellness Forum" (formerly: ITO EN Health Forum) with the purpose of contributing to the "era of 100-year lifespans" and sharing wisdom about health.

■ Two Aspects of the Flow Experience: "Fostering a Sense of Aliveness" and "Personal Growth"

Keynote Speech 1: Mr. Kiyoshi Asakawa

"The Potential of Flow Experience for Psychological Well-being and Sustained Happiness "

First, we invited Professor Kiyoshi Asakawa of Hosei University, a collaborator of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the founder of flow theory, to give a lecture on the psychological mechanisms by which people become deeply immersed in activities and maximize their abilities, as well as how individuals can develop the qualities needed to respond flexibly to the challenges they encounter in life.



"Flow Theory," proposed by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, explains the process through which people enhance their abilities and grow while enjoying what they do, by entering an optimal state of deep immersion—often described as being “in the zone.” Flow tends to occur when one's abilities and the task difficulty are well balanced, when goals are clear, and when immediate feedback is available. In such a state, individuals experience intense concentration, a distorted sense of time, and a reduction of anxiety and excessive self-consciousness.

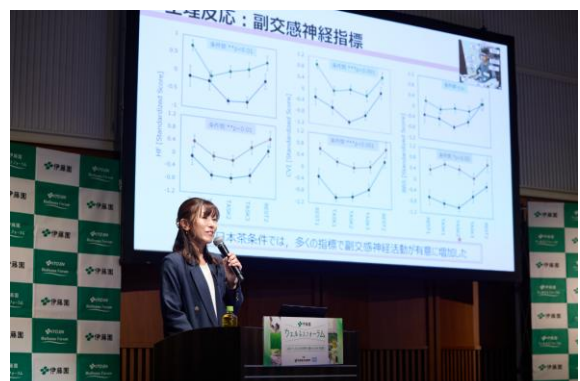
A survey of university students revealed that those who frequently experience flow tend to report higher levels of self-esteem, academic motivation, life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose, while experiencing less anxiety, apathy, and uncertainty about the future. Furthermore, the lecture also referred to the "Broaden-and-Build Theory," which suggests that positive emotions expand one's range of thoughts and actions and build personal and social resources. It was proposed that creating environments that regularly foster flow and positive emotions contribute to enhanced psychological well-being and the realization of sustainable happiness.

■ Application to Learning and Work: New Possibilities of Japanese Tea in Creating Conditions Conducive to Entering Flow

Keynote Speech 2: Ms. Chie Kurosaka

"What Is the Positive State During Mental Work Related To? —A New Attempt to Explore the Relationship Between Green Tea and Flow Experience—"

Next, Associate Professor Chie Kurosaka of the University of Occupational and Environmental Health, Japan, who led the joint research with Central Research Institute, ITO EN, Ltd., gave a keynote speech explaining the latest research findings and their suggested possibilities.



The research focused on autonomic nervous system activity and analyzed the mental state during cognitive tasks using continuous physiological measurements, electrocardiograms, electrodermal activity, blood pressure, and other factors. As a result of examining the effects of green tea and roasted green tea on psychological and physiological states during mental tasks, it was suggested that roasted green tea contributed to improving work performance and prevented the increase in fatigue, while green tea had the effect of maintaining alertness. Furthermore, in another experiment, green tea consumption shortened reaction times in mental arithmetic tasks and increased in flow scores and a tendency to perceive time as passing quickly were observed in some tasks. In all experiments, increased parasympathetic nervous system activity, which is associated with relaxation, was observed, suggesting regulatory effects on psychological and physiological states.

The lecture showed that the flow state is influenced by conditions such as task continuity and clear feedback, and that Japanese tea may not directly induce the flow state but rather establish conditions conducive to entering it. As daily practices, suggestions were made, including setting slightly challenging tasks, accumulating small achievements, adjusting physical and mental conditions, and creating focused environments by reducing notifications from emails and other digital devices, thereby presenting perspectives on applying scientific knowledge to learning and work.

■ Panel Discussion: "New Human Possibilities Brought About by the Flow State"

In the panel discussion, experts at the forefront of research exchanged views on the latest findings in flow studies. Drawing on recent advances in the field, they explored the benefits of flow, its practical applications, and ways to apply it to everyday life.



● Regarding "Children's Capacity to Becom Deeply Engaged in Learning and Personal Growth at Work"

"Immersion in learning" is a term that refers to the process of experiencing flow while pursuing one's learning goals or aspirations. This applies not only to children, but also to adults who engage in purposeful learning, such as studying a foreign language or working toward professional qualifications.

Another study has reported that "flow experiences in childhood can influence one's talents later in life." The longitudinal study that followed children identified as having abilities in specific fields over several years found that those who did not grow up in environments conducive to experiencing flow tended to subsequently move away from the very fields in which they had once been considered talented. In that sense, providing children with environments that allow them to experience flow from an early age can be seen as critically important. (Kiyoshi Asakawa)



● Regarding "Physiology of Visualizing Flow: How We Enter the Flow State"

To visualize the flow state and determine whether it has been achieved, one possible approach is to monitor physiological responses using various devices. For example, some studies suggest that heart rate may decrease during the flow state, and a future in which wearable devices are used to measure heart rate, detect entry into the flow state, and automatically adjust the environment to match that psychological state may be realized in the near future. We are proceeding with research toward that goal.

Generally, when individuals are in a flow state, they may not recognize it at the time. What is important is being attentive to signals that, when you look back, make you think "I was in a flow state at that time." For example: "Time passed before I knew it," "I worked really hard, and even though my body must have been tired, I didn't feel fatigue at all,—in fact, I felt satisfied and enjoyed it," or "I was so absorbed that I couldn't hear the voices around me." By understanding the conditions that make it easier for you to enter flow state, you can increase the likelihood of experiencing it. (Chie Kurosaka)

In previous research comparing Japanese and American students, a higher proportion of Japanese students reported that they had "never experienced entering a state of flow." Human information-processing capacity is said to be limited to a maximum of 126 bits per second. Japanese individuals, who tend to be extremely sensitive to others' evaluations, may find it more difficult to enter flow. For this reason, it is important to consider how to create situations in which, within our limited information-processing capacity, we can focus as much as possible on the task at hand. In Western contexts, personal growth is often modeled as growth through self-enhancement, that is, the psychological tendency to view oneself more positively and to maintain or increase self-esteem. In contrast, in Japan, growth is often shaped through sensitivity to others' evaluations. However, excessive concern about how one is perceived by others can make it harder to enter flow. In such environments, cultivating the habit of "praising and being praised" from an early age may help create conditions that make entering flow easier.

Moreover, people do not remain in flow continuously while engaged in an activity. Rather, they move in and out of flow—entering a state of anxiety as the level of challenge increases slightly, and re-entering flow as their skills adapt. Therefore, when creating environments conducive to flow, it makes sense to incorporate elements of "routine work" that help direct our limited information-processing capacity toward the task. By experiencing flow in various contexts, individuals can gradually develop multiple personal pathways into flow, enabling them to access a state of flow in diverse situations. (Kiyoshi Asakawa)



● "Tea as a Partner for Learning and Work: Scientific Conditioning Techniques"

Research on the flow experience and Japanese tea is rare even from a global perspective. In this experiment, despite the short measurement period, the results showed suppression of mental fatigue, which is interesting. Some studies have reported that consuming caffeine and theanine simultaneously is beneficial; however, considering that effects were observed immediately after drinking in this study, it suggests that "aroma" is also one of the triggers. This is exactly what we would like to pursue as a future research theme. (Chie Kurosaka)

One of the inspirations for this research came from our American sales representative, who told us that creators in Silicon Valley drink tea to refresh their mood and boost efficiency. As we entered the AI era following the COVID-19 period, amid rapid changes, we thought we should explore the psychological aspects as a new possibility for tea. Through this research,

I hope tea can become known as a "creative support beverage" and a "beverage that enhances work engagement." As a recommended way of drinking, since we heard that flow state does not continue constantly but comes in waves, sipping gradually while working might be a good approach. Also, I believe that having a proper cup of tea during breaks can lead to renewed energy and improved productivity for subsequent work. (Ichiro Kato)



●About applying flow (a deep sense of immersion) to education and work

I believe it is entirely possible to apply flow (a deep sense of immersion) to entrance examinations and education. The key is to begin at a level that matches one's current abilities, experience the satisfaction of "I did it," then gradually take on slightly more challenging tasks. When those challenges are met successfully and one is acknowledged or praised, this cycle continues. By repeatedly experiencing flow within this process, individuals can steadily move toward their goals. This, I believe, is what truly matters. (Kiyoshi Asakawa)

In terms of learning and work, I think it is extremely important to develop the habit of being self-aware and praising oneself in order to raise self-esteem. I hope people can identify when flow states occur in their work and learning environments and make use of them. (Chie Kurosaka)

Hearing that experiencing flow creates a sense of purpose and satisfaction and considering the research showing that tea has elements that guide people toward flow, we hope that enjoying tea can lead to enriching one's life and feelings of happiness and satisfaction. I hope learning and growth can continue across a wide range of ages, from children to adults. Therefore, we would like to expand the scope of our research to include a wider range of generations and look beyond Japanese people to include international perspectives. (Ichiro Kato)

The saying "What one likes, one will do well" originated from Sen no Rikyu's philosophy. I believe the tea ceremony systematized by Sen no Rikyu is also connected to creating an environment that generates flow (immersion). Immersion is the key to mastering life. Actively seeking such experiences may enrich our lives. (Kunihiro Nishizawa)



■Tips for fulfilling learning and work with high happiness to thrive in the AI era

To leverage human strengths in the AI era, it is important to cultivate the ability to immerse oneself, and creating such an environment will be key for future society.



【Today's Summary】

1. "Immerse in Learning"

New habits that draw out the abilities of children and adults

2. Flow visualized through the latest research

Tips for "creating environments for learning and work"

3. Flow × Tea leads to

"Self-development and lasting happiness"

Speaker Profiles

Kiyoshi Asakawa (Professor, Faculty of Intercultural Communication and Graduate School of Intercultural Communication, Hosei University)



After earning a Bachelor of Science from Tokyo University of Science and a Master of Engineering from Tokyo Institute of Technology Graduate School, he obtained a master's degree (Psychology) from Columbia University and a Ph.D. (Human Development) from the University of Chicago, USA. Professor at the Faculty of Intercultural Communication, Hosei University since 2003. Professor at the Graduate School of Intercultural Communication since 2006. Transitioning from science and engineering to psychology and education, he studied directly under Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the father of flow theory, at the University of Chicago, and has worked to carry forward the theory and promote it in Japan. His main research interests are the universality and cultural differences of flow (optimal experience), creativity, and well-being. From an interdisciplinary perspective integrating humanities and sciences, he explores the psychological mechanisms by which people become immersed and maximize their abilities, and the nature of organizations and societies where people can live better lives.

Chie Kurosaka (Associate Professor, Department of Human, Information and Life Sciences, School of Health Sciences, University of Occupational and Environmental Health)



After receiving a Ph.D. (Engineering) from the Graduate School of Life Science and Systems Engineering at Kyushu Institute of Technology, she worked in medical research management at a general hospital. She later participated in the development of the medical welfare system "impede" at an IT company and has held her current position since 2018. Her research specialties are ergonomics and psychophysiology. She focuses on the evaluation of psychological stress and flow states using indices of autonomic nervous system activity, as well as on the estimation of heat risk and fall prevention using wearable devices. Since assuming her current position, she has actively promoted industry-academia collaboration. Her recent work includes research on the relaxation effects of green tea and their relationship to improved work performance based on autonomic nervous system activity indices, as well as development of a technology for estimating heat risk using heart rate information (Patent No. 7539634).

Ichiro Kato (Director of Central Research Institute, ITO EN, Ltd.)



After graduating from university, he joined ITO EN, Ltd. Since joining the company, he has worked on quality reforms supporting food "safety and trust," including product quality assurance and establishing hygiene management systems. As Quality Control Department Manager, he directed safety evaluations and quality standard development for beverages and tea products and worked to establish a risk management system for food microorganisms. He has played a significant role in supporting ITO EN's product quality and trusted brand. Since 2025, as Director of the Central Research Institute, ITO EN, Ltd., he oversees ITO EN's fundamental research and green tea health functionality research. He is dedicated to serving as a bridge between academia and industry, with themes of "creating tea value" and "contributing to a healthy society" based on scientific evidence. His specialties are applied microbiology and food microorganism control.

Moderator : Kunihiro Nishizawa (Director, Oishii Kenko Lab (Visiting Researcher, Nikkei BP Research Institute))



After graduating from Waseda University, he joined Nikkei BP after working at Shokusan. He became deputy editor-in-chief at the launch of Nikkei Health and later served as editor-in-chief. In 2008, he launched Nikkei Health Premiere and served as editor-in-chief. From 2010, he served as Vice President of Techno Associates, becoming Senior Researcher at Nikkei BP Research Institute's Marketing Strategy Research Center in 2014 and Principal Researcher in 2016. In March 2018, he left Nikkei BP and became a visiting researcher at the company's Research Institute. That same year, he established Salta Press Co., Ltd. Currently, he serves as a commissioned lecturer at Doshisha University's Faculty of Life and Medical Sciences, a cooperative researcher at Juntendo University School of Medicine, a councilor of the Japan Kidney Foundation, an executive advisor to the Japan Gut Frailty Council, and a councilor of the Wellness Food Promotion Association. In addition to being active as a speaker and seminar instructor, he writes health columns for magazines and web media.