



# THE LSP MAGAZINE.

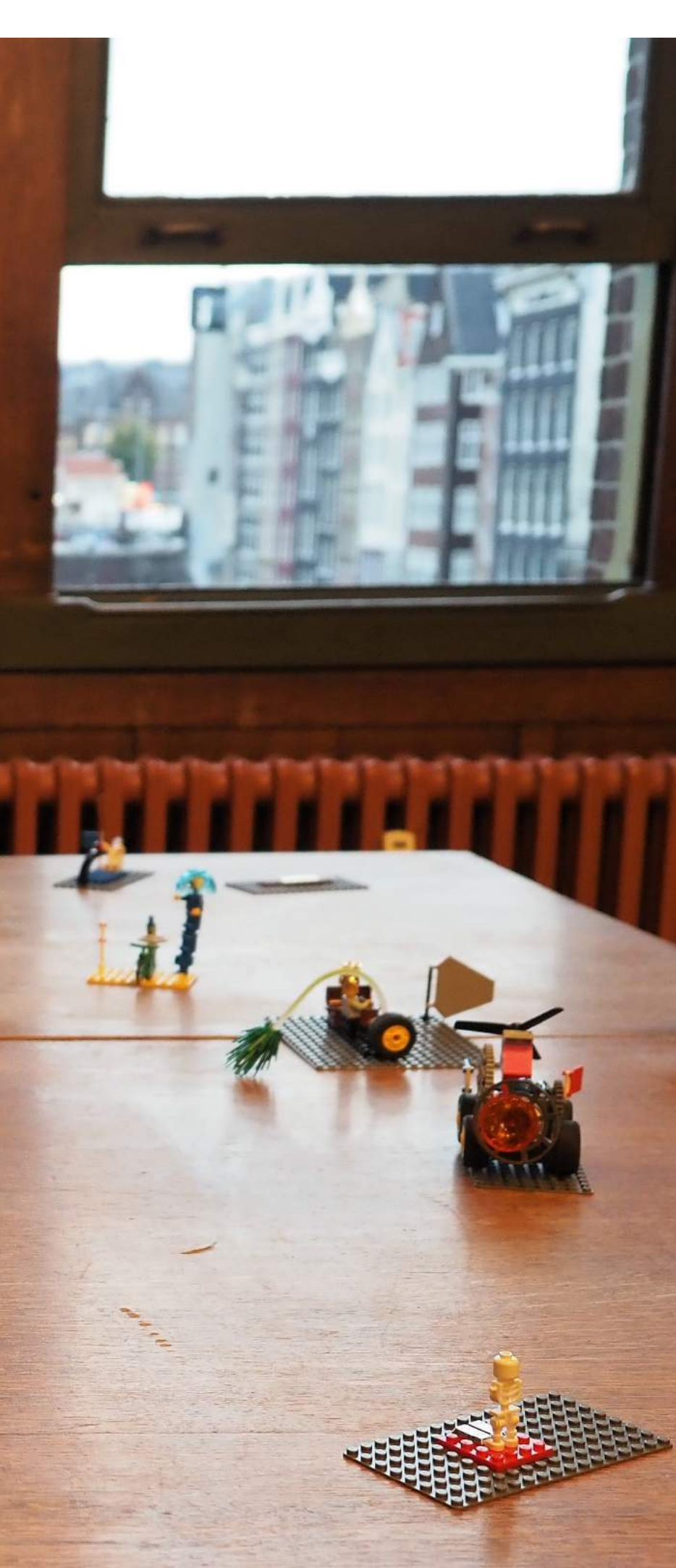
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## LEGO SERIOUS PLAY AND MAGIC!

Abracadabra Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo!



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# MIHALY CSÍKSZENTMIHÁLYI

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The father of flow

By **Dr. Jef van den Hout**

*The New York Times headline on October 27th, 2021, was: Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi, the father of 'Flow,' Dies at 87.*

## **An icon passed away**

It is obvious, for every facilitator of the LEGO Serious® Play® (LSP) Method, that we need to write an obituary. The meaning of FLOW is undoubtedly connected with LSP. At the same time, thinking about his contribution in facilitating the method, did he actually ever know about the LSP method, did he know how important his insights were for the facilitator? I don't know, but I wonder. The research and work from **Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi** have a much greater meaning than that of his FLOW Theory. Did you know he was also the co-founder of Positive Psychology (2000)? We asked Dr. Jef van den Hout to contribute to this article since Csíkszentmihályi was on



his PhD committee, defending his research on: ‘the conceptualization and application of team flow’.

### The FLOW - Concept

What did this Master and Founder of Flow (1975) mean for us, people who want to move forward? Mihaly Csikszentmihályi, introduced the term ‘flow’ in 1975 in his book *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* and initially defined the construct as “a holistic sensation that people feel when they act in total involvement” (Csikszentmihályi 1975, p. 36). In this research project Csikszentmihályi studied the experience of playfulness in chess, rock climbing and dancing as forms of adult play. He hoped by studying play, he could learn how work could be made more enjoyable. They called it the flow experience, because the people frequently used ‘flow’ in describing how they felt, often through the metaphor of a water current carrying them along. Csikszentmihályi’s original term was autotelic experiences, from the Greek for self (auto) and goal or purpose (telos)—that is, activities that you do for the sake of doing it. In the scientific work that followed he often described it as a sense of creativity that emerges from an intense absorption in a challenging activity, whether in the arts, sports, business, or a hobby. In an interview for *Wired* magazine in 1996 he put it simply (one of his talents according to his colleague Jeanne Nakamura) when asked to describe the experience of flow:

*“The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz” (or playing with LEGO). “Your whole being is involved, and you’re using your skills to the utmost.”*

[textual addition in parentheses by the authors]

### Positive Psychology

In 1990, he published ‘Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience’, which became a bestseller and has been translated into more than 20 languages. In 1996 he published another bestseller, ‘Creativity’ and in 1997, ‘Finding Flow’. In 2000, together with Martin Seligman, he wrote the now well-known article ‘Positive Psychology’ for the *American Psychologist* and is seen since then as one of the co-founders of this new important scientific field. Positive psychology studies human strengths such as creativity, gratitude, pas-



MIHALY AT TED  
Source: [Link here](#)

sion, optimism, engagement, intrinsic motivation, and responsibility to understand those aspects of human experience that make life worth living. Positive psychology can be seen as the ‘fourth wave’ in the evolution of psychology, the first waves being, respectively, the disease model, behaviourism, and humanistic psychology.

Back in 1986, Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner (a research partner of Csíkszentmihályi in The Good Work Project) predicted that Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi is going to be thought of as one of the most important social scientists in the last half of this century. He argued that by saying: “He helps us see something we knew intuitively but could not put into words. He has a way of not only getting at issues people really care about, but he is able to approach those issues in a viable way.” Isn’t that the reason we use LSP workshops?

### **Facilitating FLOW**

As a reader of the LSP Magazine, you might want to look back at the video and article in Issue 4 with Dr. Lukas Zenk. Recent research on LSP and flow indicate that LSP workshops result in higher levels of flow experiences and creative output of teams than traditional meetings (Zenk, Primus & Sonnenburg, 2021). This is especially so, because LSP workshops facilitate time for individuals to independently explore their ideas using a different kind of material in the presence of other participants. To conclude this article, we would like to give a quotation from Csíkszentmihályi that endorses the meaning and effect of LSP:

*“The real challenge, however, is to reduce entropy in one’s surroundings without increasing it in one’s consciousness. Buddhists advise us to ‘[act always as if the future of the universe depended on what you did, while laughing at yourself for thinking that whatever you do makes any difference.’ This serious playfulness makes it possible to be both engaged and carefree at the same time.”*

(Csíkszentmihályi, 1997, pp. 132-133;)

We will publish again on Flow and the importance of the concept for facilitators in the next edition of LSP magazine. On that note, we like to end with a last quotation of Csíkszentmihályi himself. We are quite sure he didn't know, nor realise, how often his insight is used during a workshop using the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY Method.

*“For one thing, as I will try to show, an idea or product that deserves the label ‘creative’ arises from the synergy of many sources and not only from the mind of a single person. It is easier to enhance creativity by changing conditions in the environment than by trying to make people think more creatively. And a genuine creative accomplishment is almost never the result of a sudden insight, a lightbulb flashing on in the dark, but comes after years of hard work.”*

(Csíkszentmihályi, 1996, Creativity, p.1)

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