



**A MAXIMALLY COMPREHENSIVE
CONCEPT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS AIMED AT
ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE HIGH
PERFORMANCE**

AUTHOR: Jaka Oman
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1. Intro

The ThinkZoe concept was created as a response to the current state of society, which today demands active and conscious personal development, since the environment we work in is not conducive to healthy personal growth and progress. The concept primarily stems from the author's personal experience, which served as the main motivation for both practical and scientific exploration.

After a five-year development period, ThinkZoe is now a scientifically grounded and practically tested system that guides individuals, groups, or teams along the path of personal and collective growth. The goal of the concept is to help individuals and teams begin moving along a path of life changes that manifest in more frequent flow states — our optimal states of functioning. In flow, we are at our most productive and also feel our best — and this is what we truly seek more of in life. When we are in flow, our results improve, and we also experience greater satisfaction and fulfillment. Through a clear and simple structure, ThinkZoe guides us on this otherwise demanding journey.

The name *ThinkZoe* comes from the word *zoe*, which in ancient Greek means *life*. The word *Think* stands beside it, as the concept encourages us to disconnect from autopilot mode and first reflect — on how we can take the wheel ourselves and take ownership of our work and life.

2. A society of exhausted systems, drained and burnedout people

Modern work is being put to the test. If we were to measure it using three basic indicators — employee engagement, mental health, and business performance — we would get a picture that raises serious concern. Research by Gallup from 2024 shows that global employee engagement is only around 21–23%. This means that more than three-quarters of people at work are present physically, but not mentally or emotionally. The cost of such disengagement is enormous — estimated at 8.9 trillion USD, which represents about 9% of the global GDP. In business terms, this translates into lost opportunities, slower innovation, lower customer satisfaction, and weaker financial results.

Even more concerning is that engagement is declining most among managers, who are the key multipliers of culture. Gallup reports that in 2024, managerial engagement in the U.S. was only 27%. This means that those who are supposed to inspire and support their teams are themselves losing connection with their work and sense of purpose. The consequence is twofold: teams don't receive the support they need, while a cynical feeling grows that every new change or program is just another burden rather than a genuine help.

At the same time, the world is facing a mental health crisis that is clearly reflected in the workplace. The World Health Organization warns that depression and anxiety cause the loss of 12 billion workdays each year, equating to around one trillion dollars in lost productivity. In 2019, 15% of employed adults had a mental disorder, and by 2025 that number will exceed one billion people. This is no longer an exception that can be ignored, but a reality faced by nearly every organization.

The OECD confirms the scale of the problem. Their analyses show that poor mental health costs member countries up to 4% of their GDP. In the European Union and the United Kingdom, this represents around 600 billion euros annually. A large share of these costs stems directly from lower employment and productivity, meaning that organizations are not getting what they could from their people. Instead of creating innovations, new products, and services, energy is spent on putting out fires, covering sick leave, and finding replacements for burned-out employees.

At the company level, the picture is similar. Calendars are overloaded with meetings that rarely result in concrete decisions. People switch between three, four, or even five projects at once, leading to a loss of focus and reduced quality of work. Many organizations use dozens of digital tools designed to make communication and collaboration easier, but in reality, they often create more noise. Teams thus find themselves in a paradox: they have more tools than ever before, yet less clarity, less focus, and less time for deep work.

Younger generations — expected to carry the future — are especially vulnerable. Studies show they report higher stress levels, more anxiety, and lower trust in institutions. This creates additional pressure on organizations trying to attract and retain talent. When managers feel disconnected and younger employees feel burned out, the result is quiet quitting — people formally stay at their jobs but give minimal effort.

All of this creates a silent erosion of business performance. People sit in meetings but are mentally absent. Projects drag on because priorities are unclear. A “firefighting” culture has become the norm — reacting to urgent problems instead of proactively creating the future. In the long run, this dynamic leads to a loss of innovation potential, higher talent turnover, and reduced competitive advantage.

3. The flood of quick tips — and why they're not enough

The market has responded to the crisis of engagement and mental health in a predictable way: with a flood of quick fixes. Bookstores and online platforms are full of guides with catchy titles such as “*5 Steps to Productivity*,” “*How to Find Balance in 10 Days*,” or “*Tricks for More Effective Work*.” Companies are investing in ever-new time management apps, collaboration tools, work-life balance programs, and various wellness initiatives.

Of course, many of these approaches are useful. **Cal Newport**, in his book *Deep Work*, convincingly shows that uninterrupted work in long blocks of time is key to creating value in the knowledge economy. **James Clear**, in *Atomic Habits*, explains how small habits lead to big changes. **Charles Duhigg**, in *The Power of Habit*, describes the mechanisms through which habits can be changed. **David Allen's** *Getting Things Done* methodology offers an effective system for reducing cognitive pressure and improving decision-making.

But all these solutions share a common trait: they only address part of the picture. **They are partial.** When we try to apply them in an already overloaded work environment, we often face a paradox: more tools, more rules, more expectations — and consequently, more pressure. As a result, after a few weeks of initial enthusiasm, people often fall back into old patterns. Not because they lack discipline, but because their environment and work systems are not designed for lasting change.

Today's employees are overwhelmed. Phone notifications, emails, communication platforms, projects, and tasks come from all directions. At the same time, there is constant pressure to be available and responsive. In such an environment, no single method — no matter how good — can solve the problem in the long run.

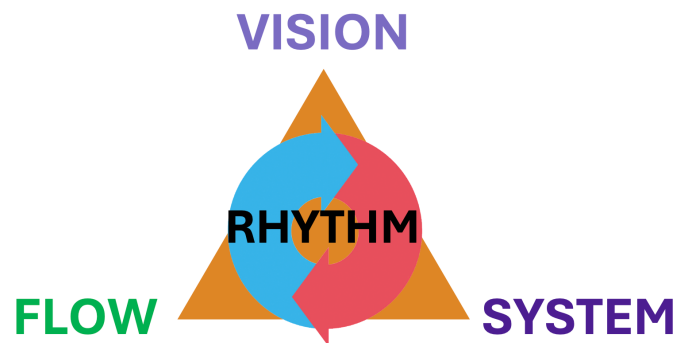
We therefore need more than another productivity trick, more than another app, and more than another wellness program. We need a holistic system that connects three key dimensions: **meaning (vision), the way we work (systems and habits), and the human rhythm (the cycle of exertion and renewal).** Without this, we remain trapped in surface-level fixes that address symptoms rather than causes.

And this is precisely why **ThinkZoe** was created — as a response to fragmentation, as an operating system that integrates science, practice, and insights from different cultures and industries.

4. ThinkZoe – The trinagle connecting all the dots

ThinkZoe is designed as a system for sustainable high performance, integrating four key building blocks: **Flow, Vision, System, and Rhythm**. Its distinctiveness lies in the fact that it is not based merely on theory but is the result of five years of research and practical work with individuals and teams from more than ten countries across Europe and Asia. **Jaka Oman**, the author of the concept, has conducted over 150 workshops and worked with individuals and teams during this period, allowing the ideas to evolve through real challenges in real organizations.

THINKZOE STRUCTURE:



The Zoe Triangle is therefore not just another “top-down method,” but a tested framework that works across cultures, industries, and team dynamics.

4.1 Flow: The Science of Deep Focus

The concept of flow was first described by **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, who defined it as a state in which a person is completely immersed in the activity they are performing. The key conditions are: a balance between challenge and skill, clear goals, and immediate feedback. In this state, people lose track of time, forget themselves, and often report the highest levels of satisfaction and effectiveness.

Later researchers, such as **Steven Kotler** — now one of the world’s leading experts on flow — and his team at the **Flow Research Collective**, demonstrated that flow doesn’t happen by accident. It can be systematically triggered through tools for managing flow (flow cycle, flow triggers, flow blockers, intrinsic motivation, mindset, goal setting, etc.).

The Neuroscientific View of Flow

Flow is now one of the most studied topics in neuroscience. Neurologically, it is accompanied by a cocktail of five key neurotransmitters:

- **Dopamine** – enhances motivation, focus, and curiosity, and enables faster learning.
- **Norepinephrine** – increases alertness and energy.
- **Endorphins** – reduce pain and enhance pleasure.
- **Anandamide** – boosts creativity by relaxing conventional neural connections and enabling associative, parallel thinking.
- **Serotonin** – provides a sense of satisfaction and calm after flow experiences.

This neurochemical mix creates a state where we are simultaneously maximally focused, creative, and internally rewarded. That’s why flow is so attractive — the brain literally rewards us for staying in it.

EEG studies have shown that during flow, brain waves shift to the **alpha (8–12 Hz)** and sometimes **theta (4–7 Hz)** range — the space between alertness and light meditation. This is an optimal zone: focused enough to stay engaged, yet relaxed enough to allow creativity and idea connection. It represents an ideal state of brain synchronization, where different regions communicate more efficiently than usual.

Perhaps the most fascinating phenomenon is **transient hypofrontality** — a temporary reduction in activity in the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for self-reflection, inner dialogue, conscious control, and time perception. When this area “quiets down,” several effects occur:

- Loss of time perception (hours feel like minutes).
- Loss of self-consciousness (less self-criticism, more courage).
- Increased creativity, as the brain connects information in new ways.

Transient hypofrontality thus explains why we often forget ourselves in flow, why we act more boldly, and why we feel timelessness. When the prefrontal cortex steps aside, other brain regions can form new connections and accelerate learning.

Business Implications

For organizations, this means structuring work to encourage conditions for flow. If people spend even a few hours per week in this state, their creativity, learning speed, and job satisfaction increase significantly over time. Research shows that individuals in flow can be up to **500% more productive** and learn new skills **2–3 times faster**.

Practical implications for HR and leaders:

- Tasks should be challenging yet achievable — to trigger dopamine and norepinephrine.
- The environment should allow uninterrupted work — so brain waves can shift into the alpha/theta range.

- Leaders must foster a culture where mistakes are not stigmatized — since transient hypofrontality requires lowering internal censorship.

Flow is therefore the **engine** of the ThinkZoe triangle, connecting psychological, neurological, and organizational dimensions into a state that people intuitively desire — and companies critically need.

4.2 Vision: The North Star That Gives Meaning

If flow provides energy, vision provides direction. Without a clear vision, people’s energy disperses in all directions. In the ThinkZoe context, vision is not a generic statement on a wall but a tangible North Star — a guiding principle for decisions, priorities, and success criteria.

We draw inspiration from various frameworks. **Simon Sinek’s “Start With Why”** reminds us that people don’t follow what we do but why we do it. The Japanese concept **Ikigai** combines what we love, what we are good at, what the world needs, and what we are paid for. **Latham and Locke’s goal-setting theory** shows that goals are most effective when they are specific, challenging, and accepted by those pursuing them. All these are forms of visualizing the future.

In companies, vision often gets lost in everyday busyness. Employees complete tasks without seeing their connection to a larger purpose — sometimes because leadership hasn’t clearly articulated it. At the same time, individuals often lack their own personal vision — an understanding of what truly pulls them forward. The alignment between **personal vision, team vision, and organizational vision** has become a crucial element of modern work and business success.

For HR, this means that onboarding new employees shouldn’t start with spreadsheets and policies but with the story of the vision. It’s equally important for HR to know how well employees understand the company’s vision — and how well they have shaped their own. People need to understand why their work matters, how it contributes to the bigger picture, and how it fulfills them personally.

4.3 System: Interventions, Habits and Protocols

Flow pushes us forward, and vision pulls us in the right direction. Together, they create movement. The **system**, the third element of the Zoe Triangle, ensures that this movement happens successfully.

W. Edwards Deming emphasized that 94% of organizational problems come from systems, not individuals. **Peter Senge** teaches us to think systemically — to look at patterns and connections rather than isolated events.

ThinkZoe builds on insights from several authors:

- **Carol Dweck’s growth mindset** shows that a learning culture is essential for sustainable improvement.
- **W. Timothy Gallwey’s The Inner Game of Tennis** reveals that the biggest obstacle is often our inner dialogue — our attitude toward challenges and mistakes.
- **James Clear and Charles Duhigg** provide practical tools for building habits — the smallest unit of any system.
- **David Allen’s GTD method** demonstrates how a reliable external system reduces cognitive load.

In the ThinkZoe context, a system isn’t bureaucracy — it’s a set of **interventions, habits and protocols** that address:

- Managing distractions and maintaining focus (focus protocols and digital distraction blockers).
- Sustaining mental and physical energy (nutrition, movement, meditation, mindfulness).
- Managing time and workload (calendar discipline).
- Adjusting the environment (physical and social settings).

This is the simplest possible framework — predictable yet flexible. In practice, every individual’s system is unique, but the guiding principle remains the same: **the system must support flow and movement toward vision.**

4.4 Rhythm: Struggle → Release → Flow → Recovery

The fourth element of the ThinkZoe concept is **Rhythm**, based on research from the **Flow Research Collective** and observations by **Steven Kotler**. Flow is not a permanent state — it’s part of a **cycle** with four phases:

1. **Struggle** – facing a challenge; effort, frustration, learning.
2. **Release** – consciously letting go; allowing the brain space for incubation.
3. **Flow** – deep, timeless, high-performance work.
4. **Recovery** – physical and mental renewal, enabling the next cycle.

Herbert Benson, who studied the “fight or flight” response, found that it is necessary for triggering flow. However, he also proved that after flow, we must activate the **relaxation response**, meaning the parasympathetic nervous system must be engaged for recovery. Without it, burnout occurs.

To achieve long-term success and maintain a sustainable system that preserves flow and progress toward vision, we must establish a balanced rhythm between **action and rest, work and recovery, flow and regeneration, growth and reflection**. Activating the

parasympathetic nervous system — the body’s “rest and digest” mode — is essential for long-term physical and mental health in both individuals and teams.

For companies, this means organizing work in **cycles**, not in an endless marathon.

- On a **micro level**: 90-minute work blocks with short breaks.
- On a **meso level**: work sprints and meeting-free days.
- On a **macro level**: quarterly reflections and intentional recovery after projects.

Disconnecting and regenerating after intense (struggle and/or flow) periods is crucial for long-term team performance.

Rhythm, therefore, acts as a safeguard — ensuring that flow doesn’t lead to burnout, but to sustainable high performance.

5. Benefits for Companies Investing in ThinkZoe

Companies that implement ThinkZoe as an operational system of work gain measurable benefits on multiple levels:

a) Measurable impact on results.

Low employee engagement costs the global economy nearly 9 trillion dollars annually. This means that even a small increase in engagement brings significant financial gains. ThinkZoe directly addresses the key drivers of engagement: clarity of goals, autonomy, sense of progress, and psychological safety.

b) Less burnout, more stability.

By introducing work rhythm — micro-breaks, regeneration after sprints, quarterly reflections — companies reduce chronic stress and absenteeism. The WHO warns that depression and anxiety lead to the loss of 12 billion workdays each year. Any organization that reduces burnout gains a competitive advantage.

c) More innovation and faster learning.

Flow accelerates creativity, while feedback systems enable rapid idea testing. This means companies can experiment with new approaches faster and deliver greater value to customers.

d) Empowering leaders as multipliers.

Leaders are often the most overloaded and the least engaged. ThinkZoe gives them tools for coaching, focus protection, and leading by example. When leaders regain enthusiasm, the effect multiplies across entire teams.

e) Employer branding and talent retention.

Generations Y and Z seek meaningful work, healthy culture, and balance. Organizations that integrate the ThinkZoe concept position themselves as environments where people can grow without burning out — greatly enhancing their attractiveness in the talent market.

6. What HR and company owners can do today?

ThinkZoe offers a clear framework, but the first steps can be small and actionable:

- **Protect deep work.**
Introduce “maker hours” — 2–3 blocks of 90 minutes per week without meetings or notifications. Schedule them in the calendar and protect them like meetings with yourself. Encourage a “do not disturb” practice, where individuals can signal when they should not be interrupted.
- **Align different visions.**
Start activities that align the visions of individuals, teams, and the whole company.
- **Set team flow rules.**
Create a simple one-page document: when we are available, which tools we use for which communication, how we give feedback, and how we respect the flow cycle as a team. This reduces cognitive noise and creates an environment for higher productivity.
- **Upgrade 1:1 conversations.**
Hold weekly or bi-weekly coaching-oriented sessions: What’s going well? What’s an obstacle? What’s the next step? How is your flow? Why is flow missing? What can we do to create more of it? This is the most powerful engagement tool.
- **Plan regeneration.**
Introduce “no-meeting days,” rituals for celebrating wins and completed projects, or “learning Fridays.” These create space for recovery and reflection.
- **Start with a pilot.**
Choose one motivated team. Test flow tools (respecting the cycle, introducing triggers and blockers). Measure the impact, then adapt and scale to other teams.

The ThinkZoe concept is simple, but implementing change — developing individuals, teams, or company culture — is a demanding task. It’s also crucial for HR itself to develop a **system** that ensures all HR activities (training, talent development, team interventions, etc.) serve the purpose of enhancing flow and moving the collective toward the HR vision and the company’s overall vision.

7. Success Metrics

ThinkZoe is not based on feelings, but on measurable results. Recommended metrics:

- **Process indicators:**

- Number of deep work hours per person per week
- Ratio of “work-to-meeting” time
- Frequency of 1:1 conversations
- Level of psychological safety within the team

- **KPIs related to individuals:**

- Productivity (time to value, quality of delivered solutions)
- Flow index
- Engagement (e.g., Gallup Q12)
- Talent turnover and absenteeism
- Customer satisfaction

When companies track both types of metrics, they can connect daily practices with outcomes related to flow and productivity — and ultimately with strategic results.

8. Concept author – Jaka Oman

Jaka Oman has dedicated his life to exploring and practicing flow. In 2019, he faced life changes that reduced flow in his life to a minimum. He found himself on the path toward burnout twice, yet managed to re-establish flow, build a strong vision, develop his own system for sustaining flow, and find his rhythm.

He was the first in globally to approach flow holistically — using nine main flow tools — and to combine it with the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method. The flow approach he uses was developed by the **Flow Research Collective**, the global leader in flow science and training. In 2022, Jaka became the **first certified Flow Coach (FRC)** in Slovenia.

As a lifelong Lego enthusiast, he is also one of the first and most experienced **LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitators** in Slovenia and the wider CEE region. He obtained his certification for this method in January 2017 and has since conducted more than 150 workshops across 10 countries (Slovenia, Austria, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Slovakia, Greece, Montenegro, and Hungary), engaging over 2,000 participants.

ThinkZoe emerged as the result of his five-year journey of research and work with individuals and teams across more than ten countries in Europe and Asia. It integrates the scientific foundations of flow with years of hands-on practice — building a bridge between academic research and the everyday reality of organizations.

9. Conclusion

Companies don't need another app or trendy method. They need an **operating system** that connects vision, system, flow, and work rhythm. **ThinkZoe** makes this possible — it's grounded in science, tested in practice, and designed to integrate seamlessly into the everyday reality of teams.

If we want people not just to survive in the world of work but to **thrive** in it, it's time to move beyond fragmented solutions and build a holistic framework. **ThinkZoe** is the answers — helping organizations create a culture of **sustainable high performance**: a culture where people don't burn out but flourish, and where individual potential transforms into the collective strength of the organization.

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