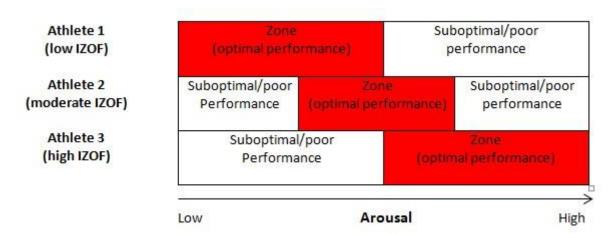# Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning (IZOF)

The most popular account for the relationship between arousal and performance is the model of Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning (Hanin, 1997, 2000). IZOF proposes that there are individual differences in the way people react to anxiety. Some tend to succeed when anxiety is low while others tend to succeed when anxiety is high.
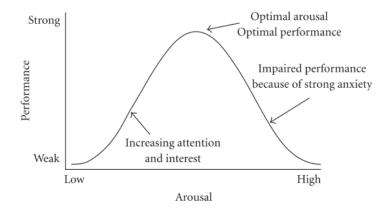
Anxiety can be beneficial

Therefore each person has his/her own preferred level of anxiety that allows them to perform at their optimum. When athletes are in their optimal performance zone this means that they are in they preferred level of anxiety. If an athlete experiences too much or too little anxiety, this can hinder performance, as the athlete is out of his/her optimal zone (Figure 1).

Find the optimal combination of useful emotions

In addition to anxiety, IZOF allows for a description of a variety of emotional states which could be either helpful or unhelpful. While in older explanations emotions were called either positive or negative, Hanin suggested that in sport setting it is more useful to distinguish between helpful and unhelpful or optimal and dysfunctional emotions. For example, some athletes may notice that feeling excited is not conductive to performing well, while others would say that feeling angry helps them to reach their optimal performance state. Thus, the Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning model suggests that each athlete could find out his or her optimal combination of useful emotions and learn, how to reach this unique state prior to competitions.

The main criticism of the Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning model is that it does not explain why some people perform better when in certain emotional states and others do not. Still, IZOF is a useful model that helps to improve athlete's self-awareness and psychological readiness. A common way to find out the individual optimal performance zone is individualized emotion profiling.
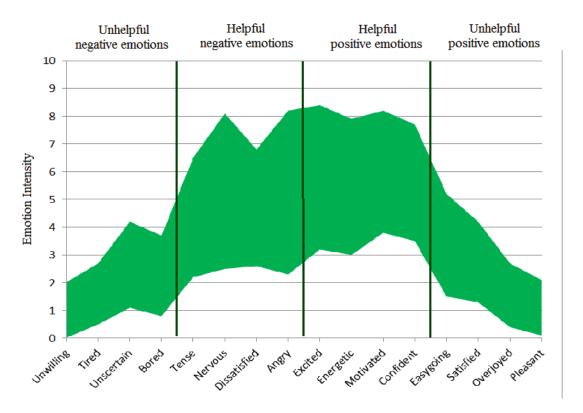
How to profile emotions?

Individualized emotion profiling means a reconstruction of the athlete's emotional experiences related to successful and poor performances.

By doing this an athlete generates personally relevant emotion words that best describe his/her optimal (helpful) and dysfunctional (harmful) positive and negative emotions:

1. Athlete identifies his/her helpful (functional) emotion patterns by selecting 4 – 5 positive and 4 – 5 negative items that best describe their emotions related to their individually successful performances in the past.
2. Athlete identifies his/her unhelpful (dysfunctional) emotion patterns by selecting 4 – 5 positive and 4 – 5 negative items that describe his/her emotions related to poor performances. The focus of recall is either on precompetition state or on repeated experiences across several competitions with similar outcomes.
3. Athlete rates how intensive did those emotions feel prior to his/her successful and unsuccessful using the a10-item scale (ranging from "nothing at all" to "maximal possible").

Figure 2 shows an example of helpful and unhelpful emotions profile:

— *Sportlyzer Academy, 2019, Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) - Sportlyzer Academy. [online] Available at: <https://academy.sportlyzer.com/wiki/arousal-and-performance/individual-zones-of-optimal-functioning-izof/> [Accessed 20 August 2022].*

Citations provided. Content provided under fair use.