



The Experimenter

How Diverse Career Motivations Affect Career Decisions

Deep down, we all approach our work in different ways, depending on our history, personality type and the many decisions that we have made during our lives. Our behaviors at work might look very much like those of others, but only we know the reasons why we perform the tasks and responsibilities of our jobs. And these reasons affect our work satisfaction most deeply, causing us to draw energy from our work or—if our motivations are not being met—to find disappointment at work.

The FutureWork Institute has researched and developed a series of categories to help explain these deep-seated motivations. We call them “career archetypes,” because research shows they are constant among many individuals.

There are five career archetypes and, it seems, one is almost always dominant in individuals, possibly from an early age:

- **The Fast Tracker** — a person who values individual contributions above all else
- **The Experimenter** — a person whose deepest motivation is to build a portfolio of skills to enable that person to discover the job or company that “fits.”
- **The Fast Tracker** — a person who sees tangible career success as a gauge of personal success in life
- **The Company-dedicated Careerist** — a person comfortable in his or her job and company because it enables that person to “dig in” and understand how “this place really works”
- **The Balanced Careerist** — a person who values life outside work as much as time spent on the job.

Each archetype is “normal,” a valid way of approaching work and career, but each is very different. Read more now to discover what motivates the Experimenter.



What Experimenters Are All About

Experimenters are on a personal journey to find the company or the job where they “fit.” Their provisions for the journey are their portfolio of skills, their resume and experience, which they can bring to their next job. Like anyone on a journey, they seldom stay in one place too long. The excitement of learning new things keeps them moving on.

Experimenters love to learn new skills. They seem to have abundant energy, as long as they are trying out something new. Experimenters throw themselves into the new task, learn everything they can about it, and find the discovery stimulating.

But they don’t like to be bored. After all, work for them is a journey of discovery and too much time spent on the same set of tasks provides little excitement. The quickest path to the exit for an Experimenter is the prospect of facing the same thing over and over again.

This does not mean that they will not stay in the same position. They will happily keep the same position, as long as the work keep changes and they keep learning new skills.

Experimenters absorb learning at a great rate. They see their managers as their “chief teachers, and love to talk shop with them. They seek out feedback, always trying to discover better ways of performing the tasks they have before them. They adore mentoring and training opportunities because these are ways to learn more about themselves and their own skills.

More experimenters are found among younger workers—an understandable phenomenon—but some workers remain experimenters for their entire careers. These are the people who seem constantly to “reinvent” themselves as they go through life, taking on new jobs and new responsibilities, always wanting to learn something new.

Managing the Experimenter

Experimenters want their managers to be teachers, advisors and counselors. Above all they want their managers to map out new tasks for them, give them new opportunities. And, they want to confer with their managers about work at each step.

Excitement at learning new things is probably the chief work motivator for Experimenters. Managers who understand this prepare Experimenters for new challenges and coach them through, continually discussing their learning experiences with them.

Working on Teams with Experimenters

Experimenters work well on teams, especially when the project requires someone to dig in and learn about something new. Experimenters seem to have boundless energy when they are discovering new learnings.

They also fit in well with other people of different career archetypes on the team. Experimenters see different work styles as ways to learn from others and quickly absorb lessons from others.

Experimenters will do the drudge work on a team, as long as it is new to them. They dislike repeating tasks already learned and can become uncomfortable if others on the team show impatience with their new ideas and suggestions.

Questions and Answers on Experimenters

Q. *Are Experimenters gadflies?*

A. No, they might appear so to others with a different career archetype, but Experimenters march to an internal drumbeat. They do not “job hop” simply for a change of scenery but to continue their voyage of learning and self-discovery.

Q. *Will Experimenters stay with the company?*

A. Experimenters will probably not remain where they are at present, simply because most work has a large quantity of sameness in it. However, their talent is most useful to the unit while they remain and, as long as they are given opportunities to try new things, they might remain for a longer time.

Q. *Do Experimenters want to be promoted?*

A. Experimenters want to be promoted if the promotion brings with it new opportunities to learn. They make excellent, creative managers.

Q. *How can we get the best out of our Experimenters?*

A. Experimenters’ main motivation is to discover the deep “work aspect” of themselves. There are three rules any manager of an Experimenter should practice:

- Spend time coaching them and building their skill sets
- Give them new opportunities to learn
- Let them go when the time comes, and welcome them back if they choose to return.

The Special Value Experimenters Bring to Work

If unbounded curiosity and an amazing energy and willingness to throw oneself into new projects is what you need in your unit, then gather together as many Experimenters as you can. You might not keep them as long as you would like—after all, they are on their own personal journey—but their curiosity and suggestions are sure to liven up any project you have.