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**ARCHETYPE
EFFECT**



Unlocking the Six Types of
Motivation at Work

JAMES ROOT

WILEY

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Introduction: The Mystery and the Moment

The Mystery

Why do you go to work? Who are you when you get there?

No, really. These are serious questions. How about the Gen Z marketer in the cubicle next to yours (if you still have a cubicle) – why does she go to work? Or the man in human resources who led your onboarding a couple of years ago? The engineer who drove your subway train this morning? The barista who made your coffee? The construction worker who built the office you are sitting in? The chief executive officer (CEO) of your firm, whom you have never met but seen on a few all-hands Zoom calls? What about the board director who voted to appoint that CEO?

Is it likely that each of these workers will have the same answers to these questions?

Not very likely. While there are important similarities in work motivation that cut across countries, job types, age groups, and genders, it turns out to be the differences that are most striking.

My colleagues at Bain and I have been talking to workers in 19 countries from all corners of the world, more than 48000 of them so far – young, old; male, female; highly educated, much less educated; high, middle, and low income; care workers,

service workers, manual workers, administrative workers, knowledge workers; workers in developed countries with aging workforces like Japan and Italy, workers in developing markets with young workforces like India and Nigeria. It is the largest and most global body of research on this topic that we know of.

Of course there are executives in the sample. They always attract attention. Far outnumbering the executives, we have listened to agricultural workers, construction and maintenance workers, customer service reps, food service workers, manufacturing workers, office administrative workers, resource extraction workers, retail salespeople, transportation workers, warehouse workers, architects, accountants, data analysts, engineers, finance professionals, information technology (IT) professionals, business consultants, marketing professionals, scientists, private security workers, legal professionals, graphic designers, academics, artists and entertainers, nurses and carers, doctors, journalists, law enforcement workers, librarians, workers serving in the military, psychologists, public officials, religious workers, social workers, teachers, travel guides . . . you get the idea. We made it a priority to hear from the full range of workers in all of the markets.

The main thing we observed is the rich diversity of motivations that bring people to work every day. Everyone has a personal algebra of motivation. Its roots may run deep, back to childhood, listening to your parents' dinner-time conversations about money and jobs; to school, the values it instilled and the skills it developed; to your early working experience, with a great boss or a horrible boss; to your current role. Or perhaps your motivation at work reflects some aspect of your intrinsic nature, however you choose to define that.

Six Worker Archetypes Emerge

Motivations might seem random at the individual level, but at scale, clear patterns emerge. The global research delivered something distinctly new. Six worker archetypes describe virtually all 48 000 individuals we surveyed. Two of them care mainly about relationships at work (*Givers* work to help others thrive; *Operators* like to have colleagues as friends but prefer to keep their heads down at work and take no risks).

Two of them care mainly about learning and growth (*Explorers* are highly motivated to try new things; *Artisans* want to achieve mastery of their domain).

The third pair care mainly about achievement at work (*Strivers* plan ahead and value the recognition of promotions; *Pioneers* want to change the world in some way and are comfortable taking risks to do so).

This insight about motivations arrives at a time of considerable complexity at work. There are talent shortages and talent mismatches in many firms. The workforce is shrinking in most developed economies and is on a similar path even in middle-income countries. And there are three trends, possible thanks only to technology, combining to change the relationship between individuals and firms.

Gig Work

First, gig work surged in prominence over the last 15 years, as platforms like Uber, DoorDash, Upwork, and their numerous global equivalents scaled up. We've seen this model before. Piecework has its origins in the guild system of medieval Western Europe and accelerated with the industrial revolution. In the late nineteenth century, the majority of factory workers

earned piece rates: they were paid a fixed amount for each item made and were not employees of the firms they manufactured for. This model fell out of fashion as firms brought more and more activity in-house and worker rights improved during the twentieth century. By 2003, pre-smartphones, less than 5% of American workers were paid this way. Now, the idea is back, with a new name: the gig economy.

Today, there may be as many as 60M workers in the United States who are current or recent gig workers, being paid piece rates.¹ If that seems like a big number, consider China, where there are close to 200M gig workers, more than the entire working population of the United States and the United Kingdom combined.² This is not simply due to the rise of platform companies for ride-hailing and deliveries. It is also because the manufacturing base in China that used to offer full-time employment contracts to their assembly-line workers has shifted substantially to short-term contracts and more contingent work. There is a wide gap in job satisfaction between lower-income contract workers and their full-time counterparts doing exactly the same job. Ask the gig workers why, unsurprisingly, they cite income insecurity as one driver of lower satisfaction; the other is having little chance to make friends at work.

Flexible Work

Second, flexible work arrangements had been moving into the mainstream for several decades prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, when many of us found ourselves in a forced experiment about where and when work could get done.³ It's hard now to find consensus among individuals or firms on the future model of working in the office/at home/somewhere else. The global workers we have studied are perfectly divided: one

quarter would like to work from home all the time, one quarter never want to work from home again, and the remaining half are divided across one, two, three, and four days in the office.

Automation Anxiety

Third, automation anxiety is experiencing another spike, with the arrival of a new generation of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and applications. Firms are perpetually learning to do more with fewer people. The last 40 years of productivity gains have come from multiple sources: self-managing teams, the hollowing out of middle management, outsourcing, but above all, technology investment.

The anxiety is a long-running story. In *Modern Times* (1936), Charlie Chaplin's character is (unsuccessfully) fed his lunch by a machine as he tightens screws on an ever-accelerating assembly line. The message is clear: artisanal manufacturing jobs are being destroyed by rampaging automation. In the 1980s, with another wave of interest in AI and the increasing presence of personal computers, the zeitgeist's anxiety about job-killing machines appears in *Blade Runner* (1982) and *The Terminator* (1984). Soon after the launch of Apple's Siri, Spike Jonze's *her* (2013) presaged the twisting ambiguities in human relations with AI-powered virtual assistants.

These three tech-enabled disruptions have emerged at a moment in social history when many workers feel more able to be themselves at work. There are of course differences from country to country, and from work culture to work culture, but the days of toeing the line, of meekly accepting the bad assignment, of sucking it up, if not gone, are certainly in retreat. It's not perfect. Experts remind us that there is still plenty of "covering" at work, when employees are concerned about being

judged, or discriminated against, for their unique identities, so they start to conceal or obscure their thoughts and opinions in an effort to fit in. But by comparison to a generation ago, let alone two, we have far more permission to be who we truly are at work.

The Myth of the Average Worker

The talent chessboard includes full-time employees, robots and AI of many kinds, contractors (often long term), gig workers, and employees of other firms in your ecosystem. The edges of the firm are becoming more porous. The ideas of a workplace and a worker are more fluid than they have been in 100 years. It's complicated.

Today, with these work disruptions and changes in social norms, one conclusion we can draw with confidence is that there is no longer such a thing as an *average* worker.

This begs the main question of this book – why should firms expect that having one way to do recruiting, one compensation model, one career path system, and one performance management system will allow all their people to bring their best selves to work?

The concept of *de-averaging* is nothing new. Customer segmentation has been mainstream business thinking for decades (there are even examples from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). The notion that buyers have distinct preferences that can be satisfied with distinct offerings and that they react to distinct messages is conventional. For just one example, the profitable growth and share gain of American Express from the early 1990s, after a period of stagnation, was built on a multiyear sequence of expansions from the original Green charge card to

different spend tiers of charge card (Gold, Platinum) to credit cards to prepaid cards to co-branded credit cards with hotel chains and sports teams to cards for seniors and for students to cards with gift rewards and with cash rewards to corporate cards for purchasing departments and for small businesses – each new offering carefully designed for its distinct customer.

De-averaging has gone into overdrive in the last 20 years, with social media, search, location tracking, and online payments providing the fuel for acceleration. We take for granted how much Google or Amazon or Instagram or Tencent or Alibaba or Little Red or ByteDance or Flipkart or Grab or Careem or Naver or Kakao or Line know about us as consumers and shoppers. For the most part, while there are those who opt out, many of us seem happy to offer our personal information in return for more personalized communications and products.

The mystery is, why have we not applied this same thinking to our workers? Why do the firms who want to sell us their products, or sell our profiles to advertisers, know so much more about what motivates us than the firms we actually work for?

The prevailing ideas about the relationship between worker and firm were forged in a different world than today's, one where workers were viewed mostly as factors of production in the machine of enterprise. Today's firm requires a new mental model, one that humanizes the way we think about work and workers.

If we want all our workers to bring their best selves every day, we have to de-average them, not only on the basis of their skills but on their motivations. And from that understanding, build good jobs and career paths around what they want, not only what suits our systems best.

The Moment

This mystery, like all mysteries, must be seen in its context.

In sector after sector, insurgent firms are creating new ways to meet customer needs and trying to tilt the economic structure of an industry away from historic leaders.

Incumbent firms, with customer assets nurtured over decades, with systems and processes built for scale, can find it hard to be as fast and as responsive to customers as the younger firms with just a fraction of their history; but they are trying, many are succeeding, and more will.

The winning playbook is changing, which should come as no surprise. Looking back through the last several hundred years of business history, since global commerce began in earnest, the idea of the firm has evolved through a series of what we can now discern as definable eras: periods when particular strategies, corporate forms, financing sources, and styles of management are the dominant norm.

The primary trigger of a move from one era to another is the declining cost and increasing speed to move products, money, and information (for example, from horses to ships to railroads to airplanes; from mail to telegraphy to the Internet; from coins to checks to digital payments). Another trigger comes from the ratcheting expectations of consumers for more value and convenience. And there is always the genius of entrepreneur-leaders who find new solutions to the old problems and are willing to go to war with the status quo to serve customers better.

The New Era

Here in the mid-2020s, we are already in transition from one era of business to the next. Inevitably, winning strategies have to embrace new truths.

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The Trade-Off Between Scale and Customer Intimacy Is Over

The first of these new truths is that the traditional trade-off between scale and customer intimacy is no longer a trade-off. Insurgents defy the sacred strategy text of the 1980s,⁴ which laid down that your firm can either be low cost or be differentiated, but not both. How do they defy it? By being both. They see no problem with pursuing the benefits of massive scale (achieving low cost) at the same time as delivering previously unimaginable degrees of customer intimacy (being differentiated). Even the newly termed *hyperscalers* should really be called the *hyperscaler-hyperintimates*, because all of them are both.

Algorithms like Amazon Recommendations or Netflix Suggestions typify the booming capability to offer the benefits of scale (the low cost of Amazon's procurement, warehousing, and distribution network; Netflix's investment in content) combined with extremely high degrees of personalization or customer intimacy. Starbucks offers an intimate relationship with your barista, who knows your name and your daily order, plus the scale-driven benefits of the loyalty program and the mobile ordering app. We are a long way from Henry Ford pursuing the scale benefits of continuous assembly for the Model T by eliminating customer choice completely ("any color, so long as it's black").

New Ways to Manage Workers

The second new truth is about us, the workers.

More work is being automated. More work is being outsourced to ecosystem partners. More firms are testing new methods of working, often with self-managing teams setting their own objectives. More firms want to push decision-making and accountabilities down to the front line, where the

organization meets the customer. There is more use of gig workers and contractors to manage capacity and for specialized expertise, more cross-functional teaming, more peer-to-peer information flow, more continuous feedback rather than once-a-year top-down performance evaluations, more team-based incentives.

With more automation, more outsourcing, and more self-managing teams, head count at the typical firm will fall, all other things equal. Just as measures of plant asset efficiency became less meaningful in a world of outsourced manufacturing, traditional measures of overhead efficiency are losing relevance in the era of scale insurgency. Long-held ideas about appropriate spans and layers are being challenged. In the parts of the business using self-managing teams, for instance, the proper span might not be the usual 6 to 8, but 20, or why not 30?

The role of the generalist professional manager, enshrined at the center of almost all large organizations for the last 100 years, is diminishing, not to nothing, but at least relegated in comparison to the mission-critical roles – those roles that truly deliver the firm's promise to its customers.

Winning insurgents do not organize around professional managers or use spans and layers as their default technique to handle growth. Insurgents value individual contributors just as highly as managers, and some (e.g. Tencent⁵ and Shopify,⁶ two of numerous examples) organize career paths around the choice to become a manager or not.

Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of NVIDIA, the platform computing firm powering much of the current AI advance, has somewhere between 50 and 60 direct reports.⁷ His logic is that CEOs can have a large number of reports because the people who report to a CEO require the least amount of oversight, leaving CEOs with more bandwidth than other managers. This is a

very different way of leading than the traditional “6 to 12” direct CEO reports that became the norm 30 years ago.

We have moved on. We are well advanced into the first phase of the era of scale insurgency. With that move, the norms of talent management are going to change.

This is the moment, and as it meets the mystery, we are seeing an explosion of experiments in people management.

The experiments still have a long way to go before we settle on a set of new norms. The playbook is always being tinkered with and adjusted for special situations. This can be exciting for those in the labs designing the experiments and for the subjects, all of us who work. In one regard, though, the designers in the human resources (HR) labs have gone too far and need to reset.

It is now the conventional wisdom in some parts of the world that what matters above all else is for humans to find their meaning and purpose in their work.

Our research tells a different story. The search for individual meaning and purpose through work, or at work, is very important . . . *but only to some workers*. An extreme version of this search is described in Professor Carolyn Chen’s 2022 book *Work Pray Code*.⁸ Chen explores how Silicon Valley tech companies bring religion into the workplace, replacing traditional forms of worship, blurring the line between work and religion, and transforming the nature of spiritual experience in modern life.

The workers she studies, many of whom are engineers, entrepreneurs, and founders at tech firms, exhibit behaviors associated with religious devotion, such as long hours, zealous commitment to their work, and a sense of mission or calling. Work satisfies their needs for belonging, identity, purpose, and transcendence that religion once met. This must be sensation-ally satisfying for them.

It is true that in some developed, Western societies including the United States, there is a well-documented retreat from organized religion and from the joining of groups and clubs that historically promoted trust and community cohesion. There is a rise in loneliness and isolation. A vacuum has appeared in some people's lives that work could step in to fill.

But we should not make sweeping, averaged-out assumptions about why people go to work and what they are looking for when they get there. Their answers vary so much. For many, it is to provide for the needs of themselves and their family. For others, it's to be with friends and enjoy camaraderie. For others, it's about learning and exploring through work. For others, it's about pursuing milestones and being recognized. None of these motivations should be considered somehow "higher" or "lower" in a hierarchy than the others – they are simply the ones that mean most to that worker at that time in their life. We risk allowing what may be a *WEIRD* (Western Educated Industrial Rich Democratic) perspective about meaning and purpose at work to obscure the reality for the great majority of workers.

Even if we stay in the United States and pull back the camera a little from the intensely narrow confines of Silicon Valley, we will find Beverley, a 45-year-old senior manager at a telecommunications company, who puts it this way: "Honestly, my job is just a job. My meaning and purpose come after I'm done with my work."

We do a grave disservice to Beverley, and the millions of others like her, and we commit a serious mistake in talent management if we conclude that she just has not found her meaning and purpose at work yet, so we must create more ways to nudge her toward it.

To be clear, I am greatly enthused by the search for personal meaning and purpose at work . . . *for those workers who*

care. Some people who search for meaning and purpose in life will look for it outside work, some at work. All these types of worker exist and sit alongside us every day. It is important in the new norms to rewrite the popular (but unsupported) assumption that finding meaning and purpose in work is the ultimate point of arrival for everyone and that those of us who do not are less effective, less productive, and less valuable.

I am also greatly enthused when *firms* develop for themselves a statement of purpose – a mission or vision. I have worked with multiple firms to support them doing precisely this and have seen the powerful integration that a well-considered corporate purpose or mission can bring. There are those for whom a firm's mission is very important as they make career decisions. It varies from country to country but averages out to just over 30% of all workers. They tend to be more satisfied at work than others for whom a firm mission is not important. But this is not the same as expecting individuals to find personal meaning and purpose at work in order to perform well, feel satisfied, and contribute differentially. Many high performers look for no such thing. Let us not assume that worker motivations are more or less all the same, because they aren't.

De-averaged, Re-humanized, Good Jobs

It is time to apply the same tools we have long used with customers to our own workers. Winning firms of the future do this and point the way to a world of work where more good jobs are created and matched to the right individuals.

In the old talent model there were “managers” and “labor.” The underlying assumption was that each employee was a unit, with its own experience and ability, moving through the system to become a better worker, or a better manager, or sometimes

to migrate from laboring to managing. Everyone was trying to improve whatever it was they did, with a goal of rising through the organization. Individual motivations barely mattered at all. This assumption was so pervasive that every aspect of the standard organization model was built around it. Rewards, reporting structures, decision rights, performance reviews – all the elements lined up.

When we explore the archetypes in detail, you will see that there was an unexamined belief baked in to the old norms that most people are *Strivers* at work. Many of the standard talent management systems are built for Strivers – this is part of the reason they are all so alike from one firm to the next.

What's now becoming clear is that some highly effective organization models, including those developed by scale insurgents, do not require every worker to try to advance up the hierarchy. There are plenty of roles where personal progress, results, and success are defined differently.

Also now clear is that it was a myth all along to assume every worker wanted the same path. As you will see, what people want in a job, and who they are at work, is richly varied. A talent system that knows what each wants, what each is stressed by, and what gives each energy can create good jobs for all types of worker – good jobs for the individual and good jobs for their firm.

The six worker archetypes can replace this rudimentary manager/labor taxonomy. Each has its own path to full potential at work, while sharing some common values and behaviors. Understanding archetypes can help all of us be more effective working on diverse teams in diverse organizations. It can help us unlock the potential at the edges of our firm, with older workers, and younger workers. It can help to head off the conflicts between leaders and those they lead that are based

in their different motivations. Understanding archetypes helps us create good jobs, where worker satisfaction and business results converge.

How to Read This Book

This book is for you if you want a new way to understand what motivates you at work every day and why you feel how you feel when you get there. It aims to give you a language for talking with your firm about your current role, your future choices, and your career options. If you have already answered those questions in full, true congratulations: please help the rest of us by sharing your story with colleagues and friends. Gen Z marketers, train engineers, baristas, construction workers, CEOs, board directors – any of us may feel we are in roles that somehow do not fully suit us or that we have had to make too many adjustments in ourselves to meet our firm's expectations about the behaviors and values appropriate for that job. Any of us may equally feel that sense of flow that shows up when we have a good job, which feels like an extension of what we have always wanted to do, with challenges, recognition, relationships, rewards, trust, opportunities to grow, all in just the right proportions for us.

The way to understand the feelings that I describe in this book is not as an abstract psychological riddle, like some other typing frameworks. These archetypes emerged first from listening to tens of thousands of people around the world talk about their jobs, what they value, what they like, what stresses them out, how they deal with the grind, what their fears about work are, how they find confidence in their ability to do a good job; and then from applying common sense to the highlights of those conversations to make them actionable.

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This book is also for you if you are a leader frustrated by the lack of change in your firm's talent systems. You want the same from your people management teams as you do from your product, sales, and marketing teams: different solutions for different profiles and preferences. What follows describes a way to accelerate progress.

In Chapter 1, I tackle the origins of the talent management assumptions and systems that we still see in use today. I retell the story of Frederick Taylor and his Scientific Management method in a way that puts the human worker at the center of his studies. I then look at some of the talent experiments of more recent times.

Chapter 2 describes the six worker archetypes that have emerged from our research. I hope you recognize yourself in one (or maybe more) of the six.

Chapter 3 describes some case studies and observations about putting archetypes into action.

Chapter 4 discusses leaders. They think about the same factors that all workers consider, putting their own weightings on particular values and job attributes and using their own models of decision-making. Two stories – one about Alfred Sloan of General Motors, one about a fourteenth-century Italian entrepreneur – illustrate different archetypes in leadership roles.

In Chapter 5, I talk about energy, stress, and wellness at work. This is a topic of current interest in many workplaces. I try to link general observations with what matters for each archetype.

In Chapter 6, I highlight some of the important differences for older, younger, female and male workers. It is important to understand these differences if we are going to build successful, diverse, multigenerational workplaces.

Chapter 7 concludes the book with more discussion of good jobs. Encouraging firms to build good jobs rooted in the skills they need *and* the motivation of each archetype is the ultimate objective of this book. What are good jobs, and how can we get better at creating them?

One more thing. You will enjoy this book more if you know your own archetype. Go to <https://www.bain.com/insights/six-worker-archetypes-for-the-world-ahead-future-of-work-report-interactive> and answer the quick quiz. It takes just a minute.

By the way, I am a Striver. There is a lot of Giver in me too, it turns out. I had to become an older worker to understand that.