

Feeling stuck?

Design your happiness through experimentation

Do you ever feel like your life is on autopilot? Are you seeking ways to optimise your wellbeing and professional performance? Have you ever felt stuck in a rut, yearning for something more? Life experimentation is a practical way of breaking free. It's about daring to step outside your comfort zone, trying new things, and discovering what brings you fulfilment, says **Beverly Landais**.

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The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines experimentation as 'the action or process of trying new ideas, methods or activities'. Conducting experiments allows businesses to explore different options without fully committing significant time, energy and resources. The learning gained can be put to good use to make better-informed decisions about which option to pursue.

Many organisations use pilots or trials to limit downsides and learn from the results. One famous example of experimentation is X, The Moonshot Factory, established by Google in 2010, which encourages high failure rates to advance innovations. Of course, Google has vast resources, but this doesn't mean smaller entities with more modest resources should ignore experimentation – quite the opposite. Properly scoped and managed testing can save time and money by providing valuable proof of concept.

What is life experimentation?

Great for business, but what about as an individual? Thinking about experimentation from a lifestyle and career point of view can be daunting as it can be hard to know where to start. However, by designing an experiment to test drive your potential new career or a business opportunity, you can take control and feel more confident about your choices.



A lifestyle experiment is a personal version of what well-run businesses always do. It involves testing new approaches to living, working and interacting with others. Once the investigation is complete, you can decide if the impact is positive or negative and whether you wish to continue the change.

The STOP, START, CONTINUE, SWAP, CREATE, TRACK framework

Ready to start experimenting? Try the STOP, START, CONTINUE, SWAP, CREATE, TRACK framework. For instance, stop scrolling through social media, start a morning meditation practice, continue your healthy eating habits, swap your evening TV for a book, create a new hobby and track your progress. It's simple, effective and adaptable to any area of your life.

Looking for inspiration? Try these simple lifestyle experiments:

- Deactivating or pausing social media accounts.
- Walking outside for 30 minutes a day.
- Cooking a meal from scratch using fresh produce.
- Go plastic-free or zero-waste.
- Read a book that you would not usually pick up.

Experimentation for career growth

If you want to go deeper and consider more significant changes in your professional life, here is a four-step process to get you started.

Step 1.

Clarify the purpose of your research. What do you hope to gain from conducting the test? You will only gain valuable insight from the results if you know this. What assumptions do you intend to evaluate? Be clear about what you know and what you assume. List the facts, then list your deductions. What questions do you want to answer?

Step 2.

Give each experiment an adequate level of resource and emotional commitment. Running several tests is possible and may be desirable; however, beware of firing off in too many directions, as this will likely be less rewarding and potentially exhausting.

Step 3.

Weed out the bad fits before you begin. Do this by reviewing your strengths (the things you love doing and are good at). If you need more clarification

Remember Walt Disney's wise words: 'The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.'

about your strengths, try taking the free VIA Character Strengths Test. This test, created by a team of scientists led by Dr Martin Seligman, the founder of Positive Psychology, measures your character strengths and values. The survey has been used in hundreds of research studies and taken by over five million people in over 190 countries.

Then, audit your resources (time, energy, money and people who might help and support you). Think through your potential options for the experiment. Where would you like to spend your time? Visualise the practical steps you would take on each shortlisted option, starting with your favourite and working down to your least favourite. Whittle the list down further by asking yourself:

- Do I buy into this option?
- Does it play to my strengths?
- Does it resonate with my values?
- Will this option stretch me and allow me to grow my skills?

If successful, will it make me happy, proud and personally fulfilled?

Step 4.

Design and run your experiment. Now that you have a shortlist of potential tests, it is time to act. Trying something out is the only way to know if it is for you. There are countless approaches to trying different ways of working and exploring new horizons. Remember, the idea is to collect as much information with as little effort as possible, so keep it simple.

Here are just a few ideas to get you started. Each experiment is a journey of discovery, so embrace the excitement and engagement it brings:

- Talk to people who have already earned their living by doing what you want. Be open about your motives

and polite with your request, as it will impact their time. Ask how they became experts in their field, what they enjoy about it, and what tips they can offer you.

- Identify people willing to support and help you to create a small pool of trusted advisors. Explain what you are attempting to do and be specific about what you want. You could offer a test pilot of your new idea to someone you trust who can review it and provide critical feedback.
- Try volunteering to explore new possibilities in a field you are testing. You'll gain experience, allowing you to network with people who work in your target sector and do the type of work you hope to do. One connection can lead to another, which might result in exciting opportunities you didn't know existed.
- Sign up for a short course on the subject of your career experiment. You can blend quality digital learning, such as edX, with in-person workshops run by adult education centres. Doing so will maximise the benefits of exposure to fresh ideas and enable you to test given assumptions while enjoying a shared experience.
- Go Zen and foster a 'beginner's mind' by being open to possibilities. Embark on each experiment with curiosity and eagerness to learn. Work hard at it. If it succeeds, you can take the test to the next level and plan for the longer term. If it doesn't, you will still have discovered something valuable. Experiment, learn and then decide which options you will pursue.

Feeling stuck is frustrating. Get unstuck with using lifestyle and career experiments that can you design and control. Doing simple things and trying out ideas will freshen your thinking. Being reminded that you are resourceful motivates you to make the changes you want for a happier and improved quality of life. ■

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