

THREE TIER DISCOVERY FRAMEWORK:

A Taxonomy of Scientific Discovery Modes

The Founder, The Expander, and The Destroyer

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a three-tier taxonomy of scientific discovery modes. Three individuals stand at a traffic signal: one sees yellow — a flag of ordered natural law. One sees red — a parrot wing of broken symmetry. One sees green — a skirt, something entirely outside the framework of the signal itself. These are not hierarchical levels of ability. They are orthogonal cognitive orientations operating at different temporal positions relative to the founding framework. The paper introduces a critical distinction: the three tiers are not simultaneous equals but temporally sequenced orientations — the Founder (Tier 1) builds the base, the Expander (Tier 2) decodes and extends it from within, the Destroyer (Tier 3) returns to the original observation as if the base never existed. All three are necessary. The Destroyer is always present but almost always ignored — first because the framework is too new to destroy, then because it is still productive to expand, and finally because no institutional channel was ever built to receive them. The paper proposes making the productive conditions of Tier 1 and Tier 2 deliberate institutional practices, before the Destroyer of each generation is lost.

1. INTRODUCTION — THREE VIEWS AT THE TRAFFIC SIGNAL

Three individuals stand at a traffic signal. The light changes.

The first sees yellow — a flag. An ordered symbol in a rule-governed system. Everything has its place. The system is comprehensible, navigable, and extensible. This person builds the framework.

The second sees red — a parrot wing. Something in the colour triggers a pattern recognition outside the domain of traffic signals. A structural connection between phenomena previously considered unrelated. This person finds the crack in the framework and extends it.

The third sees green — a skirt passing by. They were not looking at the signal at all. They were not operating inside the framework of traffic signals, traffic rules, or the shared assumption that the signal is the relevant object. From outside the framework entirely, they noticed something the other two could not notice precisely because they were paying attention to the signal.

These are not levels of intelligence. They are orientations positioned differently in time relative to the founding framework. All three are necessary. None is sufficient alone. Science has systematically remembered one and ignored the other two.

2. THE THREE TIERS — DEFINITIONS

Tier 1 — The Founder (Framework Builder)

The Founder makes a founding observation and builds the first framework to explain it. Newton observing falling objects. Darwin observing species variation. Faraday observing compass deflection near a wire. Mendel observing pea plant inheritance.

The Founder's cognitive orientation: deep focused attention on a specific phenomenon, combined with the capacity to extract a general principle from a particular observation. The framework-building capacity is the Founder's primary contribution.

Required conditions: Sufficient leisure for sustained observation and reflection. Access to the phenomenon. Freedom from institutional pressure to produce incremental results. Newton's apple garden. Darwin's Beagle. Faraday's Royal Institution laboratory.

Temporal position: At the inception of the framework. The concept is at infancy. The species is at infancy with respect to this domain. The Founder has no predecessors in this territory.

Limitation: The framework the Founder builds necessarily contains invisible assumptions — premises so fundamental that the Founder does not recognise them as choices. These assumptions constrain all subsequent work within the framework. They constitute the Foundational Remainder. Note: The Destroyer (Tier 3) exists at Tier 1 inception too, but is irrelevant at this stage — there is no framework yet to return from. The Destroyer watches, absorbs the founding observation, and waits.

Tier 2 — The Expander (Framework Decoder)

The Expander inherits an established framework and finds the crack — the invisible assumption that the Founder left unquestioned. The Expander does not demolish the founding framework. They extend it by removing one foundational constraint.

Einstein inheriting Newton's mechanics. Maxwell inheriting Faraday's electromagnetism. Crick and Watson inheriting Mendel's genetics.

The Expander's cognitive orientation: deep familiarity with the existing framework combined with sufficient distance from it to notice what it assumes. The productive tension between insider knowledge and outsider perspective is the Expander's characteristic cognitive state.

Required conditions: Full mastery of the founding framework. Simultaneous exposure to an anomaly the framework cannot explain. Sufficient institutional freedom to pursue the anomaly rather than explain it away. Einstein's patent office — full knowledge of physics, distance from academic consensus, freedom to ask naive questions.

Temporal position: Born into the world the Founder built. The Expander is a peer of the Founder in cognitive ability but of a different generation. Had the Expander lived alongside the Founder, they could not have done what they did — their observer point would have been too short. The framework needed time to mature and reveal its cracks before the Expander could find them. The Expander has the best shot at decoding the missing data precisely because of this fortunate timing.

The Destroyer (Tier 3) also exists at Tier 2 time. The Expander encounters them and largely ignores them — understandably. The Expander worked hard to decode the Founder's framework. The framework still has enormous productive value. The species agrees: still worth milking the foundation and adding tweaks. The Destroyer is ignored not because the Expander is wrong, but because the timing is not yet right.

Limitation: The Expander operates within the founding framework's domain. The crack they find is inside the framework's boundary. They extend the building. They do not question whether the building should be built at all.

Tier 3 — The Destroyer (Framework Returner)

The Destroyer operates outside all established frameworks. They do not inherit assumptions because they either do not know them or deliberately refuse to start from them. Every derivation starts from the original phenomenon — not from the existing framework. The Destroyer is not the end of a cycle but the beginning of the next one: a return to the founding observation with the entire subsequent history as context that the Founder never had.

This cognitive orientation is called Zero Cache Thinking: deriving from first principles every time, without the inherited assumptions of the field. The Destroyer frequently arrives independently at conclusions already known to the field — confirming the validity of the reasoning — and occasionally arrives somewhere the field has never been, because they took a path the framework had made invisible.

Required conditions: The conditions that produce Tier 3 thinking are almost entirely conditions of exclusion. No formal training in the field. No career dependent on the existing framework being correct. No peers to inherit assumptions from. No grants requiring incremental results. The productive cognitive state of Tier 3 is generated accidentally by marginalisation.

Temporal position: The Destroyer exists at all times — at Tier 1 inception, at Tier 2 expansion, and at the limits of the framework. At inception, irrelevant — nothing to destroy. At expansion, ignored — foundation still productive. At the limit — finally needed. But by this time, no institutional channel has been built to receive them. The Destroyer of each generation is lost before the species recognises the need.

Limitation: The Destroyer has no institutional mechanism for communicating findings. No credential. No peer review network. No publication infrastructure. The thinking happens. It frequently evaporates.

3. THE TEMPORAL HIERARCHY — NOT ABILITY, BUT TIMING

The three tiers are not a hierarchy of ability. They are a hierarchy of timing.

The Founder (Tier 1) must exist first — the base must be built before it can be expanded or destroyed. This is a temporal necessity, not a statement of superiority.

The Expander (Tier 2) cannot do what the Founder did, not because the Expander is less capable, but because the founding observation is already framed by the time the Expander arrives. The Expander sees the framework, not the raw phenomenon. This is not a failure — it is the condition that makes the Expander's contribution possible. You cannot find the crack in a building that does not yet exist.

The Destroyer (Tier 3) cannot productively operate until the framework has been built and expanded to the point where its limits become visible. A Destroyer at the moment of Founder inception has nothing to return from. The framework must mature before the return journey has value.

All three views are necessary. The Founder builds. The Expander extends. The Destroyer returns to the origin and begins the next cycle. Remove any one — the process stalls. A science of only Founders produces disconnected frameworks. A science of only Expanders produces incremental progress until the invisible wall. A science of only Destroyers produces brilliant isolated derivations that connect to nothing and evaporate.

4. THE SUFFERING CONDITION

Each tier requires specific conditions to operate. These conditions are rarely chosen deliberately. They arise from circumstance.

The Founder (Tier 1) requires leisure, access, and freedom. These are conditions of privilege. The apple garden is not accidental.

The Expander (Tier 2) requires mastery plus anomaly plus freedom. The patent office — boring, unglamorous, full of technical detail, outside the academic consensus machine — was accidentally the perfect condition.

The Destroyer (Tier 3) requires exclusion from the framework. No credentials. No career inside the system. No peers to inherit from. These are conditions of marginalisation. The 391 dollars a month transformer marketing engineer. The Nigerian STEM girl who walked into the lab without the memo about what questions are already settled.

Institutional science systematically produces the conditions for Tier 1 through research infrastructure and the conditions for Tier 2 through graduate training and postdoctoral positions. It produces the conditions for Tier 3 accidentally, through exclusion, and then fails to capture the output because the Destroyer has no institutional home.

5. THE PROPOSAL — MAKING TIERS 1 AND 2 MAINSTREAM

The Destroyer (Tier 3) cannot be institutionalised without destroying what makes Tier 3 productive. The exclusion is the condition. Giving the Destroyer a grant and a laboratory turns them into a Founder or Expander.

What can be institutionalised are the productive practices of Tier 1 and Tier 2 that currently happen accidentally:

- Tier 1 (Founder) practice: Mandatory preservation of the founder's pre-discovery raw notes, abandoned approaches, and unresolved questions. The Foundational Remainder of any discovery is most visible in the founder's confusion before the framework crystallised. Make this confusion mandatory public record — the Mandatory Author Self Critique standard.
- Tier 2 (Expander) practice: Systematic training in invisible assumption identification. The Expander finds the crack accidentally — through anomaly exposure and distance from

consensus. This process can be partially formalised through the Foundational Remainder methodology: for every established framework, identify the founding observation, the invisible assumption, and the unmined remainder.

- Tier 3 (Destroyer) capture: Create low-friction submission channels for framework-independent derivations. No credential required. Prior art search conducted by the institution, not the submitter. The Destroyer submits the raw derivation. The institution does the classification.

These three practices do not replace the Destroyer. They ensure that when the Destroyer of each generation is gone — as fertilizer, departed to fertilize other planets — the methodology partially survives and the next cycle can begin without waiting for another accidental exclusion to produce another Tier 3.

6. AUTHOR'S SELF-CRITIQUE — MASC STANDARD

In the spirit of Mandatory Author Self Critique (Budinny V, 2026), the following is disclosed:

- This taxonomy was derived from self-observation. The author identifies as Tier 3 (Destroyer). The framework may be constructed to validate that identification.
- The temporal hierarchy proposed here — Founder must precede Expander must precede Destroyer's productive moment — is presented as logical necessity. Historical exceptions may exist and are not examined.
- The claim that Tier 3 requires exclusion as a necessary condition is based on historical pattern recognition, not controlled experiment. Counter-examples may exist.
- The three tiers may not be exhaustive. Other orientations may exist that this taxonomy does not capture.
- The proposal to institutionalise Tier 1 and Tier 2 practices assumes these practices can be separated from the conditions that generate them. This assumption is not proven.

REFERENCES

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"Three stood at the traffic signal. One saw the rule. One saw the crack. One saw the skirt. Science needed all three and remembered only one." — March 14, 2026

"The Destroyer is always present. Always ignored. First because it is too early. Then because the foundation is still productive. Then because nobody built the channel." — March 14, 2026