

THE TEACHER'S QUEST FOR PROGRESS:

How school leaders can motivate instructional innovation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teacher education is ripe with ideas for improving teaching and learning. Unfortunately, when education leaders translate those ideas into school-based initiatives, many fall short of their aims. Even those with generous philanthropic backing, a solid research grounding, and careful planning and design all too often miss their intended marks.

One major reason school initiatives fail is because they are coercive. Well-intentioned leaders thrust new programs into classrooms in a top-down manner and compel teachers to change their practices to keep up with the new program. Lackluster results then follow because the initiatives never account for the goals, struggles, and day-to-day priorities of the professional educators charged with faithful implementation.

To increase the likelihood of an initiative's success, education leaders need to consider the true interests and motivations of their teachers. But understanding how to align an initiative with teachers is neither simple nor obvious. Leaders often fall into a few common traps: expecting strong support for an initiative based on its perceived virtues; tailoring initiatives to group demographics; creating solutions for product categories rather than people; and listening to what people say rather than what they do.

The Jobs to Be Done Theory offers a valuable framework—validated through research across many sectors—for understanding what causes people to adopt new products, services, or initiatives. All people have Jobs to Be Done in their lives—the progress they are trying to make as they strive toward a goal or aspiration within particular life circumstances. We call these Jobs because just as people ‘hire’ contractors to help them build houses or lawyers to help them build a case, people search for something they can ‘hire’ to help them when ‘Jobs’ arise in their lives.

Through interviewing teachers who had recently adopted new instructional practices in their classrooms—such as blended learning or project-based learning—we uncovered four distinct Jobs that characterize how many teachers strive to make progress with their students and in their classrooms.

1. Help me lead the way in improving my school
2. Help me engage and challenge more of my students in a way that's manageable
3. Help me replace a broken instructional model so I can reach each student
4. Help me to not fall behind on my school's new initiative

As we uncovered teachers' Jobs, one key takeaway became clear: one-size-fits-all initiatives rarely offer acceptable solutions for all the varied Jobs among a school's teaching staff. For example, an initiative that appeals to teachers with the “Help me lead the way in improving my school” Job will likely fall flat among teachers with the “Help me replace a broken instructional model so I can reach each student” Job because it does not offer radical enough alternatives to the status quo. Likewise, a teacher with the Job of “Help me to not fall behind on my school's new initiative” approaches new initiatives very differently from a teacher focused on “Help me engage and challenge more of my students.” Jobs Theory reveals that teachers need qualitatively different experiences to fulfill their Jobs to Be Done. In the body of this paper, we recommend ways to design initiatives for teachers experiencing each of these Jobs.

We hope that this research shifts how school leaders and policymakers think about education reform, instructional innovation, and change management. The success or failure of any school improvement initiative hinges on how well the teachers on the frontlines carry that initiative forward. If such reforms hope to deliver on the progress they promise, they should start with a clearer picture of the progress that teachers themselves are seeking.

INTRODUCTION

Year after year, governments, philanthropies, and school system leaders across the United States spend millions of dollars to try and fix whatever ails public education. Their new ideas range from significant policy-level reforms—such as common standards, test-based accountability, and teacher evaluation systems—to ideas that strike closer to the classroom—like personalizing learning, teaching 21st-century skills, and Multi-tiered Systems of Support. At the center of most of these reforms are efforts to change behavior among the second largest constituency in education after students: teachers.

Despite all their promise, few of these efforts seem to move the needle. Recently, nationwide student achievement levels have stalled, which suggests that broad-sweeping reforms of the last decade have had a marginal impact.¹ Meanwhile, results from school-level improvement efforts have not fared much better. For example, the RAND Corporation recently investigated a multi-year initiative to boost school performance through better teacher evaluation systems, only to find that the initiative did not lead to any significant gains in student achievement or graduation.² Nevertheless, countless policymakers, foundations, and industry thought leaders continue to brainstorm ideas to improve schools, and then impose them on teachers in a top-down manner.

Yet teachers are not just bystanders who must handle downstream effects of school improvement. They are the primary agents for making any initiative work. As schools' daily points of contact with students and sources of instruction, they have a significant, direct influence on student outcomes. Reams of research confirm that teachers impact students' success more than anything else a school has to offer. In short, the success of any school improvement hinges on teachers.

As we have studied why initiatives so often fail, we have observed that they do not fail flat because educators do not care or do not work hard. We also do not think these struggles exist because there are no good ideas or solutions for improving teaching. Nor do we find change to be impossible.

Instead, we believe one key reason most school-improvement initiatives struggle to gain traction is that they are coercive. Rather than attending to what teachers demand, these initiatives tend to tell teachers what they need. The field has not sought to understand the actual *progress* that teachers are already trying to make, both in their own lives and in the lives of their students.



One key reason most school-improvement initiatives struggle to gain traction is that they are coercive.

In other words, education leaders and policymakers have missed out on understanding the circumstances in which teachers are operating and their real motivations.

With support from the Fremont Street Fund, a national nonprofit philanthropy dedicated to catalyzing and scaling educator-led innovation in public schools, we embarked on a research effort to understand the underlying causes that drove teachers to adopt new teaching practices—such as blended learning, mastery-based learning, or project-based learning. What we discovered supports the research that we have done in other fields. Teachers, like all of us, look for better alternatives when the status quo isn't working. They change their habits and behavior when circumstances in their lives cause them to find new approaches to accomplishing the things they are already trying to get done.

By understanding these motivations through what we call the “Jobs to Be Done” framework, we pieced together four different Jobs that cause teachers to make instructional changes in their classrooms. In essence, different teachers find themselves in different circumstances. Sometimes they want their schools to improve. Sometimes they are looking for practical strategies and tools to make the classroom experience more engaging. Sometimes they struggle with feeling powerless to meet the individual needs of every student. And sometimes they want to keep from falling behind on a school-wide initiative that has little appeal to them otherwise.

This paper is a guide for any school leaders, district administrators, technical assistance providers, policymakers, and foundations whose reform initiatives hinge on whether teachers decide to embrace new practices. The Jobs that animate teachers' decisions allow us to see what experiences will help them accomplish the things about which they care. With this understanding, education leaders can design initiatives, products, and services that teachers are motivated to adopt. To make sense of this, we first offer an overview of the Jobs to Be Done framework, then a deep dive into our research findings and recommendations.

FOUR MISSTEPS IN BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Despite the best intentions of the people or organizations who design new initiatives, far too many “solutions” languish either unused or poorly implemented and never achieve their desired impact.

Education systems are no stranger to the chasm between ambitious reforms and disappointing results. These failures often stem from at least one of the following four mistakes:

- 1. Believing that just because someone “needs to” or “should” do something, he or she will.** Organizations with a social mission often launch services that don’t take off even though the solution is irrefutably worthwhile and addresses a “need.” For example, after the USDA updated its school lunch guidelines, cafeterias across the country replaced pizza with fresh vegetables; but as lunch trays got healthier, the number of students purchasing school lunches took a nosedive.³ Nutritious eating is not a goal most kids have, even if it is a “need” they “should” address.
- 2. Grouping people by demographics.** Categories such as “millennials,” “stay-at-home moms” or “upper-elementary teachers” aim to align new initiatives with common needs. The problem with these categories, however, is that they lump people together by surface-level characteristics that only correlate loosely with the different circumstances and challenges individuals face. This shallow categorization, in turn, leads to one-size-fits-all offerings that don’t serve anyone well. For example, two fifth-grade teachers in an urban school district might be working with students confronting very different challenges—one teacher needs new classroom management strategies to better support a student with ADHD whereas another needs methods for teaching math to a few students who are non-English-speaking refugees. Yet school systems are often tempted to offer them the same professional development regardless of those different circumstances.
- 3. Designing initiatives to fit a product category rather than to address people’s circumstances.** By framing an initiative as part of a category of like initiatives, organizations load up on all the “right” or “best” features of that category without addressing the actual circumstances people are struggling to improve. District leaders, for example, may overlook digital curricula in their curriculum adoption process if the digital curricula does not check off all the predetermined criteria on a curriculum evaluation rubric. As a result, curriculum providers must layer in all the requirements and features that a district might list in the



Experts suggest we should listen to what people say and build accordingly. The counterintuitive reality is that, without meaning to, people frequently misrepresent what they want because they don't actually know what they want.

hopes of gaining adoption, even if many of those features will never be used or might even detract from its quality.

4. Listening to what people say rather than watching what they do. Countless experts and books suggest we should listen to what people say and build accordingly. The counterintuitive reality is that, without meaning to, people frequently misrepresent what they want because they don't actually know what they want. Consider recent innovations in the textbook industry.⁴ During market research interviews, students and their teachers expressed enthusiasm for books that included online links to websites where they could learn more about topics covered at only a cursory level in the books. In response, textbook companies spent several billion dollars creating websites where students could explore topics more deeply. As it turns out, however, very few students ever click on those links. What most students really are trying to get done in their lives—as evidenced by what they do, rather than what they say—is simply to pass the course without having to read the textbook at all.

With these mistakes as a backdrop, consider some of the conventional approaches to improving teaching. Every year districts spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for their teachers to attend professional development workshops. Yet all too often, when administrators poke their heads in at these events, they find their teachers only semi-engaged in the workshop as they focus on more urgent tasks like grading papers, planning lessons, or catching up on email. Professional development intends to help teachers hone their expertise. But from the perspective of many teachers, attending one-size-fits-all workshops is not a compelling solution to the daily challenges they face in their classrooms.

THE JOBS TO BE DONE FRAMEWORK

In all the cases noted above, the proposed solutions fall short because they do not help users do what they were already trying to get done. Fortunately, the Jobs to be Done theory, which Bob Moesta, along with Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen, created, is a powerful tool for understanding people's motivations and the outcomes they desire in particular circumstances. The theory does this by uncovering the factors that actually cause people to change course and pull new solutions into their lives. This focus on uncovering causality allows us to understand how to design initiatives in ways that both align with teachers' aims and achieve school- or system-wide impact.

We all have Jobs to be Done in our lives—the progress that we are trying to make in a particular circumstance. The choice of the word “progress” is intentional. It represents movement, or a process, toward a goal or aspiration. A Job is rarely a discrete event. It's also not necessarily just a “problem” that arises, although it can be.

As teachers attested to in their own stories of deciding to make instructional changes, sometimes those changes are answers to a problem they were facing, and other times they made changes with no pressing problem in sight. Though in all cases, the decision was a process.⁵

We call these Jobs because just as people “hire” contractors to help them build houses or lawyers to help them build a case, as ‘Jobs’ arise in people's lives, they look around for something they can ‘hire’ to help them. Jobs are how people experience life. Understanding the Job helps us understand *why* people do the things they do and what their underlying motivation is. For example, one of our earlier research studies found that commuters with a long trip to work purchase smoothies in the morning not just because they need something for breakfast, but because they need something that mitigates stress and boredom while one of their hands is busy guiding a steering wheel. In that context, smoothies don't compete in a ‘beverages’ product category to satisfy the hydration preferences of the 25- to 44-year-olds demographic group. They compete against coffee, bananas, donuts, and granola bars, to address the Jobs of commuters of all ages. In other words, the Job—and not the attributes of the customer or the solution—should be the fundamental unit of analysis for decision-making.

The Forces of Progress

It's easiest to understand the dimensions of someone's Job when he “hires” a new solution—and “fires” an old one. As people make these choices, several forces act on them, as depicted in Figure 1. The first two are forces moving them toward the new solution.

There is the *push of the situation*—the moments of struggle that cause someone to want to take action. The push of the current situation is about what is taking place in someone's life to cause him to feel he needs to change and make some progress differently. The second force is the *pull of a new solution* to satisfy the Job to be Done. Without this, people will stay on a treadmill—thinking that they must do something different, but not acting. That new solution must be enticing. It must create some magnetism and allure, so people can see how it can improve their lives.

Organizations typically spend a lot of time focusing on creating pull for a new situation. Automakers run television ads that paint a picture of the adventurous or luxurious life a buyer could have from the driver's seat of one of their cars. Edtech companies make upbeat YouTube videos showcasing how much students and teachers love the fun and user-friendly features of their products. Many companies add more features to try and entice people to the new solution. But just as, if not more, important in causing a customer to hire anything—from a new car to an LMS, to a new teaching strategy— is addressing two forces opposing change.

The first is the *anxiety of the new solution*. As people consider a new solution, they start thinking about all the things they might not be able to accomplish with it. Will it deliver on its promises? Will they be able to use it? Is it too expensive? How will they learn to use something so new? That anxiety—that fear of the unknown—deters people from adopting a new solution.

The second force acting against a switch is the *habit of the present*. “I’m used to doing it this way,” or “I don’t love this, but at least I know it works,” are classic habits of the present. The thought of switching to a new solution is almost too overwhelming. Sticking with the “devil you know,” even if imperfect, feels safer.

All too often organizations don’t spend enough time reducing anxiety or even asking people about the anxiety of a situation. For example, eliminating features can often reduce anxiety because they might be overwhelming. As another example, mobile telephone companies have recently realized that locking people into two-year contracts creates so much anxiety that it prevents them from signing up in the first place.⁶

Figure 1. The Forces of Progress



Seeing Jobs in the wild

An example outside of education illustrates how these four forces that define a Job come to bear as people seek progress in their struggles. A decade ago, Bob Moesta was charged with helping bolster sales of new homes and condominiums for a midsize Detroit-area building company in an increasingly challenging market.⁷ The company had targeted downsizers, such as retirees looking to move out of the family home. The units they had developed were priced to appeal to that segment—\$120,000 to \$200,000—with high-end touches to give a sense of luxury: “squeakless” floors, triple waterproof basements with Tyvek brand wrapping, granite counters and stainless-steel appliances. Buyers could customize every detail imaginable—from the knobs on cabinets to the tiles in the bathroom; the company offered a thirty-page checklist of potential choices. A well-staffed sales team was available six days a week for any prospective buyer who walked in the door. A lavish ad campaign was splashed across the relevant Sunday real estate sections.

But, despite having lots of traffic to their units, few visits ended up converting to a sale. Although the company had calculated the cost-benefit analysis of all the details in each unit, it had little idea what made the difference between attracting a tire-kicker and a serious buyer. It was easy to speculate about the reasons for poor sales: lousy weather, underperforming salespeople, the looming recession, holiday slowdowns, competitors’ offerings, and the condos’ location. The focus was on what else the company might add to the condos to make them appeal to buyers. None of it was working.

But Moesta took a different approach. He interviewed people who had already bought a unit to learn what Job they were hiring the condominium to do. His conversations revealed an unusual clue: the dining room table.

Prospective customers who came through the units repeatedly told the company they wanted a big living room, a large second bedroom for guests and visitors, and a breakfast bar to make entertaining company easy and casual. But as it turned out, those who had bought a unit focused on the dining room table. They kept saying, “As soon as I could figure out what to do with my dining room table, then I was free to move.” People’s dining room table was causing anxiety among prospective buyers. Peculiarly, in many cases, the dining room table in question was old and unattractive and probably best suited for charity—or relegated to the local dump.

But as Moesta sat at his own dining room table with his family over Christmas, he suddenly understood. Every birthday was spent around that table. Every Christmas. Homework was spread out on the table. The children had made forts under it. Even the dings and scratches all had a story. The table represented family. The life they had built together. “That was a ‘wow!’ moment for me,” he recalled. “I realized that was huge.”

What was stopping buyers from deciding to move was not something that the construction company had failed to offer, but rather the anxiety it failed to address. The company was inadvertently asking customers to give up something that had profound meaning. One interviewee talked about needing days—and multiple boxes of tissues—to clean out just one closet in her house in preparation for the move. Every decision about what she had enough space to keep in the new location was emotional: old photos, children’s first-grade art projects, scrapbooks. “She was reflecting on her life,” Moesta said. “Every choice felt like she was discarding a memory.”

“I went in thinking we were in the business of new home construction,” Moesta said. “But I realized we were instead in the business of moving lives.” The Job to be Done for people looking to downsize was not about the features of the new property they told the company they wanted. The actual Job was “help me make a major life transition without discarding my past.”

With this understanding of the Job to be Done, the company made dozens of small, but important, changes to the offering. For example, the architect managed to create space in the units for a classic dining room table by reducing the size of the second bedroom by 20%. The company also focused on helping buyers with the anxiety of the move itself by fixing up the houses people were moving out of to get them ready to sell, and providing moving services. It even offered two years of storage and a “sorting room” space on the premises where new owners could take their time making decisions about what to keep and what to discard without the pressure of a looming move. Instead of thirty pages of customized choices, which overwhelmed buyers, the company offered three variations of finished units—a change that quickly reduced the “cold feet” contract cancellations from five or six a month to one.

Everything was designed to signal to buyers: we get you. We understand the progress you’re trying to make and the struggle to get there. Understanding the Job enabled the company to get to the causal mechanism of why its customers might pull this solution into their lives. It was complex, but not complicated.

By 2007, when sales in the homebuilding industry were off by 49% and the market all around them was plummeting, the developers had grown the business 25%.

Bob’s story illustrates how focusing on what people *should* do—move and downsize their homes as they age—often obscures our ability to understand the desire for progress that *causes* them to pull particular solutions into their lives. It also shows how addressing the habits and anxieties that keep people from making progress can be just as important as attracting them to new ways of doing.

With the understanding of what a Job is and how it plays out in day-to-day decisions, we can now dive into an overview of our research and the four Jobs we discovered that teachers have when they decide to hire new approaches to instruction.



WHICH JOBS CAUSE TEACHERS TO “HIRE” NEW INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES?

In our research, we gathered several hundred data points by interviewing teachers from public schools across a variety of contexts and geographic regions. These teachers had one thing in common: they recently made a switch to a new instructional practice, such as blended learning or project-based learning (PBL).

During the interviews, we asked teachers to describe their experiences as if we were creating “mini-documentaries” of why and how they made the switch to a new instructional practice. These mini-documentaries allowed us to capture the forces moving them toward the new practice, as well as those holding them back, by using the language of the teachers themselves. We then did a cluster analysis of the interviews based on the similarities among their forces of progress. From this analysis, four distinct Jobs emerged that characterize why teachers hired an instructional change:

1. Help me lead the way in improving my school
2. Help me engage and challenge more of my students in a way that’s manageable
3. Help me replace a broken instructional model so I can reach each student
4. Help me to not fall behind on my school’s new initiative

We then conducted a survey of 102 teachers to validate those Jobs and deepen our understanding of them. The survey results confirmed that the teachers beyond our interview sample commonly experienced the Jobs we identified. The survey results also helped us pressure test the language we used to characterize the Jobs and provided us with valuable feedback for refining how we describe the Jobs so that they more strongly resonated with the forces and circumstances teachers experience in their day-to-day lives.

Before proceeding to our discussion of these Jobs, readers should consider a few important notes regarding how to interpret our findings.

First, the four Jobs we uncovered are not collectively exhaustive of every possible way a teacher may seek progress. These Jobs merely outline the

most common contours in how teachers we interviewed decided to make instructional shifts. Additional interviews could reveal additional forces and additional Jobs. Nonetheless, given the frequency with which common forces of progress emerged in our interviews, we believe that the Jobs we identified provide a fairly comprehensive understanding of the Jobs that most teachers are trying to fulfill.

Second, some forces of progress show up in multiple Jobs. For example, both the teachers looking for better ways to engage students and the teachers looking to reinvent their instruction were pushed to find new instructional practices by seeing significant gaps in students’ academic abilities and spending a lot of time trying to keep up with the variation. Also, a teacher experiencing a particular Job may not experience every force of progress we associate with that Job.

Third, individual teachers can experience multiple Jobs over the course of their careers. Under the right circumstances, any teacher could experience any job, and many different Jobs can motivate most teachers. Teachers shift from one Job to another as their circumstances change. Thus, Jobs should not be thought of as personas for different types of teachers, but instead as demands that arise in a teacher’s life as he seeks to make progress in a given circumstance. For example, someone might buy a smoothie during a Monday morning rush-hour commute to fulfill one Job, but then hire a smoothie to fulfill a very different Job after a Saturday afternoon workout.

Lastly, Jobs are not solutions. Rather, they are like guardrails that define the parameters of effective solutions. Understanding teachers’ various Jobs makes clear what an initiative must do to satisfy teachers in their quest for progress, but Jobs do not prescribe the means for making progress happen. They provide the ruler for measuring a solution against desired outcomes

Understanding teachers' various Jobs makes clear what an initiative must do to satisfy teachers in their quest for progress. Yet, this understanding of Jobs does not prescribe the means for making progress happen.

but do not provide the mechanisms for achieving those outcomes. In the home downsizers' example above, understanding the attachment to memories uncovered the Job. But coming up with strategies to address that Job—such as larger dining rooms, fewer choices in home features, and two years of storage—was another task altogether.

Below we elaborate on our findings. We first provide short vignettes about four teachers who hired new instructional strategies to fulfill one of the four Jobs. In these vignettes, teachers' names and story details are fictitious, but based on elements of stories from actual teachers we interviewed. Following each vignette, we provide descriptions of each of the Jobs. Lastly, we give recommendations for how to design school initiatives that teachers with each Job will want to hire

Given the early nature of this research, we invite practitioners and other researchers to strengthen and improve our recommendations as they work with teachers in these different Jobs.

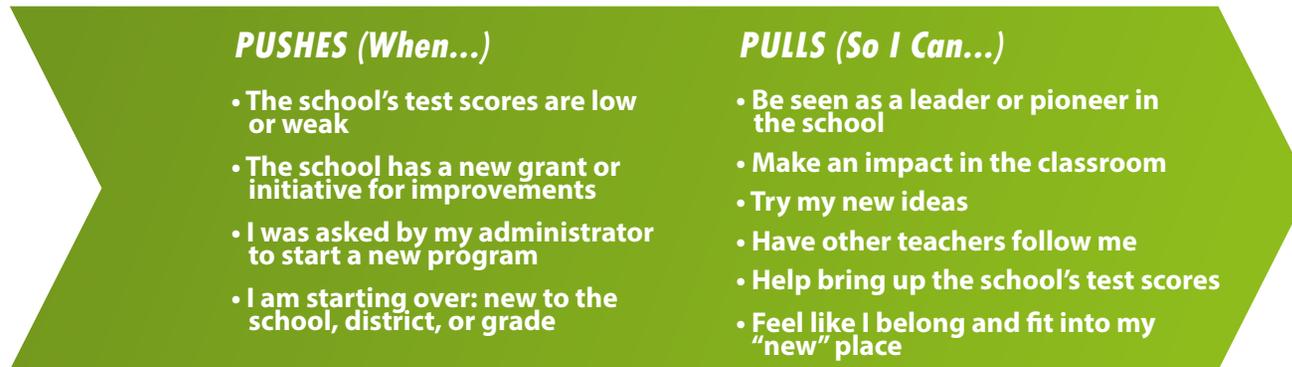
Job 1: Help me lead the way in improving my school

Three weeks into the school year, Rachel's principal came to her classroom to ask a favor: "I need you to join me on a county leadership team working on project-based learning."

As Rachel would soon find out, her principal was part of a district effort to explore whether PBL might be a promising solution for addressing its students' chronically low achievement on state tests. The district, which spanned an entire county in rural Virginia, served a student population with substantial needs: 80% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch, many were English language learners, and a considerable number were homeless. District leaders hoped that PBL might help teachers to better engage and motivate their students with authentic learning experiences, so they set out to organize a team to pilot and then spread PBL practices.

When Rachel's principal approached her about joining the leadership team, Rachel had never even heard of project-based learning. But after making some quick guesses about what it might entail, she agreed to go along with her principal's request. The principal didn't need to sell Rachel very hard on the idea. Rachel was still relatively new to teaching. During her five years of teaching 5th grade at her school, Rachel had been eager to develop a reputation for jumping into new things, taking on challenges, and going above and beyond to serve her students. Given how much Rachel strove to be a cornerstone in her school community, her principal knew she wouldn't say no.

JOB #1: HELP ME LEAD THE WAY IN IMPROVING MY SCHOOL **FORCES ENABLING PROGRESS**



The Job

Teachers experiencing the same Job as Rachel wanted to make a difference in helping their schools improve. For these teachers, adopting new ways to teach was not just about enhancing their practices or better serving their students. These teachers often worked in schools that had received a grant or adopted a major initiative to address a critical shortcoming—such as low student achievement on state tests, high student discipline rates, or low graduation rates—and they wanted to be leaders or pioneers of that initiative. They were looking for ways to be involved in improving their schools' performance, so they could be seen as leaders. For these teachers, the Job was called “Help me lead the way in improving my school.”

The fact that these teachers wanted to be leaders, however, does not mean that they coveted the limelight. Most were not seeking leadership for the sake of standing out or receiving public recognition. Rather, these teachers wanted the sense of fulfillment that comes from contributing to a larger cause. They wanted to have an impact beyond their classroom.

For many teachers, this Job was also about gaining the confidence and regard of their colleagues. Many were new to their schools or their instructional teams and wanted to demonstrate to their colleagues that they were team players and key contributors. Stepping into a leadership role was a way to help them belong and fit in.

Recommendation: Invite teachers to lead and direct pilot initiatives

For school leaders seeking to gain traction with new initiatives, starting with a pilot program and targeting teachers who are experiencing this Job can work well. When school leaders decide to kick off a new initiative with a pilot, the teachers with this Job will be among the first to sign-up so long as they see that the intention is to scale the pilot across the school. Contrary to common notions, these “early-adopters” do not necessarily join a pilot because they are enthusiasts for new technologies or for trying new things. They are looking for a way to be key contributors to something that matters for their schools. Thus, designing a pilot as part of the rollout of a school- or community-wide initiative is a great way to get teachers with this job to hire the new initiative.

Teachers with this Job typically had few habits and anxieties holding them back. For many who were new to their schools or teaching assignments, there were hardly any habits. The most common anxiety among teachers with this Job was worrying whether the new practices would work. For example, if the initiative was project-based learning, teachers wondered whether they would be able to design projects that were authentic, engaging, and good for conveying content. If the initiative was blended learning, teachers were concerned about giving up the sense of control from whole-class instruction.

To assuage these anxieties and create pull for new practices among teachers seeking to fulfill this Job, school leaders should select practices and initiatives that are clear, incremental improvements on prior practices, not radical transformations. The practices must be straightforward enough so that they can picture themselves eventually bringing their colleagues on board with the changes.

School leaders need to help teachers with this Job see how the initiative they support will result in demonstrable improvements. Teachers pursuing this Job need to feel like they are making a meaningful difference. They need to see with their own eyes—through assessment data or some other indicator—that the new practices not only improve their own teaching experience but also improve school-wide performance.

Related to their desire to lead, teachers with this Job often desire initiatives that give them opportunities to try out new ideas of their own. School leaders should, therefore, make sure that new initiatives allow these teachers to be involved in the decision-making process. Teachers with this Job want opportunities where they can make a difference not just by diligently going along with a program but by taking a seat at the decision-making table.

Job 2: Help me engage and challenge more of my students in a way that's manageable

School was starting in 20 minutes. Maria was in the copy room again. She hurriedly prepared materials for her kindergarten students' morning lesson. She was excited but nervous about the new activity she had planned. Maria was constantly on the lookout for new ways to engage her students' short attention spans with worthwhile learning activities, and she thought this lesson might do the trick.

As she hustled to the die-cut machine to cut out some shapes for her class, Maria overheard two fourth-grade teachers across the room chatting enthusiastically about their classes. They kept reiterating how excited they were about the math software their students had started using earlier that week. They especially liked how it saved them time and helped them track their students' learning, so they could know when to intervene.

Maria glanced again at the clock. She had a feeling time would run out before she could prep the other two activities she had planned to use with some of her struggling learners. The thought of having software like her colleagues that could help her deliver differentiated learning sounded nice. On the announcements board across the room, she noticed a flyer for the district's next round of blended learning training. Maria was ready to sign up.

For teachers with Job #2, school leaders should select practices and initiatives that are clear, incremental improvements on prior practices, not radical transformations.

JOB #2: HELP ME ENGAGE AND CHALLENGE MORE OF MY STUDENTS IN A WAY THAT'S MANAGEABLE
FORCES ENABLING PROGRESS



The Job

For teachers like Maria, the was “Help me engage and challenge more of my students in a way that’s manageable.” These teachers were aware of the wide variation in their students’ achievement levels and academic interests. As they strove to meet their students’ needs, these teachers had a fundamental belief that by broadening their repertoire of teaching strategies and activities, they could better engage more of their students in activities that promote learning. They were on the lookout for new ways to deliver the curriculum so that more students would feel meaningfully challenged.

These teachers were also at a point in their career where they were passionate about trying new things and were typically comfortable with any new tools, resources, or technologies they might use in conjunction with new teaching practices. When their schools offered them new resources or training on new techniques, they were eager to take advantage of the opportunity to broaden their repertoire of teaching options. When they experienced this Job, they also spoke proudly of being up to speed on the latest technology and instructional innovations.

Importantly, however, teachers experiencing this Job did not see new strategies or new technologies as fundamentally changing the way they

taught. Instead, an initiative like blended learning offered *enhancements* to Maria’s ongoing efforts to make learning more engaging. Whereas teachers like Rachel pursuing Job 1 might be willing to adopt new practices that boost test scores at the cost of student engagement, teachers focused on Job 2 maintained students’ intrinsic interest in learning as the higher priority.

Additionally, the Job to be Done for these teachers was not only about helping their students but also about making teaching more enjoyable and taking pride in their own professional expertise. They were willing to spend time and effort creating or finding new activities and resources because they knew that their classrooms were easier and more enjoyable to manage when students were excited to be there.

Recommendation: Address anxieties and create pulls for practices that build on teachers’ expertise

Encouraging teachers with this Job to change their practices is not difficult. Teachers with this Job are already on the constant lookout for new ways to engage and challenge their students. If a school has a laptop cart, the teachers with this Job will be among the first to sign up to use it. If teachers with this Job learn about a new tool or teaching strategy at a conference, they are the most likely to go back to their classrooms and try it out.

The main challenge for school leaders is helping teachers with this Job see why new practices that are part of a school-wide initiative are preferable to other new approaches teachers might pursue on their own. To solve this challenge, school leaders need to minimize the anxieties and maximize the pulls of their preferred solutions.

For teachers with this Job, two elements of a new initiative can be vital in minimizing the anxieties that deter teachers from hiring the new practices a school leader would like them to adopt.

First, teachers with this Job need to see how particular tools or practices build on their current teaching repertoire and enhance their notion of what it means to be an excellent teacher. Teachers with this Job are not looking to “reinvent” or “transform” their teaching. Overall, they are happy with how their classrooms operate. They are just looking for enhancements. If a new practice—such as replacing direct instruction with student-led learning—makes teaching feel foreign, teachers with this Job will likely steer away from that practice.

Second, ongoing, job-embedded professional development and shared planning time are key tools for assuaging anxieties. Although the primary purpose of professional development is to help teachers learn new practices, an important secondary purpose is to help teachers feel confident that they will have the support they need to implement the new practices successfully. As soon as you pitch teachers on the value of a new practice you want them to adopt, describe the ongoing professional development you have to offer them. Additional time to plan and collaborate with colleagues may also help curb some of the anxieties that come with thinking about change.

The most basic approach to generating pull for new teaching practices is through stories. School leaders should develop a compelling narrative and rationale for the merits of the new instructional approaches they would like to see their teachers adopt, and then articulate that rationale enthusiastically in nearly every interaction with their staff, backed up by even more stories and nuggets of data.

Of course, a prophet is often not received in her own country, which means school leaders will likely need to turn to outside sources of pull as well. These other sources may include books, outside experts, and conferences. Because seeing is believing, some of the most effective outside pulls come from the first-hand testimonials from fellow professionals. Taking teachers to visit schools where other teachers have already mastered the new practices can be a powerful way to spark their enthusiasm.



Job 3: Help me replace a broken instructional model so I can reach each student

“After the first class we ran out of our classrooms and met in the hall with the same excited looks on our faces and the same thought in our heads...we finally got what we wanted!”

Mike was at a breaking point. After 15 years teaching high school math, he was seriously contemplating a career change to life on the road as a truck driver. Year after year he had witnessed a parade of new “best practices” pushed by his district’s leaders. But as he tried out these ideas, none seemed to make any real difference in meeting his students’ individual learning needs. Students who were behind were persistently lost. Students who learned quickly were held back. Moreover, when they reached graduation, Mike worried they didn’t really know how to think; they only knew how to repeat, like parrots, what they had seen him do. For Mike, teaching felt soulless.

But when Jeff, one of Mike’s colleagues in the math department, came back from a conference, he brought a spark of hope back into Mike’s teaching. Jeff had heard some teachers present an approach called mastery-based learning. Rather than merely accepting that teaching to the middle of the class was a fact of life, these teachers had created a system that allowed each student to work through course content at a flexible pace. Mike thought it sounded like a much better idea than the litany of standardized best practices that had disappointed him over the years. But when Jeff told him about the intensive system of worksheets, folders, and grading that the teachers had to maintain to make their mastery-based system work, it seemed humanly unsustainable.

Nonetheless, the idea sounded so promising to Mike that he wasn’t willing to let it die. He said to Jeff, “There has to be a technology out there that can make that kind of teaching possible.” Soon thereafter they discovered Khan Academy’s free online learning resources and realized it fit the bill. They could use Khan Academy’s video lessons and problem sets to deliver instruction tailored to each student’s learning level. They could then spend class time circulating the classroom to help individual students.

On their first day piloting their new approach to teaching, Mike and Jeff knew they had found the solution. Students were working excitedly on math problem after problem without stopping. “After the first class we ran out of our classrooms and met in the hall with the same excited looks on our faces and the same thought in our heads,” Mike said. “We finally got what we wanted!”

JOB #3: HELP ME REPLACE A BROKEN INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL SO I CAN REACH EACH STUDENT
FORCES ENABLING PROGRESS

PUSHES (When...)

- I spend time trying to keep up with the gap in students' abilities
- I see the students are not engaged
- I am doing a lot of work and it's not making a difference
- I have become frustrated with the results
- I know the current way does not work and I want to do it my way

PULLS (So I Can...)

- Bring energy and challenge students
- Meet the students where they are and get them learning at their own pace
- Improve individual test scores and class readiness
- Feel like a good teacher and love teaching again
- Use multiple ways to teach

The Job

For teachers like Mike, the quest for progress of Job 3 focused entirely on the needs of individual students. They saw the wide variety of achievement levels across their classes and found it hard to keep up. They were working hard, but that hard work didn't seem to make a meaningful difference. Students were idle, bored, or disengaged in class. Their achievement was slow or even stalled. The teachers were frustrated with the results and found they had no way to reach all their students with all their varied needs. Their Job boiled down to, "Help me replace a broken instructional model so I can reach each student."

In many ways, the motivations of teachers pursuing this Job are antithetical to those of teachers seeking progress through other Jobs. Unlike the teachers who experienced the first Job around whole-school improvement, teachers with this Job are not inspired by being part of school-wide initiatives or standing out as leaders. Sometimes they are even frustrated by how school-wide initiatives distracted them from the needs of their students for the sake of meeting their administrators' expectations.

Unlike teachers like Maria with the Job of "help me engage and challenge more of my students in a way that's manageable," the teachers with this

Job did not find fulfillment through enhancing their teaching repertoire with new strategies, resources, and techniques. Technology was not attractive for its multimedia entertainment value. In fact, Mike was a bit of a curmudgeon when it came to learning how to use new gadgets. Instead, teachers like Mike with Job 3 saw value in tools, strategies, and technologies only as a means for reaching the individuals sitting in their classrooms each day. Traditional instruction, by its very design, was unable to meet each student's needs. Teachers with this Job were desperate for a better way.

The teachers experiencing this Job also measured progress differently from those in other Jobs. They didn't just want to see students more engaged in learning, nor were they satisfied with general or average improvements in student achievement. They wanted to see each student advance. Additionally, they often did not care much about whether other teachers or administrators recognized their efforts. Progress was entirely about doing what was right for their students, regardless of what external stakeholders down the hall or at the district office thought.

Recommendation: Give teachers autonomy and room to fail

It might seem that teachers with this Job would be some of the most eager to adopt new instructional practices because they are desperate to reinvent their classrooms. But these teachers will not be interested in practices that are mere tweaks to what they see as a fundamentally broken model of instruction. School leaders need to offer or allow new practices that are bold alternatives to traditional teaching.

The types of bold, new practices that satisfy this Job for some teachers will clash with the interests of other teachers experiencing Job 1 or Job 2. Radical new practices for fulfilling this Job should therefore not be promoted as school-wide initiatives. Instead, school leaders who want to support teachers with this Job should give those teachers a degree of autonomy from the needs of the rest of the school. Depending on how experimental and unproven the new practices may be, school leaders may also want to create low-stakes settings for teachers to explore these new practices—such as after-school programs, elective courses, or new remedial courses that are supplemental to students' core instruction. In addition to having space to experiment, teachers with this Job also need strong support from their school leaders so that they can gain access to the resources and political cover they need to try new things.

One other crucial form of support that these teachers need from their school leaders is room to fail. Teachers who are experimenting with bold new approaches to teaching and learning need to know up-front that it is okay if they have an initial dip in progress before they see improvement. It may take a few iterations to get new practices working smoothly. School leaders should encourage teachers to adopt a growth mindset—both through explicit conversations and by not punishing their foibles. Let teachers know that it is okay to fail forward as long as they learn from their mistakes.

Teachers with this Job also need ways to gather data that show how their students are progressing. Because these teachers cannot stand to see any of their students slip through the cracks, they need tools that allow them to track the progress of each student closely and thereby gain feedback into whether their new practices are working or need refinement. School leaders should also prioritize systems that help monitor student progress, so they can make sure experimental new practices do not go too far afield.

Job 4: Help me to not fall behind on my school's new initiative

Cindy loved teaching. She loved getting to know her students, doing hands-on activities with them, and coming up with creative ideas for lesson plans. But when she came back to teaching after many years away from the classroom as a stay-at-home mom, she found she was being asked to do things as a teacher that she had never done before. Those new practices made her anxious.

Shortly after starting work as a long-term kindergarten substitute—her first job back in the classroom—Cindy learned from her colleagues that she was supposed to use computers to do “blended learning.” As someone with self-professed zero technical savvy, the notion of using computers with her students petrified her. How would she help them use software she did not understand? How would she deal with the inevitable “technical difficulties” that were beyond her ability to solve? How would she know if her students were spending their online learning time in worthwhile ways? Troubled by these questions, she thought to herself, “This is the dumbest waste of time.” But in her determination not to fail at her return to teaching, she dutifully brought the laptop cart into her classroom a few times a week and tried to get the students doing something with computers.

The following year as a full-time first-grade teacher, Cindy gradually figured out how to use the technology. At home, she had her teenage children set up Google Classroom for her and teach her how to use a Chromebook. Then, part way through the academic year, her school finally provided her with training on the learning software she was supposed to use. By her third year back, she couldn't imagine teaching any other way. She relied on the software to help her keep her advanced students challenged, show her which students were struggling, and save her from hours of “cut, paste, and laminate” that consumed her prep time in years past. But she still vividly remembers how anxious the technology once made her feel. Were it not for her determination to keep up with her new job, she never would have tried blended learning.

JOB #4: HELP ME TO NOT FALL BEHIND ON MY SCHOOL'S NEW INITIATIVE FORCES ENABLING PROGRESS

PUSHES (When...)

- The school has adopted a new instructional initiative
- Other teachers have made the practices work
- It's now my turn to get on board

PULLS (So I Can...)

- Keep my students up to speed with their peers
- Stay at my school and with my class
- Look like a team player
- Show people that I'm trying
- Keep up with the others and not be seen as a problem
- Avoid getting bad reviews

The Job

For teachers like Cindy, the Job to be Done was “Help me to not fall behind on my school’s new initiative.”

Unlike teachers with other Jobs, these teachers were not actively looking for new practices or tools. They were experts with their familiar teaching strategies and often saw little need to change. New instructional practices—like integrating technology—seemed like an added layer of unnecessary complexity on top of already demanding work. If they did recognize that the status quo had shortcomings, they were justifiably skeptical of whether new practices would address those shortcomings more effectively than the repertoire of strategies they had developed through years of experience.

For these teachers, their Job to be Done came into play when dragging their heels or resisting change were no longer viable options. They had held back as new practices went school-wide. But once other teachers at their schools had proven that new practices could work, they felt they had little room to object.

The primary push for adopting new practices was their desire not to let themselves or their students get left behind. For example, one kindergarten teacher knew that if she didn't start using laptops with her class, her students would struggle in first grade when their new teacher expected them to be

familiar with the technology. Some teachers also felt like they were falling behind their colleagues and dragging down their collective success.

Another pull for these teachers was their desire to stay in their current job. They liked their schools and their students, and they didn't want to run the risk of getting transferred to a new site for not being up with the new program. They also did not want to receive a negative teaching evaluation and stand out to their administrators as not being team players.

Change for these teachers was more about compliance than about improving instruction. For example, if these teachers' schools were rolling out a blended-learning initiative, then the teachers would make sure to put their students on computers for the required number of minutes each day. But the teachers were often confused by the software. Their strategy was to meet the minimum requirements until they figured out what they were supposed to do or until the new practices went out of style. But they couldn't articulate a compelling rationale for why they were using technology.

Recommendation: Avoid pushing teachers into this Job

School leaders should not design initiatives to fulfill this Job. Teachers with this Job are not inspired by a quest for improving their schools or

helping their students. Rather, their desire for progress boils down to relief or escape. Unfortunately, this Job on its own rarely leads to beneficial outcomes. Although a teacher with this Job is motivated to change, he is not necessarily motivated to implement change well. This Job distracts from whatever other student-focused motivation a teacher may have.

Because this Job does not lead teachers to change for the sake of their students or their schools, school leaders should only lean on this Job as a last resort. Therefore, new instructional initiatives should nearly always be voluntary opportunities that teachers can choose whether to join. To do otherwise risks falling into the same trap that undermines so many of the initiatives we mentioned in the introduction. A major flaw of most school reform and innovation efforts is that they rely on Job 4 as the primary means for motivating new instructional practices. If an initiative isn't gaining much traction among teachers, the response should not be to crank up the pressure but to redesign the initiative to better address Jobs 1, 2 or 3 and focus on moving teachers who might fall into Job 4 to a different Job.

Rather than assume Jobs are a given, school leaders can shape the circumstances in teachers' lives that give rise to their Jobs in the first place. In other words, they can help move teachers who might fall into Job 4 at the outset of a new initiative into a more productive Job. For example, moving a teacher to a new grade level or subject can help nudge a teacher toward Job 2 by prompting a desire to find new practices suited to his new teaching context. Many teachers with Jobs 1 through 3 also noted how seeing student achievement data and observing how their students were bored, disengaged, or defiant pushed them to see a need for new practices. Thus, for teachers in Job 4, seeing shortfalls in student learning—through both data and classroom observations—can be an effective way to help them move into one of the other Jobs.

The tricky part about using student learning data and other evidence to generate pushes toward Jobs 1, 2, or 3 is that pushes from outside a teacher's observations interact with that teacher's anxieties. If a teacher gets the message that he needs to change, but experiences high levels of anxiety associated with any potential alternative, he may respond by trying to refute the evidence and resist change rather than embrace it. To avoid this trap, school leaders need to have a careful read on both the pushes and anxieties their teachers experience.

If school leaders reach the unfortunate conclusion that their overall goals require them to compel teachers to Job 4, they should try to use Job 4 just as a stepping-stone. Though at first, they may push teachers to adopt new practices to keep up, they should then focus on helping teachers seek progress in one of the other Jobs. During our interviews, we spoke with teachers who initially adopted new practices just to avoid falling behind, but who then later moved to the second Job of "Help me engage and challenge more of my students in a way that's manageable," as their experience with the new practices calmed their anxieties and helped them see the benefits the new practices had to offer. For these teachers, the "Help me to not fall behind on my school's new initiative" Job provided the kick-start to later move into a different Job.



CONCLUSION

In our research across education and other sectors, the Jobs to Be Done framework has proved to be one of the most reliable theories for explaining any product, service, or initiative's long-term success. Understanding people's Jobs to Be Done uncovers the forces that cause them to make the decisions they make. All people seek to make progress of one form or another in their lives. Uncovering Jobs allows us to see the important criteria a new solution needs to meet to help people hire it to accomplish what they already want to do. Then, with a clear understanding of the key criteria for satisfying a Job, leaders should integrate all of an initiative's features and processes around the Job.

Just as the homebuilders in our earlier example did everything from modifying their floor plans to offering moving assistance and two years storage to help people make the transition to a smaller home, nailing a Job requires thinking beyond processes, policies, or features to consider how best to deliver the ideal user experience.

As we explored teachers' Jobs, one key takeaway became clear: teachers' Jobs draw them to different types of instructional initiatives. Put differently, one-size-fits-all initiatives rarely, if ever, work because they cannot address all the varied Jobs among a school's teaching staff. Whereas a teacher with Job 3 will be attracted to radical, new practices, those same practices will ward off most teachers pursuing Jobs 1 and 2 because they diverge too far from the norm. Similarly, a pilot program that offers appealing leadership opportunities to teachers in Job 1 may very well deter teachers with Job 4 who see too many administrative strings attached. In short, initiatives cannot be all things to all people, which is why understanding teachers' Jobs and then tailoring new initiatives to address those Jobs is so important. Conventional wisdom holds that many good initiatives fail because they don't give teachers the amount of training and support they need to transition successfully to new practices. In contrast, Jobs Theory shows that it's the type of support, and not just the quantity, that matters. Different teachers need different experiences to fulfill their Jobs to Be Done.

We hope this research on teachers' Jobs to Be Done will prompt a paradigm shift in how school leaders think about education reform, instructional innovation, and change management. The success or failure of any school improvement initiative—be it blended learning, a new curriculum, project-based learning, new staffing arrangements, or otherwise—hinges on how well the teachers on the frontlines carry that initiative forward. Teachers are at the heart of all school improvement initiatives. In a space that is awash in ideas of how to improve teaching and learning, innovations are only as good as their implementation. If such reforms hope to deliver on the progress they promise, they should start with a clearer picture of the progress that teachers themselves are seeking.

Nailing a Job requires thinking beyond processes, policies, or features to consider how best to deliver the ideal user experience.

NOTES

1 Jill Barshay, “National test scores reveal a decade of educational stagnation,” *The Hechinger Report*, April 10, 2018, <https://hechingerreport.org/national-test-scores-reveal-a-decade-of-educational-stagnation/> (accessed July 16, 2018).

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4 This example comes from Clayton M. Christensen and Michael E. Raynor, *The Innovator’s Solution: Creating and Sustaining Successful Growth*, (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2003).

5 Clayton M. Christensen, Taddy Hall, Karen Dillon, and David S. Duncan, *Competing Against Luck: The Story of Innovation and Customer Choice*, Harper Collins, 2016, Chapter 2.

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7 Story adapted from Clayton M. Christensen; Karen Dillon; Taddy Hall; David S. Duncan. *Competing Against Luck: The Story of Innovation and Customer Choice* (Kindle Locations 1143-1162). Harper Collins. Kindle Edition.



About the Institute

The Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to improving the world through Disruptive Innovation. Founded on the theories of Harvard professor Clayton M. Christensen, the Institute offers a unique framework for understanding many of society's most pressing problems. Its mission is ambitious but clear: work to shape and elevate the conversation surrounding these issues through rigorous research and public outreach.



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