

The eLearning Coach Podcast

ELC 073: Using The Jobs To Be Done Framework In Learning Design
A Conversation with Ger Driesen

<https://theelearningcoach.com/podcasts/73/>

Connie: Hello learning people, and welcome to episode seventy-three of The eLearning Coach Podcast.

As a group, learning designers have been trying to break out of the order-taker role for a long time. Adopting the Jobs To Be Done framework may be one way you can help clients change their perspective. In this episode, I speak with Ger Driesen about applying the Jobs to Be Done framework to the instructional design process. This approach can help you address the functional, emotional and social aspects of learning.

Ger is the Learning Innovation Leader at aNewSpring, the provider of an online blended learning platform. In this role, he focusses on sharing the latest insights with L&D professionals to inspire them to design, develop and deliver effective learning solutions. You can find the show notes at <https://theelearningcoach.com/podcasts/73/>. Now, here's our conversation.

Connie: Hi Ger welcome to the eLearning Coach Podcast.

Ger: Hi Connie. Nice to be here.

Connie: I recently heard that you did a presentation about Jobs to Be Done, and this is something that's interested me and seemed so applicable to learning design, I can't wait to talk to you about it. How do you explain the Jobs to Be Done framework to your clients?

Ger: Yes. A strange choice of words, I guess, but I often say, if you want to apply empathy in your design, Jobs to Be Done will help you to apply empathy that really matters, or sometimes I even say, if you want to use empathy, Jobs to Be Done will get you empathy on steroids.

Connie: Isn't that interesting, because I'm always thinking of personas and empathy maps, and I really hadn't thought of Jobs to Be Done in that way, so I can't wait to hear more. Where did the framework start? What's its origin?

Ger: Yeah. Its origin is from innovation space. So, there are people like Tony Ulwick and Clayton Christensen who worked very much in product

innovation, over the years, they developed some methodologies and then called it Jobs to Be Done.

Connie: So, can you talk about the framework itself?

Ger: Yeah. So the central idea is that, people always want progress in their lives one way or another, and to get that progress in their life, they have Jobs to Be Done, so if you really know what a Job to Be Done is then you can design solutions or services or products that will help them to support with that, and with those Jobs to Be Done, they will experience pains in the process by trying to get the progress and the progress that is the gains that they would like to get out of the process. So, there is Jobs to Be Done and the related pains and gains in people trying to get things accomplished.

Connie: So, does that relate to that famous quote by Theodore Levitt, "People don't want to buy a quarter inch drill, they want a quarter inch hole."

Ger: Yes, exactly. So that's the classic one and yes, if you would work at a store that sells drills and other stuff and a client walks in and says, "okay, I'm here for a quarter inch drill", you could say, "okay, please follow me to the place where you can find them and you can choose one", or you can ask questions, and say, "why do you need drill?"

Ger: And then client could come up with story that he or she needs a quarter inch hole, then of course you can continue the conversation, "why do you need this hole?" "Yeah, because I need to put in a plug" and, "why do you want to have a plug in your wall?" "Yeah, because I want to hang a painting", et cetera. At the end it makes the story a bit silly because you will end up at the Big Bang or Adam and Eve, depends on what you believe in, but it's about not accepting that first thing. And then diving a bit deeper and doing some research about, "Hey, what is it that this person really is looking for? And maybe I have some alternatives then compared to a drill."

Ger: Yeah. That also relates to learning, because learning professionals in organizations and learning providers, often people come to them with a solution in their mind and they say, "Hey, can you get me? Or can you organize me? Or can you design a training about topic X, I or Y?" And maybe sometimes we are too eager to say, "okay, let's sit out and discuss it a bit further, and then I will start arranging it or designing it or whatever", and maybe without asking the questions, "why do you need the solution? What is the job you try to get done?"

Connie: So that is the way that Jobs to Be Done applies to learning design.

Ger: Yep. That's the first one, I guess.

Connie: Well, what about the concept of people hiring products, services and solutions? How does that apply to learning design?

Ger: Clayton Christensen came up with the idea that people hire products or services to get things done in their life, and normally you would say they acquire or buy it, but hiring is a funny, different way to look at it, but that's also maybe if you don't have to pay for it, but let's say you are a professional in an organization and you are struggling with something that you want to accomplish, then you can hire a solution for that, and that could be something related to learning, but could also be something like perform or support or whatever. Yeah. So, it's people getting access to a solution to get their job done.

Connie: Right. I remember the first time I read hire, in that context, it threw me, because I hadn't heard about hiring a product or hiring a service, I hadn't really thought of that, but it is another way to look at it.

Ger: It's nice. If you watch the video of Clayton Christensen on YouTube, it's there about milkshakes, why people hire milkshakes, it's a very nice example and it's a very, also, funny way to get acquainted with the whole language and approach of Jobs to Be Done.

Connie: I'll put that link in the show notes.

Ger: Yeah. Maybe a bit more about the concept, because first you have what we call the functional Job to Be Done, but what also is fairly applicable and valuable to me is that after that you can look at the related emotional job to be done and the related social job to be done, and that means if you have a solution in mind, you also further analyze maybe with the user and think about, when it comes to the emotional job to be done, if this person would hire this solution to get the job done, how will he or she feel about using that product or service or whatever, or solution during or just after he or she did use it.

Ger: So that's a more personal and emotional thing related to the use of a solution, and then the other one is the social Job to Be Done, and that's related to how will people look at you when you apply or use this solution for the functional Job to Be Done? Does it make you look as a professional or as a beginner or maybe that people say, "wow, that's really

cool that you have the courage to apply this or to use this", and those kind of aspects that relate to how people look at you when you use that solution.

Connie: So, you're saying there's a functional, emotional and social aspect to it, and that's interesting. Can you give me an example of exactly what you were just explaining as it applies to learning design?

Ger: Yeah. There is a recent example that's interesting, I think, it was in the newspaper in Netherlands, and it was exactly about training and how the current training didn't do the job quite well, and the title of the news was about breast anxiety.

Connie: I can't even imagine what that is about.

Ger: No, it was about resuscitation training.

Connie: Okay.

Ger: And people were quite well trained, but then in practice, they found out that ladies were treated different than men, and for some ladies the help came too late and they figured out that it was because of breast anxiety, and so the people trying to apply what they had learned felt not good applying it to a lady, because there was also this me too kind of things going on at that moment.

Connie: So, they didn't want to touch the women's chest in order to resuscitate them. Interesting.

Ger: Yeah. So, they didn't pay attention to that part of the emotional job or social job during the training.

Connie: So, what you're saying is that, during the training, they should have told them how to get over this obstacle.

Ger: Yeah. It would be nice if they had known it before that it would be an obstacle so that they could have discussed it and find a way around it, also during the training. If you keep everything rational, then you just try it on a doll and then it works or a model, but then reality is a bit different.

Connie: That's true. I mean, I've taken that training, so I know exactly what you mean.

Ger: Yeah.

Connie: Interesting. Something I would've never thought about, but when you are applying the Jobs to Be Done framework, what kind of research do you do from the start? How do you start off?

Ger: Yes. I think it's important to focus on, okay, if you want to apply it to a learning design, you have a mind that you need to design a solution, a learning solution, but first you take that step back and say, "okay, let's do some interviews with the participants and not looking at the solution, but at the problem or challenge and do so as what is their functional Job to Be Done", and that's what I like also about Jobs to Be Done, that it connects the people with their job that they are trying to get done, and so that's, I think, a different aspect compared to personas and other empathy frameworks, and it's more general, and that might be not a connection, or that's not implemented in those methodologies to really tie it to a Job to Be Done. So, first try to gather information with the participants or what is it that they try to achieve?

Ger: What is that job to be done? And really use the empathy and do a good interview, deep listening about, "Hey, what is it exactly that our challenges are?" And, the best way to do it is to do it in their specific context, so if you have the opportunity to meet them and to talk to them at the place where they have to do the job, then it'll give you much more additional information for the end result.

Ger: So, that's important. So qualitative data via interviews with the end users and best way to do it is to do it in their own context, and then based on that find the different Jobs to Be Done, and most of the time, it's not one Job to Be Done, but if it's a larger task or whatever, it might be different Jobs to Be Done, and each Job to Be Done can also consist of different job steps, so it can be quite some work to figure out what Jobs to Be Done is, and after you have a good overview of functional Jobs to Be Done, then also try to understand the emotional and the social Jobs to Be Done that are connected to them.

Connie: So, in some ways it's combining maybe a typical interview with an audience member, perhaps a task analysis, but you're really going after, in a very conscious way, real focus on the jobs, and then you're hitting on that emotional and social element.

Ger: Yeah. Exactly.

- Connie: I could imagine some people saying, "oh, well, that's just what we already do", but it feels to me that if you have this mindset and this framework, it just changes your perspective a little bit, that's how it seems to me.
- Ger: Yeah. And it will guide your questioning and the type of questions that you ask and will help you question to avoid and to ask the right follow up questions to get a deeper understanding.
- Connie: Right. Can you talk more about addressing the social needs of someone who is going through training? I mean, does that mean that someone is going to be looked upon in a certain way if they take a training course?
- Ger: Yeah. That might be, or they're looking at transfer and somebody took a training course and they will return to work or at the workplace, how will the people around this person look at this person, will they be helpful and say, "okay, we understand that you just started out with this task and are still learning, so we will support you", then it's just fine, but if the people around you say, "okay, you did this learning, but now you're back in reality, and let's do normal again", or people are afraid that they are treated as beginners, that they are insecure about applying a task, and so, knowing about that social environment to get real impact with training results can be very important.
- Connie: Okay. I get it. I can imagine somebody in a group, they've all worked together as a team and one person out of that group becomes the manager, and his or her friends are saying, "what? You're going to manage us?" And then the person goes off to a two week intensive management training event, and they come back, and they want to implement these things, and people are wondering, "how do we perceive this person now? How do we act towards them?"
- Ger: Yeah. And they say, "okay, you really changed since you are our manager."
- Connie: So, are you saying that the social aspect needs to be addressed also? Is that what that implies?
- Ger: Well, depends on the analysis, but I think, by having a look at it during the analysis, you can find out if it will be important to address it during the training.
- Connie: Okay. I see what you're saying. So, do you add this framework onto, however you typically do your instructional design?

Ger: Yes. Because it adds value for me. So, you can do task analysis, et cetera, and I think, what I see a lot in the learning community is that many people, designers, designers like to design, and they don't like analysis, that's what I see quite often. Do you agree?

Connie: I do agree. When I teach instruction design classes, I make sure I teach several different types of analysis, and then I tell people, "Well, you may not do this in your job, but now you'll know what should be done."

Ger: Yes, exactly. And then analysis is so important and, in my opinion, and my experience, analysis is a very interesting part, because it gives you so many clues for the design phase later, and of course you can do task analysis, et cetera, those are good. What I like about the Jobs to Be Done and where it adds value is that, first, what I said, it focuses really on the Jobs to Be Done, that's at connecting with the work to be done and with work processes, and then also maybe the pitfall is with task analysis or only Jobs to Be Done analysis that we only stay in the rational part of job and rational part of learning, but I really like that the connected social and emotional jobs are also considered, because work isn't always rational, quite often it's not rational at all, or it always has rational parts, hopefully, but it also has always emotional parts and social parts to it, so having that in consideration during the analysis will give you the opportunity to design better solutions, I guess

Connie: That makes sense. I can really see its value. Can we talk about a case study, for example, can you tell us about a time when you have used this and what it did to the project?

Ger: Yes. In fact, I have two redesign examples. One is about firefighters, people always law firefighters, so I had to include this one, but it was a training for firefighters, and what they normally would do is, they had this specific site with a real house that they could put on fire, and then they would put the people into the classroom one day to do the theoretical things, et cetera, and then the next day, the second day, they would really train and enter the burning house together to fight the fire and then doing the analysis again, because it was also hiring that site that cost a lot of money, they were thinking, "yeah, we are doing the classroom there, but could we do it another way?"

And by doing the analysis and including Jobs to Be Done, they found out that there is a very important social and emotional Job to Be Done, and that is when you, as a firefighting team need to enter a building or house

to fight the fire, it's very important that you can trust your colleagues and that your colleagues can trust you.

Ger: So trust, that's more an emotional or social thing, it's a very important part of it. Here again, you can learn how to technically fight the fire and what to do and not to do, but at the end, entering the house with a team, that thing of trust is also very important, and so the redesign was that the first classroom day was skipped and it was redesigned to an online, social learning module over longer time.

That meant that the participants had more opportunities over longer time to discuss with each other and to work with each other on different topics that they had to learn more theoretically. But that led to the fact that when they met each other on site for that second day in the learning house, that they really were looking forward to meet each other and that they already built much more trust than in the other situation where they only met each other one day before in the classroom where they were quiet for the instructor and not doing so much social things together. So, that's one of the examples.

Connie: That's a great example. And I would've thought maybe they would do things like catching each other when you fall backwards and climbing ropes together, but instead they were able to build trust and friendship online.

Ger: Yeah. Exactly.

Connie: An amazing story. You said you had one more.

Ger: Yeah. That's from the financial services, after the financial crisis, that's more than 10 years ago, but that came all new kind of legislation, and in the Netherlands, all financial professionals had to do additional training and certification, and so everyone working in the finance industry had to do new modules of eLearning and had to pass exams to get re-certified. Otherwise, they weren't able or allowed anymore to do their job.

The first design was a regular eLearning course, the case that we researched needed, in general, 11 hours to do regular eLearning, and then, when doing an evaluation and also with the lens of Jobs to Be Done, we found out that, there were a lot of people who said, "okay, I already had, let's say, 10 years of experience in my financial job, and a lot of the knowledge that had to be tested, I still had it very clear in my mind. So, in that sense, it was kind of nonsense to spend time again on the eLearning

and maybe I could have passed the exam much easier, and maybe I only had to learn certain new things."

Ger: And so that led to a redesign with a personalized learning path, so adaptive learning, and of course you need the platform and some technology to do so. The company I work for offers that platform, so we could work on that with the client and then based on testing people upfront knowledge that they actually already had and they experience, we could create adaptive learning, and that led to in general, that people needed four and a half hours to prepare for their exams, and so that's a very nice business case on the business side, but also the participants said, "okay, I understand. And I don't mind that I have to learn again, and I have to re-certify, but then it's nice not to do 11 hours of eLearning of things that are not needed, but had to spend less time, and only on those topics that needed my attention to get re-certified."

Connie: Yeah. That is good

Ger: Yeah. It was also more about redefining the Job to Be Done, not to finalize the eLearning course, but Job to Be Done became more, get re-certified as soon as possible. So, that's also a different definition to start with. If you start with a functional Job to Be Done, that will give you also the opportunity to redefine the problem or to be aware of your definition of the problem, and that has also value.

Connie: Definitely, defining the problem space is so important because if you get that wrong, everything else is wrong.

Ger: Yeah.

Connie: The basics. So, what has the response from clients been when you use a Jobs to Be Done approach? Do they understand what you're doing? Do you have to explain it a lot?

Ger: Well, I think the title of Jobs to Be Done, it's not that appealing directly, but I shared this and discussed it very often recently with learning designers, and if you explain a little bit about the methodology and the ideas behind it, then they all become interested very fast. So, say, "oh yeah, I can see it be an additional tool in my design tool kit, and when doing an analysis", and they also say, no, it's quite easy to apply. It's not so difficult."

Connie: Right. What are some mistakes a beginner should watch out for when just starting out with this framework?

Ger: Yeah. I think with every framework or with every approach that somebody is enthusiastic about like I am, then you also have to say, it's not magic, if you want magic, I always say, you better go to Disneyland, there you can get magic and all the rest is hard work, and so that's also with Jobs to Be Done, it isn't magic and it's just the way to get your work done, but it's still hard work, and so you have to apply it in a disciplined way and not say, "okay, let's do a little bit Job to Be Done", now you have to say, "okay, when I want to apply it, I have to dive into it, how to do it and really start with the functional Jobs to Be Done, and based on that, the other related emotional and social Jobs to Be Done", and so doing that analysis, doing the interviews, mapping the results, that all is doing real work that can help you do the work better and gives you interesting clues for the design.

Connie: Okay. So, you're saying that a mistake that a beginner might make is to not put in the full effort that is needed to get the intended result.

Ger: Yeah.

Connie: I understand that. How many people do you typically interview at the start of a project when you are using this framework?

Ger: Yeah. Good question, because people always are hesitant to do a lot of interviews because they take a lot of time, but my experience is that, around 10 interviews and sometimes five are already enough, so let's say between five and 10 interviews, but then try to do a really good and deep interviews and ask really good follow up questions that you can touch on all the basics, but then if you do those quite well, then between five and 10, after 10, you don't get much more new information.

Connie: Thanks for that.

Ger: I always ask clients, "okay, please introduce me to a variety of the people", so that you have some variety of people in your sample.

Connie: Right. Which is what you need to do for all interviews.

Ger: Yeah.

Connie: I mean, that is the advantage of the interview approach, to me, it's those follow up questions, you can dig deeper and deeper and deeper.

Ger: Yeah, exactly.

Connie: Ger thank you so much for helping us understand Jobs to Be Done, it's not difficult to understand, but there's new terminology and a bit of a new way of looking at things. So, it's not completely different, it's just one more tool that seems very worthwhile to add to our toolbox.

Ger: Yeah, exactly.

About Connie Malamed

I help people start, grow and build their instructional design skills at [Mastering Instructional Design](#).