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# Customer Discovery and Jobs to Be Done

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## Introduction

Products fail not because teams lack ideas, but because too few of those ideas are anchored in the real progress customers are trying to make. Customer Discovery and Jobs to Be Done is a practical guide for anyone who builds, funds, or scales products and services. Its premise is simple: when you investigate what people are struggling with in their actual contexts, you uncover needs that are stable, testable, and worthy of investment. Instead of chasing feature parity or the latest trend, you will learn to ask, “What job is the customer hiring us to do, and what would success look like to them?” Answering that question with evidence is how features start to stick.

Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) provides the lens for that evidence. People “hire” products to achieve progress in specific situations; when the progress is blocked, they search for alternatives. This book breaks down JTBD into workable parts: the forces that push someone to change, the pulls of a new solution, the anxieties that slow adoption, and the habits that keep them where they are. You will learn how to transform interviews into precise job stories and outcome statements that guide design and engineering without prescribing premature solutions. The outcome is a shared language that helps your team prioritize what matters and gracefully say no to what does not.

Discovery is not only about conversations—it is about contexts. Ethnographic research shows you how people actually behave, not how they wish they behaved. We will cover how to plan and conduct fieldwork, observe without bias, gather notes, photos, and artifacts, and navigate consent and privacy with rigor. You will practice contextual inquiry techniques that reveal the tacit workarounds, social dynamics, and environmental constraints that rarely surface in a conference room. These methods make your insights sturdier and your bets smarter.

From there, we turn interviews and observations into strategy. You will learn structured synthesis: affinity mapping, thematic coding, and opportunity sizing to separate signals from noise. We will map jobs, forces, and struggling moments, then convert them into outcome-oriented problem definitions. Templates throughout the book help you standardize notes, align on terminology, and maintain traceability from raw data to the product decisions that follow. By the end, your backlog will be anchored in customer-defined outcomes, not hunches.

Discovery only earns its keep when it changes what you build and when. To that end, we translate insights into hypothesis-driven roadmaps that explicitly state assumptions, risks, and expected learning. You will design lightweight experiments and prototype to learn, using success metrics that reflect customer progress rather than vanity measures. We will also cover how to communicate insights across

functions, embed discovery into agile delivery, and avoid common anti-patterns like solutioneering and overgeneralization. The goal is not a perfect plan; it is a repeatable learning system that compounds.

This book is designed to be used, not admired. Each chapter pairs clear explanations with step-by-step activities, illustrated examples, and ready-to-use templates for interviews, synthesis, mapping, and roadmap design. Whether you are a founder searching for product-market fit, a product manager refining a mature offering, a designer shaping experience strategy, or a researcher building organizational capability, you will find a toolkit you can apply immediately. Start with the chapters that meet your most urgent needs, or work from front to back for a complete curriculum. Either way, you will finish with sharper questions, stronger evidence, and a roadmap that customers will recognize as progress.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Why Customer Discovery Matters

The graveyard of great ideas is vast, often filled with products meticulously crafted but rarely used. We've all seen them: the app with a stunning interface that no one downloads, the innovative hardware gathering dust in a garage, the service launched with fanfare that quietly disappears. These aren't typically failures of engineering prowess or design aesthetics; they are often failures of understanding. Specifically, a failure to truly grasp what customers need, value, and are willing to "hire" to make progress in their lives. This is where customer discovery steps in, acting as the discerning detective before the costly commitment of full-scale development.

Without robust customer discovery, product development becomes a high-stakes guessing game. We project our assumptions, biases, and sometimes even our own desires onto an imagined user. We might hear a vague request for "more features" and interpret it as a mandate to build a swiss army knife of functionality, when the underlying need was a simple tool to solve a specific, frustrating problem. Or perhaps we witness a competitor's success and conclude that replication is the safest path, only to discover their context, their customers, and their established habits are entirely different from our own. These blind spots lead to wasted resources, demoralized teams, and, ultimately, products that fail to resonate.

Consider the classic scenario of the "solution in search of a problem." An engineering team, perhaps fueled by a new technology or an intriguing technical challenge, builds something impressive. It's elegant, efficient, and demonstrates remarkable ingenuity. But when it's released, customers shrug. Why? Because while the solution is brilliant, it doesn't align with a compelling customer need. It doesn't solve a problem they are actively experiencing, or if it does, it doesn't do so in a way that is significantly better than their current, perhaps imperfect, alternatives. Customer discovery reverses this equation, ensuring that the problem comes first, validated by real human experience, before a single line of code is written or a single design pixel is placed.

The alternative to discovery is often reliance on market research that, while useful for certain purposes, can fall short in uncovering true customer needs. Surveys, for instance, can tell you what people say they want, but often struggle to reveal the underlying motivations, the emotional drivers, or the nuanced context of their struggles. Focus groups can be swayed by dominant personalities or groupthink, leading to consensus around ideas that lack genuine individual conviction. While these methods have their place in the broader product lifecycle, they are often insufficient for the deep, empathetic understanding required to identify unmet needs that lead to truly sticky products.

Effective customer discovery isn't about asking customers what features they want; it's about understanding the "why" behind their actions and aspirations. It's about diving into their world, observing their behaviors, listening to their stories, and deciphering the real-world problems they encounter. It acknowledges that people are often poor predictors of their future behavior and may not be able to articulate their deepest needs, especially when those needs are tied to subconscious desires or ingrained habits. The goal is to move beyond surface-level requests to uncover the underlying "jobs" customers are trying to get done.

Take the example of a consumer buying a new drill. On the surface, they might say they want a powerful drill, one with a long-lasting battery, or perhaps one that's lightweight. A product team focused solely on these stated desires might prioritize developing a drill with maximal torque and an impressive battery life. However, true customer discovery would delve deeper. Why do they need a drill? Perhaps they are hanging pictures, assembling furniture, or building a shelf. The real "job" isn't to own a drill; it's to create a hole in the wall, to securely fasten two pieces of wood, or to assemble an item to improve their living space. And the real "outcome" they desire isn't just a hole, but a picture perfectly level, a shelf that doesn't wobble, or furniture that enhances their home.

Once you understand these deeper jobs and desired outcomes, your product strategy shifts. Instead of just competing on drill power, you might consider features that make hanging pictures easier and more accurate (e.g., an integrated level), or tools that simplify furniture assembly (e.g., interchangeable bits for common fasteners). The drill itself becomes a means to an end, and your focus expands to encompass the entire experience of getting the "job done" successfully and with satisfaction. This subtle but profound shift is the essence of customer discovery through a Jobs to Be Done lens.

Another critical aspect of why customer discovery matters is its ability to reduce risk. Building products is inherently risky. There's the risk of technical feasibility, market acceptance, and financial viability. Customer discovery directly addresses the market acceptance risk by ensuring that what you build has a genuine audience and solves a problem they care enough about to pay for. By investing time in understanding customers *before* significant development, you validate assumptions and de-risk your investments. It's a far less expensive endeavor to iterate on a problem definition or a conceptual solution in the discovery phase than it is to pivot or abandon a fully built product.

Furthermore, customer discovery fosters innovation that truly makes a difference. When teams are deeply connected to customer struggles, they move beyond incremental improvements to existing features and start to identify opportunities for disruptive solutions. They see the workarounds customers employ, the frustrations they endure, and the compromises they make with existing solutions. These

observations are fertile ground for truly novel ideas that can create new markets or redefine existing ones. It moves teams from simply responding to competition to proactively shaping the future.

Consider the evolution of personal music players. For years, the "job" was simply to listen to music on the go. Early devices focused on portability and sound quality. But deeper discovery might have revealed the struggles associated with carrying multiple CDs or tapes, the limited storage, and the frustration of finding specific songs. The iPod didn't just offer better sound or portability; it addressed the job of "having all my music with me, easily accessible." The breakthrough wasn't just technical; it was a profound understanding of the entire music consumption experience and the desires for control and convenience.

In a fast-paced market, the ability to adapt and respond to changing customer needs is paramount. Customer discovery isn't a one-time event; it's an ongoing discipline. Markets evolve, technologies shift, and customer expectations rise. A continuous discovery practice ensures that your product strategy remains relevant and responsive. It allows teams to detect emerging needs, identify shifts in customer behavior, and proactively adjust their roadmaps to maintain competitive advantage. It's like having a constant feedback loop that keeps your product attuned to the rhythm of your customers' lives.

Beyond the external benefits to the product and the market, customer discovery also profoundly impacts internal teams. When developers, designers, and product managers are directly exposed to customer struggles, empathy flourishes. This shared understanding of the customer's world creates a common language and a unified purpose. It moves conversations from subjective opinions about features to objective discussions about how best to solve customer problems. This alignment reduces internal friction, improves decision-making, and fosters a more collaborative and customer-centric culture.

Imagine a situation where a technical team is struggling to understand why a certain feature request keeps resurfacing, even after they've implemented what they thought was the solution. Without discovery, they might perceive the customers as demanding or ungrateful. With discovery, they might uncover a nuanced workflow or an unarticulated constraint that their initial solution didn't address. This new understanding not only allows them to build a more effective solution but also builds trust and respect between the development team and their customers.

Moreover, customer discovery provides a powerful framework for strategic prioritization. In any product development cycle, there will always be more ideas than resources. Without a clear understanding of customer needs and their relative importance, prioritization becomes a battle of wills, loudest voices, or personal preferences. Jobs to Be Done, in particular, offers a robust framework for evaluating

potential features and initiatives against explicit customer outcomes. It helps teams answer the crucial question: "Which of these potential solutions will best help our customers make the progress they are trying to achieve?"

This isn't to say that all product decisions must originate directly from customer interviews. Sometimes, truly disruptive innovations come from visionary insights that anticipate needs customers haven't even articulated yet. However, even in these cases, a deep understanding of human behavior, existing frustrations, and fundamental jobs to be done provides the fertile ground for those visionary ideas to take root and flourish. It helps distinguish between a wild guess and an educated leap of faith.

In essence, customer discovery is the bedrock of building products that truly matter. It's the discipline of humility, acknowledging that we don't have all the answers and that the richest insights reside with the people we aim to serve. It's the commitment to empathy, stepping into someone else's shoes to understand their world. And it's the foundation of smart strategy, ensuring that every development effort is directed towards solving real problems for real people. The chapters that follow will equip you with the specific tools and techniques to embark on this critical journey, transforming your product development from a series of educated guesses into a systematic pursuit of customer-centric innovation.

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