

THE CASE FOR GOOD JOBS Book Club Guide

Good Jobs Institute President Zeynep Ton's latest book, *The Case for Good Jobs: How Great Companies Bring Dignity, Pay, and Meaning to Everyone's Work* examines the “why” and “how” of the good jobs system—to help leaders and managers overcome the disconnect between recognizing a better model, and having the courage to implement it.

Who this guide is for

This book club guide was created as a resource to generate productive and insightful discussions for leaders in a variety of industries—including retail, hospitality, restaurants, call centers, and healthcare. The questions are intended to provoke and deepen your thinking around core concepts in the book and encourage you to apply the concepts to your company or industry.

While the Good Jobs Strategy involves a combination of investment in employees with operational choices that increase employee productivity, contribution, and motivation, applying the framework is not something that a single department or leader can do alone. This is why we recommend including representation from multiple functions in your discussions (e.g., operations, HR, marketing, product, strategy, supply chain).

How to use this guide

Please consider the following suggestions for your group discussions:

- **Prepare.** Before you read the chapter(s) for each week, review the questions for that week. As you read, make notes on ideas you think are relevant or useful.
- **Contribute & make space.** Pay attention to whether any voices are dominating the conversation and do your best to bring others into the discussion. If you disagree with others in your group, take a step back and attempt to understand the gap between your perspectives. Ask one another questions about how you came to your conclusions, and any assumptions that you might have made.
- **Capture learnings.** For the questions specific to your company's performance, consider taking notes on a whiteboard, or assigning a scribe to take notes. Spend time at the end of each session with a short reflection and make note of any key takeaways.
- **Be creative.** This guide brings in some recommended questions but is not meant to be a rigorous or strict curriculum. Bring in new ideas for questions and adapt the conversation to your company or context.

Potential Questions & Schedule

Week 1: Read *The Case for Good Jobs* through p 53 (Introduction, Chapters 1 - 2)

1. In the introduction, Ton describes several larger trends that make it important that we create more good jobs, such as quit rates, lost economic mobility, and smaller workforce from retirements and low birth rate. Are there any other headwinds or changes in your industry that might make it difficult to operate in the status quo?
2. What does Ton mean by being “customer centric”? What makes it challenging to be customer-centric in your industry or your company?
3. What does Ton mean by the good jobs *system with interconnected elements*? Re-read pages 20-21, on Mercadona’s schedule stability and see the diagram in the appendix. Work together to sketch out the types of decisions that lead to *unpredictable or unstable* schedules, either in retail or in your industry. What is the impact of this system on employees? On customers? Performance?
4. Ton describes some assumptions and perceptions about workers that reinforce low wages. Discuss some of those assumptions, and contrast those with what the leaders of NUMMI might have assumed about their employees when they took over the failing plant (p. 50-51).

Week 2: Read *The Case for Good Jobs* through p 91 (Chapters 3 - 4)

1. What were the indirect costs of turnover (lost sales, higher costs, lower productivity) in the Quest Diagnostics call center example? How might employees and managers feel when working in a vicious cycle environment?
2. What are the costs of poor execution in your company or industry? Discuss examples of how high turnover might contribute to lost sales, higher costs, and lower productivity.
3. At the beginning of Chapter 4, Ton describes the experience of Sarah working at a large retailer. Discuss how her experience relates to the five corporate disabilities. Why might it be difficult for this company to adapt to change and differentiate from its competitors?
4. What does high turnover make it difficult for your company to do well? What would low turnover enable you to do differently?
5. *Follow up exercise:* Look into employee turnover at your organization. What was the annual turnover rate last year, by role? Look at the distribution of tenure at your organization: what percentage of your frontline employees have been on the job for less than a year? Less than 6 months? Are these numbers surprising?

Week 3: Read *The Case for Good Jobs* through p 133 (Chapter 5, 6)

1. What are some of the reasons why “rigorous” data analytics restricts companies from getting out of the vicious cycle? How does your company or industry use data? Are there any downsides to your current approach?

2. When describing Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, Ton writes, "whatever managers assume about people will be proven right because they'll end up creating a system that promotes the behavior they expected." What does this mean in practice? Use the four operational choices and investment in people to illustrate how Theory X leader might design the day-to-day work at your company or industry. Do the same for Theory Y. See appendix for an example.
3. Tricia Griffith, one of the leaders described in Chapter 6, told Ton's class, "Operational excellence is a mindset." How did that type of mindset guide the choices that leaders like Jim Sinegal, Isadore Sharpe, and Chester Cadieux made around wages, growth, and success measures?
4. How does operational excellence create value for customers at your company or in your industry?

Week 4: Read *The Case for Good Jobs* through p 181 (Chapter 7, 8)

1. When John Furner discovered a gap between Sam's Club's current state and their aspirations, and set out to make bold changes, he received pushback from advisors and department leaders. Why do you think department leaders were uncertain of this new direction?
2. Go through the four reasons why company leaders are afraid to bet big on people (p 148 – 151). How do these obstacles show up at your company or industry? Are there any other barriers or fears to be aware of?
3. Leaders who adopted the good jobs system had conviction that the status quo was unacceptable. Discuss some of the compelling financial, competitive, and ethical arguments that these leaders developed to embolden others at their organizations to make bold changes.
4. What is the cost of the status quo at your company? What are the risks of *not changing*? Why does this matter for your customers?
5. *Follow up exercise:* Look into pay and schedules at your organization. Make histogram distribution of the annual take-home pay for your full-time employees that worked all of last year. Do the same with average hours worked per week. What percentage of management positions were filled from internal promotions vs. external hires? Are these numbers surprising?

Week 5: Read *The Case for Good Jobs* through p 207 (Chapter 9, 10, epilogue)

1. Ton illustrates that operations can de-risk people investments. What is the relationship between subtraction (reducing workload and variability) and investment in people (pay, schedules)? Why does this combination make pay investment less risky?
2. What choices did Sam's Club, Quest Diagnostics, and Moe's Original BBQ franchisee make to subtract and smooth workload for their frontline teams? Were any of these surprising or counter-intuitive?

3. What are some of the drivers of workload at your company or industry? What is the source of this work? Brainstorm a few big opportunities to subtract and smooth the work.
4. What choices did Sam's Club, Quest Diagnostics, and Moe's Original BBQ franchisee, and Chick Fil A franchisee make to increase team stability and expectations (e.g., pay, schedules, career paths)? Which choices resonated with you the most?
5. Go through the pay questions on p 195 for your organization. Brainstorm a few big opportunities to invest in people.
6. Based on the initial ideas you generated around subtraction and investment, who would need to be involved for this type of change effort?

Connecting with the Good Jobs Institute

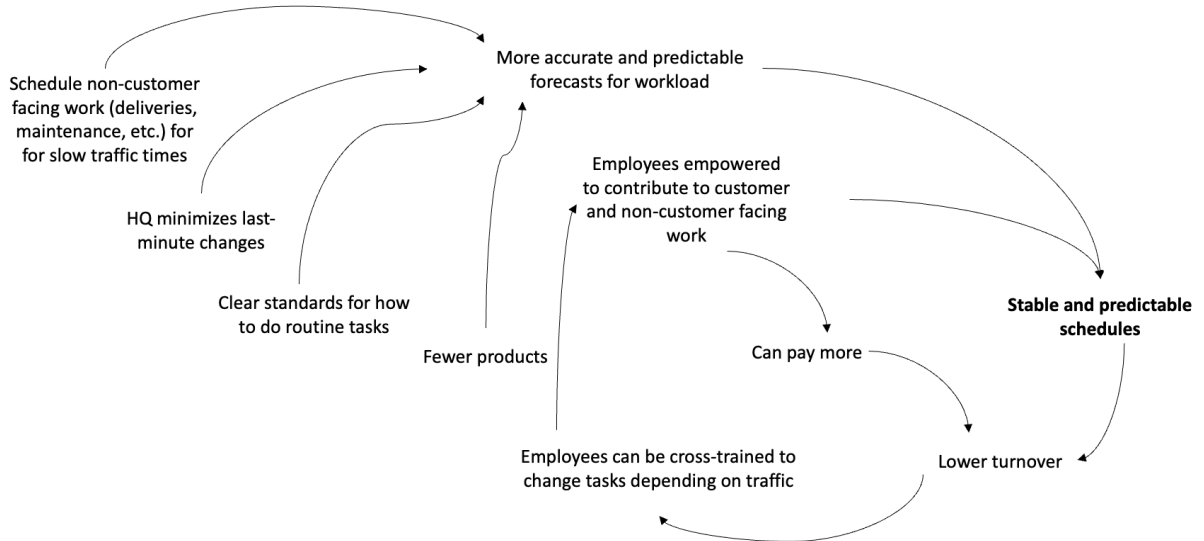
The non-profit Good Jobs Institute was founded in 2017. Our mission is to help companies thrive by creating good jobs. We work with leaders or executives across industries interested in bringing the Good Jobs Strategy to their organizations.

Through our partnerships, we guide management teams through a structured process that helps them use this conceptual Good Jobs Strategy frame to (i) clarify and align on the major pain points of the current system and scope of the business impact, (ii) generate hypotheses for ways to improve, and (iii) understand how to make an integrated set of choices to compel systemic changes.

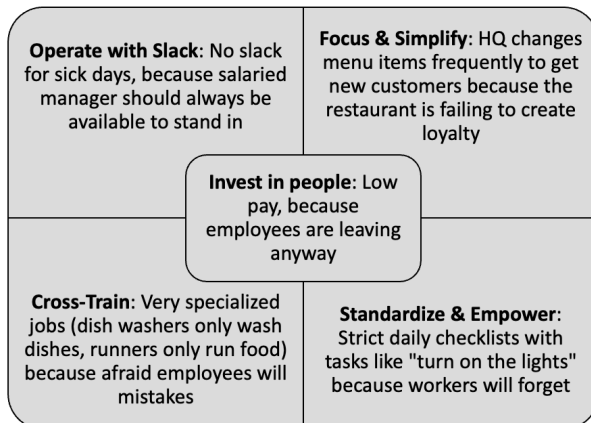
If you are interested in applying the Good Jobs Strategy at your organization, please reach out to us at sarah.kalloch@goodjobsinstitute.org.

APPENDIX

Diagram illustration for Mercadona's system that enables stable schedules (p. 20-21)



Theory X approach in a restaurant setting



Theory Y approach in a restaurant setting

