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THE ADECCO GROUP

WOMEN BACK TO WORK



Women who return to work after taking a career break due to caregiving responsibilities face multiple barriers when returning to work, including a lack of flexible working opportunities and suitable jobs, and bias and discrimination from employers. These are often compounded by personal barriers, including a lack of skills and low confidence. Furthermore, the longer women are out of the labour market, the more barriers they face when trying to get back in. This particularly applies to women who previously worked in low- to mid-skilled jobs and had low- to middle-level wages.

OUR APPROACH

Operating as a Social Innovation Lab, we use our three-step approach of Scan – Build – Scale underpinned by a unique methodology blending research, design-thinking, and systems-thinking to design and co-create solutions that will scale.

SCAN

We start each topic with the Scan phase, applying our Social Radar methodology to determine who within “Woman Back to Work” was most impacted by difficulties in returning to the workforce. Using our proprietary methodology to analyse a combination of public data, Adecco Group data, and social media data scanning, we identified a target audience: women caregivers on the urban fringes, living at or slightly above the poverty line, with the highest risk of long-term social and economic damage. Through further research conducted in Italy, Spain, Sweden, Mexico, South Africa, and Japan, we identified, two key challenges:

- First, personalised flexible working is crucial for women who need to combine work and caregiving responsibilities. This is a critical priority for women returning to work in low- to mid-skilled jobs.
- Second, after taking a career break, women frequently wish to pivot to find employment which allows them to have better working conditions, pay, and scheduling. Cultural and hiring biases and structural difficulties can make it is challenging for this demographic to change careers

than for their more high-skilled counterparts. In addition, we found that women in this demographic needed a greater awareness of the work landscape to match their talents with market demands.

These results support our hypothesis that mid-career women in vocational roles often lack viable solutions to participate more actively in the workforce. Flexible and hybrid work remains more a privilege for high- and mid-skilled workers, while there is unmet high demand for more flexibility, stability and predictability in low-skilled front-line jobs. Since COVID, women have been leaving the workforce in search for better employment and more flexibility, with high-skilled women often starting their own businesses or engaging in gig work. More mid- and low-skilled women would be able to find new pathways to work if supported to positively pivot.

To test our initial findings and understand the real underlying needs and challenges of women in finding employment, we ran the final part of the Scan phase, deeper needs-finding. This consisted of 30 empathy and consultation conversations with women from the healthcare, hospitality and logistics industries globally, individuals who experienced a career transition (former athletes), as well as with private and public sector organisations, civil society, and institutional agencies.

Additional dimensions that emerged from the consultation included:

1. **Working on our own terms:** Front-line, mid-skilled female employees sometimes lack flexibility due to rigid scheduling systems and procedures. Being able to adapt schedules and location (if possible) is an important sort of flexibility. Moreover, stability and predictability are highly demanded to have a better work/life balance.
2. **Giving a chance:** Despite needing to fill roles, companies aren't willing to give women who want to pivot a chance to show their translatable skills. These women are currently not being valued and recognized for their prior qualifications and experiences after being unemployed for a long time.
3. **Time and resource scarcity:** Women caregivers often face time and resource constraints to spend on upgrading their skills or looking for non-obvious career opportunities.
4. **Purpose-matching:** Women are looking for a job that matches their talents and passions, helps re-discover their identity while earning income and advancing their career. Not finding purpose-matching opportunities leads to knocking down their confidence and creates a sense of feeling helpless in attempting to advance.
5. **Navigating the job-finding processes:** Women in this demographic often face technological challenges in searching for a job and navigating the complex and often tech-heavy hiring processes.

Our learnings led us to further refine the target group and geography:

- Women who took a long career break (12 months and longer, which may or may not be related to maternity leave)
- Women who took a career break due to caregiving responsibilities (25-50 years old)
- Middle-skilled women (having vocational skills, defined as between low and middle level of skilling)
- Held jobs with vocational training (front line and service jobs in healthcare or hospitality) prior to the break
- Neither in employment nor in training, but actively looking for employment on their terms
- Located in the urban fringes of big cities in Mexico, Spain and France

As a result, we framed two design challenges:

- How might we help mid-career female workers in vocational professions to find the flexibility they need to return to working;
- How might we help mid-career female workers in vocational professions who stopped working in the last 2 years, positively pivot when returning to work.

BUILD

Now we are starting the Build process of ideation. Solutions are co-created with the end-user, and with a broad array of stakeholders who can make lateral leaps and bring different perspectives. For this purpose, we bring together a multi-stakeholder Working Group to brainstorm possible solutions to each

of the challenges above. Through the ideation process, we test the emerged ideas with a testing group of end-users on the ground in Spain. Their feedback is worked back into the Working Group process to narrow down and further improve the ideas. We test these again with another focus group and use their feedback to iterate further and narrow down to two or three solutions that are assessed as viable to prototype in the Accelerator.

SCALE

After completion of the Build phase, we move the most promising solutions into the Accelerator where we use techniques adapted from corporate accelerators and incubators. The key difference is that we incubate only the prototypes from our projects, not those brought in by partners or external entrepreneurs. A small, light venture team is created to take each solution forward from prototype to minimum viable product (MVP) to market. Our ventures do not aim to go fully to market, but rather they focus on developing the solutions with partners up to the point where a partner or partners feel ready to take them forward to reach the people who need them.

During the first six months (sprint 1) the venture team's focus is to deliver an MVP for the solution. At the end of this sprint, each team pitches their solution to a panel of evaluators. If the solution is deemed viable to go forward, the teams continue for another six months (sprint 2) with additional resources and the aim to deliver a product that is developed enough to be adopted by a partner who takes it to market. At the end of sprint 2, the team pitches again to the potential implementing partners with the end goal of transitioning fully into the implementing partner's organisation. Learnings from each sprint are shared across the cohort and fed back into the full Social Innovation Lab process to drive impact.

