



 Ukraine – Creative Impact Fund

LEZO

The AI-powered career platform that helps employers find specialists in the creative and tech fields

LEZO Final Report

CIRCE

Creative Impact Fund

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Summary

LEZO is an AI-powered career platform that accelerates connections between candidates and employers, while supporting candidates through the hard path of job search by career advices. The platform adopts a skills-first approach, which prioritizes candidates' skills over traditional factors like job titles or educational backgrounds. LEZO analyzes candidates' CVs to extract key skills by summarizing their experience and these skills are then compared with the requirements specified in job descriptions, offering both candidates and employers a clear understanding of their compatibility.

The implementation of semantic search within vector databases ensures precise match percentage assessments, expediting the process and minimizing inaccuracies. The platform was created with support of Projector Creative & Tech Institute which is an independent Ukrainian EdTech institute founded in 2015 that provides professional education in the field of IT and creative industries. Projector actively seeks innovative approaches in education and drives transformative change in the industry.

We are focusing on fighting a big problem with employment and job search in the creative industry in Ukraine. After the beginning of full-scale war, the unemployment rate has risen dramatically. In 2022 this rate increased from 10% to 25% (International Monetary Fund, 2023). Because of war approximately 5 million people lost their jobs (The Kyiv Independent, 2022). Djinni analytics (2023) reported in 2022 a 50% decline in the number of monthly published jobs, whereas the number of job seekers surged by 2.5 times. Due to this, the labor market became employer-oriented. Djinni observes a 45% increase in candidates without experience, driven by the growing number of switchers and junior candidates. There are also special problems related especially to the creative industry. Candidates in CCE often struggle to identify the most suitable profession, comprehend the roles of emerging digital professions, distinguish between them, and navigate the job search process in the creative field.

As a result, the duration of job search has extended significantly, with survey respondents indicating search periods ranging from two months to over a year for their most recent employment. Employers now have to review an average of 31 resumes per job opening, a stark contrast from the pre-war period when they typically assessed only 5 resumes per vacancy, as mentioned in the DOU report (2023). Consequently, the time required to onboard new employees has also substantially increased.

The goal of our product is to streamline the job search process for both candidates and employers. For candidates, we aim to highlight opportunities that align with their skills and background, reducing the time to find a job. For employers, our aim is to present candidates who best match their specific positions, thereby minimizing costs and time to hire new

employees. Additionally, we offer comprehensive support to both candidates and employers in the form of informative guidance. We provide advice on crafting impressive CVs, succeeding in interviews, and offer tips for companies on how to create compelling job listings.

Our initial goal was to create a platform that will support the whole candidate's path – from career guidance to job search. But during our CIRCE journey we understood that it would be hard to turn this into a business model, so we decided to change our strategy. We switched to technological innovation development in the job matching process. We created a [minimal viable product](#) and tested our service on real users and data. LEZO matches candidates and vacancies focusing on skills that users have rather than on job titles and parameters. This approach decreases discrimination for individuals, who may lack formal education but possess valuable skills, and allows users to explore opportunities beyond one specific profession, opening a broader spectrum of career possibilities. For employers, this means accessing a larger and more diverse pool of candidates, enabling them to identify individuals with the right skills, regardless of their previous job titles. As the next steps, we plan to stick to this skills-first approach and introduce web service to users.

CIRCE contributed a lot to our product development. We got great opportunities and resources to conduct research (both qualitative and quantitative). This enabled us to identify the primary concerns of our users, discern the most challenging hurdles they face, and understand the specific assistance they seek within the realm of job services. We integrated into the European context and told people about the Ukrainian market. Moreover, we received valuable advice on both mentorship sessions and CIRCE events, where we introduced for the first time our matching algorithm and had feedback and support from the community. CIRCE allowed us to develop a functional iteration of the product, strategically addressing one of the key pains of our audience. Simultaneously, the project is positioned for potential monetization and long-term sustainability upon its conclusion.

Journey

At the beginning of our journey, we aimed to address the employment challenges in Ukraine. On average, candidates secured employment after 47 interactions and 15 interviews, according to our market research findings. As Djinni analytics (2023) mentioned, the monthly volume of job postings has decreased from 35,000 in January 2022 to 12,000 by December 2022. In contrast, the number of candidates has remained consistently high, ranging between 17,000 and 18,000 per month. Consequently, there was a significant number of candidates compared to available job vacancies. Considering this, the time spent on job searching had considerably increased compared to the pre-war period. Moreover, in the creative industry, it is challenging for freelancers and beginners to find employment due to a lack of understanding of the market and how hiring works in such a field – what it takes to secure a job.

That's why we decided to create an algorithm to help candidates in the creative and IT sectors find employment more efficiently. Initially, our plan was to develop a service that would construct a comprehensive career trajectory – from career guidance and personalized recommendations for improving hard and soft skills to job hunting.

Throughout the program, we achieved several significant milestones and goals:

1. [Career Guidance Bot](#) Launch:

Successfully launched a career guidance bot, engaging with over 8,000 users.

81% satisfaction rate among users who completed the comprehensive career guidance process.

76% of users completed the entire career guidance process.

2. Employment Experiment:

Conducted a successful experiment in employment assistance.

Utilized career consultants to help a targeted group of participants swiftly navigate the job market.

We assisted 32 participants in finding jobs as a result of this experiment.

3. AI Matching Algorithm Development:

Developed a sophisticated matching algorithm leveraging artificial intelligence.

The algorithm, based on machine learning, enhances the efficiency of candidate-employer pairing.

After deploying the algorithm, the bot's reaction rate increased x5, and the number of matches rose x4.8. This way, we grasped the audience's response, recognizing it as a valuable and beneficial feature that enhances match percentages.

4. Free Career Course:

Introduced a valuable [free career course](#) accessible to all interested individuals, aimed at empowering candidates with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective job search. Established a structured [career template](#) in Notion to guide users through a comprehensive job search path.

We attracted around 1700 participants, and received positive feedback from 78% of users, expressing satisfaction with the information provided.

5. Qualitative and Quantitative Research:

Conducted in-depth qualitative research through online interviews with 10 candidates, identifying key pain points and opportunities for improvement.

Extended research to a quantitative phase, involving over 700 respondents to validate qualitative findings and gain insights into the job-seeking landscape.

6. Creation of [landing page](#)

7. [Web Service Prototyping](#):

Developed a prototype for the upcoming web service, a pivotal extension of our product beyond the bot.

Integration of a shared database ensures seamless communication between the chatbot and web service.

8. We attracted 385 companies and more than 13800 new users to our [chatbot](#)

Our initial idea was to create a product that would provide candidates with a comprehensive career trajectory – from career guidance to job searching. At the beginning of the program, we were focused on developing a career guidance bot, which, based on open-ended responses and AI, could help users choose a profession within 10 minutes. This was the first bot of its kind launched in Ukraine. The bot reached 8,000 users, with 81% of those who completed the career guidance expressing satisfaction with the user experience. Additionally, the bot garnered attention at conferences and in the article in educational media of Ukraine called Osvitoria (2023).

We initially planned to monetize by taking a percentage from the courses promoted through the career guidance bot. However, despite the active participation of over two thousand users who completed the career guidance process, there were no transitions to the purchase of courses in their chosen profession. Additionally, the decision-making process for purchasing a course proved to be time-consuming, ranging from 3 to 6 months. Consequently, our initial monetization idea faced challenges, leading us to reconsider and pivot our product strategy. This marked a crucial turning point in our program journey.

We conducted an employment experiment to determine whether the support of career consultants could help candidates find jobs faster. We offered assistance in CV preparation, guided company selection, streamlined the application submission process, provided

interview preparation, checked portfolios, and offered guidance before technical interviews. Users found this experiment highly valuable in reducing uncertainty and stress. However, the overall process didn't make a significant influence on job search duration. Therefore, we made the strategic decision to refocus on enhancing the comprehensive job matching process. We began developing an AI algorithm to better match candidates and employers. The algorithm works by extracting skills from the candidate's resume and the skills required by the employer from the job posting. The service then calculates the matching percentage by comparing the skill sets of both parties, allowing candidates and employers to see how well they match.

Simultaneously, we launched a free career course to help more candidates understand how to improve their job search: create resumes, succeed in interviews, and more. Following this, we conducted qualitative and quantitative research on how candidates search for jobs. We gained numerous insights and information for developing new features in the product, as well as ideas for PR and content. As of the end of the program, we had our second pivotal checkpoint – we decided to proceed with working not only on chatbot, but to create a whole web service. Now we are actively working on developing the web service – we created its prototype, integrated a new shared database for the chatbot and web service, and are developing an admin section for our team. Moreover, in the final CIRCE stage we launched a landing page about LEZO.

In shaping our project, we carefully took into account several critical factors that have played a key role in defining our strategy and priorities.

A major focus for us has been the careful planning of our business model. We aimed to integrate a monetization strategy into our platform to ensure its long-term viability. By doing so, we are working to guarantee the sustainability and success of our initiative in the future.

Equally important to us is the commitment to protecting the anonymity of candidates during their job search. Acknowledging the potential for discrimination and bias based on factors like gender and age, we are dedicated to creating a platform that provides equal opportunities for all candidates. This commitment aligns with our values of fairness and inclusivity, ensuring an even playing field for job seekers.

Another crucial factor revolves around our partnership with the Projector Institute. Our goal is to provide maximum support to their students, assisting them in transitioning from education to employment. By prioritizing the needs of Projector Institute students, we contribute to the broader objective of empowering individuals with the skills needed to succeed in their professional journeys.

Lastly, our project is driven by a desire to simplify the job search process in our economy. We aspire to ease the challenges associated with finding employment and, in doing so, increase the number of individuals who have a smooth job search experience. This

overarching goal reflects our commitment to making a positive impact on the employment landscape and improving the lives of those seeking meaningful work.

Innovation

At the first iteration of our innovation journey, our goal was to develop a comprehensive product offering that would guide candidates through their entire career trajectory — from career guidance and skill-building courses to the ultimate stage of job searching. To realize this vision, we embarked on the creation of the first step in this journey: the career guidance bot.

The primary aim of this bot is to deliver personalized career advice within a quick 10-minute session. In comparison to other similar career guidance services, ours stands out for its simplicity. Existing services often take between 1 to 4 hours to complete and rely solely on multiple-choice questions. This not only restricts user choice and creativity but also makes the process laborious, requiring users to sift through numerous options to make a suitable choice. Additionally, these services are challenging to adapt, needing constant updates to keep up with new professions, resulting in them frequently becoming outdated.

Our approach to the career guidance process is radically different. It takes a mere 10 minutes to complete, primarily employing open-ended questions to guide users in self-reflection. Leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and analyzing open-ended responses from users, the career guidance bot aimed to distill valuable insights about everyone. Users would receive tailored recommendations for a career path that aligned with their skills, interests, and aspirations. The implementation of AI made this process fast and interesting for users. It allowed users to receive quick and personalized insights, guiding them toward professions that resonated with their individual strengths and preferences. Additionally, the list of suggested professions is easily customizable for different markets and needs. Users can promptly ask questions about various professions upon receiving their results, which is especially beneficial for those unfamiliar with digital and creative job roles.

An integral step in our innovation journey was dedicated to research. We started with market research and interviews with companies in order to get insights from the employer's point of view, which pains they had during search of candidates. Also, we initiated a job search experiment to gain practical insights into the current job search process and assess the impact of career consultants on this journey. This experiment enabled us to meticulously map the candidate's journey during the job search process and identify the candidate's potential challenges.

A transformative shift occurred as we redefined our approach to job placement, adopting a skills-first methodology. Diverging from conventional job platforms that match candidates based on job titles, our service aligns vacancies with the skills candidates possess. The skills-first approach is a modern trend due to its potential to address critical challenges in the job market. According to a World Economic Forum and PwC (2023), by 2030, an estimated 85

million jobs globally could remain unfilled, highlighting the pressing need for skilled talent. The approach, as emphasized in the LinkedIn Economic Graph (2023) report, will expand candidate pools from 8 to 10 times, benefitting Gen Z, Gen X, and Millennials. This approach unlocks hidden talent pools, accelerating hiring processes and generating cost savings. Organizations fostering a skills-first culture are 63% more likely to achieve positive outcomes. It supports talent mobility, addressing skills gaps strategically, and promotes diversity by removing barriers such as gender, age etc. The skills-first approach is pivotal for overcoming talent shortages, enhancing productivity, and fostering inclusivity in the job search area.

After we understood that our first approach was not applicable to create a business model in the future, we pivot and started development of a new job matching algorithm. This AI-driven approach allows us to understand the context and meaning within candidate resumes and job descriptions more comprehensively. Unlike traditional keyword-based searches, semantic search captures the nuances of human language, ensuring a more accurate and nuanced matching process. This enables our algorithm to not only identify explicit skills but also understand the implicit relationships and context surrounding those skills. Also, the service creates a digital profile of every candidate that has their CV in the database and then compares profile with skills from vacancy description. The result is a more precise and effective job matching process, minimizing errors and incorrect match percentages.

In the end, we realized that expanding our product solely through a chatbot would be challenging. After confirming the idea's viability through the chatbot and receiving positive feedback from users about LEZO's usefulness and future potential, we made strategic decisions based on insights from research and lessons learned during chatbot development. This led us to initiate the development of a web service. Our goal is to create a user-friendly web service that includes all the features of the chatbot while simplifying the candidate and employer workflows. The web service promises a faster and more efficient experience, thanks to a more advanced database. While we currently have a [prototype](#), we are actively refining it for user suitability. We aim to introduce web service to the first users early next year.

The project journey presented several challenges that shaped our course of action. Firstly, the career guidance bot faced setbacks as it failed to deliver expected results, and users did not proceed to purchase educational courses following its use. This prompted a strategic reassessment of our approach. The competitive landscape in the job search sector added complexity. Survey respondents highlighted the prevalence of approximately 30 different job search websites, indicating intense competition. This necessitated a meticulous examination of our positioning and services against industry rivals. The organizational aspect of our work posed another challenge, with significant time spent streamlining processes. Integrating the skills-first technology into our existing telegram chatbot, developed on a no-code system, proved intricate. Adapting user flows and employer/user profiles required careful consideration to ensure a seamless transition. The challenge of populating our candidate

database surfaced due to a dual dilemma. On one hand, the shortage of vacancies hindered candidate recruitment, while on the other, employers hesitated to contribute vacancies without an established candidate base. Navigating this equilibrium was a nuanced process.

The success of our product during the CIRCE journey depended on key factors. Our team's experience and adaptability were crucial; as our product strategy evolved, the team adeptly navigated changes, ensuring continuous progress. Collaborating with Projector Institute students and graduates was also one of the success factors. The Institute's reputation facilitated the acquisition of initial candidates and employers, establishing a foundational presence in our database. The strategic use of AI technology and algorithms significantly contributed to our success. The efficiency and accuracy of the algorithm, with a low percentage of mistakes, were enhanced by AI, expediting its development compared to a non-AI scenario. Incorporating a skills-first approach aligned seamlessly with the changing gig economy. Recognizing the evolving nature of job search, we embraced a forward-thinking approach anticipating a shift from job-title-centric searches to a more efficient skills-first methodology. This strategic alignment positions our product at the forefront of adapting to future trends in the job market.

In conclusion, our journey focused on user research, adopting a skills-first approach, and leveraging AI for success. We look forward to refining and growing our product in response to evolving job market dynamics.

Impact

Our project has had a substantial impact, touching various aspects of the career development landscape. More than 15,000 users engaged with our job matching chatbot, underscoring its popularity and utility. The career guidance bot, accessed by close to 8,000 users, received positive feedback from 81% of them, indicating its effectiveness in providing personalized profession recommendations.

Facilitating 927 successful matches between companies and employees demonstrates the tangible outcomes of our platform. Additionally, the registration of 385 companies and creation of 393 vacancies signifies a growing network of engaged employers who recognize the value of our services. We observed a x5 increase in bot reactions and x4.8 in matches between candidates and employers. This robust evidence serves as a compelling proof of concept for our product, indicating its necessity and utility for users. Furthermore, it reinforces our confidence that our solution will continue to enhance match percentages.

Our Telegram channels have reached over 10,600 users, establishing them as valuable platforms for addressing complex career questions, disseminating insights from HR professionals, and offering support on mental health matters. Partnering with [Rozmova](#), a mental health service, we co-created a [publication](#) addressing the crucial topic of supporting mental health during job searches. Additionally, our collaboration with [Click&Speak](#), an English school, resulted in a unique [event](#) offering live CV checks. This initiative aimed to give advice and check users' English language skills. As well, we collaborated with [Projector Mentorship platform](#) which provides mentors from different industries that can help solve both industry-special and career-related questions. We made a [list](#) of mentors for our community so candidates can find support in their career and job search easily if needed. In addition, we conducted 11 portfolio reviews and 8 career talks as an educational resource in career development, providing practical assistance to users.

We engaged with a community of 1,400 Projector alumni, introducing LEZO and actively participating in a groundbreaking alumni community event held in the metaverse. This event marked a pioneering initiative in Ukraine. During the event, we delivered a lecture on the significance of future soft skills. Following its success, a Ukrainian university invited us to share the same lecture with its students. Through our outreach within the Projector Institute alumni network, we are dedicated to fostering the career development of these individuals.

Our free career course, attended by 1,700 people, is making a real impact. It opens doors to crucial insights about creative and tech professions, guiding aspiring candidates through seven key lessons on crafting CVs, applying for jobs, and acing interviews. To support participants at every step, we provide a handy Notion guide filled with practical advice for a

successful job search. This initiative goes beyond just numbers. It's about empowering individuals with both knowledge and tools to navigate the challenging job market.

Moreover, our innovative skills-first approach has disrupted the job search industry. This paradigm shift has not only made the job-finding process faster but also more inclusive, expanding the pool of candidates. We believe that by using this approach hiring costs will be reduced, more candidates will receive access to creative and tech jobs and certain groups of candidates will be less discriminated against. According to World economic forum and PwC (2023) report about this approach, more than 100 million people will be able to apply to certain jobs. The traditional approach to job search has a huge drawback, because it prioritises formal education und job titles over the actual skills of candidates. A skills-first approach can cause a great switch on the Ukrainian labor market.

Internally, our team has grown stronger through challenges, exemplified by the initial setback with the career guidance bot. This experience enhanced our adaptability and focus on continuous improvement. Collaborating with diverse communities, conducting educational initiatives, and achieving substantial user engagement have significantly boosted team morale. This success reinforces our commitment to making a positive impact on the career development landscape and solidifying our position as a transformative force in the industry.

Learnings

Throughout our project journey, we gained valuable insights, particularly in the area of research and development. Our discoveries have been instrumental in shaping the impact we aim to make, while simultaneously bringing attention to areas where enhancements can be made.

We designed a comprehensive [questionnaire](#) that delves into various aspects of the respondent's profile, including general information, career preferences (such as preferred types of employment, remote or office work, and career priorities), and their job search experiences (where they typically search for jobs, encountered challenges, the most difficult step in the job search process, and the type of assistance they sought). The aim was to understand the specific challenges our users face, enhance their job search experience, and identify the features they desire on job websites. A total of 700 respondents participated in the research, with the majority falling within the 18-35 age range and holding bachelor's or master's degrees. Notably, 70% of the respondents are from the design field, while others represent backgrounds in marketing and management.

In delving into our research, we uncovered several key learnings. Firstly, the realization that a significant majority (around 80%) of job seekers find the job search challenging underscored the importance and relevance of the problem we are addressing.

Notably, our survey unveiled nuanced differences between different age groups. Non-Gen Z individuals (older than 26 years old) face somewhat greater challenges in job searching, with longer job search durations and a higher perception of difficulty. Around 22% of non-Gen Z job seekers looked for a job for over six months (compared to 13% in the younger audience), and 27% overall still hadn't found a job, while Gen Z reported only 19% in this category. Also, individuals older than 26 years old encounter discrimination more often than others. We understood that our service can help lower the level of difficulty for older candidates because of the anonymity that it provides.

The revelation that 81% of respondents do not work in their field of study emphasized the significance of a skills-first approach. Evaluating candidates based on skills rather than formal education emerged as a critical factor in enhancing our approach. Moreover, the strong desire for job opportunities abroad, reflected by 60% of respondents, highlighted the potential to expand our product to other markets beyond the Ukrainian landscape.

Addressing challenges faced by candidates became a central theme in our development process. High competition, lack of feedback from employers, and insufficient experience were identified as top hurdles. Our commitment to solve these challenges is reflected in our

ongoing efforts in web service development and educational materials creation. Focusing on enhancing the job search experience, particularly in finding relevant vacancies, aligns with the feedback we received from our users.

The feedback from candidates in the survey also inspired ideas for future features development, including an interview simulator, auto-resume review in the bot, and further refinement of skills-matching algorithm. Additionally, user suggestions led us to consider offering tips for mental health, recognizing the need for support in relaxing during interviews and managing psychological aspects of the job search process.

In our work processes, we discovered the importance of applying more robust risk management, acknowledging the value of user feedback. Emphasizing that it's okay to fail and adjusting our trajectory accordingly has been integral to our learning journey. Understanding that it's acceptable to encounter setbacks and that failure is often an inherent part of innovation has allowed us to pivot effectively. The ability to adjust our trajectory in response to challenges has proven integral to our learning journey, fostering resilience, and reinforcing our commitment to delivering a more impactful and user-centric solution. Moreover, embracing an iterative approach to product development has been transformative. We've learned that the process of continual refinement and adaptation is essential for staying agile in a dynamic landscape. Survey insights showed that the primary challenge for both employers and candidates lies in the difficulty of finding each other: 29% of candidates specifically seek assistance in finding vacancies tailored to their skills and 41% of employers mentioned that sourcing is the most difficult step in hiring. Recognizing that users often tire from browsing through irrelevant job postings or resumes, emphasized the potential effectiveness of our new skills-first approach during a pivotal point in our journey.

Additionally, participating in the CIRCE events provided our team with invaluable insights and reflections on our journey with the Creative Impact Fund. Through four networking events, we meticulously analyzed our project's development, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The real-time testing of our web platform during these events allowed us to engage with participants, receive immediate feedback, and discuss potential enhancements. The positive reception from participants emphasized the relevance of our product, particularly in addressing the importance of skills-based job searching.

Our advice to those embarking on similar projects is to recognize that utilizing AI and cutting-edge technologies is not solely about creating a product; it's about cultivating a user base that finds genuine value in what you offer. While innovative technologies provide a foundation, it's the people who use your product daily that truly shape its worth.

Our future plans after the CIRCE program involve several strategic initiatives to enhance our project's impact. Our immediate focus is on finalizing the development of the first version of our web service for users. Following this milestone, we aim to execute a comprehensive marketing campaign to effectively introduce the platform to our target audience.

Additionally, we have plans to reconfigure our chatbot to provide educational mailings and curated lists of vacancies based on specific areas of interest. Looking ahead, our long-term vision includes expanding our product to new markets, with a particular emphasis on Poland, where the Projector Institute will have a presence. We aspire to grow our user base substantially, setting a target goal of reaching 50,000 users.

In conclusion, we plan to transform LEZO from a job matching bot into a full-fledged career service. Our aim is to make the job placement process in creative and technical industries faster and less frustrating for users. We want to provide assistance at every step, from personalized vacancy recommendations to aiding in the preparation of their profiles through profile analysis and a recommendation system. We are enthusiastic about the growth and development of our product, and we are committed to continually improving our services to meet the evolving needs of our expanding user community.

Linking back to CIRCE

Our insights from the development of the LEZO platform hold significant relevance to the broader context of the CIRCE program and the landscape of the creative economy.

Firstly, LEZO, as a service tailored for the creative and tech industries, aims to optimize and simplify the job search process while providing insights of working in creative industries.

Secondly, in the context of CIRCE, our participation allowed us to integrate the Ukrainian perspective into the European community. We engaged with other CIRCE participants, sharing knowledge, experiences, and receiving valuable feedback on our strategy and product. This collaborative environment fostered a rich exchange of ideas, contributing to the collective growth of projects within the CIF ecosystem.

Moreover, the opportunity to share our experiences in entrepreneurship within the creative industry was mutually beneficial, contributing to the collective pool of knowledge within the CIRCE community.

In conclusion, by facilitating a faster and more accessible job search process for individuals in the creative industries, we contribute to the overall advancement of this sector. Our journey reflects the collaborative and supportive nature of the CIF community, showcasing the potential for innovation and growth within the area of creative entrepreneurship.

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Note about AI-tools

For this report, we used ChatGPT to help us with spelling and grammar, edit parts of the text, and maintain the right tone of voice.