



Supporting mid-career to late-career workers who are insecurely employed

The National Careers Institute (NCI) partnered with the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to obtain a better understanding of the career information and support needs of individuals in their mid- to late-career stages (aged 30 and above) who are insecurely employed and unable to obtain secure, meaningful employment or stable career pathways. These individuals are referred to as 'insecurely employed workers' in this report.

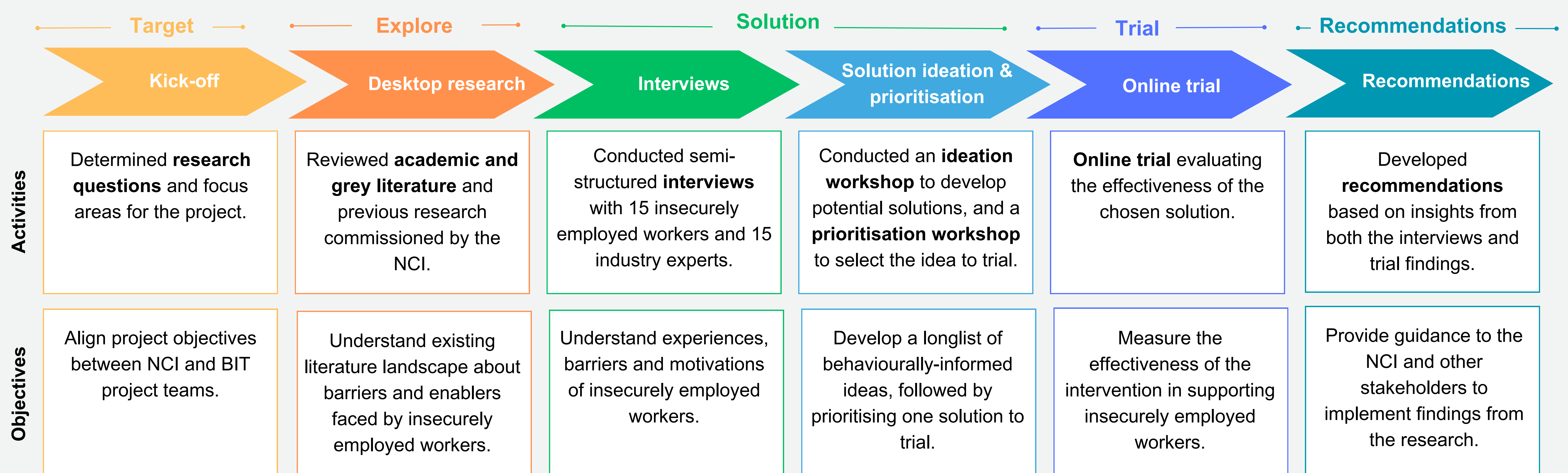
What is behavioural insights?

'Behavioural insights' (BI) refers to the practical application of concepts from behavioural science. Underpinned by the recognition that people's decisions are influenced by cognitive biases, emotions and environmental factors, BI offers a framework for designing policies, programs and interventions that better align with how individuals naturally think and act.

How was BI applied in this research?

- **Understanding real-world behaviour:** 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with insecurely employed workers to gain insights into their attitudes, motivations and behaviours in real-world contexts. We explored the barriers and enablers that insecurely employed workers encounter when seeking to obtain secure, meaningful pathways, as well as the cognitive shortcuts that may shape their decisions when engaging with career information and support.
- **Designing solutions based on evidence:** This included synthesising findings from interviews into the behavioural barriers and enablers faced by insecurely employed workers, then drawing on the interventions from the behavioural science literature that were used to address similar challenges.
- **Measuring potential impact of solutions:** To ensure that the proposed intervention (presenting work experience by skills, rather than by roles in a resume) was effective in changing behaviour, an online trial was conducted to measure the difference in choices made by employers depending on the format of a potential candidate's curriculum vitae (CV). This gives greater confidence in the potential effectiveness of this solution when implemented in the real world and allowed us to contribute to the existing evidence-base about effective interventions.

Research methodology



Interview findings

Alignment with desktop research

Insecurely employed workers' experiences inform how they define careers and employment security.	Insecurely employed workers report high levels of dissatisfaction with the 'security' aspect of their careers (Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, 2015) as well as a lack of control and agency over their work (Aletraris, 2010). According to a 2022 report by the Behavioural Economics Team of Australia (BETA), 2 out of every 10 mid-career Australians believed there is a 'likely or certain' possibility of losing their employment in the upcoming year. Furthermore, 15% of mid-career employees expressed a lack of confidence in the stability of their current position.
Insecurely employed workers are seeking careers that balance security, meaning and flexibility.	Perceptions of the availability and ease of gaining insecure employment compared to secure roles may hinder long-term employment security (Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, 2015). Insecurely employed workers experience a range of negative impacts that can motivate a career change (Gilfillan, 2018). This includes a financial and housing instability, irregular hours and diminished emotional wellbeing. However, these factors also reduce their capacity for long-term decision-making and professional development (Beyond Blue, 2011).
Characteristics of insecure work create self-perpetuating barriers to transitioning to secure employment.	Staying in under-skilled temporary employment can trap individuals in cycles of insecure employment by eroding their professional networks and relevant experience (Mauricio, 2016). The lack of networks can hinder their ability to connect with potential employers, learn about employment opportunities, and understand effective employment positioning.
Insecurely employed workers believe that employers will negatively judge their job applications.	Insecure roles tend to be viewed in a negative way by employers (Australian Council of Trade Unions, 2018), which limits the opportunities offered to insecurely employed workers. A qualitative study with 30 gig workers revealed that they were reluctant to include gig economy employment experience on their resumes due to the belief that it would adversely impact their prospects of securing a more professional position (Bissell, 2022)
Insecurely employed workers desire personalised and tailored career information and support.	Workers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds face unique barriers including discrimination, language proficiency, limited recognition of overseas qualifications, and undervaluing of overseas experience (Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, 2008). Programs that focus on personalised information, such as the provision of localised information have proven promising. For example, Careers NSW offers information about available employment and local training opportunities in multiple languages to support CALD individuals.
Insecurely employed workers want more information about the specifics of job roles and the recruitment process.	Insecurely employed workers perceive that insecure types of employment are more readily available than secure employment alternatives (Quinlan & Underhill, 2021). This highlights the importance of providing accurate information about the availability of secure roles to correct misperceptions and enable well-informed job and career decisions.
Insecurely employed workers prefer online job boards and social media to government sources for career information.	According to a 2022 BETA report, people in their mid-career are most likely to seek employment information and advice from job websites and family and friends, while only 3% reported using government websites.

Trial design

Making key skills more salient in a CV may encourage employers to make decisions based on the candidate's skills and experience, and could help to alleviate bias related to time constraints or negative views about insecure employment histories.

- Insecurely employed workers are concerned that employers may have negative views of their insecure work history.
- Insecurely employed workers are unsure about the best way to present their employment history in their CV.
- Insecurely employed workers can acquire genuine experience and expertise over multiple short-term roles.
- In many cases, seemingly different roles may require the use of similar skills.

Intervention tested

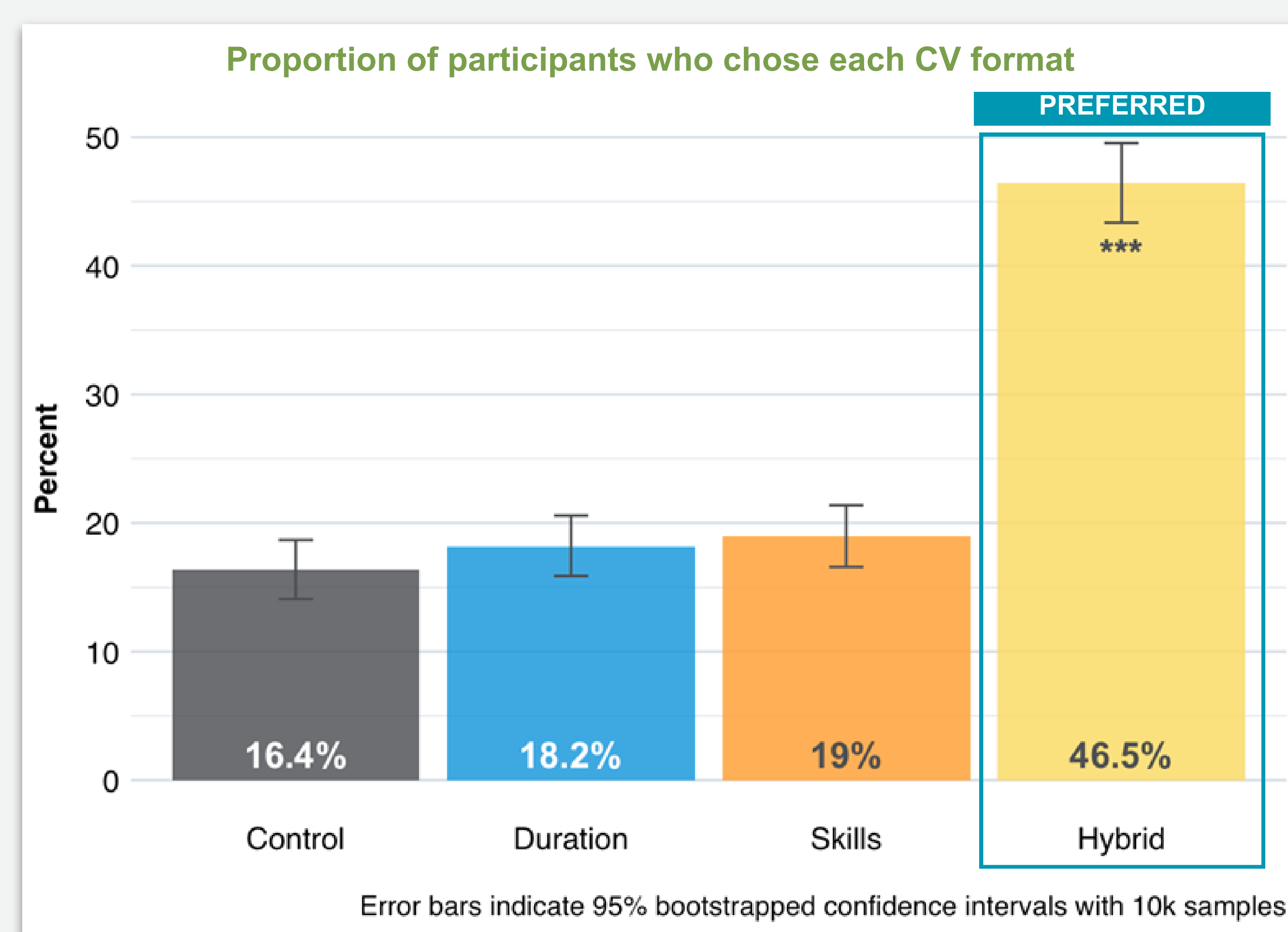
We tested four different CV formats for fictitious candidates with a history of short-term roles to determine the format employers most preferred.

- **Control:** A conventional employment history CV, where experience is categorised by the job role, but without dates to enable a simple point of comparison with other formats.
- **Duration:** A conventional employment history CV, where experience is categorised by the job role, with total years of experience listed (rather than dates).
- **Skills:** Information is categorised by key skills and relevant employment history is listed beneath each skill, with dates removed.
- **Hybrid:** Information is categorised by key skills and relevant employment history is listed beneath each skill, with cumulative experience in that skill listed in years.

1,001 individuals who had recent experience in making hiring decisions participated in the trial. Participants were shown the CVs for fictitious candidates and asked to select one CV they most preferred.

Results

There was a clear preference for the Hybrid CV format, with almost half of the participants selecting this CV. Those who selected the Hybrid CV format were also more accurate in their estimates of the years of experience of the candidate, compared to participants who chose other formats.



There was no reliable evidence for a preference for or against either the Skills or Duration formats relative to the control format.

Recommendations

Provide tailored and accessible online resources for insecurely employed workers

- Insecurely employed workers desire personalised and tailored career information and support.
- Characteristics of insecure work can create self-perpetuating barriers to transitioning to secure employment.
- Insecurely employed workers prefer online job boards and social media to government sources for career information.

For example:

- Make it easy to find relevant, tailored information.
- Provide resources that target the specific needs of insecurely employed workers.

Provide resources that support access to flexible and secure employment

- Insecurely employed workers are seeking careers that balance security, meaning and flexibility.
- Insecurely employed workers want more information about the specifics of job roles and the recruitment process.

For example:

- Support industry to provide greater specificity about flexible work and job requirements in job ads.
- Support insecurely employed workers to access employment that is both flexible and secure.

Offer insights about maintaining a meaningful later stage career

- Insecurely employed workers' experiences inform how they define careers and employment security.
- Older workers may end up in insecure employment due to their unique barriers to obtaining secure employment.

For example:

- Prompt industry to consider opportunities for late-career workers.
- Help late-career workers access employment that works for them.

Support insecurely employed workers to use Hybrid CVs

- Insecurely employed workers believe that employers will negatively judge their job applications.
- Hybrid CVs that highlight key transferable skills and list the cumulative duration of experience in each skill are preferred by people who make employment decisions.

For example:

- Assist insecurely employed workers to use Hybrid CVs.
- User test and evaluate the implementation of Hybrid CVs.

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