

# Innovation in career development at WHO



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Fabiana Mariano and Sara Canna.

## SARA CANNA AND FABIANA MARIANO GREEN, WHO

Despite the many challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO has successfully launched an original and innovative career development programme for female National Programme Officers (NPOs) and General Service Staff (GS) called **ADVANCE**. The programme has been delivered as part of the ‘**Career Pathways Initiative**’, one of the key activities linked to the Director General’s Transformation Agenda and as part of the 2021

## *Year of the Workforce: Building a More Respectful Working Environment.*

The programme also answers one of the recommendations of the 2019 Task Force on Career Pathways and Capacity Building: to launch pilot **career development and learning initiatives for women, for leadership, young professionals, GS and NPO staff** and support them along their career path.

ADVANCE was created to tap into the potential of female staff

members who often feel stuck and disempowered in their career development: amazing, bright women who often don’t see themselves as leaders because they don’t hold a title or don’t have a formal position of leadership. Empowerment is at the centre of the programme.

It is a virtual programme designed to help women discover and harness the power of self-directive leadership principles that lead to purposeful careers, characterized by harmony, connection, and impact. Its first edition

for NPOs was launched in June 2021 and the second edition, addressed to GS staff, in September 2021. The programme is cohort-based, with 20 NPOs and 22 GS staff from 32 country offices across five WHO regions.

ADVANCE’s innovation lies in two particular areas:

- First, on its **focus**: Many development programmes for women only focus on professional skills, while others on personal growth and on needs beyond the workplace. ADVANCE is different. It’s

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a unique and long-awaited resource that draws from neuroscience and the power of creating new habits to show women how to win holistically.

- Second, ADVANCE is designed to explore **key agile mindsets and skills** necessary to prepare staff for the future of work and apply them to career development. By now it is clear that successfully navigating the fourth industrial revolution requires agility, from both individuals and organizations. Agility is defined as *“the capacity to detect, assess, and respond to environmental changes in ways that are purposeful, decisive, and grounded in the will to win.”*<sup>1</sup>

The link with career development is obvious, as Fabiana Mariano Green, the author of ADVANCE, explains: *“During the programme*

*“The highest form of leadership is self-leadership. The highest purpose of leadership is to add value to people.”*

**John C. Maxwell**

*we approach life and career integration as, perhaps, one of the most complex challenges we all face on a daily basis. We take advantage of this problematic to help participants face their dilemmas and future-proof their careers by unlocking intentional learning.”*

She continues: *“If you think about it, it’s the perfect challenge to develop skills such as creativity, originality and initiative, active learning and learning strategies, analytical thinking and innovation, and complex problem solving. These are all listed as the future Top Skills for 2025,*

*according to the World Economic Forum.”*

The programme, which is *Neuroscience-based, Process-focused* and *Outcome-driven*, uses the ADVANCE Coaching System, a unique learning methodology which aims at:

- Increasing knowledge of one’s core values and vision, used to create the foundation for identifying and advancing one’s life objectives.
- Examining the opportunities, challenges, trade-offs, and organizational dynamics experienced by women in organizations, as well as reflecting on and practicing effective individual behaviours.
- Learning how to use the power of habits to align career objectives with life purpose, and experience greater fulfilment at work.
- Designing an inspiring

roadmap for building a purpose-driven career and achieving win-wins in the four domains of life: work, home, community and your private-self.

During the course participants are led to **explore with curiosity** by reframing current thinking through new insights, connections and questions; they are encouraged to **embrace their creative potential** by taking time to reflect, understand themselves and design a new future and finally move into **courageous learning by doing**: this mindset is about the willingness to try and the importance of pursuing progress over perfection.

Self-leadership in career development  
With a strong focus on self-leadership, participants become aware that there are two games involved in career development



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## The five pillars of ADVANCE



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and in anything we do. One is the Outer Game played to overcome external obstacles and win external prizes. The other is the Inner Game played against internal mental and emotional obstacles to achieve the reward of knowledge and expression of one's true potential. Both games go on simultaneously.

With the purpose of unlocking analytical thinking and innovation, the methodology unites **the analytical and the creative**: it pairs traditional career development tools with the principles of design thinking.

As a result, participants produce stronger business results, find clearer purpose in what they do, feel more connected to the people who matter most, and generate sustainable positive change for themselves and others.

Innovative learning modalities: the WHO Coaching Network and peer-to-peer learning  
 An additional innovation is related to the fact that the learning experience is underpinned by **the WHO Internal Coaching Network**, formed by WHO staff who have obtained a diploma by completing a coaching course recognized by the International Coaching Federation (ICF). This is a great example of how WHO

is tapping into hidden resources with a near zero-cost benefit to the organization and creating a true win-win for the ADVANCE participants and coaches wishing to contribute through empowering their colleagues. There is also a **peer-to-peer component**, where participants are given the opportunity to meet with colleagues in small groups to discuss learnings and challenges, foster strong connections and build a network of support moving forward.

### Some feedback from WHO participants

The statistics collected at the end of the pilot cohort, where 22 participants were surveyed, testify that:

- 98% of learners found the activities engaging and thought-provoking.
- 96% of learners had relevant, engaging interactions with the facilitator and peers and
- 100% of learners said they intend to apply the knowledge, tools and best practices in leading their life and career

Participants say that ADVANCE has helped them to:

- Feel more confident
- Have a clearer vision for life and career growth
- Gain new strategies for work-life balance

In their own words:

*"I went from doubt to a clear vision of the life I want to lead, both professionally and personally."* Chantal from Burkina Faso

*"I feel more confident that I can implement my strengths and change my focus to what I really want."* Swit Lai from Malaysia

*"I learned a lot and felt that I am not the only one in this world facing all these obstacles in my life and career. I feel ready to do my best to achieve my life and career goals!"* Areej from Yemen. ■

If you are interested in learning more about the programme or replicate it in your region or organization, please contact Sara Canna at [cannas@who.int](mailto:cannas@who.int) or Fabiana Mariano Green at [fabiana@leadinlife.com](mailto:fabiana@leadinlife.com)

<sup>1</sup> Future of work report 2020, World Economic Forum