



Design for Real Lived Experience (RLX)

Applied design principles for women aged 40-55 experiencing peri-menopause and menopause in the workforce.

Corporate offices and professional workplaces across England.

Design for Real Lived Experience principles applied for the following framing:

Role, Enterprise, Purpose or Mission: Designing supportive workplace environments for women's health transitions.

Population, Group, Identity of Interest: Women aged 40-55 experiencing peri-menopause and menopause in the workforce.

Primary Experience, Condition, Event or Transition: The transition through menopause impacting physical and emotional wellbeing at work.

Place, setting, location and/or environment: Corporate offices and professional workplaces across England.

Additional contexts: Work-life balance, stigma, health policies, and peer support networks.

Introduction

This design approach has been generated following the Real Lived Experience (RLX) report, which was structured using five framing contexts that situate a specific lived experience in relation to purpose, group, condition/event, setting, and additional context. The focus on women aged 40-55 navigating the complexities of peri-menopause and menopause within professional environments reveals a rich tapestry of embodied experiences woven through the threads of physical and emotional well-being. This journey is often marked by challenges such as stigma, fluctuating health policies, and the quest for balance between personal and professional life.

Rather than attempting to “solve” or “intervene” from an external standpoint, Design for RLX operates from within the experience field, engaging with the emergent affects and conditions that shape these women's lives. This viewpoint fosters a sensitivity towards the latent possibilities of transformation already present in the field, encouraging a rethinking of established norms and practices.

Understanding the ways in which societal structures and expectations have historically constrained this experience allows for a radical reconfiguration of how design can support women's health transitions. By turning towards the complexities and nuances of lived experience, we can cultivate an environment where real shifts in perception and practice can emerge.

1. How I perceive the RLX Field

In the unfolding experience of women aged 40-55 in the workforce, anchored within corporate environments in England, the perception of menopause extends beyond biological markers; it resonates within a relational web of influences and interactions. The transitions these women endure are seldom linear; rather, they evoke a fluidity in experience characterized by intense physical symptoms, emotional shifts, and the palpable weight of societal expectations. The workplace, traditionally a site of performance, now echoes with the complexities of these experiences, exposing a landscape marked by both solidarity and isolation.

The affective intensity within this field is concentrated around moments of vulnerability—when the body becomes a source of conflict, challenging productivity and self-esteem. The tension between personal well-being and professional identity surfaces as women navigate conversations infused with stigma, often rendered invisible by a culture slow to acknowledge the realities of menopause. This creates a duality where support networks can either flourish or falter, heavily reliant on the openness of dialogue established within teams and organizations. Amid this complexity, a pressing desire for peer support manifests, revealing an openness to share experiences and create spaces for shared understanding.

The currents within this experience field are shaped by a combination of systemic factors: entrenched stigma surrounding menopause and the often inadequate health policies that fail to address the specific needs of this demographic. The repercussions of these dynamics can lead to a stagnation of potential, where the fear of judgment stifles authenticity. Conversely, there is a burgeoning movement advocating for recognition and accommodation of women's health transitions, a turning point that seeks to redefine the narrative surrounding menopause in the workplace.

2. How we can change our design approach

In embracing Design for Real Lived Experience (RLX), we shift away from a problem-solution framework to fully immerse ourselves in the rich complexity of women's experiences as they navigate menopause. This approach acknowledges that each woman's journey is unique, shaped by an interplay of biological, social, and environmental factors that extend beyond traditional categorization. By centering our design efforts on the real lived experiences of women in this demographic, we can co-create environments that resonate with their needs, fostering holistic well-being in the workplace.

This perspective transforms the design process from one of intervention to one of collaboration and co-composition, where the voices of women are not only heard but actively integrated into the development of supportive frameworks. The principles of Design for RLX, particularly those such as “Engage Intensity Before Identity” and “Design for Duration, Not Moments,” encourage us to recognize the dynamic nature of lived experiences and respond to their evolving needs. By attending to the temporal rhythms of menopause, we can develop more adaptable, responsive strategies that acknowledge the fluctuating landscape of women's health during this transition.

In this way, our design approach becomes a means of facilitating transformation, allowing for the emergence of new understanding and practices that honor the complexities of this lived experience. The RLX principles that resonate most within this context, such as “Co-compose, Don't Represent” and “Support Transformation, Not Just Intervention,” guide us in shaping a future where women's health transitions are seen as integral to workplace culture, thereby rewriting the existing narratives surrounding menopause and fostering environments that nurture well-being and connection.

3. New design possibilities

1. Perceive Experience in Its Emergence

To perceive experience in its emergence is to recognize the unfolding nature of menopause as a journey rich with potential rather than a static condition to be managed. This principle invites us to explore how the physical and emotional shifts women encounter create a rhythm of change that can be understood as a process of becoming. For many women, the transition may initially manifest as confusion or distress, yet within those experiences lie the seeds of resilience and transformation. As the workplace environment responds to these experiences, it can either amplify the emergent potential or diminish it through rigid expectations and stereotypes.

By adopting this perspective, design efforts can become attuned to the intricacies of these transitions, fostering a deeper understanding of the emotional landscape that accompanies menopause. It allows us to ask questions such as: What shifts in intensity can we observe as women navigate their daily work lives? How do these experiences of emergence contribute to new modes of being and interaction? By focusing on the fluidity of experience, we open pathways for innovations that resonate with real needs—designing spaces, policies, and practices that evolve with women's lived experiences rather than impose constraints upon them.

2. Perceive the Field, Not the Isolated Person

In designing for the lived experience of menopause, it is essential to perceive the broader field of relations that shape these experiences, rather than viewing them through the lens of isolated individuals. The lived experience of menopausal women is deeply interwoven with their social, professional, and environmental contexts. This principle calls for a holistic understanding, recognizing how workplace culture, relationships with colleagues, the physical workplace environment, and broader societal attitudes towards menopause coalesce to form a unique experience field. The feeling of isolation often reported by women during this transition speaks to a lack of contextual understanding, which can be mitigated through relational awareness in design.

Designing with this principle means creating interventions that are inclusive of the various forces and elements at play, drawing attention to how support networks and resources can be integrated into the workplace. For example, recognizing the support provided by peer networks or organizational policies can shift how women perceive their own experiences, infusing them with agency and connection. Additionally, this perception allows for collaborative design practices that invite women to co-compose solutions alongside designers, ensuring that interventions resonate with the lived realities they face rather than imposing external frameworks that may not reflect their true needs.

3. Engage Intensity Before Identity

Engaging intensity before identity involves attending to the raw feelings and sensations that accompany the experience of menopause before categorizing or naming them. In the workplace, women may encounter discomfort, frustration, or disconnection as they navigate this phase of life, but these feelings often predate the language we use to define them. By tuning into these intensities, design can respond at a level that resonates deeply with the lived experience rather than merely applying standard solutions that fit into pre-defined identities.

This principle urges us to delve into the affective dimensions of menopause—recognizing that the experience may be punctuated by moments of intensity that can transcend individual identity. Women may feel frustration stemming from feelings of invisibility in corporate settings, yet such emotions reveal the collective resonances of shared experiences. Engaging intensity allows us to design interventions that acknowledge these emotional currents, facilitating spaces where women feel supported in expressing their full selves. Design can thus become a tool for empowerment, enabling women to articulate and navigate their experiences in a way that honors the complexities of their realities.

4. Make the Virtual Perceptible

The principle of making the virtual perceptible calls us to recognize the unrealized potentials within the experience of menopause in the workforce. This speaks to aspirations, desires, and latent meanings that women may hold but which are not yet visible or actualized within corporate culture. There exists a richness within the unspoken shared experiences or collective hopes that often remain obscured beneath the surface of daily interactions.

By fostering environments where women can express, explore, and articulate these unrealized potentials, we create opportunities for transformation. Design can illuminate the pathways toward greater understanding and connection, allowing women to share their visions for workplace policies or culture change. By making the virtual perceptible, we acknowledge the possibilities for growth and

evolution that lie within the collective experience, presenting design as a means to liberate these potentials and bring them to life.

5. Recognise Difference in Kind, Not Just Degree

Recognizing difference in kind, rather than merely degrees of experience, requires a shift in how we conceptualize menopause within the workplace. This principle encourages us to see the singularities that characterize the lived experiences of women rather than viewing menopause through a quantitative lens. For instance, the emotional and physical responses to menopause may vary dramatically from one woman to another, influenced by individual contexts such as personal history, social support, and cultural background.

Design can benefit immensely from this approach by developing nuanced responses that honor the qualitative differences in experience. This might mean creating tailored support systems, flexible work arrangements, or communication methodologies that resonate with the unique experiences of each woman. It acknowledges that menopause is not a monolith, but a spectrum of experiences that defy categorization. By embracing these differences, we foster a culture of inclusion and understanding, ensuring that all women feel seen, valued, and supported as they navigate this transition.

6. Design for Duration, Not Moments

This principle requires us to view the experience of menopause not as a series of isolated events but as a narrative unfolding over time. The lived experience in this context is marked by a fluidity that escapes conventional timelines. Fluctuations in symptoms, emotional responses, and workplace dynamics create a tapestry of experience that is rich and layered. Understanding how these dimensions stretch, loop, and build creates an opportunity for design interventions to resonate with the ongoing journey of women rather than simply addressing acute concerns.

Designing for duration allows us to create systems that are adaptable and responsive to the rhythms of women's lives. This can manifest in policies that are not one-size-fits-all but can evolve alongside individual experiences. Furthermore, we must consider the long-term implications of design choices, ensuring that they sustain support over the course of transitions rather than offering surface-level solutions. Such an approach cultivates resilience and empowers women by affirming their ongoing narratives and lived time.

7. Co-compose, Don't Represent

The principle to co-compose rather than represent encourages us to shift from a mindset of extracting insights for representation to one of collaborative creation with women experiencing menopause. Rather than designing from a distance or applying preconceived notions of needs, co-composition invites women into the design process, allowing their voices and experiences to shape solutions. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and agency, essential in navigating health transitions.

Co-composing also emphasizes the importance of relationships and relational dynamics in the design process. By engaging women in the creation of policies, resources, or environments, we cultivate a deeper connection between the design and the lived experience. This principle opens doors to participatory design practices that elevate women's voices and redefine how solutions are conceptualized, ultimately creating a more empathetic and responsive landscape for workplace wellness.

8. Support Transformation, Not Just Intervention

Supporting transformation rather than merely intervening underlines the importance of fostering an environment that allows women to evolve during their experience of menopause. It goes beyond providing services or resources to cultivating a transformative culture that encourages women to explore and articulate their journeys. This principle urges us to look for the latent movements within the experience, recognizing that meaningful transformation is organic and must arise from the experiences of those involved.

Design for transformation invites us to identify and nurture existing capacities, celebrating the strengths that emerge during this transition. By creating systems that support the flourishing of women's identities and experiences, we contribute to a cultural shift that values transformation as a continuous process. Rather than applying fixed interventions, we position design as a catalyst for ongoing change, enabling women to express their evolving identities and fostering resilience throughout their journeys.

9. Respect the More-than-Human

This principle invites us to consider the more-than-human aspects that interplay in the experience of menopause. Understanding how environmental factors, workplace design, and even the broader sociocultural landscape contribute to women's experiences allows us to create a richer, more inclusive approach. For example, the physical environment—lighting, temperature, and spatial design—can significantly impact how menopausal women feel and perform at work.

By respecting the more-than-human, we open avenues for co-creation that integrate various elements shaping the experience. This principle invites collaboration with architects, healthcare providers, and policy makers to create spaces that honor and enhance well-being. Such designs can empower women, ensuring that all facets of their experience are acknowledged and manifested within the workplace, fostering a sense of belonging and value amidst their transitions.

10. Attend to What Is Not Yet Legible

Attending to what resists naming is essential in the design process, particularly regarding menopause which often comes with a veil of silence or stigma. There are feelings, experiences, and challenges that women go through which may remain unarticulated. By acknowledging these ambiguities, design can provide spaces for exploration and understanding, allowing women to voice what has yet to be expressed.

Working with this principle means creating opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and expression. Design can foster environments where women feel safe to articulate their experiences, potentially revealing insights into their needs or aspirations. By shining a light on the unspoken elements, we can also begin to untangle the complexities surrounding menopause and pave paths for more nuanced interventions that truly resonate with lived experiences.

11. Undo Limiting Tendencies

Undoing limiting tendencies emphasizes the importance of challenging the dominant narratives and societal patterns that constrain the lived experiences of women during menopause. These can manifest as stigmatization, misconceptions, or policies that fail to accommodate the realities of women's health. By recognizing these patterns, we can devise design interventions that liberate rather than constrain, fostering a culture that acknowledges menopause as a natural part of life that deserves

respect and support.

This principle urges us to critically evaluate existing workplace structures and assumptions, questioning who is served and who is left out in the design process. By deconstructing limiting beliefs surrounding menopause, we can cultivate new narratives that empower women and encourage a broader understanding of health transitions. Design becomes a powerful tool for unraveling entrenched ideas and fostering a more inclusive, supportive landscape.

12. Co-compose Within the Flow of Experience

This principle urges us to engage with the real-time flow of women's experiences, allowing interactions and practices to arise organically rather than applying them from a pre-determined framework. By co-composing within the flow, design becomes attuned to the rhythms and expressions of lived experiences, creating dynamic solutions that resonate deeply with women's journeys through menopause.

In practical terms, this may mean fostering spaces where women can share their experiences and support one another, enabling a community to co-create practices of care, knowledge, and recovery. Design can emerge as a collaborative effort where women shape their environments, making their voices central to the process. This co-composition allows for fluid adaptations over time, ensuring that designs evolve in tandem with women's experiences and needs as they unfold.

4. Emergent Possibilities

As we engage with the transformative potential inherent in the lived experiences of women navigating menopause within the workforce, we begin to glimpse a landscape rich with emergent capacities for change. Recognizing that everything in place today is a “false necessity”—systems, structures, and cultural norms can be changed or undone—opens up pathways for new possibilities. The very frameworks that have historically constrained women also offer the fertile ground for reimagining how workplace wellness, community support, and health policy can evolve.

Imagine a future where organizations embrace fluid workplaces that adapt to the rhythms of women's experiences, fostering environments that acknowledge the transitions of menopause as integral to workplace culture. New policies emerge that prioritize flexibility, well-being, and inclusivity, anchored in authentic dialogue and peer support networks that empower women. These are not just incremental changes but fundamental shifts towards a more compassionate understanding of health transitions, fostering resilience and transformation.

This openness to potential also allows for a significant cultural recalibration within workplaces. As stigma dissipates, conversations surrounding menopause can flourish, creating a visceral understanding of the lived experience. This shift can profoundly reshape how companies engage with their employees, leading to innovative practices that enhance well-being and foster authentic support systems. The design approach that galvanizes around the principles of RLX nurtures these emergent capacities, enabling us to collaboratively compose a future where the experience of menopause is neither isolated nor stigmatized, but celebrated as a journey of growth and connection.

Next Steps

To further explore and cultivate these emergent possibilities, Umio's Design for Real Lived Experience philosophy and approach, real experience models, and experience ecosystem framing provide a

roadmap for transformation. Engaging with these design provocations can yield new strategies for creating real impact for women aged 40-55 experiencing menopause in the workforce, transforming workplaces to better honor their transitions amidst the challenges of work-life balance, stigma, and health policies.

We invite you to take the next steps towards collaboration and exploration in real lived experience.



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