

FemSTEM Coaching Circles™

Pilot 1
National Report
Italy

CESIE



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Introduction

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the first pilot of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles in Italy took place online, with the use of Zoom. Our Coaching Circles pilot started on September 2nd, 2021 and took place from 18:30 till 20:30.

The first session took place on September 2nd with 4 participants, as few of the previously registered participants had unforeseen situations and couldn't be present.

The second session was held on September 7th with 4 participants as well, as one of the participants of the first session had an urgent work commitment, but another participant who didn't manage to be present before, joined the session.

The third and final session took place on September 14th – with 4 participants again. This happened due to a family loss in the family of one of the participants.

The pilot was very successful as all of the participants evaluated their experience very highly and stated on numerous occasions that they were happy to participate and that they felt the impact of the activities in their personal and professional lives. They stayed in touch and, due to the difference in fields of expertise, work experience and age, had many things to discuss and learn from each other through the questioning technique.

Recruitment

For the promotion of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™' first pilot session, CESIE used its wide local and national network in order to contact, recruit and assure the participation of women in STEM-related fields.

The invitations were sent via emails and private messages on platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

The total of 7 participants have registered to participate, however two of them later were unable to take part in the Circles.

Out of the ones, who participated, one was previously involved in the project at the initial stages and took part in the focus group (IO1). Another one gave her testimonial to be published on the platform (IO2). She invited her friend to participate as well. Fourth participant is a co-worker of another participant of the focus group. And the final, fifth participant, contacted us through the contact form of the website of another project, also focused on women in STEM.

Overview of Participants

In the first pilot of the IO3 (Coaching Circles™) CESIE involved 5 participants overall. Below you can see a short overview of their experiences and motivations.

Participant	Background Information
Daniela	<p>Recently graduated with a degree in Architecture. Currently based in Turin.</p> <p>Decided to participate in Coaching Circles™ because, as she stated, she suffers from shyness and it influences her professional life. Also was trying to decide whether she wants to stay in STEM or pursue a new carrier in the social sector.</p>
Roberta	<p>Medical researcher from Pavia, who at the time of the pilot was undergoing an internship programme in the US.</p> <p>Had many doubts about her future career and felt as if she was exploited due to her love for her work (given more tasks than it was possible to finish during work hours, asked to work overtime and finish other colleagues' tasks).</p>
Rosalia	<p>Palermo-based chemist, working in a public sector.</p> <p>Decided to participate because after more than 20 years in her current work place decided to pursue a new career that can give her more security and possibilities in the future.</p>
Cristina	<p>Palermo-based biologist, working in private sector.</p> <p>Wanted to set new goals for her future, because she is not satisfied with her current position and career development</p>
Marzia	<p>Palermo-based architect, has her own studio.</p> <p>Wanted to improve the efficacy of her work with clients and plan the expansion of her business.</p>

The Format and Process of the Coaching Circles in Italy

The first pilot round of Coaching Circles™ in Italy was attended by 5 participants (4 per session). All sessions took place via Zoom. The sessions were facilitated by Dr. Maryna Manchenko, project manager and researcher at CESIE.

<u>Session Number</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>	<u>Tools Used/Comments</u>
1	02/09/2021	4	Getting to know each other Start, Stop, Continue, Change tool SMART goals
2	07/09/2021	4	Reflections on Start, Stop, Continue, Change tool Discussion of SMART goals Creation of Mind Maps Introduction of Circle of influence
3	14/09/2021	4	SMART goals Reflection on Mind Maps Discussion of Circle of Influence

Sessions

Each session and related materials were prepared by the facilitator in advance.

Before starting the programme, the participants were informed about the rules (learning agreement) and received general information about the FemSTEM project and the Coaching Circles™ methodology.

The first session was focused on introducing the participants and the facilitator, giving them a space to present their motivations and questions that inspired them to participate in the pilot.

Presentatevi!

- Breve profilo della vostra vita;
- La vostra situazione attuale;
- 3 sfide che avete affrontato o state affrontando in termini di sviluppo nel settore delle STEM;
- Quali sono le vostre aspettative dall'essere un membro Circle?

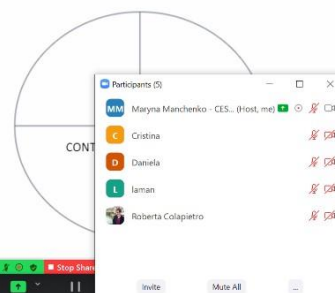


The facilitator then presented the FemSTEM project and the Coaching Circles™ methodology, the questioning technique and the rules of the group, that were discussed and approved by the participants. Then the group proceeded with the "Start, Stop, Continue, Change" tool.

Cominciamo la nostra discussione

Pensate al vostro lavoro attuale o alla vostra routine di vita. Cosa dovrete iniziare, fermare, continuare e cambiare? Completate lo schema sottostante con queste informazioni.

- Cosa dovrete iniziare a fare? Nuove tattiche per raggiungere gli obiettivi.
- Cosa dovrete smettere di fare? Attività di negatività che ti demotiva.
- Cosa devo continuare a fare? Cose che funzionano. Cose che mi fanno stare bene.
- Cosa dovrete cambiare? Tutto ciò che non funziona per aiutarvi a raggiungere il tuo obiettivo.



Each participant had time and possibility to reflect upon their habits. The facilitator presented the concept of SMART goals and each participant received information on it in order to proceed with goal setting outside of the Circle.

The session ended with the final evaluation of the session.

The second session opened with a reflection on SMART goals and overall impressions of the Coaching Circles™ experience. The participants one by one told the group about their goals, first steps and what they found challenging in the process of goal setting.

SMART

S	Specific • What do I want to accomplish? • Why do I want to accomplish this? • What are the requirements? • What are the constraints?	
M	Measurable • How will I measure my progress? • How will I know when the goal is accomplished?	
A	Achievable • How can the goal be achieved? • What are the next steps I should take?	
R	Relevant • Is this a worthwhile goal? • Is this the right time? • Do I have the necessary resources to accomplish this goal? • Is this goal in line with my long-term vision?	
T	Time-bound • How long will it take to accomplish this goal? • When is the completion of this goal due? • When am I going to work on this goal?	

→ Impegnarsi in obiettivi e

Participants: Iyman, Maryna Makhnenko - CERGE, marzambona, Daniela Corona

iPhone Di

Recruitment, retention, progression

After the discussion that participants were introduced to the Mind Map tool. The participants were given time to create their own Mind Maps, show them to other participants and answer their questions.

Your mind maps

SMART MINDS MAPS
I am good at!
I enjoy:
I WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH

Organizing stuff/ Logistics
• I want to organize my room
• I want to organize my desk
• I want to organize my schedule

Writing
• I want to write a story
• I want to write a letter
• I want to write a report

Languages: Spanish
• I want to learn Spanish
• I want to practice Spanish
• I want to understand Spanish

Cooking
• I want to cook
• I want to bake
• I want to learn to cook

Cooking + Languages
• I want to cook recipes from different countries
• I want to learn to cook from different cultures
• I want to learn to cook from different people

Participants: Maryna Makhnenko - CERGE, Iyman, marzambona, Daniela Corona

Recruitment, retention, progression

After this the “Circle of Influence” tool was introduced and explained to the participants.

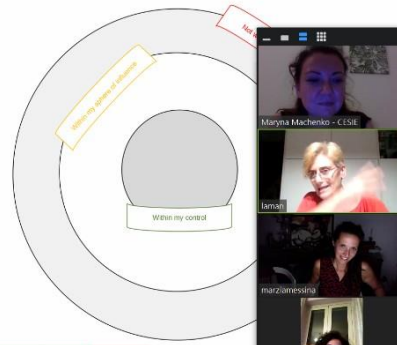
Usiamo un nuovo strumento



È importante essere consapevoli di **cosa puoi cambiare** e cosa **non puoi cambiare** in modo da poter concentrare la tua energia dove può avere il maggior impatto.

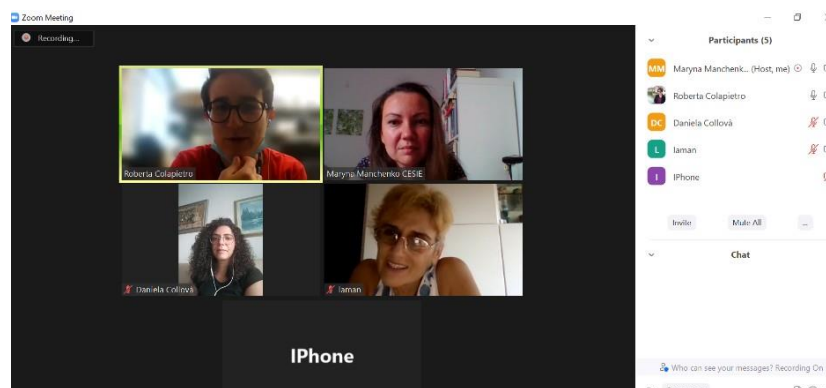
Dovresti scrivere cose nella tua vita/lavoro che:

1. **Non sono sotto il tuo controllo**
2. **Sono nella tua sfera di influenza**
3. **Sono sotto il tuo controllo**



The session ended with the evaluation.

During **the third session** participants reflected their experience with Mind Maps. Some of the participants stated that they already started using these tools with their friends and colleagues in order to help them set new goals.



Then, they once again presented the achievements of their SMART goals. The participants presented their successes, thoughts and future intentions. After that the participants presented their work with the “Circle of Influence”.

Usiamo un nuovo strumento



È importante essere consapevoli di **cosa puoi cambiare** e cosa **non puoi cambiare** in modo da poter concentrare la tua energia dove può avere il maggior impatto.

Dovresti scrivere cose nella tua vita/lavoro che:

1. **Non sono sotto il tuo controllo**
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3. **Sono sotto il tuo controllo**



The last part of the session was dedicated to final reflections, conclusions and evaluations. The participants also learned about the FemSTEM online platform and were asked to use it and later evaluate its functionality and usefulness.



Each of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ sessions were 2-2.5 hours long and were held on working days from 18:30 to 20:30-21:00 due to the fact that all of the participants are working full time.

In order to create a favourable group dynamic a lot of attention was dedicated to the “Getting to know each other” part. The facilitator used a PowerPoint presentation of the structure of the training, including the methodology, reminder of the ground rules etc. Tools and exercises were displayed on the screen throughout each session.

The participants were encouraged to work in between sections – some of the tools were presented to them in the end of each session in order to give them time to work on them in their free time. .

Impact of Coaching Circles™

In order to ensure a thorough assessment of the impact of the Circles, three evaluations were completed by the participants:

- **Session and final Evaluation Forms:** participants completed one form at the end of each Circle session and a final evaluation form at the end of the last session.
- **Soft Skills Development:** participants evaluated themselves at the beginning (Circle 1) and end (Circle 3) of the training.
- **Testimonials:** participants were asked to provide testimonials about the sessions they attended.

These forms and feedback will provide the basis for the analysis of the impact of the training programme below.

SESSION EVALUATION FORMS

A Session Evaluation Form was completed by participants at the end of each of the Circle sessions. This included asking the participants about their expectations, the methodology and what they found most useful about the session.

Session 1

The following statements were taken from the evaluation form responses after each Circle session.

Expectations for the session.

- Get to know other motivated women in the STEM field and share the information about the role of women in the sector. My expectations were absolutely met!
- As I said I had no idea what to expect, and I am pleasantly satisfied;
- To know aware and interesting people, and I'm very satisfied;
- Meeting new people.

3 main things to take away from the session:

- The feeling of not being alone, newfound desire to work, new acquaintances;
- Meeting new people;

- Being able to communicate and understand each other, being able to have the answers to the (common) doubts with the other participants, being aware of a strategy to develop their goals;
- New knowledge, reflections, new tools.

The best part of the Coaching Circles™ so far?

- Reflecting on my path;
- Comparison with the others, listening and being sincere with the group;
- The discussion on the various points (Start, Stop, Continue, Change);
- Reflection on my situation.

Any further comments?

- Waiting for the next sessions;
- Thank you!

Circle 2

Expectations for the session?

- I had no expectations and I'm really enjoying it;
- SMART goals and their discussion;
- Getting to know other women in STEM and present myself;
- "Mind maps" is a very interesting methodology.

3 main things to take away from the session:

- Focus on objectives - describe a strategy - and hit the target;
- A good example in my field of work (Marzia), the strength and attitude shown (by Rosalia), great tools to use now and later;
- Finding myself in the others; Learning to question myself about my goals, which I have never done until today; Telling the others about what makes me happy;
- Reflection on myself, reflection on the objectives, questions of the other participants.

The best part of the Coaching Circles™ so far?

- The discussions;
- Discussions with the other participants;
- Learn to ask questions without making judgments, without making comments;
- Relationships.

Any further comments?

- I am enjoying it a lot and becoming aware of things that I do, but never thought about it before;
- Learning to listen is an exercise that should be done over and over, so thank you for introducing me to it;
- Thanks, it's so interesting!

Circle 3

Expectations for the session

- I did not expect anything, but it all turned out to be very positive and stimulating;
- I expected to receive new insights on how to effectively achieve my goals. Furthermore, I hoped to continue with my group what I had started in previous meetings;
- Surely the expectations were not solving the problems that women face in the STEM field, but starting to understand our strengths and weaknesses in the workplace, personal and collective, and the major problems that women have to face;
- I didn't have a lot of expectations, and it was really good;
- I wanted to participate in more sessions, I'm sorry I didn't manage to do it.

3 main things to take away from the session:

- Becoming aware of your own value. Learning that shyness could be an added value and not a defect if well managed. Sharing is growth;
- The importance of recognizing one's limitations and knowing how to say no. Learning how to understand what is under our control and what is not. All the resources made available by the FemSTEM project;
- That we often have no problems in recognizing practical skills, but we have problems in understanding the relational or character skills we have and which then also affect the work. That comparison is always necessary and that it helps a lot. The working example of other people is always a good motivation;
- New friends, the self-reflection, the new tools;
- Knowledge, tools, reflections.

The best part of the Coaching Circles™ so far?





- Sharing thoughts, experiences and even ways of dealing with things based on experience and age;
- The possibility of being able to speak freely about even delicate topics and to be able to give shape to thoughts that are not well defined about my personality and my way of relating to the working environment;
- The comparison with people who are aware and able to understand the stories of others, also asking useful questions;
- New friends;
- Exercises.

Any further comments?

- It is great to be able to work in a group of women without judging or feeling judged;
- Thank you!

FINAL EVALUATION FORM

A Final Evaluation Form was completed by participants at the end of the final Coaching Circles™ session. This included asking the participants the usefulness of the session and how the sessions have helped them in thinking about the next steps to developing in the STEM sector.

				
Were the Coaching Circles™ useful for your soft skills development and goal setting?			1	4
Do you have a clear idea on your next steps after these sessions?			5	
How useful was the peer support, and small group environment, to help you with self-exploration?				5
Would you recommend the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ to a friend?				5

How have the Coaching Circle™ helped you to think about moving forward with your career in STEM and/or your soft skills development and your next steps to achieve this?

- If you want - you can, but not without effort;
- First of all, making me regain confidence in myself and making me realize that "I am not alone" in this journey;
- They helped me make a selection of the things that need to be worked on;
- Circles have been a lot of help in setting new goals;
- I have seen so many beautiful examples.

TESTIMONIALS

Name: Daniela

Took part in: Pilot 1 of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ in Italy

These Coaching Circles turned out to be both very useful and full of content, as well as pleasant and relaxing. As another participant stated, Coaching Circles were like “having a nice talk with your girlfriends”

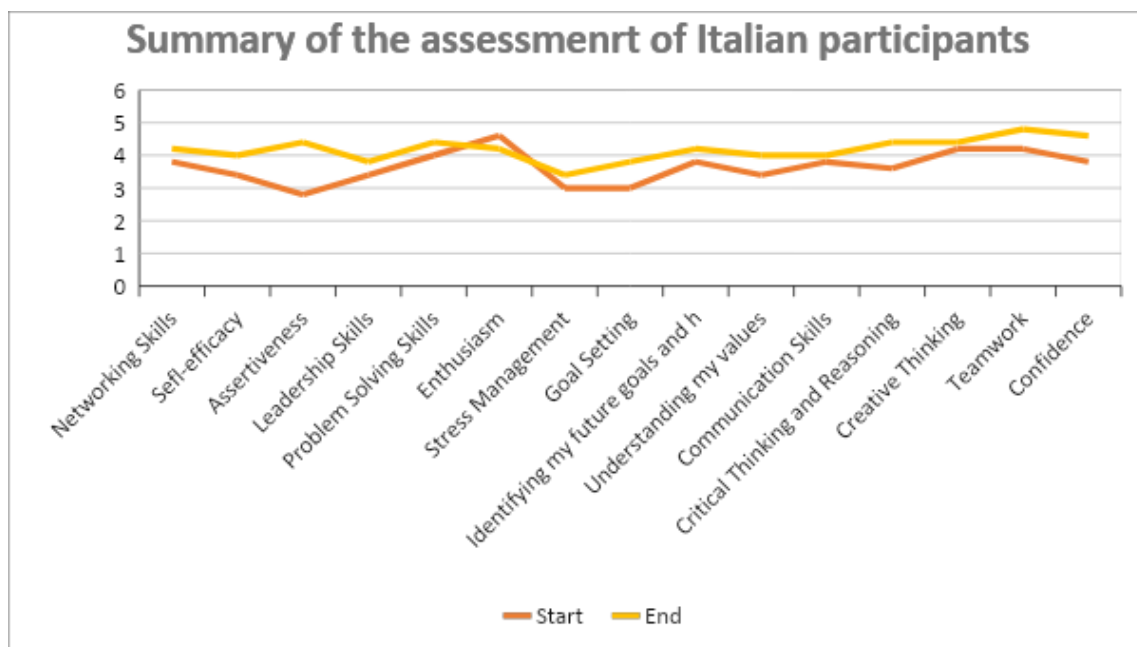
Name: Roberta

Took part in: Pilot 1 of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ in Italy

During Coaching Circles™ I found a safe environment where I could speak honestly and sincerely, but also critically in respect to my personal and gender issues that women experience while working in the work of STEM professions.

Soft Skills Development

As part of the training, participants self-assessed their soft skills in relation to their personal development in the STEM sector. Participants evaluated themselves at the beginning of the first and in the end of the last session of the first pilot of Coaching Circles™. A summary of the Italian participants' assessment are shown on the graph below.



We can see a improvement in networking, self-efficacy, assertiveness, leadership and problem solving skills, stress management, goal setting, identifying future goals, understanding own values, communication skills, critical thinking and reasoning, creative thinking, teamwork and confidence for the majority of the participants.

However, enthusiasm is one factor that seems to have lower assessment value after the sessions.

One participant out of 5 assessed her soft skills higher before Coaching Circles™ than after. In her reflection she was saying that it was a result of comparison on herself to other participants, however, she underlined that it was a positive and motivational comparison that showed her everything she wants to learn in the future.

Facilitator's Comments and Recommendations for improvement

Overall, we had a very positive experience with the facilitator guide. The instructions were clear and easy to use. The exercises are interesting to implement and all of the participants also evaluated them highly.

Due to online format, we found it beneficial to ask participants to do some of the exercises at home, as this way they had more time to think, reflect and sometimes, even do them few times for different ideas or goals. In these cases, they presented their tasks during the next session and stated that they liked it this way as well.

We have to underline that online format, both for the Training of Trainers, and for the first round of pilots, definitely impacted the success of this activity. The facilitator, not having enough paratactical knowledge of the methodology, felt certain limitation in her abilities. At the same time, the participants stated that using the questioning technique was challenging for them, as it was a new approach they are not used to. Also online format set different time and scheduling limitation that could've been avoided.

At the same time, due to the fact that we were constrained to use Zoom, three participants, who were not in Palermo at that time, were able to participate and benefit from the coaching activities.

The participants spoke very highly of the Covey Circle of Influence, "Start, Stop, Continue, Change" and mind mapping instruments, as it was something new, inspiring and interesting. Many stated that they have never done anything like this and they highly appreciated a possibility to reflect upon their own beliefs and limitations.

The concept of SMART Goals was also new to all of the participants as it showed them some of the rules of goal setting, they've never thought about it.

The group that was created, had a great relationship and collaboration since the beginning, so we opted for no ice breakers in the beginning of each session. The participants were starting the meeting with the exchange of current news and their successes.

Conclusion

The feedback from the participants of the first round of piloting of Coaching Circles™ was very positive.

They all spoke very highly of their experiences and the group dynamic, and gave positive evaluation to the impact this pilot was in their lives.

The main difficulty in the organisation of the piloting was conflicting schedules of the participants and unforeseen force majors (personal, such as death of relatives or health issues, and work-related). Due to these factors, even though the total of 5 participants took part in the pilots, we had 4 participants per session overall. Unfortunately, such issues are impossible to predict, hence one of our suggestions would be to set more flexible rules about the number of participants of each Circle. For example, due to a loss in the family of one of our participants, she had to miss two meetings and, at this point, we had to continue in order to respect the availability of other participants. However, another participant, who missed one session, received the description of all of the tools via email and presented her execution of these tasks in the next meeting.

The second piloting in Italy will be organised in the end of 2021 in online format as well.

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Recruitment, retention, progression



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