

FemSTEM Coaching Circles™

National Report

Partner Organisation: Inova Consultancy Ltd

Partner Country: United Kingdom

Pilot: 1



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Erasmus+ Programme
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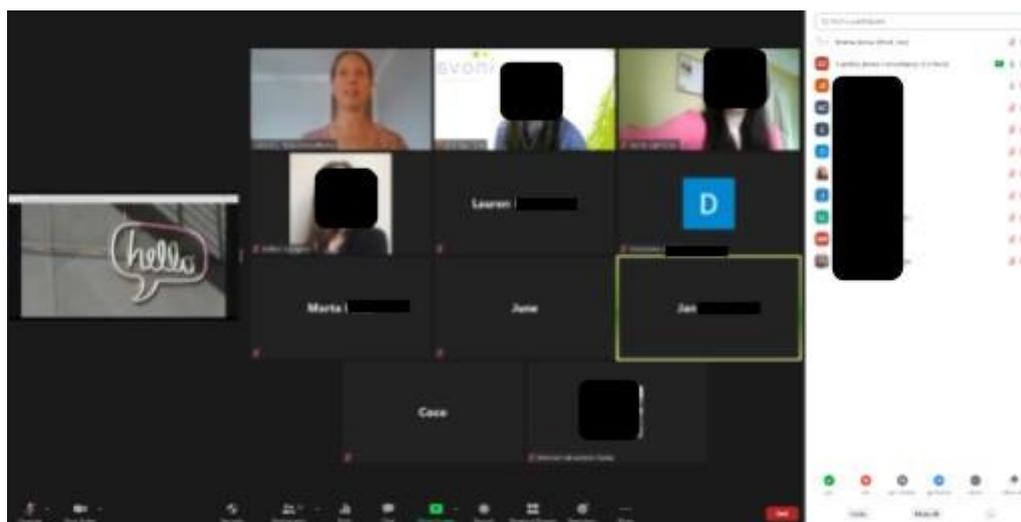
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Introduction

As part of the FemSTEM Coaching project, Inova Consultancy Ltd conducted a series of 3 Circle sessions, in order to support women in STEM with their soft-skills development, self-efficacy and confidence.

Due to Covid-19, these sessions had to take place online, using the Zoom platform as the main connection service. Subsequently, the materials and forms used during these sessions had to be amended to suit an online format; for example, all soft skills assessments and evaluations were created in a google form, to allow for these to be completed with ease during the sessions.

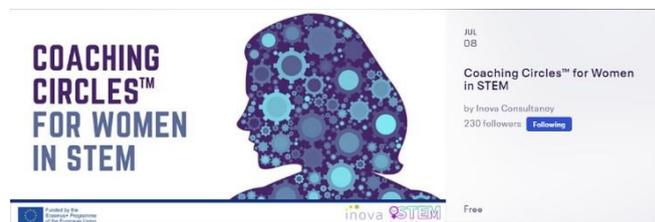


Carolyn Usher, trainer at Inova Consultancy, and Emma Humphrey, International Project Coordinator, conducted these Circles. During the first session, when many participants attended, the group was split into two groups, with one facilitator in each breakout room to moderate the discussion rounds. This was very productive as plenty of time was given to each participant to discuss their challenge and associated action points and SMART goals.

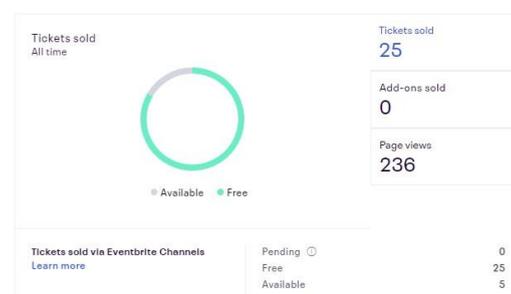
The following report details the success of the first piloting phase of the UK Coaching Circles™ for this project, including evaluations, facilitator comments and recommendations for adaptations prior to the second piloting phase in the UK.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the first piloting phase of the UK Coaching Circles™ included online strategies. Due to Covid-19, face-to-face recruitment strategies were not used; instead, social media promotion, contacting local organisations within STEM, emailing stakeholders and relevant contacts and organisation newsletters were used to engage participants to this course.



From past experience and success, Inova has found that developing an Eventbrite event for the course and using this application as a registration center was very effective, allowing participants to read into the course and register, whilst allowing Inova to monitor engagement and eligibility. In total, **25 people registered** for the course. Once eligibility was checked and confirmation and commitment obtained, a total of **11 women in STEM** engaged with the course.



Regular social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram were also used to attract people, with events on Facebook and LinkedIn supporting this recruitment. Emails to local university societies and local organisations working in the STEM field were also sent to directly target participants and engage with the local community. This recruitment strategy worked well as Inova was connected with many new contacts, which will be useful for disseminating this project in the coming months, and for further recruitment during the second piloting phase of this project.

Overview of Participants

For each pilot of the IO3 Coaching Circles™, the Partner Organisation brought together a minimum of 5- 7 women in STEM. Below is an overview of the participants involved in the pilot which took place in the UK, via the online platform, Zoom. During pilot 1, 11 women in STEM participated in the Circles. Their anonymised information can be found below:

Participant	Background Information
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Participant 1	Studying MSC in Data Visualisation. Looking for support with starting a career within a STEM industry, coming from a more arts-based, humanities background originally.
Participant 2	MEng structural engineering and architecture student. Needing support with networking skills and CVs for potential future employers.
Participant 3	Studied Maths at University. Looking for support in overall professional growth, whilst working on her weaknesses.
Participant 4	Architect and transport worker, looking for a change in career and focus.
Participant 5	Second year civil and structural engineering student at university, looking for help with developing online communication skills and the development of a professional LinkedIn profile.
Participant 6	Materials science student at university, needing support with her confidence during interviews and assessments for job opportunities.
Participant 7	MEng chemical engineering student at university. Needing help to tackle self-confidence issues, which hinder conversations and opportunities within the STEM field.
Participant 8	Biology and chemistry teacher of 22 years, looking to create videos and materials to encourage others into STEM.
Participant 9	PhD candidate in life sciences, looking for support with networking and how to move from academia into industry.
Participant 10	Biochemist, looking for a career shift to help others and needs support with this transition.
Participant 11	BSc Psychology student at university, looking to structure her time within summer to support her learning before starting a MSc.

The Format and Process of the Coaching Circles™ in the United Kingdom

The first pilot of the Circles in the United Kingdom was attended by a total of 11 engaged participants. All sessions took place online, via the Zoom platform due to Covid-19 and the subsequent inability to meet in person. The UK facilitator was Carolyn Usher, supported by Emma Humphrey, International Project Coordinator.

Carolyn Usher is an experienced trainer, mentor and coach (Sheffield Hallam University) with over 10 years-experience in supporting people with their careers and businesses and helping people to achieve their dreams. Carolyn has had numerous years experience conducting sessions involving this methodology and used this vast knowledge and experience to provide a high-quality course to benefit all who attended.

<u>Session Number</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>	<u>Tools Used/Comments</u>
1	08.07.2021	9	Soft skills assessment – start Supporting PPT Discussion rounds
2	15.07.2021	5	Supporting PPT Discussions rounds
3	22.07.2021	5	Supporting PPT Flow Theory Discussions rounds

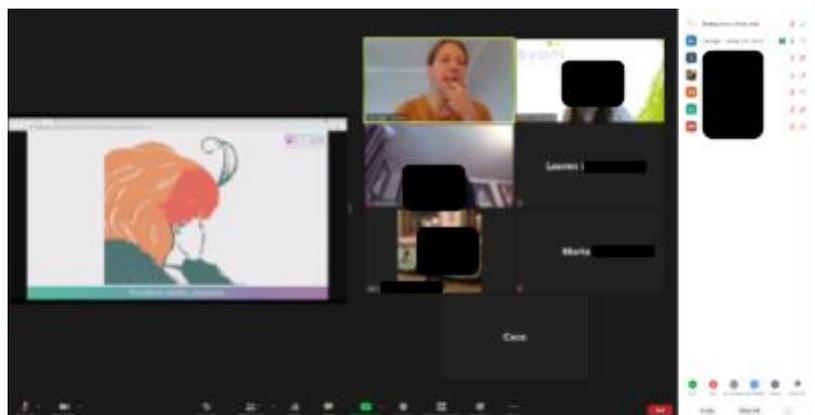
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Each of the sessions conducted by Inova Consultancy lasted for a minimum of 2.5 hours. Due to the online delivery of these sessions, 2.5 hours was an appropriate length of time for participation, without causing eye strain or disengagement. The sessions were held on Zoom, an online platform allowing for breakout rooms and chats, to engage with participants and allow adequate time for each participant during the discussion rounds. In between each session, participants were asked to work on their actions and goals set during the Circle, as well as explore the FEMSTEM e-coaching programme, to find more information on soft skills development and testimonials within the industry.

Lesson plans, based on the session plans provided in the Facilitator Guide, were used to plan each session, and a supporting presentation was used to show images, quotes and other theory for the session. Following each session, the participants were sent their goals and actions, as well as any other resources provided during the session.

Session 1: At the start of the first session, the facilitator introduced the project, the organisation and the methodology to be used over the course of the 3 sessions. A soft skills assessment and learning agreement was also completed. Following introductions to each of the participants, SMART goals and the aim of the course was explained, followed by the first session of discussion rounds and setting appropriate goals and action points. Due to the size of the group, breakout rooms were used to ensure each participant had sufficient time to discuss their challenge and goals. A facilitator was placed in each of the rooms.

Session 2: The second session involved each participant giving an update on their action points from the previous week and explaining how they got on implementing their goals. Following this discussion, the facilitator discussed the theory behind identifying strengths and focusing on a strengths-based approach with goal setting (in line with the needs of the group). Activities such as the old/young lady image was used to help this session. Discussion rounds also occurred, following the theoretical focus of the first half.



Session 3: The final session involved another round of updates on the participants' actions and goals, followed by the completion of the soft skills assessment. Participants had time to compare their scores from the first session and identify any growth in their skills or an increase in self-awareness. The facilitator discussed Flow Theory and how this relates to their

situations, followed by the first session of discussion rounds. Due to support needed with self-confidence, the session was wrapped up with a guided meditation from Clinical Hypnotherapist, and developer of the Circles methodology, Marina Larios.

At the end of each session, participants were asked to complete an evaluation form to give feedback on the session and to monitor progress.

Impact of the Coaching Circles™

In order to ensure a thorough assessment of the impact of the Circles, two evaluation exercises were undertaken 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.

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. An overview of responses can be found below:

Circle 1 – 8th July 2021

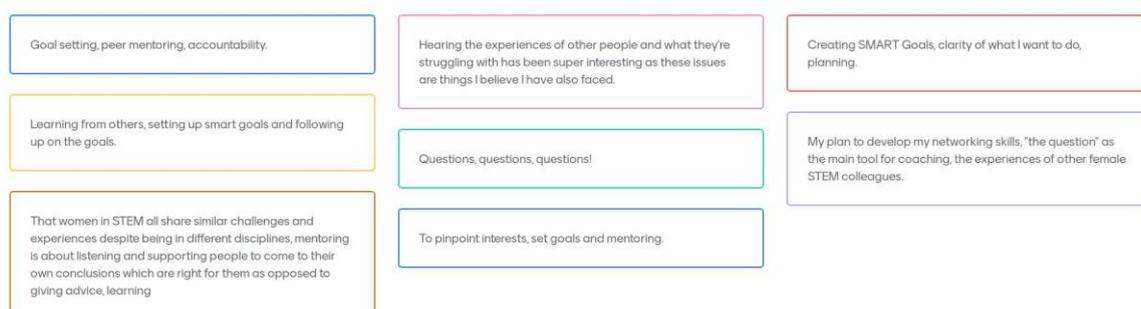
Expectations for the session?

- *I came in with very little expectations but have found the session quite interesting.*
- *I wanted to network with people from a similar background.*
- *I thought this would be a presentation, but the session has been engaging and interesting.*
- *I was not expecting such a practical session which was great.*
- *I wanted to get to know the coaching programme.*
- *I didn't have any expectations so the session exceeded them!*

3 main things to take away from the session:

- *Goal setting, peer mentoring, accountability.*
- *Hearing the experiences of other people and what they're struggling with has been super interesting as these issues are things I believe I have also faced.*
- *Creating SMART Goals, clarity of what I want to do, planning.*
- *Learning from others, setting up smart goals and following up on the goals.*
- *Questions, questions, questions!*
- *My plan to develop my networking skills, "the question" as the main tool for coaching, the experiences of other female STEM colleagues.*
- *That women in STEM all share similar challenges and experiences despite being in different disciplines, mentoring is about listening and supporting people to come to their own conclusions which are right for them as opposed to giving advice, learning methodology for good goal setting.*
- *To pinpoint interests, set goals and mentoring.*

3 main things to take away from the session



The best part of the Coaching Circles™ so far?

- *Accountability*
- *Hearing the experiences of others.*
- *Being able to express our thoughts.*
- *Meeting different people coming from various backgrounds.*
- *Sharing of experiences and setting up SMART goals for the next session.*
- *The discussions in the subgroup.*
- *Meeting people from different countries, stages of life and disciplines and sharing lived experiences!*
- *Setting goals.*

Circle 2 – 15th July 2021

Expectations for the session?

- *I did not want to have expectations, but I learned and enjoyed the session a lot.*
- *My expectation was to spend some time talking with the group leader.*

3 main things to take away from the session:

- *Resources shared during session*
- *To focus on planning ahead, in the long run. To focus on our strengths. The interesting experiences from the others, the feedback from the leader, plus the offer to help out with our LinkedIn profile.*
- *I should start focusing on my strengths, I will start to make lists of positive affirmations prior to interviews, I will question my beliefs and sources of information.*

3 main things to take away from the session



Resources shared during session

To focus on planning ahead, in the long run. To focus on our strengths. The interesting experiences from the others, the feedback from the leader, plus the offer to help out with our LinkedIn profile.

I should start focusing on my strengths, I will start to make lists of positive affirmations prior to interviews, I will question my beliefs and sources of information.

The best part of the Coaching Circles™ so far?

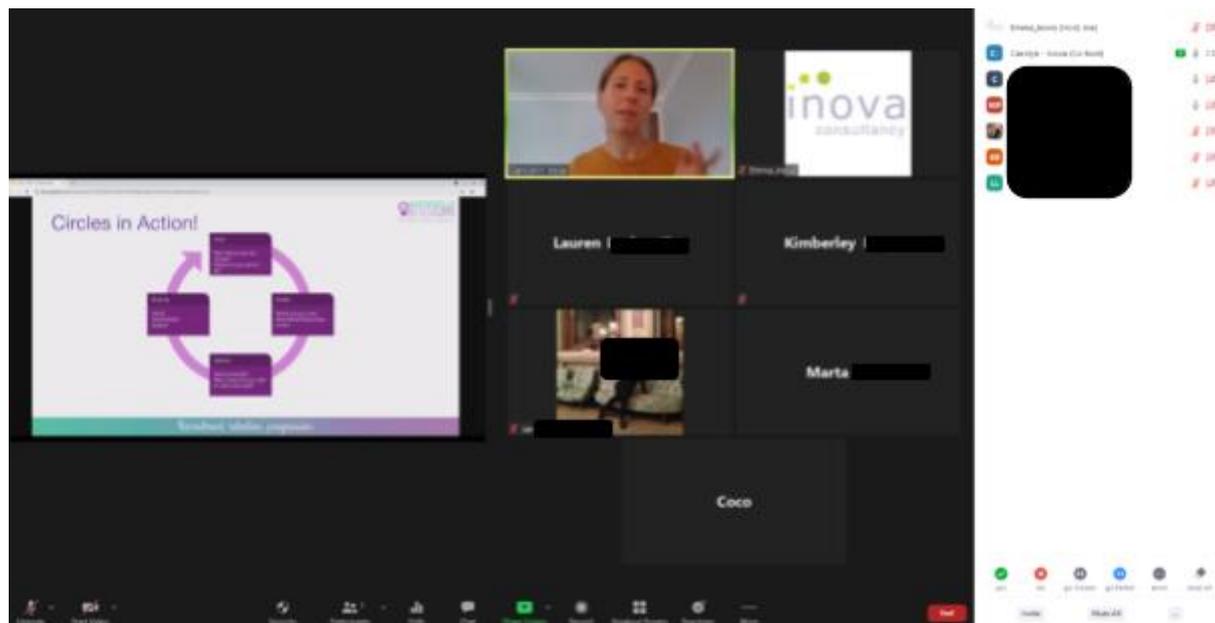
- *Meeting like-minded people, reflecting.*
- *Feeling supported.*
- *Being able to have a meaningful discussion with a small group of people.*

Any further comments?

- *Mentoring groups*
- *Excellent sessions.*

Conclusion

The overall feedback of sessions 1 and 2 was positive, with participants particularly enjoying the discussions and support from the group as a whole. Participants found the goal setting in the first session and the focus on individual strengths in the second session helpful to use in future. The participants did not seem to have a lot of expectations before the sessions but found them to be engaging and interesting, so perhaps the way the sessions were advertised to participants could be reviewed for the second piloting phase, to give more information about the format of the sessions themselves. Using the positive testimonials of participants to advertise future sessions would help to attract potential participants and set expectations.



FINAL EVALUATION FORM

A Final Evaluation Form was completed by participants at the end of the final Circle 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?	0	0	1	4
Do you have a clear idea on your next steps after these sessions?	0	0	0	5
How useful was the peer support, and small group environment, to help you with self-exploration?	0	0	3	2
Would you recommend the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ to a friend?	0	0	1	4

How have the Coaching Circles™ 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?

- *It has provided the motivation to pursue my goals! Setting my SMART goals in a friendly environment was very encouraging*
- *The Coaching Circles have helped me to put my personal goals into perspective*
- *Identify areas for improvement*
- *By showing more paths/options/ways to get organised and focused in order to set and achieve our goals.*
- *Clearly define smart goals*

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

 Mentimeter



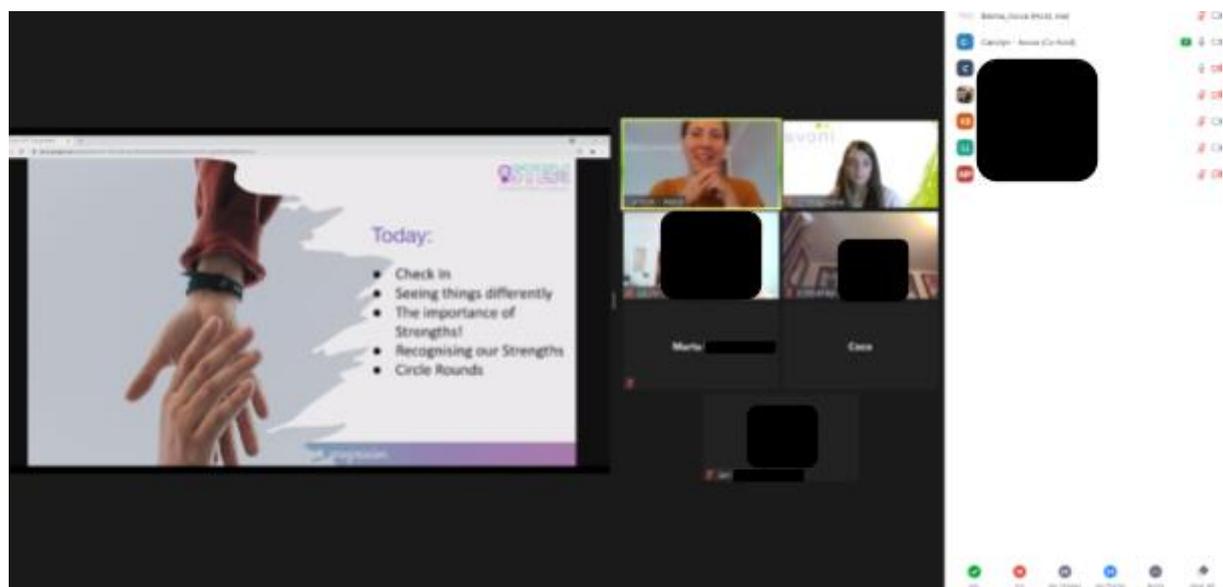
Any further comments or notes regarding the Circles?

- *Whatsapp group are useful*
- *Congratulations! Thanks for the opportunity. Very useful.*

Overall, the response to the coaching was positive with participants rating all the different aspects as either very useful or somewhat useful.

From the table above, it is evident that the group would consider recommending the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ to a friend which is an encouraging outcome. Across all 3 evaluations there was a theme of participants enjoying the peer-support aspect of the sessions which provided shared experiences. When asked whether they had a clear idea on their next steps after the sessions, 100% of respondents said they did. From the word cloud created above, it is clear that participants found the sessions helped with goal setting.

To continue the peer-support built up in this group and maintain communication with the participants, a WhatsApp group was created for all those who wished to be involved. Although the group expressed interest in having one to continue networking and communicating, there was a lack of activity in this chat. It is recommended that for pilot 2, a WhatsApp group is set up prior to the first session (with the permission of participants) to ensure communication can begin from the outset.



TESTIMONIALS

During the final session evaluation, participants were asked to leave testimonials, anonymous or accredited, about the sessions they had taken part in. The following answers were given:

Name: Anonymous

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

What did you enjoy most from these sessions? *Personal improvement*

What will you take away and implement after these sessions? *SMART goal setting and flow theory*

Any further comments? *Mentoring groups are useful*

Name: Anonymous

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

How did you find the sessions? *Very good*

What did you enjoy most from these sessions? *The various links to explore.*

What will you take away and implement after these sessions? *Focus.*

Name: Anonymous

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

How did you find the sessions? *Great!*

What did you enjoy most from these sessions? *The follow up email and "homework" were very helpful to stimulate self-reflection.*

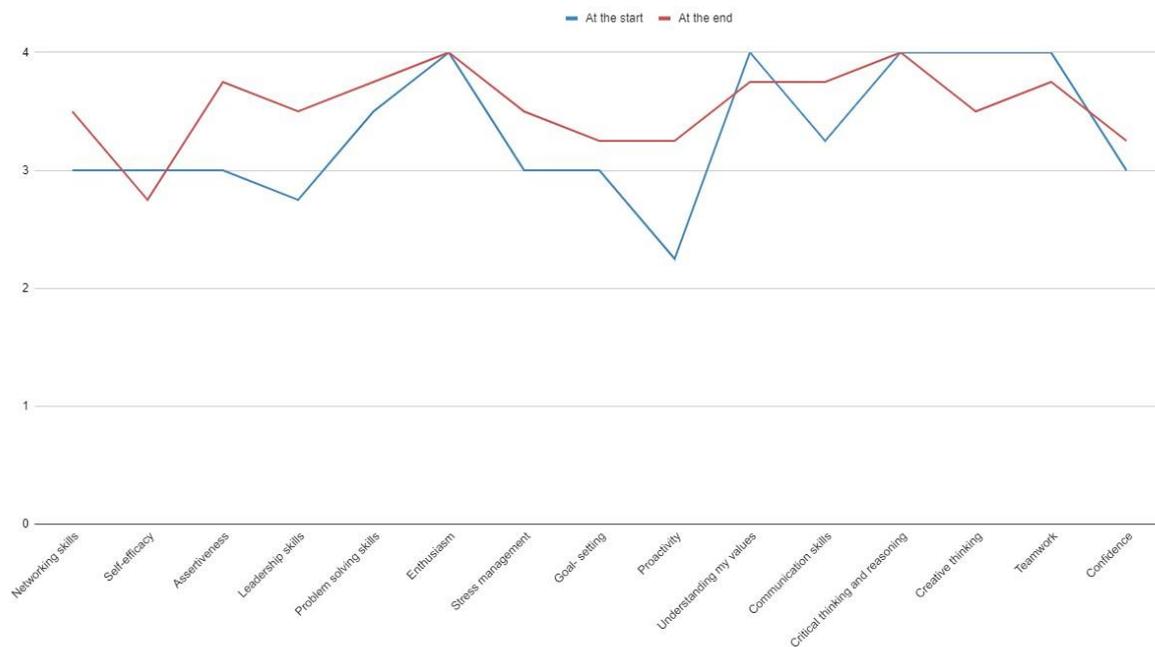
What will you take away and implement after these sessions? *Make short, small, achievable goals*

Any further comments? *The 7.5h of training could be distributed through 4 or 5 sessions. The time between sessions is quite important.*

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 and the end of the Circles period. A summary of the participants' results in the UK are shown below.

FemSTEM Pilot 1 Soft Skills Graphs



From the graph above, it is evident that the participants developed their soft skills throughout the duration of the programme and improved in a lot of areas. The most significant improvements were in participants' **assertiveness, leadership and stress management**. There were some decreases in soft skills such as **creative thinking and self-efficacy**. However, these decreases were only minor. Moreover, a decrease in these skills is not necessarily an indication of a reduction in that skill, but more of an increase in self-awareness and the acknowledgement that these skills need to be worked on more in the future months and years.

Facilitator's Comments and Recommendations for improvement

As a facilitator I really enjoyed delivering these sessions and found the group to be very engaged and willing to share experiences and ideas with each other. They were all very supportive and seemed to very much enjoy the mentoring process and the opportunity to share with others in similar fields and situations. It was notable that we had a good mix of women from different backgrounds and different stages of their career which helped them to support each other. The online facilitation worked well and meant that we had women joining us from different parts of the UK which would not have been possible had they been held face-to-face. However, as a facilitator it is difficult, if participants do not wish to turn on their cameras, to connect well with individuals. Within this group, this was an issue at times so, whilst respecting that some people do not wish to be seen on camera, for future online Circles, I would be more inclined to encourage this more, unless there is a specific reason for leaving the camera off.

The questioning approach worked well, and the participants really understood and practiced it in their time together which was good to see. Some participants fed back that they had really understood the benefit of this approach and would use it themselves in their own work.

The facilitators guide was useful and clear - I was able to use it as a good guide to the sessions whilst tailoring the tools used to meet the specific needs of this group. Once I had met the participants, it was easier to gauge what activities would work well for this group. For example, most of the participants were struggling with their confidence and therefore, it was decided that an activity on building self-confidence would be needed. This took the form of a guided meditation which, from previous experience at Inova, has worked incredibly well to support people in their development of confidence.

Overall, the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ pilot 1, in the UK, were very successful. Many women in STEM were able to engage with the sessions and implement some key goals and actions to support their development, both on a personal and professional level.

Conclusion

To conclude, this piloting phase has been successful and has allowed Inova Consultancy to collect essential feedback regarding potential improvements prior to pilot 2. These include:

- Adding testimonials to the promotion of the course to encourage others to join.
- Giving more detail during the promotion into the methodology so that participants have an expectation of what the sessions will entail.
- Organise the sessions to ensure the time is sufficient whilst also giving participants enough time to implement their goals, without feeling pressured or as if they are running out of time.
- Set up a WhatsApp group with the participants prior to the first session, to encourage communication and prolonged networking from the outset.

Annexes

List of evidence needed from each partner to be sent with the national report

- Signed **attendance list** from each Circle session – or declaration of attendance signed by the legal representative.
- Signed **Programme Agreement** from each participant – or completed via google form.
- **Soft Skills Evaluation** (at the start of their journey) - or completed via google form.
- **Soft Skills Evaluation** (at the end of their journey) - or completed via google form.
- **Session Evaluation Forms** (from each session) - or completed via google form.
- **Final Evaluation Form** (from the final session) - or completed via google form.
- **Photos** from each Circle sessions – or screenshots.
- **Evidence of recruitment** activities (e.g. screenshots on online advertising, social media, press releases etc)

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FemSTEM

Recruitment, retention, progression



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