

# FemSTEM Coaching Circles™

Pilot 2  
National Report  
Italy

CESIE



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

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# Introduction

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the second pilot of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles in Italy took place online, with the use of Zoom. Our Coaching Circles pilot started on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and took place from 18:30 till 20:30.

The first session took place on December 15<sup>th</sup> with 7 participants.

The second session was held on December 22<sup>nd</sup> with 6 participants as well, as one of the participants of the first session had Covid and wasn't able to the session.

The third and final session took place on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 with 7 participants again.

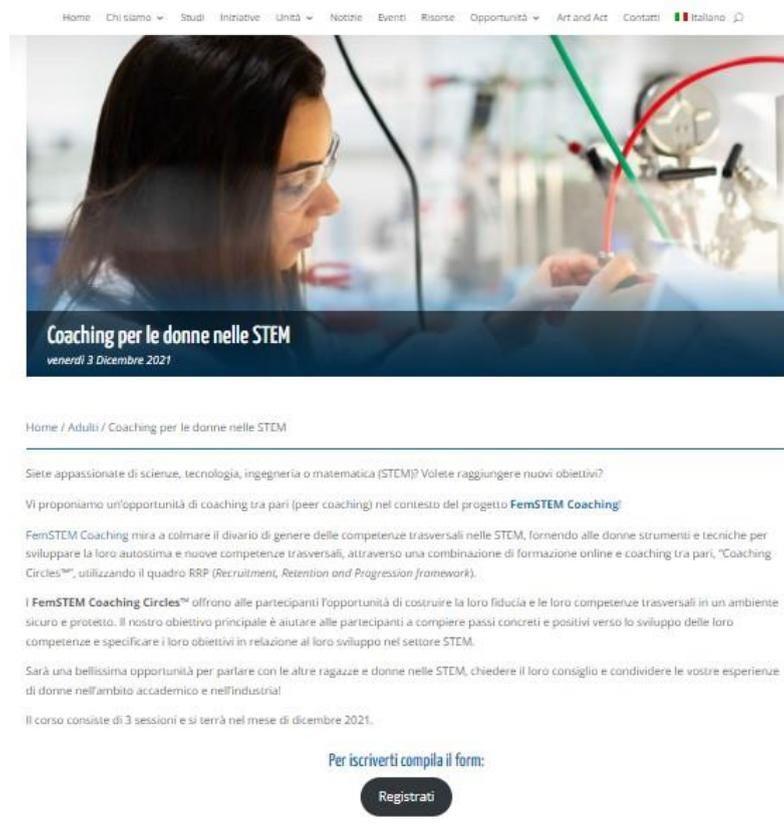
The pilot was very successful as all of the participants evaluated their experience very highly and stated on numerous occasions that they were happy to participate and that they felt the impact of the activities in their personal and professional lives. Many of them stated that during the Christmas break had a chance to apply some of the instruments they've learned about during the first few sessions and that holiday period and the beginning of the new year was a great time for them to set new goals.

# Recruitment

For the promotion of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™' second 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.

An open call was published on CESIE's website:



A newsletter with the call was sent to the network of 5914 recipients with 1212 of them acting on it by opening email.



A total of 12 participants registered to participate, however some of them later were unable to take part in the Circles.

## Overview of Participants

In the first pilot of the IO3 (Coaching Circles™) CESIE involved 7 participants overall. Below you can see a short overview of their experiences and motivations.

Participant	Background Information
Participant 1	Italian, pursuing a PhD in biotechnology at the University of Bologna. Was interested to participate in the Circles because wants to set career goals for her career after the defence.
Participant 2	Vietnamese, recently started her career in programming and is trying to get more clarity on her own expectations from the new career.
Participant 3	Italian, mathematician, working on a military base. Was interested in coaching for long time, both for her career and her personal life, as she's planning a big transition.
Participant 4	Italian, biologist, recently moved to Sicily following her partner and is currently searching for a job here. Her main motivation was to become more proactive and get clearer vision of what she wants to do in the future – apply for a PhD programme or work in the private sector.
Participant 5	French, architect, working both in the field of interior design, and in an NGO in Florence as a project manager. Wanted to decide which of her careers to follow full time.
Participant 6	Italian, architect, learned about the Circles from the participant of the previous round, who told her that she was very inspired and motivated after her experience. Participant 6 moved from Palermo to Milan and started her first job in an architect studio.
Participant 7	Italian, a professor at the university (agriculture). Preparing to retire in a few years and was interested in setting new goals for the last years of her career.

# The Format and Process of the Coaching Circles in Italy

The first pilot round of Coaching Circles™ in Italy was attended by 7 participants. All sessions took place via Zoom. The sessions were facilitated by Dr. Maryna Manchenko, project manager and researcher at CESIE.

The second session, however, was attended by 6 participants, as one participant tested positive for Covid and was not feeling well enough to attend. However, all of the participants received the presentations before the sessions, hence had all of the materials for individual work. In addition, in the beginning of the third session the group discussed some of the topics that the participant, who missed the previous session, wanted to clarify.

<u>Session Number</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>	<u>Tools Used/Comments</u>
1	15/12/2021	7	Getting to know each other Start, Stop, Continue, Change tool SMART goals
2	22/12/2021	6	Reflections on Start, Stop, Continue, Change tool Discussion of SMART goals Creation of Mind Maps Introduction of Circle of influence
3	05/01/2022	7	SMART goals Reflection on Mind Maps Discussion of Circle of Influence



# Sessions

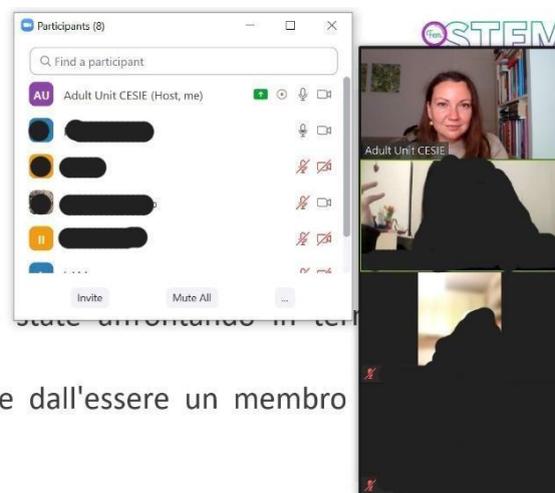
Each session and related materials were prepared by the facilitator in advance.

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 carriera e 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.

The facilitator offered the participants to take a 10 to 15 minutes and get familiar with the tool, and later invited them to proceed with their presentations, and to take active part in the discussion, always using the question technique.

The participants chose their own order in which to speak about their goals and reflect upon things they need to start, stop, continue and change. Some of the things they have named as something to stop were "complaining", "demotivating myself", "looking for excuses".

The participants also spoke about not feeling confident in the male-dominated environments (one of the example ' a PhD programme, where all of the PhD students and majority of the

professors are men), sabotaging their own aspirations by talking themselves out of being “too ambitious”, “apologizing for having an accent” or “not speaking Italian well” and being discouraged while job searching.

The participants also questioned some of the words and phrases they used during their presentations, for example, “blocked”, “discouraged”, “unexperienced”, “being/not being taken seriously”, as well as the realities of being a migrant woman in Italy, especially in a professional field.

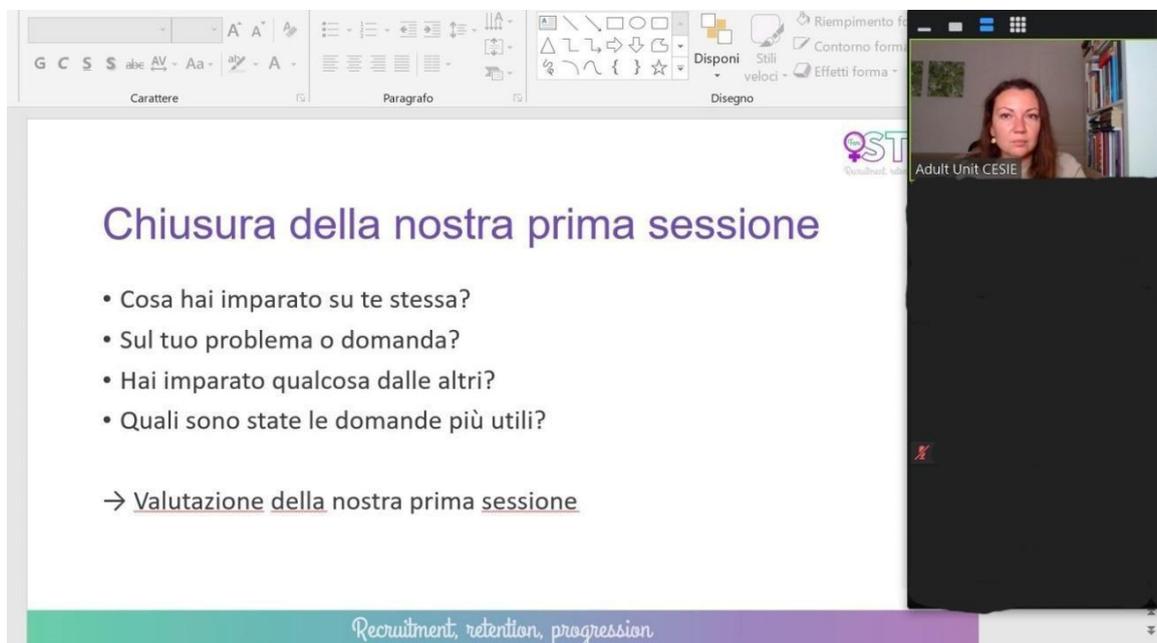
Also all of the participants came to a conclusion that figuring out what they should continue going was the hardest out of all four sections.

Each participant had time and possibility to reflect upon their conclusions and ask questions about the presentations, made by others.

Then the facilitator presented the concept of SMART goals. This tool was received with a lot of interest from the participants, who said that it was new and useful to them. Some of them stated that that was the perfect timing for learning about them, as the beginning of a new year always inspires goal setting.

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 screenshot shows a presentation slide with the following content:

## Chiusura della nostra prima sessione

- Cosa hai imparato su te stessa?
- Sul tuo problema o domanda?
- Hai imparato qualcosa dalle altri?
- Quali sono state le domande più utili?

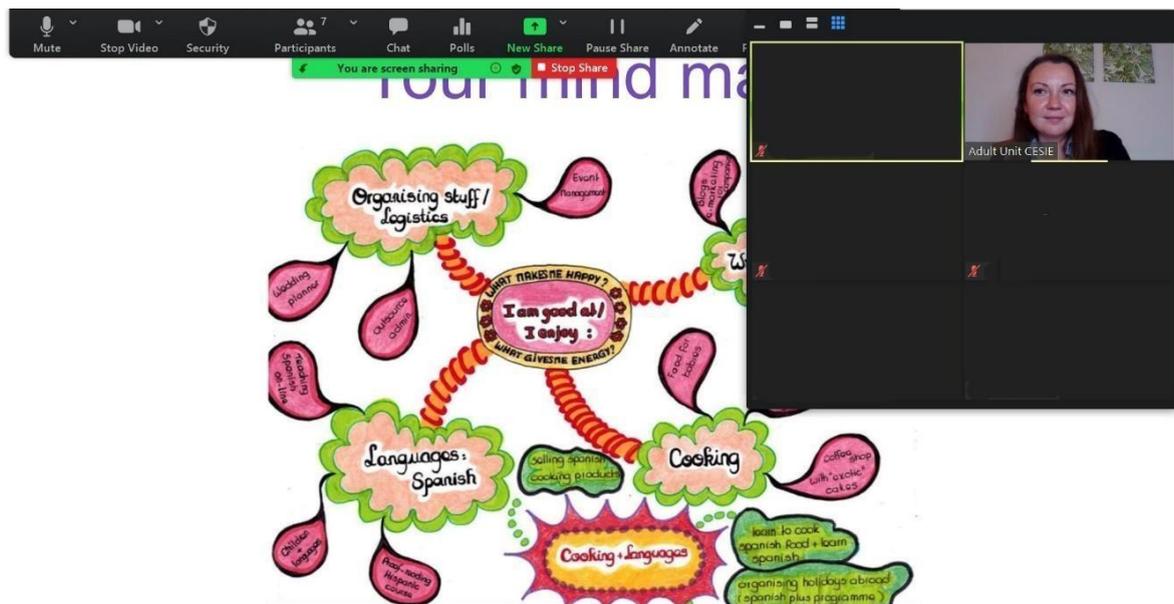
→ [Valutazione della nostra prima sessione](#)

At the bottom of the slide, the text "Recruitment, retention, progression" is visible. In the top right corner, there is a video call window showing a woman with the name "Adult Unit CESIE" below her.

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

They also reflected upon their experience of working on the goals alone, outside of the Circle. Each participant had 10 minutes to present their goals. Some of them presented goals related to work, studies or career in general, some – those related to personal life, self-development, wellness etc.

After the discussion that participants were introduced to the Mind Map tool. The participants were given 15 minutes to create their own Mind Maps, show them to other participants and answer their questions.



Recruitment, retention, progression

This session was also met with enthusiasm, as some of the participants knew about this tool, and others didn't. While presenting their maps they were speaking about how having multiple interests or sides to their personality helps them in day to day life and in work and how often some of their hobbies and competences, that seemed to be very far away from their professional lives, ended up helping them achieve certain career goals.

One of the participants, who has a mixed heritage and speaks multiple languages since young age, said that in the end she managed to find common points between her career and her competences, which brought her an important promotion.

Other things that were discussed are the influence of daily activities and work life, importance of hobbies for mental health, especially in the past two years due to Covid and lockdowns, and possibility of mixing hobbies and work competences in order to create a business.

After this the "Circle of Influence" tool was introduced and explained to the participants. For two of the participants this exercise became quite emotional due to their previous experiences. Both of them agreed that realising what was under their control and what was

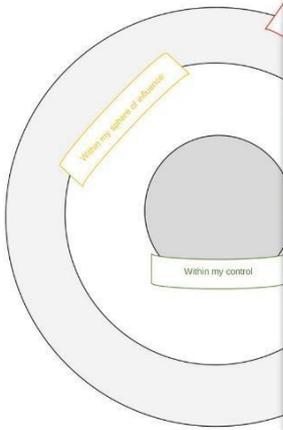
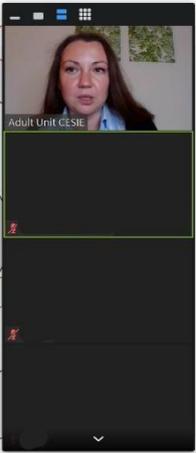
not was crucial in the process of managing those experiences and turning those situations in their favour.

**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**

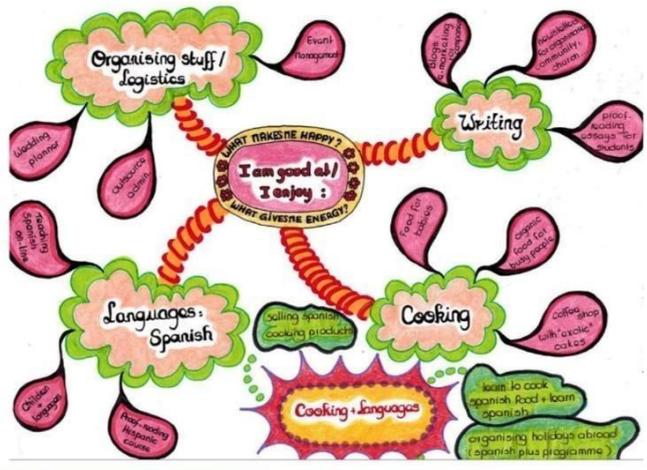
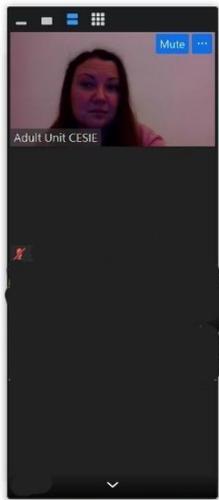



Recruitment, retention, progression

The session ended with the evaluation.

During **the third session** participants reflected on their experience with Mind Maps, as some of them continued their work after the previous session ended, during the holidays and around New Year, as they were reflecting upon the year that passed. Also, one of the participants missed the previous session due to Covid and wanted to present her map as well.

**four mind maps**

Recruitment, retention, progression

Each participant had 5 minutes to present their reflection and then - an opportunity to ask others questions.

After that the group returned to SMART goals. Participants one by one presented their successes, thoughts and future intentions. Many of them said that it was quite challenging starting from something big, so they chose to start with smaller goals – planning out a workout programme, starting training for a half-marathon, renovating an apartment.

After that the participants presented their work with the “Circle of Influence”. Each participant had 10 minutes to speak and present their results.



**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 diagram shows three concentric circles. The innermost circle is labeled 'Within my control'. The middle ring is labeled 'Within my sphere of influence'. The outermost ring is labeled 'Not within my control'.

Recruitment, retention, progression

The main topic of discussion was that for some of the participants it was very therapeutic to see how many things are actually in their control in any situation they tried this tool with. Some of them correlated this task with the “Start, Stop, Continue, Change” tool and reflected upon the words and phrases they used during the first session, for example “blocked” and “being or not being taken seriously”, and said that now they have something to think about.

Some of the participants stated that realising that they can influence so many aspects in their lives was a revelation for them.

The last part of the session was dedicated to final reflections, conclusions and evaluations.

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 on their goals 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.

- Meet interesting people;
- I would have liked to improve and reach new goals and I would say that with this first session I had valid tools to understand it!
- Yes, the facilitator is very good

- All!
- I wanted to feel part of a group and now I do;
- I didn't have so many expectations, I didn't know what it will be like. But in the end, I am happy that I participated
- I've been waiting to clarify certain things for myself and I think I'm in a right place.

3 main things to take away from the session:

- The Start, Stop, Continue, Change circle, SMART goals;
- Learning to organize my thoughts - new food for thought - learning how to gain confidence;
- Reflection, organization, breaking the old patterns;
- New acquaintances, new friends, new perspectives;
- The SMART goals thing is very interesting, I have never heard of such a thing. Then all the activities we did, and it was also nice to meet the girls;
- Activities. I also found out about a new association in Palermo and learned something new;
- Activities with the circle, then with SMART objectives and also, I enjoyed reflecting upon my skills.

The best part of the Coaching Circles™ so far?

- Relaxation;
- The best part was when we filled in the "Start-Stop-Continue-Change" circle;
- Talk about SMART goals;
- Get to know you all;
- SMART goals;
- Everything was very nice; I can't choose just one thing;
- Talking and questioning certain things.

Any further comments?

- I like being able to have the possibility of comparison with the others;
- Thank you!
- Thank you!
- Everything was very interesting.

## **Circle 2**

Expectations for the session?

- Yes;
- Yes, it was very nice again;
- Yes, I think all of them;
- I expected that I will learn many more things and I learned what I did not know;
- I wanted to talk about a problem that I can't solve. I had a chance to talk about it, and now I have many ideas of how to proceed;
- It was even better than the first time.

3 main things to take away from the session:

- How to face the challenges, learning to introspect;
- New tools, new ideas, lots of laughs;
- A feeling of belonging, many new inspirations and ideas, things to think about;
- Mind maps, it seems to me a very meditative thing;
- Self-reflection, the most artistic task, the stories of the other girls;
- The great atmosphere of this group, the support and the new acquaintances.

The best part of the Coaching Circles™ so far?

- The exercises and interactions;
- The team;
- Our group;
- The time dedicated to reflections on myself and my life, I don't do it very often;
- Asking myself questions;
- Being able to tell certain things about me that I usually don't talk about.

Any further comments?

- I wish there were more meetings;
- Nothing, just thank you!
- Thanks for all!

### **Circle 3**

Expectations for the session

- Yes;
- I am glad I learned new tools;
- To improve my skills and get new tools to understand what I want to do and how to proceed;
- Everything was perfect;
- Yes, sure;
- I wanted to meet more women in my field, and I am very happy with this group;
- Sure, all are satisfied.

3 main things to take away from the session:

- Importance of introspection, order of thoughts, long term goals;
- Mind mapping tools; control tool, but also the importance of positive thinking;
- The methodology;
- The stories of the participants, new ideas and much more;
- Reflection on myself;
- I don't know, I liked everything;
- The girls' questions - now I have so much to think about thanks to them. Then the tools - Mind Mapping above all.

The best part of the Coaching Circles™ so far?

- The facilitators's explanations;
- The team spirit and positivity;
- The simplicity of communication;

- The environment and the group;
- Our discussions and tools;
- The tools;
- The atmosphere.

Any further comments?

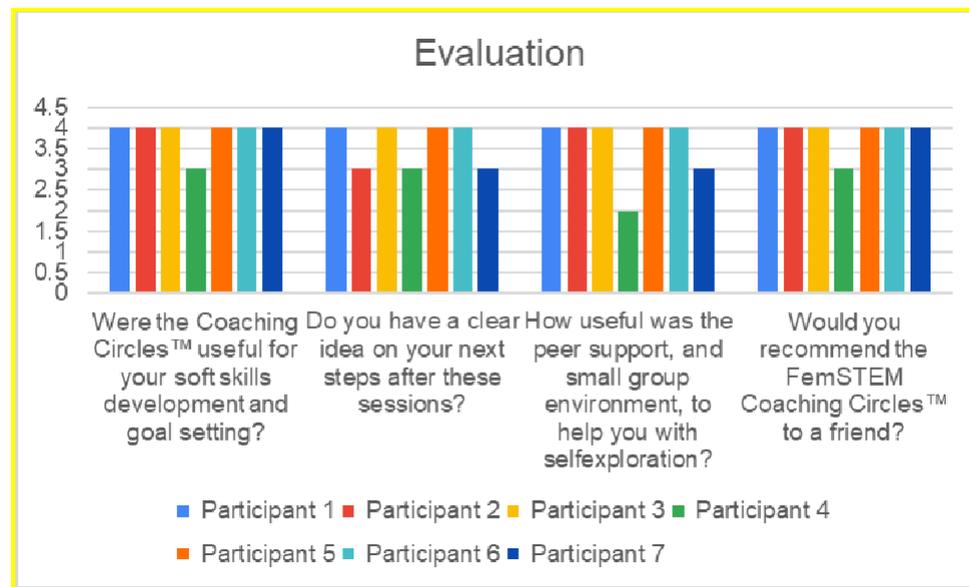
- Thanks for the sessions :);
- Thanks for the event;
- Everything was beautiful!
- Thank you;
- Let me know if you do it again! :)

Hence, the second round of Coaching Circles in Italy received a very good feedback as well. The participants were very happy with the activities and the group dynamic. Many of them said that during this period in their lives were feeling confused and after the Circles feel like things became much clearer.

They all stated that they would've definitely recommend their friends to participate in Coaching Circles and would consider participating again after some time.

## 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.



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?

- Understanding the importance of having your thoughts in order;
- To create Mind Map for my projects;
- Now I have a clearer idea of my goals;
- They gave me a lot of ideas and a lot of motivation;
- Now I want to do many things, which I didn't even think about before;
- I have a clearer idea of what I want to do in the future;
- It helped me divide the things I need to do into small steps and now I feel more at peace.

Hence, all of the participants were content with their Coaching Circles experience and evaluated it very highly.

Three out of 7 participants gave 3 points (out of 4) to the question “Do you have a clear idea on your next steps after these sessions?”. While giving their feedback, all of them explained, that for them this was just the beginning and they expect that it will take more work for them to get a clearer idea about their goals and next steps. However, they agreed that Coaching Circles really helped them to get more clarity and now they know where to start.

## TESTIMONIALS

**Name: Participant 4**

**Took part in:** Pilot 2 of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ in Italy

Coaching Circles™ really helped me to understand that the root of many of my insecurities was inside me. Starting a new career is always challenging, but now I have a better understanding and will try and stop sabotaging myself and my progress.

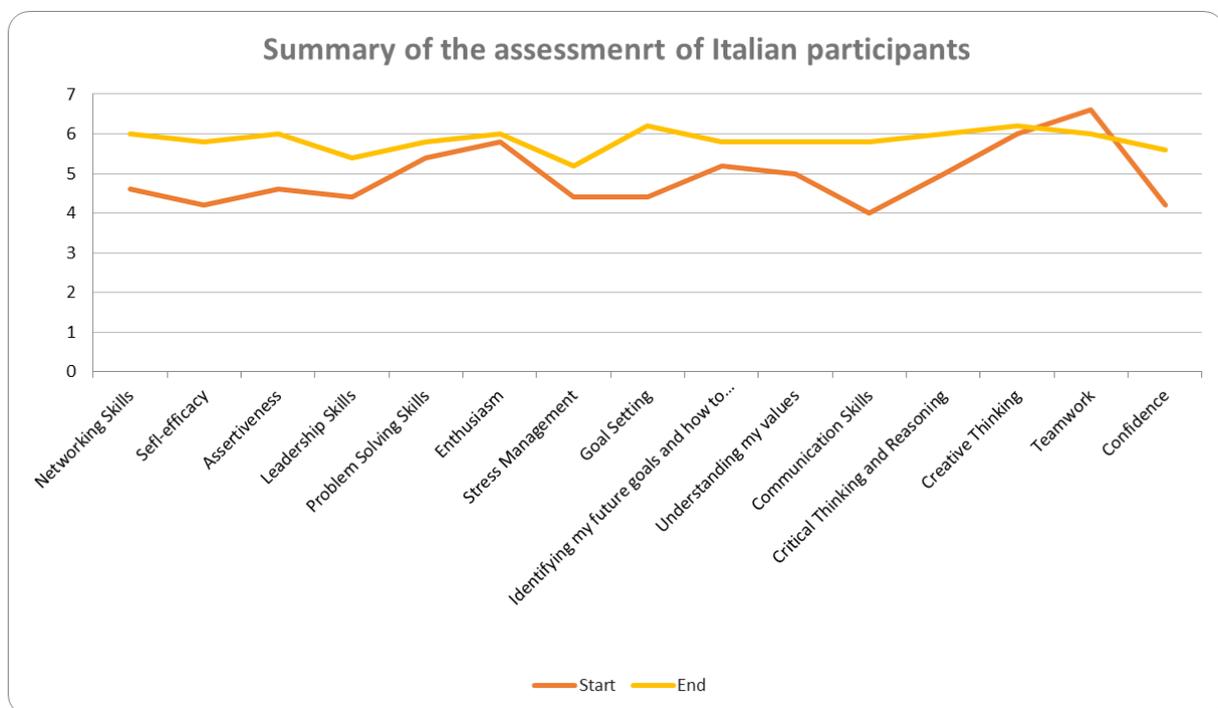
**Name: Participant 5**

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

Thanks to Coaching Circles™ I finally feel like I know in which direction I should move and what I should do next. After the first session I already started setting new goals and planning my next moves.

## 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 is shown on the graph below.



We can see an 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, and confidence for the majority of the participants.

Enthusiasm and creative thinking are two factors that seem to not show improvement and stay at the same level as during the initial evaluation. However, during the discussions all of the participants were speaking about their work with a lot of enthusiasm and spoke a lot about their creative sides during the Mind Map activity. During the evaluation they all agree that some of the skills are easier for them to access as they seem to be more confident in those skills.

Teamwork, however, got higher scores in the beginning than in the end. The participants spoke about the fact that, after three sessions and individual work, they tend to assess some of the skills deeper and see them a bit more differently.

During the evaluation the participants were speaking about the difficulties with self-assessment, both in the beginning and in the end of the pilot. Some said that it's always difficult for them to evaluate themselves adequately and the evaluation depends on their mood at any given time, the situation they are at work, the levels of stress etc. Two of the participants agreed that they have probably evaluated themselves quite low in the beginning of the Circle, as they were not feeling good about themselves at that time (end of the year stress, deadlines, anxiety etc.).

But overall, all of the participants felt like they worked on their soft skills during this round of Coaching Circles and improved many of them.

## 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 the online format and holiday period, 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.

In certain cases, they were working on the tasks both during the sessions, and after, in their free time. We dedicated time in the beginning of every session to the presentations of anything the participants wanted to share after their individual work – reflections, new ideas, break throughs, successes both from their personal and professional lives.

We have to underline that the online format, for the Training of Trainers, the first and the second rounds of pilots, definitely impacted the success of this activity.

The facilitator, not having enough practical knowledge of the methodology, felt certain limitations in her abilities. A

t 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, the online format set different time and scheduling limitations that could've been avoided.

At the same time, due to the fact that we were constrained to use Zoom, 3-4 participants, who were not in Palermo at that time, were able to participate and benefit from the coaching activities.

The participants again 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. Two of the participants actually suggested some of the activities, which they themselves find beneficial, such as gratitude journaling and vision boards.

The concept of SMART Goals was new also to this group of participants and they stated that they liked it a lot on numerous occasions.

The group had a great collaboration since the first session, as we again dedicated a lot of time to self-presentations. After that there was no need for ice breakers - the participants were starting the meeting with the exchange of current news and their successes.

## Conclusion

The feedback from the participants of the second round of piloting of Coaching Circles™ was very positive, as it was after the first one.

They all gave very good feedback in regard to the atmosphere and the environment, the feeling of acceptance in the group, as well as in regard to tools that were presented to them and the work in the group.

The main difficulty in the organisation of the piloting was conflicting schedules of the participants and unforeseen difficulties (mostly Covid, both for the participants and the facilitator). Due to these factors, even though the total of 7 participants took part in the pilots, there were 6 participants attending the second session.

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 Circles and possibly a lower number of participants per circle. This round, compared to the first one, had more participants and the sessions ended up being quite long, so the participants, all of whom were attending the sessions after a full work day, were often feeling exhausted afterward.

In general, we can confidently conclude that the methodology is well planned and useful for the target group of the FemSTEM project.

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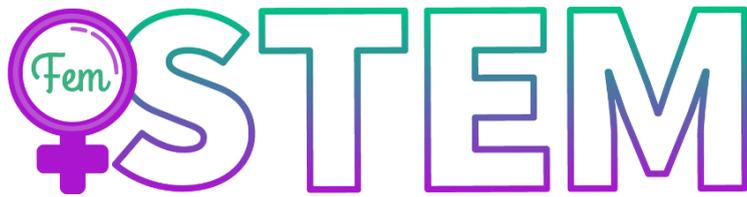
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# FemSTEM

*Recruitment, retention, progression*



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