

FemSTEM Coaching Circles™ National Report

Partner Organisation: Inova Consultancy
Partner Country: United Kingdom
Pilot: 2



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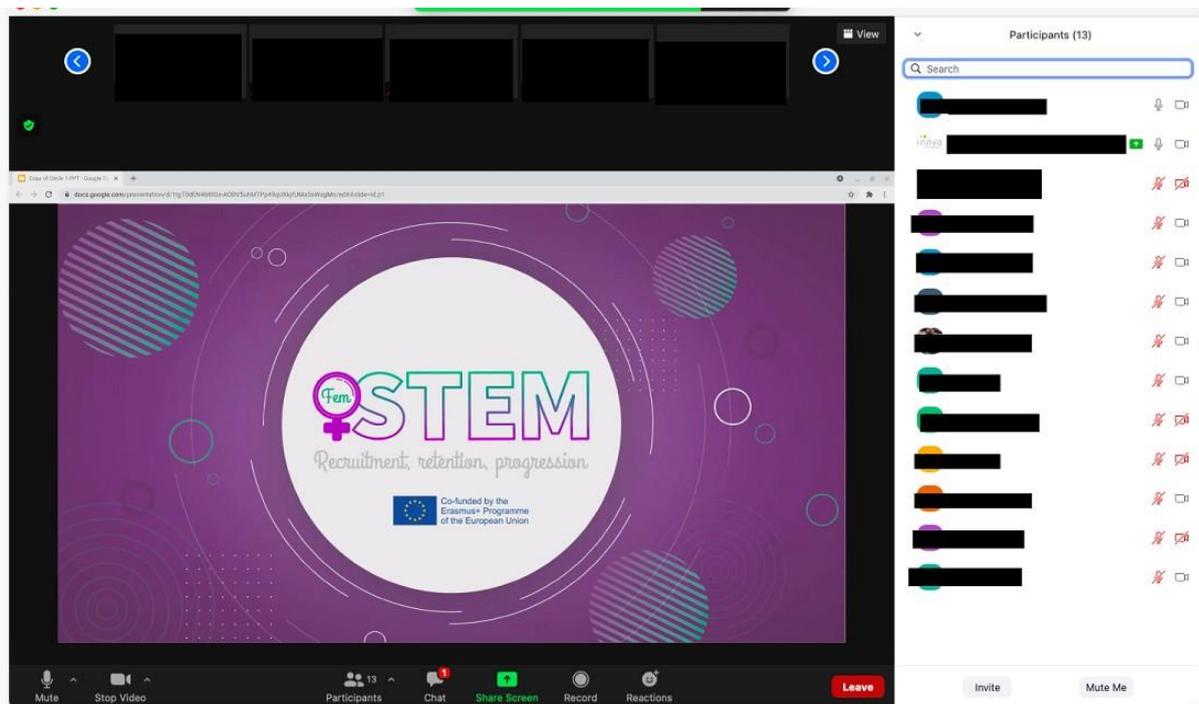
Introduction

Following the first round of piloting as part of the FemSTEM Coaching project, Inova Consultancy conducted another pilot of 3 Circle sessions to support women in STEM with their soft skills development, self-efficacy, and confidence.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, these sessions were taken place online via Zoom. The materials used within these sessions, therefore, were adapted to suit an online delivery. For example, soft skills assessments and evaluations were created within a Google form and the screen sharing and chat functions were used to share resources and information.

Carolyn Usher (Trainer, Project Manager and experienced facilitator of Circles at Inova Consultancy) Babett Csokan (International Project Manager) and Rachel Taylor (Graduate International Project Assistant) conducted these Circles. Due to the number of participants, the group was split into two groups with a facilitator in each breakout room to moderate discussion.

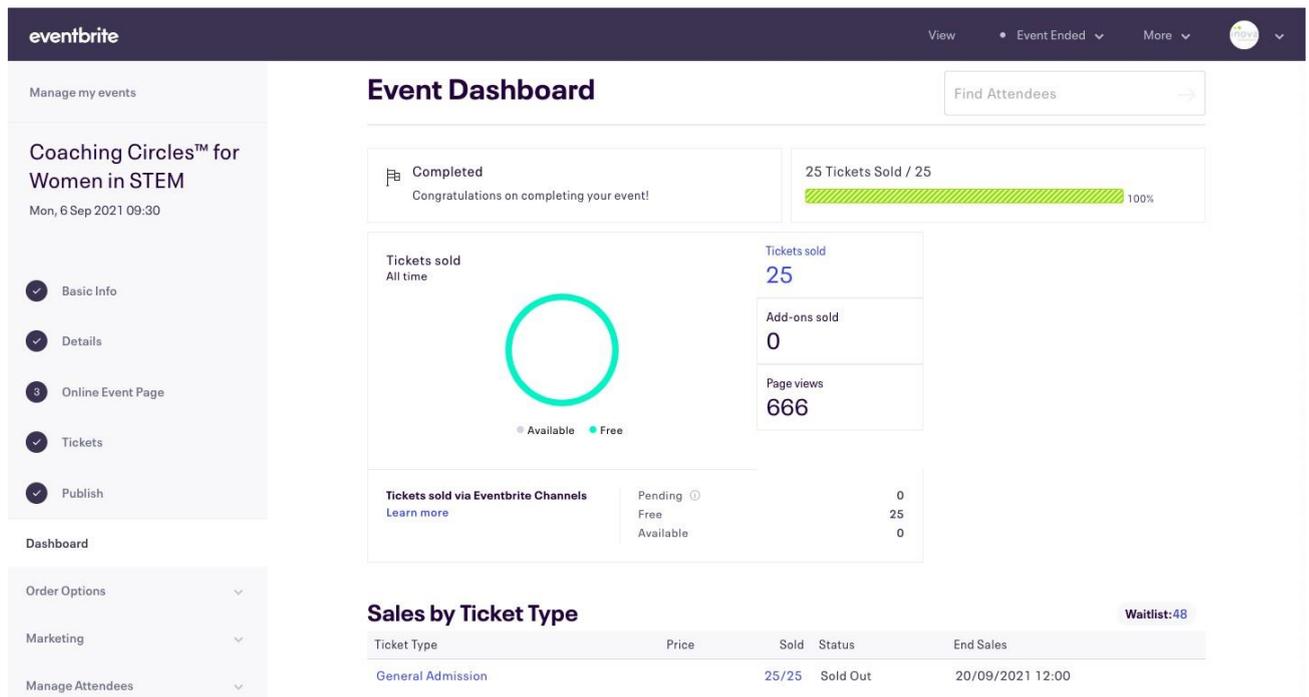
The following report details the success of the second phase of piloting of the UK Coaching Circles for this project, including evaluations, facilitator comments and recommendations for future delivery.



Recruitment

Due to the continued restrictions and disruptions caused by Covid-19, the recruitment for the second phase of piloting was conducted online. This included social media promotion, contacting STEM organisations, emailing relevant stakeholders and contacts as well as newsletters.

An Eventbrite page was created which enabled participants to register for the course and gain more information about the course content. The event had a total of 666 views. In total, 25 people registered and 48 were on the waiting list. 11 participants attended the Circles.



Regular posts were also made on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram to advertise the coaching programme. Due to the success of the recruitment strategy within the first phase of piloting, Inova had gained many new contacts which were useful for this recruitment stage.

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Flexible, responsive consultancy in the area of diversity, equality, leadership a...
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Our FREE Coaching Circles for Women in STEM were such a great success this month and we are delighted to be able to hold more sessions in September!

These sessions guarantee to help you boost your soft skills and help you put your goals into action!

Book now with the link below.

<https://lnkd.in/dMMqjZh>

#coaching #softskills #training #free



Coaching Circles™ for Women in STEM
eventbrite.co.uk • 2 min read

You Retweeted

Inova Consultancy @InovaUK · Aug 3

Our FREE Coaching Circles for Women in STEM were such a great success this month and we are delighted to be able to hold more sessions in September!

Book here: [femstemcirclespilot2.eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/femstemcirclespilot2)

@WESTskills @ShfWIT @wicatshffield @WITECeu @shuwitsoc
@STEMWomenEvents @thewisecampaign



Dates
Monday 6th, 13th, and 20th
September 2021

Time (each session)
9:30am - 12:00pm (UK time)

Location
Online via Zoom

0:03 | 65 views



Overview of Participants:

For each pilot of the IO3 Coaching Circles, the FemSTEM consortium brought together a minimum of 5-7 women in STEM. Below is an overview of the participants involved in the second round of piloting in the UK. The information is anonymised to protect the privacy of participants involved.

	Background Information
Participant 1	A neuroscientist with a PhD in Biomedical Sciences and has been working in the field of neurodegenerative diseases since 2007.
Participant 2	Works in fish health in aquaculture.
Participant 3	Works as an integrated logistic support engineer.
Participant 4	Works as a hardware design engineer in the aviation and defence sector. Also lead STEM outreach for their company's UK sites.
Participant 5	A chartered civil engineer, working within bridge design.
Participant 6	A first year PhD student in civil engineering/ biology.
Participant 7	A software engineering degree apprentice.

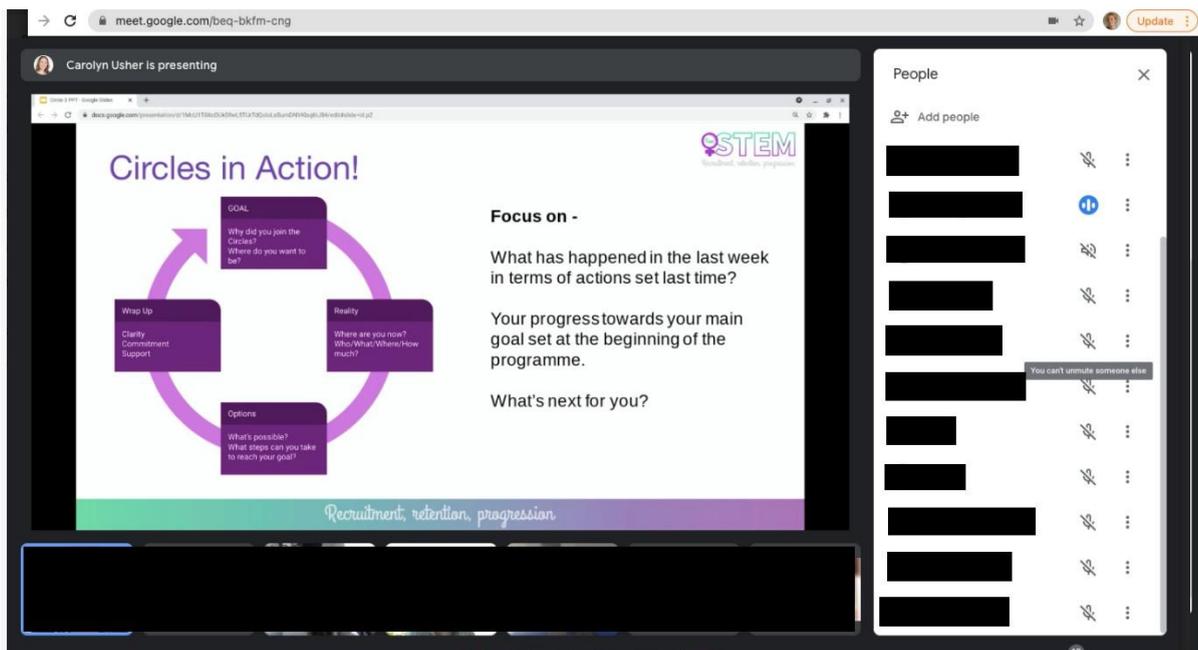
Participant 8	A systems engineer working in engineering consultancy.
Participant 9	A talent acquisition specialist for a M&E Building services company.
Participant 10	A PhD researcher in the Chemistry Department at a UK University.
Participant 11	A MSC student studying Energy Management. Previously managed energy metering projects in the power sector for 8 years.

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

Session number	Date	Number of participants	Tools used/ comments
1	06.09.2021	11	Soft skills assessment form at the start. PPT presentation. Discussion round.
2	13.09.2021	10	PPT presentation including exercises- e.g. old or young lady Discussion round.
3	20.09.2021	9	14 including those who joined in the last hour. PPT presentation. Discussion round. Soft skills assessment. Time to review the FemSTEM E-Coaching programme.

Additional Information

Each of the sessions conducted by Inova Consultancy lasted 2.5 hours. The sessions were held on Zoom or Google Meet which enabled the facilitators to coordinate breakout rooms and the chat function was used regularly so that participants were able to network and engage with each other.



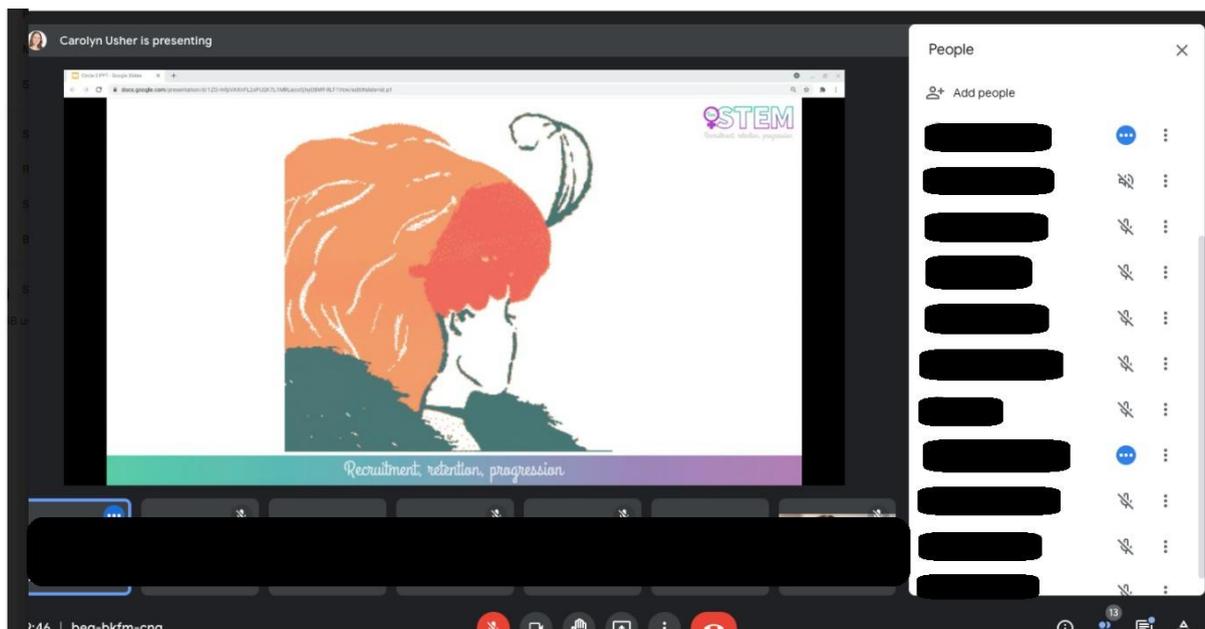
The lesson plans were based on the provided Facilitators Guide and a supporting presentation was used to show images, quotes and theories for the session. In between each session, participants were asked to work on their actions and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) goals which were set during the Circle.

Session 1: At the beginning of the first Circle, Carolyn introduced the project as well as the work of Inova Consultancy. The facilitators then introduced themselves to the participants. The methodology and structure of the Circles was explained to participants. A soft skills assessment and learning agreement was completed by all participants. Following introductions and an explanation of the programme content, breakout rooms were organised and the discussion rounds commenced. A facilitator was placed in each of the breakout rooms in order to moderate discussion.

Within the breakout rooms, each participant had between 10-15 minutes (depending on the group size) to introduce their goal and explain what they would like to achieve. After they introduced this, other members of the group were able to ask thought provoking questions which aimed to direct them towards creating a SMART goal. Once their allotted time was up, the facilitator provided a summary of their goal and the action plan they had outlined. The next person was then able to share their goal with the group.

Session 2: The second session was focused upon 'seeing things differently' and 'recognising our strengths.' The session began with some exercises related to perspective change such as the 'Young/Old Lady' exercise. Strengths based coaching was then explained to the participants. Finally, the breakout rooms were opened and the discussion round began. The discussion was centred around the goals set during the previous session. The discussion followed the same pattern as the previous session and each individual was given an allotted time to share their goal (approximately 10 minutes). Once they shared their goals, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions which allowed for the presenter to arrive at their SMART goal and an action plan for themselves. This was repeated until every person was given a chance to share their goals.

Session 3: The final session involved another round of participants discussing their goals and their progress throughout the previous week. Participants were able to share their goals and their progress, reflecting on their achievements and how setting a SMART goal enabled them to achieve their goals. Again, each participant was given approximately 10 minutes to reflect on their goal and their progress and other members asked supportive and reflective questions. This was repeated until each participant had shared their goal and was able to state how they were going to continue to progress with their SMART goals after the Coaching Circles had come to an end. The members of the Circle also completed the final soft-skills assessment and reflected upon how the sessions had improved their soft skills.



Impact of the Coaching Circles

In order to assess the impact of the Circles, the following activities 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 at the end of the training (Circle 3).
- 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 asked participants about their expectations, the methodology and what they found useful about the session. An overview of the responses can be found below:

Circle 1- 06.09.2021

Expectations

- 'Yes it was an interesting and engaging session.'
- 'It has been a great start today and I feel my expectations will be fulfilled at the end of the course.'
- 'To meet other women in STEM and share our experiences. Yes.'
- 'I expected to be introduced to other females in the STEM field who are going through the same issues in their career as I am. That was fulfilled. I also expected to learn about some steps to be more focused on my goals, which is a topic that the circle touched on and will be further discussed in the next sessions.'
- 'I thought there may have been a talk by someone who works in STEM and their experiences'

The three main things to take away from the session:

- 'SMART goals, writing down my achievements, setting a short-term goal.'
- 'You are not alone. You deserve to be in the position you are in. There is a place for women in STEM.'
- 'Females in male-dominated fields experience similar struggles, it is very important to have a women network of professionals in STEM, asking ourselves the right questions can get us further than getting the answers.'
- 'There are other females with the same issues, set up small achievable goals, set action points on a weekly basis.'

- 'Setting a SMART goal for myself, working to my goal by constantly practicing my communication skills, adaptable skills for approaching an interview.'

The best part of the Coaching Circles so far:

- 'Listening to the different experiences.'
- 'The breakout sessions where I was able to communicate my expectations.'
- 'Meeting like minded women.'
- 'Networking.'
- 'Being able to talk to others.'
- 'Considering alternatives that might help.'

Circle 2- 13.09.2021

Expectations:

- 'Discuss action points and how I achieved them.'
- 'Review our action from last week and advice from others- yes.'
- 'Get inspiration from other women in my situation, and it was fulfilled.'
- 'I was hoping to build on my confidence, it has been fulfilled.'
- 'Yes, it was good to review my progress for the week and to check in with other women in the group.'

The three main things to take away from the session:

- 'I need to be more kind to myself. I've learnt about the benefit of writing down my achievements and I've taken away the importance of accountability when setting goals.'
- 'Believe in myself as other people have been in my shoes.'
- 'Building on my strengths, managing my perception of my weaknesses.'
- 'Booking time/ blocking out time for myself and my family in my calendar is essential.'
- 'Others have similar struggles, the best thing to do is push myself into the situation I am most scared of, people's struggles might go unnoticed.'
- 'How to work on my achievements list, the idea of modelling others, the tip of working on my strengths to overcome my weaknesses.'
- 'I have achieved my goals I set last week and I feel confident that I can apply techniques we discussed in the session to continue setting and achieving goals in my day to day.'

Best part of the Coaching Circles so far:

- 'Discussing goals with other women to get advice and tips.'
- 'Talking to other women.'
- 'Seeing how other women are identifying and managing their issues.'
- 'The discussions in the breakout sessions.'
- 'Networking with women going through the same things as me.'
- 'Networking with other women and tips on building confidence.'

- ‘Networking with women at different stages in their careers and building a supportive environment for each other.’

Conclusion:

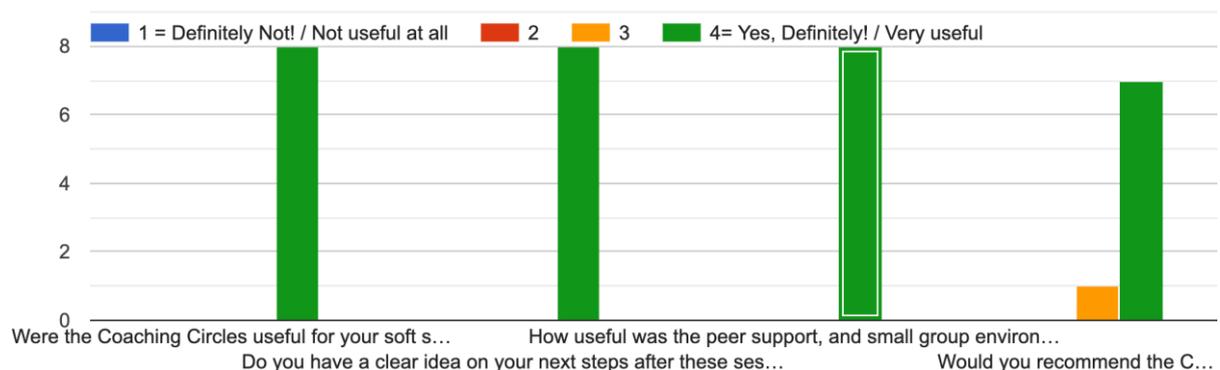
The overall feedback from the 1st and 2nd sessions was very positive (participants completed a final evaluation form in session 3 that is analysed below). The participants found networking with other women to be very useful and many found listening to the stories of others to be useful. The majority of the expectations were met, with some stating they had limited expectations. One person stated that they expected there to be a talk from a woman in STEM (an expectation that was indirectly met as testimonials via the FemSTEM website and E-Coaching programme are available). The IO2 E-Coaching Platform offers video testimonials to participants.

Final Evaluation Form

A final evaluation form, instead of the session evaluation form, was completed by participants at the end of the final Circle. This included asking participants to rate the usefulness of the session and to think about how the sessions have helped them with their career progression.

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

Please rate the following questions from 1 to 4 (1=Definitely Not! and 4= Yes, Definitely!)



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

- 'They really helped me to put some things into perspective and also how to implement goals.'
- 'I've learned it's important to set aside time for things that are important, including yourself and family.'
- 'Con la motivación y ejemplo.'- ('By motivation and example')
- Entender que es la Mentoría y como puedo aplicarlo.- ('Understanding what mentoring is and how I can apply it')
- 'Helped with goal setting and holding myself accountable for working towards these goals. Hearing other women's stories helps me feel more positive in my own career future.'
- 'It's been a safe space to chat and set goals. It's given me an understanding of how other women feel and the challenges they are facing, and has been a good focus for how to support other women at work and not default to sharing my own experiences!'
- 'Yes, talking about issues with some soft skills (networking and communication) and sharing this with other females helped me look at issues with a positive perspective. It also gave me clarity on my short term goals.'
- 'Nos permite orientar el desarrollo de las habilidades blandas en mujeres de mi ambito profesional, a la comunidad a quienes me dirijo como obstetra- ('It has helped me to guide the development of soft skills in women in my professional field, to the community to whom I address as an obstetrician.')

Additional Comments

- 'Thank you for a great set of sessions!'
- 'It's been a really great way to connect with and support, other women in STEM.'

Overall, the response to the coaching was positive and participants found the sessions to be useful. From the graph above, it is evident that the participants had overall a positive experience, with all but one participant rating the questions 'yes or definitely.' When asked whether the peer support and small group environment was useful for self-exploration, 100% stated 'yes definitely' and the responses from the previous sessions suggest that participants found peer-support to be particularly helpful.

Testimonials

During the final evaluation, participants were asked to provide testimonials. The following responses were given:

Name: Anonymous

How did you find the Coaching Circle Sessions? *Via an email from Women in Engineering Society.*

What did you enjoy most about the sessions? *Speaking with other women. Being able to tell our stories and get advice.*

What will you take away or implement from these sessions? *For example, a particular goal or skill. You are supposed to be here (in STEM) and the way you feel is not isolated, other women understand are there to help.*

Name: Anonymous

How did you find the Coaching Circle Sessions? *The Circles were really helpful, a little doubtful to begin with, but they have really helped*

What did you enjoy most about the sessions? *Being able to talk to people who are experiencing similar things.*

What will you take away or implement from these sessions? *How to dedicate time for personal life outside of work.*

Name: Anonymous

How did you find the Coaching Circle Sessions? *I enjoyed the circle session, the format promotes the sharing of experiences, and talking about our one issue and hearing others was very helpful to reach a sort of clarity for my own thoughts.*

What did you enjoy most about the sessions? *The sharing of experiences between women in different areas of STEM*

What will you take away or implement from these sessions? *In the future I will use the tips on how to boost confidence by making achievement lists and points of action. I will also implement the action of talking out loud about issues to find the solution on my own.*

Name: Anonymous

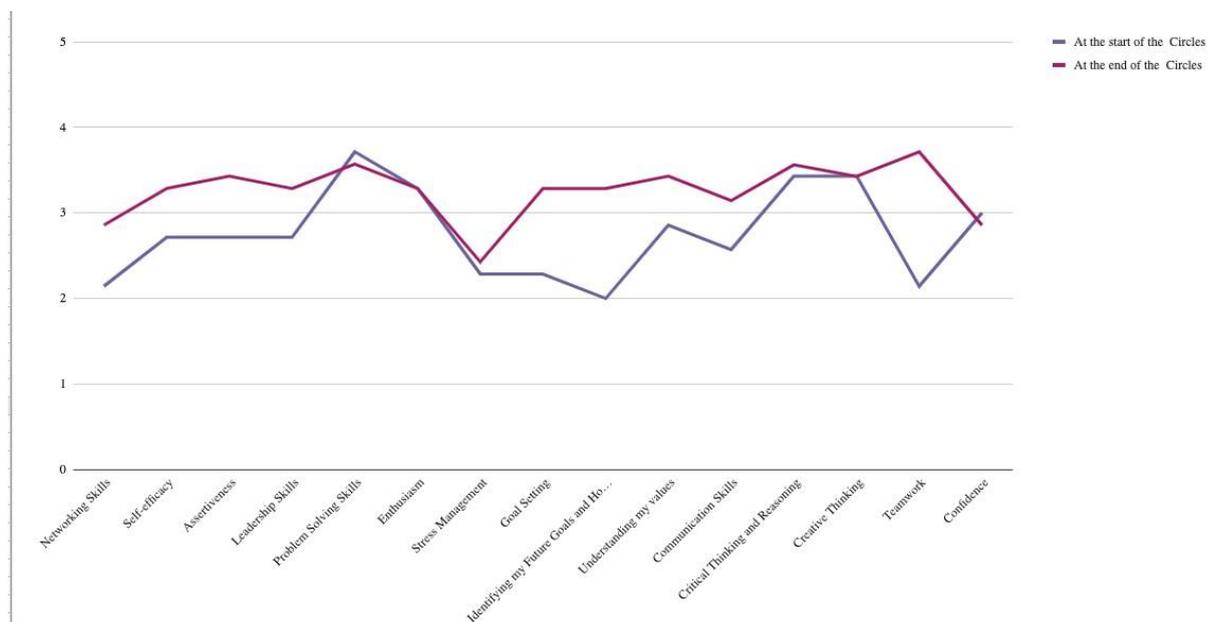
How did you find the Coaching Circle Sessions? *I enjoyed the time getting to know and network with other women from various areas in STEM*

What did you enjoy most about the sessions? *The coaching circle group sessions.*

What will you take away or implement from these sessions? *Diarise what's important, including time for yourself and family.*

Soft Skills Development

As part of the training, participants assessed their soft skills at the beginning and the end of the Circle period. A summary of the UK participants' results are shown below:



From the above graph, it is evident that participants developed their soft skills throughout the programme and improved in some areas. For example, the graph displays a significant improvement in participants' **networking, teamwork, goal setting, understanding of their values, communication skills and creative thinking**. Some areas such as **problem-solving** skills show a decrease, this may be a product of participant's self-reflection throughout the Circle's process. Therefore, a decrease does not necessarily indicate a reduction in skill, but

an increase in self-awareness as participants reflected upon their skills and engaged in discussion with other participants. Part of the aim of the coaching programme is for participants to reflect upon the skills that they may need to continue to build upon in the future months and years.

Facilitators Comments and Recommendations for Improvement

We had a great response to the Pilot 2 sessions which were very over-subscribed thanks to the Women's Engineering Society (<https://www.wes.org.uk/>) who shared the information with their large network. As a result we ran this pilot with 11 women and had many more on a waiting list (these women were invited to use the online platform and we will continue to engage with them as well). Retention over the 3 weeks was excellent, suggesting that the women valued the group and were finding it useful.

The women who joined were very motivated and engaged actively within the Circles. They were all high achievers within their fields and did well with setting goals and action points and working towards these each week. Because the group was large we followed a format of working together in the main group on a specific theme or exercise and then split into 2 'breakout groups' to complete the Circle rounds, each supported by an experienced facilitator (Carolyn Usher, the main facilitator and Babett Csokan). This worked well and allowed all the women sufficient time to share and receive coaching from their peers.

The group were slightly older on average than in Pilot 1 and therefore further on in their careers. This meant that a big theme was career progression, some of the participants were reflecting on their next steps and making decisions on whether to change employers. However, there were also similar themes to Pilot 1, including feeling a lack of confidence and experiencing "imposter syndrome", as they were all working in heavily male dominated areas.

Informal feedback from this group showed that they really valued the time spent talking about the goals and challenges and sharing experiences with women in similar roles and at a similar point in their careers. Therefore we focused more on this part of the Circle than on exercises, within this pilot. Some of the women expressed that they were keen to carry on the work they had started within the Circles, in terms of having time to reflect on their goals and set action plans in place. We have a WhatsApp group set up to help them continue to support each other with this and are exploring other ways that we can continue to support the group.

Conclusion

To conclude, the second piloting phase for the FemSTEM Coaching Circles has been successful and has allowed Inova Consultancy to collate essential feedback for the finalisation of the materials. The women who participated in the Coaching Circles were eager to share their stories and listen to one another. Several participants reflected on the questioning technique and shared that they felt it was a valuable tool. One participant even stated that she would use this practice when coaching people in her workplace.

The feedback provided within the evaluation forms indicate a positive response towards the Circles as many participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to network with other women in STEM. The piloting enabled Inova Consultancy to collect essential feedback which will support the sustainability of the project going forward. Some important takeaways from the second piloting were:

- Group discussion and bonding with others who have shared similar experiences was an essential part of the Circles for the majority of participants. It is therefore important to allow plenty of time for group discussion.
- The creation of a WhatsApp group enabled participants to continue to share their experiences and created a supportive space for them to continue to help each other.
- The recruitment strategy for this pilot worked well and we had a high level of retention.

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 session – 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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