iB LAUNCH PAD
Inclusive Business Launch Pad

Facilitators'
Guide IBL Circles

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Chapter 1: Overview

Introduction to the project

The Inclusive Business Launchpad (IBL)- An Accelerator Programme for Disadvantaged Entrepreneurs in Micro Business aims to promote equal opportunities in entrepreneurship by providing training to underrepresented or disadvantaged entrepreneurs. This includes (but is not limited to) migrants, people with disabilities, lone parents, 50+ individuals and women who are underrepresented within business. The project will respond to the target groups' specific needs and provide training on how to accelerate their business through a combination of face-to-face training and peer support through the IBL Circles (adapted from Inova Consultancy's Circles™ methodology).

As part of the IBL Project, Circles will be offered to entrepreneurs across the different partner countries (The United Kingdom, Netherlands, Cyprus, and Austria) during the project's funding period. The aim of the programme is to provide training and group support to underrepresented and disadvantaged entrepreneurs, to help them grow, innovate, and expand their business ideas and export opportunities across the EU and beyond.

The project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission. For more information please visit:

- The IBL website: https://iblaunchpad.eu/
- The IBL Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/IBLaunchpad/

What are IBL Circles?

Inclusive Business Launch Pad Circles are based on an innovative, personal development training methodology established by Inova Consultancy Ltd. The methodology is based on action learning, coaching and mentoring techniques and uses self-reflection exercises and tools to help participants build confidence and self-efficacy and develop soft skills.

The IBL Circles will enable participants to:

- Improve self-reflection.
- Enhance confidence.
- Develop goal-setting techniques.
- Develop soft skills that are important to be successful in business.
- Manage stress, change, conflict, etc.
- Increase self-efficacy and assertiveness in a professional capacity.

Adapting the methodology to create IBL Circles

The Inclusive Business Launch Pad Circles have been adapted from the original methodology based on the findings from the initial research conducted as part of this project (IO1 Framework Report). This report looked at the needs, gaps, and challenges of the target group and provided recommendations for training and support for the initial setup, growth, continuation, and expansion of their micro businesses.
The report created from this testing highlighted the key soft skills and personal development required by the target audience. The Inclusive Business Launch Pad Circles will be open to anyone completing the "Accelerator Business Launch Pad'' training which is also offered through the project. It will complement this training, helping participants put into action what they have learned. It is aimed at any entrepreneur who is facing extra obstacles to entering or growing in the business sector or who may struggle to access/benefit from existing training.

This includes, but is not limited:
- Migrants
- Lone parents
- Disabled people
- 50+ people
- Women/ men in non-traditional fields

The Framework Report was created by the partnership after in-depth research and data collection via surveys, focus groups, and interviews with the target groups. The framework report identified the main challenges that the target group faces. These are:
1. Networking
2. Lack of cultural and business understanding
3. Lack of accessible training and specific support
4. Heterogeneity of target group
5. Language and communication barriers
6. Lack of technical knowledge or business tools
7. Work-life balance
8. Lack of motivation with online learning

Through the IBL Circles, training and the online learning portal, these concerns will be addressed and tackled, enabling each participant to grow and develop their confidence and their ability to enhance their business.

This guide will present the adapted IBL Circles programme to support facilitators in the delivery of the methodology. Not only is the facilitation process described, but trainers are provided with tools and documents to use when facilitating their Circles. This should be used following the receipt of training from Inova

Consultancy Ltd. The IBL Coaching Circles training will take place during the project's lifetime to support the partners involved in the Inclusive Business Launch Pad Erasmus+ project. Other organisations/trainers/coaches interested in delivering the methodology should contact Inova Consultancy directly (*please see the contact information at the end of this guide*).

The Coaching Circles Philosophy

The IBL Circles should provide an opportunity for learners to build their confidence and soft skills in a safe and secure environment. Our main aim is to help learners take positive steps towards growing their business, through the enhancement of soft skills and building their self confidence. Self-belief is key to progression as an entrepreneur. The aim of the Circles is to promote each individual's confidence to push their ideas forward and take practical steps to grow themselves, as well as their business. Therefore, facilitators should keep in mind the following principles when delivering Circles:

- **Share:** IBL Circle enables an individual to share their problems, issues, opportunities, and challenges with others.
- **Trust:** IBL Circle provides a safe, yet challenging, environment where individuals can be supported to develop ideas and actions to help them develop personally and professionally.
- **Challenge:** Options for action should be generated and discussed and individuals should be encouraged to challenge themselves.
- **Action planning:** The individual should be helped to find the next steps forward in furthering their goals.
- **Self-reflection:** Coaching Circles should encourage self-reflection and self-belief.

As well as the above, participants should have the opportunity to:

- Meet and network with other entrepreneurs facing similar issues
- Make new friends/ contacts and expand networks

Underpinning the Philosophy of Circles

The Circles methodology has been used in different contexts since 2001 and has a proven track record in supporting personal development in previously targeted groups, including women returning to work after career breaks and young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET). The methodology has received widespread acknowledgment for its quality materials and innovative content (Inova was recognised in 2008 for the development and successful use of the methodology with women entrepreneurs by the SFEDI-Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative).

Unlike traditional training courses, learners are encouraged to find their own answers to the challenges they are facing. This knowledge is often already present; Circles helps participants uncover this knowledge through sharing and learning from each other and thereby ourselves. The concept of Circles is built on the process of learning as a journey that requires that the individual can be helped to reveal what they need to know, that some knowledge is already within and needs to be brought forward, and that shared knowledge and learning from others can be valuable.
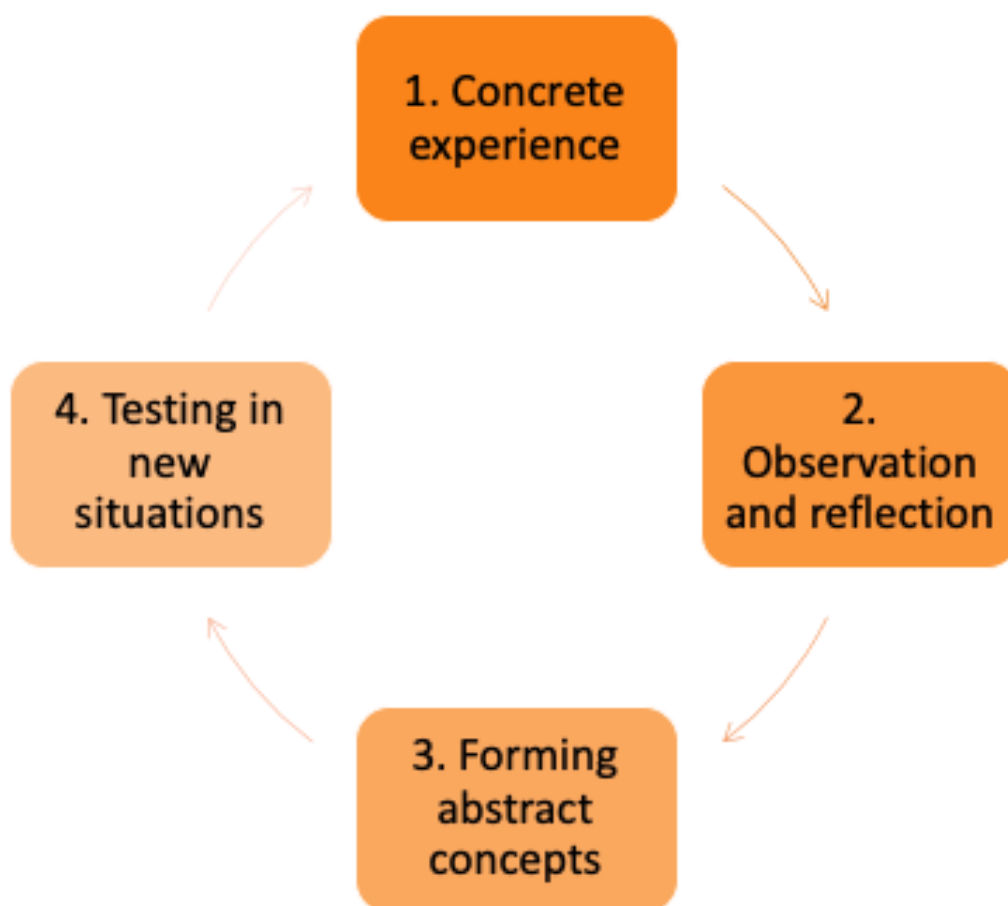
Within a Circle, facilitators should ensure that participants, and themselves, try to avoid giving *advice* and instead focus on using *questions* to help individuals reveal their own insights. This could be through group discussions, completion of exercises, and/or guided questioning from other participants. For example, through guided questioning sections within IBL Circles, participants take in turns to have a time slot to talk about their problem or opportunity and the other group members offer questions. The questioning is about discovery, trying to understand more fully any underlying issues which would be fruitful to explore further. Thus, the focus is on questioning rather than advice-giving. Similarly, when completing exercises regarding self-development or self-reflection, participants are encouraged to question their responses and to support other group members in questioning why they responded to an exercise in a certain way. This process strengthens the development of self-reflection.

The two models below (Action Learning Process and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle) are useful to further explain the purpose and process of Circles.

Figure 1: Action Learning Process

Figure 2: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1975)

The three principles of action learning are **think, act** and **reflect.** These stages are highlighted in the table below, with some questions that are likely to come up during the Circle sessions.
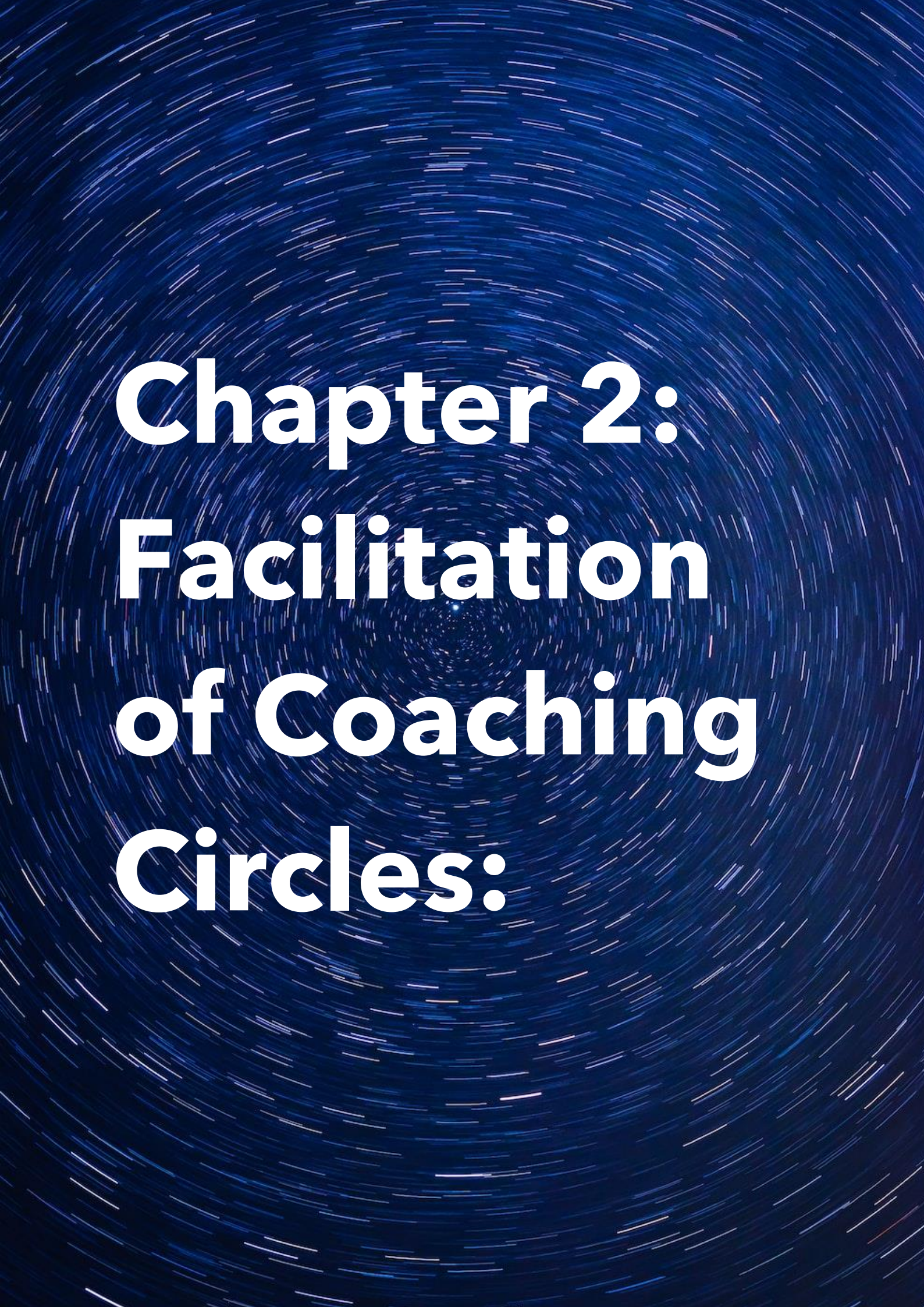
Think	The action of doing is to turn thoughts into action. It helps to underpin change	• What's your idea topic or subject? • What's your opportunity? • What's your concern? • What's a priority for you? • What question have you had about your situation? • What initial ideas are in our mind that you want to explore
Act	The ways in which you will take action outside the Circle session; how will you do this?	• Have you put a plan in place • What are you going to do? • What have you implemented an experimental variable?
Reflect	You should reflect on the outcome of your action	• What has changed? • What happened? • What went well? • What are your concerns • Are there any new opportunities • How will you adapt your plan in the future? • What questions have you been asked about you situation?

This methodology is effective because it places the learner at the centre of the situation:
- It works in real time, with live issues that are of importance to the individual.
- It integrates any theoretical learning with real experience.
- It is about action and implementation, rather than purely hypothetical scenarios.

For more explanation, here are a few useful videos about the above models:

- What is Action Learning? - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAJ0z_IdZXE
- The 3-minute Kolb - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObQ2DheGOKA
- Experiential learning: how we learn naturally https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF63HHVbpQ8

Chapter 2: Facilitation of Coaching Circles:

Aim of the Circles

IBL Circles aim to support underrepresented and disadvantaged entrepreneurs to build their confidence and provide them with the tools to grow their businesses.

Each session will see a combination of group discussion with the individual airing of issues, self-reflection, and goal setting. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that only skilled facilitators with prior experience in action learning, or those who have been trained in the methodology by a colleague from Inova Consultancy (UK), are able to lead a Circle.

Circles are generally facilitated in a non-directive manner; the sessions should be learner-led and learner-focused. However, each facilitator will have their own style which may be directive. It may be necessary to use a more directive approach when appropriate e.g. when an individual might be about to undertake risky or damaging actions which can be foreseen or if the group is lacking confidence to an extent where discussion is difficult to instigate without facilitator intervention. The size of the group may also dictate the level of direction required. Larger groups tend to be led in a more directive fashion than smaller ones.

We would expect the learning process to feature some of the following from participants:

- Exploration of what may cause a particular condition or consequence; reviewing decisions or actions and reveal how this has led to the current situation. Could problems have been avoided? What are the implications if a similar situation occurs in the future? What have they learnt from this situation?
- Examining their own thinking that led them to believe something or act in a certain way. Is a decision built on fair assumptions? Have assumptions been tested?
- We can also learn from mistakes. Argyris (1993) suggests that **learning occurs whenever errors are detected and corrected.**
- The facilitation should be future, and solution focused. It is useful to assist members in predicting possible outcomes. Have they taken everything into account? What is the backup or contingency plan? Have they considered all the options in a situation?
- Your facilitation will explicitly get people to commit to goal and action plans, report on their own progress, redefine goals, and review outcomes. Setting flippant and unspecific goals will not aid the learner's development or ability to move forward with their challenge.

- The facilitation should also involve awareness of group dynamics and group process; this may occasionally require that the facilitator may have to intervene to protect someone's time, to keep issues on track when a challenge may be causing distress when someone is perhaps using power inappropriately or behaving in a way that frustrates or blocks the group's learning. It is important that, at the beginning of the first session, group rules are set for all to feel comfortable in the group, especially when discussing sensitive or personal topics.
- Participants might wish to experiment with behaviours in the Circle (with the agreement and support of their colleagues) and obtain feedback. Perhaps a member would like to be more assertive and offer more suggestions in group settings or develop the confidence to disagree with people.
- Encourage group members to be creative, to work outside their comfort zones, and to maximise opportunities.
- Contracting: defining an agreement with the Circle members about roles and responsibilities in order that a) you can best facilitate, b) they can get the most out of the process in a climate that is conducive to learning.

Agreements need to be revisited frequently and ground rules need to be restated at the start of each session. The following section on contracting outlines this process in more detail.

Piloting and reporting

The Inclusive Business Launch Pad Circles will be piloted in 2 pilot phases with 5-8 entrepreneurs per pilot by all partners involved in the output (50-80 across the pilots per partnership). Participants will meet and discuss their challenges and barriers as entrepreneurs, and the goals they have in their personal and professional lives.

In order to collect as much feedback from this pilot as possible, each participant will be asked to complete a short evaluation form at the end of each session. These will be kept by the facilitator in order to collate all the results at the end of the pilot. Following the end of the pilot, each partner country involved will write a national report in English; this report will summarise all the information gathered from the piloting in that particular country, as well as listing feedback and recommendations from participants and facilitators. Each partner will also attach the relevant annexes needed to support the report and the information stated within. A template of the national report shall be sent to all partners prior to the commencing of their first piloting.

A final comparative report on the piloting will be made publicly available after the funded period of the project, to provide further advice and information for other trainers interested in using the methodology.

Session planning

Each session of the Circles should be **learner-led** and **learner-focused**. We suggest that you review your plan for each session following the previous meeting, in order to ensure that you provide participants with support that best matches their needs.

However, we suggest the following plans for each session as a guideline to ensure that the Circles benefit everyone.

Session 1:

Introductions- Introducing yourself and your participants to each other. Also introduces the Circles the methodology and the process.

Administration- Signing learning agreements as required and attendance lists. Discuss ground rules.

Icebreaker exercises- Choose one of the icebreaker exercises to help participants get to know each other. (*See Facilitator Toolkit*)

Soft skills assessment- Each participant should complete a soft skills assessment form at the start of the first session. This should then be stored safely by the facilitator until the final session when learners will complete this activity again to compare their scoring and the subsequent development.

Questioning- Explain the differences between advice giving and questioning, how to use questions, etc. and how this will positively affect participants' working relationships.

Discussion round- Provide each participant with approximately 15 minutes to express their issue/challenge/opportunity. You may choose one or two exercises from the toolkit to help start the discussion and give participants something to

reflect on. Choose exercises based on the areas in which your participants most need support.

Action points- Support each participant to set action points based on what has been discussed. Ensure that these goals are SMART (see annexes for information on SMART goals).

Evaluating- Ensure each participant fills out the evaluation form.

Session 2

Administration- Ensure you have an updated attendance list and reiterate ground rules.

Review SMART goals from session 1.

Discussion round- Provide each participant with approximately 15 minutes to express the issue/challenge/opportunity they are facing this week. You may choose one or two exercises from the toolkit to help start the discussion and give participants something to reflect on. Choose exercises based on the areas in which your participants most need support.

Evaluating- Ensure evaluation forms are completed.

Administration- Give any necessary reminders for the next session and any other administrative issues.

Session 3

Administration- Update attendance list and reiterate ground rules.

Review the SMART goals set from the previous sessions.

Discussion round- Provide each participant with approximately 15 minutes to express the issue/challenge/opportunity they are facing this week. You may choose one or two exercises from the toolkit to help start the discussion and give participants something to reflect on. Choose exercises based on the areas in which your participants most need support.

Soft skills assessment (if this is the final session)- Each participant should complete a soft skills assessment form again. They should then be given the first assessment to compare results and see if any developments have been made.

Evaluating- Final evaluation form to be filled in by each participant.

Administration- Certificates to be given to all those who attended two or more of the sessions. In order to enable participants to continue networking, it may be worthwhile discussing the creation of a WhatsApp group so that participants can continue to contact each other and share their thoughts, suggestions and opportunities.

Notes on session plan

- Within each session, specific tools have not been allocated. This is because it is at the discretion of the facilitator to use the tools and exercises deemed most appropriate for that particular group.
- It is suggested to use no more than 2-3 tools per Circle session. You must give enough time for in-depth discussion rounds.

Facilitation: A Step-By-Step Guide

Below, we have outlined the steps to facilitate an IBL Circle. Please read through these steps carefully and make sure you understand the different steps.

Step 1: Introductions

Begin by introducing yourself to the participants. Below are some introductory topics you may wish to consider in order to engage with the participants:
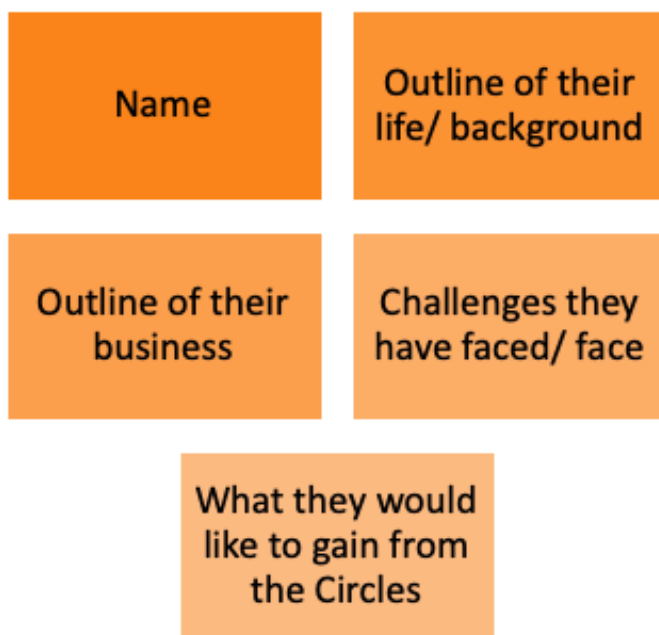
Step 2: Contracting and administration

Learning agreement: At the start of session 1, it is recommended that you ensure each participant has signed a Learning Agreement. The Learning Agreement (found in the Annexes of this guide) is a social contract that enables the facilitator and participant to have equal rights and power during the sessions. By setting out the mutual expectations of each party, everyone gains the necessary information about the training relationship and the accountability and responsibilities of each party. It is also recommended that the signed learning agreement is scanned and copied; therefore, both the participant and facilitator have a copy.

Attendance list: At the start of each session, all participants should sign an attendance list. This is essential for facilitators to evidence participants' attendance to the sessions (for funding requirements). The signed attendance lists should be scanned and sent as part of the annexes for the national reports, (original copies should also be kept in your organisation's records). A template can be found in the annexes of this guide.

Step 3: Introducing the participants

After steps one and two, you should take time to introduce the participants. Each participant should be given **2-3 minutes** to introduce themselves. If you need to prompt your group to share particular information, please look at the suggestions below:

Step 4: Introducing the Circles methodology

Once the introductions have been made, you should ensure that participants are aware of the Circles methodology and the aims of the sessions. You should make sure that everyone understands the following aspects of the Circles:

- The background to the Inclusive Business Launch Pad Circles methodology.
- An explanation of how the methodology works. I.e that the Circles provide a facilitated space for participants to complete tools, share discussions and have a dedicated time slot to present their issue, challenge, or opportunities.
- The outline of the session structure: Three sessions (a fourth is optional for further support). 3-4 hours per session (when done face-to-face; 2.5-3 hours may be adequate if done online to facilitate engagement). A trained facilitator is always present. Allocated time slots for each participant to speak (10-15 minutes depending on group size)
- Setting SMART goals: always remind participants that learning is about being resilient in the face of difficulty. It is totally normal if they do not manage to achieve everything that they set out to achieve (self-awareness and knowing your limits also form a big part of the learning curve

participants will experience in the Circles), but they will be encouraged to review difficulties, learn from them and find ways forward or new paths for action in a supportive environment.

- The questioning technique should be used throughout the Circle sessions (see information below).

The questioning technique

The presenter is the person speaking about their issues/ challenges/ opportunities during their time slot. The presenter should be encouraged to specify to the group what they need and to regulate contributions.

'Advice giving' can be unhelpful when it directs the participant to a particular way of thinking or answer. **Using questioning** instead helps to empower the presenter and supports them in finding their own solutions. Look out for and avoid sentences starting with:

- "Have you thought about..."
- "Have you tried..."
- "You could try..."

Some statements may be focused on a questioner's experience when the focus should be on the presenter. For example:
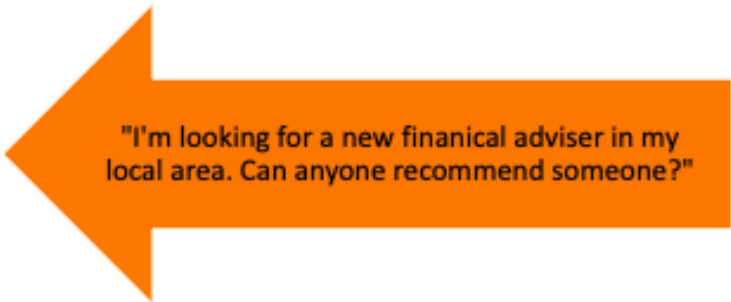

- "When I started my business I used to..."
- "When I worked at X, I always found..."

Offering advice in this way removes the focus from the presenter and can be detrimental to personal learning. Always avoid unhelpful comments such as:

"If I were in your situation I'd..."

Occasionally, some types of advice (when specifically asked for) can be helpful. For example, a presenter may ask for advice about possible contacts or networks.

"I'm looking for a new finanical adviser in my local area. Can anyone recommend someone?"

In this instance, it is helpful to offer advice and help them to save time finding a new adviser. However, the advice also offers room for caveats (not a single path which solves all their issues). The presenter would need to take responsibility and check out the credibility of the adviser, by asking for proof of qualifications etc. They would be expected to make a judgment for themselves concerning competence. Remember that the Circle is not a substitute for professional advice. Sometimes learning from others can provide a useful shortcut.

An important aspect of Circles is a focus upon questioning rather than advice giving. Asking questions, rather than giving advice, prompts participants to think in greater depth about their situation and how they can achieve their goals. By asking questions, participants encourage their peers to reflect upon their own actions and the possible next steps rather than accepting advice given to them. This aims to provide participants with the skills to reflect upon their goals and actions in the future.

Step 5: Ground rules and expectations

As a facilitator, you may be faced with several different participants with differing personalities and characteristics. Therefore, it is essential that the ground rules should be set before starting to ask each participant to open up about anything personal.

It is important to identify each participant's expectations of the sessions. It is important to understand the following aspects:

- Challenges- what level of challenge is the group comfortable with?
- Self-regulation on- how much guidance/ level of intervention would the group expect from the facilitator (this should be based on the participant's own experience in self-regulation).
- Timekeeping- How would the group like to keep time? Independently or with time warnings from the facilitator?
- Feedback- what is their preferred form of feedback: group or individual? (This is very individual and therefore the facilitator should take notes of each participant's response to this question).

You should also take this opportunity to express your expectations as a facilitator. You should highlight the following points to ensure everyone is aware of what is expected during the sessions.

Confidentiality: highlight the importance of confidentiality and lay out your expectations regarding openness and honesty.

Awareness: a key aim of the Circles is to increase people's self-awareness and understanding of others.

Attendance: reiterate expectations regarding timekeeping, cancelling and issues regarding non-attendance. Make people aware that they have to attend 2 out of the 3 sessions to receive a certificate of participation.

Responsibility: address the expectations about participants taking responsibility for their own learning path, and their goals and for asking for help if they need.

Homework: participants are expected to work on their SMART goals in between sessions. Sometimes, the facilitator may set 'homework' to support the next session. All participants should be aware of their need to prepare and engage between the sessions.

Additionally, the group should agree upon some ground rules which will need to be reiterated at the beginning of each Circle. Ground rules should address the following topics:

1. Confidentiality and respecting intellectual property
2. Attendance and commitment
3. Use of time
4. Questioning and levels of challenge
5. Respect
6. Feedback
7. Communication style
8. Different types of 'helping'- what helps and what hinders?

Step 6: discussion and tool use

Step 6 regards the main section of the Circle methodology. The first stage of this process is **Checking In**. This is closely linked to step 2 and aims to see how each participant is feeling. *What has been on their mind recently/today? Is there anything they would like to talk about? What would they like to focus on? What progress has been made since the last session*? (This is only applicable for sessions two and three).

Begin with introductory discussions about participants' emotions, general thoughts and feelings, current needs, and expectations of the session. Then the facilitator should lead the group into discussion time slots, during which, each participant has 10-20 minutes to present an issue or challenge that they would like to discuss to gain more insight and different perspectives on the topic. Prompts can be offered to participants before their time slot begins, in order to have time to decide what they would like to talk about. Prompts could be given such as the ones below:

- What's the issue, challenge, or opportunity that you would like to focus on?
- Why would you like to focus on this today?
- How did it become an issue or challenge for you?
- How important is this topic to you? (On a scale from 1-10)

The presenter should provide enough details for all Circle members to gain a broad understanding of the issue/challenge faced by the presenter.

During their time slot, the presenter may wish to invite the other members of the Circle to question them to help them gain clarity on the issue they are discussing (with guidance from the *Questioning Technique*). This questioning should lead to further discussions and revelations by the presenter.

As a facilitator, you should be carefully observing this process - ensure that Circle members stick to questions and avoid advice (gentle reminders are often required!), and probe further, when necessary, in order to gain more information and maximise learning for the presenter. You should see yourself as a guide and coach for your participants as they find their own solutions. Make sure that topics are fully discussed and not just briefly mentioned. The aim of the Circles is to explore issues and challenges in depth to find solutions!

To note:

- Exploring issues can be very time-consuming when done right. As a facilitator, you, therefore, need to make sure to organise the session well and be clear about how much time will be spent on this (this will depend on the number of participants, time, talkativeness of the group, complexity of the issue, etc.).
- During the sessions, you can ask participants to complete icebreakers/tools/activities. A pack of tools related to the different challenges Circle members may be facing is provided as part of this guide. Depending on the needs of your participants, you should choose tools that will help them with their issues/challenges.
- Remember: during the first session, all participants should complete the soft skills assessment form. Once done, this should be returned to the facilitator for safekeeping until the final session.
- We would advise you to conduct an icebreaker exercise at the beginning of the first session, in order to let all the participants feel more comfortable around one another. This could be done after the participant presentations (step 3). The rest of the tools provided should be used, at the discretion of the facilitator, based on the needs of the participants.

Step 7: Closing the 1st session

After the session ends, ensure you have a brief closing discussion to identify what your learners will take from this particular session. You can ask what they have learned about themselves and their issue/challenge or opportunity, and the impact that the session has had on them. Ensure the following has been completed:

- Session evaluation forms
- Next session- details of the next session need to be explained
- Goals- remind participants of their SMART goals and encourage them to work on them in between sessions.
- Tasks- remind yourself and participants of your tasks as facilitator e.g. send ground rules to participants.

Second Circle

During the second session, you should welcome all the participants back to the second Circle. The administration should be done (Attendance List and reiteration of group rules) before beginning the Circle. You may wish to begin with a tool/exercise to warm up participants and give them a starting point for their discussion. Discussion rounds, as described in Step 6 above, should then commence. Step 7 should be followed at the end of this Circle.
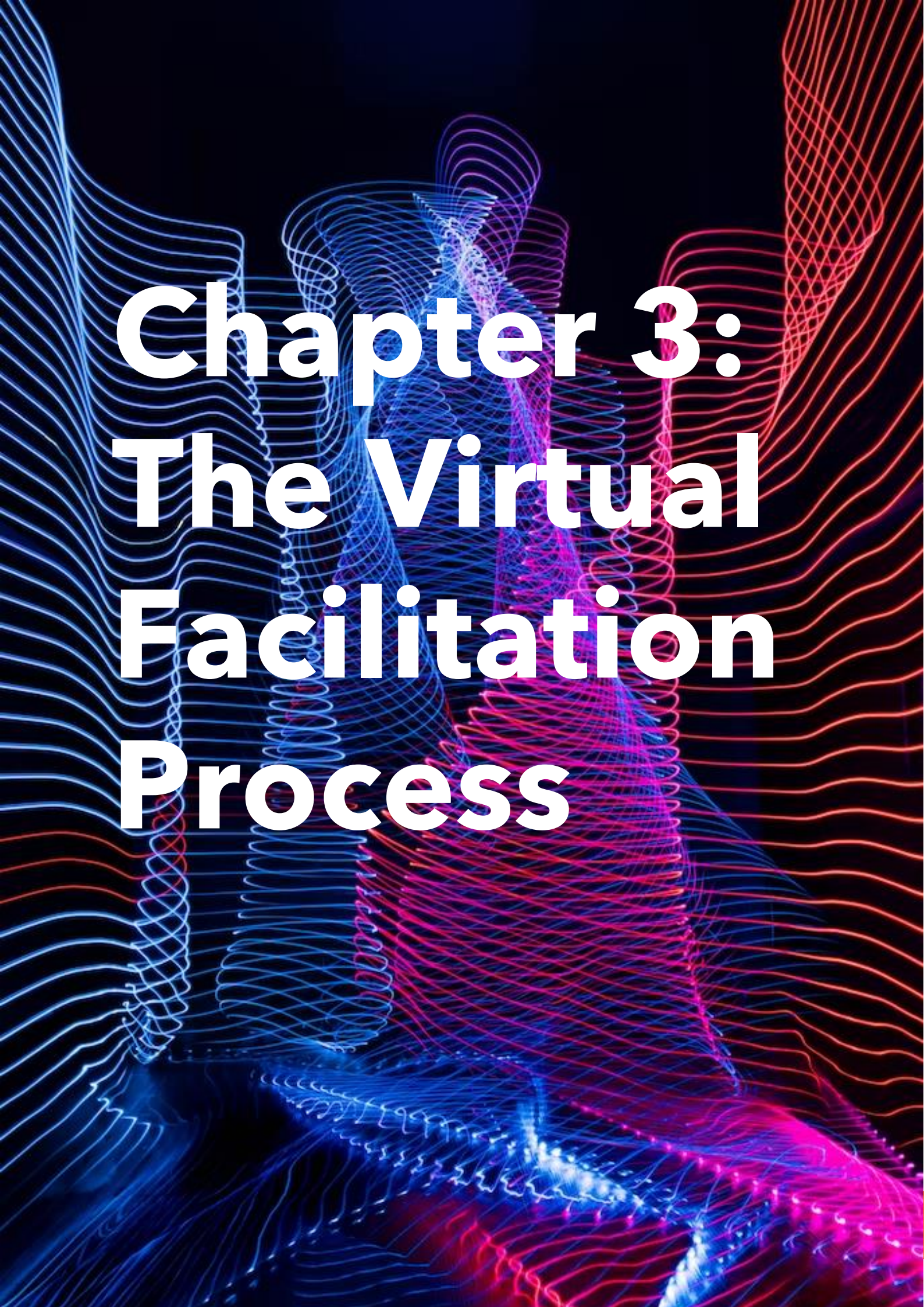
Final Session

During the final session, you should welcome all the participants back to the Circle. The administration should be done (Attendance List and reiteration of group rules) before goals from the previous session are discussed. After this, Step 6 should be followed.

Closing the final session:

There are a few necessary activities to close the final session. They are as follows:

1. A discussion about participants' experiences and overall lessons learned from the Coaching Circles sessions.
2. You should give participants the opportunity to arrange a continued learning plan, including meetups with other participants after these sessions have finished. You should also encourage the learners to continue working on their SMART goals.
3. Let participants know about other ways to engage with the project, such as through the website, Facebook page or the E-Learning Programme.
4. Hand out the final evaluation forms out and make sure that each participant fills in the document and hands them back to the facilitator before leaving the session. All the feedback gained is essential for improving the Inclusive Business Launch Pad Circles and the wider project; therefore, it is of paramount importance to get all evaluation forms back.
5. Certificates should also be handed out to all participants who have attended two or more sessions.

Chapter 3: The Virtual Facilitation Process

Chapter 3: The Virtual Facilitation Process

The information in the previous chapter can be used either for face-to-face sessions or adapted accordingly to suit delivery online. The following chapter will provide further information on how to adapt Circles for online delivery. The facilitation of Virtual Circles would be based on the Virtual Group Facilitation model (PERFORM™) by Pamela Van Dyke (2014).[1] This model consists of seven stages which must be adopted by the facilitator to run Virtual Circles effectively.

1. **Participation Selection:** One of the fundamentals for enhancing group performance is the establishment of trust and openness amongst all members (Van Dyke, 2010). The individuals that make up the group are key in determining whether group members would get along. Therefore, an understanding of the personality styles of individuals within a group setting is key. It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that all members are comfortable in participating in an online group.
2. **Elements of Group Process:** As with face-to-face facilitation, an understanding of group dynamics, the stages of the group process and how to ensure that each member participates is also essential in virtual facilitation.

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[1] Adapted from *Virtual Group Coaching: A Curriculum for Coaches and Educators by Van Dyke (2014)*

3. **Regular Communication:** Facilitators are expected to contact group members about details of the online IBL Circles on a regular basis. This involves reminding the participants ahead of the sessions about meeting times, preferences, and dissemination of handouts and online exercises. Prior to the session, participants should be contacted with important information required for the course such as links to access the online platform, tools for sharing documents, videos, and presentations.

It can also be helpful to set up a WhatsApp group or similar platform where participants can ask questions and the facilitator can easily send reminders, links, and other information.

Facilitation Skills

The IBL Circles can take place both online or face-to-face, depending upon Government restrictions and the Covid-19 situation. Here are some ideas to ensure you get the best out of online facilitation.[2]

- Guide participants to post and read messages, as well as to locate, review, and download relevant messages, materials, and resources.
- Make sure that participants understand the expectations and norms for respectful interaction, as well as know how to follow directions for carrying out the associated tasks and activities (both online and offline).
- Create a strong, interactive learning environment by encouraging participants to provide information and resources, discuss issues, and collaborate with each other to generate solutions to problems.
- Use a variety of strategies to help participants expand their knowledge based on their situations, needs, interests, and abilities, such as:
  - Ask people to elaborate upon, justify, or support ideas, especially if there are conflicting views or multiple perspectives.
  - Infusing content information to nourish the conversation.
  - Pointing out ways in which one person's comment links to or builds upon another's: encouraging the connection of ideas, thus moving the communication from individual ideas to a group understanding.
- Encourage participants to reflect on what they have learned and what impact this information has on their beliefs and behaviour.
- Guide participants, as relevant, to critique the online learning experience from a personal and professional perspective.

Organisation and Logistics

Online facilitation requires a high degree of organisation and planning. Prior to the session, the facilitator has to: take note of participant location and potential differences in time zones in order to effectively schedule meetings; be aware of the

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[2] Zorfass et al, 1998

frequency of sessions and overall duration of the sessions; be prepared on the delivery methods to be used i.e. handouts and online resources, and finally be well-trained on the virtual medium to be used.

Result Orientation

The facilitator must be aware of the outcomes of coaching throughout the facilitation process. As online facilitation is relatively new in practice, the facilitators need to have effective goal-setting skills in order to stay focused on the goal of the program, effective problem-solving skills, and the ability to overcome any obstacles that they might experience along the way. After the sessions, the facilitator has to actively reflect on the challenges they faced during the process in order to gain an understanding of how to mitigate problems that other facilitators might face during future online sessions. It is also important for facilitators to conduct the post-test evaluation which can be done using an online survey tool to determine if participants felt the online coaching process met their individual needs and expectations.

Media Interface

Facilitators need to have a clear understanding of the technology to be used for online facilitation as well as the potential benefits and limitations. Based on the Media Richness Theory by Daft and Lengel (1986), online facilitation does not allow for the full depth of communication cues that could be observed compared to face-to-face facilitation. For this reason, online facilitation can tend to feel less impersonal and less likely to evoke participant emotions than face-to-face facilitation. However, skilled participants can counterbalance this limitation by expanding their knowledge on how to create an environment where participants feel free to express themselves. It is also important that a coach-client media fit be achieved (Charbonreau, 2002). This is established if the facilitator feels comfortable using the medium if participants are comfortable using the medium and if an interaction between the coach and the participants is well established on the medium. Other media factors to consider are knowledge of the technology being used and basic technical skills, internet connection speed, and the bandwidth used by the Virtual platform.

Tools

Below you will find a list of all the tools which can be used within the sessions. These tools can be adapted and used how the facilitator sees fit. Not every tool will be used throughout the sessions and facilitators should make the decision, depending on their group dynamic, which tools will be most beneficial for the participants.

Tool	Duration	Materials needed	Aim	Reference
Old/ Young Lady	10 minutes.	Copy of image.	To aid with creative thinking and encourage perspective change.	Tool 1: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1r1c7l01GTVv1xIhsNMvt_FnSk27HSpPA/edit
Roman Numerals	15 minutes.	Copy of image.	To think creatively about new ways of thinking. Problem solving.	Tool 2: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1y6-79NHff0flVG2beNBJTfvG5iQ1-A4k/edit
Mind Map and Generations	20 minutes.	Pen, paper, art supplies.	Self expression and increase in self-confidence.	Tool 3: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pggGkiyTUwbmjyN69e6goed3x-DjXYf4/edit
Wheel of Skills	15 minutes.	Copy of image.	Identify strengths.	Tool 4: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yyufKLYTAAKj1JrN18QY595uvek2elBd/edit
SMART Goals	15-20 minutes.	Pen and paper. Copy of template.	Goal setting.	Tool 5: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1s

				mnT_ORlJ4H JX3hC07wMd RKeQE_o7XN O/edit
Motivators in Business	15 minutes.	Pen and paper.	Prioritisation and understanding their motivations.	Tool 6: https://docs.g oogle.com/d ocument/d/1 wQoqSWyyl Wc9Zy2tu9q4 lfNvc6ZTPTE A/edit
Jelly Bean Exercise	20 minutes.	15 Jelly Beans and 6 cups each.	Prioritisation and understanding their values.	Tool 7: https://docs.g oogle.com/d ocument/d/1 P156z40lrhw9 hYUu9J40CM i8zqN_ySZl/e dit
Flow Theory	15-20 minutes.	Access to the diagram.	Planning and working efficiently.	Tool 8: https://docs.g oogle.com/d ocument/d/1 uAgL3TnXlm p6i0yMLRysp 4iVWecDabP m/edit
Creating Your Vision Path	20-30 minutes.	Pen and paper. Access to handout.	Recognising strengths.	Tool 9: https://docs.g oogle.com/d ocument/d/1 XMVL0WjSev vN95ktHQLw oG85_ZMJ- ywR/edit
My Story and My Achievements	30 minutes	Pen and paper. Access to the handout.	Recognising strengths.	Tool 10: https://docs.g oogle.com/d ocument/d/1 pdYrjrX82JH5 Q1mQnlKAu 2MWby_acfV 6/edit

Ending Sessions

At the end of each session, recap and ascertain what people have learnt.

- What have they learnt about themselves and about their problem or issue?
- Have they learnt anything from others?
- What were the most useful questions?
- What impact did they have?

This helps participants to have time to reflect on the outcomes of the session prior to completing the evaluation forms. Evaluation forms should be completed at the end of each session.

Additional Handouts and Documentation

In this final section of the Facilitator Guide, you will find templates for all the necessary reporting documentation and handouts for soft skills assessments and evaluations.

- Attendance list template
- Learning agreement template
- Soft skills assessment form
- Session evaluation forms (for all sessions)
- Final evaluation form (session 3)

Learning Agreement Template

(ORGANISATION'S NAME)

Our commitments:

- Place you in a coaching circle
- Monitor your coaching circle and ensure that you meet at least 3 times
- Provide you with support throughout the duration of these sessions

Your commitments:

You agree to…
- Attend and actively participate in all meetings with your circle
- Notify [organisation name] and your mentor if you are unable to attend a meeting
- Complete all necessary paperwork- e.g., Evaluation forms after each session.

Confidentiality:
- I agree that I will not disclose I will not disclose any confidential information that I may be privy to in the Circle to any outside party, without the prior consent of [organisation name] and group participants involved.
- Please note, failing to comply with your commitments will be treated seriously by [organisation name] who has the right to remove you from the programme as a result of non-compliance.

Name……………..

Signature:

Date ___/____/____

Inclusive Business Launchpad Circles: Soft Skills Assessment Form

To be completed prior to the first session and after the final session of the Circles.

Name: _____

Date ____/____/_____

Please evaluate yourself at this present time (1= poor 5= excellent)

Soft skills	Score
Networking skills	
Self-efficacy	
Leadership skills	
Problem solving skills	
Stress management	
Goal setting	
Communication skills	
Critical thinking and reasoning	
Understanding my values	
Identifying my future goals and how to achieve them	
Creative thinking	
Teamwork	
Confidence	

Facilitators' Guide IBL Circles

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Inclusive Business Launchpad Circles: Session Evaluation Form

To be completed by the facilitator:

Name: _____

Circle No: ___
Session No: ____
Date ___/____/____

To be completed by participants:

1. What were your expectations for today's Circle, and have they been fulfilled?
2. What are the 3 main things you will take away from today's session?
3. What was the best part of the Inclusive Business Launchpad Circles for you so far?
4. Please add any further comments:

Name: _____

Date ___/___/____

Thank you! Please return this to your facilitator

Your comments may be included (anonymously) in future promotional/marketing material for the Inclusive Business Launch Pad project. If you are **not** happy for your comments/quotes to be used for these purposes, please tick this box ☐

Inclusive Business Launchpad Circles: Final Evaluation Form

To be completed by a facilitator:

Name_____

Session No____

Date ___/___/____

1. Please rate the following aspects of the Inclusive Business Launchpad Circles: (1= strongly disagree 5= strongly agree)

Statement	Rating
The Circles were useful for my soft skill development and goal setting.	
I have a clear idea on my next steps following the sessions.	
The Circles were useful for peer support, networking and helped to boost my confidence.	
I would recommend the Inclusive Business Launchpad Circles to a friend.	

2. How have the Inclusive Business Launchpad Circles helped you think about your career and business progression?

3. Any further comments?

Name_____

Date _____/_____/____

Thank you! Please return this to your facilitator.

Your comments may be included (anonymously) in future promotional/marketing material for the Inclusive Business Launch Pad project. If you are **not** happy for your comments/quotes to be used for these purposes, please tick this box ☐

References

- All images used in this report have been taken from free-to-use online sources such as
- The branding and design of this document has been created by the Inclusive Business Launchpad partnership.

- The Inclusive Business Launchpad Circles methodology has been created and trademarked by Marina Larios, Director of Inova Consultancy Ltd.

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Partners

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