



I03- COMPARATIVE REPORT: IBL CIRCLES

*Prepared by Inova Consultancy
April 2023*

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Introduction

In total the consortium engaged with 50 participants in both pilots one and two of the “Inclusive Business” Launchpad Circles. After each pilot of Intellectual Output 2, these IO3 Circles followed. The aim of the Circles was to encourage self-development and business motivation through the development of soft skills, an exploration of self-awareness, using coaching, mentoring and Action Learning techniques and tools including models such as SMART Goals and Eisenhower’s Matrix; with an overarching objective to advance their business mindsets and confidence, thus supporting business growth. The pilots of the IO3 Circles were delivered in all partner countries by facilitators who had been trained in the delivery of the methodology by Inova Consultancy Ltd’s trainers: Inova Consultancy originally developed the Circles™ methodology to support women in business and developed the process and tools to be used for the IBL target group, ensuring the needs which were identified in IO1 were considered.

The sessions were well structured and planned beforehand by the facilitators using a lesson plan. This ensured that every participant had an equal amount of time to share, reflect, set goals, and receive peer support. The feedback received was very positive suggesting that the sessions were an overall success. Participants were especially appreciative of the chance to develop connections and networks with other business owners as being a sole-trader or small business can feel quite isolating. The opportunity to set SMART goals and be held accountable to them each week was a feature that participants particularly valued about the program's material.

The Inclusive Business Launchpad (IBL) Circles was composed of four partner organisations:

- Inova Consultancy (United Kingdom)
- Inova Aspire (Netherlands)
- FH Joanneum (FHJ) (Austria)
- Center for Social Innovation – CSI (Cyprus)

Recruitment

Since this activity was in continuation of the pilots in IO2, no specific recruitment activities were carried out. The group that was invited to participate in the IO3 Circles were participants from the face-to-face IO2 pilots.

Evidence of recruitment advertising can be found in the IO2 national reports for each partner organisation.

Overview of Participants (pilots 1 & 2)

	Piloting stage	Number of participants	Total number of participants
Inova Consultancy (UK)	1	5	10
	2	5	
Inova Aspire (Netherlands)	1	7	13
	2	6	
FHJ (Austria)	1	4	10
	2	6	
Center for Social Innovation (Cyprus)	1	7	17
	2	10	
Total number of participants:			50

INOVA CONSULTANCY

Pilot 1

All the training sessions took place online between the 7th - 21st of June, the UK facilitator was Carolyn Usher (project manager and trainer). The participants who engaged in these sessions were from a variety of different business industries which included: retail, entertainment, and restaurant sectors.

Pilot 2

As aforementioned, 5 participants attended these sessions which were conducted over Zoom and occurred between 1st – 15th of December, the UK facilitator was Val Boulding (trainer/coach). Here there was less of a variation in participants; their backgrounds included: shop owners and coaching businesses.

In both sessions the majority had goals of business development whether that be through marketing strategies or diversification.

INOVA ASPIRE

Pilot 1

These sessions took place online between the 7th - 21st of June. During the recruitment process for the training, we targeted female entrepreneurs. Therefore, all the participants of the Circles were women. The Circles were all delivered by Marina Larios (trainer) and were approximately 2 hours long. Here there was a variety of backgrounds ranging from the STEM industry to graphic designers and public speakers.

Pilot 2

These sessions were all conducted over Zoom between the 7th December and 10th January. Again, all the participants were females with diverse backgrounds including: novelists, fashion designers, interior designers, and consultants.

FH JOANNEUM

Pilot 1

The program ran from November 25th to December 16th and involved four participants, primarily from consulting backgrounds, and one participant working as a counsellor. The primary objective outlined by the participants was to expand and broaden their consumer base.

Pilot 2

These sessions were conducted online occurring between 27th of January and the 3rd of February. The participants came from different backgrounds including translators, restaurant owners and artists.

CENTER FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

Pilot 1

All sessions took place online. The Cypriot facilitator was Maria Evgeniou, EU Project Manager at Center for Social Innovation. There were a total of 7 participants ranging from backgrounds of architects, authors, photographers and clinical botanists. This created a diverse panel enabling wide networking opportunities for all the participants.

Pilot 2

These sessions included an all women participant group but they came from a range of backgrounds including but not limited to: hair stylists, lawyers and bakers. There was an overarching aim of expansion within all participants.

Format and Overview

PILOTS 1 & 2

Both pilots occurred in 2022 and 4 partners were engaged in the delivery. Each session in pilot 1 followed the requirements based on the IO3 Facilitators Guide, such as, soft skills assessment, SMART goals procedure, evaluation forms. However, each organisation was awarded the flexibility to tailor their sessions to the needs of their participants which enabled them to deliver a more personalised experience so that they could get the most out of these sessions. In preparation for the pilots, partners ensured that the content was engaging for participants, despite the online nature of the sessions. However, it did prove to be beneficial as partners were able to engage with a wider audience as people did not have to travel and it provided participants with greater flexibility.

Each participant in each partner country conducted soft skills assessments at the beginning of the Circles (the first session) and at the end of the Circles. These were then turned into graphs so that participants may consider the abilities they had acquired throughout the Circles. Additionally, at the conclusion of the pilot round, participants reviewed the Circles.

The dates that each partner organisation hosted an IBL Circles session are listed in the table below:

	Piloting stage	Dates of sessions
Inova Consultancy (UK)	1	07/06/2022
		14/06/2022
		21/06/2022
	2	01/12/2022
		08/12/2022
		15/12/2022
Inova Aspire (Netherlands)	1	07/06/2022
		14/06/2022
		21/06/2022
	2	07/12/2022
		14/12/2022
		10/01/2022
Center for Social Innovation – CSI (Cyprus)	1	19/09/2022
		23/09/2022
		03/10/2022
	2	06/02/2023
		13/02/2023

		28/02/2023
FH JOANNEUM (Austria)	1	25/11/2022
		02/12/2022
		16/12/2022
	2	27/01/2022
		03/02/2022
		N/A

INOVA CONSULTANCY (UK)

The sessions were planned carefully by using a lesson plan for each day to adhere to the requirements based on the IO3 Facilitators Guide. Each session utilised different techniques in order to deliver the information in the most effective way, as well as keep the participants engaged throughout.

All sessions followed a similar pattern. Firstly, participants completed their 'soft skills assessment' forms and then as a group, the facilitator then gave a short presentation about the aims of the IBL Circles, an introduction to the methodology and some group exercises and activities. At the end of each session the facilitator ensured that each person had at least 1 SMART goal to work towards in between the current and the next session and participants discussed their progress each week. This was very beneficial as it allowed for a level of accountability and growth from all participants. A similar format was repeated for each session. In the last session, participants completed another soft skills assessment and an evaluation of the Circles. The soft skills assessments were then curated into graphs and sent to all participants, so they were able to monitor their progress throughout the three weeks.

The second phase followed and was carried out online. A key issue highlighted within this pilot was that the challenge for a few of the participants was workflow during the session and not wanting to miss sales especially with the run up to Christmas (two having shops). Another challenge for one participant was technical related and unfamiliarity with ZOOM. However, this was addressed by organising the schedule to coincide with the participants' preferred times, reflected in the fact that all sessions were attended by all the 5 participants.

Each session began with a recap of the last and included the opportunity for the participants to voice their goals, issues, and ideas to support each other's business. A few topics were raised for example "fear", "procrastination" and "imposter syndrome".

At the end of the session, participants completed the final evaluation form and a final self-assessment form. They all agreed that they wanted to continue meeting and are currently still active on the WhatsApp group.

INOVA ASPIRE (Netherlands)

In the Netherlands, pilot 1 took place all online. The first session mainly focused on introductions. It also included a soft skills assessment. Marina then introduced the concept of the Circles methodology, the questioning technique, action planning and SMART goals. Once participants were familiar with the methodology and the ground rules, participants then proceeded to begin the questioning round; this ensured that each participant had an adequate amount of time to speak and share their thoughts and experiences. The other sessions followed the same structure beginning with making sure everyone was comfortable and ending with an evaluation and a soft skills assessment so participants could track their progress.

Pilot 2 - The facilitator utilised a PowerPoint presentation with resources and tools to guide the participants through the content. This phase followed a very similar structure as phase 1. In the final session, a further recap of the methodology, tools, and previous sessions took place. This was especially important given the longer break between sessions due to the festive period. They were also able to see a graph representing their responses to see how their soft skills had changed over the course of the sessions.

One person mentioned that the final session was difficult because of the longer gap in between sessions, due to the rescheduling. Whilst this was unavoidable, maintaining an equal amount of time in between each session is important and helps to ensure that the programme flows smoothly. During the next pilot, we will consider a two week gap between sessions which will allow participants to have plenty of time to work on their goals and will help them to maintain the momentum and commitment to achieving them.

CENTER FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION – CSI (CYPRUS)

The first pilot of the Circles, in Cyprus was attended by 7 participants. All sessions took place online. They included an introduction to the concept of the Circles methodology, the questioning technique, action planning and SMART goals. In each session an evaluation and soft skill assessment was carried out for participants to track their progress. Time management was a challenge during online sessions. Participants often faced some internet connection issues, or they entered the session with some delay; however, this was overcome, and the session was still delivered by the facilitator with no further issues.

During the second series of pilots each participant completed a Google form at the beginning of the first session. The facilitator kept the answers of the participants to be discussed at the end of the third online session; this ensured no questions went unanswered. In the second session the

discussion round was very productive to everyone, as it proved to be a networking opportunity between like-minded individuals. In addition, the tools “Wheel of skills” and “My story and my achievements” were introduced to them to work on until the last session. In the last session everyone voiced how they found the experience and they also completed a soft skill assessment. The results of the first session were also shared with them via email to track the development that has taken place during these online sessions.

Note that the number of participants in pilot 2 went from 10 participants in session 1 to 4 in the final session. Despite this, those that did attend expressed their exuberance to be there.

FH JOANNEUM (AUSTRIA)

This followed the same structure as all the other organisations and included the same information. In each session a soft skills assessment was carried out and an evaluation was completed to enable participants to track their progress and illustrate the benefits of the programme.

Pilot 2 followed, more specifically 2 online meetings occurred in Graz. Due to a tight schedule of the participants the facilitator decided to implement it in 2 sessions. On Friday the 27th of January 4 training participants partook actively in the first session. Two people cancelled on short notice (because of sickness and snow chaos on the day but took part on the second day). Similar to the first phase these sessions also included an evaluation and soft skills assessment. Each participant had approximately 10 minutes to express their issues, challenges, and opportunities of the week that had passed and set some new goals in the action points part.

- In each of the organisations a similar format was followed to ensure uniformity and each participant was given the same quality service. Though, this is not to say that the facilitator didn't adapt to the specific needs of their participants.

Impact of the IBL Circles

The following evaluation exercises were completed by participants:

- Session and final evaluation forms
- Soft skills development self-assessments
- Testimonials

Session and evaluation forms:

Each participant completed an evaluation form at the end of each Circle session and a final evaluation form at the end of the last session. These were completed via a Google Form.

Soft skills development:

For participants to reflect on their skills development across the Circles, participants completed a soft skills development form (see annex). These were a self-reflective exercise for participants, and they also provided partners with an awareness of the impact of the coaching on participants personal development. At the end of the Circles, participants received their personalised soft skills graphs, so they were able to compare their skills development from before they started the Circles and after.

As well as the session evaluation forms, participants were also asked to provide longer testimonials about their experiences of the Circles.

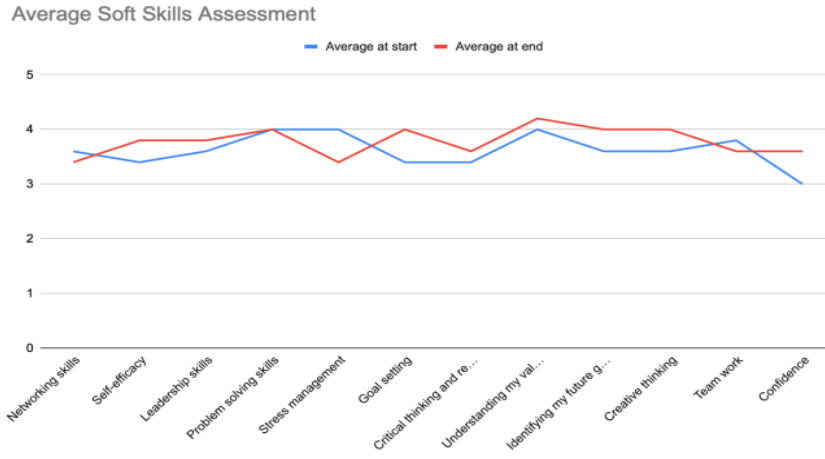
Soft skills assessment results

The following graphs represent the soft skills development of the participants involved in each pilot, per partner country. They show the participants self-assessment at the beginning of the Circles in comparison to the end of the Circles. As can be seen in the graphs below, generally participants' graphs show an improvement in soft skills such as self-efficacy and critical thinking. This suggests that the IBL Circles had a positive impact on the way in which participants viewed their soft skills and they were able to gain skills in some specific areas such as: self-efficacy, goal setting, leadership skills and teamwork.

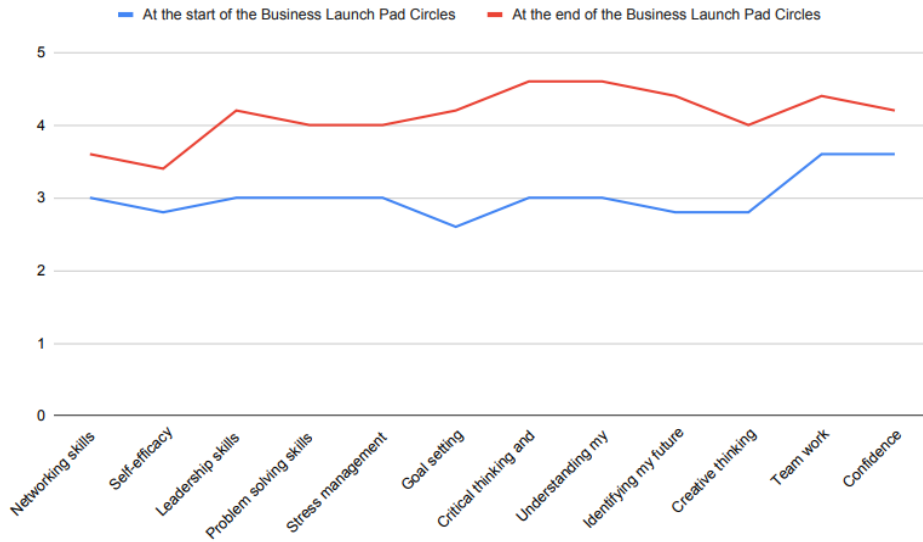
In some areas, participants did score themselves lower at the end than at the beginning. This is common and is a result of participants reflecting more clearly on their feelings about a certain area. For example, someone who felt that they were very good at networking may have realised through reflecting in the Circles that they are not utilising their networks effectively at the moment and rated themselves lower in the final session. Within coaching, we would still consider this a positive outcome as these reflections are something which can be worked on and developed subsequently.

Inova Consultancy

Pilot 1

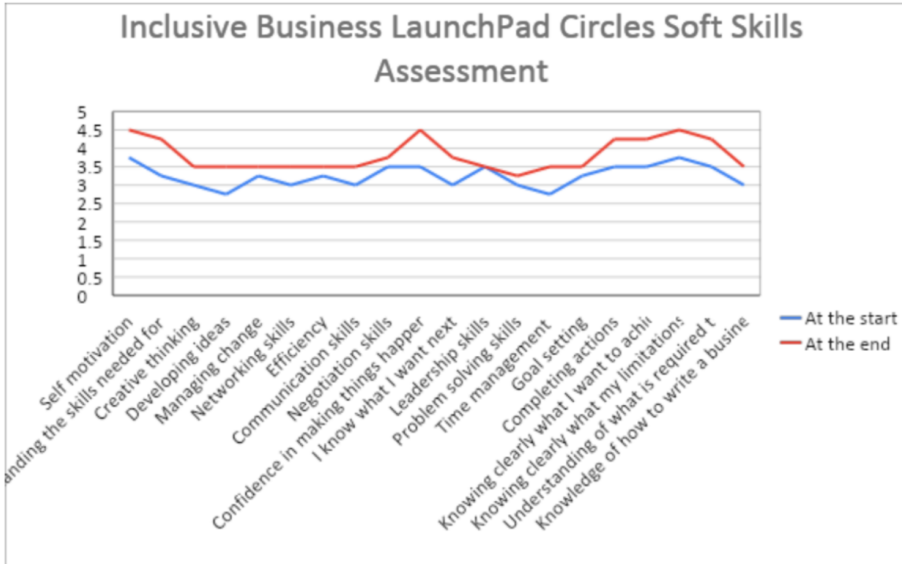


Pilot 2

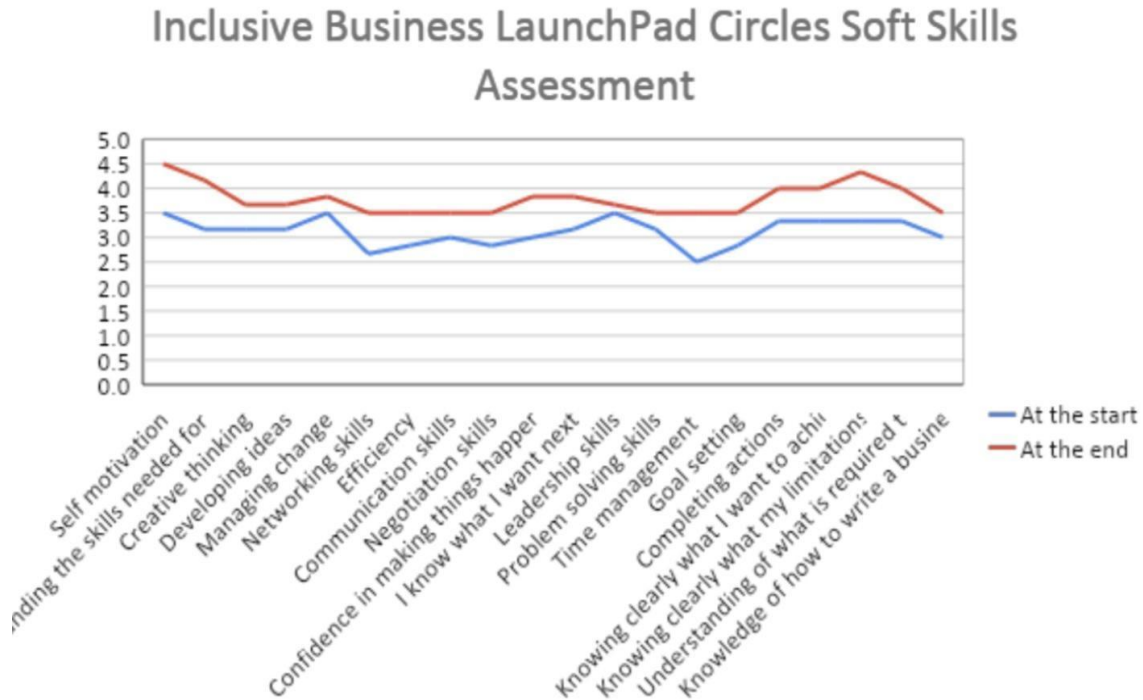


FHJ

Pilot 1



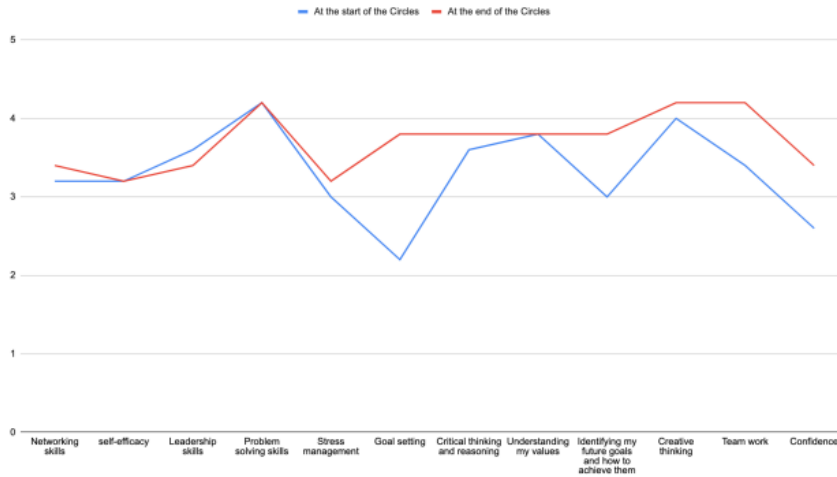
Pilot 2



Inova Aspire

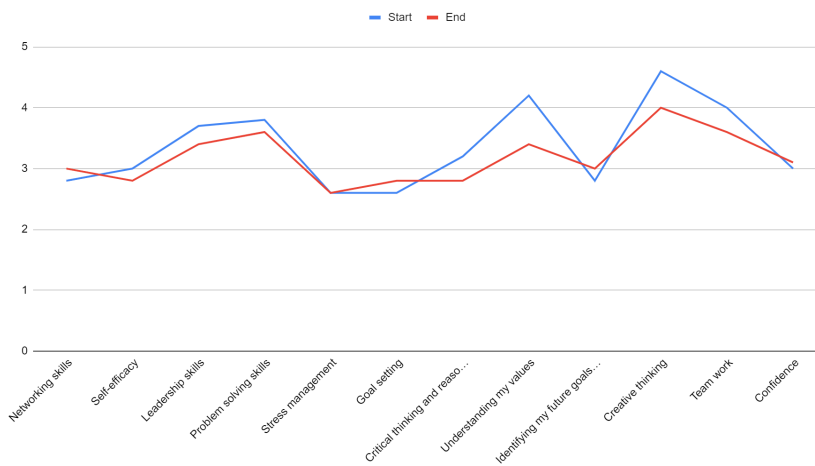
Pilot 1

The Inclusive Business Launch Pad Circles



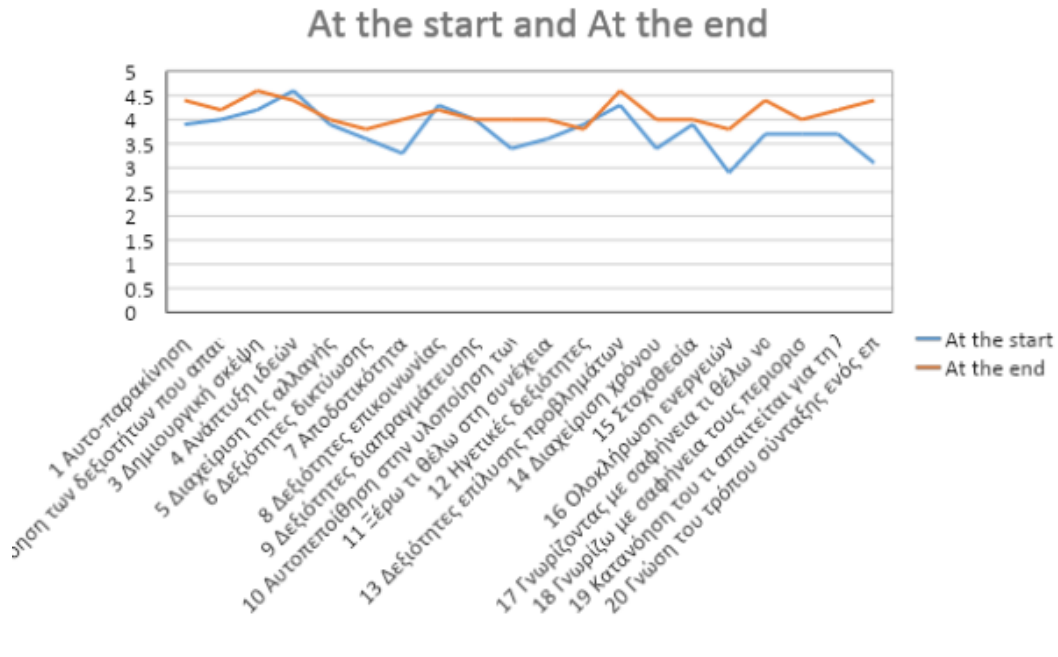
Pilot 2

Average Soft Skills Graph: Business Launch Pad Circles Dec 22- Jan 23

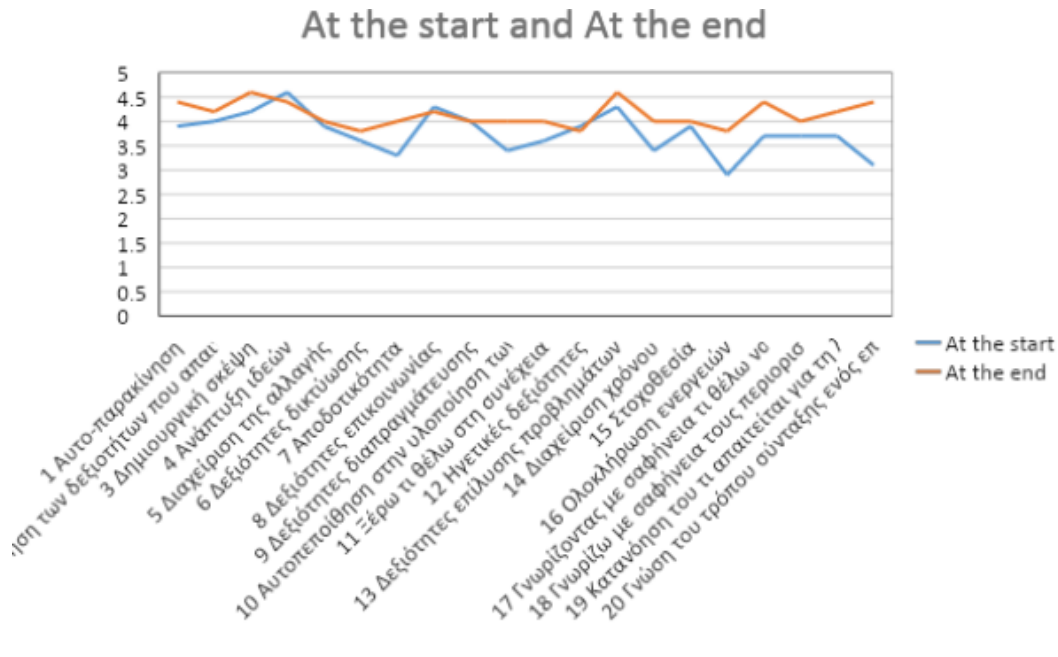


CSI

Pilot 1



Pilot 2



Testimonials

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LAUNCH PAD
Inclusive Business Launch Pad

inova
aspire

“ *Testimonial* ”

- The Circles programme has been extremely worthwhile in helping me find a focus and determine which direction and next step to take. I was feeling overwhelmed with the variety of tasks I need to do in my business, but I have been able to narrow it down and figure out the next step.

IBL Participant, 2022

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Inova Aspire



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

LAUNCH PAD
Inclusive Business Launch Pad

inova
aspire

“ *Testimonial* ”

Would you recommend the programme to others?

As an entrepreneur, I understand the necessity of such programs for all new business owners. This program gave us insights into our own abilities and helps us to prioritize and put plans in action.

IBL Participant, 2023

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Centre for Social Innovation (CSI)



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LAUNCH PAD
Inclusive Business Launch Pad

“ Testimonial

The right course at the right time!
Empowering, engaging and motivating!

IBL Participant, 2022

★★★★★ **”**



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LAUNCH PAD
Inclusive Business Launch Pad

“ Testimonial

I would like to tell you that the training program we attended was very helpful for me. I was able to put my thoughts in order, I wrote down the steps I needed to take and what to do first and second. And then start to implement the small goals I put in order.

IBL Participant, 2022

★★★★★ **”**

FHJ



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LAUNCH PAD
Inclusive Business Launch Pad

“ Testimonial

“The whole training programme helped me to develop my business further and gave me new motivation.”

“The training was inspiring.”

IBL Participant, 2022

★★★★★ **”**

Session Evaluation Forms

Here we have created a series of graphs which is essentially a compilation of certain information provided within the evaluation forms that were created during these pilots.

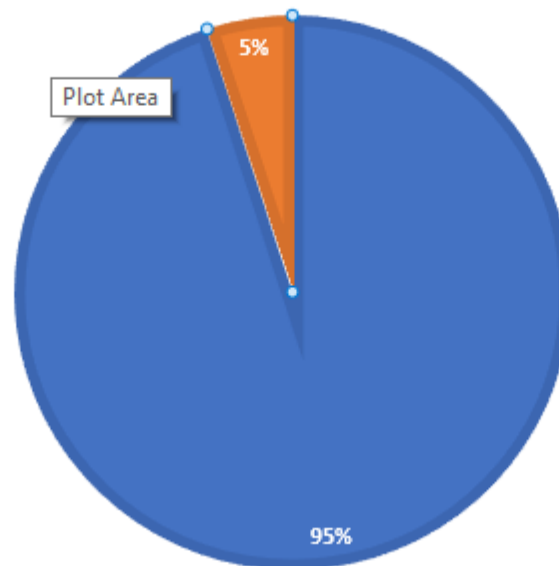
The final evaluation was completed by approx. 50 people across the two pilots. It is evident from the high scores of both final evaluations that the piloting of the IBL Circles were a great success across all partner countries. This indicates that participants were very satisfied with the Circles and found them to be a useful and positive experience.

Would they recommend the programme to others:

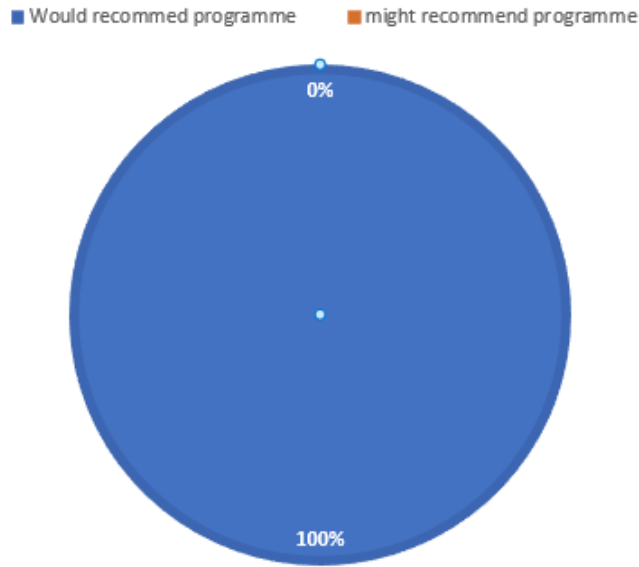
This is a compilation of all the answers across from each partner and each pilot:

Pilot 1 (20 responses)

■ Would recommended programme ■ might recommend programme

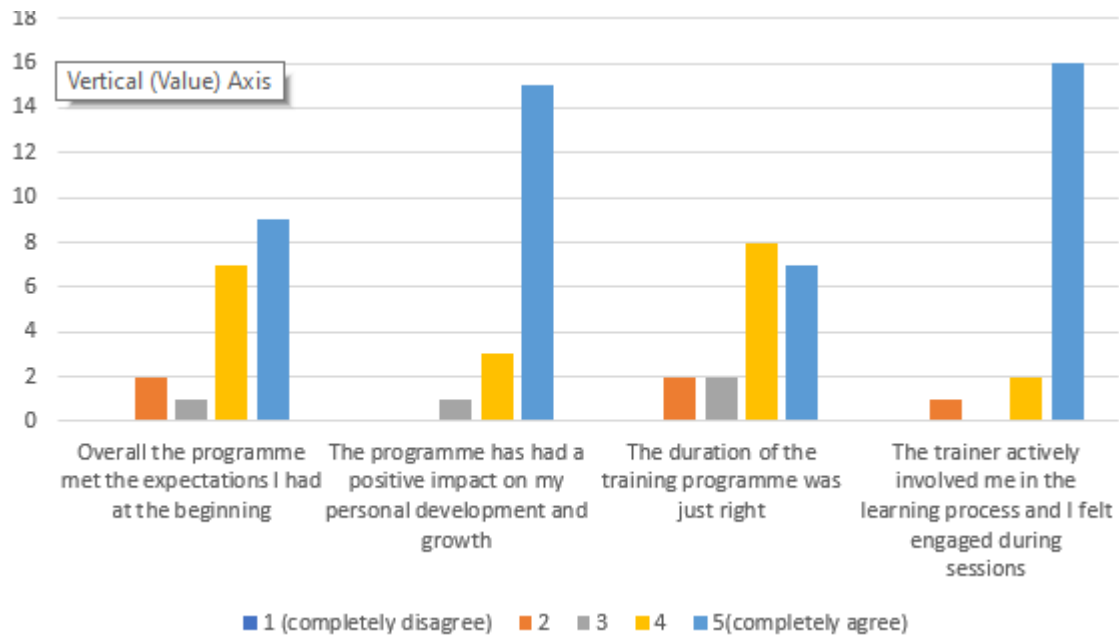


Pilot 2 (20 responses)

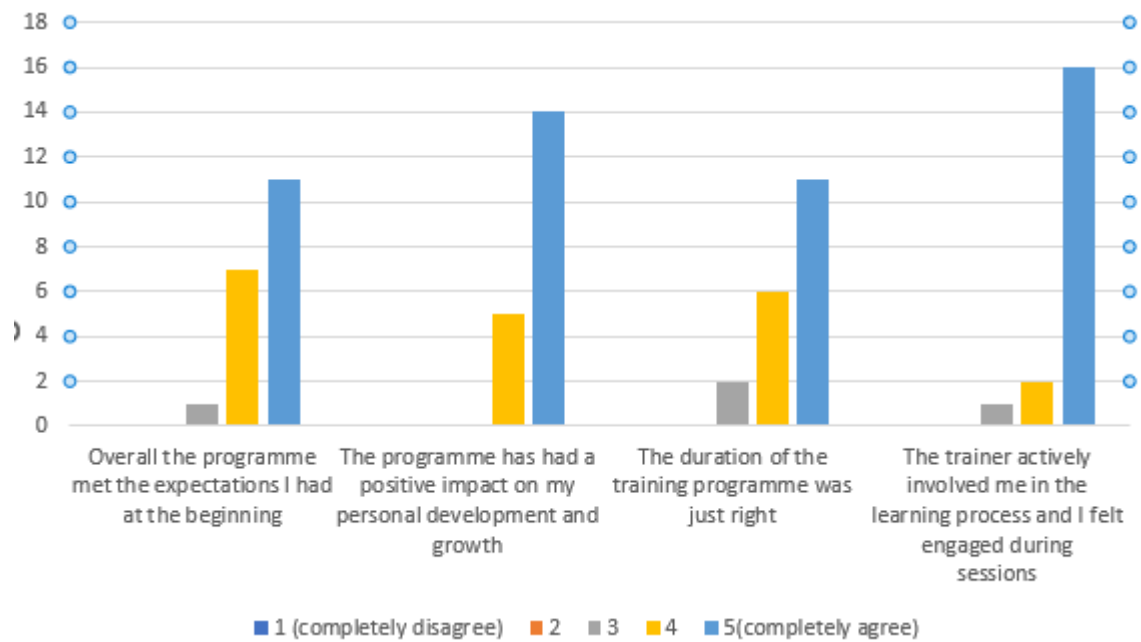


This illustrates how helpful the participants found the sessions because the fact they'd refer to others means that they believe others could also benefit from the programme.

Pilot 1



Pilot 2



Based on the data presented, it is clear that the majority of participants were extremely satisfied upon completion of the pilot program. An overwhelming number of participants rated the sessions with a 5 - indicating excellence - while others rated them as 4 - indicating they were very good - or 3 - indicating they were good. This positive feedback reflects the high quality of the supported materials and online sessions provided to participants.

We can also see from these graphs that an improvement in the scores between Pilots 1 and 2, as partners reflected on the feedback received and made changes to the delivery appropriately to ensure participants' needs were met. The materials and resources which are finally developed by the partnership, reflect changes made following all pilots and we believe they provide a high quality product which has been proven to have a positive impact on participants.

Conclusion

The piloting of the IBL Circles proved to be a resounding success across the consortium, as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive evaluations from participants. They found the sessions to be highly valuable and enjoyable, with many expressing gratitude for the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals across different industries. These Circles also provided a forum for participants to discuss common challenges, such as imposter syndrome, and learn from one another's experiences.

The impact of these Circles extended beyond the sessions themselves, with several partners setting up messaging groups on various platforms like WhatsApp to encourage continued communication and networking among participants even after the Circles had ended. In addition to benefiting the participants, the Circles also provided valuable insights to partners on the training needs of small business owners and sole traders. This allowed partners to tailor their sessions based on the individual needs of participants, with some partners noting that the discussion rounds on SMART goals were particularly effective in promoting ambition and facilitating networking opportunities.

Annexes

Copy of Soft Skills Assessment Form

Copy of Evaluation Forms

National Reports from all countries, Pilot 1 and 2.

PARTNERS



COORDINATOR - Inova Consultancy (UK)



Consultancy Academy (UK)



FHJ (Austria)



Inova Aspire (The Netherlands)



Center for Social Innovation (Cyprus)

