

W-Power 'Gender Sensitivity in Coaching'
Report on Research Findings & Concept
Note (WP3)



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Contents

| | |
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| Contents | 1 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Methodology & Research | 4 |
| Sources of Research | 4 |
| Challenges | 4 |
| Field of Application | 5 |
| Concept Note for 'Train the Trainer' | 6 |
| Approach | 6 |
| Model | 7 |
| Recommended Tools..... | 10 |
| Pre-assessment Template..... | 10 |
| Gender Sensitivity Checklist..... | 11 |
| Gender Analysis | 13 |
| Orientation Wheel | 15 |
| Continuous Improvement Template -'Implement-Evaluate-Improve'..... | 16 |
| W-Power Gender Sensitivity Pilots | 17 |
| Main Themes / Findings..... | 19 |
| Conclusions and Recommendations | 22 |
| Bibliography | 23 |
| APPENDICES | 28 |

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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| Appendix 1 – Inventory of Good Practices – Partner Template | 29 |
| Appendix 2 – Train the Trainer Training Materials (Main Training + Pilot Implementation Training) | 30 |
| Appendix 3 – Gender Sensitivity Toolkit | 31 |
| Appendix 4 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Implementation Toolkit..... | 32 |
| Appendix 5 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Scotland | 33 |
| Appendix 6 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Sweden | 41 |
| Appendix 7 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Finland | 43 |

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Introduction

This report has been compiled as part of the activities under WPT3 (Work Package 3). WPT3 contributes especially to the project objective of improving the gender-related business advisory services.

The aim of WPT3 was to create a pilot to better serve existing gender-sensitive* coaching concept for business advisors and potential women entrepreneurs. A lack of female entrepreneurs is one of the key challenges to beat in the NPA (Northern Periphery and Arctic) region, and access to gender-sensitive and diversity observing business advisory services would be one of the solutions to lower the threshold for rural-based women to consider entrepreneurship as an option. The Gender-sensitive coaching model and tools created during the project will benefit existing business advisory professionals, but open also new business possibilities for (female) entrepreneurs in the sparsely populated regions to start their own consulting businesses. WPT3 activities include sharing of best practices, regional coaching pilots and modelling.

Transnational benchmarks, sharing of best practices and findings from latest research were used to underpin the modelling process. Concept and tools were modelled in a clear and illustrative way, which will help the output dissemination.

Partner 3 (P3), WestBIC (Ireland) led the WPT3 and had the main responsibility of developing the gender-sensitive coaching concept for business advisors and potential new entrepreneurs. Other main partners were strongly engaged to the development process, especially P5 ICI (Iceland), P6 JOSEK (Finland) and P8 PEC (Shetland). Concept development is end-user driven process and associated partners as well as other target group representatives were involved in the development process and regional pilots. This work package enabled transnational learning to business support bodies across the NPA regions.

Output: Gender-sensitive coaching concept (model/tools) were created to help business advisory bodies to assist existing and potential women entrepreneurs in their business services. Coaching concept includes aspects of diversity management and thus will help the business advisors to better support different demographic groups (young women, housewives, immigrants, indigenous women). Women in project regions were also (and continue to be) encouraged to adapt the model/tools in their existing businesses or to set-up new business.

**Gender sensitivity encompasses the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities and incorporate these into strategies and actions (EC).*

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



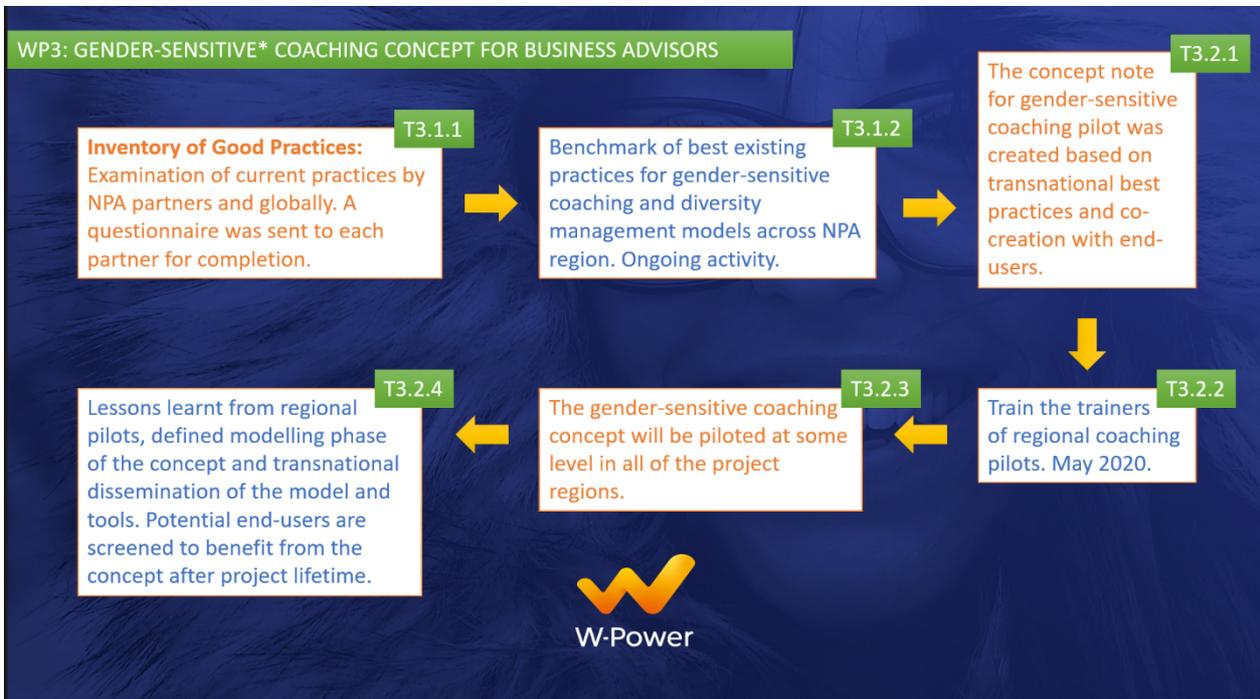


Methodology & Research

Sources of Research

The development of the models and tools were based on an inventory of best practice (including Regional/Country specific findings from studies, data and research in partner territories of Ireland, Sweden, Finland and Scotland), benchmarking of existing practices, extensive research of literature, case studies and in co-creative dialogue with stakeholders, academic researchers and policy makers. A wide range of diverse reports, academic research papers, technical notes and other literature were consulted in depth. Full methodology is given in the illustration below:

Figure 1: WPT3 Methodology



Challenges

The research undertaken identified a gap in knowledge in terms of gender sensitivity being applied to business advisory services. The research mainly focused on gender sensitivity topics in the context of employment and work-related issues, and some specific areas, such as the military and sports, as well as research. The language is complex and often misunderstood (i.e., no common interpretation around

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





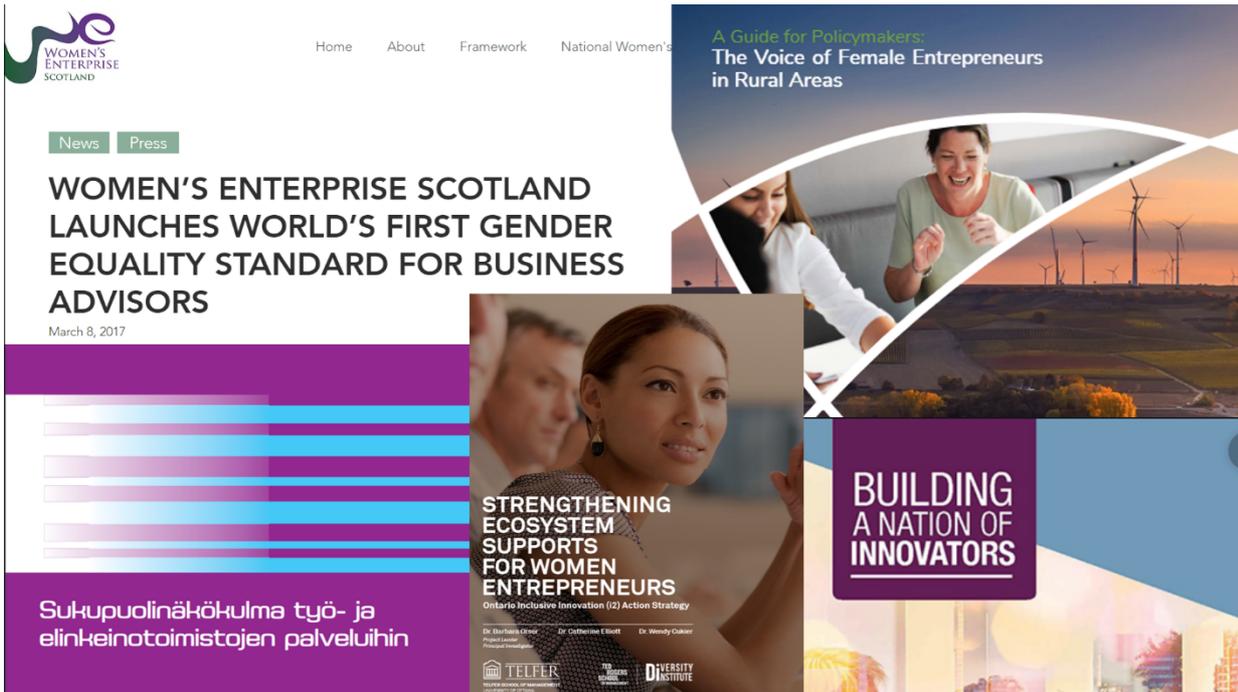
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language 'gender consideration' 'gender equality' 'gender sensitive' 'gender inclusion' 'gender mainstreaming' 'gender inclusivity' 'gender diversity' etc.).

This makes the contribution of W-Power to this topic even more timely and relevant. Despite the scarce data and studies being limited in their scope, learning from other avenues of application was reviewed, adapted and modified to align with the context of entrepreneurship.

Figure 2: Examples of Literature Reviewed



Field of Application

Coaching is a form of development in which a coach supports a client (entrepreneur) in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance. A coach doesn't give ready answers, but empowers the clients to find their own strengths, and the process is usually several months long. Coaching has various forms, e.g., personal and group coaching, and WPT3 pilot tested a range of forms, as well as distance coaching. During the research phase it was identified that the concept and tools could also apply to other areas of business support, such as training and mentoring. These aspects were also included in the pilot exercises.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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Concept Note for 'Train the Trainer'

Approach

The approach for the development of the 'train the trainer' concept for gender sensitivity was based on the premise that it has to:

- Help improve coaching, mentoring, training support provision in a more 'gender-equal' way
- help share transnational benchmarks, best practices and findings from latest research
- help remove barriers and lower the threshold for rural women to consider entrepreneurship as an option
- help business advisers to understand the "gender & entrepreneurship" issue and make them more sensitive towards the gender dimension of/in entrepreneurship
- help business advisers include the gender dimension throughout a business support service
- indicate how to design a more gender sensitive business support
- help to eliminate gender bias in business supports.

The approach also had to be suitable for localisation, be pragmatic and practitioner-orientated, have concepts presented in 'bite-size' building blocks and provide simple, easy to use tools.

Target audiences included Business Advisors & Business Support Organisations, Coaching professionals, mentors, trainers, as well as Existing & Potential Entrepreneurs.

The expected outcome included: to increase access to gender sensitive and diversity observing business advisory services, and increase in uptake of entrepreneurship by women in rural areas, and capacity building achieved of business advisers, coaches, mentors, trainers & female entrepreneurs.

This approach also drew on European Policy objectives:

- to enhance entrepreneurial education and training to support growth and business creation
- to strengthen framework conditions for entrepreneurs by removing existing structural barriers and supporting them in crucial phases of the business life cycle
- to stimulate the culture of entrepreneurship in Europe: nurturing the new generation of entrepreneurs
- to design and implement national strategies for women's entrepreneurship that aim at increasing the share of women-led companies
- to continue and expand the existing networks of female entrepreneurship ambassadors, and mentors for women entrepreneurs
- to implement policies enabling women to achieve an adequate work-life balance.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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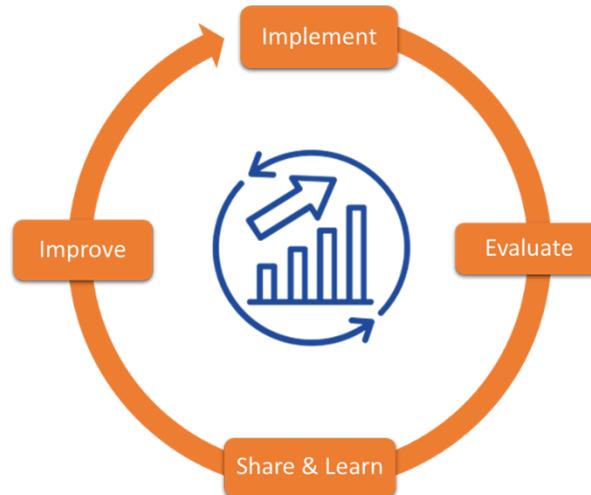
Model

Promoting women's entrepreneurship is a long-term process that requires time to change structures and attitudes in society. The model developed by W-Power was therefore conceived to fit in with this framework, encouraging a long-term view and basing itself on a philosophy of continuous improvement.

Figure 3: Continuous Improvement Model

Continuous Improvement Cycle

A gender-sensitive evaluation is a systematic and objective assessment of the design and planning (objectives, results pursued, activities planned), the implementation and results of an ongoing or completed activity, project or programme from a gender perspective.



It can take place either upon completion of the project, when focus is placed on gender impacts and the contribution of the programme to promoting gender equality, or throughout project implementation, with the aim of seeking to have a process of continuous improvement.

Integrating the gender dimension in entrepreneurial business supports is an added value in terms of excellence, depth of content and effectiveness. It helps business advisers question gender norms and stereotypes, to rethink standards and reference models. It leads to an in-depth understanding of both genders' needs, behaviours and attitudes. It helps enhance the societal relevance of the contributions from female entrepreneurs and to diversify the range of products and services.

Women and men – and women entrepreneurs and men entrepreneurs – are different. They have different needs and wants, and different expectations. If these differences are not taken into account by an organisation, it is likely to operate in a "gender blind" manner. Gender sensitivity encompasses the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities and incorporate these into strategies and actions. Project formulation should be driven by a quest to ensure that women and men can

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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equally access, equally participate and equally benefit from resources, services, capacity building and other activities offered by the project/coaching concept/programme or project.

This concept can be applied to a range of business support interventions:

- Coaching is a form of development in which a coach supports a client (entrepreneur) in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance. Coach doesn't give ready answers, but empowers the clients to find their own strengths, and the process is usually several months long.
- Mentoring can be valuable sources of information at any stage of company's growth. Mentors often give a fresh perspective on problems or challenges and the relationship is based on trust, lack of conflict of interest, mutual understanding and transfer of knowledge, expertise and experience.
- Training equips entrepreneurs with the additional knowledge, attributes and capabilities required to apply their abilities in the context of setting up and growing a new venture or business.

In line with the long-term strategy for inclusion of gender-sensitivity, the following principles were observed:

- Step-by-step development.
- Active engagement of practitioners.
- Peer learning among practitioners – both nationally and transnationally.
- Balanced and inclusive approach to avoid gender segregation and to prevent discrimination of some social groups.
- Awareness raising, advocacy and information sharing are critical success factors.
- Women's participation in entrepreneurship and their uptake of business supports (coaching, mentoring, training) must be encouraged.
- Business Supports must address women's needs, as well as men's – address both women's and men's realities.
- Research on the gender question, to enhance understanding of gender issues in entrepreneurial business supports, should be promoted.

In gender-sensitive business supports, gender is consistently taken into account throughout the business support cycle. The model has been designed so that it can be applied flexibly to a range of circumstances, as long as the measurement (pre-assessment and post-assessment) processes have been established, to capture outcomes, formalise learning and enable identification of required interventions and follow-up actions. The tools which have been developed are discussed in the following chapter in more detail. The tools recognise that performing a good analysis can be a complex process, which is often irreconcilable with some practicalities of business support provision and tendencies toward a 'tick-the-box' exercise. An

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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important balance was attempted to be struck between making tools simple enough to be used by a wide range of stakeholders while avoiding oversimplification of complex social and economic issues.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Recommended Tools

Pre-assessment Template

Objective: Provide the basis for intervention on gender-sensitivity and help formulate actions needed. This step requires extensive research which needs to be regularly revisited, updated, improved and built up over time. The focus is on building a body of knowledge related to gender-awareness, to help address gender bias (conscious & unconscious) in providing business support (coaching/mentoring/training).

How to Use: Analyse situation of women and men in the field: Collect information and data about the existing situation for women and men in the areas concerned by the planned intervention, e.g., by looking for sex-disaggregated statistics. Complement quantitative information with qualitative insights - for example from studies or consultations, and combine various sources (statistical office, academic works, policy reports) to gain a deeper understanding. Identify existing gender inequalities - take into consideration the views of entrepreneurs about what any coaching/mentoring/training support should bring (training needs analysis). To be used as a complementary with the Gender Analysis tool, which is a method to help populate the pre-assessment template. This is about the opportunities to participate on equal terms in all aspects of entrepreneurship, including supports. This is to be used as an example of what may be included in the template (data collection phase), but content should be individualised and adapted to local circumstances, which may vary (different legal and regulatory environments, differences in access to resources etc).

Norms & Values

- ⓘ Consider different realities on the basis of their sex or because of roles attributed (gender roles).
- ⓘ Consider the norms and values which regulate the process of access and control of resources
- ⓘ Consider differences between men and women taking into account the structure of the organisation of private life.

Localised Inequalities

- ⓘ Consider localised inequalities between women and men in access to resources (work, money, power, health, well-being, security, knowledge-education, mobility, time, etc)
- ⓘ Consider localised inequalities in the exercise of fundamental rights of men and women (civil, social and political rights)

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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- ⓘ Consider how gender inequalities may be either reinforced or challenged by specific cultural, ethnic, religious, age-related and other diversity criteria (e.g., traveller community in Ireland, Sami community in the Nordics, silver generation, mainstream religion vs other etc).

Needs Analysis

- ⓘ What are the expectations/needs of local entrepreneurs? Are these different for women and men?
- ⓘ Are the needs being assessed against their different interest, roles and positions?
- ⓘ How can the contribution to the needs of women and men be strengthened?
- ⓘ Thorough analysis of the training needs, both prior and throughout men's and women's engagement into business.
- ⓘ Training needs of women with regard to entrepreneurial awareness and sensitization should be assessed specifically and may require design of additional design, content & implementation elements specifically focusing on support to women entrepreneurs.

Performing a good analysis can be a complex process, which is often irreconcilable with some practicalities of business support provision and tendencies toward a 'tick-the-box' exercise. An important balance has to be struck between making the analysis simple enough to be used by a wide range of stakeholders and oversimplifying complex social and economic issues.

Gender Sensitivity Checklist

Objective: In gender-sensitive business supports, gender is consistently taken into account throughout the business support cycle. Women's participation in entrepreneurship and their uptake of business supports (coaching, mentoring, training) must be encouraged. Business Supports must address women's needs, as well as men's and their realities. Research on the gender question, to enhance understanding of gender issues in entrepreneurial business supports, should be promoted. The purpose is to aid the implementation of gender-awareness pre-assessment outputs and their integration into all phases of business support development, design and implementation. It will help ensure that gender-sensitivity is habitually included as a part of the process.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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How to Use: The checklist tool is to be used in the conjunction with the orientation wheel. Ensure that the all the perspectives are included, taking into account the context for each stakeholder – the business support providing organisation, the practitioner executing the coaching/mentoring/training, as well as the entrepreneurs. The checklist below is an example and should be adapted to the individual business support and localisation scenario. Information needed to address each phase should be drawn from the pre-assessment template which will help populate the orientation wheel and then create the checklist.

SITUATIONAL BASELINE PHASE

- Have you considered the socio-cultural influencing factors in order to determine gender-sensitive actions needed?
- Have you identified sex-disaggregated baselines and indicators as well as gender-specific targets essential for tracking progress and impact of the gender results over time?
- Have you identified the gender-sensitive factors of influence that define action needed?

APPROACH DEVELOPMENT PHASE

- Does the methodology/process for the business support development include the gender dimension/gender-sensitive approach?
- Does your programme/project/coaching concept encourage target stakeholders, especially women and girls, to participate in the development planning process?
- Does the background/context analysis of the project examine the different situations of women and men and the impacts the project will have on different groups?

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT PHASE

- Does your programme/project/coaching concept utilise gender-neutral language and stimulate participation of all gender?
- Does the results framework include gender responsive indicators, targets and a baseline to monitor gender equality results?

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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- Does the roll-out of the planned programme/project/coaching concept take into account factors defined under localised inequalities, and norms & values, e.g., private life factors, access to resources and others?

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

- Does your programme/project/coaching concept timing/place reflect the private life factors in order to determine equally opportunity for participation?
- Does the programme/project/coaching concept ensure that both women and men can provide inputs, access and participate in project activities equally?
- Is gender-sensitive language being used? Have the business practitioners delivering the coaching/mentoring/training been trained for gender-sensitivity?
- Is the programme/project/coaching concept being publicly promoted in a gender-sensitive way (same with outcomes)?
- Are appropriate feedback methods being included, that take into account the perspective of men and women (gender-segregated data)?

This is a step-by-step development process, which require long-term commitment and active engagement of practitioners. Peer learning among practitioners – both nationally and transnationally, should be encouraged wherever and whenever possible. Balanced and inclusive approach to avoid gender segregation and to prevent discrimination of some social groups should be always reflected on. Awareness raising, advocacy and information sharing are critical success factors (see tool for continuous improvement).

Gender Analysis

Objective: Gender analysis provides the necessary data and information to integrate a gender perspective into business support provision (e.g., coaching, mentoring, training). It identifies the differences in the context of entrepreneurship and receiving business support. It allows for the development of interventions that address gender inequalities and meet the different needs of women and men. The purpose of this tool is therefore to help provide basis for the pre-assessment research and to help identify factors of gender-awareness, as well as helping develop an understanding of the reality associated with the gender dimension and assist you in designing your business support strategy, programme or project. Quality of data within Gender Analysis is very important.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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How to Use: Gender Analysis is vital aspect of the pre-assessment, helping collect & develop data that will help shape the interventions into the business support to make them more gender-sensitive and allow progress towards gender mainstreaming – this is a gradual process and requires constant evaluation (see continuous improvement tool). Not all data will be instantly available, so both existing data sources (which have to be segregated by gender) and original research should be combined and data shared with, and between stakeholders. The 'factors of influence' are a visual aid to help generate ideas around topics and aspects that should be subjected to gender analysis.

Figure 4: Gender Analysis - Factors of Influence



Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



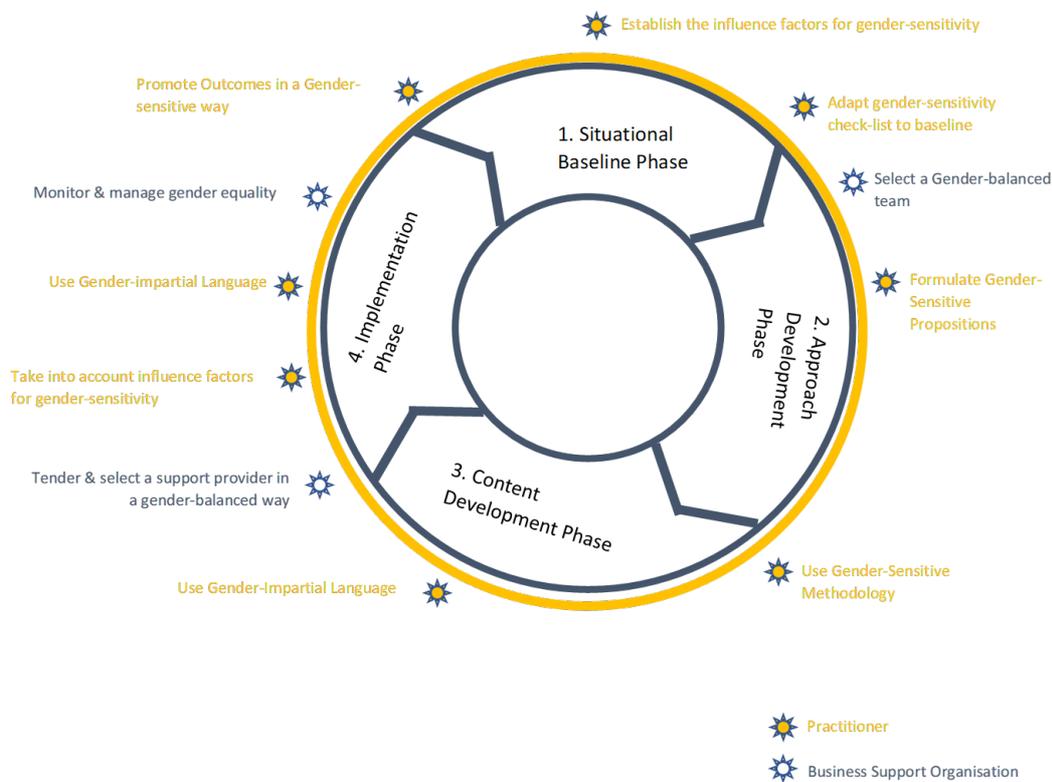


Orientation Wheel

Objective: The purpose of this tool is to be a visual assistant for generation of the checklist to be used throughout the different phases of business support provision, by indicating the generic structure and framework for the development of the gender-sensitive approach.

How to Use: The orientation wheel is used in conjunction with the preassessment tool and as a precursor to the development of the checklist. It gives examples of considerations to be taken during different phases. They are to be used as base ideas and supplemented with findings from the pre-assessment. The orientation wheel also demonstrates that consideration needs to be given to different viewpoints of various stakeholders and may cover a range of circumstances.

Figure 5: Gender Sensitivity Orientation Wheel



Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



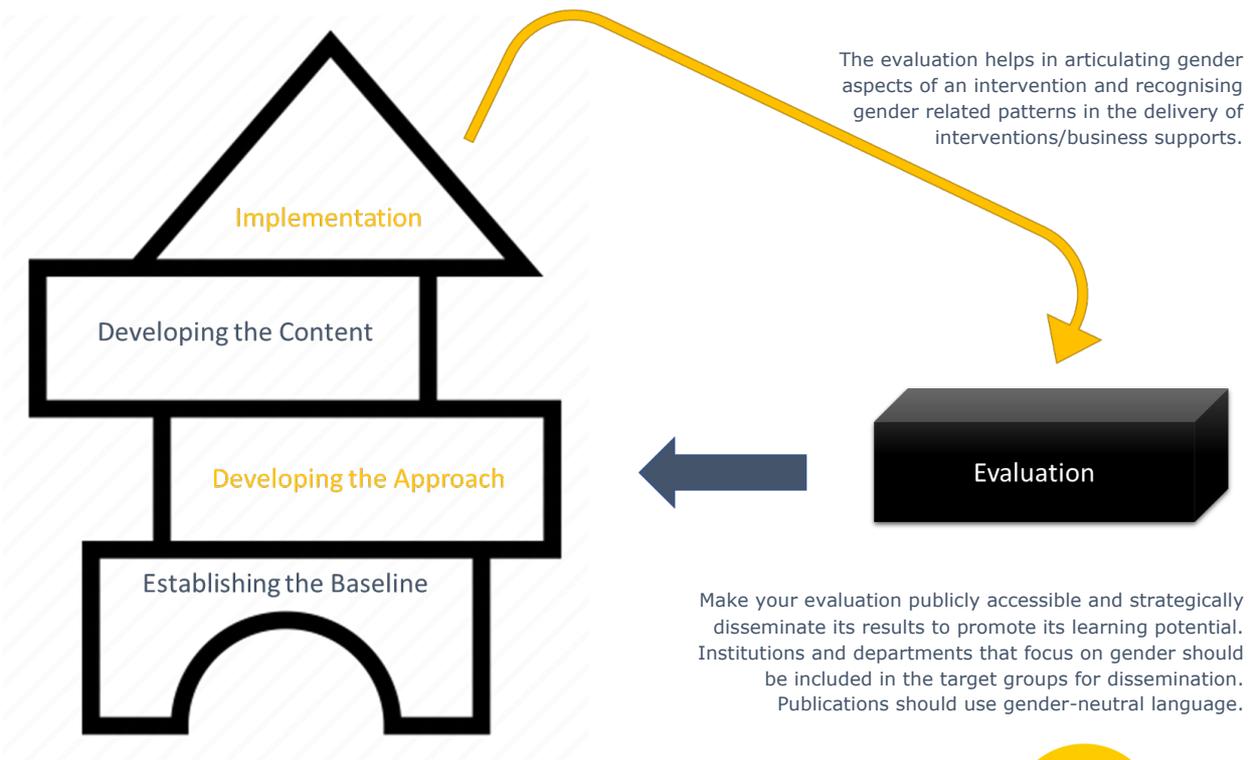


Continuous Improvement Template - 'Implement-Evaluate-Improve'

Objective: Ex ante evaluation, analysis or assessment of a programme or project that makes it possible to identify, in a preventative way, the likelihood of a given decision having negative consequences for the state of equality between women and men. The central questions of the gender impact assessment: Does a programme or project reduce, maintain or increase the gender inequalities between women and men? Were there any unintended positive or negative changes in gender relations? What factors and strategies contributed to these changes?

How to Use: At the end of a coaching cycle, project or programme, a gender-sensitive evaluation should take place. This tool gives an example of how to assess the gender impact of a business support measure. Data collection tools (such as questionnaires, surveys and interview checklists) need to be gender-sensitive, use gender-neutral language, and should make it possible to detect the different realities of men and women. This will help to avoid gender bias. Ensure women and men equally participate in monitoring and evaluation activities and decision-making processes and data is collected on women and men so that gender impacts are tracked to assess if the project/ programme/coaching concept equally benefits women and men.

Figure 6: Continuous Improvement Cycle



Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



W-Power Gender Sensitivity Pilots

The regional Pilot to implement gender sensitivity improvements in delivery of business supports, will connect with the gender analysis conducted. Gender analysis provides the necessary data and information to integrate a gender perspective into business support provision (e.g., coaching, mentoring, training). It identifies the differences in the context of entrepreneurship and receiving business support. It allows for the development of interventions that address gender inequalities and meet the different needs of women and men. Quality of data within Gender Analysis is very important. Examples are given in the template below – data can be utilised from existing research available, or from original primary research (e.g., surveys, interviews, feedback forms) conducted by the business support provider prior to the pilot taking place.

Gender Analysis is vital aspect of the pre-assessment, helping collect & develop data that will help shape the interventions into the business support to make them more gender-sensitive and allow progress towards gender mainstreaming. The goal of piloting is to measure the effectiveness of planned improvements and to use the pilot evaluation data to complete the continuous improvement loop – the pilot provides the means of experimenting with what may work best and measuring impact. It is important not to try to implement too many different measures all at once as the causality may be difficult to trace to the exact factor that contributed most to the impact (positive or negative). Each pilot needs an established baseline and a recorded measurement of same values in the aftermath.

The partners were working with the following pointers in designing and implementing their pilots:

| BEFORE THE COMMENCEMENT OF PILOT, RECORD the FOLLOWING: | |
|--|---|
| Pilot Name | <i>Enter Pilot Name</i> |
| Pilot Foreseen Duration | <i>e.g. 6 months from November 2020 – April 2021</i> |
| Pilot Participation Envisaged | <i>e.g. 30 participants – if appropriate, state more detail, e.g. geographical domain, particular demographic being targeted, or specific group being targeted. Make sure you note the gender component.</i> |
| Pilot Mission Statement | <i>Summarise in 1-2 sentences what the main focus of the pilot is – what aspects are you trying to improve.</i> |
| Research/Data that the pilot is based on | <i>Enter details of your baseline – which value are you going to tackle in your pilot? This could be, for example, related to rates of attendance, hours when training is taking place, training content, or other variables. E.g. research</i> |

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





| | |
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| | <i>undertaken by the Gender Institute indicates that x% of female entrepreneurs in Region x had no access to training y.</i> |
| What will be measured and how (methodology) | <i>E.g. as per example above we will measure increase in participation in training y by female entrepreneurs and we will measure in post-evaluation feedback study their reaction to the training content, timing and format.</i> |
| Content of the Pilot | <i>E.g. description of measure/business support being implemented during the pilot. This can be a summary description or the detailed description can be provided as an annex to the pilot document.</i> |

AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF THE PILOT, RECORD THE FOLLOWING:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Actual Duration of Pilot | <i>If different from planned.</i> |
| Actual Participation realised | <i>If different from planned/record actual participation (including any necessary detail around gender participation, geographical target etc.</i> |
| Feedback recorded | <i>Enter outcomes from the survey, interview of feedback from generated after the conclusion of the pilot. Ensure main relevant statistics are captured.</i> |

EVALUATION

| | |
|--|--|
| What was the change/improvement recorded? | <i>Compare the outcomes against your baseline. Consider and analyse main differences between the baseline and pilot outcomes.</i> |
| What has been the analysis/conclusion? | <i>Reflect on the outcomes. Has the measure had the desired effect? What can you contribute this positive change to specifically? If you believe it hasn't had the desired impact, describe what did not work and why?</i> |
| What are the recommendations and next steps? | <i>Based on the analysis and conclusions, what would you recommend? What action is necessary and what should happen next?</i> |

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





Main Themes / Findings

Gender-Sensitivity Pilots were carried out by partner regions at different stages of the project lifetime. Although the sample size was not large, the pilots provided some clear insights. The small pilot groups enabled more in-depth feedback. The individual reports from each pilot was analysed and the key findings are outlined below:

Format

There are many variables that can impact on the level of engagement particularly for female entrepreneurs, which emphasises the need for special consideration in this area when providing business supports to this target group. In many cases there is no correct or incorrect format or one type fits all approach and its advisable to adapt based specifically on the cohort involved. In addition to being female other factors like age, family commitments, full time / part time entrepreneur, where they are based etc will influence how one should structure and format the coaching. A beneficial way to decipher some factors is to send a pre-survey to participants in advance and then based off the responses one can then plan and structure according. For example, the pilots in Sweden and Finland both sent a pre-survey which enabled the organiser to better understand participants needs and expectations. As a result, the coaching / program can then be adapted to better serve the entrepreneurs and manage their expectations. It was also noted that it's worthwhile gauging the level / stage each entrepreneur is at beforehand in order to provide more suitable content dependent on their stage of the business journey i.e., some early stage entrepreneurs can be left feeling overwhelmed if the content and the other participants themselves are more advanced in comparison. Overall this allows for more beneficial, productive and efficient sessions.

Scheduling / Timetable & Increasing Attendance and Engagement

Again this factor will vary depending on the cohort and their circumstances. It was found that it is essential to implement a flexible timetable by gauging the preferred times / days of the participants. As alluded to above, the family situation and childcare responsibilities are particularly relevant in relation to female entrepreneurs and without doubt impact on their availability. The pilot carried out by Highlands and Islands Enterprises (HIE) (Appendix 5) investigated this factor specifically and found that a good approach is the recording of coaching sessions and webinars. The research conducted clearly indicates that the facility to engage with the content 'after the event' at a time more suitable for them is taken advantage of by a significant number of participants (See table 1 of Appendix 5). The downfall to this approach is the loss of live interaction and the ability to ask questions / network further.

In relation to time of day, quite often it is suggested that evening time is most suitable for female entrepreneurs, however, the HIE pilot concluded that this is not the case. The time of day did not seem to affect the level of attendance in this instance, however, it must be noted that the figures from the pilot are

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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too small for meaningful averages and this would need to be further explored in order to provide more meaningful and accurate insights.

One should bare in mind that other factors can impact attendance levels such as level of interest in the topic being covered / self-perceived skills gap; other commitments, either personal or business-related; general sense of isolation/engagement and consequent need for interaction and support; level of confidence attending live events as opposed to watching recordings; and technology or internet access challenges amongst others.

1-1 vs Group Sessions

The pilots consisted of both 1-1 and group sessions. It was found that 1-1 sessions were beneficial in terms of providing a personalised and tailored session with many participants citing the importance this had on their engagement levels and accountability. The higher level of relevance to their business ensures meaningful sessions that translated into practical learnings. While the general consensus was that individual coaching was desirable, participants also voiced the importance that group sessions had in terms of interaction, networking, collaboration and learning from each other. In summary, a mix of both individual and group sessions were deemed optimal in order to provide the best possible experience. The pilot in Norbotten, Sweden chose all female coaches to implement the sessions which was done so deliberately in order to 'strengthen a safe and interactional atmosphere'. There was no study carried out to determine if utilising female coaches has large benefits, but the underlying shared opinion is that yes there may be merit in this, but first and foremost the quality and experience of the coach is the most important factor.

Confidentiality and Trust Building

As alluded to above, creating a safe environment is an important factor when working with not only female entrepreneurs, but any entrepreneur. Understandably, entrepreneurs can be reluctant to share too much information on their idea or business so ensuring a safe space is provided is key. During the pilots, Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA's) were signed and binded all participants involved. This creates a layer of trust and should be done from the outset.

Continous Improvements

As mentioned from the outset of this section, there are no strict right or wrong approach to delivering coaching sessions as it will certainly vary depending on the group of participants involved. A key element

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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from all pilots that was flagged was the need to let the participants have an input and seek their feedback in order to build and improve upon the program / sessions. Collecting feedback was carried out during the pilot phases which in turn is the basis for some of the above suggestions. Once a program has been formulated, it must transform and continuously change in order to adapt to the ever-changing business needs of entrepreneurs. New trends, opportunities, challenges and so on are the one thing that is guaranteed in the business world so this must be taken into account on an ongoing basis.

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e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Conclusions and Recommendations

Throughout the project lifetime extensive research was conducted, models investigated and statements challenged in relation to gender-sensitivity which in turn led to the creation of some of the above tools, templates, concept notes and recommendations. The aim of WP3 and this report is to better serve existing gender-sensitive* coaching concept for business advisors and potential women entrepreneurs.

The outputs will allow business advisors to be better equipped when working with female entrepreneurs which will enable these businesswomen to flourish to their true potential when it comes to business supports. As mentioned at times throughout this report it is important that the reader takes the information and applies it with common sense relevant to their actual situation – certain tools and recommendations will no doubt need to be adapted based on the needs of the target audience and the information contained in this report should act as a guide only.

Increased awareness of the gender-sensitivity problem that exists will be the first and perhaps most difficult step in ensuring this changes for the better, but with such research conducted and trialled, and tested recommendations and tools now available, this will be invaluable in the adoption of more gender-sensitive approaches in this field.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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Promoting Gender Equality in Research Institutions and Integration of the Gender Dimension in Research Contexts <http://www.gender-net.eu/> GENDER-NET Resources <http://www.gender-net.eu/spip.php?article55>

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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Inventory of Good Practices – Partner Template

Appendix 2 – Train the Trainer Training Materials (Main Training + Pilot Implementation Training)

Appendix 3 – Gender Sensitivity Toolkit

Appendix 4 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Implementation Toolkit

Appendix 5 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Scotland

Appendix 6 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Ireland

Appendix 7 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Finland

Appendix 8 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Shetland

Appendix 9 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Sweden

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Appendix 1 – Inventory of Good Practices – Partner Template

Project Partner: _____

Please add any weblink(s) (or attach the document(s) if no weblink is available) to the reply email as appropriate. If a document relates to more than one type of information just add the weblink once.

| Type of information | Name of document/Weblink |
|--|--------------------------|
| Gender sensitive coaching concepts examples (either aimed at employees or entrepreneurs), models or tools utilised | |
| Gender sensitive coaching survey or statistical data (analysis, performance data) | |
| Challenges and opportunities related to gender sensitive coaching (research studies, reports, policy documents) | |
| Lesson learned, recommendations, implementation blue-prints, good/best practice manuals | |
| Research work on how gender affects coaching | |

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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Appendix 2 – Train the Trainer Training Materials (Main Training + Pilot Implementation Training)



[Slide Deck & Materials Available Here](#)

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e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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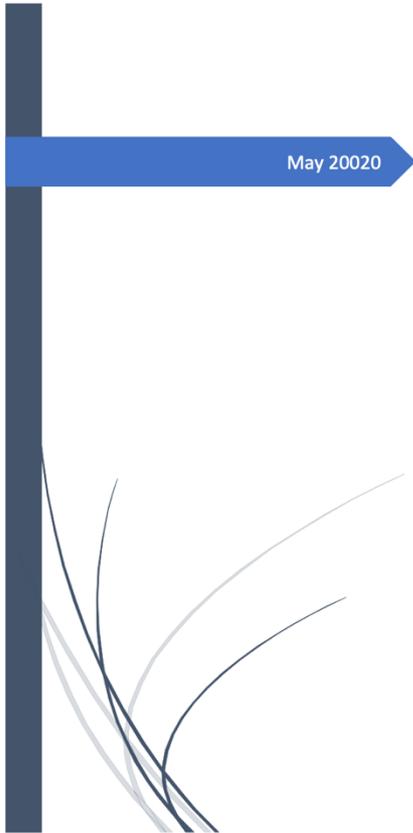




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Appendix 3 – Gender Sensitivity Toolkit



Gender Sensitivity Checklist

Gender Sensitivity Toolbox

Objective:

In gender-sensitive business supports, gender is consistently taken into account throughout the business support cycle. Women's participation in entrepreneurship and their uptake of business supports (coaching, mentoring, training) must be encouraged. Business Supports must address women's needs, as well as men's and their realities. Research on the gender question, to enhance understanding of gender issues in entrepreneurial business supports, should be promoted. The purpose is to aid the implementation of gender-awareness pre-assessment outputs and their integration into all phases of business support development, design and implementation. It will help ensure that gender-sensitivity is habitually included as a part of the process.

How to Use:

The checklist tool is to be used in the conjunction with the orientation wheel. Ensure that the all the perspectives are included, taking into account the context for each stakeholder – the business support providing organisation, the practitioner executing the coaching/mentoring/training, as well as the entrepreneurs. The checklist below is an example and should be adapted to the individual business support and localisation scenario. Information needed to address each phase should be drawn from the pre-assessment template which will help populate the orientation wheel and then create the checklist.

Helena Deane
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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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Appendix 4 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Implementation Toolkit



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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



Appendix 5 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Scotland

The pilot – rationale and method

Highlands and Islands Enterprise's *Equality Mainstreaming Report*³ sets out the organisation's commitment and approach to tackling inequalities. This is an approach developed over many years, and used to inform HIE's organisational Strategies and Operating Plans. In turn HIE's *Equality Impact Assessment* process⁴ is a key part of the process of ensuring that its products and services are free from bias, including being gender equal and gender sensitive.

The tools developed by the W-Power project focus on helping businesses and organisations develop and maintain cycles of continuous improvement to make their products and services more gender-sensitive. Although HIE already has policies and processes around gender equality in place, the W-Power pilot presented an opportunity to explore these issues further and try new approaches.

For the purposes of this pilot we selected a specific issue which is often cited as a barrier to women's engagement with business support services on an equal basis with men: childcare and other caring responsibilities. Our strategy was to explore - by means of adjusting the service in an attempt to mitigate the impact of these responsibilities - whether we could make a measurable difference to women's ability to engage with the support on offer.

One measure which is often suggested to help overcome the barrier to attendance posed by caring commitments is to hold events at a different time of day, most often in the evening, on the basis that children are in bed and/or other family members are at home to share caring responsibilities. Another approach is to deliver events online and record them for later catch-up viewing, though this inevitably means that viewers miss out on the benefits of live interaction with speakers and other participants and the ability to ask questions.

Recording events so they can be watched via catch-up is an approach which the W-Power online network of business learning and support has used from the start. Table 1 shows the pattern over time of catch-up viewing, and clearly indicates that the facility to engage with the content 'after the event' at a time more suitable for them is taken advantage of by a significant number of participants.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



Table 1: W-Power online events viewing figures over time 14th January – 2nd October 2020

| W-Power event | Date | Live event | Remote views to date end Jan 20 | Remote views to date end Feb 20 | Remote views to date end Mar 20 | Remote views to date end Apr 20 | Remote views to date end May 20 | Remote views to date end Jun 20 | Remote views to date end Jul 20 | Remote views to date end Aug 20 | Remote views to date end Sep 20 | Remote views to date end Oct 20 | Remote views to date end Nov 20 | Total views |
|--|-----------|------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Goal Setting and Making it Happen | 14 Jan 20 | 8 | 17 | 20 | 21 | 24 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 28 | 29 | 37 |
| <i>Time Management Tips</i> | 22 Jan 20 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 13 |
| Websites & social media Q&A | 30 Jan 20 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 14 |
| Sources of Finance | 6 Feb 20 | 5 | | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 11 |
| Female Entrepreneurship Funding | 14 Feb 20 | 5 | | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 8 |
| Small Business Finance | 18 Feb 20 | 3 | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Q&A on Starting a Small Business in Argyll | 21 Feb 20 | 5 | | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 8 |
| Investing in Your Marketing Strategy | 13 Mar 20 | 4 | | | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 7 |
| Tell Your Business Story Using Instagram | 31 Mar 20 | 7 | | | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 12 |
| Social Selling Using Facebook and Instagram | 2 Apr 20 | 6 | | | | 6 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 15 |
| Selling on Instagram Q&A | 17 Apr 20 | 6 | | | | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 |
| Live Case Study - ScotlandByMail | 24 Apr 20 | 7 | | | | 2 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 13 |
| LinkedIn for Business | 29 Apr 20 | 8 | | | | 3 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| Business Income Streams | 7 May 20 | 8 | | | | | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 17 |
| Automating recurring tasks, Google Analytics | 8 May 20 | 6 | | | | | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 11 |
| Live Case Study - Marketing Strategy & Plan | 22 May 20 | 7 | | | | | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 11 |
| Commercial Awareness | 2 Jun 20 | 10 | | | | | | 13 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 24 |
| Live Case Study - e-commerce* | 5 Jun 20 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | 5 |
| How Interface Can Support Your Business | 1 Jul 20 | 5 | | | | | | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| Preparing to Hire | 4 Aug 20 | 2 | | | | | | | | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 8 |

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|----|----|----|----|
| How to Go About Outsourcing | 19 Aug 20 | 5 | | | | | | | | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 12 |
| Your Podcast Questions Answered | 28 Aug 20 | 6 | | | | | | | | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 10 |
| 10 Ways to Generate Media Coverage | 24 Sep 20 | 7 | | | | | | | | | 10 | 10 | 10 | 17 |
| Follow-up PR Q&A | 2 Oct 20 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 6 |

However whilst running events in the evening to make them more convenient is common practice, the question of whether this actually increases participation rates at the live event had not previously to our knowledge been systematically explored.

Making a small change in service delivery, monitoring its impact and feeding learning into future service development is in line with the principles of continuous improvement outlined in the *W-Power Gender Sensitivity Toolkit Continuous Improvement Tool²*.

To operationalise the pilot, we selected a specific element of capacity building delivery within the W-Power network – the online Innovation Week held in late October 2020 – and scheduled a much greater proportion than usual of the W-Power events in the evening for the three days of the event.

Our normal pattern of delivery up until this point had been as follows:

Table 2: W-Power online capacity-building events by time of day

| Time of session | No. of sessions | Percentage of total |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Morning | 13 | 52% |
| Lunchtime | 4 | 16% |
| Afternoon | 7 | 28% |
| Evening | 1 | 4% |
| Total | 25 | 100% |

A little over half of the sessions had been delivered for the first time in the morning, just over a quarter in the afternoon, a handful at lunchtime (16%) and only one in the evening. The rationale for this was that as a business group it would be preferable to hold sessions during standard working hours so as not to cut into personal time in the evenings.

Attendance levels at the events the first time they were run/shown, by time of day, was as follows:

Table 3: Attendance at W-Power online capacity building events by time of day

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e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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| Time of session | No. of sessions | Total attendees | Attendees per session |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Morning | 13 | 81 | 6.2 |
| Lunchtime | 4 | 22 | 5.5 |
| Afternoon | 7 | 42 | 6 |
| Evening | 1 | 10 | 10 |
| Total | 25 | 155 | |

Although the numbers in Table 3 are too small for meaningful averages (in particular the evening event which was only one session), these figures do suggest that there would be merit in exploring the impact on attendance of running more events in the evening.

Having established the rationale for the pilot we set about creating a series of events programmed to run predominantly (though not exclusively) in evening timeslots for Innovation Week. The main events on two of the three days were programmed for the evening. A start-time of 7pm was selected in each case, and attendance at the live events was recorded.

Results

Table 4: Innovation Week programme of events and attendance levels, 19-21 October, 2021

| Date | Topic | No. attendees |
|----------------------|---|---------------|
| Mon 19th Oct | | |
| 7 pm | Cathy Higginson, W-Power Project Manager | 8 |
| 7.05pm | <u>What is Innovation</u> Short animated video by True North Innovation | 8 |
| 7.10pm | How to innovate: A hands-on innovation workshop | 9 |
| Tues 20th Oct | | |
| 12pm | <u>The Co-Innovate Programme</u> , A live webinar with Vicki Hazley, HIE Programme Manager | 7 |

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| | | |
|----------------------|--|----|
| 12.30pm | <u>Benefits of the Co-Innovate Programme</u> , An interview with Sarah Ewing from Celtic Compass | 8 |
| Weds 21st Oct | | |
| 11am | <u>Understanding, Creating and Communicating Value</u> an inspiring webinar with with Alistair Murray | 7 |
| 3pm | <u>Pitching your Business Value</u> an interview with Moira Newiss, Skirr Skin | 6 |
| 7pm | <u>Innovate your Business Processes using Digital Tools</u> a live webinar with Rene Looper | 5 |
| 8pm | 'A Journey of Innovation' An engaging conversation with Sadie Dixon-Spain | 15 |
| 9pm | Cathy Higginson, W-Power Project Manager, rounds off the week | 2 |

The results in Table 4 above show overall level of attendance was good, and higher than previous averages, probably due to the very focused and intensive publicity in the run-up to the Week. However, with the possible exception of the session at 8pm on 21st October, there was no noticeable uplift in numbers of attendees at the evening sessions.

Feedback was collected after the week through a short evaluation questionnaire. Only four attendees completed the questionnaire. They were evenly split on the question of time of day, with 2 having no preference as to the time of day events were run and two preferring the morning. No preference was expressed for evening events.

Discussion

Although this was a small pilot, it nevertheless provides some indicative data regarding adjusting the time of day events are held as a strategy to make business support more gender-sensitive.

Comparing the attendance levels for the Innovation Week series of events (held predominantly in the evening) with those held between January and early October (Table 1) mainly in daytime slots, no difference in levels of live attendance is evident. Indeed, what appears to be of greater benefit to W-Power members is the flexibility to consume content as and when suits them, possibly even in 'bite-size' chunks. Table 1 clearly

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



illustrates how viewing numbers for webinars build over time, and this proved also to be the case for the Innovation Week events (Table 5):

Table 5: Innovation Week attendance over time

| W-Power event | Date | Live event | Remote views to date end Jan 20 | Remote views to date end Feb 20 | Remote views to date end Mar 20 | Remote views to date end Apr 20 | Remote views to date end May 20 | Remote views to date end Jun 20 | Remote views to date end Jul 20 | Remote views to date end Aug 20 | Remote views to date end Sep 20 | Remote views to date end Oct 20 | Remote views to date end Nov 20 | Total views |
|--|-----------|------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Introduction to Innovation Week</i> | 19 Oct 20 | 8 | | | | | | | | | | 18 | 18 | 26 |
| <i>What is Innovation? A short animated video.</i> | 19 Oct 20 | 8 | | | | | | | | | | 17 | 17 | 25 |
| <i>How to Innovate: A hands-on workshop</i> | 19 Oct 20 | 9 | | | | | | | | | | 8 | 8 | 26 |
| The Co-Innovate Programme | 20 Oct 20 | 7 | | | | | | | | | | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| Benefits of the Co-Innovate Programme | 20 Oct 20 | 8 | | | | | | | | | | 29 | 29 | 37 |
| Understanding & Communicating Value | 21 Oct 20 | 7 | | | | | | | | | | 20 | 20 | 27 |
| Pitching Your Business Value | 21 Oct 20 | 6 | | | | | | | | | | 19 | 19 | 25 |
| <i>Inspiring Story - personal / business innovation*</i> | 21 Oct 20 | 15 | | | | | | | | | | 57 | 59 | 74 |
| <i>Innovate your Business Processes with Digital Tools</i> | 21 Oct 20 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | 8 | 8 | 13 |
| <i>Wrap Up of Innovation Week</i> | 21 Oct 20 | 2 | | | | | | | | | | 7 | 7 | 9 |

*Shared by the individual concerned through her own social media channels, which may account for the exceptional level of engagement.

The growth in viewing figures over time appears to be equally the case for events initially run in the evening as opposed to the daytime, which is to be expected given that when viewing via catch-up the original time the event was broadcast is essentially immaterial.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Time of day is often suggested as a solution to overcoming some of the barriers to women’s participation in business events, in particular the challenges of caring responsibilities. However our small pilot suggests that this is not the case.

In this small study time of day at which capacity-building events were held did not appear to affect level of attendance at all. Moreover feedback from participants did not identify the evening as a preferred time of day for attendance.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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It is important to note that numbers in this study were very small, and no details were collected from participants about their caring responsibilities, including in the feedback questionnaire (where numbers were especially small). That said, attendance levels nevertheless suggest that evening scheduling did not make a notable difference to women's ability to attend.

Given the findings of this small study, it may be that there are other equally if not more important factors that influence whether a participant attends a capacity building session or not. These may include: level of interest in the topic being covered / self-perceived skills gap; other commitments, either personal or business-related; general sense of isolation/engagement and consequent need for interaction and support; level of confidence attending live events as opposed to watching recordings; and technology or internet access challenges.

Further research including larger scale studies with the ability to produce statistically meaningful results are needed to build on the findings of this small indicative study before firm conclusions can be reached. However, based on the findings of this study, business support agencies planning online capacity building activities for female entrepreneurs should be cautious about relying on running events in the evening as a means of making them more accessible to women and hence more gender-sensitive. Careful thought needs to be given to other barriers to engagement women may experience and how these can be mitigated. Furthermore, events should always be recorded and made available for catch-up viewing.

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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



Northern Periphery and
Arctic Programme
2014-2020



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Appendix 6 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Sweden

W-Power Pilot for Gender Sensitive Business coaching and training program in Norrbotten during winter 2021

The pilot of gender sensitive business coaching included in W-Power Project Work Package 3 was carried out as a continuation of the business idea competition held in the region Norrbotten in autumn 2020. As an incentive for the competition, entrepreneurs who reached the final were offered the opportunity to participate in a tailor-made coaching programme for them in winter 2021.

The planning of the coaching programme was started together with project partners from Finland while the business competition was running in November 2020. The program in both regions was drawn up with the same content, but in the Norrbotten region, participation was offered to all 15 finalists, while in Finland only entrepreneurs who won the competition from North Karelia and Lapland regions were invited to participate in the programme. A dozen of the finalists in Norrbotten signed up and nine participated in the programme.

During the planning phase, the importance and appearance of gender-specificity was discussed both at the project group meetings, but also in the discussion with invited business coaches to implement the program. The importance of interaction in the program was emphasized to the experts.

The planning of the programme was based on an questionnaire sent to the participants in advance, which asked, about previous experience in business coaching, the preparation and implementation of a business plan, hopes for the topics of the programme and the time of the coaching, etc. The project team deliberately decided to select women as coaches, to strengthen a safe and interactional atmosphere. In addition, the three entrepreneurs who won the competition were offered the opportunity to provide individual advice on business planning (3h) and the optional area (1.5h).

Implementation of the coaching

The programme was started with a joint kick-off event that presented the content and schedule of the programme. This meeting was reserved for entrepreneurs and coaches to introduce themselves and familiarise with each other. The aim was to create a climate of trust from the first meeting, which was also reinforced by a non-disclosure agreement binding on all participants.

The first two webinars in business planning and business economics were implemented in February 2020, during the 5th program period. Webinars on branding and personal management were heard in March 2020, during 6th program period.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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All the webinars of the coaching programme were digitally accustomed and involved advance tasks prepared by the coaches. Before the start of the pilot, the coaches were instructed to design webinars to be inclusive and they were also asked to give time for participants' questions, discussion and exchange of experiences.

Participants were also presented with a Business Model Canvas modified in the W-Power project. However, this was not used in joint counselling sessions, but the discussions focused also on issues relating in particular to women's entrepreneurship, such as well-being at work, managing one's own life, entrepreneurship and private life balance, adequate leisure and rest periods and livelihoods.

Feedback of the coaching

Entrepreneurs committed themselves to participating in the programme commendably. Feedback on the guidance was collected both in writing and verbally, and they were given either a very good or a good overall value. The coaches' grip was perceived as professional, inspiring and value-creating. Many entrepreneurs were already familiar with business planning and business economics, but it was felt necessary to review and update the topics. In particular, sustainability and trends in the 2020s were praised in connection with business planning. Entrepreneurs found it very useful to work on their own company's affairs during coaching.

The time given in the coaching for the discussion between the participants and their own questions was also praised. The participants hoped also personal guidance, but at the same time it was also mentioned that even a larger steering group could be good for interaction and networking. The women-only group was also considered necessary in order to better highlight the starting points for women's entrepreneurship and women's perspective in business planning.

In the overall assessments, the advice on gender-specificity was also successful, although direct feedback on this question was received from only three participants. In this question, participants were asked to assess whether the advice succeeded in taking into account the needs of women, including the time of advice, subjects, content and the advice methods used.

After the actual pilot, two online follow-up meetings were held in May and September 2021, when the participants were able to share the news of their companies. The events also reviewed 10 good starting points for a sustainable growth environment from the implementation of the business plan.

As an organizer, I was delighted when one of the entrepreneurs during the last meeting stated that participating in the coaching programme had been a more valuable prize for her than the financial gain from the business competition!

Written by Päivi Sainio Rohner, Strukturum Ab 21-12-2021

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie





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Appendix 7 – Gender Sensitivity Pilot Finland

W-Power Pilot for Gender Sensitive Business coaching and training program in Finland during spring 2021

Helena Puhakka-Tarvainen, Karelia University of Applied Sciences
Reeta Sipola, Lapland University of Applied Sciences

The gender-sensitive business coaching pilot for female entrepreneurs in Finland was organized during spring 2021 as a joint effort between the North Karelia and Lapland regions. The target group for the coaching pilot were the entrepreneurs, who succeeded in the business idea competitions held in both regions during autumn 2020. Responsible organizers were Karelia and Lapland Universities of Applied Sciences and Business Joensuu Ltd.

Planning the gender-sensitive business coaching pilot

The planning of the coaching pilot was started together with the project partners from North Karelia, Lapland and Northern Sweden already in autumn 2020, while the business idea competitions were still running regionally. It was agreed in the early stage that there would be a joint pilot with all the winners from the ongoing Finnish business idea competitions thus, approximately 5-8 entrepreneurs. The gender-sensitive business coaching was set as one of the rewards already in the call of applications for the business idea competition.

The planning team of the coaching included the project team members, of which the Business Joensuu members were especially valuable with their long experience in business advisory and coaching. Also, an external expert with a long career with women entrepreneurs and development initiatives was invited. At later stage, all the selected coaches were involved to co-create the practical coaching contents. The training materials and tools created during the W-Power project lifetime were benefitted as a baseline for the pilot.

During the planning stage, especially the importance and appearance of gender-sensitivity in the coaching implementation was discussed. As a result, the following seven viewpoints to promote the gender aspect were defined:

Implementing a pre-survey to the participants for mapping the needs and wishes for the coaching. Also, collecting feedback is crucial for developing the concept.

Creating a flexible timetable. The preferable times should be asked from the target group (morning /afternoon /evening /weekdays /weekends /etc.). It would be also useful to ask whether the participants prefer on site, online or hybrid approach.

Tailored Business Model Canvas should be delivered to participants as a pre-assignment. The tailored BMC considers also some personal aspects instead of pure business figures.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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The actual training should be implemented in a way that the emphasis would be in trustful interaction and peer-discussions. Women coaches as role models might be worth considering, among other experts. Also, signing a non-disclosure agreement by each participant is worth considering.

Taking personal history, individual needs and business sector into account would be crucial thus, a holistic approach. Entrepreneurs are too often considered as a solid mass with similar background – versatility is ignored. E.g. tailored (private) coaching sessions could be useful.

Wellbeing at work and self-management – multiple roles as a woman. A female entrepreneur is rarely experiencing herself primarily as an entrepreneur but rather a mother, wife or something else. It is important to boost this multi-personality and find the strength from the multi-professionalism rather than considering it just a burden.

Boosting the ambition as a businesswoman – including the salary and free time into the calculations. Too often the business plans are made with very low-income expectations, because the entrepreneurship is just so fun. It is important to show that even a fun business can and should be profitable.

Implementation of the coaching pilot

Before starting the actual pilot, deeper understanding for the implementation needs were asked from the participants as a pre-survey (step 1 of the seven viewpoints above). Questions included, for example, previous participation in business coaching activities, experience in writing a business plan, wishes for the coaching topics and preferable type and timings for the coaching sessions (step 2). The tailored W-Power Business Model Canvas template was delivered to the participants as a pre-assignment (step 3).

The Finnish coaching pilot was organized as a hybrid approach (step 2). The participants both in North Karelia and Lapland were able to gather together in a joint venue in their home regions, and the regions were connected on line by MS Teams. In the first session, the coach was also present on site in Joensuu, North Karelia. In the first session, most of the participants were participating on site in Joensuu with the coach and project team, but later on the online participation was most common. Before the first session, non-disclosure agreements were signed by all the participants to keep the confidentiality.

The coaching pilot in Finland consisted of four group coaching sessions and 1-2 tailored private coaching sessions for each participant. Private coaching sessions were implemented under the de minimis rule. The group coaching sessions (3 hours /each) included the following themes:

Business Model Planning, Financials & Future Growth Goals

Branding and Productization

Target groups and Marketing

Well-being and Competences for Growth

All group coaching sessions included gender-sensitive themes as a cross-cutting approach. Three different coaches were selected based on their experience and specific knowledge. All coaching sessions were held in Finnish and recorded.

The participants were also allowed to choose 1-2 x 1,5 hours private coaching sessions based on the themes of the group coaching sessions. The private coaching sessions were reserved directly from the coach in question and the contents were tailored. After the pilot, coaches delivered a summary list of

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie



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private coaching sessions for the project managers, but otherwise the sessions were confidential between the coach and the participants. The topics for the private coaching sessions were wide: some of the entrepreneurs needed support for calculating the business plan numbers, some for patenting issues and some for time-management, among others.

Feedback and conclusions

After the full coaching process, an anonymous feedback survey was sent to all participants. We got replies from 5 of total number of 7 companies. From some companies several co-entrepreneurs participated to the coaching, but the feedback was received only from one representative per company.

Altogether, the feedback collected from the participants was encouraging. Especially the private coaching was felt to be beneficial, but also the discussions with the other participants were considered to be fruitful. The hybrid approach was both liked and disliked – for some online approach was the only way to be able to participate e.g. due to long distances or time management, but some participants emphasized that the virtual presence can never replace the face-to-face discussion.

The entrepreneurs committed themselves well to participate in the process. In each of the group coaching session at least 5 of 7 companies were participating the full sessions. After the first time, the group coaching sessions were also recorded because some of the participants were struggling with the time. This is of course not optimal in relation of the live discussions and networking, but better than nothing.

Entrepreneurs found it very useful to work on their own company's affairs during the coaching. On the other hand, some of them felt that the advance level of the participants varied too much thus, some were true beginners and some were very experienced in entrepreneurship even though in this process with a new business idea. Based on that, in the future it would be beneficial to form the coaching groups within similar business readiness level.

Also, it might have been more fruitful to have two separate local coaching groups instead of combining two regions. A joint effort increased the networking aspect, but honestly decreased the level of grouping. The only one full live session in Joensuu enabled the networking far more than the other sessions altogether. Also, this time the coaches were selected based on their specialization and totally three different coaches were participating in the implementation. On the other hand, it gave a possibility to find a tailored expert for the private coaching sessions, but on the other hand, made the coaching process of the four group coaching sessions a bit fragmented. More strict collaborations would have been needed to unify the process and avoid overlapping.

Overall, the coaching pilot received good feedback and the participants felt they got input to develop their businesses further. Time, geographical distances and the covid regulations caused some difficulties in the actual implementation, but the hybrid pilot was a good compromise. Great experiences and feedback were received to develop the concept further. There is also potential to increase the level of gender-sensitive aspects in the future trials.

Ms Helena Deane & Alison McGonagle
e-mail amcgonagle@westbic.ie