

WORKBOOK

Getting started
with **peer-to-
peer coaching:**
learning from
and with each
other



the
learning
company

Kessels & Smit

Colophon

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Compilation

This workbook was compiled by Rosa Helmantel, Ilse Boersma, Maddeleine Berendsen and Saskia Tjepkema. They gratefully drew upon formats frequently used by colleagues at Kessels & Smit, *The Learning Company*, as well as insights gained through facilitating peer-to-peer coaching sessions.

Design

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Sources

It is not always easy to trace who originally developed a particular peer-to-peer coaching method, in some cases, multiple versions are in circulation. The sources have been acknowledged as carefully as possible.

Welcome to this workbook

Peer-to-peer coaching is an effective and easy-to-organise way of learning. It can be used as part of a personal professional development programme or an organisational development trajectory, or as a stand-alone activity. We frequently apply it in our advisory and coaching practice. Not only is it effective, people also genuinely enjoy supporting one another with challenging issues. In this way, peer-to-peer coaching also strengthens connections between colleagues.

As facilitators, we are always temporarily connected to a peer-to-peer coaching group. Very often, these groups continue independently afterwards. With this workbook, we aim to provide a practical guide for doing so.

You will find here:

- an overview of **key principles** and success factors for peer-to-peer coaching. What is it and how does it work?
- a number of **peer-to-peer coaching methods** that we frequently use ourselves, with concise explanations. Some groups prefer to use the same method each time, while others enjoy varying the format. Most methods are widely applicable. Where there are specific considerations, these are mentioned in the explanation.
- **reflection tools** to help you prepare thoroughly, whether as facilitator or participant, so that you gain the most from peer-to-peer coaching.
- several observations and **experiences** from the practice of our facilitators.

We wish you much enjoyment in reading this workbook and, above all, inspiring peer-to-peer coaching conversations!





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1 What is peer-to-peer coaching?

“Peer-to-peer coaching is a structured, self-directed learning process aimed at enhancing the professional effectiveness of each participant. Its distinguishing feature is collegial, mutual coaching based on a concrete work situation.” We could hardly formulate it more clearly than in this quotation by Ger van Doorn and Marijke Lingsma (2012).

In peer-to-peer coaching, you are given the opportunity to reflect on your own actions and thinking with the support of colleagues or fellow professionals. It is a way of learning together from your own and one another's questions, challenges and successes arising from professional practice. By engaging in a structured conversation about what someone in the group is experiencing and where they feel stuck, all participants are invited and challenged to articulate their own thoughts and questions about the situation and to explore different perspectives. From this, new directions for solutions and fresh insights emerge.

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What does it look like?

In practical terms, peer-to-peer coaching takes shape when a group of approximately six to eight participants focuses on one person's case. This case presenter outlines what they are struggling with and the (internal) question or personal dilemma that arises from it.

A structured conversation then follows in which the others, using a specific working format, ask in-depth questions, mirror observations, explore assumptions, and offer alternative courses of action, in other words, they examine the issue in various ways. The final step involves harvesting the outcomes by the case presenter. They integrate the different perspectives in order to arrive at new approaches, solutions and (self-)insights. Often, there is also space at the end for a brief process evaluation and for participants to share what they themselves learned from the exploration.

Sometimes only one case is addressed; at other times, there is room for multiple rounds. Meetings typically last around two hours. Because groups meet repeatedly (sometimes even for years), everyone will eventually have the opportunity to bring forward a case.

This approach engages colleagues in an exploratory, in-depth dialogue in which everyone learns. Contributing to someone else's reflection can sometimes be just as instructive as exploring your own question.

Peer-to-peer coaching therefore differs from a traditional case discussion, as is sometimes common in healthcare settings, for example. In such discussions, the focus is solely on the situation itself, and the aim is to determine the best course of action. In peer-to-peer coaching, the focus is always on the relationship between the person presenting the case (and the way they think, view and act) and the issue itself. As a participant, you are therefore “in the picture”, the conversation concerns you.

As Erik de Haan and Yvonne Burger (2021) formulate it: *“Peer-to-peer coaching aims to enhance someone’s professionalism by discussing their person in relation to specific experiences and issues. It concerns matters such as how this person collaborates with others, operates in advisory situations, handles challenging situations with clients, forms judgements, and so forth. These topics are not directly linked to technical content, but to the person and the knowledge and skills they possess, their way of acting, judging, and so on. This makes peer-to-peer coaching suitable for mixed groups of professionals from different (sub)disciplines.”*

Peer-to-peer coaching is also not merely a round of “tips and advice”, although this may sometimes form part of the chosen format. All participants reflect and explore for themselves. This leads to fresh ways of viewing the issue and new courses of action for the person presenting the case. The others also learn, and something develops “between the participants” when you do this regularly.

What can you use peer-to-peer coaching for?

Peer-to-peer coaching is suitable for people who wish to reflect with others on how they work. What did I do? Why did I do it this way (and not differently)? How would I like to proceed? What do I need for that?

It is about learning: being open to new approaches, insights and perspectives, and letting go of unhelpful patterns in thinking and acting.

You can use peer-to-peer coaching in various configurations and around different types of themes. For example, personal development or leadership. Sometimes peer-to-peer coaching is linked to developing and embedding a particular approach, or to a substantive organisational issue. A few examples:

- All managers of an insurance company participate in a leadership programme. In addition to inspiration from speakers and practical workshops, there is space for peer-to-peer coaching, in which participants explore personal leadership challenges in small groups. It is hoped that the peer-to-peer coaching groups will continue after the programme has ended.
- A secondary school wishes to focus on pedagogy and does not want to impose a pedagogical vision. Instead, it wants to give teachers the space to reflect on how they shape certain pedagogical values in their work, and in which situations they find this difficult or challenging. In

Peer-to-peer coaching is suitable for people who wish to reflect with others on how they work

peer-to-peer coaching groups, teachers discuss pedagogical challenges. After a year, something resembling a shared pedagogical vision begins to emerge.

- An architectural firm has six young new employees. The firm is too small for a separate onboarding programme, although everyone does have their own mentor. In addition, the new colleagues meet every few weeks for peer-to-peer coaching around issues they encounter as young architects. These include maintaining work-life balance, collaboration issues and challenging conversations, both with internal colleagues and with clients. There appears to be considerable overlap in the challenges each person experiences. They deliberately choose peer-to-peer coaching formats that also help them discover their own talents and drivers. During the first year, the sessions are facilitated; afterwards they continue independently, and everyone finds that they have come to know not only themselves, but also one another, much better.

- A youth care organisation has introduced a new approach to family support. A short introductory course at the beginning of the year, together with several e-learning modules, is sufficient to explain it. To support experienced professionals in the challenges they subsequently encounter in practice, peer-to-peer coaching groups are set up. Here, staff members exchange experiences about situations and questions they encounter within families and within the internal organisation. Very soon, people begin to connect with one another outside the peer-to-peer coaching groups as well, for small questions or to reflect briefly. In this way, a valuable foundation for learning in practice is created.
- Six directors of different types of educational organisations find that they encounter issues in practice that they cannot easily discuss with others within their own organisations. They decide to establish a peer-to-peer coaching group together: once every two and a half months they meet for an entire afternoon and support one another in each person's (self-)inquiry. They recognise similar dynamics in one another and in each other's organisations and help one another navigate them. The free space to exchange ideas and to put their own uncertainties, blind spots and questions on the table proves valuable for each of them. Some of them also have individual coaching, while others attend leadership training programmes. The peer-to-peer coaching complements these.

The power of learning from what works

Finally: many peer-to-peer coaching methods are built around problems and issues in which people feel stuck. Understandably so there is energy there, and you want to help one another move forward.

In our practice, however, we have discovered that it is equally worthwhile to incorporate a positive angle. For example, by looking at what is already working and which talents the case presenter possesses, or by occasionally placing a success at the centre of the conversation.

Peer-to-peer coaching contributes, among other things, to:

- Solving participants' concrete problems
- Learning in the workplace (both in terms of general skills such as leadership and collaboration, and specific professional competencies)
- Strengthening reflective skills and self-knowledge (what are my talents and drivers, what beliefs do I hold?)
- Conversation skills (such as probing further and summarising...)
- Sharing personal and tacit knowledge
- Strengthening mutual connection: people get to know one another better
- Developing shared ways of working or shared points of departure

Want to read more about peer-to-peer coaching?

For this chapter, we have drawn on our own practice and on the books listed below. If you would like to read more in depth about peer-to-peer coaching, we warmly recommend the following:

- De Haan, E. (2001). *Leren met collega's*. Uitgeverij van Gorcum.
- Doorn, G. van & Lingsma, M. (2012) *Intervisiecoaching: kortdurende begeleiding van lerende groepen*. Boom uitgevers.



Before you begin: reflection questions

Peer-to-peer coaching is about more than technique or methods. Your attitude as facilitator and as participant has a major impact. That is why it is important to reflect beforehand on what you consider important in peer-to-peer coaching and why. This ensures that you are clear about what you want from a peer-to-peer coaching session and how you can fulfil your role effectively. Below you will find several questions that can support your personal reflection and that you can also use to initiate a conversation about this theme with other participants.

What is, for you, the function and significance of peer-to-peer coaching? What is it for, and what makes it important to you?

What was the most inspiring peer-to-peer coaching session you ever experienced (whether you facilitated it yourself or attended as a participant)? What happened then? Why is it a strong example for you? And what does that say about what you consider important in peer-to-peer coaching?

Does an “anti-example” also come to mind? A session of which you think: I would rather never do it like that again? What was missing in that peer-to-peer coaching session that is apparently essential to you? (In other words: what does this example also reveal about what you find important?)

What talents do you bring to peer-to-peer coaching? What comes naturally to you and gives you energy and how can you use that when facilitating or participating in peer-to-peer coaching?

What outcome do you envision when facilitating or participating in peer-to-peer coaching? What do you hope the sessions will lead to? (How does everyone leave the session? What do they take away? What will they do afterwards? And you yourself? ...)



2. Important beforehand: success factors and roles

Ingredients for successful peer-to-peer coaching

The atmosphere and the way people engage have a strong influence on the quality of the conversation. Peer-to-peer coaching benefits from:

- participants who bring a personal issue;
- ownership: ideally, every participant feels jointly responsible for the process and actively contributes to ensuring a meaningful input and outcome for everyone;
- voluntariness and eagerness to learn: it works best when everyone genuinely wants to learn;
- confidentiality and the trust that is built within the group.

Organisation also matters. What helps is:

- a conversation format that provides structure and a clear progression;
- regular meetings and an appropriate rhythm. Meeting once every 6 to 8 weeks works well within a trajectory; groups that stay together longer often move to meeting 4 to 5 times per year;
- a facilitator who structures the conversation. This may be a fixed person or a role that rotates within the group.

Your role as a participant

As a participant, you may bring a case to the peer-to-peer coaching session with the aim of learning from it. It helps if you are clear about what you want to gain from the discussion and why, and if you share that with your group members. You determine the boundaries of what you do and do not discuss.

When you do not bring a case yourself, you can support others from an open and curious stance by asking questions or offering advice, depending on what the peer-to-peer coaching format calls for. It is helpful if everyone follows the chosen structure, as it is designed to help the group engage in a meaningful learning conversation and to ensure that everyone's contribution has space.

Your role as facilitator

As a facilitator, you play an important role in safeguarding the quality of the process and psychological safety. You do this at the start by:

- being transparent about what you will and will not do as facilitator, and what you expect from others;
- contracting confidentiality with the group;
- agreeing with the group to speak as little as possible about "third parties": if others appear in the case (which is often the case), your conversation still centres on the case presenter and how they interpret the situation, what they struggle with, what they find difficult, where they see opportunities, what they are puzzling over... that is your focus;
- emphasising that learning is the goal, and that everyone is invited to learn (whether or not they bring a case).

Subsequently, in each conversation you help the group move through the different peer-to-peer coaching steps by:

- ensuring a good start, where everyone checks in and you jointly select a case (see chapter 3);
- safeguarding the steps of the chosen working format, both in terms of quality (for example: during a round of in-depth questioning it is not the intention that participants start giving advice) and in terms of time;
- listening carefully to the type of questions being asked and, where necessary, steering the process (it is wise to agree on this at the beginning). Ideally, questions are open and exploratory.

As facilitator, you remain alert to whether the case presenter remains at the centre of the peer-to-peer coaching and whether they still feel comfortable with the inquiry. In addition, you keep an eye on how the other participants are doing and stimulate active participation from everyone.

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Getting started... a short checklist

You are about to start working with peer-to-peer coaching, as a participant or as a facilitator.

Which ingredients for successful peer-to-peer coaching are definitely present in your group?

Which ones would you still like to check?

What agreements would you like to make with your fellow group members?

3. A good start: checking in and selecting a case

At the very first peer-to-peer coaching meeting, it is important to agree on how you will work together. You agree on basic rules, such as confidentiality, and contract each person's role. How do you then begin each subsequent meeting? The following suggestions may help you reflect on this.

Check-in

The first step in every peer-to-peer coaching conversation is a check-in. This helps to set the tone and allows everyone to "arrive". There are various ways to do this.

Some groups prefer to have a more extensive round in response to questions such as: "How are you?" or "How are you arriving today?" Others keep it very brief and move directly to identifying cases. You can also use more creative check-in formats, such as: choose a card or photo that symbolises how you are feeling. Or begin the session with a poem. Creative forms, such as poems or cards, help to stimulate imagination and shift attention to the present moment. People often arrive with full minds. Taking a moment to connect and slow down helps everyone enter "reflection mode".

How did it go (since last time...)?

Participants who presented a case in the previous session often appreciate the opportunity to briefly share how things have progressed. Conversely, the other participants are usually curious to hear about it. You can give this brief attention.

As facilitator and group, you ensure that you do not dive back into the issue in full, nor turn it into a moment of judgement or checking compliance ("Did you follow the steps you had thought of?"). It is primarily an update, which not only strengthens connection but often also enhances learning.

Selecting a case

At each meeting, you select a case to work on. There are different ways to do this.

A familiar approach is for everyone to briefly describe a current issue they would like to explore and indicate whether there is high or low urgency. The group then consults briefly and selects one question. You consider aspects such as: who has already presented and who has not? Which issue is interesting for everyone (for example, because it may also apply to them)? What is the level of urgency? A variation is "the top hat", where everyone writes their question on a piece of paper, which are then mixed in a (real or imaginary) hat. Someone draws one.



Whichever approach you choose, the final word always lies with the case presenter: do you indeed wish to place your issue before the group at this moment?

Because everyone has reflected on their own issue in this step, all participants are present with a learning focus. At the end of the session, it often becomes clear that everyone has gained something relevant for their own question, even if it was not central.

NB: it may help to send an email in advance to give everyone time to think. In that email, you can also define the scope of cases in line with the purpose of the peer-to-peer coaching group (for example: if it is part of a leadership programme, you might ask: "Think back to the learning goals you formulated at the start of this trajectory. What situation have you recently experienced, or is currently relevant, that connects to these goals and that you would like to explore? Perhaps because it challenges you or because you feel there is something to learn." In other settings, you may provide a different focus.)

It can also be enjoyable to invite participants to share a successful moment! Something that went well, that they look back on positively, and that they would like to unpack in peer-to-peer coaching in order to learn from what works (in that case, use the format "Learning from successes").

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4. Working formats

Once everyone has arrived and the case is on the table, the peer-to-peer coaching facilitator and/or the case presenter selects a working format. Briefly explain which format you will use, so that everyone can tune into that way of working. If necessary, indicate where you as facilitator will steer firmly (for example, on time or on ensuring open questions are asked). Each peer-to-peer coaching method has its own specific emphases, and naming these makes it easier to intervene if necessary.

In the remainder of this book, we present a range of **working formats** for inspiration. Very well-known and broadly applicable approaches include:

- The five-step method (and the incident method as a shorter variant)
- Progress-focused peer-to-peer coaching
- ‘Socratic’ peer-to-peer coaching
- Learning from successes

If you have been working together longer, have less time available, have a very specific issue, or are working with a very large group, you may wish to vary your approach. Therefore, you will also find explanations of:

- The ‘gossip’ method, enjoyable when the group is well attuned and ideal when time is limited
- The crossroads of choice, for when someone is truly uncertain which direction to take: continue, stop, accept?
- De Bono’s Thinking Hats, highly suitable for consciously practising different perspectives
- Speed sparring, energetic and suitable for larger groups (up to 50 people!)

Throughout, you will find **practice stories** from several of our colleagues. We also include an intermezzo on **types of questions**, because they are such an important ingredient.

“

A Benedictine walk with Sanne



Arriving at speed

What I often notice in peer-to-peer coaching sessions is that people rush in at great speed. They come running straight out of their work practice, where there is often urgency and tempo. If it does not succeed in finding calm at the beginning, you notice that the questions participants bring remain somewhat superficial. Or that they struggle to formulate a question at all. And once you begin working together, participants may not feel the space to work methodically. Before you know it, they jump to solutions, for example.

Calm and slowing down

That is why I devote considerable attention to creating calm and slowing down at the start of a peer-to-peer coaching meeting. A format I particularly appreciate for this is the Benedictine walk. It truly enables you to conduct a valuable peer-to-peer coaching session in a short time. I give participants the following instructions:

If it does not succeed in finding calm at the beginning, you notice that the questions participants bring remain somewhat superficial

Set a timer for 7 minutes and go outside; walk while following the steps.

- Speak about the question or questions you have. Use the full 7 minutes. The other person only listens. You do not begin the second round until the 7 minutes have passed.
- For the next 7 minutes, both of you remain silent and allow what you have said or heard to settle. Do not move to the next round until the 7 minutes are over.
- Only in this third round do you have a conversation about the issue together. In the final minute, try to summarise the essence of the question so that you can present it to the plenary group afterwards.
- After these three rounds, switch roles and repeat the steps.

Upon returning, I ask participants to briefly share something about their issue, and then we jointly choose one question to work on.

The effect of a Benedictine walk

I see that participants often experience calm simply by walking, away from the environment in which they work every day. It is almost a form of meditation. As a result, people gain a better understanding of their own question. They are also better able to engage with the other person's issue. There is more attention to what truly matters to that person. After walking, participants often feel a greater sense of connection with their colleague.

What I personally consider very important in peer-to-peer coaching is that participants feel seen, heard and valued by their colleagues. I see this happening more through this way of working. People become energised by it, and the quality of relationships improves.



The five-step method

Perhaps the most classical peer-to-peer coaching method, applicable to many types of issues. It starts from a concrete problem. The case presenter receives substantive advice, and the others discover something about their own analysis or perspective on the question. It is an excellent entry-level format.

Step 1. The problem on the table

The case presenter introduces their problem and briefly explains it. The others ask a few short, informative questions to clarify what the issue is about. The sole purpose in this phase is to understand what it concerns.

Step 2. Exploring the question

The facilitator invites everyone (except the case presenter) to write down two questions for themselves. The art is to formulate open questions that shed light on the relationship between the case presenter and the situation.

Everyone reads out their questions, and the facilitator writes them on the flip chart (or you may use sticky notes). The case presenter listens carefully and notices what the questions do to them. They do not respond yet.

The facilitator ensures that each question is given space and that the atmosphere allows the case presenter to let the questions sink in. Reflection already begins here.



The case presenter then evaluates the questions: which are warm, neutral or cold?

- Warm means: this question feels connected to my problem, or may lead to a new insight.
- Cold: this does not touch the core for me, or it leads me to familiar ground.
- Neutral: this seems relevant, but I am not sure whether it connects to my problem.

They do not reflect on this for too long; it concerns their first impression.

NB Group members do not respond to the evaluation, even if they feel disappointed or believe they see a blind spot. The facilitator prevents reactions or discussion. The aim is to give the case presenter space to weigh the questions.

The case presenter then answers the questions one by one, in the order that suits them.

Step 3. Towards a problem definition

All group members now consider for themselves what they believe the case presenter's core problem or question is. They write it down, beginning with the formulation: "My question/problem is..."

Everyone reads out their formulation, and someone writes them on the flip chart so they are visible to all.

The case presenter reviews them calmly and then reformulates their question/problem on the basis of these definitions. The essence of the question is now on the table.

Step 4. Advising and thinking along

The facilitator invites all participants to formulate at least one piece of advice for the case owner. The case presenter responds: what resonates? What would they like to work with? They develop a brief direction for action, thinking aloud. The facilitator ensures they are given space to do so.



Step 5. Evaluating

The case presenter evaluates the entire process: how did they experience it? What insights did they gain about themselves and the issue? What were eye-openers or confirmations? What was particularly useful?



When to use?

An accessible and broadly applicable format, also suitable for introducing the principle of peer-to-peer coaching. It is easy to explain, and participants immediately experience what distinguishes peer-to-peer coaching from an ordinary conversation: the clear ownership of the case presenter and the emphasis on questions and reflection to support learning.



How much time do you need?

With six to eight participants, the five-step method takes between 45–60 minutes. Especially exploring the question and defining the problem require time.

If you have less time, a shortened version is explained below. The incident method can be conducted in 30–45 minutes.

SOURCES:

- Haan, E. de & Y. Burger (2006) *Leren met collega's: praktijkboek intercollegiale consultatie*. Koninklijke van Gorcum.
- Brasser, A. (2010) *Organisatieopstellingen binnen intervisie*. Amsterdam: Nelissen/Boom.



Shortened variant: the incident method

Step 1. The chosen incident

The case presenter explains their situation, including what they have done so far and where they became stuck, and formulates their question. The facilitator invites the others to listen and write down their questions.

Step 2. Information round

Participants take turns asking open and informative questions. These may concern content, procedure, relationships, feelings and the role of the case presenter. The case presenter responds briefly each time.

Step 3. Analysis of the situation

Participants then discuss among themselves how they view the situation, what causes they identify, what triggers they see, how contextual factors played a role, and so on. The case presenter does not participate and only listens.

Step 4. Round of advice

Each group member gives one piece of advice: "If I were you, I would..."

Step 5. Outcome

The case presenter has the final word and responds to the advice. What resonates and why? (They do not need to analyse every piece of advice.) The case presenter states their next action.

Step 6. Evaluation

The facilitator invites the case presenter to reflect on the process: how did they experience it? What was valuable? Then everyone briefly reflects on what they learned and experienced.



Litty's question round



You can learn to ask good questions

In peer-to-peer coaching meetings, I often notice that people find it difficult to ask good questions. They really need to learn this together. How do you ask a question without judgement, assumptions or advice? And which questions truly help the other person?

It is encouraging to see that people are often motivated to learn this. After all, it is a skill that can be helpful in many situations. That is why I always make a point of continuously strengthening the group's learning capacity in this area.

The question round

One of my favourite formats is the question round. It is a shortened version of the five-step method. It works as follows:

1. The case presenter introduces their case.
2. The other participants write down all the questions that occur to them on separate sticky notes.
3. They present these questions to the case presenter.
4. The case presenter sorts the questions into three categories:
1) This question does not set anything in motion, 2) Hmm, this question lingers somewhat, 3) This question resonates.
5. The case presenter then answers only those questions that they indicated as resonating.

Which questions work?

I observe several valuable effects when working with the question round. First of all, the format ensures that ownership truly remains with the case presenter. They determine what the conversation will focus on and have the freedom to decide which questions are helpful and therefore addressed, and which are not.

The question round also has an effect on the other participants. Because the case presenter indicates the impact of the questions asked, the others learn something about which types of questions are helpful for that person. What I find particularly interesting about this format is that participants also learn not to become overly attached to their own question. It is not about whether your question is the best one, but about whether, as a group, our questions can help the case presenter. An effective question very often produces silence rather than an immediate answer. And which question will do that, you never know in advance...

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Progress-focused peer-to-peer coaching

In progress-focused peer-to-peer coaching, developed by Coert Visser, you do not immediately delve deeply into the issue. Instead, you first invite everyone to identify what they already appreciate in the case presenter's approach.

This round of compliments not only affects the case presenter (who is often focused on what they are not yet doing well...), but also influences the questioners. Their questions and advice tend to align much more closely with the strengths of the case presenter.

In addition to the general peer-to-peer coaching ground rules, it is helpful to agree on the following beforehand, as this format follows a clear rhythm:

- Participants contribute concisely when given the floor.
- If, as a participant, you need time to think, you may say "I'll pass."
- You make as many rounds as necessary so that all questions and input are addressed (in steps 3 and 4, multiple rounds are often needed).



Step 1. Sharing

The case presenter describes the issue they would like to discuss with the group. They also explain why they would like to receive advice and what the advice should focus on. In other words, they provide the group with a clear question. For example: "How can I...?"

Step 2. Complimenting

After the description, the other participants indicate what they find strong in the way the case presenter handled the situation, and why. The case presenter does not respond yet.

Step 3. Questions

The facilitator introduces the question round by recalling the original question and inviting participants: "What would you still like to know in order to be able to offer advice on that question?"

Participants take turns asking one factual and open question about the case. One question per participant. The case presenter answers as concretely and concisely as possible.

Rounds continue until participants have no more questions, in other words, until they know enough to provide advice. Participants may also pass.

Step 4. Tips

The facilitator introduces the advice round: you now have sufficient information to offer a suggestion that may help the case presenter move forward with their question. The facilitator repeats the question once more to maintain focus and then invites everyone to give advice.

Participants give their tips one by one, in a round, always in the same order. The round continues until the tips are exhausted.



Step 5. Receiving

The facilitator invites the case presenter to respond to the advice, particularly in light of the question: what can you work with? What supports your thinking? It is not necessary to evaluate every tip. The invitation is simply to take from it what helps them move forward.

Thinking aloud, the case presenter explains which pieces of advice appeal to them: what can they use? What has the entire round taught them?



When to use?

This is also a broadly applicable format and can be used when time is limited (in that case, it is important to limit the number of rounds in steps 3 and 4). The compliment round makes it particularly suitable for groups that are just starting. It gives everyone a sense of appreciation. For the case presenter, it is less daunting to bring forward an issue, as they also receive recognition for what they are already doing well. For the other participants, it is equally pleasant to be able to articulate that.



How much time do you need?

With six participants, progress-focused peer-to-peer coaching can be completed in less than 45 minutes. It is an ideal format for gathering many practical tips in a short period of time. With more participants, you will generally need more time.

SOURCE:

- Coert Visser www.progressiegerichtwerken.nl (with minor adaptations)

The art of asking questions

Questions are a vital working element of peer-to-peer coaching, and at the same time, asking them is an art. The more aware you are of the nature of your questions, the more effectively you can use them. It can be worthwhile, at the beginning of a peer-to-peer coaching process, to pause briefly to reflect on the importance of questions and to exchange some tips or agreements. For example: "Let us ask as many open questions as possible. These often begin with 'how', or with 'Can you tell us a bit more about...?'"

You will notice that people then become more conscious in their questioning. And even if it does not immediately succeed, it becomes easier to name it, to yourself ("Wait, that was not really an open question, let me rephrase it") or to each other ("You just asked three questions at once, which one would you most like answered?"). Asking questions is itself a learning process in which a group can grow together.

What kinds of questions are there? What should you pay attention to?

Closed and directed questions

Closed and directed questions often yield factual information and can work well as a clarifying mechanism, for example when you need contextual information. However, they can also feel like an interrogation and may lead to short answers or a question-and-answer pattern.

Directed questions often begin with who, what, why, when... A multiple-choice question is also a form of directed question, as the questioner provides a limited set of options. Closed questions are those that can be answered with "yes" or "no". For example:

- Has it happened this way before?
- Was the outcome what you had hoped for?
- Do you get along well with this colleague?

Directed questions also have a closed character, because only one answer is possible. For example:

- What was the amount of profit this year?
- How many colleagues are attending the team outing?
- Are clients enthusiastic or reserved about your idea?

Open questions

Open questions give the other person considerable freedom in formulating their answer. This allows them to explain their thoughts in their own words. Open questions often begin with what, where, when, how. Or simply with: "Can you tell us more about...?"

Probing further

When you wish to know more about a topic, or invite a colleague to continue exploring a particular line of thought, you can probe further. You connect your next question to something the other person has just said. For example: "What do you mean by 'they'?" Sometimes it is enough simply to repeat the last word as a question: "The project was delayed." "Delayed?"

Questions about differences and similarities

Questions about differences and similarities can help someone sharpen their thinking. For example: "In what way is this solution better than the other?" or "What is your shared interest in this situation?"



Questions to avoid

As facilitator and participant, it is important to be alert to:

- suggestive questions (“So you are used to being in projects that fail?” or “Have you told your director honestly?”)
- critical questions (“Didn’t you reach that conclusion rather quickly?”)
- why-questions (“Why did you say that to your colleague?”)

In peer-to-peer coaching, you try to avoid these as much as possible. They tend to close down rather than open up learning and reflection, for example because someone moves into defence or begins explaining or responding to a perceived judgement or implied solution embedded in the question.

The cocktail question, a question containing several questions at once, is also best avoided. Ask one thing at a time.

Levels of questioning

Besides the type of question, you can also vary the level of your questions.

During case exploration, when you are trying to understand what is happening, you often ask about:

The more aware you are of the nature of your questions, the more effectively you can use them

- context and situation: what is happening, who is involved?
- activities, behaviour and approach of the case presenter: what have they done so far?

Later in the conversation, you may wish to go deeper, exploring areas such as:

- your colleague’s talents and/or capacities;
- someone’s (often unconscious) assumptions and beliefs about the issue or about themselves;
- the values that play a role for them.

Which level is most appropriate when cannot be captured in simple rules; this overview serves mainly as illustration. And as encouragement to remain aware of the level at which you are observing and listening, and therefore also framing your questions. Sometimes this awareness leads to entirely new insights.



'Socratic' peer-to-peer coaching

A peer-to-peer coaching format that beautifully unfolds the diversity of perspectives within a group is Socratic peer-to-peer coaching. It also helps you go a step deeper in (self-)inquiry: not only exploring possible courses of action, but especially underlying patterns of thinking, values and beliefs.

The format below is based on the more extensive Socratic peer-to-peer coaching approach developed by Jos Kessels and colleagues (2003), as well as on the logical levels of Gregory Bateson / Robert Dilts.

Step 1. Presenting the case

The case presenter shares the issue they are facing. They formulate it as much as possible as a "film" and take the others into the story. NB The facilitator invites the group members, while listening, to place themselves, as themselves, in the shoes of the case presenter: "Try to visualise it in such a way that you can imagine yourself in that situation."

At the end, the facilitator asks where the "heat point" lies for the case presenter in this film, and what the question or dilemma is that they are facing.



Step 2. Exploration with open questions

Participants ask several open clarifying questions that help them, as themselves, to step into the shoes of the case presenter. It helps if the facilitator explicitly repeats that instruction: "The aim is to enable you to empathise and place yourself in the situation." (NB This often leads to clarifying questions about context.)

Step 3. Personal reflection with thinking questions

The facilitator asks everyone in the group to place themselves in the situation: "Imagine that you, as yourself, were in that situation," and to answer the following questions as honestly as possible, in writing. Everyone is given time to write:

- What would you feel or experience in that position? Which emotions would arise?
- What would you think? Which helpful and unhelpful thoughts would run through your mind?
- What would you therefore do? How would you answer the question posed, or address the dilemma? What effect would you hope for?
- And why? From which values or starting points would you reason?

NB It helps if the facilitator writes the questions on a flip chart. You may also read them aloud at the beginning so everyone can write them down before working silently.

Step 4. Reading round

Each participant reads aloud what they have written. The case presenter listens. The case presenter reads their own answers last.



The facilitator ensures that participants:

- read exactly what they have written. This is often shorter and clearer than speaking extemporaneously.
- limit themselves to answering the questions; they do not need to explain why they would act differently from the case presenter, etc.
- do not respond to one another.
- read their text, even if they say, "Mine is the same as the previous speaker." In practice, it is often slightly different. And even if it is very similar, that in itself is information.

Step 5. Receiving and reflecting

After the reading round, it is the case presenter's turn. What do they take from this entire round? What has become clearer? Which perspectives are helpful? Which course of action do they now consider? And which value or starting point will serve as their anchor?



When to use?

For groups that have known one another for some time, this is often a pleasant and deepening format. The working mechanism here is more collective self-inquiry, which fosters openness and equality. It can also provide a welcome variation from more question-focused formats.



How much time do you need?

With six to eight participants, this Socratic peer-to-peer coaching format takes 45–60 minutes. Presenting the experience usually takes around 10 minutes, and clarifying questions another 10 minutes. The process of stepping into the other person's shoes, writing and reading aloud often takes around 30 minutes. Identifying the essence may then take about 10 minutes. These are indicative timeframes; group size influences duration.

SOURCE:

- Kessels, J., E. Boers & P. Mostert (2003) *Vrije ruimte: filosoferen in organisaties*. Boom uitgevers.



Learning from successes

Peer-to-peer coaching often focuses on problems or dilemmas. For variety and for learning impact, it can be highly valuable to examine a successful action instead. You may also combine the two.

For example, someone has a challenge around “being assertive.” You could then take an example where this actually worked, even if it was only a positive exception, and unpack that together. It may also be that the peer-to-peer coaching is organised around a theme, such as giving feedback or collaboration within a new team. In that case, it helps if the example illustrates that theme.

Incidentally, people sometimes need to overcome a threshold before calling something of their own a “success.” You can support one another in this by briefly brainstorming strong examples together (and then choosing one).

Step 1. Story

The case presenter tells, preferably in detail, the story of a positive example. It may be a larger or smaller example. It may be recent or from longer ago. That does not matter, as long as the person looks back on it positively. For example, because the process went well, or because the impact was significant, or both.



The case presenter tells the story as a film: what happened, who was involved, what was the effect... In principle, group members do not ask clarifying questions, unless necessary. The facilitator may occasionally help the story move forward.

The facilitator gives the listeners a clear instruction: listen carefully and write down what you believe were the factors that made it work. How did the case presenter achieve the desired result?

Step 2. Inventory of success factors and contextual characteristics

The listeners name the success factors they hear. The facilitator records these on a flip chart or sheet visible to everyone.

There are two types of working principles (which the facilitator writes in two columns):

- Left column: Initiatives, qualities, strengths and actions of the case presenter.
- Right column: Contextual characteristics and support from others.

This is done as a brainstorm, so participants build on one another's contributions (there is no discussion). Continue until the flip chart is full or no further factors emerge.

Step 3. Deepening

The case presenter responds, corrects or adds to what has been listed. Together, the group searches for the essence. The key question is: what is the common thread, what lies underneath? What is fundamentally the core reason this succeeded?

Step 4. Evaluation

Participants answer together the question: "What will we take to heart?"



When to use?

This format is particularly suitable in situations where the group shares a common theme. For example, a peer-to-peer coaching group that is part of a learning or organisational development trajectory. Or a team that wishes to learn about giving feedback or holding one another accountable. In such cases, learning does not occur only for the person presenting the case, but for everyone simultaneously, around the theme central to the programme or team.

How much time do you need?

With six to eight participants, this format takes between 45–60 minutes. It helps to first develop a clear understanding of the success experience and the success factors. Approximately 20 minutes are needed to inventory the success factors in the left and right columns. Deepening usually takes about 15 minutes, and evaluation around 10 minutes.

SOURCE:

- Haan, E. de & Y. Burger (2006) *Leren met collega's: praktijkboek intercollegiale consultatie*. Koninklijke van Gorcum.



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Peer-to-peer coaching for organisational development by Ton

Value for the organisation

As an experienced peer-to-peer coaching facilitator (and enthusiast of the format), I increasingly realise that it could actually yield much more. So much happens in those meetings, and there are recurring themes in the insights people gain. We do not always do anything with those patterns. But we could.

I increasingly try to use peer-to-peer coaching as a means for organisational development as well. I facilitate peer-to-peer coaching in groups and ask each group to appoint one representative. I then bring those representatives together so that they can combine the recurring themes emerging from the various groups.

Recently, I worked with an organisation in which, in every peer-to-peer coaching group, the theme of “contracting the relationship between commissioner and contractor” emerged. It turned out to be an organisational theme, even though many people initially thought it was their individual question. You can share such insights while maintaining the confidentiality of the peer-to-peer coaching sessions. You do not need to share cases, and certainly not names, it is about recurring themes and common questions.

In those meetings around recurring themes, I also like to invite other colleagues who did not participate in the peer-to-peer coaching groups but who are involved in organisational development.

Collective learning

In this way, the focus shifts beyond the individual; learning becomes more collective. This does require a certain critical mass in the peer-to-peer coaching groups (for example, all managers at a particular level participating) and a broad perspective from facilitators.

It is no longer solely about supporting individuals or the group, it becomes important to look at the broader context. All those valuable insights that surface during a peer-to-peer coaching session, how can we connect them and make further use of them within the wider organisational context?

So much happens in
those meetings, and there
are recurring themes in the
insights people gain





The 'gossip' method

A slightly unconventional format is gossiping, in the presence of the person concerned. The case presenter literally turns around while the others talk about him or her. By listening, the presenter discovers blind spots or new perspectives.

Step 1. The question at hand

The case presenter briefly explains their question, problem or idea.

Step 2. Exploration

The other group members explore the question or idea by asking several (open) questions.

Step 3. Gossiping in the person's presence

From this moment on, the case presenter remains silent and the facilitator asks them to sit with their back to the group. For example, facing a window. They may take a notebook on their lap, but that is not necessary. The invitation is simply to listen calmly.

The group members "gossip" in a respectful way. This means they speak about the case presenter's issue and how they observe the presenter dealing with it. What do they think is going on? Which talents do they see in the case presenter, and which are not being used? In an appreciative and exploratory manner, they also exchange more sensitive observations and examine whether they notice certain assumptions that influence behaviour.



Together they reflect on questions such as: what drives this colleague's behaviour and thinking process? What effect does that have? They do not need to be certain, they can phrase it tentatively: "It seems as if..." "I wonder whether..." They may also speak freely about themselves: how would they feel in that situation? What would they do?

Through the conversation, the group members arrive at a number of statements that illustrate which alternatives or possibilities might emerge if the case presenter were to adopt different beliefs or assumptions, or bring other talents into play. It does not need to be a fully formulated piece of advice, and the "gossipers" do not need to agree with one another, unfinished thoughts are welcome, and questions are equally valuable.

Step 4. Harvest and receiving

The facilitator invites the case presenter to turn back towards the group and share what struck them most, what happened internally, and which insights the conversation has provided. They indicate which statements they can work with (the rest may be left aside).

Step 5. Evaluation

The case presenter and the participants evaluate the process. They may ask each other questions such as: "What added value did this process have?", "What did you hear that you would not otherwise have heard?", "What did this do to you?"



When to use?

Gossiping is a very powerful and effective format for a group that has known one another for some time. It is not recommended for groups that are not yet psychologically safe.



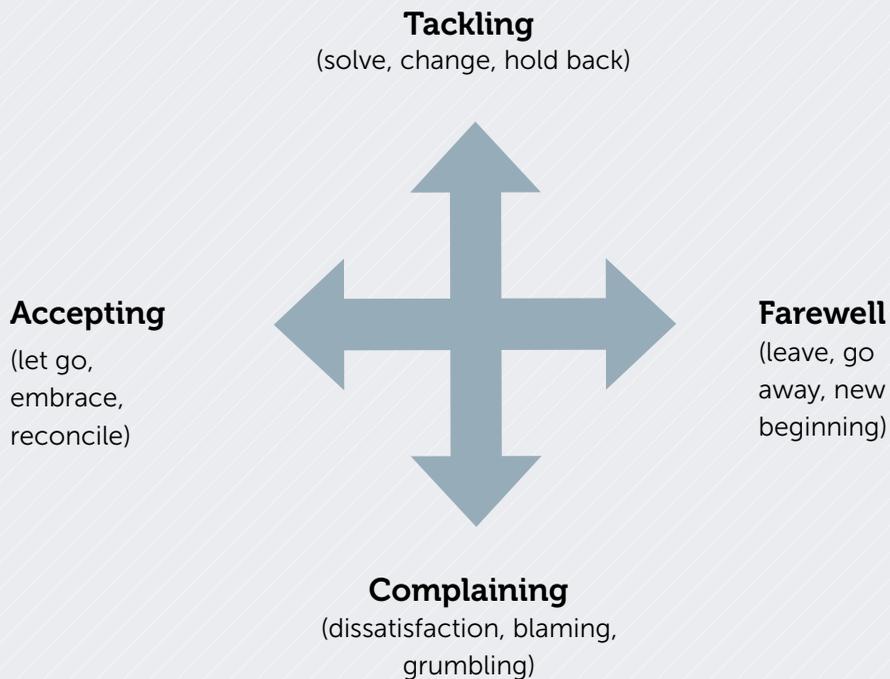
How much time do you need?

With six to eight participants, the gossip method takes between 35–45 minutes. It helps to take sufficient time both to explore the question and to allow the gossiping conversation to unfold.



The crossroads of choice

The crossroads of choice is a metaphor for the directions (choices) available when you are stuck with something that makes you unhappy. Martijn Vroemen (2020) developed this model and an accompanying peer-to-peer coaching format. It helps the case presenter explore all possible choices and perhaps select one. The crossroads looks as follows:





Step 1. Presenting the issue

The presenter chooses a theme or case that evokes frustration. It is important that no attempts have yet been made to solve the problem, or that it concerns a recurring issue. The presenter explains the situation and participants ask follow-up questions about both the experience and emotions involved, as well as the options already considered or tried.

Step 2. Explaining the crossroads

The facilitator explains the crossroads model, on a flip chart or by marking it out on the floor. It is important not yet to link it to the presenter's issue.

Step 3. Feedback on the four directions

The other participants divide themselves among the four directions and feed back to the presenter what they have heard in the story so far about the four possible directions: Acceptance, Complaining, Leaving and Taking action.

Where necessary, they also ask additional questions about the direction they represent. For example: What options have you considered in this area? What is important to you in this direction? What seems possible or impossible?

Step 4. Generating options

In small groups, participants have 10 minutes to generate arguments and possible approaches for the direction they represent.

After those ten minutes, they present their ideas. What might be a way for the presenter to choose this direction, taking into account what is possible or important for them? The facilitator monitors time and speaking turns.

The presenter does not respond and is given time afterwards to let everything sink in.



Step 5. Evaluating options

The case presenter walks through all options and explains for each direction why it might or might not work. The round concludes with tips and advice, followed by the presenter's reflection on what they will or will not do.



When to use?

Particularly when a participant feels stuck in mental loops, powerless, or close to slipping into complaint mode, this is a helpful format for rediscovering perspective and possibilities.



How much time do you need?

With six to eight participants, the crossroads of choice takes 45–60 minutes. Providing feedback from the four directions usually takes around 15 minutes, and generating and sharing options around 20 minutes.

SOURCE:

- Vroemen, M. (2020) *Praktijkboek teamcoaching – oefeningen, modellen en checklists*. Boom / Impact.

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A peer-to-peer coaching group in flow, Willemijn and Litty



EXPERIENCE STORY

In a peer-to-peer coaching group that is “in flow,” you feel it immediately: “Yes! This works. We are moving forward together, the atmosphere is good, everyone is engaged. We listen and ask the right questions. There is safety.” But how do you get there?

The answer is not simple. Many factors are involved and several conditions must align. Yet there are certainly levers you can influence.

Holding space

Literally, holding space means creating space. It is important to ensure together that a peer-to-peer coaching session becomes a place where you can bring difficult matters. A place where you feel your doubts and concerns are welcome. Where there is room to discuss what truly matters to you. For this, it is essential that participants feel genuinely heard and seen.

Your attitude, both as participant and as facilitator, matters greatly. It is important that you can explain what you are doing and why you make certain choices as facilitator. That way, you are transparent and trustworthy. It is also important to continuously seek a balance between moving with the group and steering the process. So, explain what you are doing, beforehand when introducing the method, and during the session, for example when giving listening instructions.

Being present with attention

Slowing down together is another success factor. We often invite people to shift to a different pace so that we truly meet in the present moment. For example, through a short body-oriented exercise: imagine

the outline of your body. Or place your feet firmly on the ground and take four deep breaths. This often immediately creates calm, enabling deeper attention to one another.

This attention strengthens mutual involvement. Participants genuinely want to listen to one another's stories and dilemmas and to do what is needed to support each other.

You can also strengthen involvement by creating continuity across multiple sessions with the same group. At the end of a session, for example, we ask: what is your intention? Or which experiment will you try in the coming period? And then we return to that at the next meeting. In this way, you truly build a shared story.

Listening

Listening is an art in itself. Open listening to another person's story or concerns requires truly stepping into the other's world, without seeking confirmation for yourself or forming judgements.

Consciously committing yourself to listening well can help. As facilitator, you can also provide listening instructions. These are often built into peer-to-peer coaching formats.

We sometimes ask listeners to complete the following sentence after hearing the story: "I hear the story of someone who..." The case presenter may then choose which formulation resonates most. That becomes the story you continue exploring. In this way, you help participants truly listen, while keeping ownership with the case presenter.

Learning together

Flow also emerges when you are genuinely learning together. For example, about how to listen well or ask better questions. This does not have to be heavy or forced, it may remain light.

A participant who says during the session: "Ah, that was a closed question, how can I phrase it openly?" And then you may even laugh about it together.





De Bono's Thinking Hats

The hats developed by creativity expert Edward de Bono (2011) form a thinking technique that can complement various peer-to-peer coaching formats. Each hat represents a different perspective. The black hat represents critical thinking: what risks and disadvantages do you see? The yellow hat represents optimism: what opportunities do you see? There are six hats in total:

By inviting participants to (imaginarily) put on a hat and look at the issue from that perspective, everyone is challenged to step outside their habitual way of thinking, in a playful manner.

You can combine the hat technique with multiple peer-to-peer coaching formats. Below, it is illustrated with the incident method.

Step 1. Distributing the hats

Brief explanation of the hats (via slides, handout or cards). Each participant adopts a hat.

Step 2. Presenting the issue

The case presenter elaborates on the issue. Meanwhile, participants formulate questions from the perspective of their assigned hat and write them down.



The white hat: objectivity and neutrality. Focus on data, facts and information, without emotion or interpretation. What is already known about the issue?



The red hat: feelings and intuition. Emotions also play a role in understanding an issue and reaching decisions. What is happening beneath the surface?



The yellow hat: optimism and positivity. This perspective explores opportunities and benefits. What could happen if everything works out? What is already going well? How can we build on that?



The black hat: risks and downsides. What are the weaknesses of the idea? What might go wrong? What pitfalls or obstacles exist?



The green hat: creativity, alternatives and new ideas. What other possibilities exist? How can we think outside the box?



The blue hat: meta-thinking. This is the reflective perspective: how are we thinking? Could we think differently? It is thinking about thinking.





Step 3. Information round

Participants take turns asking open and informative questions, regardless of hat colour. The case presenter answers.

Step 4. Analysis from the hat perspective

Participants discuss the situation from the perspective of their assigned hat. The case presenter listens only.

Step 5. Advice round

Each participant gives one piece of advice from their hat: "If I were you, I would..."

Step 6. Outcome

The case presenter responds to the advice. What resonates and what does not? They indicate their next action.

Step 7. Evaluation

The case presenter shares their experience and the effect of the group's input. The session concludes with reflections on what everyone learned and experienced.



When to use?

The six thinking hats were originally designed to support teams in better decision-making. They help examine an issue from different perspectives in a structured way.

Groups sometimes have preferred perspectives and neglect others (for example, little tolerance for naming risks, or limited creative energy). With the hats, all perspectives receive attention. This improves both the quality of conversation (one perspective at a time) and decision-making.



You can also use the hats in peer-to-peer coaching when you want a playful format that challenges participants to look beyond their habitual thinking patterns.

How much time do you need?

With six to eight participants, this format takes approximately 45–60 minutes. The first two steps take around 15 minutes. Exploring perspectives through the hats often takes about 20 minutes.

SOURCE:

- de Bono, E. (2011) *Zes denkhoeden*. Business Contact.





Speed sparring

Speed sparring is a peer-to-peer coaching format suitable for both small and large groups, as a stand-alone conversation or at the beginning or end of a meeting. Everyone works on their own issue. The speed and repetition generate energy and stimulate knowledge sharing.

This format works well with both small and large groups. When working with a large group, it is important to organise the space carefully and explain the format clearly.

Tips for implementation:

- Ensure a large space with sufficient chairs (no tables). It may also be done standing if kept shorter.
- Arrange chairs in pairs across the room, in a long row, two rows, or scattered. An inner and outer circle also works. Position chairs so that participants face one another directly, with space between pairs. This creates small two-person conversations.
- As facilitator, be very clear in your instructions, especially regarding switching places. This maintains the “speed” of the format.
- Have a bell, phone alarm or sound signal to mark the end of each round (particularly in large groups, your voice may not suffice).



- Ensure that during the pause (step 4) and at the end, there is truly one minute of silence. Participants receive many impressions and insights and need time to harvest them.

Step 1. Formulating the issue

Participants formulate a question or idea they wish to explore.

Step 2. Dividing the group and explaining the method

The facilitator divides the group into two roles: questioners and sparring partners. For example: "Everyone with their back to the window is a questioner," or "The inner circle are the questioners." Each pair consists of one questioner and one sparring partner. With an uneven number, the facilitator may participate, or you may form a trio. The facilitator clearly explains the method and checks that everyone understands their role.

Step 3. Sparring in pairs, 3 rounds

Questioners present their question, dilemma or observation to their sparring partner and discuss for 7 minutes. The facilitator signals the end.

Questioners then move one seat clockwise and present their question, including insights gained, to a new sparring partner. Again, 7 minutes. A third round of 7 minutes follows.

Step 4. Absolute silence

After the third round, there are 2 minutes of complete silence.

Questioners organise their input and write down important new insights and thoughts. Sparring partners will soon become questioners and prepare their own question. The silence is important, a sharp contrast to the previous 30 minutes.



Step 5. Switching roles

Roles are then reversed, and steps 3 and 4 are repeated.



When to use?

This format is highly suitable for large groups. In a relatively short time, it generates depth and exchange. It works well at the end of a study day, for example. It can also help groups that are not accustomed to asking each other questions or sharing knowledge to get started. The format powerfully stimulates group dynamics. Everyone is simultaneously thinking along and asking questions, which quickly normalises the practice.



How much time do you need?

With the above structure, speed sparring takes approximately 60 minutes. We recommend reminding participants one minute before each round ends to begin wrapping up. This keeps the pace brisk. Absolute silence in step 4 is equally important to allow harvesting of insights.

5. Harvest

At the end of this booklet, you will find several reflection questions to consider what you have discovered and how you would like to apply it in practice.





What will you take away from this book?

What is your greatest insight after reading or working with this book?

What is one thing you would like to start doing differently when facilitating peer-to-peer coaching? Why? What effect do you hope for?

Is there something you will never (again) do? Why not?

Which talents can you use to shape peer-to-peer coaching sessions effectively?

What would your ideal peer-to-peer coaching session look like, one that you would love to facilitate or experience? (What kind of issue is discussed? How many people are present? Where are you? Which format do you use? How does the conversation unfold?)

What else would you like to hold on to?



