

The Peer Learning Group Model®

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Are you tired of wasting your time and energy dealing with management and performance issues that could have been resolved quickly and easily if only your managers had better skills and experience?

Do you cringe when your managers undermine each other during management meetings instead of respectfully working together toward a common goal?

Are you frustrated watching a steady stream of trusted employees and top performers leave your company because they don't feel valued or sufficiently challenged?

- What if you knew that 90 minutes every month would improve your business's bottom line?
- What if your managers consistently and effectively used best practices?
- What if your management team was supportive, open to new ideas and willing to collaborate to make them happen?
- What if your company was considered one of the best places to work?

The answer: You would save a lot of wasted time, money and unnecessary stress. Better management means better employee performance, morale and retention. Those are the cornerstones of a profitable and sustainable business.

The workplace and the world are changing at an incredible rate, becoming increasingly complex. Successful businesses need their managers to have new skills to meet those challenges and to be able to create new knowledge to address each new emerging challenge. The question is how to ensure that they gain those skills in the most job-relevant, effectual and cost-effective manner.

The Peer Learning Institute® can provide that for you. In only 90 minutes a month, your managers can build their knowledge and skills in a collaborative peer-to-peer learning process within the context of your organization.

In this paper, we will consider why peer learning is so necessary and how The Peer Learning Group Model® fulfills that need.

Why is Peer Learning so Valuable?

Peer leadership development dramatically improves the bottom line.

Organizations that use peer learning within their organizational context for leadership growth have 36% more net revenue per employee, 9% higher gross margin and are 4.6 times more likely to anticipate and respond effectively to change.¹

Today's complex world requires a new form of learning.

Work² is now more: cognitively complex; team-based and collaborative; dependent on social skills; dependent on technological competence; time pressured; mobile and less dependent on geography. Managers need new skills to effectively manage these challenges- and they require learning and skill development options that go beyond traditional classroom training or e-learning sessions.

Organizations need to develop situational best practices.

Organizations need to develop innovative practices (new knowledge) to meet each new unique situation as it arises. These are “situational” best practices that are specific to the organization. In order to develop this new knowledge, Hagel III and Brown³ propose that managers create small diverse work groups that provide a respectful and comfortable environment within which employees are encouraged and supported as they try different responses to new situations and learn from their experiences.

Self-managed learning is more useful than classroom or e-learning training

In the 2017 *Learning in the Workplace* survey⁴ conducted by the Center for Learning and Performance Technologies, over 5,000 managers and employees were asked to rate the importance (value/usefulness) of 12 work-related learning methods. The least-valued ways of learning in the workforce were found to be the traditional forms of learning: classroom training and e-learning. The top two most valued ways of learning were self-organized and self-managed forms of learning, which is what The Peer Learning Institute[©] Program provides.

¹ Bersin by Deloitte, High Impact Leadership, 2016.

² The Changing Nature of Organizations, Work, and Workplace, by Judith Heerwagen, Ph.D., J.H. Heerwagen & Associates; and Kevin Kelly and Kevin Kampuchean, U.S. General Services Administration.

³ <https://hbr.org/2017/08/help-employees-create-knowledge-not-just-share-it>

⁴ <https://www.wbdg.org/resources/changing-nature-organizations-work-and-workplace>

Collaborative learning enhances critical thinking.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1986)⁵, there is persuasive evidence that cooperative teams achieve at higher levels of thought and retain information longer than if their members work quietly as individuals. The shared learning gives the Institute members an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning, and thus become critical thinkers⁶.

Social dynamics increase the pressure to keep up with peers.

Germany recently published the results of a study of millions of workers in 330 different professions, conducted over a 15-year period. The study⁷ determined that the success of peer learning can be attributed to social dynamics as well as knowledge sharing. The researchers found that, when an employee's colleagues increased their performance, the employee's performance also increased. This was attributed to social pressure or peer effects: when employees are around other high performers, they feel the pressure to keep up with their colleagues.

Organizational knowledge needs to be shared and retained.

Typically, 20% of knowledge in average organizations is stored in paper form, about 38% is stored electronically, and an astonishing 42% is stored as tacit knowledge⁸. This historical and procedural knowledge is often lost when long-term employees leave the organization. A peer learning and sharing platform brings the tacit knowledge and experience out into the open and makes it available for others to use and pass on to others.

The most effective learning comes from experience, experimentation and reflection.

Research⁹ that resulted in the 70:20:10 Model found that approximately:

- 70% of learning comes from experience, experimentation and reflection;
- 20% of learning derives from working with others; and
- 10% of learning comes from planned learning solutions and reading.

Peer learning is the future of leadership development.

The classic leadership development program, conducted in physical isolation of the organization and outside of its operational context, needs to be replaced by experiences that

⁵ Johnson, R.T., & Johnson, D.W. (1986). Action research: cooperative learning in the science classroom. *Journal of Science and Children*, 24(2), 31-32.

⁶ Totten, S., Sills, T., Digby, A., & Russ, P. (1991), *Cooperative learning: A guide to research*. New York: Garland.

⁷ Peer Effects in the Workplace IZA DP No. 7617 September 2013

⁸ <http://kmllearning.blogspot.com/2007/07/why-tacit-knowledge-be-converted-into.html>

⁹ See 702010 Institute for details and evidence: <https://702010institute.com/>

build in real work, risk and accountability, intentional networking, exposure, collaboration, just-in-time-learning, and on-the-job problem-solving.

What is a Peer Learning Group[®]?

A Peer Learning Group[®] consists of up to 6 managers who have the same level of responsibility and face a similar management challenge. The group is entirely self-directed and is held onsite. The group meets together in two 90-minute sessions to work through a module with materials and activities that help them to address their challenge. In Session 1, the managers share their knowledge and experience and learn new techniques. Between Sessions 1 and 2, the managers practice using techniques they learned or applying new knowledge that they jointly created during Session 1. In Session 2, they reflect on their practice experience and plan how to use what they've learned.

Why is The Peer Learning Group Model[®] so Effective?

The Peer Learning Group Model[®] uses a self-directed collaborative peer learning approach that enables managers to integrate new information with their prior knowledge and experience to create new understanding. They learn together as a team, guided by our structured learning design that uses the context of the organization and the reality of its workplace as the basis for learning and sharing. The Peer Learning Group Model[®] enables the managers to develop new “best practices” to address the specific challenges they face on the job.

The Peer Learning Group Model[®] eliminates the disadvantages associated with traditional classroom training and e-learning. It does this through a primary focus on the 70% of learning that comes from work performance¹⁰, as seen below:

Traditional Learning	The Peer Learning Group Model [®]
Focuses on learning solutions.	Focuses on creating effective connections between working and learning by working together and formalizing solutions.
Learning is the result of a skills deficit.	Learning tackles performance problems within the organization.
Analyzes the learning need.	Analyzes organizational and performance needs.
Develops and delivers formal learning solutions.	Develops and delivers solutions to improve organizational performance and learn from this experience.
Focuses on learning goals.	Focuses on performance goals.
Focuses on content.	Focuses on context and content.
Focuses on theoretical knowledge (what).	Focuses on practical knowledge (how).

¹⁰ In their book: *702010 Towards 100% Performance*, Arets, Jennings and Heijnen point out that there are significant differences between traditional learning and performance paradigms embedded in peer learning.

Focuses on the classroom, workshop or learning management system.	Focuses on the entire organization.
Focuses on the participant or “learner” in formal learning situations.	Focuses on work, managers and the organization.
Learning is an event in itself.	Learning is a constant process and part of overall performance.
Learning is separated from work.	Learning and working are integrated.

The Peer Learning Group Model[©] constitutes a bridge between traditional skills training and the broader organizational learning based on sharing and peer collaboration.

Traditional learning methods will continue to be useful when it comes to acquiring basic skills and technical competencies. However, they offer little help to managers who are dealing with the complexity and fluidity of the changing workplace. Managers need to learn in a way that focuses them on the real issues and challenges they face on the job.

The Peer Learning Group Model[©] is also effective because it:

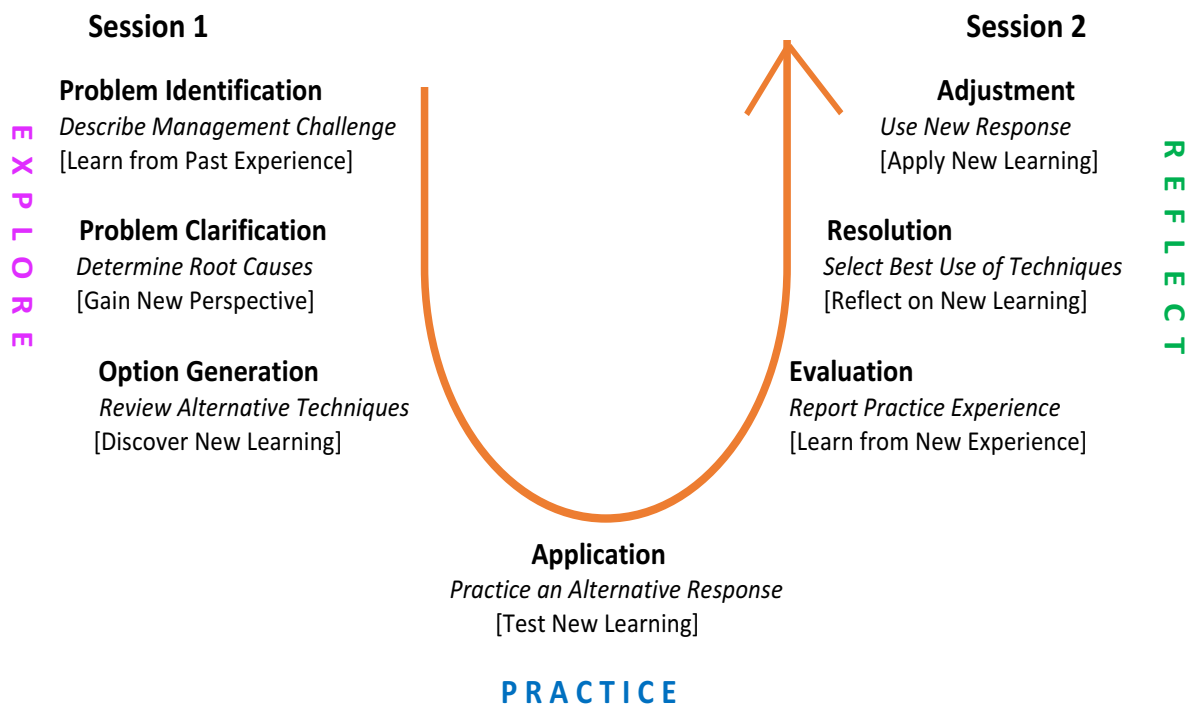
- Brings managers together with their peers to learn and share new management techniques to address specific workplace challenges within their organization.
- Uses the context of the organization and the reality of its workplace as the basis for learning and sharing, resulting in actions and behaviors that lead to a better performance.
- Provides a background and a framework for discussion but does not prescribe the content of that discussion.
- Is self-directed, avoiding the need for an outside facilitator who does not know the history or the culture of the organization.
- Strengthens the managers’ meeting management skills by having them take turns facilitating the group, assisted by a facilitator guide.
- Ensures that all of the managers are involved in the discussion, so they understand and feel comfortable with the new techniques.
- Builds teamwork by obliging the managers to create a safe and trusting environment so they can collaborate on examining a problem, exploring an idea, and developing a solution.
- Requires that managers test out new management techniques with the assistance of mutually-minded peers and the support of upper management.
- Guarantees that the right managers receive the right knowledge and skills at the right time.

What is The Peer Learning Group Model[®] Structure?

The Peer Learning Group Model[®] is based on the principles of Theory U¹¹. Theory U proposes that the quality of the results of a social system are a function of the quality of awareness, attention, and/or consciousness of those within the system.

The Peer Learning Group Model[®] is structured in three main stages that form the U, as shown in the figure below:

1. Session 1: exploration through a deep dive into the issue;
2. Between Sessions 1 and 2: application of new knowledge or skills through practice; and
3. Session 2: reflection that allows the managers to view the initial challenge with a new perspective, and be prepared to respond in the future with new situational “best practices” specific to their organization.



¹¹ Otto Scharmer, Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges, Berretta-Koehler Publishers; 2nd edition, 2016

What can The Peer Learning Group Model[®] Do for You?

The Peer Learning Group Model[®] offers an innovative and cost-effective method of professional development for managers. Managers collaborate with their peers in a self-organized and self-managed process. They share their knowledge and experience, learn and practice new skills, create context-relevant new knowledge, and support and motivate each to better performance.

Peer learning is the future of leadership development, and The Peer Learning Institute[®] is in the vanguard.

If you want to:

- Build your managers' skills and abilities;
- Ensure consistent, effective and appropriate management best practices;
- Energize your management team;
- Improve performance throughout the organization;
- Create a positive and collaborative work environment;
- Secure, preserve and create new organizational knowledge;
- Retain valued employees; and
- Invest in the success of your employees, your managers and your organization;

then The Peer Learning Institute[®] will help you meet your goals.