

Peer-Group Support Framework – Issues Sessions

1. Background

The Academy For Chief Executives¹ run ‘Issues Sessions’. This is a variant of ‘Action Learning’. Their process is as follows. I have used it myself within other peer group meetings and the participants gained substantial benefit.

2. Adapting To Time & Audience

Working groups should be between 4 and 8 people.

Decide how much time to allow in the working groups, and how many issues to cover in the session, allowing 30-90 minutes per issue. This is a rich technique and, once participants are engrossed, it is much easier to extend the time available than to guillotine.

Steps C & D are optional, and possibly not appropriate for your meeting, but highly recommended so the content is self-directed to the most interesting topics. Skipping them means the process takes longer, since the syndicates cover the issues raised by every member.

3. Process

The notes below assume two issues covered.

- A. If there is a large group, allocate members to working groups or syndicates, using a supporting technique or self-selection. Avoid having direct competitors in the same group, so people are not inhibited about helping each other. The working groups should appoint a meeting chair.
- B. In the syndicate groups, go once round the table. Each participant states the personal or work issue that is concerning them (simply, concisely, with no questions).
- C. Again round the table, each person voting for the issues that they want to explore this session. Two votes per participant - people can cast both votes on one issue if they want, but cannot vote for their own issue.
- D. The two issues that poll the most votes become the explored issues for the session.
- E. Round the table again, with the first issue owner being asked lots of questions by every other participant (questions only, no answers, to give thinking time and chances to combine or reinforce ideas). This can be stressful for the issue owner, since it ‘attacks’ the problem from diverse perspectives, many of them new to the owner. However, it is the strongest part of the process in bringing clarity.

¹ ACE is a special interest group featuring structured peer-group support within cells of non-competing chief execs. www.chiefexecutive.com

- F. Round the table a final time (for this issue), with other participants giving the issue owner either one or more solutions, or a methodology to reach a solution.
- G. Repeat for the second issue.
- H. [Optional.] If the full group split into syndicates, an optional plenary session when the full group reconvenes can summarise the learning. Each syndicate has appointed a spokesperson, who then gives the full group a condensed version of the knowledge gained during their sessions.