

Elements Series

# Peering into the Future: An Applied Framework for Learning Together in Organisations



**oasis**

School of Human Relations

This brief guide aims to set the wider context. It identifies peer group approaches as one way organisations and the people within them can engage with ongoing learning and increase the effectiveness of their actions.

Peer learning is a form of development that is effective, collaborative, relational and challenging. It equips organisations to work with the potentials and constraints being faced by many.

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## Shift happens

As emphasis moves from employers being able to provide long-term security, to employees needing to give more attention to their own individual employability, there is an increasing shift towards individuals being more responsible and accountable for their own learning and development.

As the knowledge and understanding of what is effective practice in many fields changes with ever increasing pace, there is a shift from training to learning and development, learning how to learn.

When an organisation is facing economic and people resource restraints, traditional forms of training are often cut first as savings are made. However, development and ongoing learning is critical if organisations are going to thrive as well as survive.

Organisations need to continuously adapt against a backdrop of increasing uncertainty and complexity. They require leadership to be fostered throughout an organisation rather than simply at the 'top'. That calls for a shift to more co-creative and collaborative approaches to effective and timely decisions being taken by more people, more frequently, in more places.

The need for more people to be part of the leadership of the future requires a shift in how we unleash human potential. This need is matched by individuals wanting to have more influence. Leadership of the future is less about the theory of an idealised leadership model and more about the practical ability to navigate a journey of authenticity and inspiration; energising and equipping oneself and others to make the right choices for the situation at hand.

As organisations are challenged to look further than their own, often narrow contexts, and engage with other previously ignored or unrecognised stakeholders, including the planet, more and more are recognising that they require approaches that offer integrity in the face of greater demands, trust, authenticity, stewardship, meaningful action, clarity of purpose and openness to continual learning.

Many of these approaches call for more effective relationships to be present and more of the whole person to be engaged.

If an organisation's vision, direction of travel and culture encourages inspiration, engagement, empowerment and connectedness, then the need to manage, monitor and control falls away.

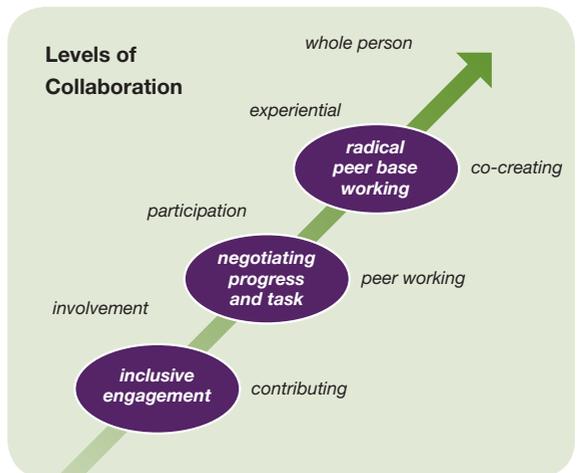
*The cumbersome governance mechanism of hierarchical management can be replaced by governance through values, enabling people to become the change they wish to see. While it is imperative to have a wholesome, ambitious view of oneself, this self-improvement strategy goes hand-in-hand with a sense of interconnectedness, belonging and sharing that comes with community.*

## Peer based learning as a response to the shifts

A simple perspective on peer-based learning is that it encourages us to learn from our peers rather than going to a formal hierarchy of knowledge that we treat as the source.

It honours the idea that each of us has the basic capacity to learn, that we have know-how beyond the traditional academic conceptual knowing, and that many real-world practices are best learned from those engaged in applying them with the capacity to learn whilst doing, rather than from people who simply know about them or have a theory about them.

Peer-based learning challenges how power is held and used. It promotes the exercise of power with people rather than over them. Peer-based approaches encourage people to be more self-aware, self-initiating, self-managing and as a result more able to use power appropriately and with awareness. The diagram on the right<sup>1</sup> identifies different levels of collaboration and peer working and illustrates them as a continuum.



Oasis has pioneered a human relations approach to peer learning that we term Whole Person Learning (WPL)<sup>2</sup>, which essentially calls for more of the person to be engaged in their learning. The approach has been applied in a variety of sectors, such as international business, retail and manufacturing, human services, community and social entrepreneurial settings, housing and health, as well as education including global business schools. It's an approach that values experience and expression as a form of knowing that can lead to transformative learning. Deeper learning and effective practice can be accessed and applied through engaging more of the whole self. So rather than starting with the concept or information, which often comes from the outside, WPL emphasises starting from where you are, working with your questions, experiences, intentions and feelings. Inside out, rather than outside in.

<sup>1</sup> *Guide to Authentic Collaboration*, by Ralphs, Lockwood, Ellerby et al, Oasis Press, 2010

<sup>2</sup> See *Learning for Tomorrow: Whole Person Learning*, by Bryce Taylor, Oasis Press, 2007, *Whole Person Learning*, by Bryce Taylor, Oasis Press and GRLI Press, 2010, and *The Complete Facilitator's Handbook* by John Heron, Kogan Page, 1999.

In many ways this is easier to apply than to explain.

Despite peer-based learning increasingly fitting with the spirit of the times, it is often underestimated how much orientation a person who expects and relies on more hierarchical-based approaches requires to move to ones that are peer-based. However, once that shift is made, greater accountability, responsibility, human relations skills, meaningful practice, openness, transparency and the person as self-initiator are all part of the advantages and benefits.

Peer-based learning brings an ethos that goes beyond the accumulation of knowledge and respect for clarity. It provides an approach that is more suited to those people who need to integrate knowledge and application (emerging theory and skills that need to be brought together in the performance of the task to be done) – those of us who are essentially practitioners.

When we are concerned with what needs to be done we need to know more about:

- Ourselves
- How we relate to others
- The processes that are taking place in the system between ourselves and others
- The contextual shifts and the potential impact they are having
- The nature of change and development.

In addition, peer-based learning fosters within a person the ability and desire to:

- Participate in decisions that impact on their life and work
- Articulate and act out of their own values and beliefs
- Use power and authority awarely, discriminately, responsibly and with a willing accountability
- Play an active part in the community to which they are attached
- Demonstrate an involved concern toward those people and things they care about.

In short, more of the individual's thinking processes and emotional responses are on show and at stake. This makes it a much more risky endeavour and one that is never fully secure.

However much we aspire to the peer principle, none of us enters a peer learning group able to act as a fully functioning peer. All of us carry a legitimate degree of human vulnerability that requires us to acknowledge it, work with it and discharge it as it appears.

## **Developing the necessary conditions**

Creating conditions conducive to peer learning will go some way to helping it to flourish. Many also need support to learn how to do it, as for a lot of us school experiences involved being told what was important to learn, and work settings are often similarly reliant on somebody else knowing what is needed.

Self-management and collective orientation reframe challenges as opportunities. The conditions refocus attention from management to own-powerment – encouragement through learning, rather than management through fear or ever increasing controls and externally set targets.

A key aspect for effective peer-based learning is establishing the right organisational culture; a culture that fosters diversity, self-initiation, accountability, straight talking, considering the whole, and encourages creativity, while ensuring the diverse stakeholders live and breathe the values inherent in that culture. The culture is the spirit of the organisation. This spirit constantly senses and responds in ways much like a conscious person constantly improves through self-reflection and personal management, yet in organisational life it is often at a more unconscious level.

As traditional organisational structures break down and some organisations seek to become more values-led, the working environment becomes emotionally and mentally healthier, and attempts are made to meet business goals without sacrificing personal values and integrity. Our working life acts to reinforce individual integrity by providing a rich context for individual and collaborative learning. The more working environments become values-led and life-inspiring, the more alive the organisation and the more aligned those within it can become to the true nature of what is within and around us. This helps unlock the creative potential within us, enabling us to individually and collectively re-connect with our authentic selves and so perceive business challenges as opportunities for life enhancement.

To unlock such potential it is often necessary to give permission to let go of old habits or to unlearn. For many of us there are times when we are more committed to not learning than to learning, especially when the rewards we have become used to depend on it. When a rational or logical approach is highly valued it can be more difficult for a person to see the benefits of experiential learning. It can be harder to commit to an approach that calls for more visibility without some kind of positive experience that demonstrates the benefits.

Whole Person Learning is an approach that puts the learner at the heart of their own learning, seeking to bring more of themselves to the learning process, whilst remaining

connected to the values and direction of the whole. Sometimes this is as simple as the moments when we know we are developing at a personal level in our willingness to understand more deeply the thoughts, questions, perspectives and feelings of another person. These kinds of approaches are rarely found in business organisations and educational settings but are becoming more acceptable and sought after.<sup>3</sup>

### **The nature of peer learning groups**

Over many years there have been a number of approaches that have sought to reflect a peer-based learning methodology. You may have been part of, or heard about some of these under names such as action learning, co-operative inquiry, dialogue at work, etc. Within our own work we have given the names full circle, collaborative inquiry, learning community and peer learning groups to these approaches. Essentially they are all forms of a small group of people (three to 12, and more usually four to six) who gather together on a regular basis and in a safe enough environment to learn from and through each other. In a fully peer-based group there is no recognised single leader, although there is often a need for a facilitator in the early stages to assist groups to learn some of the skills involved in applying peer-based approaches.

### **Is peer learning helpful to all organisations?**

There are differing views on this question.

Some argue that a person and an organisation need to be at a particular stage of development to really embrace and utilise peer learning approaches. Certainly a person who has no sense of having anything to learn, especially with someone else, is unlikely to be open to learning, let alone peer learning. Similarly if an organisation's key decision makers do not recognise that learning and development is required, do not value freedom, choice, or the need for robust and effective feedback, then it is unlikely it will place any investment or energy into supporting such processes. And even if it does recognise that developing its employees is necessary, it may believe that this is best done to employees, rather than with them.

Others do not recognise peer learning as being at the higher end of the development scale, but see it as an approach that simply works if and when it is required – a more transactional approach to applying the method.

<sup>3</sup> 50+20 Agenda, Management Education for the World: see [http://50plus20.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/50+20\\_AGENDA\\_15June.pdf](http://50plus20.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/50+20_AGENDA_15June.pdf)

I have seen its benefit when an organisation is itself needing to embrace more integrative approaches and a more collaborative and adult-to-adult culture. I see this as reflecting a stage of organisational development that is required when there are greater levels of complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability. Rather than being a transactional approach I have seen it reflect a transformative stage of individual and organisational development.

At a personal level I think that being part of an ongoing learning group is a life-enhancing process and one that I have been engaged with since I was young in one way or another. When I was younger I don't think I was very 'developed', but I found something in it that helped me be more effective in my world. How I have used myself within them, who I have worked with, how much I am conscious of, have all changed and developed.

*Do it and find out for yourself* is about as helpful as I can be.

## What to do in a peer learning group?

For us at Oasis, the primary purpose of a Peer Learning Group (PLG) is to facilitate change and learning, leading to meaningful action, in individuals, through their engagement in a peer-based learning process.

### What needs to be given attention?

The following section outlines some of the areas that need to be given attention in considering establishing a peer learning group.

#### Purpose

It is important to identify, clarify, understand and agree the purpose of the group. A group that is working together to help each individual by working with their questions in an active learning cycle is different to a group that is addressing a focused task on behalf of the organisation and has a requirement to report on the learning gained.

#### Membership

This includes considering what your needs may be in relation to:

- Similarity/difference of approach
  - Similarity/difference of work setting
  - Mix of authority
  - Experience and background
  - Questions being addressed or individual needs
- Geography
- Skills base
- Range of experience
- Level of challenge
- Level of support.

#### Diversity

If there is too great a similarity it is possible for the group to become too cosy or collusive and lack an incisive or rigorous perspective.

#### Size

The group needs to have more than three members and less than six. If the group is three people and one person is unable to make a session, two people can lack clarity of focus, diversity and 'go to sleep'. If the group is bigger than five or six, it is unlikely the group can meet often enough to give everyone the time they need. We have worked with larger peer

learning communities over six months and longer, although this often calls for around two days per month.

### **Accountability**

It is important to be aware that each person is individually accountable for what they say and do. And together the group is mutually accountable for how they work and the consequences of their actions and decisions.

### **Confidentiality**

Groups that are self-managing and independent of any organisational sponsorship will often be free to determine their own levels of confidentiality. Groups that are set up by an employer or within an organisational setting will have levels of confidentiality appropriate to the guidelines and agreements within the wider organisation. Quite often this comes down to keeping personally identifiable information confidential within the group, and if there is anything said that a person struggles to manage they talk to the individual concerned and/or the group before talking elsewhere, if at all. As with any voluntary condition we take a risk in how much we trust ourselves and each other to do as we agree. The very process shaping and agreeing conditions can often increase the levels of trust and commitment between those within the group.

### **Decision Making**

A peer learning group has to decide at some point how it makes decisions, how it knows it has made a decision, the requirements on each person of a decision and how and whether it records any key decisions made. There are many ways peer groups can make decisions, some more formalised, others that offer more flexibility and nuance.

### **Duration**

A group will need to determine how long it meets for a session and how frequently it needs to meet. It is useful to remember that it is easier to take dates from a diary than to put a two or three hour session for four or more people into one.

### **Environment**

It is the role of the group to ensure it works within a conducive space and environment, ideally one that has no interruptions. The inner space and ways of working may also be important, as most would ask for mobiles and other electronic devices to be turned off. A group might decide to meet over a lunch break, although the level of depth and engagement can be more challenging to achieve and less likely to occur.

## **Pitfalls – Games peer groups play<sup>4</sup>**

### ***Ain't it awful***

Members confirm how awful their situation is and reassure one another that to be involved in such an unrewarding environment makes them 'mad' and 'powerless' to change anything.

### ***Mine's bigger than yours!***

Each person plays this subtly, or not so subtly, attempting to outdo each other in relation to how effective they have been, or how excellent their organisation is. The game is sustained by everyone being concerned that if there is a winner the others have lost.

### ***More tea?***

This is more a pastime than a game, it involves everyone taking the informal time and extending it through the whole session, underpinning the perspective that we have nothing to learn really.

### ***Eternal starters***

This is when a group never quite gets started. There are so many reasons – John has forgotten to book the venue, Pat can't make it at the last minute, two of us were so late it wasn't worth getting started, we can do it next time...

### ***We are the best***

It is possible to avoid facing difficult discussions or critical comment by praising other members as a way of hidden bargaining – I won't mention this if you don't mention that. This is a form of protection where we all know something needs to be addressed and don't. It can make the group very resistant to being asked questions about how they are really developing.

This is about the aspect of competition in the group – a normal and healthy part of all group processes, unless it is hidden and covert. It can be an attempt by someone to take charge in the absence of a named leader, and if anyone points this out they can be seen as aiming for the title. It can also be surfaced through individuals frequently criticising what the group is working with and how it is working.

### ***Hunt the problem***

This is the risk of one person being the focus for issues for which the others do not want to acknowledge in themselves. One manifestation of this can be members moving to

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Shohet and Hawkins, *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, OU, 1990

a 'helping' role attempting to sort the person out, in a kind of subtle put-down, and thus moving the 'helper' into a more comfortable zone.

However the group operates, it is important not only to give attention to the external learning of group members, but also to how the learning takes place and the inner life of the group. Discovering how to balance these areas for attention is part of the learning process.

### **Formation and first session**

Be clear about the commitment, it is not helpful for members to say yes to something when they really know it is not going to be possible. If a person experiences resistance to meeting, then this needs to be explored and shared, as talking about what might get in the way may help to overcome it.

Contracting is clearly important at this stage and it is critical for the group to set its own working arrangements. These may include participant expectations for the peer learning group; levels of confidentiality; dates; timing; venues; behaviours; how the sessions will be managed; the kind of areas under focus – work, personal, programme issues, feedback needs, etc; role expectations around such areas as booking space, time keeping, leadership etc; and whether there is informal time.

It might also be useful to consider how the meetings are to be reviewed, if they are. This might be as simple as checking in at the end of each meeting around some specific questions that help the review process.

It is important not to simply follow some list of activities, but work out together what is required for the group you have got.

### **Doing the work**

There are a variety of creative methods available to explore the particular issues or questions that may arise within the life of a peer group.

We recommend you use the Oasis Seven Stage Model for Effective Relationships as an aid to practice.<sup>5</sup> It has clear stages outlined and highlights the skills needed for each.

The following is intended to offer some ideas for trying out and developing, rather than sticking to obsessively.

5 *The Seven Stage Model for Effective Working Relationships*, Oasis Elements Series, Oasis Press 2011

## Bringing an Issue

If individuals each bring an issue they each want to work on – there are many ways to work:

- Each person can offer a thumbnail sketch of their question/situation, after which the group decides together which one the whole group wants to work with
- The time is shared between each person
- The underlying themes, if any, are uncovered and the group decide to use one situation to explore the theme(s) more deeply
- In looking at a situation/question/issue it would be helpful to consider what the presenter wants to gain from bringing it – clarification, deeper understanding, options for action, etc.

### **Exploration example**

*In presenting it is helpful to agree how the work is going to be considered. First the presenter might outline their story – context, who is involved, how did they become involved, what has happened, sequence, challenges/blocks, intent, feeling, outcomes... The others might refrain from any solutions and focus on asking questions to add further clarity.*

*Once the story has been outlined the others may each say something about what they have heard, first impressions, any key characteristics, etc. The presenter responds by saying what they have realised, understood further, gained from the responses.*

## Knowing some moves

If a person wants to understand more deeply the relationship between themselves and someone else or a group then there are approaches that can illustrate this very quickly, rather than using a more traditional verbal approach.

### **Colour Mapping**

Outlining a system through shapes and ‘flow charts’ is understood by many and can be a very helpful tool to understand a situation or process. Less used, but often very effective, is the use of colours (especially chalk pastels that can be merged and moved) on paper as a way to express the forces and processes at work in a more fluid and creative way. This can capture the nuances of connections and overlaps that line drawings sometimes hide or diminish.

### **Sculpting**

Once a focus is decided, the person can ask others to represent individuals in the scenario and 'sculpt' them into positions that demonstrate the person's perception of how they experience it.

Those taking part can say what it is like being in the positions they have been placed in and this can assist the presenter to understand more of what might help to progress the situation.



### **Rehearsal**

Very often using a group to rehearse a range of possible interventions can be very worthwhile. You will realise this calls for the creative element of people to be encouraged, whilst ensuring it doesn't get carried away into gross exaggeration. This usually calls for one of the group to be 'director'.

It is useful for the person who brings the issue to take the role of the individual they are trying to work out a way forward with. They will know quite a lot about how the person operates and the kinds of responses that are made. Others can then try different approaches to create the outcome that is wanted, or to explore which other outcomes may be more appropriate.

#### **Focus on an individual project**

*Each member takes time to talk through a project outline and any issues or blocks they think they might meet in achieving it (10mins). The other members give as many ways forward and options for progressing, developing, achieving the project as possible – to each one the presenter attempts to respond with a 'yes but...' for why the suggestion would not work.*

*After an agreed time (20mins) the presenter reflects on the experience and expresses any learning or new options that have emerged.*

## Generating Options

For some, one role of group learning is to come away with more choice than they arrived with. This calls for the opportunity, once a picture of the situation or question has been created and considered, to generate options.

One technique is *idea showers* – having determined what the situation is, the group have the freedom (with nothing that is said being commented upon) to generate as many possibilities as they can, each aspect is recorded and the next idea is offered. The shower of ideas continues until the thoughts, no matter how crazy or fantastic, are exhausted.

Then the group takes time to consider each of the suggestions and have the chance to combine different elements to evolve completely new scenarios or possibilities.

## Reviewing the group

Whilst the group may review the work they have undertaken, it is also important to review the way in which the group has operated and undertaken their work together. This includes considering the nature and quality of the relationships within the peer learning group, the dynamics and how they have changed or evolved over time, what challenges have been faced, what has yet to be faced, etc.

Further questions that might help include:

- What has worked well and can be developed further?
- What needs to change?
- What is a new behaviour or approach that the group could introduce?

## Other Types of Learning Groups

### Action Learning

Reginald Revans developed this approach over 50 years ago in the English coalfields. Essentially it was an approach that involved managers in the resolution of their own problems for the first time.

It has two goals:

- To benefit the organisation by addressing perplexing problems that have heretofore been insoluble
- To benefit individuals by making it possible for them to learn with and from others by discussing the difficulties each member of the action set experiences while working on a significant organisational problem.

This form operates from a set of underlying assumptions including:

- Managers learn best from each other
- Managers learn from reflecting on how they are addressing real problems
- Managers learn when they are able to question the assumptions on which their actions are based
- Managers learn when they receive accurate feedback from others and from the results of their problem solving actions.

They are also based on some organisational values:

- Organisational issues are solvable by organisational members who care about the issues
- Organisational members who have not previously been involved in the issue can offer a fresh perspective in innovative solutions.

Action Learning differs from peer learning groups as it is often highly task-focused, often with the focus on an organisationally agreed area, and is usually charged with implementing a particular solution. Peer learning groups focus on developing a whole person approach to learning, with the areas dependent on what the individual members bring, although these areas will often have an organisational alignment. As such peer learning groups bring a stronger emphasis to the human relations aspects of the process and dynamics within that process.

### **Co-operative Inquiry Group**

*“Co-operative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself, in order to understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things, learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better.*

*Co-operative inquiry is a systematic approach to developing understanding and action. And while every group is different, each one can be seen as engaged in cycles of action and reflection.”<sup>6</sup>*

It follows a number of phases of inquiry and often engages in some four to ten cycles. These can take place over a short workshop or may extend over a year or more, depending on the kind of questions that are being explored.

Unless one of those involved has a working understanding of the practice of co-operative inquiry, a facilitator is often required.

This work has been developed and pioneered by John Heron, one of the Oasis mentors.

### **Supervision Group**

Supervision groups tend to focus on individual practice and act as an organisational mechanism to replace or complement in-house supervision arrangements.

Supervision groups tend to focus on what Gaie Houston called the three Ps – plumbing (technical, procedural requirements); policing (control, regulatory concerns) and poetry (creative, educational aspects). The agendas are often set organisationally, and the ways in which they are monitored are also often established centrally.

### **Facilitated Learning Group**

This final example relates to learning groups that have a facilitator involved, either to help establish a learning group, help it develop towards being a peer learning group, or to bring specific expertise to an issue or central question.

6 From *A Layperson's Guide*, Heron and Reason

## The Peer Principle

The peer principle is the foundation of all authentic and genuine human meeting.<sup>7</sup>

People working as peers work from a basis of mutuality and challenge – that includes conflict and opposition as well as joint problem-solving.

It is the essence of significant development. It is the basis of the recognition and value of human worth. It is the foundation of the human order where people meet as persons, relate as persons and act together as persons in relation – irrespective of whatever distinctions or differences they also have to acknowledge.

To be a true peer you must wear your expertise lightly and enter into the fullness of human meeting on each occasion. You must beware of arriving ‘knowing’ what is needed or required and remember that ‘we make our reality together’. To be sure, we each contribute something particular and distinctive; this is what makes it unique and unrepeatable. We must always remember that we cannot go back and do it again: it stands for all time. There is only this time and it is only this way, yet this is simply something to remember rather than be chained by. Each meeting is unique. However hard we try to make it the same; however much we make meeting a habit and our relationship a predictable pattern, if we are to meet as persons we have to be open to the unique, the particular, the uncertain and the unknown. This is an uncomfortable commitment.

<sup>7</sup> See Bryce Taylor, *The Transition to Peer Learning*, Oasis Press.

## Want to find out more?

Nancy Dixon, *Dialogue at Work*, Lemos and Crane, 1998

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R Revans, *ABC of Action Learning*, Mike Pedlar Library, Lemos and Crane, 1998

Bryce Taylor, *A Guide to Inquiry and Experiential Research: The Oasis Approach*, Oasis Press  
<http://www.oasishumanrelations.org.uk/resources/manuals/whole-person-learning/collaborative-inquiry-guide>

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*The 50+20 Agenda: Management Education for the World*, Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative, World Business School Council for Sustainable Business and PRME, 2012  
[http://50plus20.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/50+20\\_AGENDA\\_15June.pdf](http://50plus20.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/50+20_AGENDA_15June.pdf)

*The Seven Stage Model for Effective Working Relationships*, Oasis Press, 2011

Oasis runs a number of programmes and workshops that use peer learning approaches, including self and peer review and assessment processes. For more information see [www.oasishumanrelations.org.uk](http://www.oasishumanrelations.org.uk)

## About the Oasis School of Human Relations

The Oasis School of Human Relations is a not-for-profit learning, research and consultancy organisation. We have been at the forefront of human relations practice and consulting for over 20 years. We bring radical human relations approaches to transform the world around us. We work with people and their questions, key decision makers, communities and the workplaces of tomorrow.

Oasis provides a ‘fertile spot in the desert’ – time and space, individually and collectively, to reflect, raise consciousness, influence worldviews, implement change and deepen relationships with oneself and others. Our solid reputation is based on the quality of our services, our holistic approach and the meaningful, sustainable relationships shaped by those we work with.

As a partner of the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative since 2004, we have an international reputation for our work and research and we are the global pioneers in the application and the practice of Whole Person Learning.

We fulfil our purpose through:

- Equipping individuals as the ‘instrument of change’ through developing practical applied human relations skills and approaches
- Providing direct development and services to communities, organisations, teams, workforces and individuals engaged in change
- Encouraging local, national and global communities of responsible action
- Supporting original and unique collaborative and co-operative research
- Dissemination of learning through dialogue, seminars and publications
- Developing a community of human relations practitioners.

Our work is deep and wide-ranging. We offer ways of working that engage with the future, awaken a passion for learning, harness the potency of uncertainty and deepen effective relationships.

## Oasis Services

We provide quality services to a wide range of individuals and organisations in the social business, commercial, not-for-profit and public sectors, so long as they are working toward sustainable and equitable social change, ethical action and globally responsible practice.

Essentially, we recognise that relationships are at the heart of effective development. Organisations are a potent mix of people, processes, values, resources and purposes, operating in a changing context. Networks, groups, teams and communities bring organisations to life, but these are only as good as the relationships within and between them. Relationships are not easy, especially in organisations with complex and emerging dynamics. Oasis helps to develop human relations, both internally and externally, to allow organisations and those who work within them to unlock their potential and better achieve, if not shape, their purpose.

Our areas of activity include:

### **Team Development**

- Facilitating team effectiveness and inquiry
- Working with creativity and challenge

### **Organisational Development**

- Harnessing the wisdom held within organisations
- Building collaborative leadership, emergent and participative cultures

### **Community and Employee Engagement**

- Engaging more of the whole person at work
- Designing and developing participative, collaborative action

### **One-to-one and full circle development**

- Developing leaders, managers, practitioners and teams
- Supporting boards and developing effective governance

### **Learning and educational programmes – developing capacity**

- Preparing facilitators, developers, practitioners and change agents
- Enhancing personal and professional performance
- Establishing self and peer assessment and learning strategies

### **Staff wellbeing services – developing the Workplace of Tomorrow**

- Wellbeing audits
- Employee learning, support and development
- Conflict facilitation and mediation

## About the Author

**Nick Ellerby** is co-director of Oasis with a background in organisational development, education, psychology and human relations. During his early career in human services, teaching, governance and individual mentoring, he was invited by the Universities of Hull and Humberside to pioneer, design and facilitate longer term individual and group development programmes for business and public sectors. After ten years of working intensively with human relations and the management of change the invitations became focused on developing teams and strategic practice, especially in the context of complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity.

He co-founded The Oasis School of Human Relations in 1993, working with whole organisations facing new strategic questions, significant cultural transitions and seeking more participative, transformative and engaged approaches to leadership and learning.

His work involves him on an on-going basis with committed and inspiring leaders, boards, CEOs, mentors, senior teams, practitioners and change agents across the world. Nick is senior advisor to the UNGC/EFMD Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative.

Facing the deeper questions arising from local and global complex collaborations he is interested in how individuals and the organisations can shape responsible practice, step out of dysfunctional or outmoded patterns of behaviour, deepen affective competence and learn new ways of working fit for the future.

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**Nick Ellerby**





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