

# PEER WORKS

Embracing the movement for collaborative  
working and distributed power

YOU?





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What if there are better ways of working that value freedom, responsibility, authenticity?

Imagine what your organisation could achieve if all its people were collaborating effectively, consciously and dynamically?

Ever longed for a workplace that honours the whole person and as a result improves how it runs and serves its clients and stakeholders?

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# INTRODUCTION



WE BELIEVE THERE ARE WAYS OF WORKING THAT ALLOW PEOPLE TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL, WHILE ALSO SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF JOINT LEADERSHIP.



Organisations shape our lives – where we live, how we're governed, the things we buy, how and where we work. We spend most of our working lives in organisations. They provide us with education, work and income, and perhaps finally with care and support. They can bring us moments of creativity and satisfaction. They can provide the most amazing services and deliver significant impact. They can also drive us crazy with frustration and undermine the very purpose and values they strive to achieve.

Often it is the bureaucratic nature of organisations that is at the heart of this frustration – the procedures, policies, structures and constraints that build up over time. Organisational bureaucracies seem to create patterns that no-one wants, no-one understands and that often reinforce hierarchies and the concentration of power.

At PEERworks we know there are other ways. This booklet tells our five-year journey as a group of organisations exploring peer-based working. We believe there are ways of working that allow people to reach their full potential, while also sharing the responsibilities of joint leadership. This helps teams to flourish, and organisations to achieve their objectives in sustainable and life-affirming ways.

We hope this booklet acts as an invitation for you to join us on the journey of finding new authentic collaborative ways of working. We don't think we've found all the answers yet. But we have built up some experience – and we'd love to add your stories to the growing bank of approaches, tools and experiences.

The booklet has been structured around themes and also includes stories and some tips and techniques. Feel free to dip in and out, read it in any order, or explore cover-to-cover. Whatever suits your attention span and your way of absorbing. We hope it serves your own development as a valuable catalyst in your life and work.

**We have mixed these examples of theory and practice together throughout the booklet to show how they inform each other**

## A GUIDE

This booklet contains a range of different ways to look at peer working. Feel free to dip in and out or to choose the bits that most appeal to you. It is designed as a manual with tools and approaches, and as a book of stories from organisations exploring how to work together in life-affirming ways.

### LOOK OUT FOR:



#### Stories

Short descriptions of organisations and their journeys



#### Applied Concepts

For those interested in the theories that feed into this work



#### Side boxes

Additional prompts and tools you may find useful



#### Questions

Challenges you might ask yourself about your own organisation



# RUTH'S STORY

Throughout its life Reclaim has gone from strength to strength. But around four years ago Ruth noticed something did not feel right. As a pioneering spirit she had put everything she had into the growth of the organisation. She had a strong vision of where it should be going and what it should be doing. She rallied people around her and built an organisation that did cutting edge work with working-class young people.

But then Reclaim's greatest strength, Ruth herself, began to become a constraint. There was only so much of her to go round. People came to her for decisions they could easily make themselves. And as the organisation grew, policies and procedures seemed to be needed.

Reclaim had always done strengths-based working with the young people it mentored. Peer approaches, personal growth and collaboration were in its DNA. Could these same approaches be mirrored in the office, amongst staff? How could Reclaim stay true to its vision and values without Ruth being their main repository?

Four years on and so much has changed. It's still a work in progress but with careful attention things have shifted. Nine young people now work for Reclaim running programmes and co-producing new initiatives. Systems and procedures are in place but staff have a degree of autonomy and a strong sense of what working at Reclaim is all about. And a shared set of values – to guide decisions and behaviour – are front and centre.

How this was achieved – and what's still to do – is the story of peer working.

**Ruth Ibegbuna founded Reclaim in 2007. It has grown rapidly since then, now employing more than a dozen staff in a multi-award-winning charity.**

# PART ONE Fundamentals

## 1 AN INVITATION

**This is an invitation to people who are actively exploring new ways of working and alternative forms of organisation.**

We are aware of many people seeking new approaches to the way organisations operate. Sometimes these pioneers may feel isolated or disconnected from like-minded colleagues who are also designing and implementing change. One thing we learnt when setting up PEERworks is that we are not alone. By sharing our experiences, our challenges, our successes, we have built a community of practice that supports and sustains us.

### What are the benefits of PEERworks?

As a group of organisations working within this world of emerging structures, we have taken the time to reflect on what is working for us and the benefits it brings to our work. Of course, there are challenges involved in peer working (which we explore later in this booklet) but these are far outweighed by the benefits of patterns that help to release human potential.

As organisations our biggest asset is our people. Finding ways for them to play to their strengths, to support each other, to empower by being empowered, are what peer working is all about. By creating a culture that values everyone, distributes power more evenly and contains processes for shared decision-making, we have discovered that we can generate a range of powerful benefits.

#### In peer-based organisations we can:

- › Powerfully fulfill the potential of individuals, teams and the organisation
- › Co-create leaderful organisations rather than leader-led organisations
- › Develop agile, flexible and adaptive ways of working
- › Develop individual and mutual accountability
- › Create more people in more places willing and able to “step up”
- › Inspire life, learning and a culture fit for the future
- › Free people to make the decisions that affect them
- › Build organisations where people and values align to bring greater impact in the world
- › Attract staff committed to collaborative, responsible and shared leadership.

### Who are PEERworks?

PEERworks is a dynamic peer-based group of leading edge social change organisations applying alternative approaches to how we work. We are one response to the impulse for alternatives to the usual answers and the usual ways of organising.

## What does PEERworks stand for?

We are about developing forms of organisation that embody principles such as equality, compassion, social justice and mutual respect. PEERworks stands for a commitment to developing and implementing policies, practices and structures that demonstrate and promote these principles within our organisations. This includes supporting each other to reflect on our organisational development, so that we continue to learn and improve.

## What does PEERworks involve?

We aren't a talking shop, we are more of a learning, action and mutual support group. We are made up of organisations that are actively trying things out, reflecting on and refining our approaches, and continually developing our practice. We welcome people from organisations that are exploring flatter structures, shared leadership and distributed power and who are keen to share their experiences openly so we can learn from each other.

## Why Peer Working?

It has become commonplace for the organisations that shape our lives to be based on a hierarchical model. It's so common, that we almost see hierarchy as inevitable, somehow natural. In truth, the hierarchical model has a built-in tendency towards a "command and control" approach which seeks to shape behaviour, in response to the needs and wishes of those at the top.

In the process hierarchies risk crushing creativity. They often stifle personal freedom and the ability to act by imposing rules. Research tells us that the more rules there are, the more "stupid" the behaviour in the organisation becomes. People feel unable to think for themselves, believing that there is a rule for everything. It's not actually that the people are stupid – just that there is a culture of not making informed decisions.

In response to these unintended consequences of hierarchy, a whole range of new organisational forms are emerging. As the world becomes more complex, and individuals seek more autonomy and freedom, many people are realising that we need people and organisations that are able to think on their feet, operate more consciously, network effectively and harness the potential of both those inside the organisation and those around it.

Peer working is essentially about finding ways to release human potential and bring more of ourselves to our work. This means creating structures and ways of working that equalise participation and distribute decision-making, learning, responsibility and accountability throughout an organisation.

“  
PEER WORKING IS ESSENTIALLY ABOUT  
FINDING WAYS TO RELEASE HUMAN  
POTENTIAL AND BRING MORE OF  
OURSELVES TO OUR WORK  
”

**PEERworks is  
not for everyone  
in every context.  
These questions  
might help you  
discover how ready  
you are for trying  
something new**

IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO THREE  
OR MORE OF THE ABOVE, IT COULD  
BE WORTH YOU CONSIDERING BEING A  
PEERWORKS ORGANISATION.

??

**Are your current ways of working (or structures) getting in the way of what is required for the future?**

Yes  No

**Are you looking for approaches that encourage individual and mutual accountability and responsibility?**

Yes  No

**Is your organisation under 1000 employees?**

Yes  No

**Does your organisation need a commitment to developing its people over time in order to be sustainable in a changing world?**

Yes  No

**Is it recognised that self-initiating, collaborating and effective decision-making behaviour needs to be demonstrated by as many people as possible across the organisation rather than just at the senior levels?**

Yes  No

**Are you prepared for organisational change to take months and possibly years rather than weeks and months?**

Yes  No

**Is there an appetite for exploring, learning and being open to change?**

Yes  No



# 2 PEER WORKING IN ORGANISATIONS



**APPLIED THEORY**

## TEAL ORGANISATIONS

Frederic Laloux's recent book *Reinventing Organisations* described institutions at the cutting edge of new ways of working. He called these Teal Organisations and observed that they shared some key cultural characteristics:

**Self management** – trust, freedom with accountability, open information, the power of collective intelligence, responsibility

**Wholeness** – equal worth, contribution, safety and care, connection, learning and growth, relationships, resolving conflicts

**Purpose** – the organisation has a soul and a purpose, so do the individuals. Sensing into the future, profits flow from purpose.

In exploring our own stories, we recognise we are schooled in hierarchy - both literally and metaphorically. Think back through your life – family, school, university, work. It's quite likely all will have been organised hierarchically. It will have been clear where the formal power sat – concentrated the higher up the hierarchy you go.

While this can be useful where a high degree of organisation and control is required, it does not fit all situations or functions.

An exciting array of new organisational forms and theories are evolving. They offer a wider choice of structures and approaches for organisations that see the benefits of distributing power and enabling people throughout the organisation to negotiate some professional latitude.

In research we contributed to, The Oasis School of Human Relations found definite trends in developing the Workplace of Tomorrow - organisations where people and planet really matter. The research identified seven principles organisations need to demonstrate. Some of these are also particularly relevant for organisations interested in peer working:

## 7 principles to shape the workplace of tomorrow

- > Connect people with their passion, their purpose and their planet
- > From leadership to leaderful
- > Create authentic organisations
- > Approach complexity with inquiry
- > Pattern hope to help the future emerge
- > Develop relational innovations
- > Trust more; control less

So, by peer-working or peer-based, we mean organisations that are committed to finding ways for people to work together in a spirit of collaboration or cooperation. They may be organisations that have flatter structures or are run cooperatively. Equally they may be organisations that have traditionally had a hierarchy and are in transition. Whatever the context, they are involved in experimenting with more distributed forms of power and decision-making. They are trying to develop a culture where all voices have equal consideration and respect and where the people impacted by decisions are involved in making them.

Of course such an approach has many implications. For instance, it suggests that relationships are open to exploration, clarification or challenge. Meetings are likely to be more open and to encourage individuals to work with the issues that arise: issues of competence, structure, power, rivalry, competition, favouritism and so on.

If relationships are open to comment, the peer approach then helps create a safe space for difficulties in working relationships to be explored, for organisational challenges to be understood and for the right people to address them using an appropriate form of decision-making.

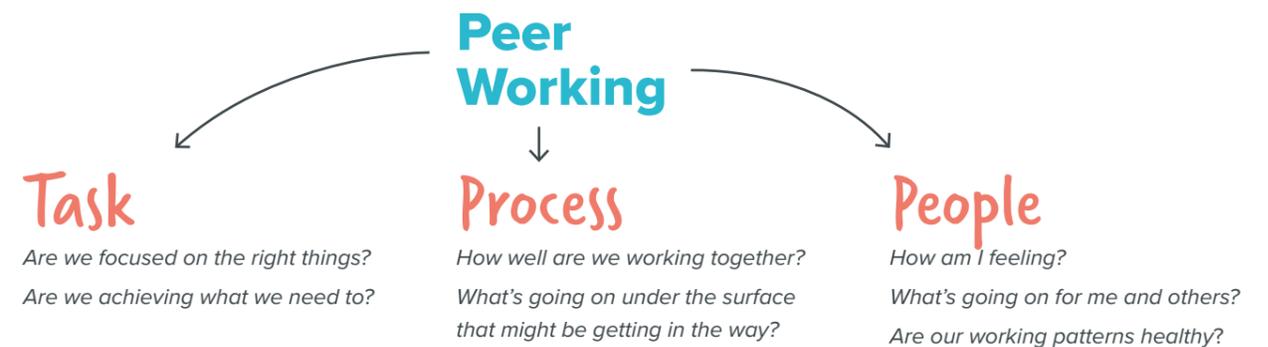
Our experience suggests that there are no easy answers and that no single thing will create a positive peer-based working environment. On the contrary it requires a clear set of values, a living learning culture plus a whole set of systems and processes to build trust and closer working relationships.

While there is no silver bullet for healthy peer working, we have, through our on-going inquiry, identified some factors that help to create a positive culture:

- > Focus on tangible things that can be changed - try things out, reflect and learn
- > Find ways for each of us to realise the importance of working on ourselves as agents of change within the organisation
- > Build in 'reflective' practice so that individuals, groups and teams can consciously review how we are operating and what our own part is within the system
- > Work with the creative tension between task, process and people. All three need attention if an organisation is to run consciously and effectively
- > Value difference – there is strength in diversity, so airing and exploring differences can help build cohesion, trust, learning and ultimately a more robust outcome.

One way to summarise this is to say that effective organisations, including peer-based organisations, tend to pay attention to three aspects: people, task and process. In our experience, many organisations pay a lot of attention to getting the task done. But if this is done at the expense of caring for people, or noticing the processes and dynamics at play, then people can burn out or disengage. Then actually, the task suffers.

Much of the next section describes ways we have found to embed and strengthen the peer-working model within our organisations. It provides some practical tools and approaches that we've found useful along the way.



## CHECKING IN

Why not start meetings with a check-in. This gives each person uninterrupted time to answer two or three questions such as:

How am I (really)? What's going on for me at the moment?

What's stuck with me since the last time we met?

What do I want out of the session?

What will I put in?

One thing I'm grateful for today.



APPLIED CONCEPT

PHASES OF ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

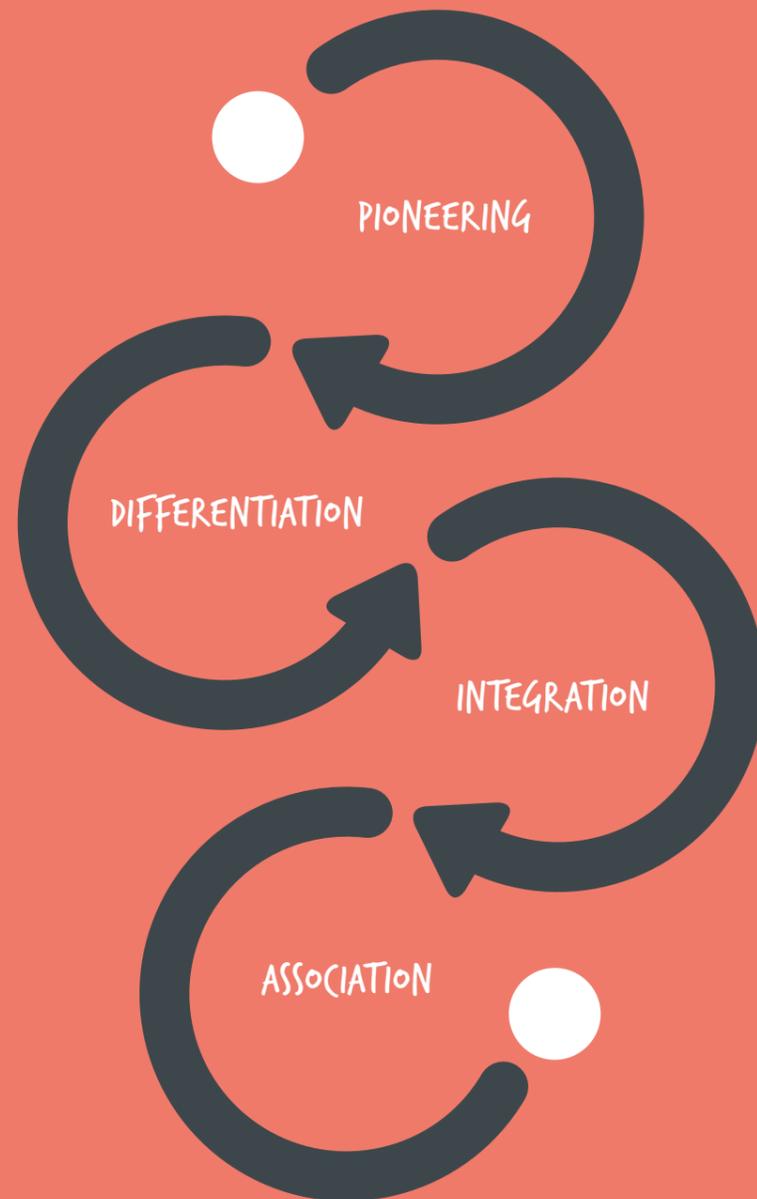
We have noticed that many organisations go through phases of development, for instance:

- PIONEERING
- DIFFERENTIATION
- INTEGRATION
- ASSOCIATION

Many organisations start with the pioneering inspirational founder. Everything revolves around this energetic and often visionary force and everyone pulls together flexing roles and responsibilities to get things done. There is little formal sense of management or structure that has any real influence.

Then there is a call for clearer roles, clearer responsibilities and systems. This leads to a form of differentiation. This often essential phase can have a tendency to over-solidify things resulting in bureaucracy, losing sight of the original values – and frustration at what is being lost. Organisations can move beyond this by becoming more agile, more joined up across the parts and bringing a focus on people and what is really valued back into the mix.

The result can be described as a phase of Integration. Here the organisation finds its stride again and operates as an effective whole. A fourth phase can be seen where organisational boundaries open up, creating a drive towards networking and meshing with other organisations to achieve purpose. This process of working and influencing across boundaries can be termed Association. These latter phases can flourish through the skills and attitudes encouraged by peer-based working.



## 3 PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

So how do you actually do it? What can we do on a day-to-day basis to promote peer-based ways of working? As a group of organisations exploring this in real life we have found a range of methods and techniques that help. We see these as falling into three aspects of practice:



### PEER Processes

Organisational life is full of processes and ways of working that either embody hierarchy or can create a more distributed approach to power. Such areas include:

- > How meetings are run and who chairs them
- > How and where decisions are made
- > Reward systems – both formal and informal
- > Accountabilities, particular in relation to statutory requirements
- > Supervision and appraisal
- > Performance management
- > Management roles and responsibilities
- > Group and team leadership
- > Encouraging the whole person.

We understand the essence of peer working as creating organisational spaces where people are able to bring more of who they are and what they offer to work. Yes, it's about distributing power in a different way and while this is an end in itself it's also a means to more productive, enjoyable and healthy organisations.



## SOME PEER PROCESS TOOLS

Role and Function review: a structured group process to clarify roles to iron out any overlaps and identify any gaps.

Anchoring - changing the labels within the team and establishing individuals to be reference points for each other rather than managers. No one person in charge, but everyone working within a set of agreed and shared principles that can keep everyone accountable.

Clearly devolved responsibilities: having all members understanding their roles within each individual project, team or position.



To what extent do your processes and procedures concentrate or distribute power?

How much do you welcome and encourage people to bring their whole self to work?

What is your prevailing model of leadership? How tied to status is it? How fluid is it?

How clear are roles and responsibilities?

As a group we decided to look in detail at four areas in detail. The points below provide some tangible examples of principles and approaches that are working for us:

### Encouraging the whole person

- › Recognising that we are more than just employees - we are people. What's going on in our lives impacts on how we are at work.
- › Acknowledging that being human is more than just an intellectual activity. We are head, heart, body and soul.
- › This means it is useful to develop all aspects of our self and all aspects of our ability to interact with others: team work, emotional intelligence, intuition, compassion.
- › Building in creative workshops and group time - to help thoughts, feelings and insights to emerge from teams.
- › Helping individuals to bring more of themselves, using methods and tools for more personal and team encouragement.

### Group and team leadership

- › Knowing that "there's a leader in every chair" and that leadership can move fluidly within a team depending on the task, people's feelings, the level of trust.
- › Rotating membership - groups of people running certain tasks or projects, with an agreed rotation of all members, for instance on a shift pattern. To give the opportunity to learn from others and to enable different people to take leadership roles as and when required - working with the authentic hierarchy.
- › Rotating facilitator role - when the team remains the same but different members take on the role of chair, facilitator or lead within the setting, i.e. rotating the chair role to organise and manage the space, topics and timings of the meeting.
- › Co-creating the agenda - this is to create opportunities for all group or team members to put up their own agenda items for a meeting.

### Supervision

- › Alphabetical supervision - arrange the team in a circle by name. Each person becomes the supervisor and supervised.
- › 360 appraisal - an approach which is designed to offer a perspective of the whole progress of an individual using self-assessment, the views of those they supervise, those who manage them, as well as the potential views of clients they work with. Aiming to take all aspects to offer an overall appraisal. A diagnostic is normally in place beforehand with questions that are reflected on within the process. 360 is often undertaken anonymously.
- › Self and Peer Review and Assessment (SAPA) – an iterative annual process where we chose our own peer group to conduct our review. We make a claim of our growth as a practitioner, backed by evidence. This is then affirmed or not by our peers.
- › Self and manager review – a Self and Peer Review but with the added stipulation that our manager has to be included in the review circle.

### Roles and responsibilities

There is a lot of evidence that where roles and responsibilities are unclear this can give rise to tensions and frustrations - we might expect or assume that someone else is meant to be doing something that has an impact upon our job. So being clear can be very helpful (especially after the Pioneering phase described earlier).

## PEER Structures

Over the last few years more examples have been emerging of organisations experimenting with peer-based forms of organising. These include entities such as The Oasis School of Human Relations (peer working and peer-based learning with 14 staff and 50+ associates since 1989), FAVI in France with 500 workers, Morning Star with 700 workers in California, Bettys & Taylors Group in Harrogate with 1,500 staff and a collaborative CEO team and distributed leadership, Kin&Co (a London-based international communications organisation) and Buurtzorg's 7,000 nurses in the Netherlands.

These organisations are part of a long and rich tradition of exploring ways to work together as equals, peers or collaborators. In the UK there is a vibrant co-operative sector which stretches back to the 19th century. We also have mutuals in financial services and more recently new structures such as Community Interest Companies.

The skills and attitudes required seem to echo many of the working values of the organisations that formed PEERworks and so provide the potential for a different kind of approach that blends collaborative working with distributed leadership.

The following is simply to give some flavour of the emerging models, and we anticipate many more will be prototyped.

#### 1. Single self-directing team

Within small organisations, under twenty employees, the approach is to run the organisation through a single team with clear relationships to any overall governing body, including who and how links, dialogue and decisions are made. The skills needed relate to working with others, ability to shuffle roles and self-manage, as well as knowing when to collaborate and when to act. The nature of the work determines the level of meetings called for, the shaping of authorities, and the frequency of large group engagement.

#### 2. Interconnected teams

This is a fairly widespread approach to peer-based working in organisations. It reflects an approach termed 'parallel teams' by Frederic Laloux. It is suitable for work that can be reduced and repeated readily enough, and therefore offered through teams that can hold a high degree of autonomy. The teams remain connected within a wider community of practice to share learning and determine administrative activities. Roles are determined within the teams of 5 to 12 people, handling their own budgeting, planning, recruitment, peer supervision, etc. Co-ordination teams are often called for, including teams that take care of tasks that



### APPLIED CONCEPT

## HOLACRACY

Holacracy is a very recent development in organisational practice. Like Sociocracy (described elsewhere) it is based on self-managing circles. The difference is that Holacracy has a very prescribed set of meetings and processes. It is based on two in particular: governance (being clear who is taking responsibility for what) and tensions (identifying and dealing with where we are rubbing up against each other).

The idea is that this set of processes creates a stable structure which then allows freedom and self-management to blossom. Some organisations that have implemented Holacracy have found that this gives rise to a lot of emotional issues that then need to be dealt with outside the formal system (questions such as "Am I able to really manage myself?", "How do I deal with the conflicts and tensions with others when there's no manager to go to?"). This need for more emotional intelligence and the ability to relate to others as whole human beings goes hand in hand with peer-based working.



What are the characteristics of your organisation's structure?

What does it say about where power is held and how it works?

would otherwise be duplicated. There are no middle managers, rather coaches have key roles.

### 3. Web of Practitioners

Issues such as services, budgets and results are agreed in teams, with each team knowing how it is linked. But roles and commitments are less about teams and more about each person creating their role and approach, but having to gain support and agreement from those individuals they most need to be connected to. Such agreements are written down and shared with everyone.

### 4. Nested Teams

This approach has been popularised under the term Holacracy and is essentially teams that are nested and called circles. Each circle is autonomous and decides how roles are shaped, but unlike single self-directing teams, these circles are able to align with the needs of other circles, in some applications reflecting a traditional hierarchy, thus enabling more specialisation the deeper the circles go within an organisation.

There is a hierarchy of complexity and scope, but the hierarchy is not of people and power. Each circle is still able to make its own decisions, and these cannot be overturned by others. A person may be in more than one circle.

## PEER Culture

Creating a culture that values everyone and encourages collaboration takes time and energy. In one sense it encourages us to continually un-school ourselves and re-learn the intuitive approach to play we knew as children.

Because we are so used to operating within hierarchies it can be challenging to get into a peer-based mindset – and from there into peer-based ways of working. In our experience it can be a challenge for managers to share power – often because they see it as their job to make difficult decisions; it's what they're paid for. It can be an equal challenge for employees to step up – they can feel like they're not paid enough to take responsibility or that they just want to do their job then go home.

We've also found that power operates at a bewildering number of layers. Those of us who have worked in cooperatives or collectives know only too well that a structure that more evenly distributes power does not necessarily make life easier. Informal hierarchies emerge, based on the social hierarchies of wider society: gender, race, age and so on. The longer-serving members of an organisation often wield considerable power.

For us, peer-working does not mean doing away with power or leadership. Rather it means consciously taking note of where and how power operates and checking whether that's how we want it to work. We are all of equal value and we all have an equal voice, but some have more experience, or are subject experts, some

have a very detailed view of the specifics while others have an overview of the whole. All this needs to be taken into account.

One small business connected to The Oasis School has set out its own principles for how power should be devolved. This involves ensuring that decisions, responsibility and accountability are all located in the same place – otherwise people are not held to the decisions they make, or don't have the power to change the things they are accountable for. The overarching principles are set out like this:

- › The foundations of distributed leadership are engagement, trust, honesty, and effective relationships, interdependent with mutually agreed clarity of roles, authorities and accountabilities.
- › Each of us in the organisation has the ability and responsibility to be leaderful and to influence decisions, including those that impact upon us.
- › At every level we are clear about the what, who and how of decision-making.
- › Decisions are made by the person or designated group closest to the activity within their agreed authorities, whilst taking into account any givens and the wider impact of the decision.
- › Decision-making groups should contain the optimum number of people to enable effective decision making.
- › Functional managers are responsible for modelling distributed leadership behaviours and influencing, supporting and enabling them in others.
- › Distributed leadership is not a vehicle for functional leaders to absolve themselves of their responsibilities. There will be occasions when high-risk decisions, agreeing business priorities, inexperience or sustained stuckness may require a leadership intervention.
- › Where there is visible hierarchical leadership it needs to be aligned with the distributed leadership approach.

A peer-based culture is also one that is likely to pay particular attention to the welfare and wellbeing of its people. If we are honest, this is not always the case in organisations that purport to have a social purpose or to be good employers.

Many of us have worked in organisations where we've caught ourselves in a sub-conscious competition to work harder than others to prove our commitment or our value. We may also believe that we should sacrifice our own interests for the cause. These beliefs can set up unhealthy dynamics within groups, teams or organisations.

A few tools to help support wellbeing include:

- › Designated time to check the wellbeing of team members and to air any tensions or conflicts between them
- › Using simple techniques to validate each person – for example checking-in at the start of meetings ensures everyone feels they have a voice



## MIKE'S STORY

### CORE MUSC

Core Music is a social enterprise in North East England which is on a mission to make music accessible to the whole community. It's a place where people of all ages and abilities can learn to play or sing, and take part in sessions, clubs and workshops. Founder Mike Coleman says:

From my perspective and experience of trying to operate in a peer way it is so important to put the building blocks in place. The philosophy and culture of an organisation is paramount to creating the environment for peer group working to take place. Interestingly I thought we had this here but the reality is that peer group working happens in small pockets of work and isn't organisation-wide. We have a lot to do and much much more to learn.

From our PEERworks residential sessions I have felt more valued and less judged than in any other working environment. Trying to translate those sessions to day-to-day operating is a different animal as different pressures apply. Personally, I would like other colleagues to experience the Haybergill Residential as this could potentially give me an ally and champion of the concept.



# LAUREN'S STORY

BRUNSWICK ORGANIC NURSERY

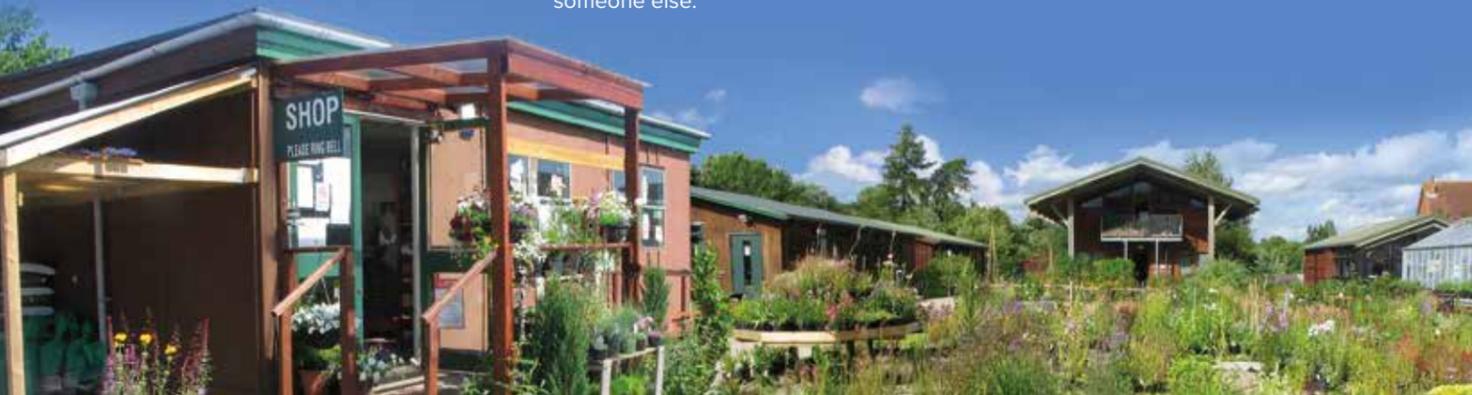
Peer working for me means active and conscious collaboration, with each person helping to steer the work forwards whilst holding onto what is significant for them in the process - be that a boundary, an objective, a principle . . . Peer working means being able to work in a way that considers each person holistically - what can we each offer right now and how this is affected by wellbeing, homelife, relationships, experience, confidence and development. It can be comfortable, reassuring and feeling like I am not alone. It can be uncomfortable as the process, or my peers, encourage (or even demand) me to face myself and what I need to change.

When I think of the people that I have worked most closely with as a peer at Brunswick, these are a few of the ingredients that stand out to me as needing to exist in our relationship.

- > Honesty and trust. Real honesty and real trust - so often, these things are said but are not really true at work. Being able to speak honestly and have also trust in the relationship and individual that this is done with care.
- > Being recognised and valued and being responsible for reciprocating this for others. I need to feel valued and I recognise that others do too.
- > Self reflection - am I getting this spot on, do I need to tweak what I'm doing or am I way off?
- > Being accountable and willing to take on what is needed. Things will go wrong, the unexpected does happen . . . and still, I will be able to decide what I am going to do about anything that I am responsible for.
- > The plan is the plan until we decide together that it is not. We trust each other to get on with the plan knowing what the boundaries are.

My hardest experience of peer working was trying to peer work through a tricky and exhausting restructure in which my day-to-day role (Deputy Manager) became so confused with Adam's role (Manager) and simultaneously, I was having to face a future role which I'd never contemplated and struggled to see myself in. Trying to deal with the demands of a messy present whilst handling strong emotions about the future and be a good peer was sometimes really hard!

This is where hierarchy can be easier to fall back into but peer working is better! As I look back now, peer working meant tackling and deciding what to do together, trusting each other even when everything felt like a mess, valuing what we each could offer and manage, and for me in particular, Adam being a very patient, honest and encouraging peer whilst I did a huge amount of self-reflection! I have changed through this process in a way that I know I would have avoided or missed if I'd just slipped into the easier 'safe haven' of hierarchy and deferring to someone else.



- > Special meetings dedicated to reviewing wellbeing
- > Valuing people as people, not just as "employees"
- > Encouraging people to bring their whole-self to work, rather than putting on a professional face when they walk through the door.

These things send subtle messages that we are all OK and we are all valued. This is the foundation for a culture of peer working.

## Learning Together as PEERs

Peer working can also be effectively used to explore difficult issues and questions. Various approaches have been used by our members to create a more participative and collaborative approach to research and inquiry. These include:

**Action Learning** – working as peers on a theme, topic or questions. As a group we meet to explore a challenge then go back into our workplace to try out approaches before coming back together to share learning.

**Critical Action Learning** – as above but with conscious reflection on process and group dynamics.

**Community of Practice** – people sharing experiences around a tangible piece of practice/work. We agree a specific practice issue we want to work on together. We share our own experiences and learn together so we can improve our practice.

**Constellations of Communities of Practice** – networks of Communities of Practice that share experiences and learn from each other.

**Inquiry Processes** – collaborative and/or co-operative more or less self-managing processes to explore a challenging question.

We have also found that it can be beneficial to do our monitoring and evaluation work as peers. This means finding ways for those involved in a project to be actively involved in the evaluation process. They might help to design it, be involved in reflection processes and be asked to self-assess strengths and areas for future development.

In a traditional framework this might seem less "objective" than an "independent" evaluation but the results are actually no less rigorous. People undertaking work are often fully aware of what's going well, what isn't and what they'd do differently next time round. All they really need is the space and time to reflect - and a bit of good facilitation to provide a degree of challenge.

Peer evaluation processes we have been involved in have included elements like the following:

- Interviews:** getting views and perspectives from all stakeholders



How would you describe your organisation's culture in three adjectives?

What would an outsider say your culture says about your organisation?

What one thing would you change to make it more peer-based?



APPLIED CONCEPT

INQUIRY PROCESS

PEERworks members use a range of different Inquiry processes to explore issues for which there is no easy available answer. Inquiries are a great way to find deeper meaning, explore research in action and prototype new solutions. They also tend to build strong bonds between those involved.

**Cooperative Inquiry:**

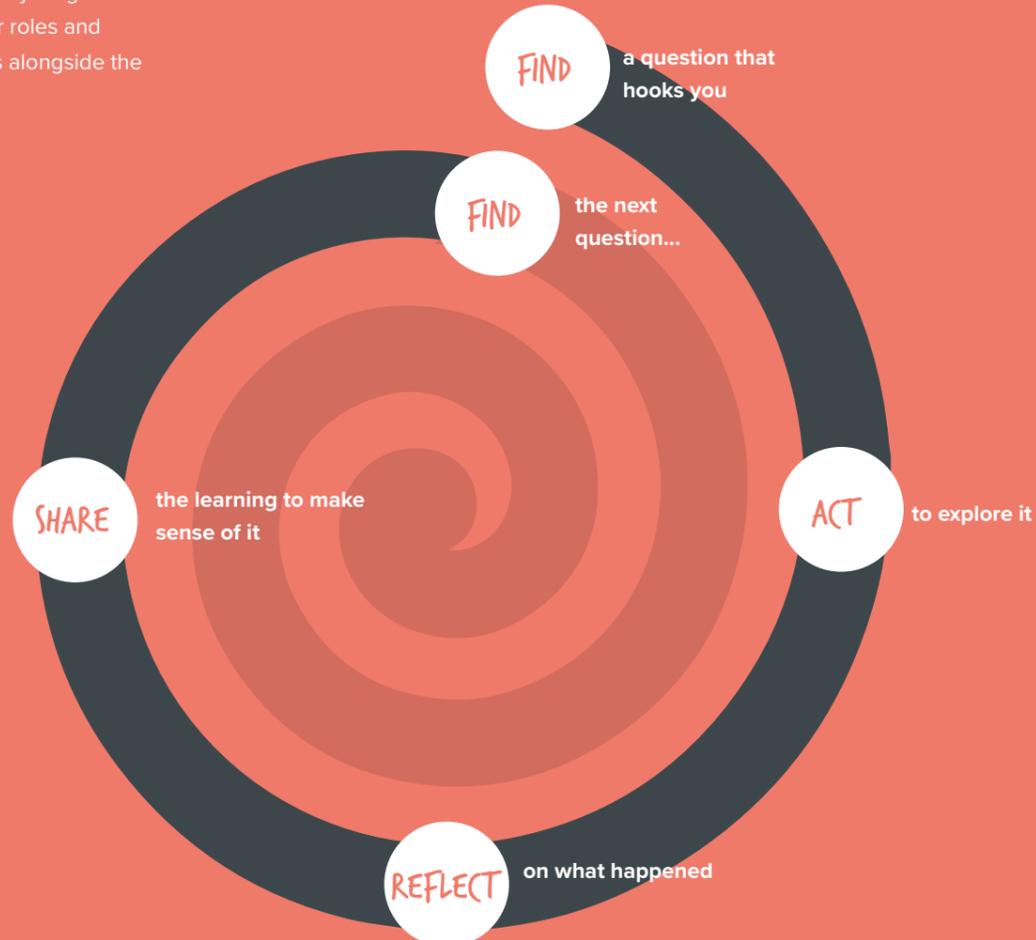
The major idea of cooperative inquiry is to “research ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ people.” It emphasises that all active participants are fully involved in research decisions as co-researchers. At its most radical it is a call to bring your whole self in a way that creates a learning environment that honours freedom and responsibility. Often those who start the inquiry let go of their leader or facilitator roles and become co-researchers alongside the others involved.

**Collaborative inquiry:**

is similar to cooperative inquiry in providing a cycle of meetings that move between action, reflection, making sense and learning, but is often held more strongly by a facilitator and as a result more suited to contexts that work better with more structure and guidance.

**Appreciative Inquiry:**

a strengths-based model which starts with telling stories about times when things have gone well and uses these to identify strengths and assets that can be built up. The process then moves into exploring what needs to change to become the organisation we can envision.



What are the “wicked” problems or questions you face?

Would they benefit from some creative and collaborative exploration?

How often do you set aside time to get out of the operational and spend time in the bigger questions?

**Storytelling:** starting with the initiator or the longest-serving member of the project and working round to the newest. What have they seen? What have been some of the highs and lows?

**Metaphors:** What’s a metaphor that describes the journey we’ve been on and the next chapter?

**Nature-based analogy:** If this project were a tree, what are its roots, its fruits, the fallen branches?

**Whole-system reflection events:** Finding people to represent the various parts of the system and all the stakeholders. Telling the story from different points of view.

**Fish-bowl:** Asking different stakeholders to share their views, usually as a conversation between four points of view, watched on by other participants. Then they vacate their seats in the centre allowing four new perspectives.

The key is that stakeholders are active participants rather than feeling “done to” within an externally-run process. Of course, even this type of peer-based evaluation can benefit from external facilitation or expertise. It’s more a matter of how it’s designed and run.

# 4 VALUES TO SUPPORT PEER WORKING

At PEERworks we have worked together for five years, sharing our experiences, and engaging in joint working activities to explore what it really means to work as peers. It is a process of action learning and cooperative inquiry. We raised issues and questions when we were together and agreed to explore these in our own workplaces before we came back together again.

After several years we felt we'd learnt enough to identify some of the underlying principles that bound our efforts together. These are the values that underpin peer working in our organisations:



## 1 Distributed power, authority and influence

Reaching a shared understanding of how power and influence operate; feeling able to name and challenge when needed; knowing who is/are in the best position to make decisions.

As we have explored peer-working approaches we have tried to set aside traditional hierarchical power structures. This allows more and more members to be equally empowered to act. Each person increasingly has authority to make

decisions relating to their roles and responsibilities as a peer worker and is encouraged to take decisions as fully engaged employees or volunteers.

To do this, peer groups need to guard against the potency of informal hierarchies of power (see below). Staying awake to the re-emergence of hierarchies or the growth of new power bases is a particular and sensitive responsibility of peer-working teams. Raising awareness and recognising informal hierarchies as they emerge is important, and can involve challenging a member of the team with evidence of undesired behaviour. If not addressed, the consequent disruption can be demotivating as well as taking up precious time and emotional energy.

We have found that there can sometimes be a tension between trustee or director boards and the desire of those working within organisations to move towards greater trust and self-management. Trustees need to be mindful of their legal responsibilities, which are often shaped through hierarchical systems. Meanwhile staff and volunteers can be keen to have greater freedoms and responsibilities.

These tensions can be minimised when Boards recognise their need to develop a more agile and collaborative approach. Progress can emerge when staff and trustees work together on developing the peer group structure and jointly own it. Creating a peer group structure within the board itself is a question for contemporary governance, when for example both charity and company law expect a named chairperson.

## 2 Collaborative decision making

Agreeing how decisions are made both within meetings and outside them. When can we take the time to build consensus and what are the consequences when we do not? When are individuals empowered to act and decide?

At its best, peer-working is when people make individual and informed decisions in their own sphere of work. When decisions are needed that affect multiple spheres of activities, those affected come together to:

- > assess the variety of options available
- > weigh the consequences of the various courses of action
- > share their knowledge
- > ensure that each person has adequate information on which to base a decision
- > come to a consensus on which to base a collaborative decision.

This is not always a straightforward process. We strive to undertake this process in a time-effective manner but we have found that the speed and efficiency of decision-making is often dependent upon the degree of trust between partners. And trust takes time.

Collaborative decision-making also asks us to be open to changing an opinion or letting go of authority we may once have held. At times we need to let go of ego to reach agreement for the benefit of the organisation.



PEER GROUPS NEED TO GUARD AGAINST THE POTENCY OF INFORMAL HIERARCHIES OF POWER



## DISTRIBUTION OF POWER AT STUDIO HOUSE

Chris Williams, Director

We decided rather than having different departments and roles within a meeting, we would work in all areas together but structured meetings to reflect the topic. For example, meeting headings were management, HR, day programme, Health and Safety etc... and the same people would run all meetings but with different hats on. This allowed us to use authentic hierarchy based on the principle that the person with the most knowledge at any one time has the freedom to take the lead.

“  
COLLABORATIVE DECISION-  
MAKING ALSO ASKS US TO BE OPEN  
TO CHANGING AN OPINION OR  
LETTING GO OF AUTHORITY  
”

It can also be helpful to stick with it - and not “opt out”. As peers we are encouraged to stay engaged with the process. In return our peers will make efforts to ensure that all voices are heard and taken account of.

As a collaborative decision-making process can typically be demanding to learn and apply, especially initially, the organisation needs to ensure that time is allowed in work schedules for all staff to be fully involved in decision-making.

Collaborative decision making means that “power” needs to be acknowledged wherever it is thought to reside and that an applied process of decision making is based on a shared understanding and use of power, agreed and implemented by everyone.

### 3 Relationships based on the whole person

**People are complex and beautiful. We do not need to leave our self at the door when we come to work. We know that working with these complexities is worth it because this is where people grow and interpersonal blockages can be dissolved.**

Each person brings a unique set of experiences, skills, strengths (and limitations). As peer organisations we are making efforts to respect these, take them into consideration and value the strength and additional capacities that come with diversity.

Peers are recognised not only as workers but as individuals with multiple aspects to their lives (including outside the workplace) and in doing so relationships can be recognised on a more holistic view of the whole person. This reflects people starting from where they are, not where others think they are or want them to be. We continue to try to work with people’s real experiences, questions and feelings.

We don’t pretend that this is easy; after all, I know something about me that you don’t know, you know something about me I don’t know, we both know this about me, and then there’s the unknown. To work with the whole person does not mean we need to know every nuance of all our colleagues’ characters and lives, but that we respect those parts we do know, and we are able to distinguish between those parts important for the workplace and those parts which are irrelevant.

One often overlooked element of the person in the workplace is – are they doing what they most enjoy? Transition to a peer group structure can unleash previously hidden potential. And this can mean we have to think creatively about moving people around so that they can work where their passion and energy lie.

Sensitivity to issues underlying a colleague’s workplace behaviour is fundamental to peer group working.



### 4 Openness, mutual respect and equality of voice

**Showing care, compassion and challenge to your fellow peers. Giving encouragement for the fainthearted to become courageous. Stretching yourself while looking after your own well-being.**

One of the most positive aspects of a peer culture is that sense of people being in something together, valuing each other, respecting each other and still being able to speak their truth. Again, we have found this comes with trust and with a sense that relationships are strong enough that they will not break when we have to have difficult conversations.

Peers are encouraged to be open, to “speak their own truths”, to respect their colleagues and ensure that each peer is given equal weight in offering their opinions and being heard. Everyone has the opportunity to express their view even though not all voices will carry the same resonance. Those who feel disadvantaged in any way need to be encouraged to speak openly about their fears so that they can be recognised and addressed.

An environment which nurtures these qualities is essential; the acquisition of appropriate skills to practice these qualities is necessary. Individual behaviour in this context expresses gentleness and warmth towards others in debate.

### 5 Self and mutual accountability

**“Knowing what we stand for is important. Knowing what I stand for is important. Knowing we are going to hold each other to this is just as important.”**

Peers are self-managing as far as possible, taking responsibility for their decisions, questioning their own motives and actions and being open about their mistakes.

Peers are encouraged to hold their colleagues to account if they have not undertaken something that is their responsibility to do, and this will be done in a sensitive, exploratory way, seeking to learn, rather than seeking to blame. This is what makes it peer-accountability rather than hierarchical-accountability.

Ultimately, all peers within the group accept that the success of the organisation, or their part of it, is more important than their individual egos.

### 6 Challenge and the willingness to be challenged

**“Only by doing and being what we need to be will new growth and strength be encouraged.”**

This focus on mutual accountability can sometimes require us to challenge our peers - and in return to be open to challenge. This isn’t about blaming or “calling out”. It’s more about curious questioning, supportive nudging or offering a different, even disruptive, perspective.

“  
PEERS ARE ENCOURAGED  
TO BE OPEN, TO “SPEAK  
THEIR OWN TRUTHS”  
”

This in turn involves the ability to hear differing perspectives and respond positively while being able to ask powerful questions to facilitate others in clarifying, re-framing and learning.

Peers are encouraged to offer challenge and to appropriately question their own actions, motivated by the well-being of the organisation and its people.

Peers welcome constructive feedback from their colleagues in order to develop personally and professionally, and this needs to be given respectfully and appropriately in order for the peer and the organisation to benefit.

This can only happen when all in the group approach an issue with an open mind and hold their individual expertise lightly, acknowledging that often the 'outsider' can see the truth hidden to those who have lived with an issue for a longer time.

## 7 Authentic hierarchy

**"Letting go of the possibility that you are the only one that can do this."**

As we've already said, peer working involves moving beyond structural hierarchies of power to find more inclusive and developmental ways to run organisations. At the same time we have found that within our various organisations we have a wealth of experiences, skills and expertise.

These capabilities build people's ability to perform their specific role and to contribute to the wider goals of the organisation. There will be times when it is appropriate to defer to an individual's view on topics relating to their specialism and give due weight to their opinion. At the same time it is important to accept that even experts can be questioned at a basic level. And their view may or may not be what the wider organisation needs at any given moment.

It's a complex dance between tradition and innovation, knowledge and intuition. This kind of "authentic hierarchy" based on knowledge, skills, expertise and capabilities needs to adapt in each discussion, whilst based on truly valuing each person's potential input.

One person described it this way: "There are no experts, only expertise." Another used the analogy of a flock of geese. They fly in a V formation because this is the most streamlined shape. But the lead goose changes from time to time, allowing for activity then rest. Those not in the lead honk encouragement.

Hierarchies in PEERworks organisations can operate in different ways, depending on the issue requiring a decision, and the breadth of skills and experience represented amongst the peer group. In small organisations, where it may not be possible to have expertise in specialist areas such as finance, HR and law, it is important to recognise gaps and to be honest about the dangers of uninformed opinion. In larger groups, the tendency not to challenge the "experts" or those with many years in post may create an unhelpful informal hierarchy.



How clear are your organisation's values?

How shared are they?

What would an outsider say your values were, judging by the way people act?

What gaps do you see between declared values and actual behaviours?

# PART TWO Taking it to the Next Level

## 5 CITIZENS AS PEERS

“

THERE IS A DIFFERENT FEEL TO ORGANISATIONS THAT RELATE TO PEOPLE AS PEERS RATHER THAN CUSTOMERS, CLIENTS OR SERVICE USERS

”

Every once in awhile you come across an organisation that takes your breath away. Sometimes it's because of the thing it produces – a truly innovative product or service. Sometimes it's more in the way they work – an ethos or pattern of behaviours that stands out. On very rare occasions, all of this comes together.

Studio House is one such place. It's a drug and alcohol rehabilitation service based in Nottingham. Many of the staff are themselves in recovery. They know what it's all about. They've been there and as a result their relationship to their residents is of a more humble, more human character. They walk alongside their residents because they are still, at some level, in the same process themselves.

At times this creates a culture of peer support and camaraderie that is distinct and powerful. This can apply within the staff team as well as within the public-facing service. There is a different feel to organisations that relate to people as peers rather than customers, clients or service users. We're in something together, working it out, rather than providing a service or selling a product.

Studio House is not alone. Several of the PEERworks organisations have made great strides in working with their “client group” as peers. The Junction are another example where young people have been formally welcomed into the systems and structures of the organisation – not in a tokenistic way but in a way that has meaningful influence.

### Trustees as Peers

The issue of congruence can also raise its head in relation to the formal governance structures of an organisation. This is particularly relevant where there are external advisors involved such as non-executive board members or trustees.

Trustees have a legal duty to scrutinise activity and ensure legal compliance. This can often make them feel like an internal police force. Can the relationship between boards and staff operate in a peer way, given these formal duties? And can boards themselves operate as peers – for example in how they run their own meetings?

Sam Anderson at The Junction started to work with these issues. She found it a hindrance to be moving towards peer working within the organisation but for trustees not to understand what this was about. “A couple of years ago we got much more explicit with the board about how we worked with young people and how we were developing our working as a staff team. We convinced them of the importance of congruence – that this should apply throughout the organisation.

For many of our trustees, peer working was really alien to their known ways of



People & Planet have also been innovative both in their internal working patterns and their work with their membership. Formed in 1969 as a student movement against world poverty, the organisation has been through many different versions - all with a focus on flat structures and student participation.

## 50 YEARS OF COOPERATIVE WORKING

People & Planet believes that building a truly democratic movement can only start from the bottom up. That's why all the groups in the network have full autonomy on which campaigns they run and how those campaigns are organised. Many groups in the network use consensus-based decision making to make sure that all their members can input on the direction and organisation of their campaigns.

Although most of the groups in the network run at least one national campaign that has been democratically chosen at Summer Gathering, this is not mandatory.

At times People & Planet has been a collective with no formal leader, at other times it has had an overall Director. The most recent Director left in 2012 and a flat staff structure was put back in place. This transition was managed with the support of an external facilitator. Since then there have been ongoing challenges in balancing the time needed to make such a structure work and the pressing needs of funders, members and an increasingly chaotic world situation.

People & Planet is now overseen by a Board of Trustees. The majority are students elected each year. The Chair is also a student. Having strong and skilled student Trustees has been a great support for staff and has helped to maintain good working relationships between staff and the Board.



### THE JUNCTION, LEITH, SCOTLAND

The Junction Youth Advisors (JYAs) are young people offering staff and services support and challenge to be the best that they can be; whilst evolving their own understanding of health and wellbeing issues for local young people.

JYAs explore a variety of Junction services, such as drop-ins, walk-ins, complementary therapies and Creative Express workshops – so that they might better understand, influence and in turn promote, the organisation.

working. However they have all thought deeply about it, and realised that we are trying to do something very different, that has value and is congruent with our vision that 'People reach their full potential!'"

Now each Peer Grouping (e.g. Project Workers, Senior Team, Staff Team, Trustees) within The Junction endeavours to work as a group of peers. The Junction also now has four key subgroups overseeing its activities. Each of these contains a member of the board, a senior manager and a staff member. A culture of collaboration has been introduced to encourage joint decision making.

The Junction (introduced on page 28) is a good example of this:

*Peer Working at The Junction is something which is continually evolving; it is both inspiring and challenging. Over the past year we have developed many of our practices, systems and processes to be more peer based, by continually adapting and learning from our own experiences.*

*One of the ways we have developed a process to enable greater peer working is through a subgroup model to support the implementation of our new strategic plan. The subgroups comprise people with the skills and knowledge best placed to make decisions relating to that group – resulting in a more authentic hierarchy. Each subgroup contains a trustee, a senior worker and representatives from the staff team.*



Do your values operate differently in different parts of your organisation?

What is your approach to stakeholder involvement?



“ Studio House has grown as a company year-on-year, with better external relationships, financial growth, service expansion and a greater depth of relationship with residents. Peer working has been central to this. ”

## CHRIS'S STORY

From the very beginning, Studio House was founded on collaborative approaches. In 2003 the founder, Chris Smith invited a group of ex-service users, practitioners and business people to create something new in the world of addictions. He wanted a place that prioritised human growth over politics, structure or procedure. For ten years Chris worked tirelessly to experiment, practice and refine a culture of transparency, openness and professionalism.

In July 2013 Chris handed over the company to two ex-residents, Chris Williams and Kirk Blacker, who had recently completed the very recovery programme that Studio House had pioneered. They both knew they were involved with something different, something special enough to pursue. They just weren't sure exactly how.

A breakthrough came in 2015 when the whole staff team took part in the Developing Peer Organisations programme at Oasis. Both Chris Smith and Chris Williams had been involved with Oasis, partnering with them for advice, development and practical support. Having the whole organisation learning together helped to create a shared understanding of the peer approach and common ground for future development. They joined the PEERworks Inquiry later that year, and Studio House has gone from strength to strength.



# 6 SKILLS FOR PEER WORKING

**Like any activity, peer working requires skills – some that are familiar and some new ones to learn. And like all skills these are better when practised regularly.**

In 2015 PEERworks agreed the following skills as being necessary for effective practice. At first we listed them as a long list:

- > Self-monitoring – review, assess yourself
- > Contracting skills – negotiating, being specific about what you/we have agreed to do, by when, limits, etc.
- > Challenging appropriately
- > Listening skills
- > Evaluating information
- > Prioritising
- > Self-managing
- > Self-reflection
- > Giving and receiving feedback
- > Identifying repeating patterns
- > Asking for help, giving help and receiving help
- > Refraining skills – letting go
- > Articulating your view – with skill and confidence
- > Expressing and working with feelings – emotional intelligence
- > Working with conflict – ways that you can respond to conflict include compromise, avoidance, accommodation, competition and collaboration
- > Resilience – holding your power (this was about not being powerless – you have the opportunity to speak up and shape what happens in peer working).

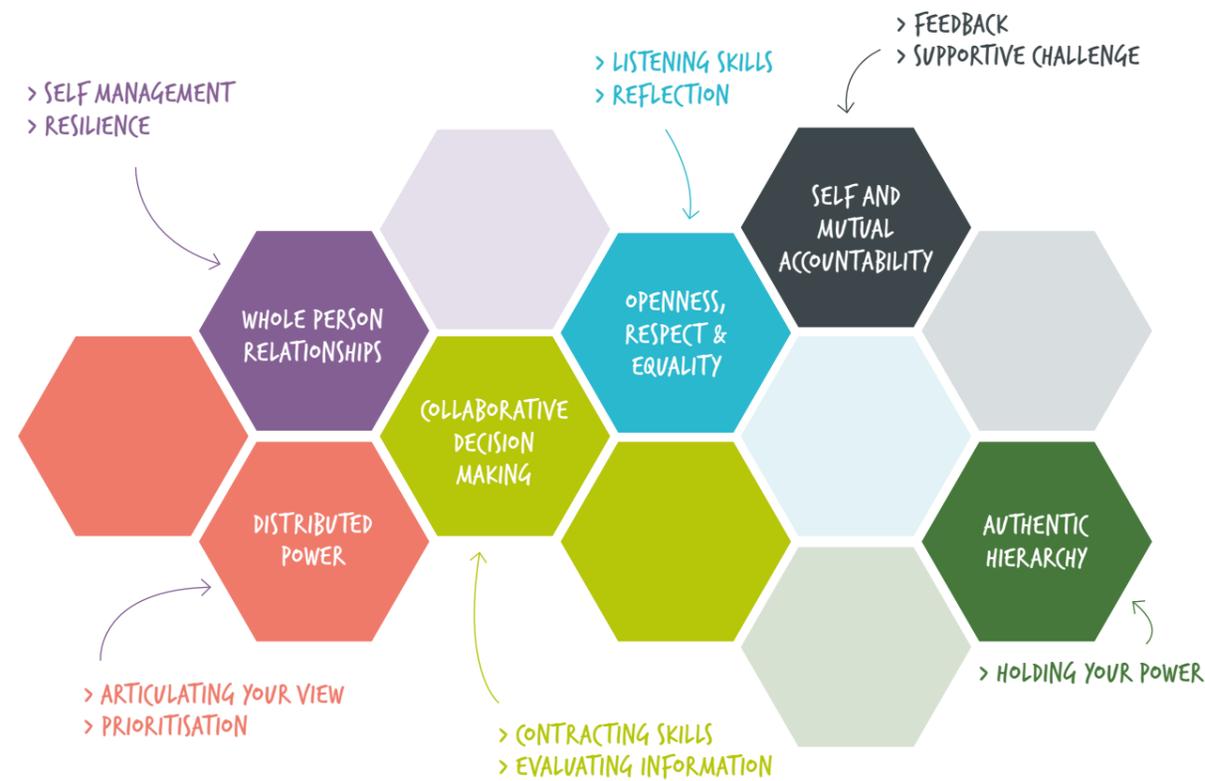
“ WE MUST ACT DIFFERENTLY IN ORDER TO LIVE OUT OUR VALUES ”

It's rather a long and unwieldy list so we wondered if these skills might fit underneath our guiding principles. Were there skills and behaviours that backed up each value? That seemed to work at some level: values are nothing unless they are turned into concrete behaviours. We must act differently in order to live out our values. And to act differently we need to practise new skills and approaches.

If we follow this line of thought, it becomes clear that it will be helpful to nurture and develop these skills among the people in our organisations. It's less about leadership skills and more about leaderful behaviour among all stakeholders. As Margaret Wheatley reminds us, there is a leader in every chair.

In many cases this will require a dedicated development programme designed with and for the organisation's specific needs, culture and traditions. Some useful common elements to this type of organisational development programme might include a series of skills-based sessions on:

- > Building rapport and developing trust
- > Consensus decision making



- > Holding difficult conversations
- > Giving and receiving feedback
- > Self and Peer Assessment
- > Finding your voice
- > Managing yourself in change
- > Effective challenge strategies (for self and others)
- > Facilitation styles

One thing we've noticed about these skills is a feeling that they should just be there in organisations. Our experience is different from this. While the skills needed for peer working are natural human skills in relationship building, they need attention and ongoing development. Practice makes perfect! It builds muscle-memory and strength. The more we practise our skills the more skillful we become.

Because of this, skills-based learning can be very useful. In this model people are actively encouraged to practise skills like active-listening or giving and receiving feedback within a safe learning environment. Using "triads" can be useful for this: one person practises the skill with the second person while the third observes.



# NICK'S STORY

## A Living Experiment

Nick Ellerby was one of the co-founders of Oasis in the 1980s and continues to be a member of the peer director group. Oasis exists for people to learn and at its most radical to experiment with a culture where no-one can tell anyone what to do. It challenges traditional approaches to power, authority and gender by honouring the peer principle. This means that the Directors Group, the Staff Group and the wider community of associates and practitioners all find ways to interact as peers – while acknowledging their very different roles and responsibilities.

Over its lifetime Oasis has supported dozens of organisations to release their human potential and to move towards peer-based ways of working. This has included all sectors - from government, to academia, voluntary and community groups to local, national and international businesses.

The work has the same shape whether it's within Oasis itself or within one of its partner organisations. So issues of power, influence, cooperation and accountability are never far from the surface. Internally, not all decisions involve or require the consultation of everyone. But when changes have a wider impact, Oasis colleagues work collaboratively to explore issues and solutions. This draws heavily on the facilitation skills of many of the Oasis community. There are times when this hasn't been easy - you often hear the term "fierce peer" being used.

It's an organisation where people are encouraged to take personal responsibility and everyone is prepared to give an account of their actions and decisions. Processes like peer supervision are common and Self and Peer Assessment (described separately) is an ongoing commitment at the heart of the enterprise.

"It's when I'm working in a peer group that I experience the life-affirming reality of what it takes to be able to work effectively together, achieve more together, and unlock our potential."

## Accountability

One of the guiding principles of peer working is to challenge and be prepared to be challenged. This is the essence of accountability. There are three main aspects to accountability:

- > I can account for my actions.
- > I can give voice to my experience.
- > I can stand by my thoughts.

In doing so, I am willing to be open to challenge and clarification that may lead to change.

### Accountability runs throughout all peer working

Challenge can sometimes feel intimidating (depending on your cultural background) but in truth it is where we learn - when we challenge ourselves or accept a challenge from outside.

So having a culture where we hold ourself and our peers to account can be very helpful. It ensures the organisation stays lively and continues to learn.

It is also true that accountability is often needed for decisions to have any impact. In our increasingly busy world it is easy to lose track of what we've agreed to do. So deadlines, behaviours, routines start to slide. When this happens we as individuals and as organisations can "return to type", slipping back into old patterns or following the course of least resistance.

There are some simple ways to bring accountability to the fore in organisational life:

- > Keeping accurate action lists for groups/teams
- > Keeping your own To Do list
- > Displaying agreed behaviours and values around the office
- > Reinforcing and celebrating positive progress
- > Accepting and admitting when you have personally fallen short
- > Holding others to account for the things they have agreed
- > Regular progress review meetings
- > Regular supervision - either managerial or peer-based.

Many PEERworks organisations have also implemented Self And Peer Assessment (SAPA). This is an alternative to the usual appraisal processes which encourages self-responsibility and personal development (see box).

### Hidden Hierarchies

When we work together as peers, the power of our positions within the organisation start to count for less. However, people still often have a tendency to defer to the founder or to those who have been around longest.

External power patterns like race and gender can also live within an organisation,



## SELF AND PEER ASSESSMENT AT OASIS

"Very early in our development as a peer-based organisation we introduced the idea of self and peer-based review and assessment for all those who work at The Oasis School. Whilst we thought it made sense for our facilitation and development practitioners we hadn't anticipated it would be embraced by people in admin and finance roles so strongly. It's been inspiring as an organisation.

"Given that Oasis has a small core infrastructure team, it has been gratifying that the approach has been so welcomed by everyone. In the early days the focus was specifically on learning development, but as the individuals become more confident and safe in the peer-based way of working it has extended to incorporate specific work objectives. It has helped sustain us as a learning organisation that is self-managing in its orientation rather than looking to others to manage people.

"In the first round of self and peer work, the emphasis was as a review process, claiming 'where I am', 'what I can do' and 'what I want to develop'. Only after the first year did it shift to be an assessment process, one based on the objectives set by the individual and affirmed by their peers. For people new to Oasis and our self-managing peer-based ways, it takes a while to apply the approach, but it is greatly helped by the shared stories of how well it works."

NICK ELLERBY

even when it is working hard to equalise power. Paying attention to these factors and how they impact on your own internal processes - can be important.

Some organisations and individuals have taken on the approach of "calling out" behaviour that they feel supports wider power structures like racism or sexism. This is sometimes a contentious approach. At times it can be helpful - within an overall guiding principle of challenge and be challenged. At other times it can slip over into a behaviour that feels punitive or that becomes a competition to be the most politically correct. We have witnessed all of these patterns in our organisations from time to time.

For us, there is something about treating ourselves and our colleagues with compassion. Yes by all means challenge (and be prepared to be challenged) but do this skillfully and with kindness. We are all learning and we are all (generally) trying to do our best.



What are your own strongest peer-working skills?

What skills are common in your organisation?

Is there a skill you'd like to develop further?

How does mutual-accountability operate in your organisation?

# 7 CHALLENGES OF PEER WORKING



If challenges are merely opportunities for learning:

What has your organisation learnt so far on its journey?

What's still to learn?

**No-one is saying peer working is all plain sailing. It has its challenges, as does any way of working. At first people can often feel like it takes more time. This can often be the case, but if decisions are made by consensus or consent they can turn out to be better, longer-lasting decisions. Plus once we get into our stride with it, the pace can pick up, so it need not be more time-consuming.**

Sometimes also, there can be a misunderstanding about what peer working means. There can be a lack of clarity about who needs to be involved. This results in a default position of involving everyone. If we're peers then everyone's voice counts.

The misconception here is around inclusion. Not everyone needs to be involved in every decision. Trust and delegation are key. It's those closest to the decision, those directly involved, who need to have a say. Others need to trust that they can leave their colleagues to do a good job.

Another major challenge is around power, as already discussed. Organisations moving towards peer working can sometimes get stuck in informal hierarchies which can create implicit power dynamics. Alternatively there can be a veneer of distributed power while still some defer to those in authentic positions of power. All this can cause paralysis or a power vacuum.

In addition, we have noticed a number of trends in our own organisations:

- › We have found that to practise and apply what can be seen as a radically different approach is easier when it comes to the services we offer rather than the way we organise ourselves. Most clients want to be met with a sense of equality, collaborative working and a quality of relationship. In the office it can be easy to slip back into traditional patterns of work and relationships.
- › Potential funders and board members can have a set of expectations as to how something works based on their own experiences and the wider dominant cultural and organisational norms. This can sometimes run counter to a PEERworks approach.
- › We don't think that the PEERworks approach is a "fix all" for every organisation or group. Even if you like what it represents it's unlikely to be for you if you have over 1,500 employees, or if it is, it's critical to recognise the effort and resource that will be required.

## Meetings and Decision-Making

Peer-based organisations tend to want to make decisions in ways that do not concentrate power unnecessarily in a small number of people. Experience has shown that simple majority voting on issues can often be divisive – it can create winners and losers and this can harbour resentments and ill-feeling.

Peer organisations tend then to operate through consensus. They might avoid actually voting by trying to reach a shared agreement.

This way of operating can present and create challenges. These are explored further in the section on challenges below.

To avoid some of the challenges here, it is important to be clear about the decision being made and to record it – this much is shared with more traditional meeting processes. Often this resolves around a member coming up with a clear proposal. This is discussed until it reaches a point that it can be agreed. If a voting process is used, this is usually by a show of hands. If there is no consensus around the proposal it falls and someone else makes a new proposal.

It's important to realise that consensus does not necessarily mean unanimity. Sometimes there may be one member who cannot support the proposal. The group then need to ascertain whether the person feels so strongly that they wish to block the proposal or whether they are able to register their objection and let the proposal pass.

In sociocracy (see box) a slightly different process is used. This is one of consent rather than consensus. The process works like this:

- › Present the proposal
- › Clarification questions from each member
- › Quick reactions round
- › Check for consent
- › Resolve any objections
- › Agree and celebrate.

## Power Vacuum

We have sometimes experienced a power vacuum arising in organisations making the transition to peer working. What we mean by this is that once you move away from hierarchy (where it's usually clear how decisions are supposed to be made), there can be a period when it's not clear how to make changes, or who is empowered to act. This can lead to inertia or a (mistaken) belief that everyone needs to be involved in every decision.

The discussion above about Distributed Power is helpful here. The main point is that those most closely affected by the decision are the ones who should be empowered to act.



### CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

- › Hold a space to air the issue and fully understand it from different angles.
- › Keep going until someone is moved to frame a proposal.
- › This is put clearly by that person to the group.
- › There is then a show of hands: up if you are in favour, pointing down if you are absolutely against and held horizontal if you need a clarification or amendment.
- › The proposer then hears only from those with their hands horizontal (which can sometimes cause frustration for the "nos" especially if they are new to the process).
- › Proposer then decides how to adapt their proposal to incorporate the concerns and suggestions from the "maybes".
- › Amended proposal is put to the group. Or the proposal has insufficient support in which case you start again.



### APPLIED CONCEPT

## SOCIOCRACY

Sociocracy is a system of organisation that uses consent rather than consensus (although it had its origins in consensus decision making). It also uses circles - groups of people working together on a topic or as a team who make decisions together.

These circles each send two representatives to a central circle which holds the whole. This double link is used to ensure that information and communication work effectively in both directions.



## TYPES OF ROUND

We frequently use two different types of round when we are together as a PEERworks group. Sometimes we will go round the group in turn, either clockwise or anticlockwise. Whoever decides to go first also decides which way round to send it.

The alternative to this is “popcorn” style. This is taking the round in no particular order. Whoever goes first, goes first. If what they say triggers something for you, you go next. You pop when you’re hot.



What challenges has your organisation overcome recently?

Where are the places it is making most progress?

Do you recognise any unproductive patterns?

How could these be addressed?

Another adage we sometimes hear is, “It’s better to ask for forgiveness than permission.” The peer principle encourages you to act on things within your remit and then to be prepared to give an account for your actions.

Of course, each organisation will want to make its own agreements about how these things are handled. It is important to operate within an overarching agreement about decision making and accountability.

## Never-Ending Consultation

Another phenomenon we have noticed is that sometimes aspiring peer organisations can go the extra mile in consulting and engaging people. While this can be very beneficial, it’s important to be able to move on. This involves recognising when enough is enough and moving on once there is a felt sense that consensus has been reached.

## Equalising Participation

People are different. Some are naturally talkative and tend to think things through by talking them through. Others need time and space to order their thoughts and ideas before they talk. One common challenge we have all encountered in our organisations is how to make sure everyone’s voice is heard. Some approaches we use to work with this challenge include:

Check-ins - starting the day or meetings with hearing from everyone. This welcomes each person into the group and lets them hear the sound of their own voice.

Rounds - there are times when it’s useful to hear from everyone. To do this we have a round. Each person takes it in turns to talk uninterrupted. The round ends when everyone has spoken once. No-one talks again until the round is complete.

Spaces - in a “Space” it’s OK for people to talk more than once and it’s OK not to take your turn. It’s a more freestyle approach and is usually time bound - we’ll spend twenty minutes exploring a topic and unpacking it before we make a decision. The key is to see a space as an opportunity to listen and understand other perspectives (rather than to put your own).

Talking Stick - in a space the possibility emerges for one (or more) voices to dominate. To counteract this we sometimes introduce a talking stick (or other object). Only the person with the stick can talk. When they are done they place it back in the centre for the next person to pick it up.

# PART THREE Conclusions

## 8 ME AS A PEER

Now, there is another way to look at all this peer working stuff. This perspective would say: it's all well and good to have the right structures and processes and even the right culture, but the key to peer working is for me to act more and more like a peer. This viewpoint is based on two assumptions:

1. The only person I can be sure of influencing is myself, so that's the best place to start.
2. If I embody peer working it's possible that this will encourage others to follow. I can't be certain of this, but it's worth a try.

The suggestion is that unless people start to behave differently, very little will change. And the best place to start behaviour change is with yourself. It's not an "either/or" thing, it's more a "yes/and" thing: structures, values, processes and culture plus personal reflection, feedback and behaviour change.

So what would it mean for me to embody the spirit of being a peer? How would that look, what would my behaviour be like? And what stories do people have about how this has played out in their organisations?

### Reflection

In our experience many organisations and many people are so busy working and getting stuff done, that they find it hard to create the time and space for reflection. This is as true for cause-based organisations as it is for profit-based ones. There is always more to get done, targets to hit, deadlines to meet.

Yet unless we make time to reflect we miss a valuable opportunity to stop and take a wider perspective. The Dalai Lama is credited as saying that you should meditate for twenty minutes every day - unless you are really busy. Then it's an hour!

There are a number of practices for encouraging personal reflection:

- > Meditation
- > Silent walking
- > Walking in pairs
- > Bringing your attention to this moment
- > Taking time to "scan" your body - what sensations are going on?

Quite often your body can be a good early indicator of how you're feeling. The body gives clues to the emotions and the emotions give clues to our underlying state of being. Gaining this self-awareness can be useful in promoting wellbeing and in reflecting on your own effectiveness.

It can also be useful to be aware of your often repeated patterns. That way you can catch yourself early if you are subconsciously entering into a pattern that is not

serving you. Three common patterns include:

- > Fight - reacting to stress by becoming combative
- > Flight - feeling like you want to run away when in uncomfortable situations
- > Freeze - that "rabbit in the headlights" moment!

These are all physiological responses triggered by our nervous system. They have arisen because of our evolutionary need to survive - but they are not always useful in the modern world.

There are a number of other ways we can sabotage our own attempts to work as a true peer with other people. We can fall back into the "hero story" seeing ourselves as the one who needs to sort out the problems and issues. Or we can become the "maiden in distress", waiting for someone else to ride over the hills to our rescue.

Most of us will recognise the voice of each of these in our head: "Someone's got to do it", "I'm paid to sort this sort of thing out" or "Well, that's not my job", "Nothing ever changes around here", "I don't have enough power to take that on".

### Making a Drama out of Nothing

Another framework that we have often found to be useful is the Drama Triangle. This idea was developed as part of the Transactional Analysis school of psychology. It goes something like this: Most "games that people play" can be analysed using the Karpman Drama Triangle. It suggests that there are at least two, and sometimes three, roles, which switch quickly from one person to another. These are the roles of "Persecutor", "Victim" and "Rescuer".

Whenever people play this game, they step into one of three "scripty" roles. These roles reflect the behavioural outcomes of the three positions of the Drama Triangle. The Persecutor puts others down and belittles them. The Rescuer also sees others as not being OK but responds by offering help from a one-up position: "I have to help others because they are not good enough to help themselves." The Victim role fulfils a sense of being one-down and not OK.

All roles entail a discount and a taking of power, or giving up of power to the other or others involved. Persecutor – other's right to respect and value; Rescuer – other's ability to think and act for themselves; Victim – discounts self – either as someone worthy to be rejected or unable to think, decide or act.

There are antidotes to each of the positions, which can help us get out of drama when we realise we have got caught up, or stay out of drama we see heading our way. This means stepping out of the three roles and into an "Adult" position:

1. Persecutor becomes the holder of boundaries or moves into a consulting role.
2. Rescuer becomes the facilitator or supports decision making.
3. Victim takes responsibility to ask for help without "collapse" or martyrdom.

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### PERSECUTOR

**"I'm OK. You're not OK."**

- > "This is your fault."
- > "You are to blame."
- > Overly strict and rigid
- > Mobilised by anger
- > Rigid, authoritarian stance
- > Frequently alienates others
- > Often wins in the short term

### RESCUER

**"I'm OK. You're not OK."**

- > "Let me help you."
- > "I can make you feel good."
- > Feels guilty if doesn't help other people
- > Feels uncomfortable when others are distressed
- > Keeps victim dependent

### VICTIM

**"I'm not OK. You're OK."**

- > "Poor me."
- > "You can make me feel bad/good."
- > Feels victimised, oppressed, self-pitying
- > Hopeless, powerless, ashamed
- > Blocks self from making decisions or solving problems
- > Stays stuck in inappropriate situations

“  
WHAT WOULD IT MEAN FOR  
ME TO EMBODY THE SPIRIT OF  
BEING A PEER?  
”



### USEFUL REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- > Am I in hero mode?
- > Am I in victim mode?
- > Am I trying to "fix" someone?
- > Did I just pass up responsibility?
- > Am I reacting to something that isn't really going on?
- > Who does that person remind me of?
- > Has something or someone just triggered me? What was that about?
- > Am I caught in a power dynamic here?



## GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

### Effective Feedback:

- › Is timely – soon after the event (but not in the heat of the moment)
- › Is specific – uses actual examples
- › Talks about the behaviour rather than the person
- › Is based on how you felt in response
- › Is offered with compassion
- › Is solicited – at the very least you check whether the other person wants to hear it
- › Finds the middle ground between “sledge-hammer” and “pussy-footing”

Using these antidotes, we can all maintain our personal power. In each case there is a shift in mindset. If I find myself unwittingly persecuting someone else I can shift to the role of consultant. It's likely I have information or advice that will help others. If I have a pattern of rescuing I can be more facilitative, helping others to find their own solutions. And if I fall into a victim mentality on occasion, I can allow myself to take responsibility and credit for my actions.

## Feedback

Receiving feedback can be a useful way to gain another view on how you come across in group situations. The Self and Peer Assessment process described above has been designed to elicit balanced and useful feedback.

What makes the approach unique is that it starts from your own view of your strengths, capabilities and behaviours. By taking time to self-assess we are developing our own reflective skills. It also means that we often anticipate other people's feedback, making it easier to accept and internalise.

We often hear people talk about the “shit sandwich” of feedback. It's said that if you have something negative to say to someone, you sandwich it between compliments or positive statements.

We find this approach a little disingenuous. Feedback is not about one person getting something over on someone else. Feedback is always best viewed as an opportunity to learn. This is how it is best offered and received. If you can't get yourself into this mindset for feedback, wait for another time.

## Behaviour Change

Behaviour change is a very popular topic these days. There are a wealth of theories and frameworks about how to make behaviour change stick. From our own experience we have found a number of factors help.

First and perhaps most obvious, I have to want to change. If someone gives me a piece of feedback that I don't really understand or I wasn't ready for, it won't stick. Or if my heart isn't really in the change I won't make it.

Second, it helps for me to understand my common self-sabotage patterns. What do I often do to avoid doing something? If I understand this then I have an early warning system.

Third, it's great to get positive feedback. Hearing from others that they've seen change, even a glimpse of change, is great. It keeps me positive and energised.

And fourth, it's helpful to be held accountable – in a supportive and caring way. I don't particularly want to be “called out” on poor behaviour(!) but I don't mind being in a team culture where we all hold each other to account for the things we said we'd do. This might involve some form of supervision, reflective group work or peer support.

## What Does it Feel Like in Practice?

And if I get these things in place, if I get regular supervision or peer support, then what might it feel like for me to be operating as a peer? We asked people for their views:

“ Trusted, supported. I still experience some uncomfortable feelings but I'm grateful that they can be acknowledged. Free-er, enlightening, responsible for contributing (in a good way).  
**Suzanne Campbell, The Junction**

“ I feel met, truly met - the experience at its best is when I feel we are meeting beyond the roles we fulfil - and you and I are fully present to each other. When I'm with peers I am free to focus on what's important to me, and whilst I am available and open to the other person or people, I believe they are free also.  
I recognise that in peer relationships there is an authentic hierarchy which is influenced by the experience, understanding and skill we each bring.  
**Nick Ellerby, Oasis**

“ How peer working feels:  
› Paying attention to others and really listening to them  
› Being prepared to work with difference  
› Finding places of common ground (as a place to engage with difference)  
› Knowing there is expertise but no (single) expert  
› Getting myself (my ego) out of the way  
› Conflicts or challenges are allowed to surface as needed. This can feel uncomfortable in the moment but worthwhile in the end.  
**Kathryn Winterburn, NHS Leadership Academy**

“ How has it felt? Mostly fluctuating between feeling like I have totally ‘got’ peer working and then, five minutes later, thinking ‘Hang on, is this peer working?’! PEERworks is a great space to explore and practice with a group of people who I think are up for working in a way that keeps relationships at the heart of everything and ultimately, changing workplace culture. It is full of challenging discussion, reflection and stretching myself - all supported by great people.  
**Lauren Webb, Brunswick Organic Nursery**

What we have found is that different organisations have different feels to them - in part shaped by their history and heritage, or their founder, or the people in them and their values. This means that some organisations concentrate on one part of peer working while others concentrate on another.

It's more from the sharing of learning and cross-fertilisation that the new and exciting things appear. Any one organisation working in isolation is likely to become a little “stale” or inward looking. That's why we formed PEERworks: to learn and share together and in doing so, to motivate each other to keep going.



What do you most love about working as a peer?

What are your greatest team-working strengths?

When it's not working so well, what is triggered for you?

What skill or capability would you like to develop more of?

## 9 WHAT NEXT?

If the Industrial Era was the age of hierarchy and the heroic leader, the coming age will be the age of collaboration, meaning and distributed power. As Otto Scharmer reminds us: "The gap between ego-system reality and eco-system consciousness may well be the most important leadership challenge today – in business, in government, and in civil society." Peer working means creating healthy eco-systems within teams, organisations and networks. It means moving beyond heroic leadership towards leaderful behaviour by all. At different times this may mean being a conscious follower, a committed contributor, a critical friend or a dedicated team player.

Our ability to make this transition is being shaped by our ability to act in new ways and to manage our work together on the basis of collaboration and mutual accountability. At PEERworks we tend to see this as a journey rather than a destination. As separate organisations we all continue to trial, prototype and implement peer working in a variety of forms. As a Community of Practice we continue to meet annually to reflect and share practice. We are grateful to the Oasis Foundation for supporting these annual get togethers.

We find that each year our practice deepens. When we are together we increasingly embody the spirit of peer working. We are learning as we meet, year on year.

We know there are no easy answers here. There is no blueprint. Each organisation is unique. It has a history, a DNA. And peer working needs to be shaped and tailored by the people implementing it.

This is why it's so important to us to operate as a community of practice – for mutual support, for learning, to deepen our practice.

**If you fancy joining us, you'd be most welcome. All we ask is that you bring a commitment to peer-based working and a willingness to learn and contribute. This give and take provides fertile soil for growth. The rest will come from working with an openness to others and your own drive to apply what you experience to the life of your organisation.**



What's a next step for you and for your organisation?

What practical changes could you safely experiment with?

What would be a reasonable stretch for you?

Working as peers requires time and attention. It is founded on trust which takes time to build.

As we build trust and relationship, decision-making becomes quicker and more effective.

As peers we set aside hierarchical behaviours and statuses. We all take responsibility.

Peer Working requires us to spend time together, to meet and to engage with one another and not simply absorb a way of working.

There are tools and techniques, structures and policies that can help us to work as peers.

Self and mutual accountability are the core. I stay awake to my responsibilities, you help me in this and in return I support you to uphold your end.

Each time a member of the team changes, we have to start again to reform and rebuild cohesion.

At the end of the day there is joy (as well as challenge) in working as peers. There is also purpose: to embrace a more equitable and developmental way of working.

## LESSONS ALONG THE WAY



## PEERworks ORGANISATIONS INCLUDE:



### Brunswick Organic Nursery

York-based organic gardening enterprise. We offer purposeful work and training to people with learning disabilities (Workers) who are often excluded from having these chances. It provides Workers with the opportunity to develop their skills within the project and beyond.



### The Oasis School of Human Relations

A radical not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the development of individuals, groups and organisations. Our peer-based, collaborative approach develops and inspires responsible practice and leadership across all sectors, equipping people and organisations with the skills, strategies and attitudes they need to flourish.



### Refugee Youth

Our mission is to create an environment of friendship and inclusiveness in which young refugees gain strength and confidence, collectively and as individuals, through creative learning. We aim to be a place where young people can test out their ideas, and receive the support and resources they need to work together to make positive change.



### Core Music

Northumberland not-for-profit on a mission to make music accessible to all. A place where people of all ages and abilities can learn to play or sing, and take part in sessions, clubs and workshops.



### People & Planet

The largest student network in Britain campaigning to end world poverty, defend human rights and protect the environment. We're a student-led movement that empowers young people with the skills, confidence and knowledge they need to make change happen, at home and globally.



### Studio House

Nottingham-based drug and alcohol rehabilitation service. We believe that if people are given the benchmark of a vibrant way of living together, they gain that perspective for life. We induct residents into the thinking, feeling and judgement basis required to live in this way. They are coming into a self-established peer culture that is nurtured and maintained by staff. Staff responsibility is to hold the residents to the agreements they made on entry to the project.



### Inspiring Scotland

We transform vital charities. We empower visionary leaders. We shape public policies. We believe in opportunity for everyone. We do not accept the status quo and we are committed for as long as it takes, whatever it takes, to build a better Scotland.



### The Reader Organisation

We are the pioneers of Shared Reading – a simple idea that changes lives. By bringing people together to read great literature aloud we are improving well-being, reducing social isolation and building stronger communities across the UK and beyond.



### YUMI

York Unifying Multicultural Initiatives is a voluntary, intercultural network. We provide opportunities for people who have come to live in York to meet with the local community, make friends, develop confidence and feel valued members of York community. We support people with different cultural roots, languages and walks of life to share skills, learn from each other, celebrate traditions.



### The Junction

A safe, friendly, confidential centre which offers lots of health-related services, education and support for young people in Leith and North East Edinburgh aged 12-21.



### Reclaim

Working class young people being seen, being heard and leading change. Multi-award winning social change charity based in Manchester.

## PEER WORKING & SOCIAL CHANGE

The Oasis Foundation is pleased to support PEERworks as part of our work to promote social and environmental justice.

We see our work as being composed of four strands:

1. Catalysing the development of people engaged in social change
2. Supporting social change organisations
3. Direct action for social change, social justice and wellbeing
4. Fostering the transpersonal aspects of the whole person.

How we work is as important to us as what we do. We are guided by core values that shape our approach to social change and social justice:

- Whole Person approaches – developing all that we are and can be
- Peer-Working – promoting ways of working that distribute power, support individuals' passions and build purpose
- Working with what's emergent – shedding light on what's not known, what's at the edge and where we can go next that is not "tried and tested"
- Building Connection – people are most creative and effective when they're connected – to their sense of self, to each other, to society and to the natural world.
- Supporting the New Story - creating and nurturing the new rather than mitigating or fighting against the way things currently are.

We strongly believe that radical approaches to peer-working are an important part of creating a more just and sustainable world. We are proud to play our part in this process.

To find out more visit  
[oasishumanrelations.org.uk/about/oasis-foundation](http://oasishumanrelations.org.uk/about/oasis-foundation)

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## WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT PEERworks:

“

This proposal for better ways of working is both inspiring and challenging. It also gets down to the nitty-gritty of how to do it. At a time when hierarchy, leadership obsession, ego and bureaucracy are dominating most organisations, it is a breath of very nourishing fresh air.

”

**CLARE SHORT**

Chair of Cities Alliance,  
former MP and Secretary of State

“

PEERworks is an invaluable guide on the journey, helping confront the snares of our past while opening possibilities for our future of work together. Filled with courageous reflections and promising practices, PeerWorks will be a rich resource for all of us seeking a world that works for all.

”

**MYRON ROGERS**

Author, Researcher and  
Consultant

“

It's good - very thorough. It's useful to have something more focussed on the actual experience of working with less hierarchy, and what it means for our interpersonal behaviour.

”

**GEOFF COX**

Internationally renowned Social  
Enterprise Developer

“

PEERworks offers us a glimpse of what's possible; drawing on hard won insights, fresh ideas and practical tools that have emerged from their own experience and commitment to working as peers.

”

**ALLISON TRIMBLE**

Senior Consultant,  
The King's Fund

“

I found PEERworks really interesting and different to anything I've done before, mainly because of the way it was structured and entirely led by the participants. It allowed a lot of space and opportunity to take a step back and think creatively.

”

**A EVE RIBBONS**

Participant

“

Lots to nod at and agree with, to learn from. I always enjoy what comes from Oasis.

”

**ED MAYO**

Secretary General at  
Co-operatives UK

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