

PEER SUPPORT

What is Peer Support and why is it important?

Peer support is when people in the same sector, or in similar positions, provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to each other

- A peer supporter is someone who has "been there, done that" and can relate to others who are now in a similar situation
- Peer to peer mentoring helps experienced social enterprises to support others and connects them on a collective level to existing networks, promoting wider networking, and sharing of good practice
- Social enterprises can be isolating places to work, and it is comforting to find someone who understands and can help
- Peer support offers a level of understanding that you can't get from the private or public sector support services

What forms of Peer Support exist?

Networks

Networks are group of organisations or individuals who are actively interconnected for a common purpose; to share knowledge and experience and to gain support from each other – see the Network Knowledge card for more information.

Coaching

Coaching tends to focus on an existing problem or a specific outcome that a coach can help an individual to achieve. It is not always an ongoing relationship, and may finish once the business problem has been resolved or skill transferred.

e.g., **Micro Coaches**

Micro Coaches is a peer-to-peer support programme that taps into the business expertise of peers and enables participants to learn essential skills directly from others.

A Micro Coaches session matches participants with a Micro Coach-trained business leader, who shares their own skills and experiences. Participants are taught how to understand those skills and how to use them straight away in their own businesses.

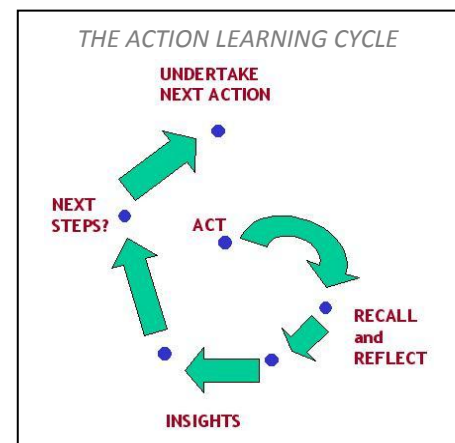
Action learning

Action learning involves small groups meeting to talk intensively about their recent achievements and problems in a non-judgemental atmosphere. People can ask each other questions, but do not give advice. In this environment, people can be open and honest, acknowledge the personal and emotional issues that affect their projects' development, and learn from each others' experiences.

e.g., The School for Social Entrepreneurs

SSE uses Action Learning because:

- *People have different learning styles and needs*
- *People learn best about entrepreneurship by taking action and doing it themselves.*
- *The experiences of successful social enterprise practitioners provides valuable learning and support.*
- *Expert knowledge is most useful when it can be directly related to an enterprise's current situation.*
- *Students can learn a lot from each other, not just from experts.*
- *Self awareness makes it easier for students to use their talents, resolve personal difficulties, and to make choices compatible with their values.*



Social Enterprise Visits

By visiting social enterprises, peers can see successful entrepreneurs 'live' in their working environment, gaining insight into how they work, either individually or as an enterprise. Visits allow peers to ask questions, observe, and draw inspiration from each other in real-life business situations.

e.g., Peer to Peer workshops

The Social Enterprise Coalition (SEC) ran a series of peer learning workshops to support organisations going through the Right to Request.

The workshops gave participants the opportunity to:

- *sit down with colleagues who have experience in running a social enterprise*
- *talk about the challenges they were facing*
- *bring questions, issues and ideas to test out with peers*
- *ask for advice, to help organisations move forward most effectively*



These workshops operated alongside events which offered more technical information, while the Peer to Peer workshops facilitated smaller groups, were more “two way”, and gave organisations a chance to ask an ‘expert witness’ the questions that they wanted answering.

Mentoring

A partnership between a mentor and mentee normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences. A mentor is a guide who has gained experience and is further along in their career than the mentee, helping the mentee to find the right direction and to develop solutions to career issues.

e.g., SENW Peer to Peer Mentoring programme

Delivered by Social Enterprise North West, the Peer to Peer Mentoring programme matched entrepreneurs in newly established and growing enterprises, with more experienced mentors.

These relationships allowed social entrepreneurs to access professional advice, helping their businesses to thrive and become sustainable.

One participant from the course said, “I had already run a private enterprise but coming into the social enterprise sector was all new to me — it was like starting from scratch. I didn’t know how the sector operated, who to network with or who held the funding purse-strings. The Peer to Peer Mentoring programme has been a real help to my community interest company. My mentor not only helped me with the problems I had identified, he’s pointed out issues I hadn’t even considered!”

Where can I find more information about Peer Support?

The Social Enterprise Coalition is the national body for social enterprises, representing a wide range of social enterprises, regional and national support networks and other related organisations:

- www.socialenterprise.org.uk
- More information and case studies on peer support can be found on the [SEC Business Support](#) page

Each region in England has a social enterprise support and networking body:

- Social Enterprise [London](#) – SEL
- Social Enterprise [East of England](#) – SEEE
- Social Enterprise [West Midlands](#) – SEWM
- Social Enterprise [Yorkshire and Humber](#) – SEYH
- Social Enterprise [North East](#) – NESEP
- SE2 Partnership ([South East](#))
- RISE ([South West](#))
- Social Enterprise [East Midlands](#) – SEEM
- Social Enterprise [North West](#) – SENW

Social Enterprise East of England Microaches programme

- www.microcoaches.co.uk

School for Social Entrepreneurs

- www.sse.org.uk

The Guardian Social Enterprise Network:

- www.guardian.co.uk/social-enterprise-network

Social Enterprise advisor networks:

- 4SE Business Advisor Network www.socialenterprisewm.org.uk
- SEASON Advisors Network www.se2partnership.co.uk
- SEEM Business Advisor Network (BAN) www.seem.uk.net

Rural enterprises:

- The Plunkett Foundation have a network for community run shop social enterprises, [Plunkett Community Shops Network](#), which hosts peer events, forums, and workshops.