Peer Consultation Circle Protocol

A Structured Format for Mutual Learning in the CoP

Purpose of this tool

A 60-minute peer-to-peer learning protocol for use in CoP sessions. Based on Action Learning Set methodology and the Thinking Partnership approach. One practitioner brings a live challenge; peers ask questions only; the presenter draws their own conclusions. Rotate roles over time.

How to use this document

This template is designed to be filled in directly — on screen or printed. Fields marked with a dotted underline are for your input. Sections in blue boxes are guidance or instructions. You can adapt the language to fit your local context.

Group size: 4–6 facilitators (ideal)

Duration: 60 minutes per round (rotate presenter across sessions)

Setting: Online (video call) or in person — both work equally well

Frequency: Monthly or quarterly CoP sessions

Facilitator: One member takes the timekeeper / process-holder role (rotates each session)

The Core Principle

The Peer Consultation Circle is built on one radical idea: the person with the challenge already holds the insight they need. The role of peers is not to give advice, but to ask questions that open new thinking.

This requires genuine discipline. The most natural impulse — to offer a solution, share a similar story, or give advice — must be consciously set aside. The power of this format is in what it refuses as much as what it invites.

Roles

Role	Responsibility
Presenter	Brings a real, live challenge from their facilitation practice. Not a solved problem — something genuinely open. Listens to questions. Reflects aloud. Arrives at their own insights.
Questioners (peers)	Ask open, curious questions only. No advice, no suggestions disguised as questions ("Have you thought about...?"), no personal stories. The goal is to help the presenter think, not to think for them.
Process-holder	Keeps time. Names if a "question" has become advice. Holds the container without directing content. Opens and closes the session.

Session Flow

Phase	Time	What happens
Check-in	5 min	Each person shares one word for how they arrive. Process-holder opens the session and names the format.
Presentation	7 min	Presenter describes their challenge. Peers listen without interrupting. Process-holder keeps time. After 7 minutes: presenter finishes with the sentence "What I most want to think about is..."
Clarifying questions	5 min	Peers ask only clarifying questions — to ensure they understand the situation. Not exploratory yet. Presenter answers briefly.
Deep questioning	25 min	Peers ask open, curious questions. One at a time. Silence between questions is welcome. Presenter responds however feels right — sometimes a question doesn't need a verbal answer. Process-holder gently names any advice that creeps in as a question.
Presenter's reflection	10 min	Peers are silent. Presenter reflects aloud on what emerged from the questions. What shifted? What new clarity? What is their next step?
Group reflection	5 min	Peers briefly share what they noticed — not about the presenter's challenge, but about their own thinking during the session. What questions stayed with them?
Check-out	3 min	Each person shares one word or sentence: what they're leaving with.

Ground Rules (to be read aloud at the start)

1. Questions only in the questioning phase. If you notice yourself forming advice, turn it into a genuine question or stay silent.
2. Ask one question at a time. Don't bundle two questions together.
3. Shorter questions are usually better than longer ones.
4. Silence is welcome. Don't rush to fill it.
5. The presenter has permission to pass on any question that doesn't land for them.
6. Confidentiality: what is shared in the circle stays in the circle.

Types of Questions That Open Thinking

Type	Examples
Perspective shift	"What would this look like from the community's point of view?" / "What if the opposite were true?"
Values / meaning	"What matters most to you about this?" / "What does this challenge reveal about what you care about?"
Assumption surfacing	"What are you assuming here that might not be true?" / "What would have to change for this to work?"
Resource / strength	"What have you already tried that has worked, even a little?" / "Who or what do you have available that you haven't used yet?"

Forward movement	"What would a small, doable next step look like?" / "What would you do if you weren't afraid of getting it wrong?"

Facilitator Notes (for the process-holder)

Today's presenter:

The challenge they brought:

Key moment or shift I observed during the session:

What I will carry from this session into my own facilitation practice:

Rotating the format

The Peer Consultation Circle works best when the presenter role rotates across sessions — so that over time, everyone has had the experience of both presenting and questioning. A good CoP rhythm: one session per month, 60 minutes, one presenter per session. After six months, every member has presented once and the group has built real depth of mutual trust.

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