

Peer-Group Coaching

A high-impact, just-in-time, self-renewing, low-cost,
and easy-to-learn method facilitating fast and sustainable
leadership development on all levels.



by Marcus Gottschalk

Introduction

Can a simple, easy to teach and also cost-effective method solve a lot of your leadership woes? In a survey of senior executives and talent managers from over 20000 large companies conducted by Deloitte in 2014, the highest concern of respondents ranked 'developing leaders' as the most important organizational priority. [1] 66% of respondents rated their ability to train leaders, especially millennial leaders, as poor. Those business leaders recognised that leadership shortcomings can have unpredictable consequences for the business and directly impact its future. At the same time, many executives *find that the traditional methods of leadership development, such as training, mentoring or coaching, are not sufficiently meeting the preparation challenge.* The reality that organisations are faced with today is an interconnected world that is changing fast and becoming ever more complex. With those changes, organisations and leaders have encountered a whole new set of internal and external challenges, and leadership development has become vital to their survival and ultimate success.

As a result of this new environment, organizations are investing more in leadership development. However, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crises, many HR and L&D professionals are now confronted by budgetary dilemmas in designing and choosing the right training programmes for their staff. An approach we use with great success here at CLP to meet both the development challenges and budgetary dilemma, is to involve colleagues and peers to sustain, develop and coach each other. This method is embodied in Peer Group Coaching (PGC) which serves to satisfy the organisation's need for leadership development by teaching leaders to develop themselves together as a group. With this paper, we aim to give you an overview of the benefits of PGC, what factors make PGC successful and how we implement PGC in organizations.

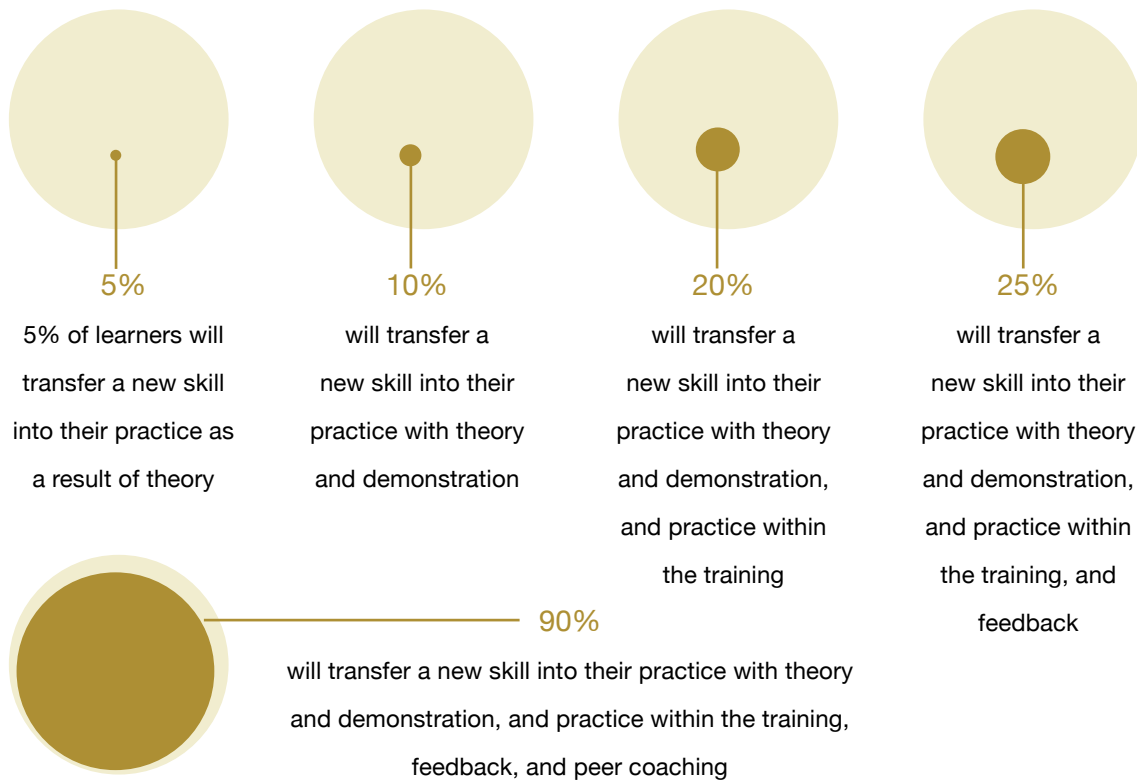
*PGC is high in impact, just in time, self-renewing,
low in cost, and easily to learn.*

Karan Rhodes, Microsoft's Global Programme Manager of LD, for example, reports in the journal Leadership Excellence:

“The Peer Coaching experience has huge value for the participants and our company; in the first year the program’s evaluation score was 98%. This could become a legacy training platform for Microsoft.”

Leaders also complain that they get less feedback and direction the higher they climb in their organisation’s hierarchy. *Peer-group coaching offers a powerful approach to satisfy top-management’s need for feedback and development through people that are familiar with their everyday challenges.*

Further statistical evidence to support peer coaching effectiveness comes from many sources. Perhaps the most easily understood data comes from Dr. Bruce Joyce, „Staff Development Awareness Conference“[3]:



For most trainings, 90% implementation with leadership development programs seems like a dream. Let us show you how we do it!



Peer-group coaching and how it works

PGC is a unique form of Leadership development coaching, where 3 to 6 peers rotate roles to coach each other on business and personal issues without the support of an external facilitator or coach. The mutual support is carried out in a non-judgemental, non-evaluating, non-threatening and co-equal fashion and peers are always matched in business experience, one of the most important factors in coach matching. [4]

Change, Leadership & Partners (CLP) is among the first organisations of the worldwide to have initiated and researched how to help peer groups become more effective coaches in corporate management settings. In the last four years we have used the method to enhance leadership development programs in multinational companies in insurance, pharmaceuticals and engineering sectors worldwide and have constantly researched how exactly leaders learn during Peer Group Coaching as a top management priority.

*In CLP's experience,
PGC works best under the following conditions:*

- a)* Trust and honesty are built and monitored throughout the process – a positive and trusting environment is key to an effective learning and development.
- b)* Participants come from the same hierarchy – not as direct colleagues, but peers from different parts of the organisation.
- c)* Participants share relatively similar characteristics in some areas such as age, family status or personality since these similarities contribute to better group cohesion.
- d)* The size of the group is limited to a maximum of 6 people in order to create and maintain the intimacy that makes PGC work. In a relatively smaller group it is easier to build trust, demonstrate honesty, openness and develop empathy.
- e)* Informality and diversity is favoured – competitiveness, fear, friction are poisonous for the PGC learning environment

PGC's effectiveness stems from its unique process and characteristics and also how we prepare leaders to meet this challenge. To understand how PGC exactly works, we would like to give you an overview of how PGC is implemented, how it works and what makes it especially unique.



Implementing PGC

To initiate peer-group coaching, participants undergo a day of training. The peer groups are then scheduled and peers meet once a month for 6 months. After 6 months, CLP recommends supervision of the peer group to further enhance learning and implementation of what has been learned.

Participant Training

During the first phase, participants acquire PGC skills to coach and sustain each other successfully. Participants learn:

- a) coaching skills
- b) the PGC process
- c) how to build *a creative, positive and authentic learning environment*

Acquisition of coaching Skills

Coaching *skills increase from session to session* and although they take time to learn, in the experience of working with a multinational insurance company, this

increase in skill was one of the main reasons why PGC participants reported that the experience became richer with every session. Specific skills, such as leading through asking systemic questions, listening, understanding, and encouragement are crucial for each peer group coach. *In our PGC Kick Off programs, participants are trained and developed* in the skills of active listening, hypothesis building, supporting the ideas of others and using coaching questions.

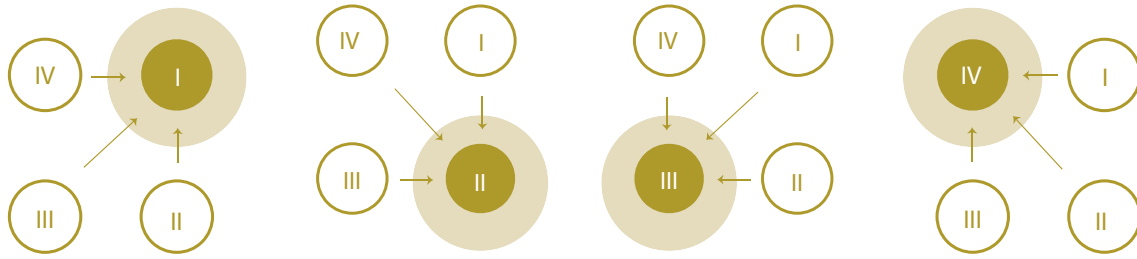
The PGC process

The PGC processes are straightforward and have two dimensions – horizontal and vertical. The horizontal processes describe what happens from start to finish and include social meetings, frequency of meetings, the mode of meetings, that is face to face, virtual or by video/ conference. Horizontal processes include every step from session to session. Vertical processes describe what happens within a single PGC session and include role rotation, techniques implemented for skills development and time to reflect.

PGC flexibly adapts to the demands and self-managing capacity of the group. The peer group schedules their meetings and discuss the best way to conduct the meetings by themselves with no outside intervention. Peer Groups are encouraged to include social activities aside their PGC meetings, since we found that group building activities such as having lunches or dinners together strongly enhance the effectivity of PGC on personal goal attainment. These personal goals and cases are also negotiated and discussed within the group. Leaders are encouraged to challenge their own personal pressing challenges and goals within PGC.

During the PGC sessions, the following vertical processes ensure that leaders have learning experiences that can be transferred to their daily lives. The ability to facilitate learning and developing without us being there, is the main reason we started to employ PGC in organizations. *At CLP we have spent the last years researching exactly how the process of learning in PGC takes place and what factors make PGC so successful.*

Role Rotation



Role rotation is one of the key characteristics of PGC. As its name suggests, peers rotate roles, taking on the role of coachee at least once, while the other participants take the role of coach. In the CLP's experience, PGC works best, when each participant takes the role of the coachee once and that of the coach multiple times. Role rotation fosters trust amongst participants because all peers share their professional and personal experiences and also requires the peers to adapt to different learning situations. As coachees, peers have an opportunity to get coached and professional feedback from a high number of professionals for their own personal situation. It also gives them a feeling that they are not alone in their position. Many times, problems have come up before and participants can relate. Having no external coach also fosters conformity and coherence as participants all come from the same company and are familiar with the organizational culture. Furthermore, by practising the role of a coach, participants learn how to address development, ask the right questions and how to sensitively deal with pressing issues. They have an opportunity to develop themselves by taking on different roles throughout the process. This way, participants automatically learn to think about and understand situations from different perspectives, since this is inherent to the PGC process.

Techniques for skills development

Peer Group Coaching has a ripple effect stemming from the inherent training of coaching skills. Since peer coaches are constantly working on their ability to use the coaching skills during their PGC sessions and get immediate feedback and results in the group, they develop this skillset as part of their own leadership skillset. Participants of PGC report that they adapted the skillsets as part of their own leadership skills and succeeded in implementing the skills to develop their own direct reports.

Time to reflect

A feature of PGC that is inherent to PGC is scheduled time to reflect. In daily business, taking time to reflect daily practice and issues is often perceived as time wasting or outright impossible without distraction. With PGC, participants have their sessions as part of their busy schedule, thus scheduling their time to reflect business practice without distractions. PGC allows leaders to take a scheduled time out and reflect on their daily practice.

Exchange of information and experience

In each session PGC participants discuss topics agreed in advance so they can prepare themselves for the discussion. However, PGC sessions also serve as a flexible forum and participants are free to bring any relevant topics they consider important to be shared. This freedom gives participants a feeling of security and informality which contribute to an atmosphere of openness and group cohesion. From the experiences we made with participants from a multinational medical engineering company, we observed that participants developed their professional and personal relationships among themselves beyond their PGC meetings and that most continued the contact after PGC had been completed. As an outcome, leaders reported that PGC successfully contributed to cross-functional team building and intra-organizational networking.

Building a creative, positive and authentic learning environment

PGC offers leaders a break from their routines. Participants report that they looked forward to and appreciate the sessions as an opportunity to express their opinions and experiences without being judged by co-workers or bosses. Sessions become a place where leaders learn and share solutions or tips to address their current challenges. In PGC participants do not hide or push back their personalities. PGC creates a room for authenticity. Nevertheless participants always stay bound by the core principles (trust, respect, honesty, and collaboration) on which PGC is based.

The benefits of PGC

PGC's benefits are easy to list: PGC is an effective, cost-efficient intervention that allows consistent leadership development with only minimal external intervention. It leads to practical development in leadership areas participants want to work on and adapts to any leadership challenge a leader might face.

Transfer of learnings

Benefits of PGC predominantly emerge in two steps. The first one is the awareness when participants realise that they have acquired new knowledge, information or a new approach to a particular topic or issue. The second is implementing what has been learnt. *Through PGC, leaders tend to adapt their behaviour, style and problem solving approach.* Changes are also positively welcomed by leaders' subordinates and co-workers. One of the leaders who took part in a CLP-led PGC project described his personal change:

“Before I was leading in a little bit directive way, by telling people straight away what the solution should be. Now it is more about listening and thinking what works and what does not. I have noticed that my leadership style has changed.”

Practical implementations go beyond the individual level and have a positive impact on working environment, decision making and collaboration. Moreover, it also contributes to a re-invention of organizational culture. Leaders become more resourceful, solution-oriented, flexible and adaptive after taking part in the PGC experience.

A Flexible Process

PGC is very flexible. Participants can meet each other face-to-face, virtually online or via phone conference. In addition to enabling participants to connect wherever they are located, it also helps participants to connect with leaders across the continent or globe and contributes to awareness of intercultural and diversity challenges.

A unique approach

Based on our experience and PGC research, there are several reasons why PGC is a unique and beneficial form of coaching. These can be highlighted as follows:

- Role rotation enables all participants to learn coaching skills
- Cost saving – no external coach
- Allows flexibility in topic selection
- Creates a positive atmosphere
- It allows authenticity for leaders
- Improves problem solving, communication skills of members
- Improves active listening and empathy
- Improves the ability to give useful feedback to peers and direct reports
- Increases participants' self-confidence in leadership and adaptation skills
- Facilitates positive changes in leadership style and behaviour, without actively teaching about leadership
- Underlines the importance of trust, honesty and collaboration
- Introduces a platform for gaining new perspectives on a wide range of topics
- Contributes to organizational networking

One of the great advantages of peer-group coaching is that it can be applied on all leadership levels across an organization and can become an integral part of organizational leadership development programmes.

*PGC enables continuous learning and development
long after external programmes have ended.*



How you can start benefitting from PGC

- *You want to use the transformative power of PGC to benefit your own organization?*
- *You are interested in our portfolio for leadership development and how we can help you?*
- *You are interested in PGC but want more information?*

No problem. Contact us at info@change-leadership.net or call us at +44 7831 041160. CLP is customer driven and we will find a customized high quality solution that fits your organization and culture.

“Peer Group Coaching is the most cost effective implementation of coaching we can offer and we are excited about its benefits in organizations worldwide.”

Marcus Gottschalk



Marcus Gottschalk, M.Sc., is CEO of Change, Leadership und Partners, SARL. He is studying at Oxford Brookes University in order to achieve a Professional Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring and specializes in Peer-Group Coaching.

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