

Session 7: Advisor as Innovation Coach – Peer Consultation Practice (13:45–15:15)

Objective

Provide participants with a hands-on opportunity to apply the module's concepts to their own real-life challenges through a structured **peer consultation** exercise. By acting as both “consultant” and “client” in small groups, participants will deepen their understanding of how to analyse an innovation process problem and generate solutions using peer input. They will practice using the toolkit (spiral, network analysis, etc.) in a coaching conversation. The aim is for each participant to leave with concrete ideas or next steps for a current challenge they face, and to experience the value of peer support among advisors.



Presentation - Introduction (10 min)

Introduce the concept of **peer-to-peer consultation**: a structured process where colleagues help one person think through a problem, often called a “case clinic” in some training circles. Emphasize that advisors can use this among themselves (building a community of practice) and even facilitate peer consultations among farmers (like group problem-solving). It is a way to leverage collective intelligence, which we have in this very room.

We can follow these steps in small groups:

1. **Formulate the Question:** One person (the “narrator” or the case giver) briefly presents an innovation-related challenge they face and frames a question they want help with. For example, “*How can I engage more farmers in my agroforestry network meetings?*” or “*Our project is stuck in planning – how do we move to action?*” The key is a clear, focused question.
2. **Gather Information:** The peers ask the narrator clarifying questions to understand the context better. The narrator should share enough detail (stakeholders involved, what’s been tried, etc.) but not a full novel – perhaps 5–7 minutes of Questions & Answers (Q&A).
3. **Analzse:** Together, the group uses relevant **innovation process tools or principles** to analyse what might be happening. This is where they might say, “*Sounds like in Spiral terms you’re between Inspiration and Planning – maybe the group needs more structure*” or “*Could it be a gatekeeper issue? Who might be playing that role?*” They can sketch a mini network analysis or identify a pattern (this step is essentially the peers discussing, while the narrator mostly listens).
4. **Re-formulate the Question (if needed):** Sometimes through analysis, the real challenge becomes clearer. The group or narrator might reframe the question, For example: “*Maybe the real question is how to build trust between farmers and researchers, not just get farmers to attend.*”
5. **Offer Advice:** Now the peers each offer their suggestions or “*if I were you I might try...*” ideas. Importantly, **no discussion or defending** during this – the narrator just listens and takes notes. This is a brainwriting of advice in spoken form. It taps their creativity and experience.
6. **Conclude:** The narrator shares what advice or ideas resonate most and what they might do. They essentially “harvest” the consultation, and thank the group.

Wrap up with a quick reflective round. This process is powerful: it’s structured (so it’s safe and efficient) and peer-driven (so it respects that we all have wisdom to share). Research in professional development shows that peer consultation improves skills, confidence, and reduces isolation – mention that to motivate full engagement.

Activity- Facilitating innovation or networks (60 min):

Break into groups of approximately 4 people (so each consultation can take 15 minutes and everyone gets a turn if time allows; if time is short, not everyone may present, but ensure at least 2-3 cases per group). If groups are larger, do 20 minutes (mins) per case and not everyone will present.

Have each group choose a timekeeper/facilitator to keep them on track (you can give them a cheat-sheet of steps with suggested timings: 2 mins formulate, 5 mins Q&A, 5 mins analysis, 5 mins advice, 2 mins conclude = 19 mins each).

Ask participants to think of a challenge *now* they could bring up. It should be related to *facilitating innovation or networks*, not a purely technical agroforestry question (so “*how to get funding*” or “*how to deal with an uncooperative stakeholder*” – yes; “*what density to plant trees*” – not the focus here, unless the issue is how to convince others of that density). If someone does not have a personal case, they can imagine one from their context or even adopt one from a colleague’s experience that they know of.

Once in groups, give them approximately 15 minutes per consultation. Walk around to observe quietly, making sure they follow the structure (intervene only if a group is confused or off-track). It is important the narrator does not get interrupted by unsolicited advice too early, and that others do ask questions before jumping to solutions. After about 45-60 minutes, all or most groups should have done 3-4 rounds. Call time.

Debrief (15 min)

Bring everyone back. Lead a debrief:

- Ask the “narrators”- “*How was it to receive advice in this way? Was something particularly useful?*” Perhaps one says “*I realized I’ve been neglecting the Inspiration stage with my group; we jumped to Planning and lost people. My peers gave me ideas to do a visioning exercise to re-inspire everyone.*”
- Ask the “consultants”- “*How was it to advise? Did the frameworks help you structure your thinking?*” They might say it was satisfying to use the concepts to help a colleague, or that explaining someone else’s issue gave them insight into their own.
- Highlight any instance where a tool clearly informed a suggestion, For example: “*In one group, they drew a quick network map and found no ‘link’ to policymakers, which was the crux – great use of the tool!*” or “*I heard someone identify a ‘freeze’ pattern and suggest a warm intervention – wonderful application of yesterday’s learning.*”

Underscore the value of peer learning: often, innovation advisors operate solo in their region; forming a peer network (like through this training or professional associations) can be extremely valuable. Encourage them to continue reaching out to each other for peer consults after the module – maybe schedule a follow-up call or online group.

Success Tip: This peer consultation method can be adapted to work with farmers or mixed stakeholder workshops – e.g., farmers consulting each other on farm-level innovations, which is empowering and breaks the expectation that only the “expert” has answers. It reinforces the co-creation ethos.