Research on Collaboration in Action

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In this paper I will focus on the psychological dynamics of multiparty collaboration, illustrated by two projects in which I have been engaged. First I describe what I mean by multiparty collaboration. Next, I outline the principles of designing and executing action research projects. The theoretical background for these principles is derived from the domain of Organization Development and from a psychodynamic perspective on organizations and organizational change. Subsequently I present my experiences with running a complex behavioral simulation of multiparty processes. I share some main observations pertaining to the social difficulties people encounter when working across system boundaries. The second project concerns an action research project of an organizational change process in a nursing home. I describe the action research process and my role as a consultant. I then review some generic issues related to multiparty processes that are typical for both projects. I end with some reflections on universities and multiparty collaboration.

Key words: Multiparty collaboration, action research

Introduction

Collaboration is ‘hot’. Public-private partnerships and network organizations are designed, organizational forms for which an underlying concept of collaboration is essential. Books appear that reflect an academic interest in the structural and strategic characteristics of these new organizational forms, or that address managers who are faced with interorganizational challenges.