Building capacity for learning and change through reflective conversation

David Coghlan
Claus Jacobs

Conversation is central to the process of organizational learning and change. Drawing on the notion of reflective conversation, we describe an action research project, “learning through listening” in Omega, a residential healthcare organization. In this project, service users, staff, members of management committees, trustees, managers, and central office staff participated in listening to each other and in working together towards building capacity for creating their own vision of how the organization could move into the future, according to its values and ethos. In doing so they developed ways of engaging in reflective conversation that enabled progress towards a strategic direction.

Keywords: Action research, reflective conversation, organizational change, healthcare organization

Introduction

Central to processes of organizational change and learning is the engagement of members of the organization in visioning, planning, taking action and reviewing (Dixon 1998). Weisbord (2004) notes that over the twentieth century there was an evolution of practice in the development of organizational meaning making and community formation. In the 1950s everybody solved problems. In the 1960s experts improved whole systems, and now in the