

**An insider and participatory action  
research study of the service development  
role of the executive team of an  
organisation providing services for people  
with intellectual disabilities**

**David Kenefick B.A., Dip.App.Psych., M.Ed.**

**Submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy to:**

**Dublin City University**

**Supervisor: Dr Melrona Kirrane,**

**Dublin City University Business School**

**Submitted: September, 2015**

## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not, to the best of my knowledge, breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_

David Kenefick

I.D number: 56121148

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2015

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the time, energy and skills of my co-researchers and colleagues in conducting this action research. I thank them for their support and I wish them well with their ongoing work.

My academic supervisor, Dr Melrona Kirrane, has provided guidance, support and helpful feedback throughout the research and writing process. She has been involved with my journey of learning for much longer than either of us anticipated. I thank her for her patience and persistence.

I wish to thank the members of the Review Panels who met with me over the years of study and research. In particular, I thank Professor Brian Leavy, who has been involved from the beginning, for his thinking and feedback.

My critical friend and wife, Mary Rafferty, has enabled me to survive and complete this research. A special thanks to her.

# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. The Action Research Approach .....	1
1.2. The Executive Committee .....	2
1.3. The Research Topic.....	2
1.4. Service Development.....	3
1.5. Research Roles.....	4
1.6. Thesis Model.....	5
1.7. Ethics .....	5
1.8. Structure.....	6
1.9. The Story.....	8
<b>Chapter 2. Literature Review .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Organisational Change .....	11
2.1.1 Planned Change .....	12
2.1.2 Episodic Change .....	16
2.1.3 Emergent Change.....	18
2.1.4 Continuous Change.....	19
2.1.5 Contemporary Continuous and Mixed Approaches to Change.....	20
2.1.6 Other Relevant Literature .....	24
2.1.7 Constructs relevant to this research arising from the literature on organisational change .....	26
2.2 Complexity Theory.....	27
2.3 Action Research.....	38
<b>Chapter 3. Methodological Process .....</b>	<b>93</b>
3.1 Philosophical Approach.....	93
3.2. Action Research.....	95

3.3.	The Main Research .....	108
3.4.	Two Major Elements of the Action Research as Conducted .....	115
3.5.	Reflection.....	117
3.6.	Ethics .....	119
3.7.	Robustness and Validity of the Action Research.....	123
3.8.	Data Analysis Approach and Methods .....	125
<b>Chapter 4.</b>	<b>The Story of the Action Research .....</b>	<b>137</b>
4.1	Cycle One .....	137
4.2	Cycle Two.....	153
4.3	Cycle Three .....	170
4.4	Review of the Action Research Project by the Research Group, 3rd April 2012 191	
4.5	Conclusion .....	196
<b>Chapter 5.</b>	<b>Findings .....</b>	<b>197</b>
5.1	The Role of the Executive Committee in Relation to Service Development..	197
5.2.	Findings on the Role .....	198
5.3.	Findings in relation to Action Research Processes and Practices .....	212
5.4.	Findings in relation to Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR).....	238
5.5.	Insider Action Research (IAR) .....	246
<b>Chapter 6.</b>	<b>Discussion and Conclusions .....</b>	<b>252</b>
6.1	The Context of the Action Research.....	253
6.2.	Action Research Process.....	263
6.3.	The EC Role regarding Service Development .....	278
6.4.	Conclusions.....	282
6.5.	In Conclusion .....	288
<b>7.</b>	<b>References.....</b>	<b>290</b>

<b>Appendix 1: Ethics Documents for Pilot Project .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Ethics documents for the main research .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Appendix 3: The research proposal to DCU .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Briefing Document for the Executive Committee for the Pilot Project ..</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Appendix 5: The principal researcher’s preunderstanding .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Appendix 6: Briefing document for the Executive: Main Research .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Appendix 7: Learning from Cycle 1 Document .....</b>	<b>1</b>

## **Abstract**

**Author:** David Kenefick

**Title:** An insider and participatory action research study of the service development role of the executive team of an organisation providing services for people with intellectual disabilities

This study examines the role of the Executive Committee in relation to service development, within an organisation that provides services to people with intellectual disabilities. The principal researcher was a member of the Executive Committee (the Senior Management Team of the organisation) and all other members of the Committee were co-researchers. Insider action research with a critical participatory focus was the philosophical and methodological basis of this investigation.

Over a two year period, the current service development role was examined and evaluated by the research group. The group explored changes to its role and possible enactment of such changes. Potential future roles and their evolution were considered.

The thesis related data analysis was conducted following the group research using critical hermeneutics.

The findings highlight the difficulties experienced by the group in identifying how its service development role should change and the struggle to take action in the service of such change. The findings demonstrate that conducting insider action research with a top management team in an unstable and demanding environment and in parallel with the work of the Executive Committee is challenging for both the group and the principal researcher. They explore the complexities of taking a critical participatory approach in insider action research.

The research is discussed in the light of the context within which it was conducted, the process of the action research, the outcomes of the research and how they relate to each other and to change, complexity theory and action research literature.

This study contributes to guidance for researchers in relation to conducting insider action research with an executive committee taking account of its environment, role duality of the Principal Researcher and co-researchers and to combining critical participatory action research with insider action research.

## List of Tables

Table 1: Bullock and Batten’s four phase model (Bullock & Batten, 1985).....	13
Table 2: Summary of Van de Ven & Sun framework of change models.....	23
Table 3: Comparison of frameworks for thinking about causality.....	29
Table 4: The Stages of the Action Research Cycle of Some Action Researchers .....	60
Table 5: The ladder of Pretty .....	67
Table 6: Principal Researcher’s ideas and questions at the start of the research.....	199

## List of Figures

Figure 1: The Action Research Cycle .....	57
Figure 2: McKernan’s action research model .....	58
Figure 3: The Action Research Cycle .....	59
Figure 4: Spiral of Action Research Cycles .....	61
Figure 5: McNiff’s 1988 Spiral .....	62
Figure 6: A generative transformational evolutionary process .....	62
Figure 7: Complex Dynamics of Action Research.....	64
Figure 8: Conceptual model of an action research thesis.....	65
Figure 9: The Action Research Spiral.....	96
Figure 10: Themes related to the role of the Executive Committee on service development .....	200
Figure 11: Cycle 1: October 2009 to April 2010 .....	214
Figure 12: Cycle 2 May 2010 to March 2011 .....	218
Figure 13: Cycle 3: March 2011 to October 2011 .....	223

## Frequently-used abbreviations

AR	Action Research (AR)
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems Theory (CAS)
CPAR	Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR).
FPAR	Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)
IAR	Insider Action Research (IAR)
PAR	Participatory Action Research (PAR)
EC	Executive Committee
PR	Principal Researcher

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

This study involved a participatory and insider action research study of the service development role of the Executive Committee. The organisational setting of this study was a large service provider for people with intellectual disabilities. The organisation is a non-denominational, voluntary organisation that provides services and supports to more than 1,600 children and adults who have intellectual disabilities and to their families. The organisation has been in existence for more than fifty years, operates primarily in Dublin and provides a wide range of types of services to service users and their families. These include early intervention, multi-disciplinary clinical, educational, training, occupational, recreational, residential and community living services and supports.

### **1.1. The Action Research Approach**

An action research approach was used to carry out all phases of the research. These included gathering data and information on the service development role, planning change activities during the research, experimenting on some proposed changes and developing a plan for changes during the research and following the research. Action research was employed as it was regarded as a vehicle for learning that would inform the Executive Committee as a group and each of the individual members. In this way, action research would contribute to how members of the Executive Committee thought about, planned, enabled and supported service development in the future.

The research with the group was conducted over a twenty four month period from 2009 to 2011. It was carried out in a participatory manner with all the members of the Executive Committee. The members were involved as co-researchers throughout the group period of the research. As well as being participatory, this action research was insider because the principal researcher was a member of the Executive Committee. No-one outside the Executive Committee was involved in the research. This was a

small group study of seven people, including the principal researcher, acting as an action research group.

The philosophy underpinning the research was Critical Theory. This was chosen because of its focus on empowerment and emancipation, the critical approach to all aspects of the research and the high level of participation that is advocated and expected.

## **1.2. The Executive Committee**

The Executive Committee is the top management team of the organisation within which the action research was conducted. The Chief Executive reports to the Board of Directors. The Executive Committee was established in the 1980s to replace the previous senior management team of which the principal researcher and two other executives had been members. Four members of the research group, including the principal researcher were members of the Executive Committee since its establishment. The other three co-researchers joined the Executive Committee between 1995 and 2001. The total membership from 2001 was seven. This was a small group with long working relationships between the members. During the group research one member retired in July 2010 and another in February 2011.

## **1.3. The Research Topic**

The topic for the action research was proposed by the principal researcher because of his understanding of the Executive Committee's current role in relation to service development and the need to change this role. It was also influenced by the wider debate concerning services and supports to people with disabilities. Nationally, there is a range of values and policies in relation to providing services to people with intellectual disabilities. There is a continuum of models of services. At one end of the continuum the approach is to deliver services and supports in the community in an individualised manner and to involve people with disabilities in deciding on the

services that they need and want. At the other end of the continuum there are service providers who provide much more institutionalised services on large non-community sites. The national policies at government, research and field or sector levels are generally moving in the direction of individualisation and mainstreaming of services, aiming to create new models and to change existing services. Involving and empowering people with intellectual disabilities are the aims of an increasing number of services.

The principal researcher had experience of being involved in and leading service development over several decades and in a range of different types of services. At the time of the research proposal, service development was a significant element of the principal researcher's role in addition to his operational and strategic management responsibilities. The principal researcher anticipated that this research would be an opportunity for the Executive Committee to identify changes that it wished to make in relation to service development and its own service development role, to experiment or make changes and to learn from the action research.

The study produced two sets of findings, one in relation to the Executive Committee's service development role and the other in relation to the action research process.

#### **1.4. Service Development**

Service development is a process without a clear definition. The approaches used under this description include working in accord with public or organisational policy, innovation, competition and profit making depending on the type of organisation and the services that are provided by the organisation or company. As the term *development* is understood it means growing, progressing, advancing, using learning and moving in a positive direction. Maintaining the status quo is not considered service development in any organisation. As already indicated, services for people with intellectual disabilities have been developing for decades, even if some of these developments have been slow. Services have developed as a result of a range of

influences. These include new knowledge, changing organisational and public perception and expectations, human and disability rights movements, changing health and social care environments, academic research and increased communication and information sharing. Pressures to change have also come in response to fewer resources, regulatory changes and state expectations in relation to outcomes and accountability. This generally episodic development and the recognition of people with intellectual disabilities and their rights in the current environment means that services need to develop rather than simply expand. Lack of clear definitions of service development and very limited research on service development created some questions for the research group as to how to address the research topic. The general understanding, following early examination and discussion, was that for this research, *service development* meant progressing towards more individualised and rights based services and making changes that are based on vision, knowledge, learning and being creative. The group also established that service development needed to be cognisant of national policy, quality standards and the wishes of people with intellectual disabilities.

## **1.5. Research Roles**

A distinctive feature of the research process is the role of the group as a research group and the recognition that all members of the group were considered to be co-researchers. As participatory action research the research actions that were undertaken were those proposed by group members and decided on or agreed to by the group. While the principal researcher also made proposals, he did not work from his own plan and he did not lead the planning and implementation, except at the beginning of the research. His role was to facilitate the group in carrying out the research, to work actively with all members of the group and to keep an academic focus throughout the research.

## **1.6. Thesis Model**

The thesis is organised according to a structure that allows the presentation of the substantive research topic, namely, examination of the role of the Executive Committee in relation to service development, along with an in-depth recording and analysis of the action research methodology and processes. This includes a description of the methodology and research processes and how it worked across the study. The spiral, cycle and iterative processes are described, and reflected on in order to make sense of the research and to enable an appropriate presentation of the findings. The Story chapter presents most of the description, narrative, reflection and sense making, in addition, given the research approach, there are narrative elements included in the Methodological Process, Findings and Discussion and Conclusions chapters.

## **1.7. Ethics**

As this was insider action research with the Executive Committee where the principal researcher is identified as the author, the team and individual members of the team are identifiable. The principal researcher has attended to ethical concerns in writing the thesis. In particular this means not identifying co-researchers, unless it was impossible not to, as with a limited number of references to the Chief Executive. The study illustrates the ethical risks for both the principal researcher and the co-researchers in undertaking insider group research with the only such group in the organisation. The ethical issues may also limit how the 'story' and the findings can be used outside the thesis.

## **1.8. Structure**

### **1.8.1. Literature Review**

The literature review chapter is presented in three sections. The first section examines the literature on organisational change, the second section explores complexity theory and the final section of the literature review focuses on action research.

The literature surrounding organisational change was identified as critical because the examination of the Executive Committee's role was likely to result in the identification of the need for change. The understanding of the principal researcher was that the manner in which the Executive Committee carried out its service development role and managed service development throughout the organisation followed the planned and episodic models of organisational change. Given the emergent and ongoing nature of changes in services he considered that it was important to consider and understand a broader approach to organisational change as represented in the literature. This section ends with constructs in relation to organisational change that are relevant to this research.

The second section of the literature review examines Complexity Theory. This was considered appropriate due to its relevance to organisations generally and particularly those that could be considered as complex adaptive systems. It was also relevant because of its approach to organisational change, especially ongoing change and to how senior managers should work with the organisation and with individual staff members. Its relationships with organisational change theories and its relevance to this research are also considered. This section ends with a construct on organisations, organisational change, leadership and management.

The third section of the literature review addresses action research. Following a general introduction to action research, three main philosophical theories that underpin action research are reviewed: Pragmatism, Critical Realism and Critical

Theory. The history and development and the types of action research are reviewed. This is followed by descriptions and illustrations of how the spirals and cycles of action research work. The two forms of action research applied in this thesis, insider action research (IAR) and critical participatory action research (CPAR) are then specifically reviewed. These are followed by reviews of a number of particularly relevant elements of action research: reflection; first, second and third person action research; validity and rigour and ethics. The section ends with a review of action research involvement in and relationship with organisational change.

The chapter ends with a summary of the review making connections to this research and the context within which it was conducted.

### **1.8.2. Methodological Process**

The chapter begins with a summary of the Critical Theory philosophical approach underpinning this research. This is followed by two main sections: action research processes as they are used in the research and the data analysis approaches and methods used.

The section on the action research processes describes all the relevant aspects of the action research. This is followed by a report on the research pre-step. The methodological process section for the main group research describes how the research was conducted by the group, by sub-groups and individuals from the group and by the principal researcher. It describes the reflective processes and practices of the group and of the principal researcher. A detailed description of the ethical issues and how they were dealt with follows. The final element of this section covers how robustness and validity were addressed.

The approach to data analysis is the second main section of the chapter. This section begins with identification of the data collected and how they were collected. It describes how the decision on the critical hermeneutics approach to data analysis was

taken and what this approach meant in analysing this research. This is followed by a description of how the data analysis was carried out. There is a significant amount of detail given in this description including what the principal researcher did to ensure rigour and validity. This information is included to ensure that the research can be objectively examined.

## **1.9. The Story**

This chapter describes the group research over the two years during which it was conducted. It describes the cycles of the research including group, sub-group and individual activities. Extracts from the principal researcher's reflective journal following group sessions or other events are included throughout the story. These extracts show the principal researcher's reflections at the different stages in the research. The description of each of the three major cycles ends with a section on reflection and sense making from the data analysis and the writing of the story. These contribute to Discussion and Conclusions. The story ends with a description of the group's review of the research following its conclusion and also includes a section on reflection and sense making.

### **1.9.1. Findings**

The report of the findings reflects the main focuses of the research. The first section presents the findings on the role of the Executive Committee in relation to service development under the headings of the themes that emerged in relation to the role. The second section presents the findings on how the action research worked with this group in addressing the role and changes to the role. Of particular importance for the findings is the fact that action research is a change process as well as a research process and was chosen as both for this research study. The findings are presented in considerable detail to demonstrate the connections and interactions between the topic of the role and the action research processes and how each influenced the other. The findings are presented in a manner that enables the reader to follow and

understand the cycles and spiral of the research and how these evolved over the course of the study.

### **1.9.2. Discussion and Conclusions**

This chapter discusses the context of the research, the action research process and the outcomes in relation to the research on the Executive Committee's service development role. It ends with conclusions in relation to the research.

The section on the context discusses the three major elements of the context, their interaction and their impacts on the action research. It includes the principal researcher's understanding of and learning about these issues and their relationships to theories and makes recommendations in relation to the conduct of action research in an unstable and demanding context.

It discusses and critiques the action research process with focuses on power, role duality, structural duality, participation and reflection. The principal researcher's understanding of and learning about these issues are identified and discussed. This section ends with recommendations on conducting IAR with a focus on conducting this research with one senior management group.

The third section of the chapter discusses the outcomes that were achieved during the research in relation to the Executive Committee's service development role. The influences leading to the outcomes and agreements reported are discussed. This discussion is connected to the discussion in the previous section on how the group worked through the action research processes.

The chapter ends with conclusions on the research and the outcomes and learning arising from it. The thesis closes with some overall conclusions in relation to the research, identifying learning of relevance to other action researchers.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to identify the role of the Executive Committee in relation to service development; to identify and agree on a changed or developed role; to plan and take actions on changing the role within the action research; to plan for actions following the action research. The literature reviewed was chosen because of its relevance to this research. Organisational change literature is relevant because change is a major aim of the project. Complexity Theory literature is helpful in understanding the complex nature of a service organisation such as the one within which the research was conducted and because it could be related to and inform both organisational change and the research project. Action Research literature is reviewed to understand the research methodology and how it relates to organisational change.

Theories of organisational change and how they have developed are reviewed. This includes a focus on the current context in which the complexity of change is identified, illustrated and explained and combinations of theories and models are presented and investigated. Complexity Theory is reviewed with a particular focus on organisations and organisational change. Action Research literature is reviewed, given its central focus in this work. Action Research as an approach relates to and influences how all aspects of the research topic are examined, planned, enacted, reflected on and analysed. The reviews of contemporary organisational change, Complexity Theory and Action Research describe the theoretical landscape of the research. These reviews and constructs based on this literature contribute to the identification and description of the context of the research.

## 2.1 Organisational Change

The order of the review of Organisational Change which relates to the historical creation and development of these theories and to contemporary theories will be:

- 1) Planned Change
  - a) Origins and Models of Planned Change
  - b) Reasons for Planned Change taking place
  - c) Critique of Planned Change
- 2) Episodic Change
  - a) Description of Episodic Change
  - b) Punctuated Equilibrium
- 3) Emergent Change
  - a) The Origins and Development of Emergent Change
  - b) Characteristics of Emergent Change
- 4) Continuous Change
- 5) Contemporary Continuous and Mixed Approaches to Change
  - a) Contemporary theories and connections between theories
  - b) Frameworks
- 6) Other relevant literature
  - a) Parallel Learning Structures
  - b) Team performance and innovation

The section on Organisational Change briefly reviews key models in the literature on Planned Change: Episodic Change; Emergent Change; Continuous Change and Contemporary Continuous and Mixed Approaches to Change.

This range of theories is included in the review for a number of reasons. They influence organisations and especially top management teams on how they approach making or enabling changes in their organisations and so are relevant in addressing the research topic. As this research is participatory action research with the members of the Executive Committee acting as co-researchers, their understanding of and preferences for different change theories can influence the research. These influences can be at

the levels of understanding, analysis and critique of the Executive Committee's current role, what changes to make to the role and how to make those changes both during the action research and following this research. The overview of the literature ends by distilling constructs in relation to organisational change, the context, and the relationships between them.

### **2.1.1 Planned Change**

- a) Origins and Models of Planned Change
- b) Reasons for Planned change taking place
- c) Critique of Planned Change

#### a) Origins and Models of Planned Change

Planned change generally aims to replace one entity (e.g. structure, system, approach to work, behaviour) with a new one (Bamford and Forrester (2003); Weick & Quinn, 1999). It is no longer the main organisational change theory, but it was the most influential approach to organisational change for fifty years until the early twenty first century (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). It is seen as underpinned by the work of Kurt Lewin (1946, 1947), especially his 3-Step model, 'unfreeze – change – refreeze' (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Elrod & Tippett, 2002; Esain, Williams, & Massey, 2008; Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Burnes (2004b) sees Lewin's contributions to organisational change as much broader than an underpinning for planning change. He observes that Lewin had an enormous impact and that Lewin's approach to planned change was based on field theory, group dynamics, action research and the 3-step model used *in combination*. Burnes's argument, in his reappraisal of Lewin's work, is that using these four concepts in combination can bring about effective change and that Lewin's approach used with fidelity, is still effective. It does, however, require attention to the detail of Lewin's work, as people undertaking change may not understand all four concepts and how to combine the effectively.

Following Lewin, the most common models of planned change use phases of change. These phases are seen as states or steps that an organisation goes through as it implements planned change. The phase models of planned change will be familiar to people involved in organisational management as some version of this approach is often used for organisational change or for specific work projects. There are many models of phased change. Bullock & Batten's (1985) four phase model, developed from a review and synthesis of over thirty models of planned change, is a good example and summary of phase models. Table 1 summarises the key change processes involved at each stage/phase.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Change processes involved</b>
<b>Exploration Phase</b>	becoming aware of the need for change; searching for outside assistance with the planning and implementation of the changes; establishing a contract
<b>Planning Phase</b>	collecting information to contribute to a diagnosis of the problem; establishing change goals and designing appropriate actions to achieve them; getting key decision makers to approve and support the proposed changes
<b>Action Phase</b>	establishing appropriate arrangements to manage the change process; gaining support for the actions to be taken; evaluating the implementation activities and feeding back the results so that adjustments can be made
<b>Integration Phase</b>	Reinforcing new behaviours through feedback and reward systems; gradually reducing reliance on the consultant; diffusing the successful aspects of the change process throughout the organisation; training managers and employees to monitor the changes constantly and to seek to improve them

**Table 1:** Bullock and Batten's four phase model (Bullock & Batten, 1985)

Burnes (1992) identifies that phase models which include a change agent, for instance that of Lippitt, Watson, and Westley (1958), give the organisational consultant a more directive and a less developmental role than they would have in action research.

## b) Reasons for Planned change taking place

The literature identifies four main factors underpinning choices to undertake planned change:

- Some type of failure in the organisation, such as poor performance (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994; Weick & Quinn, 1999) or failure to create continuously adaptive organisations (Dunphy, 1996)
- Changes in the organisation's environment. This is particularly relevant in the context of the public sector and publicly funded organisations (McWilliam & Ward-Griffin, 2006; Molineux & Haslett, 2002)
- The planned change approach is underpinned by an organisational environment in which it is the role of the top of the organisation to decide on and direct organisational change. (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994; Esain et al. 2008)
- Concerns regarding the organisation's structure or strategy are identified by Huber, Sutcliffe, Miller, and Glick (1993) as prompting it to undertake planned change

## c) Critique of Planned Change

### Stable Conditions

The first criticism of planned change is that it assumes that organisations operate under stable conditions and that they can move in a planned way from one planned state to another (Burnes, 1996). However, many organisations experience the environment as uncertain and may need to make changes at a speed for which planned change is not appropriate (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; McDaniel, Jordan, & Fleeman, 2003).

### Rational Approach

The highly rational approach of much planned change is criticised by Bamford & Forrester (2003) as not taking account of issues such as environmental turbulence and

absence of agreement about organisational direction. Pettigrew (2012) also critiques the linear process assumed in planned change. He says that, by the 1980s, the simple linear notions *'had to contend with newly exposed layers of complexity.'* (p. 1308). In contrast to structured approaches, it is increasingly recognised that processes in organisations are complex, unpredictable, fluid and irrational (Doyle, Claydon, & Buchanan, 2000; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

#### Lewin's 3-Step Model

Lewin's previously dominant underpinning of planned change, and particularly his 3-Step model, has attracted criticism since the 1990s. An early critique by Moss Kanter, Stein, and Jick (1992) of Lewin's 'simple model' was *'...first, that organizations are never frozen, much less refrozen, but are fluid entities with many "personalities". Second, to the extent that there are stages, they overlap and interpenetrate one another in important ways.'* (p. 10). In making this statement they mean that the notion of phases or changes, while attractive and easily communicated, does not reflect the reality of organisations.

#### Top Down

Planned change is identified as top-down, directive and controlling (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). One set of problems with this approach is identified as lack of adequate communication which contributes to scepticism, resentment, resistance, misinterpretation and misunderstanding and therefore makes change more difficult (McWilliam & Ward-Griffin, 2006). Another set of problems is the speed of the change, with the top managers being far ahead of other staff in the process and staff not getting the time and support that they need to implement the change (Meyer & Stensaker, 2007).

#### Summary

In this review planned change, which was the dominant organisational change theory for more than forty years, is identified as built on Lewin's 3-Step model. The other major models for planned change are phased change models. There is significant critique of planned change because of elements of the theory and because of the

planned approaches. It is no longer the leading theory in the literature, even if it is popular with organisations.

### **2.1.2 Episodic Change**

This section introduces Episodic Change and reviews Punctuated Equilibrium, as a significant episodic approach.

a) Description of Episodic Change

b) Punctuated Equilibrium

a) Description of Episodic Change

Episodic change is a term used to describe organisational changes that are infrequent, and discontinuous, but are also intentional. It is an occasional interruption of or divergence from the organisation's equilibrium (Weick & Quinn, 1999). As with planned change it is initiated at the top of an organisation. While it is likely to be strategic, deliberate and formal it may also be disruptive and even dramatic because of its episodic nature. The changes may be prompted or caused by particular internal or external events, may happen slowly because of the wide scope of the project and may not be fully completed (Mintzberg & Westley, 1992; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Weick & Quinn describe three important processes related to episodic change. These are:

- inertia, that is maintaining a system's equilibrium because of an inability to change as quickly as needed;
- the triggering of change by sources such as the environment, performance, characteristics of top managers, structure and strategy (Huber et al., 1993)
- the change that happens through the replacement of an identity, an entity, a programme or a structure.

## b) Punctuated Equilibrium

Punctuated Equilibrium is a particular approach within episodic change. Romanelli & Tushman (1994) and Gersick (1994) identify this as a successful way for organisations to change. Romanelli and Tushman describe punctuated equilibrium as brief, radical and pervasive change that brings about organisational transformation. Along with Gersick, they also support a strong role for senior management in the change process. Gersick claims that managerial foresight produces more successful change than managerial reaction.

Romanelli & Tushman (1994) link punctuated equilibrium to change which happens in a significant and revolutionary manner. Their theory proposes that such change will be more successful than small accumulated changes. They also claim that their findings support the view of other authors that revolutionary transformation is the most common mode of fundamental transformation (Lant & Mezias, 1992; D. Miller & Friesen, 1982).

Weick & Quinn (1999) point out that punctuated equilibrium theorists assume that organisations fail to adapt during periods of equilibrium. This leads to decreased effectiveness and eventually to pressure for change which gives rise to a revolutionary period. Punctuated equilibrium theorists who describe periods of gradual change as periods of equilibrium appear to ignore the impact of gradual change (Gersick, 1994; Molineux & Haslett, 2002).

Punctuated Equilibrium continues to be considered in the development of the mixed model approaches to organisational change. Van de Ven and Sun (2011) present a framework for organisational change that consists of four models of change which they connect to both episodic change and punctuated equilibrium. Their framework is further reviewed in the section on contemporary organisational change (and see Table 2).

### 2.1.3 Emergent Change

Emergent Change began to develop as an approach in the 1980s. Advocates of emergent change are characteristically more united in their criticism of planned change than in agreement about a specific alternative model (Bamford & Forrester, 2003).

a) The Origins and Development of Emergent Change

b) Characteristics of Emergent Change

a) The Origins and Development of Emergent Change

Models of Emergent change evolved from three sources:

- The culture excellence model: This model, created by Peters and Waterman (1982) proposed that organisations should develop flexible cultures that promoted innovation and entrepreneurship and that encouraged bottom-up, continuous and cooperative change. Such a culture would enable change needs to be identified, proposals to be made and creative actions or experiments to be undertaken by staff.
- Postmodernism: Considering organisational life as socially constructed, postmodernists identified power as central to organisational change (Burnes, 2004a) and power struggles as more likely to bring about organisational change than any consensus-building or rational decision making process (Pfeffer, 1992).
- The processual approach: Processualists argue that change is continuous and essentially unpredictable in nature (Dawson, 1994; Pettigrew & Whipp, 1993; Wilson, 1992). It enabled and encouraged 'emergence' because it is an approach that is less prescriptive than some other approaches, and places more emphasis on analysis, understanding the complexity of issues in a change process and identifying the range of change options (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Burnes, 2004a)

## b) Characteristics of Emergent Change

Theories of Emergent Change focus on the developing and unpredictable nature of change. Change is viewed as a process that unfolds over time through the interplay of factors, especially power and culture, within an organisation and its interaction with the external environment (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Hayes, 2002; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992).

Emergent Change approaches emphasise a bottom-up approach rather than the top-down approach of Planned Change. It is regarded as impossible for senior managers to identify, plan and implement every action involved in a change process (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Weick, 2000). Ideally, top management creates a climate in which people identify the need for change, experiment and take risks and work to implement change (Applebaum & Wohl, 2000; Burnes, 1996; Peters & Waterman, 1982). This change in role for senior managers can present difficulties, as facilitating the change process and controlling the operations at the same time can cause confusion and contribute to resistance (Luscher & Lewis, 2008; McWilliam & Ward-Griffin, 2006).

### **2.1.4 Continuous Change**

Continuous change theory concerns change that is constant, evolving and cumulative (Weick & Quinn, 1999). It also has emergent patterns (Dunphy, 1996) and these patterns exist because a process such as Feldman's Performative Model (Feldman, 2000) enables agents to make changes as a result of reflections on and reactions to iterations of their work routines.

A major concept within the theory is that small continuous changes that are created simultaneously across different parts of an organisation can accumulate and create substantial change. Plowman, Baker, et al. (2007) conducted organisational research demonstrating that small changes could be amplified and lead to larger change. It indicated two interesting effects of small changes: they can have an impact on the internal or the external environment which leads to other changes that are neither planned nor anticipated and continuous and relatively slow change can ultimately be

radical. The focus on small changes across the organisation can be on everyday events, actions and, especially, interactions between members of the organisation. This focus on small, everyday actions and events may be described as improvisation (Orlikowski, 1996) or accommodations and alterations and changes in routines (Feldman, 2000). Weick and Quinn (1999) make the specific claim that small changes can be decisive if they occur 'at the edge of chaos'. The value of making small changes continuously and how they build into substantial changes is supported by authors taking a processual approach (Weick, 2000) and by Complexity Theory (Stacey, 2007). It is a different perspective from the 'macro' perspective of planned or episodic change. Those taking an episodic approach, such as Romanelli & Tushman (1994), disagree that small changes can be built on to enable transformation. Continuous change has grown as an organisational change theory and this and its relationships with other change theories will be reviewed in the next section.

### **2.1.5 Contemporary Continuous and Mixed Approaches to Change**

Contemporary theories and connections between theories generally reflect attention to the complexity and demanding nature of organisational change in the current environment. They also show evidence of the development of theories and a potentially improved relationship between theory and implementation of organisational change.

This section reviews current literature demonstrating the development from single theories and approaches to mixed or combined approaches and theories that take account of complexity. The frameworks for related models of change constructed by Van de Ven and Sun (2011) are reviewed.

- a) Contemporary theories and connections between theories
- b) Framework

- a) Contemporary theories and connections between theories

In contemporary approaches to change there tends to be an emphasis on continuous change with enabling structures, processes and leadership approaches (Buono &

Kerber, 2010; Ciao, 2012; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). The other significant emphasis in contemporary literature is the recognition of the changing, sometimes turbulent, and challenging environment in which organisations are operating (Bartunek, Balogun, & Do, 2011; Buono & Kerber, 2010; Ciao, 2012; Wolf, 2011).

Håkonsson, Klaas, and Carroll (2013) suggest that long term organisational performance and reliability are both superior when change is continuous and that change should be seen as a constant feature of organisations. This is a different view from the previously common one that organisations that are changing are not in their normal state, but are in a special one. This changed perspective is supported by a number of authors writing before Håkonsson et al.: Feldman (2000) links her performative model of change to continuous change; Tsoukas & Chia (2002) claim that it is difficult to overcome implementation problems identified in the literature unless change is seen as continuous and Oswick, Grant, Michelson, and Wailes (2005) describe change management as a continuous journey of discovery.

Continuous change requires different approaches to leadership and management from the planned and episodic theoretical approaches. Meyer and Stensaker (2007) reflect that the reality for many organisations is that they have to manage multiple change processes and that this is a continuous process within organisations. They outline issues that are recognisable to people in organisations. These include the continuous distribution of resources between the operational work and the change processes, the problems of linking projects together and the risk of some change projects failing to be completed because new ones are beginning. Kotter (2012) concludes that the most agile and innovative companies build a second system to continually work on formulating and implementing strategy.

Håkonsson et al. (2013) also address the relationship between approaches and leadership. Their conclusion is that leaders should see themselves as designers of structures that support continuous change rather than initiators of change interventions and should prepare for continuous rather than episodic change. This conclusion can be related to Weick and Quinn's (1999) assertion that in order to operate continuous change which people are attracted to, managers need to make

deep changes in themselves first and move from telling people what to do to showing them how to be. Brännmark and Benn (2012) conclude that if a continuous change process is to be sustainable, management's goals must be balanced by the perspectives of the stakeholders. They also assert that those affected by the change should be allowed to participate in the implementation and to be empowered by that participation.

Wolf (2011) identifies that this is a time of rapid change for organisations and observes that the previous planned change model is no longer adequate. His premise is that positive discourse and interaction can lead an organisation to change with agility. Håkonsson et al. (2013) identify that: '*Changes in the environment create a misfit with the organization, deteriorating its performance*' (p. 181). To successfully cope with this, they recommend that the organisation should be flexible and adapt to the new environment. Continuous change is recommended by Ciao (2012) who distinguishes between continuous and convergent change which produces simple innovations and continuous and radical change which focuses on real strategy. Ciao considers that to interact successfully with a turbulent environment it is necessary to develop continuous, knowledge-based change. This is contrasted with Episodic Change which is described as generating high costs and risks.

Buono & Kerber (2010) note that as organisations are increasingly facing situations of continuous change, there is a requirement for increased readiness for continuous change. This recommendation is particularly interesting because Buono & Kerber recommend using three methods: Directed, Planned and Guided change, and moving from one to another as necessary and appropriate. Their definitions are:

***Directed Change*** '*is driven from the top of the organization and relies on authority, persuasion and compliance*' (p.7)

***Planned Change*** '*may arise from any level in the organization but ultimately is sponsored by the top*' (p. 7)

***Guided Change*** is '*an iterative process of initial interpretation and design, implementation and improvisation, learning from the change effort, and then sharing that learning system wide, leading to ongoing re-interpretation and redesign of the change as needed.*' (p. 8)

Buono & Kerber’s approach, which is less participatory and empowering than that of Brännmark and Benn (2012), is a good illustration of a contemporary mixed approach to organisational change with both continuous change and top-down change involved.

b) Framework

Van de Ven & Sun (2011) have reviewed mixed models of change. Their framework, which they link to episodic change and punctuated equilibrium, was developed from the earlier Van De Ven and Poole (1995) framework and a summary of the four theories involved is given in Table 2.

Theory	Characteristics
<b>Teleological Process Theory (Planned Change)</b>	Views development as repetitive sequence of goal formulation, implementation, evaluation, and modification of an envisioned end state based on what was learned or intended by the people involved
<b>Life Cycle Process Theory (Regulated Change)</b>	Depicts the process of change as progressing through a prescribed sequence of stages and activities over time.
<b>Dialectic Process Theory (Conflictive Change)</b>	Explain stability and change in terms of the relative balance of power between opposing entities
<b>Evolutionary Process Theory (Competitive Change)</b>	Unfolds as a recurrent and probabilistic progression of variation, selection, and retention activities

Table 2: Summary of Van de Ven & Sun framework of change models (2011, pp. 61-64)

According to Van de Ven & Sun:

*'The four models of change can be viewed not only not only as alternative perspectives on a single phenomenon but also as different temporal phases in the journey of change in a complex organization.'*  
(2011, p. 69).

They conclude that organisational change cycles endlessly between the four models, with Life Cycle and Evolutionary cycles being convergent and Teleological and Dialectical cycles being divergent. Because of the complexity of organisational change they consider that change agents may cause problems by sticking to their model of change and on correcting breakdowns that occur. They advocate the value of using multiple mental models of change and the interactions between them. They further acknowledge the complexity of organisational change, noting that:

*'the effectiveness of our propositions is limited because many observed processes of organizational change are more complex than any one of the four models can adequately address.'* (p. 66)

Contemporary organisational change theories have changed significantly to reflect new understandings of organisations and change and to take more account of the changing environment in which the organisation is operating and within which it must change.

## **2.1.6 Other Relevant Literature**

Some other areas of literature have emerged as relevant as well as those already included in the review.

### Parallel Learning Structures

Building on the work of Zand (1974), Bushe and Shani (1991) propose Parallel Learning Structures as an organisation development intervention used both as a mechanism for the effective implementation of planned organisational change and for supporting organisational learning in all its forms. Bushe and Shani describe the key feature of parallel learning structures as creating a bounded space and time for thinking, talking,

deciding and acting differently than normally takes place at work. These features are shared with structures that may be established in action research, to support participation and engagement and to establish a clear focus on the research. In the classic form, Parallel Learning Structures are specifically designed to acknowledge and address the particular challenges of bureaucratic organisations such as the organisation that was the subject of this study. However, Zand (1974) and Schein (1995) emphasise that structures that are effective for performing and solving clean, closed-ended problems are not good for learning and managing open-ended problems, such as those that were the focus of this research.

#### Team performance and innovation

Uzzi and Jarrett (2011) and others who have studied the relationship between team composition and performance have found that relationships among collaborators are a reliable predictor of creativity and group success. Critically Uzzi and Jarrett (2011) found that both lack of familiarity and over-familiarity created similar difficulties.

#### Power

While power is widely acknowledged as a central force in organisational change (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Buono & Kerber, 2010; Håkonsson et al., 2013) the concept itself is contested and can be interpreted in different ways. These different interpretations are especially influenced by the location of the interpreter within the power structure (Walt et al, 2008). Lukes' (2005) framing of power highlights several interconnected dimensions of power which may be in operation in a given organisational or system structure. These include control over a) decision-making and political agenda); b) issues and potential issues; c) observable (overt or covert) and latent conflict; and d) subjective and real interests.

## **2.1.7 Constructs relevant to this research arising from the literature on organisational change**

### **Managers' approach to change reflects experience, organisational context and culture and tolerance for uncertainty and loss of control**

Managers' approach to change and their preference for planned, emergent or continuous change arises from their learning about change theories and methods; their experience of change; what they believe about organisational structures and systems and their capacity to tolerate uncertainty. At a particular time their approach is also influenced by the turbulence of the external environment, by the equilibrium or edge of chaos state of the internal environment and by the scale and pace of change that is required.

Managers with a low tolerance for uncertainty, in a turbulent external environment, and with a requirement for rapid and/or extensive change of their own creation or in compliance with their board or funder are likely to adopt a model of planned change which allocates greater control to the manager and seems to assure success by prescribing the changes to be made. Managers and organisations develop preferred and habitual approaches to change. Managers with little experience of managing change are likely to accept the approach of their senior manager and therefore to follow this as their approach to organisational change.

### **Continuous change approaches are more effective than planned change approaches:**

Continuous change means that an organisation is able to adapt and can make changes in response to, or in anticipation of, developments in the internal or external environment. This approach allows the organisation to move from maintaining the status quo to working in a more developmental way on desirable changes in different elements of the organisation or across the whole organisation.

To be effective, continuous change requires experimentation, learning and adaptation. This approach allows complex changes to be worked through over time, making it

more likely that they will be successful compared to a planned change approach. Another advantage of continuous change is that small changes in different parts and at different levels of the organisation can combine to produce bigger, organisational level changes.

Continuous change is not compatible with a top-down, planned and controlling approach to change. The different management required for continuous change includes designing organisational structures to support continuous change; managers working to support continuous change; involving stakeholders, both staff and clients, in the change processes; and seeing change management as a continuous journey of discovery. Involving stakeholders can empower staff and clients by enabling them to participate in organisational change and to contribute from their knowledge, experiences and skills and can develop and improve the changes through this learning as changes are made continuously. Continuous change may involve ongoing iterations of planned change.

## **2.2 Complexity Theory**

The section on Complexity Theory initially reviews the origins and philosophical underpinnings of complexity theory. The relationships between complexity theory and organisational change theories are reviewed with because this has relevance for examining, managing, leading and changing organisations. The section ends by proposing constructs arising from the literature in relation to complexity theory, its relationship to organisational change and its relevance to and influence on this research.

Complexity Theory is reviewed under the following headings:

1. The Origins of Complexity Theory
2. Philosophical Underpinnings of Complexity Theory
3. Complexity Applied to Social and Organisational Systems
4. Complexity Theory, Management and Leadership
  - a) Management

- b) Leadership
- 5. Connections and Relationships between Complexity Theory and Other Approaches to Organisational Change
  - a) Edge of Chaos
  - b) Complexity Theory and Planned Change
  - c) Complexity Theory and Emergent Change
  - d) Complexity Theory and Continuous Change
- 6. Summary

### **2.2.1. The Origins of Complexity Theory**

Complexity theory has developed from natural scientists trying to build mathematical models of systems in nature (Burnes, 2004b). Ilya Prigogine (1917-2003), the physicist, is credited with being a key creator of complexity theory (Bragg, 2013; Stengers, 2004). It has been identified as a theory for more than forty years. It examines and enables ways of addressing a wide range of aspects of the natural world and of human systems from sciences such as biology through to politics. There are a number of different theories within Complexity Theory, including Chaos Theory, Dissipative Structures Theory and Complex Adaptive Systems Theory (CAS). Complexity Theory as applied to the organisational context is a set of theories that primarily address aspects of what organisations are and how they work, including how they change.

Complexity Theory can be linked with both emergent and continuous change in organisations. Some authors link complexity theory to planned change, but others in this field contest this link. Given how some authors describe organisations as complex adaptive systems and how they approach change this literature is relevant to action researchers aiming to undertake organisational change.

### **2.2.2. Philosophical Underpinnings of Complexity Theory**

The philosophical underpinnings of Complexity Theory are described by Stacey and his colleagues (Stacey, 2007; Stacey, Griffin, & Shaw, 2000). They trace Transformative Teleology back to the dialectical thinking of Hegel. They trace Natural Law, Formative, Rationalist and Adaptionist Teleologies back to Kant, but identify that Kant himself did

not believe that Formative Teleology could be applied to humans. Table 3 summarises key points from Stacey et al.'s description of these Teleologies in relation to causality.

<b>Teleology</b>	<b>Movement towards a future that is:</b>	<b>Nature and origin of variation/change</b>
<b>Secular Natural Law Teleology</b>	A repetition of the past	Corrective, getting it right, fitting, aligning
<b>Rationalist Teleology</b>	A goal chosen by reasoning autonomous humans	Designed change through rational exercise of human freedom to get it right in terms of universals
<b>Formative Teleology</b>	A mature form implied at the start of movement or in the movement. Implies a final state that can be known in advance	Shift from one given form to another due to sensitivity to context. Stages of development
<b>Transformative Teleology</b>	Under perpetual construction by the movement itself. No mature or final state, only perpetual iteration of identity and difference, continuity and transformation, the known and the unknown, at the same time. The future is unknowable but yet recognizable: the known-unknown.	Gradual or abrupt changes in identity or no change, depending on the spontaneity and diversity of micro interactions
<b>Adaptionist Teleology</b>	A stable state adapted to an environment that may change in unknowable ways	Gradual change due to small chance variations at the individual level

**Table 3:** Comparison of frameworks for thinking about causality

(Adapted from Stacey et al., 2000, pp. 52 -54)

Stacey et al. observe that many Complexity Theorists combine Transformative Teleology with either Rationalist Teleology or Adaptionist Teleology. In taking a Hegelian approach, they argue that there should not be any such combination, rather

the teleology used should just be Transformative. They consider that combining either of these teleologies with Transformative Teleology implies a division in thinking on which the dominant management discourse is built and that the risk is that Complexity Theory is simply used to present the planned, top-down discourse using a new vocabulary. S. Maguire and McKelvey (1999) may be an example of this in stating that they view Complexity Theory as part of the modernist programme.

In his 2007 paper, Stacey explains further the Hegelian view of the individual as '*a cultural being, necessarily dependent on others, who only develops a mind and purpose of his own in interaction with others.*' (p. 294). Placing this importance on the individual and their interaction with others drives much of how organisations function and change, according to Stacey, as explained below.

### **2.2.3. Complexity Theory Applied to Social and Organisational Systems**

The application of Complexity Theory to organisations is different from the application of those theories that are strongly scientific and mechanical or linear, including the non-complexity theories and models of Directed Change or Planned Change. Stacey et al. (2000) state that: '*A complex adaptive system consists of a large number of agents, each of which behaves according to its own principals of local interaction.*' Houchin and MacLean (2005) observe that social systems are different from systems in the natural world in a number of ways. For example, they suggest that the rules that determine interactions between people are socially constructed: as everyone has a psychological state, when infused with memory, desire and other emotional states, the role and nature of feedback and the distinction between positive and negative feedback become blurred. Connectivity and interactions between individuals or groups are essential elements of complex change. These are known as networks, which are a focus of complexity theorising and research (Stacey, 1996a). Stacey (2007) argues that the fundamental ideas underlying the current dominant discourse on management and organisations were developed over 200 years ago. This development was from Kant's notions of efficient and formative causality and, despite his warnings against

applying these ideas to humans, they were imported into thinking about human actions through systems theory in the middle of the last century.

McDaniel et al. (2003), suggest that health care organisations can be seen as complex adaptive systems. They observe that the properties of such systems are emergent (they operate under conditions far from equilibrium, self-organise and adapt their structure when necessary) and that such organisations are not seeking equilibrium but are continuously emerging. This emergence may happen because of learning from clinical research, from the changing social situations in which the organisations are operating and because of the political or economic context. e Cunha and da Cunha (2006) observe that organisations co-evolve with their environments in ways that diverge from classical change paradigms and that converge with Complexity Theory thinking.

#### **2.2.4. Complexity Theory, Management and Leadership**

Overall, the role of the manager or leader, as seen by Complexity Theory, is different from that identified in mainstream management and organisational literature. The leaders support, or if necessary create, an unstable environment in which innovation and change can emerge. They engage with members of the organisation on an everyday basis and in particular help to make sense of the changes that are taking place. They welcome surprises, seeing them as opportunities rather than risks or failures and are prepared to improvise as they go along. The risk for leaders taking this approach is that they may not be seen as adequate for their role by their employers, investors or the public as they are not “taking charge” sufficiently.

##### **Management**

Stacey et al. (2000) describe scientific management (Fayol, 1948) and systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968) approaches as the dominant discourses in the history of the management of organisations. While both approaches enable ways of thinking about and designing stability and continuity in organisations, they have difficulties in explaining the role of the individual person and the possibility of transformative

change in organisations. It is in the context of these issues that Complexity Theory offers value.

Stacey's (2007) view is that mainstream organisational and management thinking is "magico-mythic" and that this is disguised by rational-sounding language. This term comes from the writing of the process sociologist Elias (1998) according to whose explanations nature is understood as impersonal forces that individuals cannot control or as personalised gods and spirits that are also beyond human control. Stacey also claims that organisations construct a fantasy world so that they can preserve the illusion that someone is in control. As with other writers who take an emergent approach, (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Doyle et al., 2000; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), Stacey observes that many studies point to the ineffective or the disruptive effects of change approaches that use grand designs, which are part of planned change theory. In particular, he notes that the myth of the grand design has been imported wholesale into public sector governance.

McDaniel et al (2003) identify that 'surprises' in organisational change are inevitable and that if surprises are approached positively they can generate an opportunity for creativity and are a major source of learning. They observe that in health care organisations, surprises are viewed as '*generally dysfunctional occurrences*' (p. 266). Disagreeing with this view, they argue that:

*'When health care managers take a complexity science perspective, they see the possibility that surprises can be promising opportunities for new approaches to meeting organizational goals.'* (p. 267)

They conclude that surprise is both natural and a 'gift' and that:

*'Action is an important response to surprise, because action leads to sense making and to learning. We need reflexive action and active reflection, which enables one to pay close attention, triangulating, looking at the edges, rather than always having eyes*

*and mind drawn to the heart of the matter. This leads to a willingness to question, explore, and experiment.’ (p. 275)*

e Cunha and da Cunha (2006) consider that, according to Complexity Theory, strategic management is a process of permanent flux, with action and learning feeding back to each other in iterations. They also suggest that in dynamic environments managers are challenged to make decisions as they go along rather than being able to follow a precise strategic plan:

*‘In this sense, strategic management can be portrayed as occurring when improvisational decisions are made, framed by a number of simple rules that prevent the organization from drifting. [...] synthesizing strategic intention, managerial foresight and organizational control’ (p. 847).*

### **Leadership**

In elaborating his view of the importance and effectiveness of everyday interactions, Stacey (2007), describes the role of the leader as participating actively in local interactions to both widen and deepen communication. He suggests that many people prefer the myth of the hero who can change the whole organisation (Georgiades & Phillimore, 1975). However, the heroic leader (or researcher) remains a powerful and attractive myth in many organisational settings, fuelled by the proliferation of ‘how to be...’ publications aimed at managers.

Plowman, Baker, et al. (2007) and Plowman, Solansky, et al. (2007) who take an approach including complexity theory and emergent change, also contrast the enabling role of leaders in complex systems with the traditional controlling leadership role, although they note the limited empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the enabling role. In particular they identify the importance of leaders as ‘sense-makers’ who interpret and give meaning to changes rather than directing them. This role has also been identified by Luscher & Lewis (2008) and originally by Weick (1995). It is a theme that can be identified in current change literature even when it is not explicitly addressed (Håkonsson et al., 2013).

## 2.2.5. Connections between Complexity Theory and Other Approaches to Organisational Change

### 2.2.5.a) Edge of Chaos

A major aspect of the relationship between Complexity Theory and other approaches to organisational change is the concept or metaphor of the Edge of Chaos (Coghlan & Rashford, 2006; e Cunha & da Cunha, 2006; Weick & Quinn, 1999). This concept suggests that some systems, including social systems, are operating at a point or in a region between order and randomness or chaos. In other words, they operate in a complex situation. In recent years the term has been used in relation to organisations, their environments and organisational change. The concept is used by writers using planned, episodic, emergent and continuous change approaches.

*'The edge of chaos is a dynamic that occurs when certain parameters fall within a critical range – for example, critical rates of information flow, degrees of connectivity and diversity between agents.'*(Stacey et al., 2000, p. 146)

Complexity Theorists describe systems in emergent complexity as being in a state 'far from equilibrium' (S. Maguire & McKelvey, 1999). Also described as being at the 'edge of chaos' and as 'bounded instability', this is a state in which there is a mixture of order and disorder, many unpredictable events and an irregular pattern in the organisation's behaviour. Stacey describes this state as the best or only one in which complex organisations can transform themselves (Stacey, 1996a, 1996b).

e Cunha and da Cunha (2006) assert that:

*'In a complexity perspective, strategy is the art of maintaining the organization at the edge of chaos, a space where freedom and direction combine to produce creative outputs.'* (p. 847)

Weick & Quinn (1999) include organisations operating at the edge of chaos in the description of Episodic Change. However, improving performance while at the edge of chaos may be seen by Complexity Theory as being enabled by the surrender of control rather than by the more traditional control approach of Episodic Change (Dunphy & Stace, 1988). An organisation at the edge of chaos can be seen as having a set of

simple elements tied together by complex relationships. This involves feedback that is nonlinear, so there are both positive and negative feedback loops, as a result of which an organisation is simultaneously capable of stability and instability, so behaviour at the edge of chaos is paradoxical (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Coghlan & Rashford (2006) identify complex adaptive systems operating at the edge of chaos as enacting third order change or developing the capacity to change their schemata or world-view as changes emerge. Their description of the learning of members of the organisation suggests a continuous process rather than an episodic one: “[...] *the habit of questioning their own assumptions and points of view and developing and implementing new ones.*” (p. 46).

#### **2.2.5.b) Complexity Theory and Lewin’s Planned Change**

Burnes (2004b) and MacIntosh and MacLean (2001) both make links between Complexity Theory and Lewin’s planned organisational change approach. Burnes, who is not a complexity theorist, describes Lewin as an advocate of extending democracy in organisations, which is similar to the Complexity Theory approach to democracy in organisations. He argues that Lewin did not view organisations as fixed and stable and that this corresponds to the Complexity Theory view of organisations being in a state of ‘order-disorder’. Burnes also identifies action research, as presented by Lewin, as bearing a close resemblance to ‘self-organisation’ in Complexity Theory. He suggests that the term ‘self-organised’ could be used in place of Lewin’s term ‘planned’. Also related to self-organisation, and perhaps democracy, is the emphasis put on group or team change by both Lewin and Complexity Theorists. Burnes’s reappraisal of Lewin’s theories leads to his understanding that both Lewin’s theories and Complexity Theory are in accordance with a contemporary, complex approach to organisational change.

MacIntosh and MacLean (2001) relate the notion of creating far-from-equilibrium conditions to ‘unfreezing’ in Lewin’s (1947) 3-Step model. They consider that Complexity Theory contributes valuable insights into what should be done before, during and after ‘unfreezing’. They observe that far-from-equilibrium conditions are often created by a real or precipitated crisis. An example of this is Maguire and

McKelvey's (1999) description of CEOs **creating** the region of complexity in the context of organisational change rather than simply looking for it. The argument against relating far-from-equilibrium states to the 3-Step model is that it is seen in Complexity Theory as an on-going state and that change happens in small events over a prolonged period of time leading to radical change (Plowman, Baker, et al., 2007; Stacey, 2007).

#### **2.2.5.c) Complexity Theory and Emergent Change**

Searching the literature on emergent change leads quickly to papers which connect Complexity Theory and change (MacIntosh & MacLean, 2001; McDaniel et al., 2003; Plowman, Baker, et al., 2007). Even though there are different views of Emergent Change (Bamford & Forrester, 2003) and different types of Complexity Theory, emergence is one of the key elements of complexity and is seen as applying to all systems (Bragg, 2013). An illustration of the connection is the identification of radical, emergent change by Plowman, Baker, et al. (2007) in their study of a complex organisation.

#### **2.2.5.d) Complexity Theory and Continuous Change**

While Complexity Theory is about much more than organisational change, it has links with the theory and the application of Continuous Change. This linkage applies especially to the version of the theory proposed by Stacey (1996a, 2007). Both Complexity Theory and Continuous Change assume that the organisation is operating in a non-stable situation and that changes are influenced by a variety of actors interacting and taking actions in the organisation. This is supported by the actions of senior management in creating and supporting a climate in which such changes can happen (e Cunha & da Cunha, 2006; Orlikowski, 1996; Plowman, Baker, et al., 2007; Stacey, 2007).

Recognising all these elements of change allows us to link theory and research on Complexity Theory to essential elements of Continuous Change (e Cunha & da Cunha,

2006; S. Maguire & McKelvey, 1999; McDaniel et al., 2003; Plowman, Baker, et al., 2007; Stacey, 2007).

#### **2.2.6. Summary: Complexity**

Complexity Theory as applied to organisations and organisational change is extensive, with a number of sub-theories. The Complexity Theory view of the complexity of organisations and of other concepts that relate to this view are helpful to this research and it connects with change theories reviewed and with action research. These concepts include interactions, feedback, equilibrium, emergence and operating at the edge of chaos.

#### **2.2.7. Construct arising from the literature in relation to complexity theory, its relationship to organisational change and its relevance to and influence on this research.**

**Recognising that organisations are complex and that change is an ongoing, dynamic and emergent process requires leadership and management which is different from that required for planned change approaches**

Through a Complexity Science lens, organisation development and change happen most effectively in the region of 'bounded instability', also known as 'the edge of chaos'. Normalising this state allows managers to recognise the potential of organisational uncertainty and turmoil. Developing an organisational and management capacity to recognise the potential of this state gives rise not only to a greater tolerance for disorder and uncertainty – increasingly familiar situations for organisations – but also to the knowledge, skills and expertise to identify and exploit emergent opportunities for change and transformation.

To engage the whole system in organisational change, disruption, disturbance and change should be seen as normal, developmental and positive. This requires a management approach which models a tolerance for uncertainty and can contain the

anxiety which inevitably accompanies any innovation or change, wanted or unwanted. The role of the manager in this approach is not to dictate, prescribe or control change, but to pay attention and to help others to pay attention, to what is emerging in the organisation and its environment, to work with others to interpret and make sense of emergent change and to support reflexive action and active reflection.

Managers who can cope with uncertainty, understand that surprises can be valuable as well as risky, believe in working jointly with stakeholders to create change, manage their concerns regarding the organisation's structure or strategy and can tolerate a slower pace of change are better equipped to manage emergent or continuous change.

## **2.3 Action Research**

Literature on action research is reviewed because it is the approach used in planning and carrying out the research by the principal researcher and participating co-researchers. It also contributes to the analysis of the data from the participatory research. As action research can be a change process or part of a change strategy as well as being research it is also important to review the relationships between action research and organisational change.

Action Research is reviewed under the following headings:

1. Introductory Description of Action Research
2. The Philosophical Basis of Action Research
3. The History and Development of Action Research
4. Types of Action Research
5. The Cycles and Spirals of Action Research
6. Participatory Action Research (PAR)
7. Insider Action Research (IAR)
8. Reflection
9. First, Second and Third Person Action Research
10. Validity and Rigour
11. Ethics
12. Action Research and Change

### 2.3.1. Introductory Description of Action Research

Action Research is identified by those who use it as an approach to research, rather than a methodology (Altricher, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerrit, 2002; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; McKernan, 1991; Roth, Shani, & Leary, 2007). This distinction moves outside the normal categories of methodology and method. Perhaps the most significant distinction from other research traditions is that it is '*research in action rather than about action*' (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p 3). This contrasts with research methodologies such as ethnography, longitudinal studies and cross-sectional studies that examine action but are not involved in it.

Action research is a major departure from traditional empirical research. In relation to organisational research it is different from the dominant approach of quantitative research which has an aim of producing results that may be used generally in organisations. Action research does not aim to produce data that can be analysed so as to produce general laws. However, it does produce local knowledge some of which may be generalisable.

Action research does not involve traditionally designed experiments in which variables are fixed or manipulated and in which experimental and control groups are used (Gill & Johnson, 2002). The focus in action research moves from observing and describing what is happening to considering, reflecting on and attempting to understand what is happening. This is followed by taking action, monitoring what happens, reflecting on each step, analysing data, and coming to conclusions. These steps are repeated in a spiral of cycles until sufficient change has occurred or new knowledge has been developed (Chiu, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). Action research also rejects the separation of thought and action that underlies the pure and applied distinction that has characterised both management and social research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). This means that thinking may influence the actions taken as the research progresses, in contrast to more traditional research in which the decisions on actions are taken before the actions begin. However, the

approach allows for a wide variety of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods.

The action research is led or enabled by a principal researcher or a small group of researchers. The researcher(s) are often from outside the organisation, community or other research setting, but in the case of Insider Action Research at least one researcher is a member of that organisation on an ongoing basis. The different ways in which these roles work will be described in following sections.

The other people involved in the research are usually described as participants or collaborators rather than subjects. This is because their contributions to the research are more significant, equal and often more complex than providing data to the researcher(s). How involved participants are depends on the type of action research being conducted and on their own wishes regarding involvement. This ranges from a high level of participation in which everything is decided on, acted on, reflected on and analysed by both the researcher and the participants to more scientific methods in which the researcher takes a clear leadership role. These different approaches will be described in more detail below.

### **2.3.2. The Philosophical Basis of Action Research**

The three major philosophies that are identified as underpinning action research are Pragmatism, Critical Realism and Critical Theory. Further philosophical underpinnings of action research are related in the literature to positivism and more recently to social constructivism (Hilsen, 2006; Meynell, 2005) and postmodernism (Whitehead, 2005).

#### **Pragmatism**

Pragmatism developed in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first theorists were Peirce (1839-1914), James (1842-1910) and Dewey (1859-1952). Crotty (1998) suggests that these early Pragmatists were both constructionist and critical. Pragmatism later came to be popularised in forms that obscured its critical character.

The starting point for Pragmatism is that hypotheses are not developed in a vacuum, but as part of a network of laws, axioms, auxiliary hypotheses and heuristics. This means that theories are not isolated singular statements. Pragmatists hold that all knowledge of the world is accessed through theory. We never actually access the truth. We access theories about the truth (Benton & Craib, 2001).

The notion of instrumental rationality underlies Pragmatism, that is, “what works is right”. Another way of putting this is to say that for most Pragmatists a belief is true not because it represents reality but because it has enabled us to achieve our stated goals: they stress the priority of action over principles.

The approach of pragmatists to inquiry is about adaptation to and control of our environment. So science is about problem solving. Methodological choices are made on the basis of how successful we think they may be in helping us to solve a problem and knowledge is successful practice. This is a transformation of traditional epistemological, moral and metaphysical questions into practical problems.

The view of culture and society that pragmatism came to adopt is essentially optimistic, peaceful and progressive. The Pragmatist world is a world to be explored and made the most of, not a world to be subjected to radical criticism. Rorty (1989), an influential postmodern pragmatist, believes that moral choice is nearly always between competing good things rather than between right and wrong. The choice between these must always be part of inquiry.

### **Pragmatism & Action Research**

Pragmatism, as a philosophy, has been a major influence on action research since its beginnings in the late 1940s and could be considered to be the philosophical foundation of action research. John Collier’s thinking was influenced by that of Dewey (Neilsen, 2006).

It has been a strong influence in the United States (McKernan, 1991). It has also been so in Britain where, for example, Reason's approach to action research developed from Pragmatism and has been strongly influenced by Rorty's postmodern pragmatism (Reason, 2003). Pragmatism has had a major influence on the development of action research in Scandinavia (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008), although Gustavsen (2008) notes a change over time and suggests that Critical Theory now has more influence on action research in Norway.

Pragmatism fits well with organisational structures and systems and, particularly with regulated and bureaucratic environments. Because of its focus on what is positive in the organisation and on choosing between different "goods" it maintains the existing power structures. Both of these features can be viewed as strengths (Gill & Johnson, 2002) or weaknesses (Crotty, 1998) depending on the positions of the researcher, the participants and the commissioner of the research. That is, whether they wish to choose the best practical option that is available or possible or they want to critically examine and change the area or issue being focused on by the action research.

### **Critical Realism**

Critical Realism has a realist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology: it posits that a separate reality exists but that we cannot bridge the gap between subjectivity and that separate reality. It holds that we can make sense of cognitive practices such as the sciences only on the assumption that they reflect something that exists independently (Benton & Craib, 2001).

Critical Realists regard the surface appearance of things as potentially misleading as to their true character and they assert the need to work to overcome these misleading appearances. They posit powers, forces and mechanisms that lie beneath the surface of what is observed or experienced. These are revealed through the use of metaphor and model building. This approach suggests that current beliefs will always be open to

correction in the light of further cognitive work. This ‘fallibilist’ approach of Critical Realism is in contrast to both idealist and relativist theories which can be seen as insulating themselves from the possibility of being proved wrong by doing away with the idea of a knowable, independent reality (Benton & Craib, 2001).

Critical Realism has a relationship to Scientific Realism as it holds that explanation is more than prediction. This is different from Positivism in which explanation equals prediction. For Critical Realists the ultimate goal of research is not to identify generalisable laws (positivism) or to identify the lived experience or beliefs of social actors (interpretivism): it is to develop deeper levels of explanation and understanding (McEvoy & Richards, 2006).

### **Critical Realism and Action Research**

The two major strengths of Critical Realism as a basis for action research are that it focuses on explanation rather than prediction and on understanding in the context of knowledge being fallible, incomplete and always open to development.

Its emphasis on a critical approach means that hypotheses, theories and issues are examined critically. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) describe the focus of Critical Realism on epistemic reflexivity, which looks at exposing interests and enabling emancipation through self-reflexivity. As they describe it, reflexivity is not neutral, but has normative aspects and aims to facilitate change through democratic engagement and a commitment to change.

Few action research authors identify Critical Realism as influencing their research approach or as a major influence on the development of action research. Coghlan identifies Critical Realism as the basis for his action research and in more recent publications links it to the work of the Canadian philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan (Coghlan, 2007b, 2008; Coghlan & Shani, 2008). Coghlan’s 2008 paper describes and examines Lonergan’s philosophy and approaches to knowledge and

authenticity in depth. In this paper Coghlan examines authenticity as first person practice, with a particular focus on action research. He comments that:

*'At its core first person practice means that our own beliefs, values and assumptions, ways of thinking, strategies and behaviours and so on are afforded a central place of inquiry in our action research practice.'* (2008, p. 352)

He discusses Lonergan's approach to knowledge and draws attention to the concern with the structure of knowing rather than with the existence of knowledge or with what is known. Coghlan later identifies the relationships between Lonergan's thinking and theorists' approaches to action research such as Argyris's action science construct (Argyris, 2004) and Torbert's construct of developmental action inquiry (Torbert & Cook-Greuter, 2004).

### **Critical Theory**

Critical Theory began with the 'Frankfurt School' in 1923 in the Institute of Social Research. The background to Critical Theory, especially the notion of dialectic can be traced back to Marx, Hegel and Kant and ultimately to Plato and Socrates (Crotty, 1998; Kakabadse, Kakabadse, & Kalu, 2007). Initial theorists in the Frankfurt School were Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972) and they were succeeded by Habermas, who is a major influence on critical thinking as it shapes an approach to action research.

#### **Habermas**

Habermas (1986) seeks to provide a normative basis for Critical Theory. His central epistemological tenet is that human beings constitute their own reality and organise their experience in terms of cognitive interests.

He describes three types of interest:

1. Technical interest in predicting and controlling objectified processes – the realm of instrumental action. This gives rise to the natural sciences and technologies.

2. Practical interest in being able to communicate with others. This gives rise to the historico-hermeneutic sciences (the sciences of understanding).
3. Emancipatory interest (reflective). This gives rise to critical theory and to the critical sciences, including psychoanalysis and critique of ideology.

(Benton & Craib, 2001)

Habermas takes language as the basis for Critical Theory. Arising from the three types of interest and his framework of communicative rationality, Habermas proposes a Theory of Communicative Action.

Habermas seeks to replace epistemology with ethics, or, more specifically, cognitive-communicative ethics. The communicative ethics approach means that a principle is justified only when all those who are affected by the principle are rationally convinced of its validity. This normative principle of universalisation is, for Habermas, the stepping-stone to social critique (J. D. Smith, 2004).

#### Freire

While Habermas approaches Critical Theory from an academic perspective, Paulo Freire's experience was in education with people in deprived and marginalised situations (Freire, 1973). His thinking comes from Marxism, from the liberationist literature of Latin America and from existential phenomenology. As with those coming from the Frankfurt School, he adopts a dialectical approach.

#### **Critical Theory and Action Research**

The key distinguishing feature and strength of Critical Theory is its focus on empowerment and emancipation. This comes from Habermas's concepts of Communicative Action and Discourse (1986) and from Freire's concept of Critical Consciousness (Freire, 1993). These concepts emphasise the critical examination of the issues and thoughts being examined, but in the context of working to emancipate people who are powerless or to assist them to emancipate themselves.

Arising from technical interest, practical interest and emancipatory interest and his framework of communicative rationality, Habermas proposes a Theory of Communicative Action. In this theory he contrasts Purposive Action with Communicative Action. Purposive Action may be Instrumental Action (goal orientated interventions in the physical world) or Strategic Action (attempts to influence the thoughts and behaviours of others for the purpose of achieving private ends).

Communicative Action is consensus orientated; the assumption is that participants want to resolve their conflicts through communication rather than through violence or compromise. Habermas admits that communicative action often breaks down because of the inability of certain claims to generate consensus (J. D. Smith, 2004). However, he maintains that argument is important, even if agreement is not achieved.

In the dialectical struggle, Habermas recognises dangers of the system (which includes economic and political imperatives) overwhelming the life world. This notion of the life world and its contrast to the system is a key strand of how Critical Theory underlies action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000) and is important in research involving disempowered, marginalised or disabled participants.

Habermas moves beyond Communicative Action to Discourse, in which the participants subject themselves and their beliefs, norms and values to critique and argument with a view to coming to an agreement about the validity of problematic claims. In summary, the ideas of Communicative Action and Discourse support working for agreement and aiming for the ideal in one's activities.

In order to enable communicative action, dialectics and discourse, Habermas proposes the use of Communicative Space for participants. This is an important element of critical action research.

Freire also has a philosophical influence on action research especially participatory action research, whether or not it is described as critical. He introduces the idea of *Conscientisation*: an awakening of or increase in consciousness. When describing the

process Freire also uses the terms critical perception, critical consciousness and critical theory. He suggests that praxis is the only route to conscientisation with human beings engaging in the world as transformers of the world.

Freire views the world as now subject, not merely to natural evolution, but to an historical evolution in which human beings have a guiding hand. In Freire's view, people can see their situation not just in terms of how it is, but also in terms of how it can be. Thus they enjoy a situated and embodied freedom: not the freedom to realise absolute, abstract ideals, but the freedom to address themselves to their situation, identify its potential and create the better out of the worse.

Freire also believes that action and reflection must go together. When they do they become creative. Freire interprets 'dialogue' as action and reflection in fellowship and solidarity. This thinking underpins action research based on Critical Theory. He places more emphasis on action than Habermas does and this emphasis supports the approach of those action researchers who see their work as emancipatory (Kemmis, 2008; lisahunter, emerald, & Martin, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002).

He suggests that his approach with a focus on the specific needs of the oppressed is '*a way to avoid both the totalising Eurocentric and androcentric logic with its Hegelian roots, the pessimism that comes from a critical theory solely trapped within a philosophy of non-identity.*' (Freire, 1993 p. xii). This thinking encourages inquiry that has positive aims, is critical and includes action. It gives rise to the influence of Freire in the fields of education, adult education and community development.

### **Critique of Critical Theory**

A potential weakness of Critical Theory is that the focus remains on critique and that action does not happen (Reason, 2006). There is also a risk highlighted by McNiff and Whitehead (2002) that the theorising of Critical Theorists stays at the level of description and propositional statements, that they seldom critique themselves and that they do not embody their theorising in their practices. Awareness of these concerns and the examination of them through a reflexive praxis will help to enable

the potential disadvantages of the Critical Theory approach to be overcome and its advantages to be realised (Lisahunter et al., 2013).

### **2.3.3. The History and Development of Action Research**

Most writers trace action research back to Kurt Lewin and, in particular, to his paper 'Action research and minority problems' published in 1946, a year before he died (Bargal, 2006; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Gronhaug & Olson, 1999; McInnes, Hibbert, & Beech, 2007; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). Fewer writers (McKernan, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Neilsen, 2006) identify Collier as one of the founders of action research. Neilsen argues that Collier wanted to promote the use of action research to solve important social problems, while Lewin, who also wished to solve such problems, wanted to promote action research as a dimension of scientific study. Neilsen also notes that:

*'Collier also appears to be the first person to have coined the term, action research, in an academic publication. Collier's article "United States Administration as a Laboratory of Ethnic Relations", appeared in Social Research a year before Lewin's 1946 paper was published' (p.391)*

Both Neilsen (2006) and McKernan (1991) trace the roots of action research back to the thinking of John Dewey (1859 - 1952). Dewey had significant roles in philosophy, psychology and education. He made a major contribution to education in the twentieth century. McKernan also traces the origins of action research back to the Science in Education movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries and to the Group Dynamics movement of the 1930s and 1940s. So, while action research as a named research approach started in the mid-1940s, developments towards the approach were taking place over many years before that.

Lewin, Collier and their associates conducted action research in a variety of social settings in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Coughlan & Coughlan, 2002). Following Lewin

and Collier, action research is seen taking place in three major areas: communities, education and organisations. More recently has been used to address feminist issues (Reid & Frisby, 2008), in health services from both clinical and management perspectives (Coghlan & Casey, 2001; McInnes et al., 2007) and in relation to and directly with people with disabilities (Williams, St Quintin, & Hoadley, 2006). These different applications of action research will be included in the next section of the review.

### **Areas in Which Action Research has been Conducted**

Action research has developed and now exists in a range of different areas. The three early areas in which it began were community settings, organisations and education. Lewin (1946) and Collier (1945) began action research in community and other social settings in the 1940s in the United States of America. Organisational development using action research also began there in the late 1940s (Coughlan & Coughlan, 2002). Significant work continued in the 1950s, but declined late in that decade. There was a similar pattern of development and decline in education during the 1950s. These declines were influenced by an increased emphasis on objective methodologies and a growing separation between research and practice.

In the UK the use of action research in industry began in the 1950s, was especially related to and influenced by the socio-technical work of the Tavistock Institute (E. J. Miller, 1993), continued through several decades and began to change and expand in the 1990s.

Action research in community settings has continued since it was initially developed. Freire (1973, 1993) led work and had a significant influence on both community and education action research. Community action research has developed in a participatory form and has spread across many countries. Examples include Tanzania (Swantz, 2008), Mexico (Castillo-Burguete, Dolores, & Dickinson, 2008), Denmark (Morck, 2000) and Australia (Iisahunter et al., 2013).

In education, action research re-emerged in the 1970s and has been extensively practiced (Greenwood, 2012; McKernan, 1991; Ravitch & Wirth, 2007). It began to be seen in education in Ireland in the 1980s and has continued to be a significant research approach, with a variety of contributions including work on school systems and practice (Lillis, 2000; Ó'Muimhneachain, 2002) and first person research which educators use to develop their own skills and expertise (Long, 2000; McKernan, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000).

Action research began to appear as an approach in management research in the 1990s (Coughlan & Coughlan, 2002; Eden & Huxham, 1996; Gill & Johnson, 2002). It continues to be used organisationally with a range of approaches including both Insider Action Research (Moore, 2007; Roth et al., 2007) and action research conducted by consultants and academics (Meynell, 2005; Molineux & Haslett, 2002).

Action research also emerged in the area of health in the 1990s. In health it addresses both hospital and community work. Bate, Khan, and Pyle (2000) addressed sensitive organisational development in an NHS Trust in the UK. Bridges and Meyer (2007) describe hospital action research in the 1990s that involved both managers and practitioners. A strength of action research in health has been to enable the involvement of patients and service users within hospital settings (Bradburn & Mackie, 2001; Hynes, Coughlan, & McCarron, 2012), in the community (Bostock & Freeman, 2003) and in mental health (Weaver & Nicholls, 2001).

Action research in the area of disability is recent in development. It is still a small area in the literature. The areas approached through action research include researching the lives and experiences of people with visual disabilities, with a focus on emancipation (French & Swain, 2000); finding out if services provided are properly client orientated and focused and improving those services (Dennett, 2001) and conducting action research in partnership with young people with intellectual disabilities, family members, policy makers, managers and practitioners (Williams et al., 2006).

Feminist action research is recent in its creation and development. Reid & Frisby (2008) write about Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) and describe it as developing from Feminist research, Action Research generally and Participatory Action Research. They identify Ledwith and Asgill (2000) and (P. Maguire, Brydon-Miller, & McIntyre, 2004) as contributing to this combination and development.

There are a number of significant values of conducting action research in these distinct areas. The first is that it can involve people as participants rather than subjects. It always does in community and feminist areas and increasingly does so in other areas. The second value is that the research involves action as well as the collection of evidence. This enables, contributes to or enacts change in the area addressed. The third value in these areas is that the work on change is closely connected to experimentation, reflection, learning, knowledge development and experience of research so that it gives a wide range of people useful experience in conducting or participating in research and potentially continuing to carry it out (Melrose, 2001).

### **Summary: Action Research**

Reviewing these varied uses of action research illustrates both its development and its value in a range of areas. Many of these examples suggest the appropriateness of undertaking PAR with the executive group of an organisation that provides services to people who have disabilities, which operates within both the health and the education sectors and which aims to enable people with disabilities to live at home and in the community.

### **2.3.4. Types of Action Research**

Within the action research approach there is a range of 'types' of research. These range from types of participatory action research where the emphasis is on emancipatory work with communities (Swantz, 2008) to Action Science (Friedman & Rodgers, 2008) and Action Inquiry (Torbert & Taylor, 2008) where the emphasis is on

research as social science and producing empirical data and where there is less emphasis on participation.

A list of the different types of action research gives some idea of the range of approaches, but it can also be misleading because different authors use the same term in different ways. Many researchers do not identify their research as one of these types but simply describe their approach as 'Action Research'. The list also notes the philosophy underpinning the type of action research where this is clear.

### **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

PAR began in the 1970s with Paulo Freire's focus on self-actualisation (Kakabadse et al., 2007). Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) describe PAR as a social process which is practical, collaborative, emancipatory, critical, reflexive and dialectical. They observe that it '[...] *aims to transform both theory and practice*' (p. 598). lisahunter et al. (2013) note that it '*relies upon the expert knowledge of all participants and is enacted in the potential unpredictability of real life situations.*' (p. 20). While there may be a focus on community settings it is now also used for emancipation and transformation in organisational settings (Chiu, 2008). It has a philosophical basis in Critical Theory.

### **Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)**

While much PAR is critical in nature, CPAR is strongly underpinned by Critical Theory, which also influences the nature of its enactment (Kemmis, 2008). Some researchers enact research which is critical and fits with definitions of CPAR, but use different terms, for example, lisahunter et al. (2013) who use the title of Participatory Activist Research. It has a philosophical basis in Critical Theory.

### **Cooperative Inquiry (Heron, 1996)**

*'Cooperative Inquiry is a form of second-person action research in which all participants work together in an inquiry group as co-researchers and co-subject.'* (Heron & Reason, 2008 p. 366). It has a philosophical basis in Pragmatism.

### **Collaborative Inquiry**

Collaborative Inquiry also has a primary focus on the inquiry group. It is also described as having a focus on communicative action (Kakabadse et al., 2007). It has a philosophical basis in Critical Theory.

### **Appreciative Inquiry**

*'Appreciative inquiry is a collaborative and highly participative, system-wide approach to seeking, identifying and enhancing the 'life-giving forces' that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic, and organizational terms.'*  
(Watkins & Mohr, 2001 p. 14)

It has a philosophical basis in Pragmatism.

### **Action Inquiry**

*'a kind of social science that can generate timely action.'* (Torbert & Taylor, 2008 p. 239). It focuses on first, second and third person inquiry and aims to produce double- and triple-loop learning. Action Inquiry tends towards the positivist end of the research continuum, but the researchers may well take a pragmatist approach.

### **Action Science**

*'Action science refers to a broad approach to social science that links human meaning making with the discovery and shaping of the causal theories that create our social world.'* (Friedman & Rodgers, 2008 p. 252). It is linked to the theory of action approach developed by Argyris and Schön (1996). It has a philosophical basis in Pragmatism, but tends to be towards the positivist end of the research continuum. Some researchers are clearly positivist in their approach.

### **Clinical Inquiry and Clinical Research**

This focuses on research driven by client needs and proposes a form of empirical research that it claims has advantages (Schein, 2008). Unlike Appreciative Inquiry, it focuses on pathologies and problems. Clinical Inquiry and Clinical Research is located towards the positivist end of the research continuum and in some cases the researchers are explicitly positivist in their approach (Molineux & Haslett, 2002).

### **Traditional Action Research**

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) describe Traditional Action Research as coming from the work of Lewin and having a focus on collaborative change management or problem-solving as well as producing new knowledge. Traditional action research developed from a pragmatic philosophical basis. In current use the philosophical approach of the researcher may vary.

### **Insider Action Research (IAR)**

Action research carried out by a 'complete member' of an organisation in and on their own organisation, working with a group or groups of colleagues (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). IAR is influenced by Critical Realism, but not all IAR is based on Critical Realism.

Notwithstanding confusion about the use of some terms and the fact that there is crossover between different 'types' of action research, it is important in any research to know the approach undertaken by the researcher. Knowing and understanding this will assist and enable both co-researchers and participants and also readers and evaluators to critique and learn from the research. The philosophical basis for the approach taken is also important as it affects how the research is conducted. This choice is therefore crucial for the researcher, the co-researchers and participants and the organisation or community participating in the action research.

### 2.3.5. The Cycles and Spirals of Action Research

Action research is a cyclical process, which works through numbers of cycles in what is described as a spiral. This cyclical or spiral process is used because action research is, as noted above, research in action rather than research about action. It aims to make changes, to have outcomes and to enable and create learning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Because this is research *in action*, analysis, learning and conclusions during the research may lead to changes in direction, plans and processes.

How the cycle is described and enacted varies, with some authors such as Zuber-Skerrit (2001) setting out models of cycles and spirals with specific steps. While it may be seen by some practitioners as appropriate to follow these precisely, what is advocated more recently is to use the process in a more flexible and emergent way (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). This means that there may be variations in the cycles, but there will definitely be variations in the spirals. The spiral process is described by Lisahunter et al. (2013) as a key to action research. They go on to say that the research should not just be seen as a collection of cycles, but that:

*'the project evolves from one cycle to the next as you learn more about yourself as a practitioner, the context of the project and its participants, the process and practices [...] and the outcomes of project action'* (p. 64).

The aim of an action research project is to make changes, to learn, to create new knowledge and, perhaps to develop or contribute to a theory over the course of the project. Because of these aims, the complexity of many action research settings and projects and of the emergent nature of action research the spiral process is critical and ultimately more important than the cycles in isolation.

### **The Pre-Step**

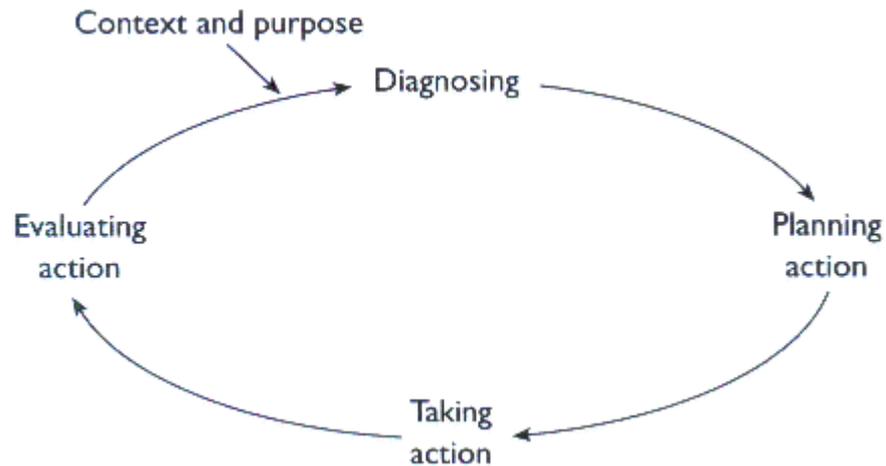
The 'Pre-Step' is part of a number of models of action research cycles. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) identify the pre-step as the starting point for action research projects and link it to Lewin's (1946) model in which he uses the term 'Idea' rather than 'Pre-Step'. In Coghlan & Brannick's pre-step the context, purpose, choices and desired future are examined and the establishment of collaborative relationships with those who have or should have ownership of the issues to be researched is worked on. This step also has similarities to the contracting step in Organisation Development consulting as described by Gill & Johnson (2002). Their version of the pre-step uses the consultancy terms 'Entry' and 'Contracting'. They put the emphasis for this stage of the work on what they describe as psychological contracting in which motives, goals and the locus of control are discussed between the researcher and those collaborating in the research. The main issue, at the pre-step stage, is the views of the co-researchers or participants on mutual control of the project. McInnes et al. (2007) call the first phase of their four phases of action research '*a foot in the door*' (p. 383).

This step is omitted from models presented by many other writers, for example McKernan (1991). However, the processes identified by Coghlan & Brannick are often described as part of action research, particularly insider action research, without being identified as a pre-step, but they are included in the overall process (Moore, 2007). As is almost inevitable in action research, the focus of the research may change as the work progresses and the relationship between the researcher and the participants will develop and will be different at the end of the research from how it is at the beginning.

### **Cycles**

Cyclical models begin with Lewin's (1947) model of *Idea, Planning, Fact-finding, Execution and Analysis*. This initial model has been developed by other action researchers, most of whom also propose four steps. The differences in their models are influenced by their philosophical and methodological approaches. Entering the first cycle of the research necessarily follows on from the identification of the need or wish to address the area or issue through action research. Different terms are used to

describe what precedes the first cycle: McKernan (1991) uses the term 'Problem Situation'; lisahunter et al. (2013) call it 'reconnaissance' and Coghlan & Brannick (2005) use the terms 'Context and Purpose', which are part of their 'Pre-Step'.



**Figure 1: The Action Research Cycle**

(Coghlan and Brannick, 2005, p.22)

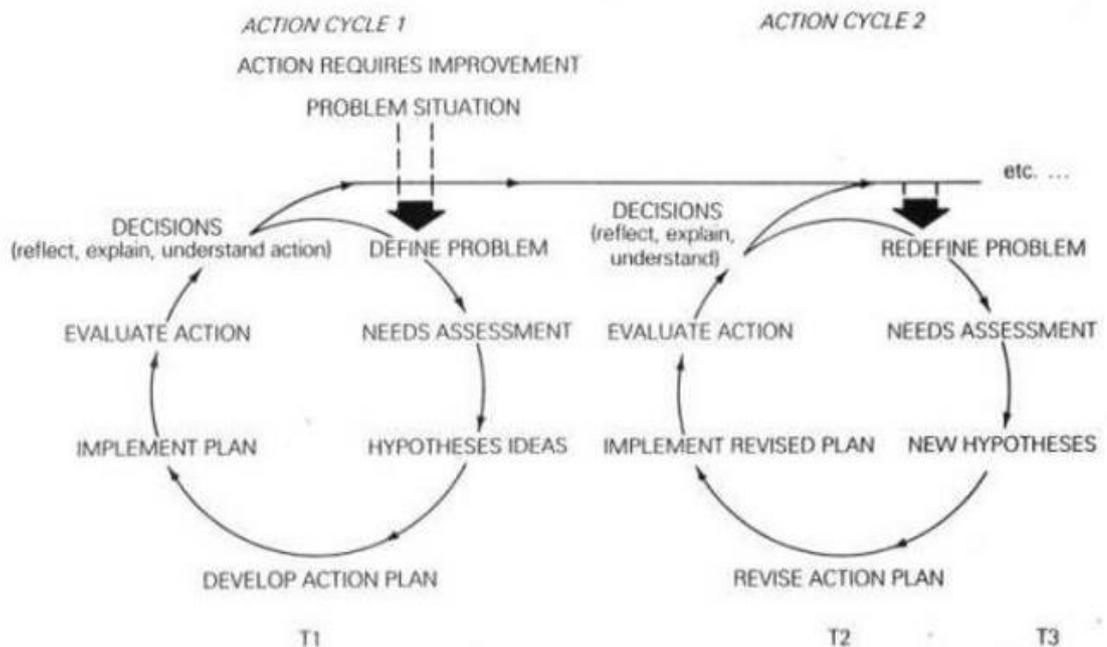
Coghlan and Brannick's (2005) cycle (Figure 1) is a good illustration of a basic cycle, starting with the link into the cycle from the *context and purpose* and the four-part cycle of *Diagnosing*, *Planning action*, *Taking action* and *Evaluating action*. They do not advocate rigid linear following of steps in the cycle and caution that '*It is important not to get too preoccupied in the cycles at the expense of the quality of participation*' (2005, p.25).

In their 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) have refined and developed the cycle. They now begin the cycle with *Constructing* rather than *Diagnosing* (2005).

They demonstrate the complexity and lack of linear cyclical actions with their image and description of a clock, with each of the three hands representing a different cycle. These three cycles are concurrent and the shorter and faster cycles may enable progress in the slower and longer cycles. This description is recognisable to action

researchers, especially insiders. It also links into the concept of spirals. Other researchers, including Cook (2009) also describe the concepts of multiple, varied and sometimes concurrent cycles.

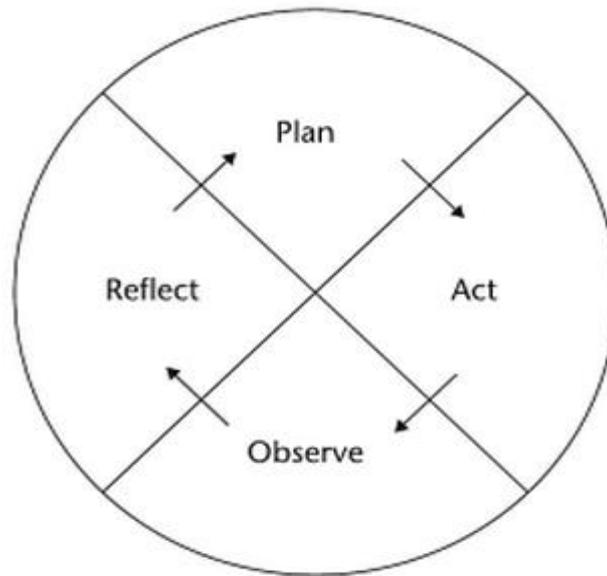
While many models of cycles consist of four steps, some include more. McKernan’s model, with seven steps, is an example of such a cycle. The steps in his cycle are: *Define Problem, Needs Assessment, Hypotheses Ideas, Develop Action Plan, Implement Plan, Evaluate Action, Decisions (reflect, explain, understand action)* (McKernan, 1991). McKernan’s action research model is given in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: McKernan’s action research model**

(from McKernan, 1991, p 29)

A common set of steps in four-step models is: *Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect*. Different researchers use variations of the model, so a generic model adapted from Lewin’s original model illustrates this cycle (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: The Action Research Cycle**

(Adapted from Lewin, 1946)

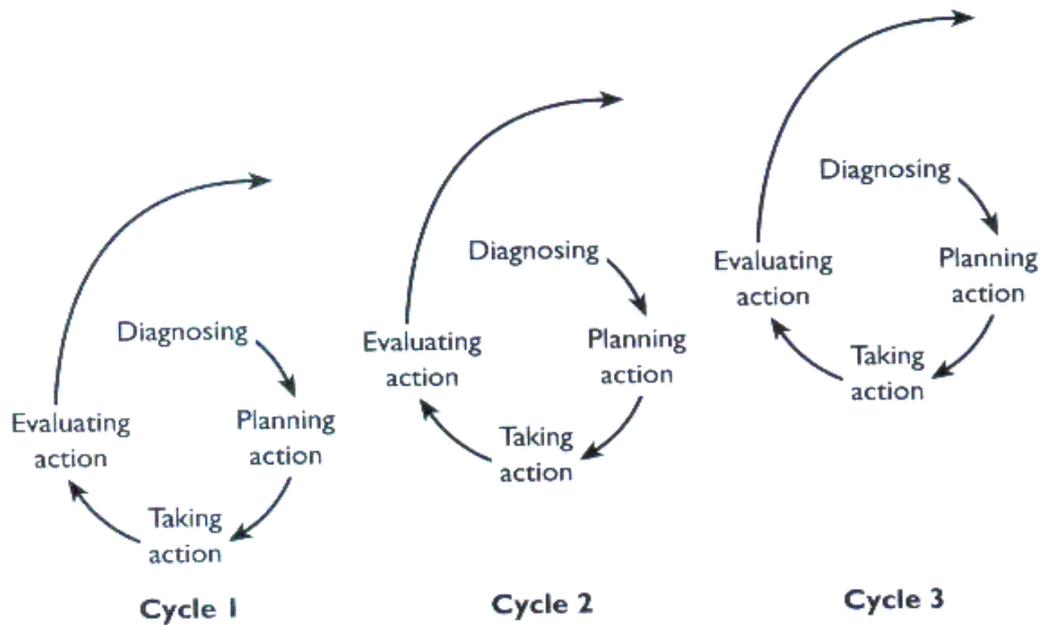
Table 4 sets out the similarities and differences between different models of cycles. This refers to a limited number of action researchers, but it gives an overview of what is used and presented in current and recent research. The pre-step is not included in this table as it only applies to IAR.

Coghlan & Brannick (2005)	lisahunter et al. (2013)	McNiff (1988)	McKernan (1991)	Kemmis (1988)	Watkins & Mohr (2001)	Zuber-Skerrit (2001)
Diagnosing			Define problem Needs assessment		Discovery	
Planning Action	Planning	Plan	Hypotheses Develop Plan	Plan	Dream  Design	Plan
Taking Action	Acting	Act	Implement Plan	Act	Delivery	Act
		Observe				Observe
Evaluating	Reflecting / Underst- anding	Reflect	Evaluate plan in action	Evaluate		Reflect
Moving on to the next Cycle						
Feed into next cycle of Diagnosis, Planning and Action	Next Cycle informed by previous Cycle. Second emerges from First.	Modify Plan	Redefine problem	Revised Plan		Revised Plan

**Table 4:** The Stages of the Action Research Cycle of Some Action Researchers

### Spirals

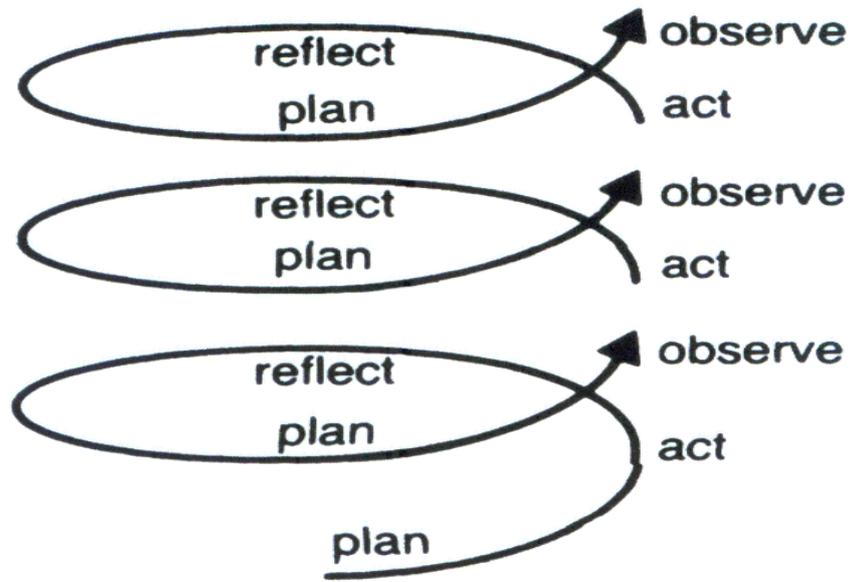
Spirals are the process of working through repeated cycles. They are illustrated here by Coghlan and Brannick's (2005) spiral (Figure 4) and in the Methodological Process Chapter by Zuber-Skerritt's (2001) spiral (Figure 9).



**Figure 4:** Spiral of Action Research Cycles

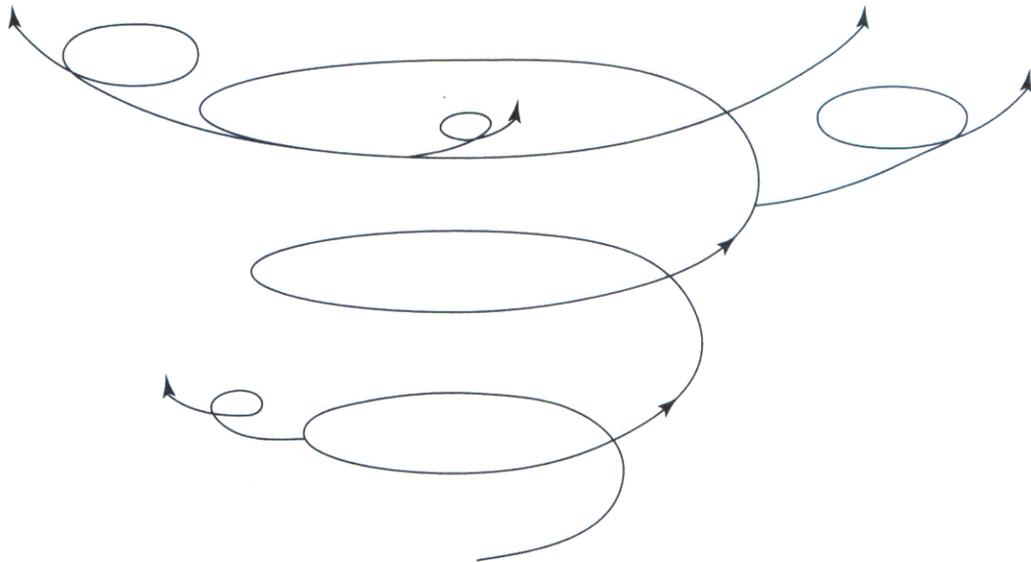
(Coghlan and Brannick, 2005, p. 24)

The experience of action research and representing this experience through the use of cycles and spirals has led to movement by some action researchers away from a systematically structured cyclical process to a more emergent one. This places greater emphasis on spirals and identifies the spiral process as a key to action research, especially participatory action research and insider action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Cook, 2009; lisahunter et al., 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). The spiral process is exemplified by McNiff. Writing in 2002 she contrasts her 1988 cycle model of *Plan, Act, Reflect, Plan, Observe* (McNiff, 1988) (Figure 5) with her current “*generative transformational evolutionary process*” model (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002 p. 57) which does not contain any marked steps and which has an evolving spiral, with main and sub cycles addressing the issues that emerge as the action research progresses (Figure 6).



**Figure 5: McNiff's 1988 Spiral**

(McNiff with Whitehead, 2002, Figure 3.6. p 57)



**Figure 6: A generative transformational evolutionary process**

(McNiff with Whitehead, 2002, Figure 3.5. p 57)

McNiff describes the spiral as a visual metaphor, that is *'[...] an iterative spiral of spirals, an exponential developmental process.'* (p.56). In agreement with Coghlan & Brannick, (2005), Lisahunter et al., (2013) also identify the complexity of cycles:

*'Action research is often described as a complex set of phased cycles that make a larger spiral of understanding, planning, acting and reflecting, each phase informed by praxis, or dialectical interplay, between theory and the practice at each stage'* (p. 64)

Cook (2009) supports such an evolving spiral in writing about the purpose of “mess” in action research. She describes how both she herself and fellow action researchers in 1992 had to address issues, to learn and to develop knowledge in a manner that was appropriate to a particular task. This did not mean that they were following a prescribed model of action research process:

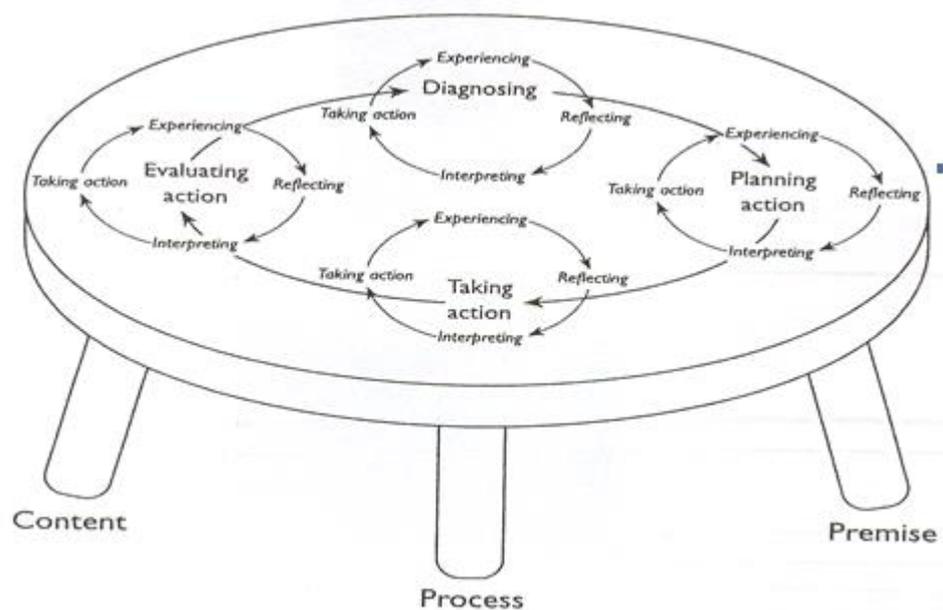
*'We kept adapting our research, either by shifting our spiral to another plane or by adding new loops and pathways. We felt, however, that this process of adding to, shifting and branching off, thinking and shifting, was important to our research.'* (p. 278)

The spiral is important when planning action research, as it evolves when conducting the action research with participants and when analysing the processes and content data at the end of the research. The spiral, especially the fluid and evolving spiral, is a better representation of real action research and enables better analysis and understanding of the processes and the outcomes.

#### **2.2.4. Cycles for Academic Action Research**

When there is an academic element to the action research, as well as the organisational or group element, there are some models of cycles that are specifically designed to enable or assist the principal researcher who is undertaking the academic aspects. Two of these models are those of Coghlan and Brannick (2005) and Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher (2007).

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) develop the levels of their model in order to contribute to analysis and learning (Figure 7). They model a meta-learning cycle that examines the research as it is taking place, using the concepts of *Content*, *Process* and *Premise* to examine the steps in the core research cycle. They indicate that this is of particular relevance to those undertaking academic research, because it enables the principal researcher to examine in depth each of the steps taken in the cycle. They also introduce an experiential learning cycle, *Experiencing, Reflecting, Interpreting, Taking Action*, which can be applied to each of the steps in the action research cycle. The aim of this cycle is to enable learning during and from the action research. This model reflects the greater complexity of actually undertaking insider action research and the emphasis that Coghlan & Brannick place on academic rigour.

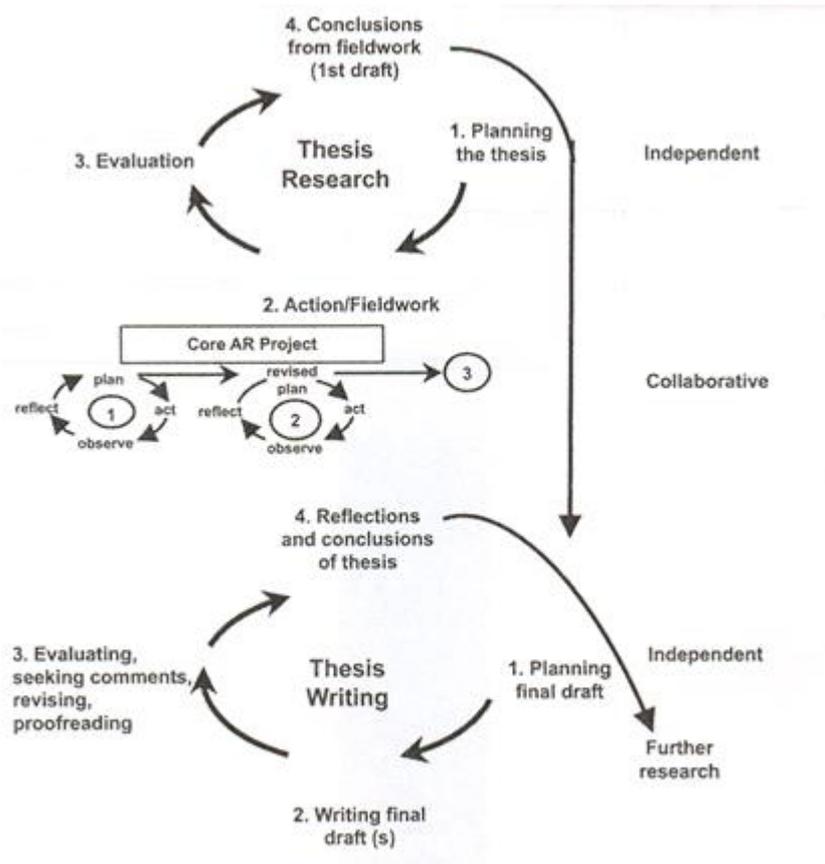


**Figure 7:** Complex Dynamics of Action Research

(Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 41)

Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher's (2007) model (Figure 8) illustrates the different areas of work involved in the core project and the thesis research and how they are linked. They developed this model from an earlier one by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002). Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) distinguish between the core project, which focuses on the situation and process of practice in an organisation, while the thesis focuses on

intellectual, propositional knowledge. Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher (2007) describe the fieldwork as collaborative and participative, while the thesis research and writing is individual work by the candidate. This is the general view of academic dimensions of action research.



**Figure 8:** Conceptual model of an action research thesis

(Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher, 2007, p. 421)

Both of these models contribute to the work of the principal researcher in carrying out their role as a postgraduate researcher. They depict group action research process; the independent actions that should be taken outside the group action research as it proceeds and then the thesis related steps. The differences between academic action research and practice action research are described by a small number of authors. These differences include making choices in thesis action research (Dick, 2002); writing an action research thesis and challenges to the standard thesis writing requirements (Davis, 2007); working to maximise the rigour of the action research (Melrose, 2001);

working on an action research thesis and recognising and using both the distinction and the relationships between the core research and the thesis research (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002) and the challenges for an executive undertaking doctoral action research in their own organisation (Coghlan, 2007a).

These authors argue for the value of conducting post-graduate action research in various settings, including the researchers' own organisations. They also recognise the potential academic challenges of undertaking such action research and offer guidance to assist such researchers.

### **2.3.6. Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

Participatory Action Research is specifically reviewed as one of the forms of action research used in this study. It is a form of action research in which the people taking part in the research are participants rather than subjects. Participation is seen as an important element of action research by many action researchers (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Gustavsen, 2008; Humphrey, 2007). Others place a significant emphasis on participation, see it as essential and explicitly name the action research in which they engage or write about as participatory action research (Chiu, 2006; Kemmis, 2008; lisahunter et al., 2013). The development of this approach was strongly influenced by Freire's revolutionary pedagogy (Freire, 1970). It was also influenced by the description of PAR by Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) as having the potential to create knowledge that does not simply reproduce the views, values and interests of dominant groups; as taking place with a transformed researcher/researched relationship which is power-sharing and presents a challenge to oppressive relationships; and as being collective research which gives a privilege to local voices, culture and wisdom. Recent researchers who have used PAR identify Critical Theory as their philosophy (Chiu, 2006) or demonstrate this focus through the approaches that they take in working on PAR (Jacobs, 2010; Khan, Bawani, & Aziz, 2013; L. Smith, Bratini, Chambers, Jensen, & Romero, 2010).

## Participation

In action research participation can occur at a variety of levels as set out in the typology produced by Pretty, Guijt, Thompson, and Scoones (1995) and reproduced in Table 5.

<b>7. Self-mobilisation</b>	Community members set their own agenda and organize for action. Professionals have a role in the background, are facilitative and supportive but only if asked
<b>6. Interactive Participation</b>	Professionals and community members work as equal partners in defining the problems or needs and the strategies for change. There is a sharing of knowledge and a valuing of 'local' or 'lay' knowledge. Professionals facilitate and support the process.
<b>5. Functional participation</b>	Community members are involved in decision-making and the development and execution of programmes or activities. Professionals are in control and take responsibility for the process.
<b>4. Participation by consultation</b>	Community members are asked to give their opinions on the program plans. The professionals decide what to do.
<b>3. Participation by information</b>	Community members are informed in an early stage about the program plans and are given the opportunity to ask questions.
<b>2. Passive participation</b>	Professionals are in control of the program; community members are informed about the program.
<b>1. No participation</b>	Community members are not informed about the program, only about the activities for which they have been recruited.

**Table 5:** The ladder of Pretty

[cited by Jacobs, 2010, p. 369] (Pretty et al., 1995)

Jacobs (2010) observes that participation at the lower levels of this ladder is instrumental, whereas it is more democratic and empowering at the higher levels. The ladder and Jacob's comments demonstrate that only the top levels are true PAR. Shani, David, and Willson (2004) emphasise that "*Maintaining total equality among all research participants is essential, so no distinction is made between researchers and practitioners.*" (p. 90). This is a key part of PAR which distinguishes it from other action research in which the participants may be involved at a lower level. An example would be participants being consulted by the researcher as part of a researcher designed project, the researcher analysing these consultations and coming to conclusions without involving the participants.

PAR is identified as valuable by numbers of authors, including Melrose (2001), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), L. Smith et al. (2010), Jacobs (2010) and Isahunter et al. (2013). Its value includes the democratisation of research and knowledge through the joint process and through co-learning; contributing to or enabling empowerment through the empowering capacity of the process and being a vehicle for social change through actions to which all participants can contribute equally. PAR is particularly identified as effective in community settings, especially with people living in disadvantaged situations and developing countries, people with health needs and people with disabilities because it involves these people in the action research rather than simply conducting the research about them (Bostock & Freeman, 2003; French & Swain, 2000; Khan et al., 2013; Rahman, 2008; L. Smith et al., 2010; Swantz, 2008).

PAR is increasingly identified as also taking place within organisations (Chiu, 2008; Ospina, Dodge, Foldy, & Hofmann-Pinilla, 2008; Shani et al., 2004) and joint organisational–community settings (Chiu, 2008).

Melrose (2001) describes the particular value of PAR to participants as "*The emancipatory researcher not only treats the group as equals but also leaves the group enabled to continue with the research without expert help.*" (p. 162). This goes beyond the notion of the action researcher changing things in a group or organisation and

means that the core research group can continue to change things in a critical, participative way.

### **2.2.5. Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)**

While most PAR is underpinned by Critical Theory, CPAR has an explicit critical focus and has specific focuses as developed and advocated by researchers such as Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Kemmis (2008). Kemmis identifies that a key difference between PAR and CPAR is that in CPAR participants aim to be critical by:

*'trying to find how particular perspectives, social structures and practices "conspire" to produce untoward effects, with the aim of finding ways to change things so these consequences can be avoided.'* (p. 125)

Kemmis gives a detailed definition of CPAR (2008, pp. 135-136). Habermas's (1986) focus on language as the basis for Critical Theory influences how CPAR is carried out. This influence comes through his Theory of Communicative Action, which is consensus orientated, although Habermas admits that such consensus is not always achieved. To enable Communicative Action, researchers must work to open Communicative Space for the research group. Habermas also places a strong emphasis on emancipation and this informs the aims of CPAR.

### **Challenges**

Aspects of PAR require significant work and can present challenges for some or all of the participants. Power, power relationships and power sharing and control may be the most challenging issues (Jacobs, 2010; L. Smith et al., 2010). Jacobs (2010) also identifies a number of other challenges to conducting PAR. A particular challenge is the time-consuming nature of PAR and the potential tension between having a timescale and keeping space open for co-learning. Other potential difficulties, include the building of trust and respect within the group, and misunderstandings, disagreements and even conflicts stemming from different perspectives.

The establishment of an environment of trust (L. Smith et al., 2010) and of a communicative space (Kemmis, 2008) or dialogue (Jacobs, 2010; lisahunter et al., 2013) are described as important actions to set up a good PAR process and to address the challenges described above. There is some dependence on the principal researcher or research team to do this. Reflection is also described as an essential feature of PAR (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In particular, addressing issues such as power and power relations (Jacobs, 2010) are significant aspects of managing PAR as they are in IAR (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

lisahunter et al. (2013) summarise the requirements and challenges of undertaking PAR:

*'PAR relies upon the expert knowledge of all participants and is enacted in the potential unpredictability of real-life situations. As such, PAR is a complex, time-consuming and risk-taking process that requires a critical openness to dialogue and learning on the part of all participants or stakeholders.'* (p. 20)

### **Summary: Participatory Action Research**

While all action research is participatory to some degree, PAR requires the highest levels of participation. Because of this the participants themselves have significant roles and can make decisions on and contributions to how the research is conducted and to reflection, analysis and conclusions. This has been primarily a community form of Action Research, but is increasingly seen as also appropriate for organisations. It has already been proved to be of value in community settings and with groups of people who are clients or who have particular needs or situations, such as people with disabilities and young people. The challenge in relation to organisations is to be able to take the democratic, empowering and emancipating approaches of PAR into a system that may have strong power structures and relationships.

### 2.3.7. Insider Action Research (IAR)

Insider Action Research (IAR) is a particular approach to action research in which the researcher or one of the researchers is a full and ongoing member of the organisation in which the research is taking place. Coghlan and Brannick (2005), Roth et al. (2007) and McNiff and Whitehead (2002), among others, describe and discuss the process and implications of Insider Action Research.

IAR contrasts significantly with other forms of research in that the researcher is part of the organisation in which the research is being conducted and is explicitly working from that position. The researcher is not trying to establish an external, objective role in relation to the organisation or the aspect of it being researched and their existing organisational role is now concurrent with the researcher role. In some cases, such as that reported by Roth, Sandberg, and Svensson (2004), the insider may be part of a research team in which there are also outside researchers. In others, as in the case of Moore (2007), the insider may be the only person with a specific research focus.

IAR emerged in the 1990s and has developed and become established since then (Coghlan, 2007b). Researchers in IAR are *'[...] immersed in local situations generating contextually embedded knowledge that emerges from experience.'* (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007 p. 60). This is contrasted with research from outside the organisation which has a stronger relationship with traditional positivist science. IAR is described as being able to develop the capabilities of organisations and carrying it out is an example of organisational capability (Roth et al., 2007). In order to develop these new capabilities it is necessary to develop a new insight into the organisation or its relevant section. IAR can be the catalyst for developing this new insight (Coghlan & Shani, 2008). IAR includes levels of inquiry, approaches, activities and methods from within a wide range of action research, so there is no single way of carrying it out. The position of the insider researcher means that new knowledge can be produced which might not be possible with external researchers (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Roth et al., 2007). Because IAR involves an inside researcher and inside participants reflection is

important both to contribute to an effective process and to developing insight and knowledge (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan & Shani, 2008).

Coghlan and his colleagues (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan, 2007a, 2007b; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Coghlan & Shani, 2008) draw attention to a number of key elements of IAR:

- The Inside Action Researcher
- If the Inside Action Researcher is an Executive
- Preunderstanding
- Role Duality: Organisational and Researcher Roles
- Organisational Politics and Political Relationships
- First, Second and Third Person Inquiry or Practice
- Ethics

The first five elements will be reviewed next and the final two in the sections on First, Second and Third Person Action Research and Ethics.

### **The Inside Action Researcher**

As stated at the beginning of this section the insider is a full and ongoing member of the organisation. The insider has a different perspective on the research from that which an external researcher would have. They have knowledge of the organisation that includes the culture, the dynamics, the relationships between different departments, the policies and strategies and both the formal and informal processes. This presents great advantages in undertaking the action research, but also contributes to challenges in terms of effective research and academic standards (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

The position as insider means that the researcher can build on their closeness to the research setting and on their relationships with their colleagues, but they must also create a distance in order to be able to see things critically and to enable changes during the IAR (Coghlan & Shani, 2008). Membership of the organisation gives the researcher initial access to potential participants and to data. It also can give

advantages in negotiating the contribution of the participants, changes in some of the research actions, if those emerge and access to records if that need arises.

The challenges to them are not static or predictable. As IAR is a dynamic process, they have to deal with emerging processes as they work through the research. However, challenges are not simply issues to be coped with and managed, if they are inquired into and reflected on they can be learned from and the learning can be shared (Coghlan & Shani, 2008).

### **If the Inside Action Researcher is an Executive**

Little is specifically written about the issues that arise when IAR is conducted by an organisation member who works at executive level and few people have written about conducting IAR while they worked at that level. Coghlan (2007a) contributes to the understanding of issues which arise when executives undertake IAR for doctorates. He cautions that adding the new researcher role can be *'[...] difficult and awkward and can be confusing for them.'* (p. 297). He identifies that a series of issues such as role conflict, loyalty tugs, behavioural claims and identification dilemmas are likely to be experienced. Their role duality is also likely to affect their relationships with colleagues. His view is that managing organisational politics is probably the most important issue, especially if they wish to remain within and progress in the organisation. This is particularly so because *'Undertaking an action research project in one's own organization is political and might even be considered subversive.'* (Coghlan, 2007a, p. 298).

Holian (1999) and Moore (2007) describe undertaking doctoral IAR projects while working as executives in large and complex organisations. Both executives encountered and experienced problems, challenges and emotional issues. In both cases the researchers learned about themselves, their colleagues and the organisation, including learning things that they had not intended to learn through the research. All of the areas usually identified as potentially challenging or problematic were experienced as such by both executives and researchers, even when they were not

expected to. In Moore's case this may have been contributed to by virtue of the fact that his research was with the Board of the organisation. In Holian's case it is clear that many of the issues arose because the research was being conducted widely across the organisation and also because it had a focus on ethical decision making.

### **Preunderstanding**

The term 'preunderstanding' is used to describe the insider's familiarity with the culture and informal structures of the organisation and how to get things done (Gummesson, 2003; Roth et al., 2007). It also sets out the researcher's understanding of why it would be useful to undertake this research and to use this methodology. It relates to both explicit and tacit knowledge and to lived experience before the beginning of the research project. These are all potential advantages for the research. The potential disadvantage of the insider's preunderstanding is that, being part of the organisation's culture, the researcher may find it difficult to analyse and critique (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Examination of the researcher's preunderstanding by the research group should form part of the pre-step and critical recording of this could form a valuable part of the research.

### **Role Duality**

An inside action researcher has one role as an organisational member (for example, as a manager, clinician or technical expert) and another as a researcher. This means that during the research they have two sets of relationships with their colleagues. This may lead to tensions (Holian, 1999) even if these are rarely as extreme as those experienced by Krim (1988), where physical violence was feared. Taking up the new role as researcher in addition to an existing organisational role may cause confusion and contradictions for the researcher (Humphrey, 2007). This includes the inherent tension between thinking and doing (Moore, 2007). In Critical Theory based action research the researcher may be seen to move in the direction of thinking and to place less emphasis on action. The new position of role duality may also cause confusion for their colleagues so the researcher has to be clear with colleagues, as well as with themselves, which role they are in at different times. They also need to continually

negotiate with their colleagues and manage their relationships and to make shifts in the different roles as the research progresses (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007).

Role duality was a challenging issue for both Holian (1999) and Moore (2007) and their experiences are examples of the potentially greater and more complex level of challenge of having two parallel roles for somebody in an executive position.

Holian describes the effect of inquiry outcomes both on caring for herself and for participants and on her different roles:

*'I discovered that I was not adequately prepared to look after either others or myself when the tidal wave of negative fall-out arose and fell. As a result I was not able to continue to balance the multiple roles of researcher, senior executive and program facilitator.'* (p. 4)

Moore's comment on the role duality is: *'I found that I was faced with an inherent conflict between my position as an insider and my role as a researcher.'* (p. 33). A significant outcome for both researchers was that they decided to leave the organisations in which they worked as executives. This was a difficult and significant decision for both.

### **Organisational Politics and Political Relationships**

The importance of organisational politics and of power relationships are emphasised by Coghlan and his colleagues (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005; Roth, Shani & Leary, 2007; Coghlan & Shani, 2008). Doing research in one's own organisation is identified as political. Insider action researchers need to be aware of this and work to manage both the politics and the power relationships. There are multiple types of relationships and those that are important will depend on the staff position of the researcher, the research topic, who the participants are and their roles (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

Having a preunderstanding of the organisational politics and the power structure and power relationships is identified by Brannick and Coghlan (2007) as helpful in conducting the research. Moore (2007) admits that in conducting the research he

*'exposed perceptions I had not previously encountered'* (p. 33). This highlights that even if the inside action researcher is aware of some preunderstanding and does work on developing their preunderstanding before beginning to work with the participants it is still likely that they will learn things about the organisation, the participants and themselves that they were not aware of before undertaking the research.

There are issues of power relationships that only arise or are increased because of the inside research and the position of the researcher. One is the effect of the power of a top manager on the research and on the researcher. Moore's (2007) example of this is:

*'The Chief Executive made it evident that his prime motive in supporting me in my research was to try to keep me happy in order to secure my continued commitment to sustain him, rather than to learn from or act on any outcomes or findings that my research might produce.'* (p. 29).

Another issue is that the researcher may feel that they do not have power, but they may be seen by other members of the organisation as having power because they are currently doing research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). This has an effect on the researcher's relationship with colleagues, so they need to be aware of this potential view in order to be able to manage their relationships better than they could if they had no awareness of such a view.

The IAR process may be seen as subversive or *'threatening to existing organizational norms.'* (Coghlan, 2007a p. 298). This may mean that senior staff, especially top management team members may use their power to influence the research topic or direction. Moore (2007) illustrates the implications of an executive or board requirement for the researcher, explaining that *'It was made evident to anyone who had tried to speak out against the way the organization and the board was being run, that challenge, opposition or dissent would not be tolerated.'* (p. 360).

The on-going process of reflection by both the key researcher and the participants offers opportunities to examine both role and political issues, how both the researcher

and others are dealing with them, to conceptualise what is happening and to make plans for action to improve understanding, participation and relationships (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Winter & Munn-Giddings, 2001).

### **Summary: Insider Action Research**

Insider Action Research has developed and grown since it emerged in the 1990s. It is not as frequently used and reported on as action research where the researcher is from outside the organisation where the research is taking place. Considering using IAR and having good quality applications have been enhanced by the use of Coghlan & Brannick's (2005) book, which is referred to by many other researchers, including those not actually using IAR. IAR has great potential for making changes within organisations and for doing this in a way that will also contribute to increasing democratic approaches and organisational learning and introducing practices, such as reflexivity, that can assist in the improvement in how work is carried out and services are delivered. The challenges involved in IAR may make it less likely to be used, especially in relation to significant and controversial topics. However, these challenges can be addressed by learning from the literature and from other insider action researchers before beginning the work with the group or groups within the organisation and by having an external person such as an academic supervisor or a critical friend to be consulted or to critique the ongoing work. The role of critical friend is described in more detail in section 3.3.4.

### **2.3.8. Reflection**

Reflection is a key and distinctive element of action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; McKernan, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000). Reflective practice has developed from the writings of Dewey (Chiu, 2006) and through the Action Learning processes of Revans (1982).

More recently the concept has been contributed to by the work of Schön (1983). It involves a complex process of observing, recording, reflecting, conceptualising, concluding and learning. As with other aspects of action research, the development and use of reflection is closely linked to the theoretical basis of the researcher's approach. Thus, Coghlan & Shani (2008) base reflection on the thinking of American Critical Realist Lonergan (Coghlan, 2008) and Brannick & Coghlan (2007) describe undertaking epistemic reflection and methodological reflection, again making a clear link to Critical Realism. Action researchers taking a Critical Theory approach emphasise the importance of critical reflection in bringing about change (Chiu, 2006; Johansson & Lindhult, 2008; Ravitch & Wirth, 2007). Chiu notes that, especially in PAR writings:

*'reflection appears to be closely bound up with Freire's (1972) concept of conscientization or critical reflection which refers to a process in which the consciousness of the disadvantaged, the poor and the powerless is awakened through critical pedagogy and reflection.'* (Chiu, 2006 p 186)

Kakabadse et al. (2007) clarify that in action research there needs to be both reflection on action, that is looking back on experience and reflection in action, that is on action as learning as it happens. They say that the latter, which they describe as *'in vivo' reflexivity* (p. 258), is more spontaneous and they credit Coghlan and Brannick (2000) with this description.

There are a number of ways in which reflection can contribute to action research:

- it can help to enable its emergent nature through reflection during action and following steps in the cycle (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002)
- it can help the researcher and co-researchers to address issues of power relations (Chiu, 2006; Hilsen, 2006)
- it can help researchers to address ethical issues arising during the research (Hilsen, 2006)
- it is important in ensuring the validity of the research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; McKernan, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000; Olesen, 1998; Ravitch & Wirth, 2007)

- it can ensure the integration of the action and the research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005)
- it can enable researchers to go beyond learning and transformation and contribute to scientific knowledge and theory (Chiu, 2006; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005)

Both Coghlan & Brannick (2005) and Kakababadse et al. (2007) emphasise the importance of reflection by group members as well as by the principal researcher. This reflection will enable learning as to how the group manages communication, solves problems, makes decisions, manages conflict and so on. Rigg and Trehan (2008) report that participants who are asked to use critical reflection may be reluctant, sceptical or negative in their responses, although this tends to be a minority.

Reflection in action research must include scrutiny of the researcher's own belief systems. Far from adopting an objective, neutral stance, in action research the researcher surfaces their own values, assumptions and beliefs and documents these to assist the understanding of what is being researched (Brannick & Coghlan 2007; Chiu, 2006).

### **Critical Reflection**

There are three important features of Critical Reflection: The first is that it should be transparent. This is done through the researcher sharing their reflections with their collaborators (Meynell, 2005). The second feature is taking the transparency further and increasing the opportunities for collaboration. The third feature is the increase in the possibility of empowerment through reflection at different levels: the researcher, the collaborating group and the wider organisation or community (Chiu, 2006; Hilsen, 2006; Kakabadse et al., 2007). These levels are often identified as First, Second and Third Person (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The importance of Critical Reflection is that it is done in depth through intense and probing questioning and through reflections on assumptions in both theory and practice. Some other action researchers see reflection that does not meet all the requirements of critical reflection as nonetheless valuable

for them as researchers (Humphrey, 2007) and for the research (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007).

### **Dialogue**

In the context of any participatory or collaborative research group dialogue has an important relationship to reflection.

*'Dialogue is probably the most difficult, uncomfortable and sensitive form of communication since it surfaces critical insights as the source of action. Research evidence suggests that high-quality dialogue is not easy to obtain but its importance cannot be over-estimated.'* (Kakabadse et al., 2007 p. 255)

Kakabadse and colleagues go on to say that dialogue is needed *'in order to create meaningful knowledge among participants who share similar challenges'* (p. 255) and that to create this knowledge *'a variety of options need to be surfaced'* (p. 255) and participants need to be enabled to bring relevant issues to the fore. The purpose of these approaches is to develop shared understanding so that consensus can be developed on ways forward, through open-mindedness and willingness to change position.

Dialogue is directly related to reflection in that it creates a space where participants feel they can reflect both on action that has already taken place and on current action. The latter requires individuals to be mindful and to have developed a capacity for self-critique (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Kakabadse et al. (2007) point out that for *'the creation of new knowledge that emerges directly from the shared experience of the group involved in the context of change'* (p. 258) the reflection needs to be transparent for all members of the group. This transparency requires *'commitment to a deep, intense, and probing questioning or critical reflection of assumptions embodied in both theory and professional practice.'* (p. 258). It is, therefore, clear that the dialogue and reflection of this nature are demanding for a group of participants or collaborators.

Gustavsen (2008) identifies a shift in Norwegian action research in 1980s to dialogic process and critical reflection, directly influenced by *'Habermas's notion of free communication [which] was brought to bear on tasks associated with local constructivism'* (p. 435). In Freire's approach, critical dialogic reflection is a social and collective process of empowerment that takes place in public (McLaren & Leonard, 1993).

### **Reflective Journal**

A reflective tool for action researchers in the first person element of the research is their use of a reflective journal or diary throughout the research (Humphrey, 2007; Kakabadse et al., 2007; Meynell, 2005). The use of a reflective journal can assist the researcher's contribution to the group research processes as they proceed and can be helpful to them in managing the challenges and emotional impacts of the action research. It can also contribute to the academic aspects of the research, as entries can be made at some intellectual distance from the participatory work as well as much closer to it. The more 'distanced' entries can contribute to the need to analyse and understand in a more objective manner.

Coghlan (2007a) uses the term *'reflection on reflection'* (p. 301). The use of personal reflective journals by all participants and the sharing of these reflections within the research group has some advocates (Melrose, 2001), but this can only happen if the participants wish to carry out this process. Coghlan & Brannick (2005) argue that if the group is able to explore the issues arising in the action research, this allows it to go beyond personal blame, draw on group development and take necessary action to improve the group activities. As reflection is such an important element of action research it is essential that at least the principal researcher uses a reflective journal throughout the research.

### **2.3.9. First, Second and Third Person Action Research**

The terms First, Second and Third Person action research are used to describe the different levels of the action research processes as they relate to the principal researcher, to the group(s) involved in the research and to the wider environment at a number of levels. The terms are also used in relating these different aspects of the research to each other. This formulation was originally that of Torbert (1988). It was taken up by some influential researchers (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2001, 2008). An advantage of the use of the three terms and concepts is that in setting up an action research project the researchers are enabled to identify the levels at which work must be undertaken and at which it is aimed to produce outcomes. It is understood that all three levels should be involved in every action research project or study that involve more than the principal researcher.

#### **First Person**

First Person action research is focused on the research practice of the principal researcher. It addresses areas such as the researcher's basic assumptions, desires, intentions and philosophy in relation to the research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). It also inquires into how the researcher conducts the research and what the researcher is understanding and learning from their actions (Kakababadse et al., 2007). This first person action research is seen to be valuable. *'In our action research practice, first-person inquiry provides a foundational practice and disciplines through which we can monitor the impact of our behaviour.'* (Reason & Bradbury, 2008 p. 6).

In insider action research there is a value in how the principal researcher addresses their preunderstanding of the organisation and of the research topic, their role duality as a member of the organisation and a researcher and how they manage organisational politics and their relationships with their colleagues (Coghlan & Shani, 2008). It enables their own learning-in-action and contributes to their development, potentially both in research and in their organisational role (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

Some first person action research is carried out specifically to learn about and to improve the researcher's practice. Coghlan (2007a) suggests that this fosters an ability to develop an inquiring approach to the researcher's life. They can inquire into different aspects of their behaviour, including ways of relating, the actions they take and how they take them. They can also inquire into their assumptions and their understanding. All these inquiries can be aided by the use of reflective journals and other records. This can be an individual element of the action research that is conducted in parallel with the second person group research.

One of the McNiff and Whitehead's (2002) areas of interest is action research designed specifically to enable professionals to inquire into and develop their work practice, especially in the area of education. This research can be totally focused on the practice of the researcher. Examples of educators in Ireland who used this approach are Ní Mhurchú (2002) who addressed how to improve her practice as a teacher in the area of assessment through the use of portfolios and Ó'Muimhneachain (2002) who has described how he discovered a deeper understanding of his educational values and beliefs through action research with colleagues, students, parents and fellow researchers. This approach has been also used more widely in areas such as health, academic research and organisational change (Burgess, 2006; Heen, 2005; Marshall, 2004; Taylor, 2004).

### **Second Person**

Second Person action research is undertaken with the principal researcher and a group or groups of participants or collaborators working together on the research. It will be clear from the descriptions of action research already given that these groups will be a variety of different types and that they will also differ in size from small teams to large community groups. As already described in relation to action research in general and PAR in particular, the issues addressed should be issues of mutual concern and how they are addressed is also a matter of decision or influence by the group. These issues must be addressed through direct dialogue, conversation and joint action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Reflection by group members as well as by the principal researcher is

identified as an important element of second person action research. Both Coghlan & Brannick and Kakabadse et al., (2007) emphasise the importance of this.

### **Third Person**

The term Third Person action research is used to describe two elements of taking the research beyond the individual researcher and the research group. It can be the action of extending the second person level work by aiming to create a wider community of inquiry through working at an intergroup level or moving into wider organisational or community groups. It is also the term used to describe the dissemination and extension of the learning and knowledge through reporting to stakeholders and networks and through publication. (Coghlan, 2007a; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Coghlan & Shani, 2008; Kakabadse et al., 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

### **2.3.10. Validity and Rigour**

The practice of action research requires a 'scientific' understanding of the approach. Gill and Johnson (2002) suggest that this is only a dilemma if one is '*adopting a positivist stance that defines "science" in terms of hypothetico-deductive concerns and objectives*' (p. 90). Roth, Shani & Leary (2007), who advocate Insider Action Research, claim that IAR:

*'epitomizes the challenge of balancing the demands of intellectual rigor required by the research community and the relevant applications required by the organizational members'* (p. 42).

Coughlan and Coghlan (2002) argue that action research can be justified within its own terms and does not have to justify itself in relation to other epistemologies and research approaches. In other words, action research is not based on a positivist philosophy and therefore should take a different approach to ensuring its robustness and value from the traditional scientific approaches to validity. While the work of action researchers can be open to critique, Coughlan and Coghlan assert that: '*Action*

*research does not have to justify itself in relation to alternative epistemologies and research approaches.'* (p. 236)

Dick (2002) argues that reliability and validity are still useful concepts for action researchers. He relates this to the purpose of making changes to some part of the world. He also argues in favour of generalisability, but accepts that there has to be some trade-off between being relevant to the situation being researched and discovering general truths.

If action research is to contribute new knowledge it is important for action researchers to be fully aware of the issues involved and of the ways of addressing them.

Perhaps the most significant issue in relation to validity is that of the researcher's own perspective or bias. This is highlighted by a number of authors and they propose solutions. Reason and Rowan (1981) warn of the danger of the researcher projecting their own perspective without being aware of doing so. They stress the importance of a high quality of awareness. Denzin and Lincoln (1998b) suggest that the researcher should be aware of and articulate their own perspective. Similarly, Coughlan and Coughlan (2002) explain that: *'The principal threat to the validity of action research comes from the lack of impartiality on the part of the researcher.'*(p. 237) They state that action researchers, therefore, need to present all aspects of their research so that they are open to testing and critique. (Brannick & Coughlan, 2007) propose that the researcher must explicitly surface their own assumptions, values and beliefs. In summary, action researchers need to have a high level of awareness and to present their own beliefs, values and assumptions and a clear description of their research steps.

A number of authors discuss the relevance of dialectics, dialogue and participation as ways of ensuring validity. Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) propose that part of achieving validity in action research is having a process of continuous negotiation and setting out the different views of the participants. Both Reason and Rowan (1981) and Olesen (1998) discuss the importance of a dialectical approach. McNiff and Whitehead

(2000) stress the importance for the researcher of getting other people to validate their claims and for Melrose (2001) the important 'other people' to do that validating are the participants. Kakabadse et al. (2007) take a similar view and state that the validity rests on the open, critical subjectivity of the co-inquirers in judging the fruitfulness of the findings. All of these views suggest a critical approach to collaboration and participation and an avoidance of consensus collusion on the part of co-researchers (Reason & Rowan, 1981).

The importance of the conscious and deliberate enactment of the research cycle in ensuring validity is outlined by a number of authors (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Of particular importance in the enactment of the cycle is the concept of reflection in action research, which has been examined above. In order to ensure validity of action research it can be argued that there is a need to go beyond the relatively simple steps set out by Schön (1983) and to take an in-depth, critical, reflexive approach as advocated by authors such as Chiu (2006) and Kakabadse et al. (2007). The impediment to this may be that the participants may not wish to take part in and give the time and in-depth openness that is required for critical reflection. This still leaves the researcher able to use critical reflection in the first person aspects of their research.

There are the essential tasks of describing the research process, telling the 'story' and presenting the data collected. Gronhaug and Olson (1999), in discussing whether or not the knowledge produced by action research is scientific, highlight the challenge faced by action researchers in the gathering, analysis and interpretation of data and in the planning and execution of actions. They criticise the failure of many action researchers to report in detail on their research activities or on the steps by which they have arrived at their interpretations and actions. This, they suggest has contributed to the negative image of action research within the traditional research community.

Melrose (2001), whose paper focuses on rigour in action research, suggests that while some researchers may see rigour as synonymous with validity, it may actually have a

wider meaning such as referring to the whole process of action research including the choice of method to suit the research question, how the collaborative research groups are constituted and facilitated and dissemination of results in ways that are appropriate to different audiences. An alternative meaning is the view that rigour equals quality and that in action research quality leads to transformation for the research participants and improvement in the situation or practice studied. Melrose also addresses rigour through use of the core research group, repeating the action research cycle in a spiral, and through triangulation, reflective journals, meta-reflection, keeping a clear document trail of decisions, actions, and so on. Coghlan & Brannick (2005) have similar views with their description of quality and rigour focusing on cooperation with members of the core group, practical outcomes, constant reflection, plurality of knowing and significant work. They also use the meta-learning cycle in which content, process and premise reflection on the action research cycle takes place.

In summary, action researchers must set out their own perspectives (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b) engage with their co-researchers (Melrose, 2001; Winter & Munn-Giddings, 2001) and carefully document and present all of the research steps taken and the data collected. Many authors (Coughlan & Coghlan, 2002; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Melrose, 2001; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) assert that validity lies in the skills, sensitivities and high quality awareness of the researcher.

### **2.3.11. Ethics**

The basic requirements for ethical behaviour in any research involving people also apply to action research. These include requirements that participants give informed consent; that the research does not cause harm to the participants; that it should be beneficial to the participants and other identified people and that confidentiality should be maintained.

A major challenge to ethics in action research is that it is not possible at the beginning of the project to set out precisely how the research will be conducted. Aspects of this will emerge as steps and cycles of the research are enacted. For this reason it is not sufficient to make an ethics declaration at the beginning of the project. In addition there must be a focus on ethical aspects of the project throughout the research as questions and issues will arise at different points (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Eikeland, 2006; Coghlan & Shani, 2005).

Because action research is not objective in the traditional manner, the relationship between the researcher and the participants is different from that in other research projects. How the research is conducted needs to take account of the values, objectives and power needs of the parties involved (Bargal, 2006). Also because of the nature of action research, its effect on participants may need to be managed even more carefully than in other research. These effects may be on the wider organisation or community as well as or rather than on the immediate participants (Coghlan & Shani, 2005; Hilsen, 2006).

Confidentiality and anonymity may be difficult to maintain, especially in insider action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Gill & Johnson, 2002). This highlights the importance of obtaining meaningful informed consent and of examining ethical issues as they arise during the research, as well as the proper management and care of documents and data, especially electronically.

In any research project that focuses on change in organisations the concepts of trust and of power are important (Gustavsen, 2008; Hilsen, 2006). The surfacing and discussion of power issues and power relations is necessary in any such project, but this work must be managed ethically. It is essential that these issues are addressed appropriately as they arise and that they are recorded.

Insider action research has particular ethical issues related to the role duality of the researcher, how they handle their relationships with participants and the problematic choices that they have to make (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Holian, 1999; Moore,

2007). Learning from the literature and from the experiences of action researchers is important, but working with participants to jointly manage ethical issues is even more important.

The collaborative nature of action research is crucial to determining and managing ethical issues. Kakabadse et al. (2007) recommend that there should be a mutually acceptable ethical framework that should be consistent with inquirer's beliefs and those of the participants or organisation. Hilsen (2006) proposes the concept of a covenant between the researcher and the participants as a way in which the action research should be enacted. She emphasises that the focus of the research should be *on 'the best interests of the others'*; that the research should be *'orientated to creating social justice and a more democratic work life.'* (p. 28) and that trust should be seen as a method in the action research and not just an outcome. There is no one approach or framework used in action research to form covenants, agreements or contracts with groups or organisations. They range from the critical and participatory end of the continuum as illustrated by Hilsen and also broadly used by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) and Lisahunter et al. (2013) to the much more scientific and formal end as illustrated by the research conducted by Molineux and Haslett (2002) where the research was part of the organisation's "People Strategy". The pre-step approaches put forward by Coughlan & Brannick (2005) and Gill & Johnson (2002) in relation to insider action research both assist in developing a covenant.

### **2.3.12. Action Research and Change**

Whatever the approach taken, action research is clearly about change, whether the approach taken is positivist, planned change (Molineux & Haslett, 2002) or living theory (post Critical Theory) (McNiff, 2006). There is an increasing focus on bringing about and studying organisational change. This includes action research based on Pragmatism (Bate et al., 2000), on Critical Theory (Kakabadse et al., 2007) or on Critical Realism (Coughlan & Coughlan, 2002; Roth et al., 2007). The view of action research as a planned change process (Burnes, 2004b; Cummings & Worley, 1997) has now shifted

to seeing it as a much more emergent process in which it is not fully clear initially what will happen as a result of engaging in cycles of action research (Meynell, 2005; Ravitch & Wirth, 2007; Whitehead, 2005).

There are a number of different focuses on the emergent nature of action research: Coghlan & Shani (2005) focus on the emergent inquiry or research process and Whitehead (2005) focuses on it from the perspective of organisational change. In research taking a critical approach, change is seen as emerging from what the researcher and participants decide together (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007). This understanding and McNiff and Whitehead's (2000) description of action research as an emergent system of converting values into practice are particularly important to this research.

The action researcher is often seen as a change agent as well as a researcher, whether this is as someone working within the organisation (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) or as an outsider (Kakabadse et al., 2007). The research addresses a wide range of aspects of organisational change including: evaluating and facilitating organisational change (Meynell, 2005); beginning innovative change (Shotter, 2010); addressing specific strategies in a client organisation (Molineux & Haslett, 2002); and addressing organisational capability development in your own organisation (Roth et al., 2007).

The difference between action research and the various organisational change theories and methods is that action research is both a research approach and an organisational change methodological process.

### **2.3.13. Summary**

This study was about the role of the Executive Committee of the organisation in relation to service development. It aimed to examine the current role and what a more ideal role should be and to potentially make changes in the direction of the more ideal role. The literatures on Organisational Change and Complexity Theory were reviewed in relation to this work. Action Research was identified as the most appropriate

research approach because it meant that members of the Executive Committee would be part of the research as co-researchers rather than as subjects and because the Action Research would be research *in action* and so could produce group changes and plans as well as evidence, learning and knowledge.

In the organisational change review there is a particular focus on contemporary literature. This literature recognises that the environment can be unstable, complex or turbulent. The approaches taken to organisational change have moved to continuous change or mixed approaches which use a number of theories.

Examining how managers approached change both theoretically, in relation to decisions on the future role of the Executive Committee, and practically, in relation to the conducting of the group Action Research, was relevant because the research group was also the Executive Committee. Managers' approaches are influenced by their learning about change, their experience of change, their beliefs about organisational structures and systems and their tolerance of uncertainty. The literature on the environment suggests that their approach to change is influenced by the external environment, especially when uncertain and turbulent. These environmental influences may reinforce managers' belief in planned and directed change or move them towards emergent and continuous change approaches. The management approach to change undoubtedly affects the approach of a research group of senior managers conducting Insider Action Research that includes potential organisational change.

Continuous change can be connected to Action Research. While one project may not seem to be continuous change because it is relatively short, Action Research actually works in a continuous fashion during the cycles unless the approach used is a strictly planned one. An Action Research project that involves organisational change is an opportunity to experiment with a continuous form of change, to learn from that and for these factors and the outcomes of the research to influence adoption of a continuous change approach more generally.

Complexity Theory was reviewed because of its understanding of organisations, how they operate and how they change. Its findings, models and recommendations are particularly relevant for health and social service organisations which it identifies as complex adaptive systems. The Complexity Theory advocacy of the effectiveness of change in an environment of 'bounded instability' / 'edge of chaos' and advice on how this should be conducted is relevant for both this research and the organisation in which it was conducted. Insider Action Research is an opportunity to develop a management capacity to recognise the potential of bounded instability, to experiment with it – with a connection to continuous change – and to develop a capacity to use it following the Action Research.

Operating change at the edge of chaos requires a changed management role. This changed role was part of the research proposal and the Action Research was an opportunity to learn about it and to decide on whether to move to it and how to adopt it.

As the literature describes, whatever the outcomes of Action Research, learning and understanding is developed through the research and potential recommendations for how to address the research question.

## Chapter 3. Methodological Process

### Introduction

The chapter begins by describing Critical Theory, the philosophical theory that underpins the research. This is followed by an introduction to action research (AR), briefly describing cycles and spirals and how they are used in this research. The two AR approaches used, critical participatory action research (CPAR) and insider action research (IAR) are described. The important features of both are explained and how these features were used and how they operated in the research is described.

An account of the pilot project for the research, which was an AR pre-step, including how it was set up and how it operated, is given.

The main research is described in terms of the recommended and necessary processes and actions and how these were used at first person (principal researcher) and second person (research group) AR levels.

The last section of the chapter covers the data that were collected and how they were collected; the data analysis approach chosen and why it was chosen; and the conducting of the first person thesis-related data analysis. This description is detailed in order to demonstrate what the principal researcher (PR) did to achieve rigour and validity and to enable objective examination.

### 3.1 Philosophical Approach

The philosophy underpinning this research is Critical Theory. This philosophical stance began with the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. Crotty (1998) reflects that Horkheimer, one of the early critical theorists, sought a philosophy that was not '*divorced from the lived reality of social life*' (p. 1310). Instead, he wanted philosophy and science to inform each other dialectically. He believed that, if that happened, there would be a social philosophy that would stand as a critical theory of society.

Habermas (1986), who later became an influential critical theorist, identified three types of cognitive interest: technical, practical and emancipatory. Emancipatory interest, which is also reflective, is the one that gives rise to critical theory. Language is an important basis for Habermas's Critical Theory. Two key aspects of this are communicative action and discourse, which are seen as supporting working for agreement and aiming for the ideal in activities.

Another important critical theorist is Freire (1973). His work focused on education with people who were marginalised and deprived. He introduced the idea of *Conscientisation* (an awakening of or increase in consciousness). In describing this process he distinguishes between critical perception, critical consciousness and critical theory. He also has a significant focus on change, especially for and by people in deprived and marginalised situations.

The approach of critical theory is to subject hypotheses, theories and issues to critical examination and to focus on change, empowerment and emancipation.

Critical Theory was chosen as the underpinning philosophy for this research because it is one of the major philosophies that relate to AR. It was considered to be the most appropriate choice for a number of specific reasons, including the focus on empowerment and emancipation; the critical approach to inquiry, examination and all other aspects of the research and the significant degree of participation and collaboration expected from the participants in the AR. Empowerment and emancipation were identified as particularly important because of their relevance for people with intellectual disabilities to whom the organisation provides services. The high level of participation was essential because of the empowering focus and also because the research group was the Executive Committee (EC). The critical approach underpinned all the focuses of the research. The underpinning effects of Critical Theory will be observed in the descriptions of the AR processes.

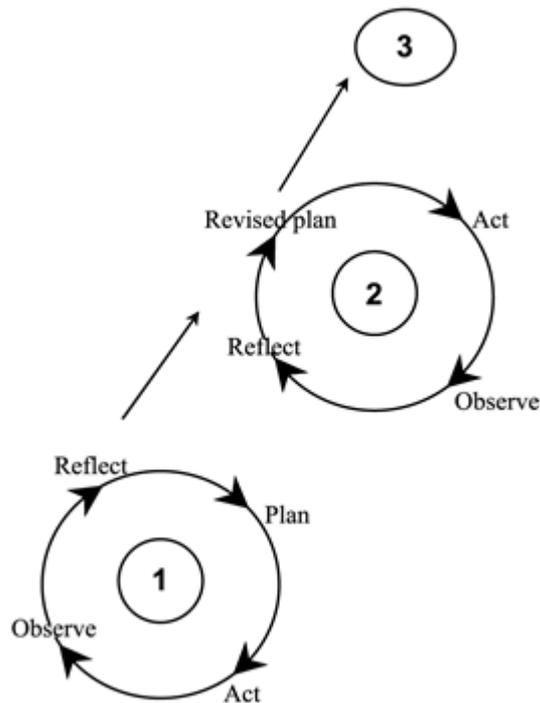
## **3.2. Action Research**

Action Research is not so much a methodology as an approach or an '*orientation to inquiry*' (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.1). It involves working through **numbers of** cycles in an evolving participatory process in order to bring about change as well as create learning, add to knowledge and create or develop theory. There is a range of approaches from a scientific approach with low levels of participation through to participatory action research with high levels of participation. Action research which has developed approaches at the participatory end of the continuum may be seen '*not as a set of concrete steps but as a process of learning from experience, a dialectical interplay between practice, reflection and learning.*' (McNiff, 2002, p. 15)

### **3.2.1. Action Research Spiral**

All forms of AR work through cycles that develop into a spiral. Many of the models that are presented look clear and prescribed, working through four, or more, stages in one cycle before moving on to the next cycle or completing the research (Molineux & Haslett, 2002; Torbert & Taylor, 2008). The reality of AR, especially PAR, is that the process is 'messier' than that (Cook, 2009) and there may be small cycles that go off in a direction that was not intended but feed back into the larger cycle or become too isolated to do that. Or there may be partial cycles that are begun but not completed because of participants' decisions. There may also be small cycles conducted in parallel by different sub-groups of participants which later contribute to a larger cycle (McNiff, 2002).

Coghlan and Brannick's (2005) Spiral of Action Research Cycles model (Figure 4) and Zuber-Skerritt's (2001) model of the Action Research Spiral (Figure 9) are both examples of the most common pattern of four steps in each cycle and each cycle contributing to and moving on to the next similar cycle in the spiral.



**Figure 9: The Action Research Spiral.**

(Zuber-Skerrit , 2001, p15)

These models illustrate the cycles and spirals in what looks like a predictable pattern. However, as identified in the literature review, Coghlan and Brannick (2005) and others explain that, in practice, there may be cycles of different size, length and speed; a number of cycles may operate in parallel with each other and not all cycles may be completed.

McNiff's Spiral, which she terms '*a generative transformational evolutionary process*', (Figure 6 ) is an illustration of how AR may actually work out. She does identify stages in the research and describes her spiral as '*an iterative spiral of spirals, an exponential developmental process.*' (p. 56)

### The Action Research Spirals and Cycles in this Research

This study had three major cycles. All these cycles are larger than any illustrated cycle with four steps. Cycle 1 (C1) is the closest to cycles described in the literature. Cycles 2 (C2) and 3 (C3) took place over a longer time and had a greater number of sub-cycles. However, the use of the term 'cycle' is useful because it illustrates the broad pattern of the research. Within these major cycles, especially C2, there were small sequential and parallel cycles. In this study, this group conducted its AR by working through different steps and sequences of steps within and across cycles. The illustrations of how those operated reflect the apparently disorganised and emergent model depicted in McNiff's spiral. While this appears 'messy' it does not mean that the research has not progressed.

#### **3.2.2. Action Research Approaches**

Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) and Insider Action Research (IAR) were the dominant starting points of this research. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a form of AR in which those involved in the research are participants rather than subjects. Participation takes place at different levels, but must at least involve participants in decision making and in the development and execution of the research. Ideally participants set the focus and the plans for the research themselves and are supported by the professional researcher(s). CPAR has a particularly strong critical focus and two of its aims are the empowerment and emancipation of the participants and people to whom they relate as community members, staff or in other ways. CPAR uses '*consensus orientated communicative action*' as a key aspect of the AR (Kemmis, 2008). This requires the development of a communicative space for the research group, that is, one in which there is increased trust and good communication processes operating within it.

Conducting AR which involved both CPAR and IAR required a number of issues to be clearly identified, understood and addressed. These included ethical issues, bias, role

duality and potential tensions. How these issues were addressed will be explained in more detail in the section on the Combined Methodological Process below.

### 3.2.2.a Important Features of PAR

Whether the term 'critical' is included or not, there are features of PAR that are important in the practice of the approach. PAR should be:

- Critical
- Participatory
- Emancipatory and Empowering
- A social process
- Practical and collaborative
- Recursive (reflexive and dialectical)
- Aiming to transform theory and practice

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000)

#### Critical

The concept of critique in critical theory means exploring existing conditions to find how particular perspectives, social structures or practices may be irrational, unjust, alienating or inhumane. It also means exploring how they are interlinked in ways that cause them to produce such consequences. In CPAR participants aim to be critical in this way, with the further aim of finding ways to change things so these consequences can be avoided (Kemmis, 2008). This is in contrast to simply observing, collecting data, analysing, describing and explaining. The critical approach also requires critical reflection and critical self-reflection. Critical reflection and collaborative processes, decisions and actions are enabled by opening a communicative space.

In this research the concept of the critical approach was introduced to the AR group in the pre-step sessions with a short introduction to Critical Theory and an explanation of the PR's wish to take a critical approach to the AR. This was discussed, debated and agreed by the group. Working to build a communicative space, including reflection in group sessions and in some inter-session reviews and descriptive documents by the PR and co-researchers were part of the effort to take a critical approach. This was also

done by using Kemmis's (2008) definition of CPAR to develop the framework for the major document on The Learning from Cycle 1 (Appendix 7) and for the framework for the final group session in C3.

### Participatory

Participatory research is described by the International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research (ICPHR, 2013) as a research paradigm rather than a research method. Participation as a research paradigm is a defining principle throughout the research process. This paradigm is the set of underlying assumptions about the area and how research should be conducted. The principal assumption is that the participation of those whose life or service or work is the subject of the research fundamentally affects all the aspects of the research. This participation is an end in itself and recognises the potential contribution of each individual and the co-creation of knowledge (ICPHR, 2013). PAR is therefore different from other forms of AR as a major goal is to maximise the participation in all aspects of the research of those involved.

From the outset research the principal researcher set out to support a high level of participation. The participants were defined as co-researchers, that is people who contribute to all of the aspects of the group research, rendering it a collective research process. Because this was also academic research there was also an individual aspect of the research. Given the high level of participation, the co-researchers also contributed to the academic research. The co-researcher role was established in the pilot pre-step and participants understood that from the start.

### Emancipation and Empowerment

Emancipation and empowerment are key elements of CPAR. Emancipation is seen as procuring equality and in some settings political equality. It is often a focus for people who are disenfranchised or who are disadvantaged for reasons such as gender, race, class or disability. Empowerment refers to increasing the strength of individuals, groups or communities. This may refer to a range of areas including economic, political, social, gender and organisational.

A focus on emancipation and empowerment began in the pre-step with a briefing on Kemmis's (2008) definition of CPAR. Actions were taken at different points to encourage a focus on emancipation and empowerment. Two examples of this are: in the first group session in the main research one of the areas that the group was asked to reflect on in relation to the future of service development was 'Processes for empowering and supporting staff and service users to lead and work on service development'; in the first session of C2 when there was a co-researcher proposal for more in-depth analysis of data that had already been collected and analysed the PR proposed that an empowerment lens should be used for the analysis. It is important to identify that the dual focuses of emancipation and empowerment were on service users. In relation to the co-researchers and other organisational staff, the focus was principally on empowerment.

#### Social process

A social process is one in which there are interactions between individuals. This includes a range of activities such as cooperation and conflict, establishing a system of relationships, what happens when changes disturb existing modes of relationships and a range of features in relation to events: sequence, repetition, relationship between, continuity and result.

This AR was planned to be a social process, with all members of the research group meeting together, interacting, cooperating, disagreeing, agreeing and developing their service development role. The processes put in place at the beginning of the research and developed as the PR learned and the co-researchers learned and expressed their wishes and preferences all meant that this was a social process rather than a scientific examination.

#### Practical and Collaborative

The practical aspect of PAR is concerned with improving practice and improving the position of the people participating in the research and relevant people outside the research group. It also works to develop knowledge through aspects of the AR.

Collaboration means working together on the research and having shared aims in relation to it. It includes joint and agreed activities, sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus. The aim in the initial plan for the AR was that it would be both practical and collaborative. The efforts by the PR and by co-researchers to produce practical results can be identified in the story of the research journey and in the findings. The concept of collaboration was introduced to the co-researchers in the pre-step pilot project and was discussed by them at [that](#) point. The processes described below assisted in developing collaboration.

### 3.2.2.b Insider Action Research (IAR)

Along with PAR, IAR, informed by the work of Coghlan and Brannick (2005), is the second dominant starting point of this research. IAR is AR in which the researcher, or one of the researchers if there is a team, is a full and ongoing member of the organisation in which the research is taking place. In IAR the researcher is not trying to establish an external, objective role in relation to the organisation or the aspect of it being researched. Rather, their existing organisational role exists in parallel with their researcher role. This is significantly different from research in which the researcher is external to the organisation and where a more objective position is adopted. This research was IAR because it was conducted by all members of the Executive Committee with both the principal researcher and the co-researchers having role duality.

Working with a small, senior group of which one is a member is a more intensively 'insider' position than that of the researcher in much of the reported IAR. Most reported IAR has been conducted by middle managers, technical experts, teachers or clinicians and some involves external researchers as well as the insider. Where executives or senior managers conduct the research this can lead to tensions and problems for the PR that are more significant than in other IAR settings (Holian, 1999; Moore, 2007).

There are a number of issues that the PR must be aware of and manage in IAR. These are:

- Preunderstanding
- Role Duality
- Organisational Politics and Power Relationships

#### Preunderstanding

This is the insider's familiarity with the culture, structure and action processes in the organisation and their understanding of why it is useful to undertake this research and to use this methodology (Gummesson, 2003; Roth, Shani & Leary, 2007). It relates to both explicit and tacit knowledge and to lived experience before the beginning of the research project. In insider and participatory action research it is important that the preunderstanding of the PR is shared with the participants. It helps to make clear to the participants the thinking of the PR and the reasons for the research proposal. It should also assist them in making changes to the research proposal.

The PR's preunderstanding should be shared with and examined by the group (Coghlan & Shani, 2008). In this research the PR listed points on his preunderstanding before undertaking the pre-step and presenting them. He developed this into a more comprehensive document before the beginning of the main research and briefed the group. The preunderstanding was used to prompt the group's reflection on the EC's role.

#### Role Duality

An inside action researcher has one role as a member of the organisation and another as a researcher. This required the PR to manage two sets of relationships with EC colleagues during the research. Other members of an organisational committee, team or unit working as co-researchers/participants also have role duality. In this case each person was a member of the EC with a specific role such as Chief Executive or Regional Director and a role as a co-researcher. The concept of role duality for the PR was introduced to the group in the pre-step. It was identified as an issue by the PR and

discussed with any co-researchers who wished to discuss it in individual meetings held in preparation for the main research. It was reviewed in further individual meetings. Role duality was also a topic addressed in the C1 review session. The PR used his reflective journal to identify and consider Role duality issues in order to manage them individually or with the group.

#### Organisational Politics and Power Relationships

Doing research in one's own organisation has political effects within the organisation or within the research group. Power relationships also affect the research because of the position of the inside researcher and the position of the executive who has sponsored the research. In this research the effects of the politics and the power were entirely within the research group. The influences in relation to both came from all co-researchers as well as from the PR and the Chief Executive as sponsor. These three influences mean that organisational politics and power relationships should also be seen as connected to and influenced by the role duality of all participants. Both the politics and the power relationships must be managed throughout the research. The ideal is that this is done by the participants as well as by the PR. Reflection is a key aspect of this management. The individual meetings immediately before the main research and during the research were opportunities for discussing these issues as was the C1 review session. These issues were also identified and reflected on in the PR's reflective journal.

#### **3.2.3. Pilot Project and Pre-Step**

##### 3.2.3.a The Pilot Project as an Action Research Pre-Step

The pilot project was enacted as a 'Pre-Step'. This term for the preparatory stage of the AR was introduced by Coghlan and Brannick (2005).

Coghlan & Brannick's pre-step looks at why the project is necessary or desirable. It examines the context of the project both internally and externally. It assesses the forces driving change internally and the degree of choice about how the system

responds to these. They propose that following these assessments the pre-step should also involve a definition of the desired future and they identify that this is critical in defining the boundaries of the project. A major focus of the pre-step is on the establishment of a collaborative relationship with those who have or need to have ownership of the key questions being examined. Another key part of the pre-step is setting out the researcher's preunderstanding of the organisation and the need for the research project.

Gill and Johnson (2002) also describe a preparatory process, although they do not use the term 'pre-step', and they compare it to the entry and contracting stages in consultancy. They put the emphasis for this stage of the work on what they describe as 'psychological contracting' in which motive, goals and the locus of control are discussed between the researcher and those collaborating in the research. The important issue, at the pre-step stage, is the views of the co-researchers/participants on mutual control of the project, according to Gill and Johnson.

In this research project the pre-step addressed the following issues:

- A description of the PR's understanding of the need for this research project
- A description of the proposed research topic and the working title
- Giving the potential co-researchers the opportunity to reflect on and change or make changes to the research topic and the working title for the project
- Giving a description of AR with explanations of both the insider and the participatory approaches
- Describing and discussing the role duality of the PR
- Getting the agreement in principle of the members of the EC to participate in the AR and to take on the described roles of co-researchers
- Exploring the potential co-researchers' understanding of the implications of and their agreement to the emancipatory and critical approaches being taken to the research
- Identifying and discussing ethical issues
- Establishing a collaborative relationship for the purposes of the research

This approach was developed by the PR with the support of his research supervisor, making use of the pre-step approaches of Coghlan and Brannick (2005) and Gill and Johnson (2002), but with greater similarity to Gill and Johnson's approach.

#### 3.2.3.b Preunderstanding and the Pre-Step

As the pre-step was introducing the proposed research topic and the research approach to the potential research group and working to establish an agreement on both and on collaboration in the research, it was essential to inform the group of the PR's preunderstanding.

The points that were shared with the co-researchers were:

- The organisation does not have a good overall planning process for service development, but tends to respond to significant needs, demands or environmental requirements
- The current service development process is too dependent on decisions at the top of the organisation
- The organisation's processes for developing and supporting people to lead and work on service development projects need to be improved
- There are widely differing management views between those, like the principal researcher, who favour an emergent process and those who advocate a planned process
- Methodologies for reviewing and assessing the progress and success of projects are not applied to all service development projects

#### 3.2.3.c Preparation

The preparation for the pre-step was based on the learning from a literature review of IAR, PAR and the critical approach to AR. Consultations with the academic supervisor and with the critical friend were significant elements of the preparation. The pre-step was planned to be carried out with the full EC if all members agreed to become involved. It was made clear by the PR that taking part was optional for every individual.

The Executive Committee consisted of seven members:

- The Chief Executive
- The Deputy Chief Executive with responsibility for Administration
- The Deputy Chief Executive with responsibility for Services (the PR)
- Three Regional Directors, each with responsibility for all services in a geographical area (the Regional Directors reported to the Chief Executive through the Deputy Chief Executive/Principal Researcher)
- The Director of Psychiatry

Documents related to ethics for the pilot project are in Appendix 1.

#### 3.2.3.d Pre-step actions with the research group

The work with the research group began with an advance briefing of the group at a regular EC meeting in October 2007. In January 2008 the PR had individual meetings all potential co-researchers, first with the Chief Executive and then all other members of the EC, to brief them, respond to questions and obtain informed consent to participation in the pre-step. All EC members agreed to take part in this pre-step project. There were two sessions with the whole group, one in February and one in March, 2008. These sessions were audio recorded.

The first group session which lasted for two hours addressed the following areas:

- A description of the PR's understanding of the need for this research project
- A description of the proposed research topic and question
- Exploring the co-researchers' interest in and agreement on the working research proposal
- Giving a description of AR with explanations of both the insider and the participatory approaches
- Exploring the co-researchers' willingness to work on the research in a collaborative way
- Introducing and discussing the implications of taking an emancipatory approach
- Describing and discussing the role duality of the researcher
- Identifying and discussing ethical issues

The second group session, some four weeks later, addressed the following areas:

- Giving the co-researchers the opportunity to reflect on and influence changes in the research topic and the working title for the project,
- Exploring the group's understanding of and agreement to the emancipatory and critical approaches being taken in the research
- Establishing a collaborative relationship for the purposes of the research

There was considerable discussion in both sessions on the research topic of the EC's role in relation to service development as it was presented to the group, but no major change to the research topic or alternative topic emerged from the discussion. Following the two sessions the analysis identified three major themes in the discussions, with sets of related ideas. These themes were:

1. The role of the Executive Committee
2. Creativity
3. Service Development

Members of the group were more interested in discussing these topics than in discussing IAR, CPAR, collaboration, emancipation or empowerment.

Co-researchers were positive but cautious about emancipation and empowerment as an approach. The major concerns voiced were the responsibilities that the EC had on the one hand, and on the other, the potential negative effects of increasing emancipation and empowerment of service users, family members and staff. This was seen as a particular risk in an external environment in which there was criticism of services for people with disabilities. The concerns raised were also about a potentially critical approach to the organisation. There was limited focus on other aspects of the critical action research approach and ultimately the group expressed willingness to collaborate in the project using this critical approach.

### 3.2.3.e Starting the Action Research Approach in the Pre-Step

The pre-step was an opportunity to put in place an ongoing approach that used careful preparation for each session with the co-researchers; consultation with both supervisor and critical friend; presentation of the PR's research focus and key elements of his preunderstanding of the issues to be addressed; recording of the group's work; establishing a group reflective process and assisting the group to move from one step in the research to the next steps.

## 3.3. The Main Research

### Introduction

Formal agreement to conduct the main AR project was necessary. Individual meetings were held with all the members of the EC as potential co-researchers. The approach to the research and potential issues arising in conducting CPAR in an insider fashion were discussed. In the discussion the PR made it clear to each person that they had an individual choice as to whether or not they participated in the research. Written consent to participating in the research was obtained from all members of the EC. Ethical approval was received from the Research Ethics Committees in Dublin City University and the service organisation.

Documents related to ethics for the main research are in Appendix 2.

There were three major AR cycles across the group research as a whole. These were numbered as Cycles One, Two and Three (C1, C2, C3). As identified in the literature (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) there were multiple smaller cycles within these major cycles. C1 (seven months) concentrated on working on understanding, reflection, analysis, provision and review of information and beginning to develop plans. It ended with the group review and learning session, which produced initial steps for C2. C2 lasted for eleven months and included a three month gap. It worked through

numerous smaller cycles using different steps in some cycles. This cycle was ended by the early retirement of the Chief Executive and the appointment of a new Chief Executive, both of whom were co-researchers in the group. C3 began with a new agreement with co-researchers to continue the AR for a limited amount of time and again worked through several small cycles before concluding after eight months. There will be greater detail on these cycles in the Story chapter.

The main research is described under headings which reflect the recommended and necessary processes and actions and their use at first person and second person action research levels. The headings are:

1. Revisiting the principal researcher's preunderstanding
2. Introduction of the research topic to the research group
3. Combined methodological process
4. Implementation by the principal researcher of the piloted methodology and processes
5. Development and implementation of processes and methods
6. Two major elements of action research as conducted
7. Reflection
8. Ethics
9. Robustness and Validity

### **3.3.1. Revisiting the Principal Researcher's Preunderstanding**

The preunderstanding as set out before the pre-step was limited, so it was revisited and recorded more comprehensively and in more detail in July 2009 before the main AR started with the group of co-researchers. This revisiting included the PR's reflections on his contributions to the two pre-step group sessions. This was part of the overall research process to contribute to the group's AR and to enable the PR to reflect on that preunderstanding when the AR with the group was complete.

The headline points from the revised preunderstanding shared with the group are:

- The [Executive Committee] view is that successful service development is planned and organised from the top of the organisation down and that this is the only way to do it 'properly'
- The views of [Executive Committee] members in relation to change and management tend to be traditional
- Creativity for service development is blocked or slowed in the organisation because of the societal, [funder] and organisational shift to risk aversion and because there is much more focus on systems than on individual actions that may produce good results for service users.
- The organisation says that it involves staff in change and it does, but often in a controlled way using plans and templates.
- Service development is happening in the organisation. It tends to happen in a way that is clearly identified in the literature on organisational change. There are multiple separate projects. Some link and overlap, while others do not.
- One of the biggest challenges experienced is the competition between managing the operation of the delivery of service and the management of service development and change more generally
- It seems to be difficult for the [Executive Committee] to develop and agree on a vision for what services should be aiming to achieve and what they should be like. Within the [Executive Committee] there are different views about what service models should be developed, different views about how to make changes and different understandings of what service development is about.
- People work hard on service development.
- Service developments often seem to depend on the person or people involved. These people can have a significant impact on the focus, the approach and the outcome of the project.
- The starting point for the research is that the organisation needs to have in place a culture and a social system that encourages, enables and supports changes that are thought of and developed locally. This means enabling people to have a deeper understanding of what the services are about and enabling people with a

deeper understanding to use that understanding to develop the services. The principal researcher believes that these ideas fit with the concept of emancipation for services users, families and staff.

The first person element of AR is often described as important both for the PR's learning and for wider learning for other researchers and practitioners (McNiff, 2002). This self-analysis paragraph, which was in addition to the shared preunderstanding on the research topic, gives a short picture of where the PR thought he was at the beginning of the main research.

*'He is too conforming. He is not sufficiently good at advocating for, planning and supporting radical change in services. He takes on too many different projects and major tasks and so some do not get properly addressed or some things get left for significant periods because he does not address them. He is constantly trying to balance what he sees as the over control by some other members of the [Executive Committee]. He is currently trying to engage in service development that is more participatory, more empowering and more emancipatory through the [X] project.'*  
(Principal Researcher's Preunderstanding, July 2009)

This document is in Appendix 5.

### **3.3.2. Introduction of the Research Topic to the Research Group**

The beginning of C1 was a reintroduction of the research topic and its context to the research group. In Group Session 1 (GS1) of C1 the co-researchers were given a written document entitled 'My Perspective on Reasons for Undertaking this Research' (see Appendix 6). That document covered a number of issues that were relevant at this stage:

- The research topic
- The research approach
- The principal researcher's perspective on reasons for undertaking the research

- The dual roles
- The initial plan for the first three group sessions
- Three areas for reflection on the Executive Committee's current role re service development
- Three areas for reflection on the Executive Committee's potential future role
- A question: 'Overall how do my perspective (i.e. the principal researcher) and your reflections on these questions influence your thoughts about this research?'

The co-researchers were then given three areas for reflection on the current role and the three on the future role that had emerged from the principal researcher's preunderstanding and from points made by the co-researchers during the pre-step sessions. How this was worked on is described in the Story chapter.

### **3.3.3. Combined Methodological Processes**

As this AR involved both IAR processes and methods and CPAR processes and methods, this section summarises how these were combined and used.

Conducting AR which involved both CPAR and IAR meant that it was important that a number of issues were identified, understood and addressed. These included ethical issues, bias, dual roles and potential tensions.

Consideration of issues related to ethics, bias, dual role, power and relationships led to a number of interventions designed to acknowledge and address these issues:

- Individual meetings with co-researchers at key points in the action research
- Briefing of the group on both CPAR and IAR
- Involvement of the PR's academic supervisor and critical friend in considering how to approach and manage the work with the research group and in discussing reflections and analysis

- Involving co-researchers in taking records of group sessions, reviewing and analysing data, writing review documents, developing plans for group sessions and other elements of the action research
- Aiming to ensure that ethical, role duality and relationship issues raised by co-researchers were discussed by the research group
- Making and collecting records of all elements of the AR as it progressed
- Making Reflective Journal entries following group sessions and other elements of the AR. The Reflective Journal was particularly important as it enabled the PR to identify issues arising in relation to this being IAR, to consider how to address them and to seek any necessary support from his critical friend or supervisor.

#### **3.3.4. Implementation of Piloted Methodology and Processes**

The methodology and process elements that were piloted in the pre-step and used in the main research were:

- The establishment of the PR's Reflective Journal and recording reflections at each significant step in the process (for example following a group session with the co-researchers)
- Meetings with the Academic Supervisor as a key element of learning from and in relation to the research, and also to plan the research actions
- The establishment of a critical friend and consultation with her on many aspects of the research. Costa and Kallick (1993) define a critical friend as:

*'a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward.'* (p. 50)

The role of Critical Friend is identified in AR literature, especially that with a significant academic element or focus. Melrose (2001) suggests using critical friends to assist the

researcher with meta-reflection contributing to quality and rigour. Zuber-Skerrit & Fletcher (2007) suggest that researchers can get feedback from critical friends as well as from their supervisor on how their thesis work is contributing to knowledge and on problems or shortcomings with their work, especially at early stages. The collaboration with a critical friend is of particular importance for a sole insider researcher. While some literature recommends using multiple critical friends in this research, for reasons of confidentiality, there was only one critical friend. She undertook to treat this research confidentially. The group were made aware of her role.

The critical friend in this study is an organisation development consultant who works primarily with organisations in public service areas such as education and health. She has experience of offering role consultation to individuals and so understands the process of feedback. She has considerable research experience both academically and as part of her work. She also has previous experience in organisations providing services to people with disabilities including the one in which this study was conducted. The critical friend and the principal researcher are married to each other.

### **3.3.5. Development and implementation of processes and methods**

In AR, particularly PAR, there are likely to be changes and developments in the processes and methods that are planned and used. These changes arise both from the learning of the principal researcher and from the knowledge, expertise, learning and contributions of the co-researchers.

In this research, this meant that in addition to the processes and methods adopted from the pre-step other processes were developed as the research progressed. As the co-researchers became more involved and embraced the participatory model more fully the following elements changed or developed as the research progressed:

- Move from audio recording in the pre-step to written records in the main research. The audio records were very detailed and were not considered to be necessary as the focus of the research was the group rather than individual

members of the group. This decision was made following consultation with the supervisor. In C1 the PR took the written records. In the C2 and C3 three of the co-researchers and the PR took the records. Audio recording was used for the final session of the AR because of the length and complexity of that session and the importance of being clear about what decisions and agreements were made at the end of the research. This session was transcribed by the PR.

- From the beginning of C1 the PR electronically circulated the draft record of the group sessions and asked for corrections or changes. Following any feedback from co-researchers the agreed record was circulated
- From the beginning of the C2 co-researchers became more involved in planning the steps for the next group session or the next actions to be taken. This reduced the involvement of the supervisor and the critical friend in this element of the research and increased the participatory element. This was a development in the group's effective functioning as co-researchers. It was particularly influenced by the group action learning review session at the end of C1.
- Group review sessions were held at key points in the research spiral

### **3.4. Two Major Elements of the Action Research as Conducted**

#### **3.4.1. Group Sessions**

Group sessions with all co-researchers were a core element of the AR throughout the three cycles. There was no standard detailed plan for every session. The design of a group session depended on the stage of the AR and the agreed plan for steps to be taken during the session. However, most sessions included a short introduction followed by feedback from reviews, analyses or plans. These issues were discussed by the group and discussion led to proposals and, usually, agreement on the next steps to be taken. The PR's practice was to end sessions with a reflective period. This did not always happen, because the group had run out of time.

The focus of the group sessions varied, depending on where the work was in an AR cycle. Sometimes an initial and major focus was on reflection on what had been done in the last session or in the inter-session work. In some sessions the major focus was on feedback from analysis or review of data or the steps being taken by the group. In other sessions proposals were brought to the group for consideration following the previous sessions and inter-session work, usually by at least two researchers. In sessions, at various points, the major discussion was on the overall plan for the AR or the plan for the next steps.

The records of the group sessions were taken as written notes. While there were some direct quotations, the more common method was the essence of what individuals were saying as well as descriptions of the different stages of the session, decisions, plans or other content. In C1 the PR took the records. These were circulated electronically to the rest of the group after the session, asking for feedback on accuracy and suggested changes. Once this feedback was received the record was edited and recirculated. There was a much higher level of feedback in C1 than in the other two cycles. In C2 and C3 the record taking was shared between three co-researchers and the PR. When a co-researcher took the record or part of a record it was sent to the PR who did editing or combining and circulated it for feedback. As before, after time for feedback the record was confirmed or edited and recirculated. This process was important because it meant that the group session records were agreed and shared and so were an element of the participation.

#### **3.4.2. Inter-session Action Research**

The other major element of the AR was the research work done by the PR and/or co-researchers between group sessions. This inter-session work was done individually, in pairs or in sub-groups of three. This work involved data analysis; reviews of elements of the AR, or of organisational or national policies or documents; developing proposals for next steps or future work; reflection on the EC's role or on the AR processes and related learning and, finally, contributions to plans for the next group session.

In some instances the guidelines for the inter-session work were agreed during a group session. This discussion and agreement was sometimes in response to a proposal brought to the group by individual researchers or some combination of the PR and one or two co-researchers. More often the purpose and outline of the work would be agreed at the end of the session and the PR would be asked to prepare a framework or guidance on the work. This was normally done soon after the session and circulated electronically. In some instances this guidance work was done jointly with a co-researcher. The level of co-researcher involvement in this work increased from the beginning of C2. This was because of the review at the end of C1. The PR continued to consult his supervisor and his critical friend, particularly when this was needed because of issues such as complexity of the group approach at that point or a time gap in the AR sessions.

Much of this inter-session work produced documents that were circulated to group members in advance of or at the next session. These documents included:

- Written analysis results
- Review documents
- Learning Document
- Mind maps
- Information on the topic being examined
- Plan for the next group session
- Proposal on actions to be taken following discussion
- Content proposals

### **3.5. Reflection**

Reflection is a key process in AR. It is identified as contributing to learning, to analysis, to improving research and professional practice and to advancing the AR through its cycles (McKernan, 1991; McNiff, 2000; Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). In AR there needs to be reflection *in* action as well as *on* previous action (Kakabadse et al., 2007).

Critical reflection is seen as important in bringing about change in AR, underpinned by Critical Theory (Chiu, 2006; Johansson & Lindhult, 2008; Ravitch & Wirth, 2007).

The PR worked to enable and to encourage co-researchers to be reflective during the AR and to use their reflections to learn and to assist the AR. Reflection was introduced to the co-researchers in the first briefing document given to them in the pre-step. In GS1 in C1 it was identified to the co-researchers that reflection is a valuable part of AR and it was suggested that each of them might set up a reflective folder. The PR is not aware of any co-researcher setting up a reflective folder or journal. When feedback on reflections on the pre-step was given to the group in GS3, consideration of how reflection had helped with the pre-step was included: this feedback encouraged co-researchers to use reflection.

Reflection by all researchers was built into all elements of the AR from the beginning of the group research. Reflection on each group session at the end of the session was proposed as a routine element of the group's work. When there was a plan for the areas to be addressed a 'review of session' slot was always included. Reflection was included in frameworks for inter-session work when this was appropriate for the work being undertaken. It was also included in the work when pairs of researchers worked on proposals or plans. These were reflected on within the group as part of deciding how to combine proposals or to select one pair's proposal or plan. Where it was appropriate, reflection was built into review and analysis work. An example of this is the Action Learning- based review session at the end of C1 which included reflection on the EC's role, on service development and on the AR process.

### *Reflective Journal*

For all action researchers the use of a reflective journal is one important element of reflexivity (Meynell, 2005). Authors writing about undertaking thesis research emphasise its importance (Zuber-Skerrit & Fletcher, 2007). The PR kept a reflective journal throughout the AR. The framework for the entries was Experience, Reflection, Conclusions/Conceptualisation and Actions. This was an adaptation of Kolb's Model (1984) as proposed by Coghlan & Brannick (2005). Entries followed group sessions,

individual meetings, inter-session work, meetings with supervisor or critical friend or other events or contexts as the AR progressed.

During the AR with the research group the reflective journal assisted the PR in understanding what was happening; how the processes were working; what changes he needed to make to his first person AR or to propose to the group for the group AR; what plans needed to be made or proposed. It helped him to identify ethical issues and what supports the group or group members needed. It also helped him to cope with the role duality and the dynamic, power, confusing and political issues that he experienced. Following the group AR the reflective journal contributed to the data analysis and the conclusions. This will be explained in those chapters.

### **3.6. Ethics**

There are a number of ethical issues that are of particular importance in action research, with both IAR and PAR requiring particular considerations.

#### **3.6.1. Participation**

The plan of the PR was that the members of the EC would be the members of the core research group and so would be co-researchers. Before and during the pre-step pilot project the PR anticipated that there might be a cycle or cycles that included stakeholders who were not members of the EC, that is other staff, service users or family members. It became clear to the PR that because of his organisational role this would not be possible, based on the review of literature on research ethics, especially that related to action research (Zeni, 1998), from discussions with the supervisor and from preparing the submissions to and communication with both Research Ethics Committees. Thus the research was clarified as being clearly bounded IAR conducted within the group of EC members including the PR.

### **3.6.2. Informed Consent**

Informed consent is less than straightforward in AR because the research evolves over time, but this is especially so in CPAR as all major decisions about what happens are taken by the group rather than by the PR. This was addressed in a number of ways:

- Before the pre-step pilot project the planned research and particularly the pilot were explained to the EC. Individual meetings were held with all potential co-researchers and they were given the necessary explanatory document. Their consent, including signed consent, to participate in the pilot was obtained. As part of the pilot project what both insider and participatory action research are and what they would mean for the members of the EC was explained and discussed. This enabled them to broadly agree to participate in the main research and to raise concerns. Their status as co-researchers rather than subjects was also explained and explored.
- Before the commencement of the main research informed consent was obtained in accordance with the requirements of the research ethics committees of DCU and the PR's organisation. This was done through briefing the whole research group, meeting each individual member, providing written information and getting both verbal and signed consent.
- Consent to keep the records of participation of the two co-researchers who retired during the AR and to use their data as part of the research was obtained through individual meetings with them before they retired.
- When the Chief Executive of the organisation changed a research group meeting was held to consider whether or not to continue with the AR. All co-researchers agreed to participate in a third cycle with a broadly agreed time scale.

The consent documents and all other relevant ethics documents are included in Appendix 2.

### **3.6.3. Confidentiality**

The literature identifies confidentiality as a significant issue in relation to IAR (Coghlan

& Brannick, 2005; Gill & Johnson, 2002). This is especially so in IAR within a small, senior group. Confidentiality was discussed with the group during the pre-step pilot. While the records of the group sessions that were shared with and used by the action research group identified individuals – which co-researchers found more useful than anonymous records – those shared with the PR's supervisor or critical friend were anonymous, as were analysis documents produced following the end of the group cycles of AR. Confidentiality was not an issue that was raised by co-researchers in individual meetings or in group reviews.

Given how easy it may be to identify the organisation, the group and individuals, confidentiality has been an on-going ethical concern of the PR. It is clear that the thesis cannot be made available to others for some years and that anything written about the AR will require a close attention to maintaining confidentiality.

#### **3.6.4. Avoiding harm**

This was addressed by reflecting on sessions and their records and identifying and dealing with any issues identified. It was also addressed by having a number of individual meetings with co-researchers during the AR. These enabled co-researchers to raise and discuss issues in a confidential setting. Ethical issues were also identified by co-researchers' review sessions, through reflection and in review documents. The PR was aware of these issues, especially in the context of his role duality, was respectful of all co-researchers and did not give critical or negative feedback in relation to individuals. Where necessary, issues were discussed with the PR's critical friend or supervisor. These steps helped to address the concerns identified by Coghlan & Shani (2005) and Brydon-Miller, et al., (2006) that there must be a focus on ethical aspects throughout the research as questions and issues arise at different points.

The ethical use and safekeeping of the records of the group sessions were an element of the AR which helped to progress the research. They were treated confidentially throughout the research. In the first cycle these were taken by the PR, circulated for

confirmation or change and circulated as the final version. In Cycles 2 and 3 records were taken by co-researchers and the PR and the same dual circulation process was used. This meant that all these records were effectively agreed by the whole group. It also meant that if any researcher had concerns about what they were reported as saying or doing this could, if necessary, be addressed.

### **3.6.5. Role Duality**

IAR has particular ethical issues related to the role duality of the researcher, how to manage relationships with participants and the problematic choices which may emerge in the course of the research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Holian, 1999; Moore, 2007). These issues were managed through on-going awareness; the use of the reflective journal; consultation with co-researchers in joint inter-session work; discussion in individual meetings with co-researchers; opportunities for co-researchers to raise issues in reflective sections of sessions; group review sessions; and consultation with the PR's supervisor and critical friend. The role duality of the co-researchers emerged as an issue during the AR. This was identified by a small number of co-researchers both in individual meetings and in group sessions. The principal researcher needed to be aware of this issue and how it could affect the positions and careers of co-researchers and to work to ensure that unless a co-researcher wished to take risks they were not expected to do so and nor were they challenged in ways that would put them at risk.

### **3.6.6. Group Decision Making**

A major way in which ethical issues were managed throughout the research was to take decisions or actions based on the agreement of the whole group. This PAR approach was often difficult and may have contributed to the limited progress on experimental actions and change in the research. The decisions on proposals, plans and actions were always made by the group. These will be addressed in the Findings and Discussion and Conclusions chapters.

### **3.7. Robustness and Validity of the Action Research**

The Literature Review describes the differences between action research and positivist and scientific research in terms of approaches to robustness and validity (Coughlan & Coughlan, 2002; Gill and Johnson 2002; Roth, Shani & Leary, 2007). Guided by the literature as well as his own knowledge of validity the PR worked to have the highest possible standards of robustness and validity.

During the group action research the actions taken to develop validity and robustness were:

- Setting out the PR's approach to the research at the beginning of the pre-step and at the beginning of the main research his perception of service development, how the EC enacted its role and the reasons for undertaking the research and questions for the co-researchers to reflect on to begin the research
- Documenting the PR's preunderstanding before beginning the main research with the group.
- Recording all the research steps in
  - group session records
  - group, sub-group and PR review and analysis documents
  - group, sub-group and PR proposal and plan documents
  - records of individual meetings
  - group review records
  - electronic communication documents to and from co-researchers regarding session records, inter-session work, preparation for next steps and arrangements for meetings, etc.
  - the research journal of the PR

- Gathering and managing as much data as possible both for analysis and to enable the story to be told
  
- Working to have as high a level of participation and therefore contribution of the co-researchers to the robustness as possible. This included:
  - Working to enable the setting out of the different views of and negotiation between different members of the research group
  - Involving co-researchers in reviews and analysis during the research
  - Involving co-researchers in developing and writing documents, proposals and plans
  - Facilitating reflection by co-researchers during the on-going AR process.
  - Facilitating the making of all major decisions by the group rather than by the PR
  - Running a review session at the end of C1
  - Holding a group review session following completion of the group research work
  
- Using a personal Reflective Journal throughout the research and using these reflections in order to be as fully aware as was possible of the issues involved in the research and of ways of addressing them and including these reflections in the data analysis following the end of the group research

In relation to the data analysis following the group research the work to achieve appropriate robustness and validity were:

- Reviewing relevant literature to examine appropriate methods of data analysis and seeking the supervisor's advice on the approach chosen
- Choosing to use a critical hermeneutic approach for the overall data analysis. This approach enabled and encouraged the PR to develop results that were not simply his understanding. An important part of this data analysis was the use of critical reflection during the data analysis. This gave a thorough way of making explicit and addressing the PR's perspective and bias

- The validation of some of the conclusions and claims from the PR's data analysis by linking them to the views and claims of co-researchers or of the whole research group

In writing the thesis, the validity and quality issues were addressed as follows:

- Describing the PR's reasons for proposing the research topic and relating these to his perspectives, values, preunderstanding and assumptions
- Telling the story of the journey through the AR
- Describing the engagement with the co-researchers in this chapter, in the Story, in the Findings chapter and in the Discussion
- Clear information on how the data were collected and the sources of the data.
- What records and other documents were produced and used
- Addressing executive and organisational power in the Findings and Discussion chapters

### **3.8. Data Analysis Approach and Methods**

#### Introduction

This description is of the approach to the data analysis and the methods used, primarily describes the analysis done by the PR following the group action research. The description includes all data collection during the group research and it refers to the connecting and comparing of the PR's analysis with co-researcher analysis during the group research.

Different AR projects use different approaches to and methods of data analysis. The approaches used are influenced by the philosophical and methodological approaches, by whether or not it was participatory and by its relationship to academia. An approach which is used in and advocated for PAR involves the co-researchers in the analysis (Melrose, 2001). This approach alone is generally not sufficient to meet the academic requirements for doctoral research. It is seen that the doctoral candidate,

who is effectively principal researcher, must do their own analysis at an academic or meta-learning level (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005; Davis, 2007; Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher, 2007). Therefore, even though analysis has been conducted by co-researchers throughout this project it was necessary for the PR to undertake an analysis that is appropriate for the research approach used. Nevertheless in conducting this analysis the analyses and reviews conducted during the AR with the group of co-researchers were used to contribute to the whole picture and, at some points, to challenge the individual analysis of the PR.

### **3.8.1. Data Collected**

AR is a complex process with multiple types and sources of data so it is especially important to specify data and data collection methods. (Coughlan & Coughlan, 2002; McNiff, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In this project the analysis was conducted using all data that were collected. These were:

- a) Records of preparation for work with the group
- b) Group session records
- c) Records of work done by the PR between group sessions
- d) Records of inter-session work done by the PR and co-researchers
- e) Documents created as part of the group action research
- f) The PR's reflective journal entries on sessions and on actions and events between sessions
- g) Record of the sequence of the AR cycles
- h) The Context as data

These headings are now expanded:

#### **3.8.1.a. Records of preparation for work with group:**

- 1. Planning
- 2. Discussions and reviews with critical friend
- 3. Discussions and reviews with supervisor
- 4. Individual meetings with group members

5. Working with an individual co-researcher or a pair of co-researchers to develop a plan for the next session or the direction of the AR
6. Emails to co-researchers
7. Plan for session with group

3.8.1.b. Group session records:

1. Group session records written by the PR, circulated for agreement by group members, corrected following feedback and re-circulated
2. Group session records written by a co-researcher, circulated by the PR for agreement by group members, corrected following feedback and re-circulated
3. Flip chart records
4. Audio recordings

3.8.1.c. Records of work done by the PR between group sessions:

1. Developing and setting out a framework document for individuals, pairs or sub-groups to do work between group sessions
2. Reviewing the previous session and preparing for the next session based on what was agreed by the group
3. Checking with individuals or pairs on the work they were to do before the next session (emails or notes)

3.8.1.d. Records of inter-session work by the PR and co-researchers

1. Analysis of data and presentation of findings documents
2. Proposal documents
3. Plans for the AR(next steps, medium or longer term plans)
4. Documents on information from outside the group
5. Review documents

3.8.1.e. Documents created as part of group action research

1. Documents the PR wrote for the information of the group
2. Documents the PR wrote as agreed by the group
3. Documents the PR wrote jointly with another group member
4. Documents written by other group members

3.8.1.f. The PR's reflective journal entries on sessions and on actions and events between sessions

3.8.1.g. Record of sequence of AR cycles including:

1. Dates agreed for sessions
2. Sessions postponed or cancelled
3. Changes made as a result of events outside the AR

3.8.1.h. The Context as Data

1. Major events happening in the organisation
2. Major events in the external environment
3. Time since the previous group session
4. Whether or not a group session was postponed, rescheduled or shortened in time

### **3.8.2. Choice of Data Analysis method**

As there is no specific method for the analysis of data from AR it was necessary to do work to inform a decision on what method should be used. A range of methods for the analysis of qualitative data was reviewed. This included publications by Wolcott (1994) and Miles and Huberman (1994) each describing a number of qualitative data analysis methods. Three specific methods were also reviewed. They were Framework Analysis (Richie & Spencer, 1994), Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and Critical Hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998; Kincheloe, McLaren,

& Steinberg, 2011; Kögler, 1996). From this initial review a more detailed consideration was given to Grounded Theory and Critical Hermeneutics. The ultimate decision was that the analysis would be guided by the Critical Hermeneutic approach. This was because of the relevance of Critical Hermeneutics and how it addressed data analysis in AR that had been based on a critical approach. Critical Hermeneutics can be seen as being at a transition or linkage point between Hermeneutics and Critical Theory.

### **3.8.3. Critical Hermeneutics**

Critical Hermeneutics is an approach that takes account of both Hermeneutics as more traditionally known and Critical Theory. It developed from a debate between Gadamer, who took a more conservative approach and Habermas, who took a critical approach (Crotty, 1998). It is critical because it raises questions about the values and ideologies that underpin both knowledge and social practice. A practical intention of the critique is towards the emancipation of people who are disadvantaged by social power structures. Another purpose of critical hermeneutic analysis is a critique that will work to reveal power within social and cultural contexts. These are firm links to Critical Theory and Critical Participatory Action Research.

Critical Hermeneutic analysis depends on the researcher's preunderstanding (Gadamer's 'historical understanding') and current understanding and the relationship between them as a major element of data analysis. This aligns with critically based AR which stresses the importance of the researcher's preunderstanding and the value of recording that before beginning the research or as an early element of it.

The key elements of Critical Hermeneutics data analysis for this research are:

- The primary concern is with the meaning of the text or the text-analogue (The actions in this research)

The use of the Hermeneutic Circle to

- create a dialectic between understanding of the whole and interpretation of its parts

- create a dialectic between what we know and what we have learned
  - move between emic (relates to how the participants think, perceive, categorise and behave) and etic (shifts the focus to more objective categories, interpretations and explanations by the principal researcher)
  - enable the researcher to gain distance from personal assumptions
- Critical reflection by the researcher while conducting the analysis is an essential element of Critical Hermeneutics
  - Positioning themes and meanings in relation to existing research
  - One of its purposes is to expose power imbalances and to challenge the status quo

#### **3.8.4. Conducting Data Analysis**

The analysis by the PR consisted of a cyclical analysis process rather than a linear process. Sometimes this consisted of working through all the data and at other times through sub sections of the data, for example the data from one major action research cycle. The analysis addressed both the content of the research and the AR processes. Even though the analysis was a cyclical process for the PR the term 'cycle' is not used to describe it as this can confuse it with the AR. Instead the term 'stage' is used.

##### **3.8.4.a. Themes**

Having decided to use Critical Hermeneutics and established the major elements of doing this, a review of all the records was conducted. This established a number of factors in relation to the data:

- The order of the research and of all the different elements
- The order of all the records and therefore of the data
- The existence of all the data
- The different types of data

Following this review the PR developed mind maps to show the links and relationships between the whole and the parts of the research. It became clear that there were two main areas: content and action research processes.

The analysis began with a review of all the themes and concepts under the heading of Content and their relationship to the Research Questions. All the themes and sub themes that were identified in GS1 & GS2 in C1 were grouped, reviewed and regrouped. The records of all the other group sessions and other records, especially the records of inter-session work were analysed to track the persistence of themes across the cycles and to identify the emergence of new themes. The frequency of occurrence of each theme and sub-theme in each session, in inter-session work and in each cycle was calculated. This demonstrated the persistence of themes within and across cycles. Reflection on this analysis showed that it was necessary to identify the initiation and 'ownership' of themes: were themes maintained by individuals, sub-groups or the whole group? This identification and reflection was important because this was group research. The reflection also highlighted the need to identify group decisions or consensus in relation to themes and to consider whether the group was discussing them as descriptions of the present role and context or proposals for changes for the future.

One way to check the perceptions of the PR was to review the records of sessions and documents where co-researchers produced, discussed or reviewed themes. This helped to verify whether or not themes were really group themes rather than themes for individual co-researchers. Work to identify the meaning of the themes also helped to confirm whole-group themes and to identify what the different themes meant in the context of the group.

The next stage of analysis was relating the parts to the whole, that is relating the themes on the role, as parts, to the group, as the whole. An outcome of this analysis was confirmation of the earlier conclusion that the group as the whole must be related to both the themes and other role issues and to the AR processes. That was because the research was focusing on a group that was both the EC and the research group.

All of the analysis of the data to develop themes and to identify their meanings was assisted by consultation with the critical friend. This included questions and challenges as to the substance of some proposed themes; the validity of frequency of occurrence as a measure of robustness of a theme; the importance of the group when examining themes and discussion on reflections.

The meaning of the themes was established through detailed examination of all the elements of content analysis and all the results that had come from those.

#### Positioning themes and meanings in relation to existing research

Taking the Critical Hermeneutics approach of positioning themes and meanings in relation to research literature, the themes were initially linked to the literature as it had been reviewed up to this stage of the analysis. This positioning was revised following updating of the literature review.

#### 3.8.4.b. Dialectic between what we know and what we have learned

Another element of Critical Hermeneutics Analysis is the dialectic between what we know and what we have learned. To identify the principal researcher's understanding, all the documents that set out his preunderstanding were reviewed. These were:

- The Research Proposal that was part of the application to the Professional Doctoral Programme (2006) (Appendix 3)
- The Briefing Document to the Executive Committee at the beginning of the Pilot (Pre Step) Project (February 2008) (Appendix 4)
- The Document of The Principal Researcher's Preunderstanding (July 2009) (Appendix 5)
- The notes for the introduction of the Executive Committee to the action research in the first main research session (October 2009) (Appendix 6)

The next elements of addressing this dialectic involved:

- The dialectic between what the co-researchers knew and what they learned from reflections and reviews in group sessions and review documents produced by co-researchers
- The principal researcher's reflective journal entries throughout the action research
- The principal researcher's reflections and records of learning during the data analysis

#### 3.8.4.c. Moving between emic and etic

The emic approach relates to how the participants think, perceive, categorise and behave. The etic approach is more scientific and shifts the focus to more objective categories, interpretations and explanations by the principal researcher. The emic analysis was undertaken through consideration of analysis by co-researchers and joint analysis by the principal researcher and individual or pairs of co-researchers. Given the principal researcher's roles as part of the group and part of the Executive Committee it was inevitable that there was an inclination towards emic analysis. Etic analysis was worked on through the use of mind maps, charts and diagrams; through factually checking results that were emerging from the analysis, for example levels of participation, enactment of group plans, time gaps in the action research cycles. It was also enhanced through consultation with the critical friend, academic supervisor and reference to relevant literature. The etic analysis raised questions about or confirmed some findings from the emic analysis and vice versa. Moving between the two also helped to keep the principal researcher's interpretation of the findings as open as possible and to avoid rapid biased findings or findings that ignored the inside knowledge and understanding.

### **3.8.5. Analysis of Action Research Processes**

This involved detailed reviews of all records in order to identify how the action research processes worked, how they developed and how they changed. The first conclusions were those of the principal researcher. These were related to the views of the co-researchers as identified from reflection, review documents and review sessions. The conclusions were also discussed with the critical friend and positioned in relation to literature on action research, especially on IAR and CPAR/PAR.

This analysis contributed to results in relation to the first person element of the action research, in relation to how the group carried out the action research process and in relation to the level of usefulness of CPAR or any form of PAR with an executive team.

The first person element analysis included:

- Embedded analysis: reflections on sessions and on how the principal researcher's role was taken up
- The principal researcher's own experiences as a member of the research group
- How the principal researcher's research approach worked (outcomes, personal reflections and reflections and feedback from co-researchers)

The analysis of how the group conducted the action research process was done through a detailed analysis of all the records across the cycles and referring to relevant action research literature. The analysis of the group processes and of power and the status quo were three of the focuses because of the CPAR approach to the research. These focuses are part of a Critical Hermeneutics analysis and this was also one of the reasons that that this methodology was used.

#### **3.8.5.a. Analysis of the Group Processes**

This analysis began with the first stage of analysis and continued through each stage of the analysis. The focus in this analysis was on the processes within the group conducting the action research. Evidence of how the group operated as a group was collected during every stage of the analysis. It involved analysing the group review and

reflection sessions and individual meetings with co-researchers. Two elements of the Critical Hermeneutics approach were particularly important in this analysis: the relationship between parts and whole and working to gain distance from personal assumptions. As the focus of the research was the group it was important to use statements and questions by individual co-researchers as prompts to analyse the group process rather than that of individuals. Working to gain distance from personal assumptions required repeated reading of the records and presenting proposed results to the critical friend to enable challenges to assumptions. Over a number of iterations and linking with literature, this enabled a more objective analysis of the group process.

#### 3.8.5.b. Analysis of Power and the Status Quo

Exposing power imbalances and challenging the status quo are core elements of Critical Hermeneutics analysis. As the focus of this action research was the role of the Executive Committee, the focus was on the group rather than on individual group members. Power was identified as a theme in the first stage of the analysis. Much more about power was later identified as other cycles were worked through with an increased awareness on the part of the principal researcher of how it might be referred to and guidance from action research literature and theses. During the cycles of action research it had already been identified by the group that power of the group, power relations within the group and power relationships between the Executive Committee and other parts of the organisation were all issues that influenced service development. This enabled the conclusions of the principal researcher to be validated by comparing them to group and individual co-researcher understandings.

Challenges to the status quo could be identified from how the group said it enacted its role as Executive Committee in relation to service development and how the principal researcher identified challenges in each of the stages of the analysis. However, these challenges were affected by the changes of membership of the Executive Committee during the action research and following the end of the action research work with the group. These challenges will be presented and discussed in the Findings chapter.

### **3.8.6. Meaning from Reviewing All Phases of the Data Analysis**

Meanings were identified through paying attention to the need to find meanings as each stage of analysis was worked through. This was developed and refined through reviews of all the records created during the analysis, through further analysis prompted by these reviews and by discussion with the critical friend and supervisor.

### **3.8.7. Summary**

Action research is different from traditional research methods. Its focus is on research *in* action rather than research *on* action. Its quality depends on clarity about, attention to and enactment of philosophical and methodological principles, especially participation developing knowing and producing change. These principles are brought to life through the use of invitations to and engagement with participants in the research and through repeated iterations of cycles and spirals of joint attention, engagement, action and reflection.

The process of action research in this study has been described in detail. The experience of and challenges in the use of CPAR and IAR in the research have been elaborated, with consideration of the ongoing implications of learning in action for the principal researcher. The process of analysis and generation of findings has been detailed and the use of the principles and practices of action research has been emphasised. The ways in which this study confirmed the learning from the literature on action research receives particular attention and issues that were new and different are highlighted. The learning from the overall process will be described in the Discussions and Conclusions Chapter.

## Chapter 4. The Story of the Action Research

### Introduction

The story of the progress through the cycles of the action research (AR) covers the major elements of the work and the significant events that occurred. The pattern of the AR was individual work by the principal researcher (PR), group sessions and work by co-researchers and the PR between the group sessions which often happened following group decisions in the session. The description of the story is written in the third person, as is the rest of the thesis.

The story includes reflections from the Reflective Journal of the principal researcher (PR) following most, but not all, group sessions and more recent reflection and sense-making at the end of each cycle. The PR had already been making entries in his Reflective Journal during his preparation for the start of the main research work with the group. In beginning the first cycle with the group he began to make entries following group sessions and other activities such as inter-session planning, analysis or review and individual meetings. These reflections are placed in boxes following descriptions of group sessions and inter-session work. They are all headed 'Reflective Journal' followed by the cycle and group session numbers. In the Reflective Journal boxes, reflections and conceptualisations from that time in the research journey are introduced and summarised and include quotations from the entries made at the time. The introductions and summaries as well as the quotes are all in the first person. The quotations are in italics.

The reflection and sense-making at the end of each cycle are contributions of the principal researcher as the story is written. They are all written in the third person the same as other current writing.

### 4.1 Cycle One

The beginning of the main research was designed to enable transition from the pilot project (pre-step) into the main research and to begin the main research. The PR

developed a plan for the first three sessions of the first cycle in order to re-engage with the Executive Committee (EC) as a research group. It was designed to re-introduce the research topic, the critical participatory action research (CPAR) and the PR's rationale for this focus. This was intended to enable the group to reflect on the topic and the questions that the PR was raising about it and then to consider if the group wished to make changes to how the EC acted on service development and how these changes might be made. This initial C1 work would be influenced by feedback from the Pilot Project, the PR's preunderstanding, group clarification of what service development actually means and an introduction of reflection as an important part of AR.

The PR approached the main research with the aim of maximising the engagement of group members. The group was briefed at a regular EC meeting in July 2009. It was highlighted that each individual had the option of being involved in the research or not and it was agreed that the PR would have individual meetings with everyone before group meetings began.

### **Individual Meetings**

Individual meetings were held with all EC members during September and October 2009. The PR reminded them of the purpose of the research; discussed his role duality; their wishes regarding involvement, and possible outcomes for them. They were offered the opportunity to ask questions, given the plain language statement and the consent form: agreement to participate was received in all cases. At least three individuals identified that there might be power or interpersonal relationship issues between co-researchers, not just between the principal researcher and the co-researchers.

**Group Session 1 (GS 1)** with the group was in late October 2009. This session began with the introduction of the research. The group was reminded of the research topic, the AR approach and the role duality of the PR. This was followed by verbal and written descriptions of the PR's perspective on reasons for introducing this research and an outline of the plan for the first three sessions (Appendix 6). The value of

undertaking reflection as part of AR was described and it was suggested that each co-researcher might keep their own reflective journal. They had the opportunity to ask questions.

The group's AR began with areas for reflection based on the PR's preunderstanding and the group views expressed in the pilot project (Appendix 6). These areas were addressed under the broad headings of the current and future organisational environment. This step was intended to contribute to enabling the AR to begin to address the topic of the EC's role on service development. The areas they were asked to reflect on were:

#### The Current Environment

- The current episodic approach to service development
- The dependence of current service development projects on initiatives and decisions at the top of the organisation
- The impact on service development of small continuous changes made at local level

#### The Future Environment

- The need for an organisational process to support continuous service development
- Processes for empowering and supporting staff and service users to lead and work on service development
- What would enable everyone to contribute to the development of high quality, innovative services?

Following reflection by individual co-researchers, the group identified ideas, which had already arisen in the pilot, which were prompted by the 'Areas for Reflection' or were new within the group.

In C1 the PR took written records of each group session. He began the practice of circulating the written record of the session as quickly as possible after the session and looking for feedback on corrections and additions to the records. Following feedback the revised record was then circulated.

## Reflective Journal C1, GS 1

I already experienced undertaking IAR with my own team as anxiety provoking. Examples of this included impacts on my consciousness and behaviour during the regular executive committee meeting in the morning before GS 1 and managing my emotional reaction to the 30 minute delay to the start of the session at the request of an individual co-researcher. These experiences of the effects of undertaking IAR and of role duality fitted with what I had learned from the literature.

*'Involving everyone and having dialogue – especially dialogue that involves myself – is not easy given that there is a mix of needing to have good group facilitation skills, good recording for research purposes and the need to manage one's dual roles and organisational relations.'* This reflection identified the number of roles that I had and the particular difficulty caused by those in being part of the group in addressing the content rather than working mostly on the processes. The self-chosen taking of all the session records was a practice that made it particularly difficult to engage to any significant level in discussion or dialogue.

**Following GS 1**, the PR developed themes from the ideas that were discussed. These were divided into three groups and used as a major element of the revised plan for the second session as a way of progressing the group's work.

The themes developed were:

<b>1. Present</b> History Decisions at the top Power Strategy Small continuous change Episodic change	<b>2. Present &amp; Future</b> Communication Structure Creativity Vision	<b>3. Future</b> Changes to make Focus on Service Development
--	--	--

**GS 2** was planned for November, but was postponed until the 9<sup>th</sup> December, so that the time between the first and second sessions was almost six weeks.

This session began with feedback from the co-researchers. This was intended to be from their reflections on the PR's perspective on reasons for undertaking the research, as presented in the first session. In fact most of the feedback was on the group discussion in GS 1 rather than on the PR's perspective. The session then moved on to work in pairs on three major themes that had emerged from the first session. These were (1) Structure, (2) Decisions at the Top of the Organisation, (3) Changes to Make. Each pair was asked to consider one major theme and the links between that theme and other themes. Following feedback from the pairs and group discussion the group decided that the pairs needed to do further work on the themes before the next group session. By the end of this session there was group agreement regarding three issues: that the Executive Committee had a role in relation to service development; that the current role was less clear than its role in relation to other areas of responsibility and that the role should be clarified and should change. At the end of the session the PR outlined that the group should complete this element of the AR; that it needed to address the meaning of service development and that the meaning of the Critical Participatory Action Research approach needed to be revisited.

### **Reflective Journal C1, GS 2**

At this point my thinking was that if I planned sessions in advance this helped to ensure that everyone was involved and could contribute and that it *was 'one good way of managing power imbalances.'* The other planned process that I believed was effective was asking co-researchers to work on the themes in pairs. It produced good outcomes in the session and also contributed to the proposal and agreement for the first co-researcher work outside the group sessions. I was particularly reflecting on my planning because I was aware of a methodological tension between on the one hand enabling the AR to advance and contributing to participation and on the other hand taking a lead role that could be seen as reducing the participatory approach.

In thinking about whether people saw themselves as co-researchers I said '*...all or most people understand that they are a key part of the project and that they have significant responsibility.....I still have some question as to whether they see themselves as co-researchers or if their focus is more on strategy and action.*' This was a question about whether the group members were trying to enact action research or focusing on strategy and action as they would in their EC roles. At this stage of the AR I was not sure which it was or whether it was a mixture of both. At this stage I did not see it as a problem and considered that the approaches could form part of the group's future discussion.

The experience of the feedback from the reflection slot at the beginning of the session suggested to me '*that people are not used to reflection and that I need to look at how I set out reflective sessions and shape the questions very carefully.*' While the group's focus was on content rather than on the AR process I did question whether my set up for the slot may have made it easier for people to feedback on this focus.

At the end of the journal entry my summary thinking of issues already reflected on was: '*While these two sessions have been valuable they are also very good examples of the challenges of IAR: managing power relations well, but having some difficulty with being the principal researcher and a full part of the dialogue and discussion.*'

### **Inter-session AR**

As agreed, the co-researchers continued their work in pairs on the themes they had considered in GS 2.

**GS 3** was planned for 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010, but was postponed to 5<sup>th</sup> February, a gap between sessions of almost two months. This session began with the PR reminding the group about AR by talking them through a spiral that illustrated how it can be both planned and emergent. There were no questions or comments on this presentation.

Each pair made a presentation on their inter-session work on the themes. Two of the pairs mostly focused on what they had already said in GS 2 and one focused on a particular part of the organisation's service. These presentations were followed by some discussion on what had been presented. There were conflicting opinions, but there was no argument about what should happen. However, there was no agreement on any planning or actions to be taken on any theme following this work.

The PR then gave the group feedback from the Pilot Project, which was discussed. A summary of the concepts, and links between the elements and themes in the pilot discussions was charted to make it visible for the group.

At the end of the session it was co-researcher proposed and then agreed that the PR would prepare and circulate a themed record of the first three sessions. It was also agreed that each individual would work on the concept of service development using a set of questions developed by the PR. This work would be presented in the next group session. The agreed purpose of this was to examine the concept of service development in more depth, to share experiences and understandings of it, to relate all of this to the literature on service development and then to agree on the group's understanding and description of service development.

### **Reflective Journal C1, GS 3**

My comment on the second postponement of a group session was very brief and was most focused on being prepared for this session.

I identified an issue of dominance by particular co-researchers: *'There is dominance of the discussion, so this has an impact on how people's contributions have an impact on the overall thinking of the group'*. This dominance affected issues such as the direction of discussions and what was proposed and agreed at the end of the session. I understood that the dominance related to the executive position of the individuals and/or their level of power within the EC. I felt torn between having structured sessions and managing dominance to some extent in this way and having less

structured sessions in which every group member could be involved as they wished and the group could choose how to work., versus working to involve every group member and allowing the group to operate as it wished.

I was identifying a connection between the AR and my regular work: *‘What I am thinking in doing the research is influencing what I am thinking in other aspects of the work. At times that is good, but at other times I am having to hold back on what I am saying... The dual role piece is in my mind a lot.’* At the end of the entry I was noting that role duality was a significant issue: *‘The dual role issue is starting to have a major impact on all of my behaviour in relating to other members of the [EC].’* A major aspect of what I meant was that the role duality was restricting or influencing my behaviour towards all group members.

**Inter-Session AR**

As agreed, the PR developed a themed record of the first three sessions and circulated it to all the co-researchers.

The PR’s analysis was that there were major and minor themes that emerged from the work by pairs and the discussion by the whole group:

Major Themes	Minor Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power and empowerment</li> <li>• Requirements for service development</li> <li>• Decisions at/dependence on the top</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the executive does service development</li> <li>• Context and environment</li> <li>• Low levels of skills and influencing by some local staff</li> </ul>

This analysis showed that the major themes from the three group sessions were two thirds different from those the PR put forward for consideration by pairs of co-researchers in GS 2.

**GS 4** was held on the agreed date of 24th February 2010. This three week gap was the shortest time between sessions so far. One co-researcher was unable to attend. This was one of the few sessions which not every member of the group could attend.

Only three co-researchers and the PR had done inter-session work. The PR gave a short summary of his literature review of service development. The three co-researchers described service development within the areas of the organisation which they managed. These presentations demonstrated the complexity and the success of projects; how service development reflected the structures, systems and cultures in the organisation; processes which were or which should be used for service development and some connections between these examples of service development and the literature. There was a brief general discussion, but available time was limited and there was no agreed decision on the group's understanding and description of service development or on next steps.

#### **Reflective Journal C1, GS 4**

I interpreted two (more powerful) co-researchers' failure to undertake inter-session work as an expression of power. I saw this as another piece of evidence following those in previous sessions of how being in a powerful position could allow a co-researcher to choose what they would do, despite group agreements.

Interpersonal power seemed to me to be a huge issue but I was unsure how to surface it without having a negative impact on myself or on some co-researchers. At the end of the reflection I said '*Power within the group is a key feature*'. The reason I believed that power was 'huge' and 'key' was because of the impact that it had on me as PR and, more importantly, on the equality of the participants in IAR. I decided at the end of the journal entry to discuss it with my supervisor and my critical friend.

I had reservations on challenging power influences on what I did because of both my role duality and my wish for the AR to continue. At this point I was unclear which was

the better way to both protect my roles and enable the AR to continue. I was also concerned about confidentiality and that too specific identification of power positions would create difficulty in including it in the thesis.

I had not been expecting a lot from this session. However I found that *'the different presentations were very interesting, not least because of their very different approaches.'* I thought that they gave a good picture of service development within the organisation and I found this reassuring in relation to co-researchers' knowledge of service development and encouraging in relation to the focus and proceeding with the AR.

I was concerned that because of the shortness of the session and no specific reflection questions that there was little verbalised reflection by co-researchers. The experience made me think that it was necessary to set up reflection specifically in a group session.

**GS 5** was held on 9th April 2010. This was six weeks since the last session. This was the last group session of C1 and a review of it. The group reached this point having spent a significant amount of time addressing service development and the EC's role in relation to it, but not developing a plan or first steps as to which aspects of the topics to address or how to address them. The PR considered that at this point a thorough review session was essential.

An Action Learning Cycle with the headings Experience, Reflections, and Conclusions was the structure of the review. Individuals used the headings as a way of describing their experiences in C1, reflecting on them and what had emerged in the cycle and then coming to conclusions about the focus of the research and the way forward, particularly what should be focused on in preparation for and during the next cycle.

A number of co-researchers reflected that it was useful or valuable to have time for thinking and discussion and described this time as 'protected' or 'equal'. One co-researcher questioned whether or not the PR's influence on thinking had been useful.

In the conclusions a small number of co-researchers linked service development to politics and then to issues such as power and authority.

A group discussion on 'What do we pay attention to as we move into the next cycle?' followed the review. There was also a short, but useful, discussion on ethical issues for the group including the role duality and the implications of this for the co-researchers as well as for the principal researcher.

There was no group consensus on the focus of the next cycle. However, next steps were agreed following proposals by individuals:

- A more in-depth analysis of the data to be carried out by the PR and two co-researchers before proceeding to action
- The PR would meet individuals to discuss his role and the group's role
- A meeting would be held outside the research between the CEO and three co-researchers in relation to how the Executive Committee worked, potential organisational restructuring and succession planning
- The focus on action in the next cycle should not be on too simple an action

### **Reflective Journal C1, GS 5**

Before the review session began I was quite anxious about the session because of the time since the last session, the fact that this was the first major review of the research and knowing from a previous session about the impatience of one co-researcher with the pace of the work. Following the session my overall reflection was positive: *'Using the learning cycle worked very well – enabled people to describe, reflect on, explore and decide what to do next.'* Despite an individual criticism of my influence on the AR and agreements to the meeting outside the AR and to more data analysis, at this stage I was generally positive about the effects of the review.

In relation to my AR practice I had a dilemma as to whether I should be the person who made proposals as to what should be addressed next or whether, I should leave it to the members of the group to make the proposals. The latter approach should have

increased participation, but my observation was that most times the proposals were made by a specific co-researcher. At this point I did not come to a conclusion as to how I should generally manage this issue. However, I did record that I should make sure that the co-researcher who had made a number of the proposals in this session should not over-organise things. I also reflected that I should check individual proposals with the whole group rather than simply letting it agree to the proposals and that I should seek proposals from everyone in the group.

The review, preparation for it and the outcomes also contributed to a number of conclusions in relation to conducting IAR: *'Action research really does go where people / groups want / suggest.'* This conclusion related to how the group had worked slowly through small cycles on the themes on service development, the repeated agreements for further data analysis and a powerful group member becoming frustrated at the lack of action.

*'Dual roles are wider than those of the principal researcher. Again, this could be part of the contribution to knowledge.'* The role duality of co-researchers, which had been discussed by a minority in the initial individual meetings and which I was aware of during C1 was now identified by co-researchers and seen by me as existing and relevant: *'The points about everyone's dual roles and the potential risks for everyone were very interesting. I don't think I have seen that in the literature. I need to track it. If it is not there it is one contribution to knowledge.'* As I had already identified the role duality of co-researchers I was pleased that co-researchers were also identifying it and feeding back on that identification. It was unclear whether this knowledge would have the effect of enabling co-researchers to manage role duality to facilitate group equality or whether it would simply inform the continued use of more powerful executive positions within the AR group. It was clear to me that I needed to pay attention to the duality both politically and ethically. However, I was not sure how to manage the significant power issues effectively.

*'There is huge value in having external people to discuss the approach with. I need to*

*keep doing this with [my supervisor and my critical friend] and to record the discussions and interactions so this can contribute to the write up of the thesis.'* This conclusion was reached because of their contributions to my plan for this review, how I should approach it in my PR role and being aware of potential difficulties that might arise in the review.

## **Reflection on and sense-making of C1**

### **Role duality**

At the beginning of the group research, the PR was aware of the role duality issue in relation to insider researchers from reviewing the literature. Throughout the cycle he was aware that having role duality influenced his behaviour during the AR and also in other EC meetings and contacts. Within the research, the influences were on how he behaved towards the co-researchers as a group and individually. For instance he was constrained in his challenges of more powerful group members and he did not act in a way that would put less powerful individuals at more risk by, for example, challenging them either. In his regular executive role during C1 he tended to be aware of his AR role when interacting with EC members and so was more careful and sometimes more restrained in how he acted.

As C1 progressed the PR became aware of role duality issues in relation to co-researchers. This arose from issues such as who spoke most during group sessions, which co-researchers made proposals for actions which were agreed by the group and the kind of knowledge that each co-researcher had of service development. He was conscious that at least some co-researchers were aware of the duality from the outset. By the end of C1 he was aware that it could be an issue for co-researchers and that at least some saw it as a risk factor outside the AR, that is in their EC roles, as well as within it. This was a new understanding that emerged between the initial individual meetings and the C1 review session.

**Power**

Power was very quickly identified as an issue within the research group. This power could be related to the specific organisational roles as well as to the personalities of the co-researchers and to inter-personal relations. The organisational role factor was clearly related to role duality. The PR identified it as a factor that influenced practices within the group such as more powerful co-researchers speaking more than less powerful co-researchers and making proposals for next actions by the group and by the PR that were readily agreed. Power could also be seen as related to who carried out AR work. While all co-researchers took part in the research, more inter-session work was undertaken by less powerful co-researchers.

**Action Research Practice**

This was a focus of the PR throughout C1. He was aware of his lack of experience in undertaking AR. This meant that all his planning, actions and follow-up to reflections took considerable effort. He also experienced a dilemma between planning group work in order to get the group research underway and facilitating as much participation as possible. He was pleased when the wish to increase participation through activities such as joint PR/co-researcher session planning and co-researchers undertaking record taking were agreed in the review session. He was pleased because such processes would be more participative and so should make the AR more congruent with CPAR. He was also pleased that these views had come through the review session. The proposed increases in participation came from a combination of criticism of his role by a powerful member of the group, readiness of less powerful co-researchers to become more involved and his own understanding of the need to share activities, especially planning.

While co-researchers were interested in and wished to participate as co-researchers, there was little or no interest displayed in participating in other aspects of the CPAR. The PR was frustrated with this and believed that it was having negative effects on the research process. He understood these negative effects to be: not working through AR cycles; not reflecting much in action or on action once it had happened and not

working to develop equality within the research group.

Decisions on how the PR, while acting in that role, could deal with ongoing issues such as power were challenging, so he valued and used the opportunities to consult with his supervisor and critical friend. The major difference between consulting them and consulting the group was that they were outside the group and were not influenced by the history and culture of the group. They also had research and group expertise that could guide his planning. In C1 their major guidance on his actions were on the setting up of the research with the group, planning group sessions during the cycle and on having a real and useful review session at the end of the cycle. They also enabled more objective thinking so that he was able to move into the research without being over influenced by the culture of the group. This experience reinforced the literature advice in having objective people with whom to consult.

### **Reflection**

This was an aspect of group behaviour on which the PR focused and reflected because he understood it to be an important element of AR. He saw as useful co-researchers' contributions on how the EC managed and contributed to service development. These contributions may have been based on their reflections on service development. At the same time he understood that they were not reflecting on what was happening in the AR. This view was changed by the review session at the end of C 1. It was clear in this session that all co-researchers had thought about the processes and had immediate or developed views on what was working, how well it was working and what was not working. It was still unclear to the PR whether co-researchers were reflecting in action as the cycle progressed or whether all or most of the reflection happened in the review session. The success of the review session reinforced the PR's thinking that he needed to build reflection opportunities into more of the AR.

### **Context**

In C1, the difficult external environment was already having significant effects on the thinking and the necessary actions of the EC. This influenced the priorities of members

of the group both in terms of their focuses within the AR and on whether the AR or another activity was a priority at a particular point. A major effect of this in C1 was postponements of group sessions and then quite long gaps between them. The PR saw these gaps as having negative effects on the progress of the specific cycles being worked through and possibly on the AR overall. The feedback and discussion in the review at the end of C1 made it clear from statements made and actions agreed that the context within which the AR was being conducted was having an increasing effect on the EC and therefore on the research group. This was very much in the PR's mind in thinking about the move from C1 to C2.

### **The PR's position at the end of C1**

At the end of C1 the PR's thinking was that there could be changes in relation to the EC's role and that these could happen through the AR and then outside the AR. These changes could be contributed to by the service development themes that had emerged from the first three sessions and by the agreement that there was a need to change the role. He was also positive about the thinking of group members in relation to both service development and the AR process that were shared in the review session.

He was disappointed that progress during C1 had been so slow. He also had concerns about the feedback to him that participation in the AR was principally to support him; about his confusions about his role in the group discussions; about the low level of the reflection by co-researchers and about the group's focus on content rather than process.

In moving from C1 to C2 there were a number of issues in his mind. These included making the AR more participative; moving on from repeatedly working through small cycles; power and role duality; the impact of the national environment on the organisational context and then its impact on the AR.

He had become aware that it was now unlikely that the work of the EC research group would get to a point where he could seek further REC approval and then consult with

and potentially involve other stakeholders such as service users, family members and staff members. This moved his thinking from focusing on the emancipation and empowerment of service users and staff to focusing on emancipation and empowerment within the EC.

## 4.2 Cycle Two

**Group Session 1 (GS 1) of C2** was held on May 12th. The PR fed back to the group what had happened in relation to the actions agreed in C1, GS 5 and on his own reflections following that session and individual meetings. The reflections particularly related to the value of the review session, in particular the insightful honesty in contrast to the 'niceness' of previous sessions, developing the group ownership of the project and relating that to the PR role. The feedback was followed by proposals from both the PR and co-researchers, which were agreed, that co-researchers become involved in planning and recording as well as in other work such as information sharing, analysis and reflection.

There was some level of discomfort and disagreement evident in the group during this group session. This was present following feedback from the meeting between the CEO and the three co-researchers and then during comments on the research process and statements on what should be included in and what should be dealt with outside the research.

Following the meeting between the two co-researchers and the PR on further data analysis held between the two cycles there was a proposal to further analyse the data using an empowerment lens. This was proposed by the PR because empowerment was a focus of the critical approach. This was agreed following contrary views from one co-researcher about using this lens.

## Reflection on C2, GS 1

I identified the immediate value for me of a co-researcher doing the recording of the session. This value was being enabled to be much more involved in the discussion and activities of the group because of not doing the recording.

I also identified a less positive issue in the session: *'The looser structure allowed a reverting back to [two co-researchers] doing most of the discussion with [another one] coming next.'* These reflections strongly connected to role duality and power. I identified this through noting and reflecting on statements and interventions by individual co-researchers. For future sessions I thought: *'Need to have a session that includes everyone, gives everyone ownership, allows me to be involved and clearly moves things forward.'* So, once again I was reflecting on how the session was structured and enacted and what this meant for future sessions.

## Inter-Session Reflection and Planning

Following GS 1 and his reflection on it, the PR was concerned that the group was not showing any signs of moving on to action and had agreed to go back to analysis again. He was also concerned about the ongoing different levels of speaking among co-researchers across most sessions, except where there was a tight structure as in the review session. He felt that he needed to find a way to get out of the practice of repeatedly going around the same issues and stages, especially as both he and some co-researchers had identified this practice as normal for the group when acting as EC. His observation of and reflections on the context showed how much of a major focus and a priority the national financial crisis had become for all members of the EC by this time. In this situation and because service development is related to both finance and service delivery, his thinking was that it could be helpful to *make an agreed connection* within the AR between the financial crisis and the service development focus. He thought that making this connection could improve the focus on the research, connect it to reality and contribute to the outcomes. He was also concerned that the project was in danger of running out of energy at this time. This was a significant point in the research and therefore the principal researcher believed that he needed to make an

individual proposal rather than wait for a group proposal. The PR discussed this with his Critical Friend and with the CEO, who was not sure if this was the correct approach, but agreed to him making the proposal to the group.

GS 2 took place in June. Nobody except the PR, had undertaken the agreed inter session work - data analysis using the empowerment lens. This was not discussed and the PR made his proposal to connect the AR to the context and environment. The proposal for developing plans as part of the AR work included:

- What we are going to do
- How we are going to do it
- How this work links in to the broader plans for addressing the environmental crisis
- Suggested method for developing plans
- Reintroduce review/reflection section of sessions

Following discussion, the majority of members of the group did not wish to link the AR too closely to the environmental crisis, as they stated that work was already being done in relation to the crisis outside the AR and that such a focus could reduce the value of the AR. It was agreed that before the next session the group would work in pairs to propose what the group would work on and how it would do it. It was requested that the PR develop a briefing document to enable the co-researchers to do this work.

### **Inter-session work**

As requested, the PR circulated a briefing document to the pairs and worked on a proposal with one co-researcher. As the next session approached the PR learned that two of the pairs had not met and done their work. Following discussions, the pairs agreed dates to do the work and a new Session 3 date (27. 07. 10). The three pairs produced work ahead of the session. The PR reviewed the three proposals and set them all out in one comparative document with the themes identified and circulated that information.

## Reflection on C2, GS 2 and inter-session period

I found the time at the end of June and the beginning of July tiring and stressful in my EC role and discouraging and frustration in my AR role. The former was because of the cuts and what I saw as the HSE's approach and the attitudes of some people at work. The latter was because of how I understood the behaviours of the co-researchers. I recorded that I was discouraged and frustrated by the behaviours of co-researchers and that *'I did not find the last session very stimulating and was frustrated by the lack of ability of the group to choose which route to take and my lack of ability to enable the group to make a choice.'*

*The lack of response/action following the session was also frustrating.....' I listed all the actions that should have happened and did not and my eventual action of having to postpone the next session. I was pleased with the agreement to do the necessary work before the new date, but was clearly unhappy that there were no apologies about the lack of action*

At this point I needed a break. My reflection following it was interesting in relation to my role duality: *'The week off with no focus on the research was good. The major problem with working on the research during time off is that it is so close to my work that it is like being in the most intensive and demanding aspects of my work and it links to or reminds me of other demands, disagreements, frustrations, etc.'*

## GS 3

The pairs' proposals and the PR's summary were presented and discussed. There was some struggle with deciding on the next steps. Ultimately there was no agreement on actions based on any of the proposals. Instead there was a co-researcher proposal, which was agreed, that the PR would work with another member of the group to develop the learning from C1. It was also agreed that an unnamed pair would identify a project on which to take action.

### Reflection on C2, GS 3

My reflections on my feelings were about being frustrated and being pleased. I was frustrated when two co-researchers focused on the slowness of the AR. These focuses sounded like criticism of the AR itself and potential risks in the context of the environment and the power positions. My frustration was because the group was working slowly despite my efforts. I was also frustrated because one of these two co-researchers had a number of times proposed revisiting issues for data analysis and because I was trying to operate as PAR should with the group deciding rather than me. An example of how I experienced the group on decisions at this point was: *'Repeated frustration at the lack of response from people when I asked how they thought we should address things.'*

Once again power emerged in my reflection. I said that that there were *'Real issues of trust and power relationships – all this might do is reinforce the approach that is already there.'* The second statement meant the approach that taken outside the AR being taken and strengthened within the AR. I also thought that *'I need to decide how to address the power issues with [specific co-researchers]'* This last thought was because the power issues were repeatedly arising both in and between group sessions and I was reflecting on them repeatedly.

At the end of the reflection I noted that I was: *'Ultimately pleased with agreed tasks at end of meeting – especially with me taking on responsibility in relation to learning.'* This was because I had gone into the session with a lack of enthusiasm and had experienced: *'Repeated frustration at the lack of response from people when I asked how they thought we should address things.'* So a session that began without good indicators of progress ended with some progress and an opportunity for me to lead on further progress.

### Change in Research group Membership

At this point in the research one co-researcher retired from the organisation and left the study. The PR met this co-researcher to deal with moving out of the research and to offer the opportunity of the withdrawal of records relating to that individual from

the research records. The co-researcher wished that all related records would remain as part of the overall research records.

### **Inter-session work**

**The paper on the Learning from Cycle 1** (Appendix 7) was developed by the PR and one co-researcher. The framework for the document was the definition of CPAR by Kemmis (2008), which was set out in detail and the concept of service development. This gave seven headings for reviewing the learning. It was designed to be helpful for co-researchers in examining identified learning, but also to revisit the CPAR approach. Under each heading the relevant content and the relevant process were set out before identifying the learning under that heading.

### **Research gap and Individual meetings**

No group sessions were held during August, September or October because of work focus and group members' annual leave. Given how the research was progressing and the time gap since the session in July, the PR had individual meetings with all but one of the members of the group at the end of October to enable the restarting of the AR. There were different views among the co-researchers on what should be acted on and how to act. In relation to what should be acted on these ranged from areas such as the future of the organisation or the service development role to power relationships or dynamics. In relation to 'how' they ranged from saying that the PR needing to do a written plan to specifics such as looking at the layers of learning in the AR.

The PR prepared for **GS 4** in early November with contributions from his Critical Friend and from the co-researchers. The detailed plan for the session had four major focuses:

1. Reflection
2. Learning
3. What to change
4. First steps in change

A major part of the session was discussion based on the Learning from Cycle 1 document. Even though it was identified as valuable, there were different individual comments about it but no real consensus on the learning. Also, there was no

consensus as to or how it should be acted on. This was despite the PR giving examples of moving from learning to first steps for change (The approach of this presentation was to help the group to move on, but not to just give it one option.) Following end of session discussion and some further discussion the next day it was agreed that the PR would work with two co-researchers and prepare a proposal for the next session at the end of November, linking with the other co-researchers as this work was being done. Because of previous identification of the group's difficulties with or lack of interest in reflection and the PR's belief that more reflection needed to take place, he discussed how people might reflect during sessions.

#### **Reflection on C2, GS 4**

*'The session was a mixture of being difficult for me because of comments about the process of the research, lack of interest in reflection; potential ethical issues because of the suggestion about moving outside the group and managing the time and frustrating because of some more wandering and lack of clarity on issues; exciting and stimulating because there was much more straight discussion on how the [the executive], works, what we missed gaining from earlier in the research and the relationships within the [executive].'*

*'It really felt like the 'communicative space' was starting to be used more. I think that the learning paper and the individual meetings probably helped with that ... It has taken a lot of effort to open up the communicative space to the extent to which it has been opened up.'* These comments were based on the discussion addressing a range of issues, the learning document, the AR process and how the EC worked and then the co-researcher suggestion to link the AR to the work on the environmental situation. The linkage proposal was a surprise as it was only two sessions after its rejection: *'It was also very positive to have the suggestion and agreement on linking the research to the work on savings to be done on Thursday and the focus to come from that.'* At this stage I did not record any further reflection on this change.

### **Inter-session Work**

As agreed at the group session the PR met with two co-researchers following the session. It was agreed that he would do a summary on 'How [the executive] Works' from the Learning from Cycle 1 document and circulate it and ask four questions of all co-researchers in advance of the next group session.

1. What is the impact of how the [the executive] works on service development?
2. What do we need to change?
3. What are the most significant issues to focus on for change?
4. First steps

The PR received responses to these questions from four co-researchers and drafted responses himself. He set out all five responses in a table so that they could be compared. The PR and the two co-researchers then developed three proposals for action based on the responses to the questions. They were:

1. Vision, Values and Aims / Strategy
2. Systems, Processes and Structures for service development at [the executive]
3. Moving out into the wider organisation (It was noted that this was a further stage of research and was not covered by the current ethical approval)

**GS 5** was held on 25th November. There was a short discussion on the points made by individuals in response to the questions. The three proposals were presented. It was agreed to proceed with the three proposals. It was also agreed that this work had to be done in the context of the current environment and that the context and the research needed to continue to be linked. It was agreed that two co-researchers (one from the last trio) would work with the PR on the proposed actions and would set out tasks for the group.

### **Reflection on C2, GS 5**

At this point I was identifying positive progress: *'This approach is moving things on. I have much more of a feeling that things are happening and that people are engaged. I think that between sessions 4 and 5 the in-depth thinking came much more from the*

*individual work and my work and then the work by [two co-researchers and me].’ I now believed that we may have got to the type of focus that I wanted in the AR, but that it had taken far too long.*

My reflections on the improved progress suggested a range of improvement factors rather than one change:

- The impact of the Learning from Cycle 1 document
- People doing individual inter-session work
- Shorter, more frequent group sessions

### **Inter-Session Activities**

In November the CEO announced that he would be taking early retirement and that The Board of Directors would recruit a new CEO by the end of February. This was the second co-researcher to leave the research.

The meeting scheduled between the PR and two co-researchers to draft a plan did not happen, so he drafted the plan on his own. He developed a detailed plan based on what individual co-researchers and his sub-group had brought to Session 5 and what was discussed and agreed.

### **Reflection on C2, 22. 11. 2010**

*My reflection on the CEO’s retirement and the AR was: ‘In relation to the research this [i.e. the CEO’s retirement] raises huge questions: the [EC] will be different from March on, so what does that say about the focus of the research and more specifically about what we do and how we do it. Do I need to try to finish by the end of February, even though we may not have got to where we may have intended to or where I would have liked to get to? This is yet another feature that clearly identifies the organisation and makes the thesis unreadable by the general audience. In one way it is just another indication of the reality and the value of doing AR. It really shows how things happen and change in organisations and that more ‘scientific’ research may not always be capturing reality.*

My conclusion in relation to the ethical issues was: *'Managing the ethics of how this is written, agreed and made available /not made available will be critically important.'*

**GS 6** was held on 16th December. The discussions on vision and values included an individual view that the Chief Executive should define and lead out on vision and values and the PR view that it was necessary to go through the vision and values held by individuals and to see how that would transfer into an agreed position. Following the discussions it was agreed that the group would take actions on vision and values and on defining service development and that the PR would have an individual meeting with the CEO on *vision and values*.

#### **Reflection on C2, GS 6**

I noted that there had almost never been a session in which there had not been wandering away from the agreed topic focus or that an individual (often the same person) acted as if trying to take control of what was being discussed and decided on. My reflection on this was: *'I still feel that I am not doing well at enabling everyone to have an equal voice. I probably do not have enough skills in doing something like that. I probably do not have enough power and it will/would probably take much longer than this to do it.'*

My major conclusion in this entry was that: *'Power is a major factor in the [executive] and it is clear that some people really want it to be and believe that that is what is important. I think that the session further confirmed my belief that my views in relation to power are significantly different from those of [some other co-researchers]'*.

**GS 7** took place on 20th January 2011. There was discussion on vision, values and mission and on service development. This was the only session for which a record was not completed by the co-researcher undertaking the recording and could not then be circulated before the next session. A brief record of the session was made available to the PR following the end of Cycle 3, after several requests.

### Reflection on C2, GS 7

This was a brief entry and so reflected the dip in the energy and activity in the AR on my part as well as by the co-researchers.

I said that there had been limited work done between sessions. My understanding was that the two reasons for this were that the group members were very busy and that this work was not a priority for them/us.

My understanding was that despite the 'dip' the discussions on both service development and on clarifying the focus on mission, vision and values were both useful in relation to progressing the work on these areas.

I ended the entry by saying: *'My expectations and my anxiety and concerns about the sessions are all at a much lower level.'*

As agreed, **the CEO was interviewed re Vision and Values** (02. 02. 2011). He said that he never saw himself as the one who carried the vision; rather he facilitated others to do so. Neither was he ever convinced that changing the vision or mission statement had an impact on how the organisation functioned. He had some question about whether or not the Executive had taken on its responsibility for driving change.

### Inter-Session Work

Between sessions seven and eight the two co-researchers did the agreed work on developing a document on *mission and vision and values*. Another co-researcher prepared a summary document on service development based earlier AR work and the PR's literature review.

**GS 8** was held on 17. 02. 2011. The paper on *vision and values and mission* was presented. It included definitions/descriptions of *mission, vision, values and strategy*. It identified direct references to *mission and vision and values* in organisational documents. Finally it gave a brief discussion and some questions to consider. During the session there was agreement with the proposal by the two co-researchers that the

organisation's statements on *mission and vision and values* needed to be rewritten to reflect up to date thinking and language. It was also suggested and agreed that the question 'How does the executive drive values throughout the organisation?' should be addressed next. The session record does not indicate any discussion of the summary document on service development. There was no agreement on specific work to be done between sessions, so the PR e-mailed the co-researchers to ask people to think about the 'drive values' question in advance of the next session.

**The CEO was interviewed at the point of his leaving the AR** and retiring from the organisation at the end of February 2011. He said that the only way that service development will happen is if the EC had someone on it with responsibility for service development and that a person or a committee would be appointed to carry out service development. He thought that in the AR the group had been '*very long-winded*' and *that 'we have gone in a number of circles'*. At this meeting the CEO was offered the opportunity for all data relating to him to be withdrawn from the research records. He agreed to the records remaining as part of the overall research records.

**GS 9** was held on the third of March. This was the first session not attended by the retiring CEO. The new CEO had just been appointed two days before this session was held. This change in the internal make-up of the group influenced whether or not the AR would continue and if it did would influence the approach to the AR. These factors effectively made this the last session of Cycle 2. The group discussed the question on the Executive driving values. The PR noted three streams from the discussion: the importance of language (on which there was not full agreement), the implementation of values in practice and how those receiving services were conceived of (e.g. as customers or service users). There was no agreement as to what the next step(s) should be, but it was said that perhaps the group needed to understand better what was taking place.

### Reflection on C2, GS 9

My brief reflection was that the period up to and including GS 9 was that it was a *'very mixed period for the research'*. I noted that two co-researchers had done good work on *'mission, vision and values'* and that the CEO had cooperated on this topic and on a final interview.

I understood that I had (in contrast to the rest of the time) only given *'basic attention'* and *'very little time'* to the AR.

### Reflection on and sense-making of C2

#### **Role Duality, Power and Power Relationships**

These were significant issues throughout C2. The discussion in GS 1 of C2 included much more verbal conflict than any previous session or any other session in C2. It was influenced by the focus of some co-researchers on the organisational context and the significant work being done outside the AR. It was also influenced by the meeting between the three co-researchers and the Chief Executive; by a co-researcher's apparently negative view of the PR's role and by a power focus on not allowing the AR to interfere with the top down organisational plans and actions. What makes sense as an explanation of this higher level of verbal conflict is the complexity and challenges of the situation at that time within and outside the AR and the messages on power that emerged in the C1 review and the meeting with the Chief Executive.

Role duality continued to have an influence across the Cycle. As in C1, this influence could be seen in how much and what co-researchers said and did not say in the group sessions. Its influence could also be seen in more powerful EC members making proposals for steps to follow group sessions; in resisting or questioning proposals, such as the use of the empowerment lens for data analysis; in requesting the PR to take actions to facilitate inter-session work by co-researchers.

Role duality and power relationships were also highlighted during the work on *vision and values*. The group began this work with enthusiasm. However, the expression of

different views on *vision and values* was influenced by power related statements early in the discussion such as the statement that the Chief Executive should lead out on and define *vision and values*.

The other piece of evidence of the importance of the effect of role duality was the fact that while the PR worked hard to facilitate the whole group working on all aspects of the AR and questioned some statements he did not strongly challenge these statements on roles and power and often accepted the proposals for next steps.

All of these issues and experiences are likely to have given clear messages to all members of the research group and to have influenced their behaviour either following a specific event or gradually as they observed or experienced particular behaviours.

The retirement and replacement of the Chief Executive caused a 'dip' in the progress of the AR. While the 'dip' in the research can be understood as being influenced by a change in the context in which the AR was being undertaken and is discussed below, there were also role duality issues for the PR. At this time his ability as PR to progress the research was influenced in the group by the retirement of the sponsor of the project. His role as PR was also influenced by the effects on his EC role of what was happening outside the research. In his EC role there were a number of issues that influenced the type and amount of work he needed to do and his thinking about the future of the EC. These issues included the Chief Executive's preparation for retirement; the potential for another member of the EC and research group or himself being appointed as replacement Chief Executive and the ongoing managing the challenging service issues in this context.

### **Participation**

There were changes in the levels and patterns of co-researchers' participation when the AR moved into Cycle 2. There were three major influences on these changes:

1. The C1 group review session
2. Role duality
3. Context and environment

The review session helped to clarify what participation meant and was an opportunity for co-researchers to express wishes to increase their levels of participation. Increased participation was notable as part of the group's approach.

While all members of the group participated in sessions and in inter-session activities, role duality influenced how the changes in participation were undertaken. Significant elements of these differences were:

- less powerful co-researchers recording group sessions and doing more activities between sessions
- more powerful co-researchers choosing what inter-session work to be involved in and reducing their levels of that work as the cycle proceeded
- the PR being expected to undertake activities such as setting out guidance for an inter-session activity, doing summaries of documents or reviews and developing session plans

An important aspect of the participation was the significant amount of time that most co-researchers gave to the research. Participatory research is time consuming and the time required for the group research was greater for participants than it would have been in other forms of research. Giving such time in a context which required considerable time for both strategic and operational work was particularly demanding.

A challenge in relation to the value of this use of time was postponements of group sessions and the three month gap during C2. Postponements and gaps contributed to the messiness of the research process. The postponements and gaps led to interruption of the work as it was being conducted and caused revisiting of previous work and lack of certainty about what had previously been agreed and what work should have been undertaken. This caused additional work, but also contributed to more limited progress in the research. Having postponements and a long gap may have been an easier choice for co-researchers because the AR was only in their foreground while they were acting as co-researchers. The situation was different for the PR, with the AR always in the foreground because of his research role. The background to the AR was fraught and difficult during this time and could therefore

take over from the focus on participation in the AR and be the established foreground.

Although individuals participated, they did not always take an action research approach. The alternative approaches that were taken were those of carrying out work as they would normally undertake it. The PR has two understandings of why this was so. Firstly members of the group were all used to working in their own or the group's ways and given their stages in careers and lengths of time as part of the EC it was not easy to change those approaches. Secondly their lack of interest in the introductions to AR must have reduced the likelihood of them using real AR methods.

**AR practice (going round in circles):** The first half of Cycle 2 had a pattern of reworking, revisiting and further analysis rather than moving on to planning or action. Despite the feedback on this pattern in the C1 review, this was a longer and more confused version of the pattern than in Cycle 1. It took until GS 5 to get agreement on specific areas to plan and take action on rather than review, analyse or learn from. The explanation for this pattern of activity is a little complex. In its EC role the group sometimes acted in this way on particular, especially challenging, topics. Role duality and power relations allowed some co-researchers to make successful proposals for further analysis or revisiting a theme or focus. A third explanation could be the demanding and distracting context. So, an overall view of this behavioural pattern could be that all or most co-researchers did not find it easy to adopt AR as it was explained to them.

### **Context and Environment**

The influences of the context and environment were felt throughout this cycle. While some of the influences were clearly internal most of these were also affected by the external environment.

The first influence in C2 was the co-researchers meeting with the Chief Executive. Holding the meeting outside the research was a clear message about what could and could not be discussed within the research process. The Chief Executive's work on the

corporate restructuring had a significant effect on the thinking within the research group following the review session at the end of C1 the meeting with the Chief Executive and discussion early in C2. Feedback from this meeting contributed to the one session at the beginning of C2 in which there was more conflict and disagreement than usual. The co-researchers later expressed the opinion that this meeting with the Chief Executive had a negative effect on the AR. The effect was not examined by the group in any depth, so it is difficult to be precise about its effect. However, the PR's observation suggests that this meeting and the following group discussion did give a clear message about what the AR could and could not address.

How co-researchers approached the concept of connecting the AR and the context was an interesting sample of group members' thinking on where service development sat, but more particularly the place of the AR. When, early in C2, the PR proposed that the AR on the EC's role would be connected with its work in relation to the financial crisis the co-researchers unanimously agreed that this connection should not be made and that conducting the AR without that connection would be more positive and valuable. The PR's interpretation was that there were two reasons for the strongly agreed decision. One reason was that service development was seen as important and that linking it to the financial crisis could have had negative effects. Another reason was that the strategic and operational responses to the environmental situation were being led from the top and that connecting PAR to them was not viewed as appropriate and was, perhaps, viewed as interfering. At that point it seemed that the group wished to address its service development role in a positive way. However, the PR understands that this decision was influenced by the pressures of the context and was also further evidence of the role and structure duality influences on the AR. It is likely that the research had also become less of a priority because it was not an urgent issue for the co-researchers. When, later in C2 co-researchers proposed that the AR should be linked to the current environment and that the two needed to continue to be linked this may have been a change of thinking that was influenced by the continuing environmental changes and pressures.

The environment and context also had effects on the continuity of and the level of focus on the AR. The largest effect was the gap in the group AR during August, September and October, 2010. This gap and postponement of sessions interrupted people's work and thinking and contributed to the revisiting of issues. The PR needed to take actions to update co-researchers and to enable the research to progress. Looking back at this pattern of interruptions suggests that this was an influence on both going round in circles and finding it difficult to come to decisions actions.

Another contextual process that affected the AR was the November 2010 announcement by the Chief Executive of his decision to retire and then the process for the appointment of a new Chief Executive. This further change to the context affected the entire research group from November 2010 to March 2011. The energy in the AR, including that of the PR, was reduced for the final period of C2. Less action was taken during this period than throughout most of the research. The level of activity, including reflection, of the PR was significantly lower than at any other stage in the group research. It also raised specific questions for the PR in undertaking IAR in an academic context. These included:

- The roles of the Principal Researcher
- The changing core research group
- Confidentiality
- Managing ethical issues
- Whether or not the research could continue

This decision and announcement showed strong evidence of the influence and effects of the organisational context on insider action research.

### **4.3 Cycle Three**

#### **Review Board**

At the meeting with the DCU Review Board in January 2011 the inevitable difficulties that would be caused by the change of Chief Executive were identified in the discussion and summarised in the report. These included that change in the

composition and dynamics of the EC and therefore of the research group and that these could disrupt the AR in ways that would be difficult to mitigate within the thesis time. If the PR changed his EC role this was identified as a significant difficulty.

This review was followed by a meeting with the PR's supervisor to consider how to complete the AR and later one to consider how to proceed with the AR if necessary and the group wished to or to complete it at that stage.

### **Meeting with the new Chief Executive**

Before the beginning of Cycle 3 (C3) of the AR the PR met the new Chief Executive to decide whether to proceed with the research given the changes in the core research group. It was agreed to proceed with the actions already agreed in C2, subject to the agreement of the group as a whole.

**GS 1 of C3** was held on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2011. The purpose of the session was to decide if the group wanted to proceed with the AR. The PR had identified that this explicit agreement was critical following discussions with his supervisor, reading relevant literature, reflections on his dual roles and how he was approaching the AR.

All the co-researchers discussed the issues involved and agreed that the group should continue with the AR. There was no indication from anyone that they wanted to stop. The PR did indicate some advantages to carrying on, but did not push them. There were some positive comments on the research process, including on the opportunity for reflection. The new Chief Executive proposed continuation, which may have influenced the decision of the group. The PR suggested that he would come back to the next session with proposals as to how the group would progress.

### **Reflections on C3, GS 1**

<p>I entered this cycle with mixed feelings: I was pleased with my PAR approach of consultation with the whole group and then with its agreement to continue with the AR. I was surprised at the different atmosphere and dynamics in the group. It did reinforce the ideas about the impact and influence a CEO can have. In starting another</p>
--

cycle, I was disappointed that by this time I had not got a lot further in working with the group. However, my feelings about the group seeming keen to continue with the AR were much more positive.

In order to assist in proceeding with the research the PR prepared and brought information and proposals to the group for the **GS 2** held on 31st March.

They were:

- The group to reflect on what it had agreed
- The PR's proposed timescale for the remaining work
- The PR's proposal on how the group would finish the work on vision and values
- The PR's proposal on linking the work on vision and values back to the role on service development
- The PR's plan for taking action on the role
- Addressing Reflection

The group agreed to use the time scale that the PR proposed, with the aim of ending the AR in September 2011, i.e. in six months. It also agreed that the group sessions and the inter-session work would continue even if not all members of the group were present. A detailed plan for continuing the work on *vision, values and mission* including all the researchers who would be available was agreed. A significant amount of the work on this plan was to be carried out before the next group session.

### **Reflections on C3, GS 2**

I was satisfied following this session. I described it as a '*positive session*'. This was because of both the positive steps that were agreed by the group and the focus on completing the work on vision and values. Even though this was all very practical rather than in depth it was still positive and active.

I thought that the steps that I had taken in consultation and in proposals for working in the current context of the EC were '*a good model for addressing the issues of AR in the*

*specific situation*'. I was aware that my actions had followed my own review of the extent to which the research question had been answered and my discussions with the Review Board and my supervisor and then my reflections on all of these. All of these first person elements and the group's decisions made me feel that I was 'entering a positive phase' of the AR.

### **Inter-Session Work**

Four members of the group undertook work while the fifth member was on leave. This was involved identifying what organisational documents said about *vision, values and mission*; identifying other organisational values which were not documented; reviewing *vision, values and mission* as set out in national and other external documents; comparing the organisational documents to those external documents and writing a summary of the work already done by the group on *vision, values and mission*. This was one of the periods when good work was undertaken as agreed between sessions.

**GS 3** on 13<sup>th</sup> May with the full group present began with feedback on the inter-session work. The major discussion was then on *vision, values and mission*. It was proposed by one co-researcher that the work on vision, values and mission should be taken out of the AR and that there should be consultation with stakeholder groups. Another co-researcher stated that the group had travelled through the work on these topics and needed to bring it to a conclusion. This co-researcher also proposed rewriting the Mission Statement in 'today's language'. These proposals led to further discussion and it was then agreed to take vision and values out of the AR, to rewrite the Mission Statement and then take it out of the AR. Two co-researchers were to work on the rewriting and the PR and another co-researcher were to work on structuring the documents and work on the topics.

In the short reflective time at the end of the session people were positive and even enthusiastic about the work undertaken.

### Reflections on C3, GS 3

I understood that the decision to close the work on vision and values and then mission and to take them out of the AR was influenced by power relationships within the group. This was because of how the proposal to take this action was driven until there was group agreement. I reflected that the work on vision, values and mission had taken a long time and that it was not completed particularly as the relevance or importance of these issues for service development had not been addressed. However, I was positive about the agreement to consult other stakeholders about these issues and the opportunity for me to influence that work.

A reflection on my role duality was: *'Having the [service development project] Review day and the[group session of the] AR so close together was beneficial for me in my thinking about both as the sessions progressed and in my reflections and thinking about what I might do overall and next in relation to both projects.'*

Following the session I was initially disappointed that the group had not progressed further on vision and values before taking it out of the AR. However, I did feel that the AR was progressing and that *'if I keep focused on it I will get good progress and be motivated to do other elements of the work on the thesis.'* and I also reflected that after three sessions *'There was still a sense of people moving on and being willing to work towards the conclusion.'*

### Inter-Session Work

Following this session one co-researcher worked on the Mission Statement and produced five options. In consultation with another co-researcher the PR produced a briefing document for the group that outlined the work that had been done on *vision, values and mission* and how the group might move on to the group strategy on service development or the role re service development. This proposal emphasised the PR's view that there were core research questions on the EC's role re service development

and that the group needed to consider if it had already answered them. If it had not, then it needed to address them before moving on to the strategy. The PR also said in the briefing document that a modified or different approach could be proposed by co-researchers. A major decision for the group in the next session would be whether to address the strategy or the role as the next step.

**GS 4** was then held on 15<sup>th</sup> June. There was broad agreement on a draft *mission statement* and a series of actions to be taken in relation to it outside the AR. Some co-researchers understood that the question of the EC's role in relation to service development had not been answered. There was agreement on the need to focus on this question before or instead of focusing on a strategy on service development. At the end of the session it was agreed that two pairs of co-researchers would review how the role question had been addressed in the AR to date and if/how it was answered and that the PR would provide guidance to the pairs for this work.

#### **Reflections on C3, GS 4**

I had very few reflections on this session. The two most significant were:

I understood that the decisions in the session were linked to people's interest in the work that the EC was doing outside the AR. I wondered '*how much is the planning influenced by the AR and how much visa versa?*'

As following previous C3 group sessions I reflected that there were '*different group dynamics*', but I did not spell out what I thought was causing the change.

#### **Inter-Session work**

The agreed inter-session work was undertaken by one pair of co-researchers.

**GS 5** was held on 8<sup>th</sup> July. It began by addressing the question of the EC's role on service development, taking into account the short document on the role put together by two co-researchers. The main points that they made were:

- To set the agenda

- Leadership
- Create the environment
- Facilitate service development
- Monitoring

The other two co-researchers had not met. The discussion by some group members shifted quickly from the service development role to the change of Chief Executive with at least two interesting comments ‘...with a changing of the guard...’ and ‘Staff are very aware there is a new “sheriff in town”.’ Following return to a discussion of the role it was agreed that it had been addressed at various points across the AR, but that it was unclear as to whether or not the group had come to a conclusion. The group agreed that three co-researchers and the PR would undertake a review of the records of all three cycles. It was agreed that the PR would give guidance for doing this.

### **Reflections on C3, GS 5**

My immediate reflection was that *‘The review of all the sessions is good in terms of data analysis and reflection, but probably should not be needed at this time – should be moving to agreed plans and/or actions.’*

Once again my description included the fact that there was further discussion in relation to the change of CEO, but this time also in relation to other changes that had happened inside and outside the organisation.

My reflections included a couple on the group: *‘I felt that there was a particular piece of being nice to [co-researcher X] on the part of [co-researcher Y] and to some extent, [co-researcher Z]...The group is different. Individuals are the same, but may be emphasising somewhat different things.’*

In relation to the processes in the group’s work I reflected that: *‘The most challenging piece is to manage people’s focus on talking about what is in their heads rather than the particular issue to be talked about at a particular time.’* and *‘I was happy with how I got the group to decide what to do and how to do it rather than me telling them.’*

### **Inter-Session Work**

The PR divided the records to be reviewed between the three co-researchers and himself, set out the main questions to be answered and the actions they might take to answer these questions. The PR asked each co-researcher to produce a summary document and, based on their reviews, to identify what the group still needed to address on the EC's role on service development.

The three co-researchers returned their reviews and having completed his review the PR produced a summary document of all four reviews.

These documents identified the range of points and themes put forward and discussed by the group. It was clear from the reviews that there was limited consensus on what the EC's role was, what it should be and what the AR group should do to make changes in relation to the role. It was also clear from the reviews that how the EC acted in relation to service development had been a more significant topic in the AR than what its role was or should be.

A number of Themes related to the role and organisational change were identified in the reviews:

#### Cycle1:

- Decisions at the top
- Access to power
- Structure of the organisation

#### Cycle 2

- Role of the CEO
- Internal executive power, roles and relationships
- How the executive works
- Facilitating/nurturing service development
- Mission, Vision and Values
- How the changes to the executive's role should be made
- External environment

### Cycle 3

- The altered environment and its impact on the executive's role

The final question in the review was 'Is there any indication that how the role is fulfilled is changing/has changed during the research?' The only significant point made on this was in relation to the work done on *vision and values and mission* and how these topics underpinned the role and related to the AR work.

**GS 6** was held on 22 July. Each of the four researchers who did a review presented their findings. This was followed by a discussion. There was general agreement that the group had not fully addressed the issue of the EC's role on service development or the changes to be made and how they could be made. However, in discussion there was a range of views on this.

A brief discussion on the group dynamics which were related to the change of Chief Executive and therefore the service development role was introduced by a co-researcher.

The discussion moved on to whether the work on the role should be taken out of the AR. This was a change in direction given that work on this had been agreed, two sessions previously, as a priority for the rest of the time available for the AR. Two co-researchers said it should be taken out and two others argued for the advantages of keeping it inside the AR for both the research and the group.

Close to the end of the session a co-researcher indicated lack of clarity on what the term 'service development' meant and this was briefly discussed with the PR stating that it was a complex concept, but that there could be learning from the group's work and discussions on the topic.

At the end of the session it was agreed in relation to the work on the role that:

- Two co-researchers would look at the role of the Executive Committee

- The PR would look at the role of the Executive Committee and the definition of service development in the records together with one co-researcher

In addition the PR would 'highlight' issues in relation to communicative space because he had mentioned its value.

### **Reflections on C3, GS 6**

In relation to the review of records my reflections were: *'I found people's understanding of what emerged in the review very good. The discussion was interesting and challenging because it addressed so many elements of our internal dynamics. What was particularly interesting for me was that even though some of the views on dynamics, power, etc. went a bit further than before, most things had been said before. This together with people's identification of the difficulty for the group in being able to move on has made me think that there is a level of inability to agree on a consensual way forward and there is a dependency on [people in the group with greater power, including the PR].'*

This led me to reflect on my role in the group and possible learning: *'There is a feeling of relief and some satisfaction that I am now near to the end of the work with the [EC]. The big question for me is, could I have fed back to them/challenged them in a way/ways that would have enabled decisions and moving on.'*

At the end of the reflection entry I said *'Development of more in-depth conclusions from the records may help to enable the group to develop a critical view of the [executive's] role. I have an opportunity to work on this over the next month.'*

### **Inter-session work**

The PR produced a document, with input from one co-researcher, that aimed to produce further analysis and a better understanding of what came from the review carried out by the PR and three co-researchers. This was done by working through three depth levels:

1. Setting out the themes identified in the reviews and the ideas related to them

2. Describing the relationships between the different themes, sub-themes and ideas under the heading of Understanding, Learning and Development
3. Giving an overall picture, as identified from the records, of the AR group's understanding and views of what the EC's role should be and how it should be carried out.

The group was also provided with a mind map of the themes and the ideas related to them. Another pair of co-researchers was to do work on the EC's role re service development. They did a short amount immediately before the start of GS 7 and produced a list of headings of aspects of and issues related to the EC's role.

**GS 7** was held on September 2<sup>nd</sup>. Each piece of inter-session work was presented and discussed briefly. This led to a decision that there was a need to reach agreement on the EC's role on service development and on how to achieve that. It was agreed that the final session should focus on that. It was agreed that the PR, with a co-researcher, would develop a framework for the next session, give co-researchers a description of a critical approach and communicate with them during the preparation. The final session was scheduled for early October.

## Reflections on C3, GS 7

I had a brief reflection on this session: *'I was tired and frustrated. On the one hand I would have been happiest if people agreed to stop that morning and on the other I wanted to have a concluding session. My concern about that session [i.e. the final session] is that it will be "led" by [an individual] and whether it is or not the group will come to too quick a conclusion after 18 months of work.'*

My concern was contributed to by the discussion and decision in relation to the final session. This discussion went through the 'historical' and present roles of the EC; a decision that there was no group agreement on what the role should be; whether or not to finish this work within the AR; whether or not there was time to do it; various suggestions as to what should be done and a final decision that the purpose of the final session would be: agreement of the role of the EC in relation to service development.

### Inter-session work

The co-researcher and the PR agreed to use Kemmis's (2008) definition of CPAR as the framework for the concluding session. This model had already been used to write the review of the learning from C1.

The co-researcher recommended reminding the group of the underpinning Critical Theory philosophy and Kemmis's contemporary approach to CPAR. As the PR was going on leave, the co-researcher handled the communication with the other co-researchers. He circulated the PR's revised summary document on Critical Theory and Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) and a number of other documents outlining evidence of thinking on the EC's role re service development. He sought feedback from co-researchers on how the group should work on the topic for the final session. He received very limited feedback on how to proceed.

Given the limited responses, the co-researcher and the PR developed the plan for the session. This was scheduled to be a longer session than recent sessions, so there was

time to address sets of questions in order to aim to achieve consensus on the EC's role and what changes needed to be made to achieve that role.

**The plan for the session was:**

1. An introductory reminder on Critical Theory and CPAR
2. Addressing three themes from the research using questions from CPAR: *Understanding, Learning and Development; Systems and processes; Service Users / Engaging with the wider organisation/other stakeholders*
3. It was also recommended that the session would end with a Reflection on that session and a discussion about how the group should reflect on the entire research.

**GS 8** took place, as planned, on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, two years from the beginning of the main research. Unlike, earlier sessions this one was audio recorded to get an accurate record of what was discussed, agreed and decided on. This was necessary because it was the final session and because of the extra length of the session The PR introduced the session and the collaborating co-researcher introduced the CPAR background for the session and reminded the group that CPAR had been the research approach. There was no comment on the approach or framework from any of the other co-researchers despite prompts.

The Theme of Understanding, Learning and Development was discussed first. There was broad, though not explicit agreement that the EC's role needed to change in relation to this theme. The group identified three changes that were required:

1. Devolution of power and responsibility. This was identified as the most important change
2. Focus on the outcomes
3. Listen to the individual voices of service users

The Theme of Systems and Processes was discussed next. There was very considerable discussion on the current role and how it was enacted with many examples being given. A large part of this section was dominated by one co-researcher talking. This co-researcher left the group, as planned, at the end of this section. The discussion in this section showed some increase in the group agreement on empowering staff and service users.

The next section was on change in relation to the role. The idea of having a service development office was discussed and received some amount of favour. There was discussion about the systems that were in place and how they worked as a background to changes that needed to be made and how the EC could make them. There were also some ideas about sharing and spreading information.

The third theme was that of engaging with the wider organisation, including service users and with other stakeholders. There were three sub themes: enabling, supporting and encouraging; communication; and power. There was considerable discussion about power, including how others were discouraged because they were not enabled. Discussion about communication drew three co-researchers into talking about the understanding that staff had about what the EC did, about membership of the EC and about the roles of some its members. Power was again discussed during this conversation. One co-researcher said that power should sit with service users and asked how the EC could constitute a structure that would ensure that. The other co-researchers essentially said that they did not disagree, but did not say any more than that.

The group then briefly moved back to the question of how that EC could make the necessary changes. There was a set of proposals from one co-researcher, but there was no group agreement, partly because of the time constraint.

The session ended very shortly after a second co-researcher had to leave. This was the end of the final AR session, two years from the first session. All that remained was the review of the overall research by the whole group as it now existed (i.e. without the two group members / co-researchers who had retired).

### **Reflections on C3, GS8**

There was no Reflective Journal entry following GS 8. Neither are there any reflective notes that were written at that time. It is not clear why there was no reflection

recorded, as at least some must have taken place. It is likely that the PR was relieved to reach this point and concentrated on writing the long record of the group session.

### **Reflection on and sense-making of C3**

#### **Role Duality**

Role duality continued to be an influence in Cycle 3. The first influence was on the PR's wish to continue the AR into a new cycle. In the PR role he believed that it was necessary to continue with the AR because of the limited progress it had made in relation to the central research question on the EC's role and his wish to do successful academic research. An element of the slow progress was the PR's cooperative, friendly and restrained approach and this arose, in part, from his experience of role duality. Evidence for this before the decision to move on was the PR's agreement to action proposals made by co-researchers in more powerful EC roles and his limited critical feedback on concept, proposals or actions. This behaviour was influenced by his EC role in which he was both less powerful and more powerful than different co-researchers. This contributed to limited challenging and to protective and supportive actions.

The change in the membership of the research group and the change in the holder of the Chief Executive role contributed to the demonstration of the relevance and importance of role duality for the PR but also for all co-researchers. The new Chief Executive had a new role outside the AR and this influenced their AR group role. Evidence of this influence was the proposals made and decisions led by this co-researcher that were agreed to be the whole group, including the PR. Another evidence theme was the references to followed by discussion on the change of Chief Executive across several sessions in the cycle. These were initiated by co-researchers. The discussions and the points made must have kept a focus on the role duality of the Chief Executive and this would have influenced the other co-researchers and the PR.

The other influence was the apparent understanding of some co-researchers of the Chief Executive's organisational role. The statements that there was '*a changing of the guard*' and that '*Staff are very aware there is a new "sheriff in town"*' are evidence of

these understandings. It was clear to the PR in hearing these statements that they were not just about the new Chief Executive, but were about a person in the role of Chief Executive. These statements suggested that the Chief Executive was seen as a ruler, as somebody who believed in rules and ensured that staff followed the rules and that they were at least potentially sharp and could take harsh or punishing actions. If the Chief Executive was seen like this in their organisational role, then in their AR co-researcher role they were likely to be seen as having a big influence on the research group.

### **The decision to take the work on vision, values and mission out of the AR**

How the decision was driven and agreed indicated the influence of role duality among co-researchers. The role duality of the PR also influenced agreement to the decision because of his experience in C2 when his proposal to get agreement among group members on vision was dismissed. This was followed by a statement on the Chief Executive's role regarding vision was emphasised and he was asked to interview the Chief Executive on vision, values and mission as part of the AR. Given that experience, the agreement of other co-researchers to removal and the wider role duality experiences he did not challenge the removal of the work on vision, values and mission

### **How the group completed its work on vision, values and mission**

It was agreed in GS 3 to take vision and values out of the AR and that after some specific work on a mission statement it would also be taken out, which it was in GS 4. It is worth exploring why these decisions were made at this point in the research.

Group members thought that they had done enough work on these concepts and they wished to move on to further steps in the agreed plan. The evidence for this view is the amount of intersession work and group discussion that had been undertaken in C2 and C3; statements by co-researchers in CS 3 on the work now being done and the positive and enthusiastic statements in the reflective slot at the end of the session.

Co-researchers also believed that there should be consultation with stakeholders such as service users, families, staff and the board of directors. This approach had already been discussed in C1 and it was now the beginning of the proposal to take the

concepts out of the AR. The PR thought that this was a positive approach, but did not believe that the work was ready for this action yet.

Role duality, as described above, and therefore power relations within the group was also a factor in this decision.

At the time, but even more so in writing the story and reflecting on that, the PR's view is that the work was not properly completed. He understands this to be the position even though good work was done on vision, values and mission and that it contributed to the advancement in the group's thinking, particularly in relation to connections with and empowering of stakeholders. It was not properly completed because the group's views on vision and values were not clearly agreed and documented. No AR finally agreed documents were produced – on vision and values there were only review and evidence documents. While these were useful they did not clearly set out the research group's position, wishes and plan. This meant that significant changes to the concepts and approaches could be made outside the AR leaving a question about how much the AR would really contribute to the organisational vision, values and mission.

What influenced the PR to agree to the concepts being taken out of the AR was the power influence, but more importantly the expressed views of the group that the work had been done and that it should be taken out. The weakness in this approach was the PR not giving critical feedback to the group on where he understood the work on vision, values and mission to be and what he understood still needed to be done for success both within the AR and outside in the wider organisation. Why he tended to behave like that has been referred to in the Role Duality section.

While it was not obvious at that stage this proposal may also have been a first indication of a wish by some co-researchers to end the AR. This will best be discussed in the reflection on the AR processes and practices in C3.

#### **The role regarding service development**

Following the work on vision, values and mission the group began again to address the

major focus of the research, which was the role of the EC in relation to service development. Early in working on the role it was proposed to also take it out of the AR at that point. Not all co-researchers agreed with that proposal and discussion led to agreement to continue work on it for a time.

However, after two sessions on the role there was a proposal to take this topic out of the AR at that point. This was the second proposal to take an element of the AR out of the research process. Such proposals were reducing the areas addressed by the research and in the case of the role, i.e. the major focus of the AR if it had been taken out that would have ended the AR, except for review and reflection. Such a proposal and support for it can be understood as a wish to end the AR. If there was this wish it is interesting that it developed not far into the work that had been agreed by the whole group when there had been an explicit option to end the AR. The proposal can be connected to role duality, power management and tiredness with work in general and the AR specifically.

The connection to role duality and power management relates to who made the proposal. The role duality connection is straightforward, that is the EC role of the proposer. The power management connection is more speculative. It could be understood as a wish to be in a position to decide on and manage the role and changes to it. The power management issue is also considered because of the earlier driving of taking vision, values and mission out of the AR. The understanding of tiredness as a factor comes from the PR's observation of reductions in inter-session work, of co-researcher's behaviour in some group sessions and observations of tiredness outside the AR.

Two co-researchers argued for the continuation of the work on the role and discussion led to agreement to do that. It was argued that continuation within the AR would be valuable for the research and the organisation and supportive for the continuation of the work on the role. These arguments and the ultimate decision to continue appeared to be influenced by two factors. Firstly this view was probably supportive of the PR and respectful of his role duality and secondly it was seen as a contribution to the

organisation. This was identified as potentially coming from the group's work because it was undertaken in communicative space and protected time.

What is interesting about the next steps is that the group could not quickly identify its view to date or agreement on the role and how it should change. As in previous cycles this led to further review. This review aimed at identifying the group's views on the role, its level of agreement and decisions on change was the third large review carried out in the AR. At that time the PR reflected that while the review might produce useful information it was late in the AR to be carrying it out. The actual values of the review were that it contributed to consensus on progressing on the work on the role and a better set of outcomes from the final group session than might have been expected, even though the ultimate outcome was not arrived at.

While there were positive moves in the thinking on empowering service users and enabling staff in relation to service development these outcomes were short of the intended outcomes so the PR was still left with a question as to whether it had been worth undertaking all the intensive work over the final three sessions of C3. The increase in activity and the positive moves happened for a number of reasons. These were the significant review and the learning from it; the opportunity to address the role that was seen at that point; the more exclusive focus on the role across the last four sessions and the CPAR framework for the final session that appeared to prompt and enable a more critical approach to the topic.

### **AR Process and Practice in C3**

C3 clearly demonstrates the practice of the PR to undertake significant levels of inter-session work including doing individual work, working with co-researchers, giving guidance to co-researchers undertaking work, producing summaries of co-researchers' work and alone or with a co-researcher developing a plan for the next group session. This practice was inevitable when acting as PR, but the level was increased by the PR's wish to achieve as successful outcomes as possible in the soon to finish AR and by requests or proposals by a co-researcher when inter-session work was being agreed. It

is unlikely that the AR would have reached the points that it did, especially on the EC's role if the PR had not undertaken such inter-session work and contributed to the group sessions through this work.

There were fewer cancellations or time changes of sessions than in the previous two cycles. This was mostly as a result of the plan agreed by the group early in the cycle. The two relevant elements were the fact that many of the group sessions were shorter than many of the sessions in the previous cycles and because it had been agreed that the AR could proceed without all members being at every session. Individuals missing a small number of sessions may not have been ideal, but it was seen by the PR and by co-researchers as a way of completing the AR during a time when annual leave would inevitably have an effect on the AR.

C3 again demonstrated the group's practice of repetition of work, revisiting topics and having some difficulty in moving on in the process. By this cycle even the PR contributed to this by including the task 'Reflections on what the group has agreed' in the plan drafted for the group at the beginning of the cycle. The work on the EC's role across four group sessions also demonstrated the habit of 'going round in circles' despite the amount of work undertaken at this time and the interest and even enthusiasm expressed. This behaviour is likely to have been prompted by the experience and habits of the group.

### **Context**

The context within which Cycle 3 was conducted influenced how the AR was conducted, how co-researchers participated in the research and the outcomes of the research. In C3, as in the previous cycles the fact that the research group was also the Executive Committee and the national financial crisis were two significant aspects. In C3 the other significant aspect was the change of organisational Chief Executive.

The research group also being the EC influenced the establishment of role duality and how it worked. This was because of the three different grade levels, but also the different power positions of different participants who were on the same grade. These

aspects of role duality and participants' experience of how the group worked when acting as EC influenced factors such as making proposals, taking leadership actions and undertaking inter-session work.

In C3 the national situation had much less effect on the pattern of group sessions. There were fewer changes to times and dates than in the other two cycles. It did have an influence through the amount of challenging and sometimes stressful work that the group members had to undertake as members of the EC. These pressures on the group members were somewhat relieved by what they viewed as a protected space within the AR. The evidence of this was the dynamic discussions in a number of sessions, especially the last three.

The change of Chief Executive was a significant change in the internal organisational context in which the group participatory AR took place. This was a complex change in the context, because both the former Chief Executive and the new one had both the top management role and a role as a co-researcher. While power was an obvious and cited issue the personality and relationship issues also influenced group members in relation to what they discussed and what decisions they agreed to, such as taking elements of the AR out of the research process.

A somewhat less significant, but still influential, contextual issue was the length of the AR, with C3 taking the last six months of a two year period. The ongoing AR added to the higher than normal level of EC work being undertaken. While pleasure was expressed during C3 in relation to some aspects of the AR processes it is likely that the length of the research contributed to some co-researcher behaviours. One such behaviour was co-researchers who had previously undertaken all agreed inter-session work, not undertaking some agreed work or doing it in a superficial manner. Another behaviour likely to have been influenced by this contextual factor was the agreement to take vision, values and mission out of the AR. This had required quite an amount of inter-session work by two co-researchers. It may also have contributed to the proposal to take the work on the role out of the AR. The evidence for this was statements that

this had not been agreed to despite a good deal of work. Some co-researchers may have seen continuing on this within the AR as using up time without good outcomes. What was surprising in the time context was the unanimous and strong agreement to continue the research. It was, and remains, unclear to the PR whether this was courtesy to and/or support for him or interest in continuing the research in order to reach better outcomes for service development, or some combination of the two factors.

#### **4.4 Review of the Action Research Project by the Research Group, 3rd April 2012**

This was a review by the group of the action research. It took quite a while to set up, initially because of competition with EC work and then one co-researcher being on sick leave. It was carried out using a set of questions from the PR and a co-researcher. These were:

1. Learning for the [EC] group
2. What will we take out of the research and act on in the [EC] and/or the organisation and how will we do that?
3. What are the views of the co-researchers on being part of participatory action research and what have you learned from it?
4. What are the views of the co-researchers on using the critical approach to the action research?

It was suggested that group members write a document, using these questions, in preparation for the session. Only the PR and one co-researcher did this. The PR's document included the following points that are for noting:

- The aim in relation to the role not being reached
- The influence on the AR of power within the group
- The potential value of the learning documents produced
- The good work done on vision, values and action and the lack of post-AR action on them to date
- The demonstration of the value of reflection and the low level of it within the group

- The potential value of communicative space, but the limitations caused by communication practices within the group
- The challenge of role duality, especially when trying to take a critical approach
- Co-researchers did very good inter-session work
- The group's thinking on empowerment, especially for service users, advanced significantly as the AR progressed
- There were impacts on the AR from the financial crisis and from the time gaps between and the postponements of sessions
- *'Records show that some participants, at least, believe that issues were surfaced that would otherwise not have been surfaced'*

The one co-researcher who wrote a document also made a lot of points and the following are some to note:

- The research highlighted the importance for an organisation of having a stable management team
- Service development can happen around us or without us particularly if energy of EC is focused in another direction
- While we speak about the importance of being on the ground, we may not often do so (to engage with the rest of the organisation)
- Each of us has a sharp capacity to pick up information and accurately interpret what we see on the ground.
- Quality: We are driven by a desire to provide high quality services
- To date our mission statement has been undefined – too general. Too many words attempting to encompass all aspects of everything.
- The organisation derives its power from the top. The top is deliberately controlling. Which is not to say that power is not exerted independently at many levels of the organisation.
- PAR: Creates an opportunity to communicate at a personal and revealing level. Based on shared participation and transparency
- CPAR: It took time to become confident in the process.
- I think the benefit of the research is that it brought a 'task' focused group together to view their collective role in a more collaborative way

Neither document is included in the appendices because of issues of confidentiality.

In the review session the group worked through each question with each person having an opportunity to make their points and there were short discussions. Each question produced individualised responses and there were no responses to any of the questions that were agreed by the group. Across a number of the questions, but especially on learning for the group, the judgements and recommendations of co-

researchers related to experience within the group acting as EC and within the organisation rather than the AR. This mixture in the focuses within the group was similar to what happened within the AR.

There were a small number of views that several or most of the group expressed. It is worth identifying these:

- The time and space for reflection was identified as important, powerful and valuable. Even if this space was not fully used by the group it was obviously valued. This was not the first time that it had been identified as a positive element of the AR and there was some reference to how it might be used outside the research.
- Service development was referred to in responses to several questions. These were a mixture of being critical of how the approach to it worked in the AR; the importance of service development; recommendations on changes that were similar to those made within the AR and the need and potential to work on service development and to improve the EC's role in relation to it.
- The general view of group members was that the critical approach had only been used to a limited extent. The points relating to this outcome were questioning if co-researchers understood it; the risks involved in challenging other people in the group and the PR's view that people did not take up the critical approach.

While there was other useful reflection and learning identified in the review the other points were only made by one or two group members. This was a similar pattern to the discussions within the research and so did not lead to strong conclusions from the review. Because of the approaches of group members and despite the PR at the end of the session revisiting the question as to what would be acted on following the research there was no group agreement on an area or areas to act on. However, as this was a review this was not a requirement for the group.

#### **Reflections on the Review of the Action Research, 03. 04. 2012.**

*I think that this was a more useful experience and session than I expected. I just think that we should have had more sessions like that during the research and/or that I should have tried to make more use of the reflections that we did have.*

*Everyone contributed. My experience was that people were quite open and honest. Sometimes more honest than during the research sessions. One of the interesting things for me was that people said very similar things to what I had noted in many instances, even though I had probably spent a lot more time on the work and had had the experience of doing data analysis.*

*I was surprised at the level of directness and honesty of what some people said, especially given that we were now finished/finishing the AR.*

*What little understanding people had of the Critical approach does not surprise me at all.*

### **Conclusions**

*Being internal makes it very hard to address aspects of the IAR, e.g. facilitation; reflection; the critical approach.*

*Even though actions did not happen in the research there may be positive outcomes, but these may not be part of the writing up.*

*The culture of not taking action was clearly highlighted*

### **Reflection on and sense-making of the review of the AR by the group**

The review was an opportunity for the PR and for the co-researchers to reflect on the AR project and to share those reflections and ideas coming from them.

It was a process that gave the PR some data on co-researcher's reflections, assessments, impressions and intentions. These, together with similar data collected from previous reviews and reflections gave the PR some co-researcher positions to which he could compare his initial data analysis and therefore improve it.

The focus on and valuing of protected and reflective space and time showed that it

was a process that aided the AR through the opportunities to think about issues and to share the thinking. This is likely to have advanced the thinking within the research. However, it also enabled the process of working through issues more than once and moving off an issue being worked on to an interest of an individual co-researcher. This is likely to have contributed to the slow progress and the limited results on the intended outcomes.

It is relevant to the findings and conclusions of the research that as in the final group session of C3 and early in C1 the group agreed that it had a role in relation to service development and that the role needed to be changed. The fact that there was no group agreement on what the changed role should be or how the changes should be made or approached can be related to how the group tended to work as the EC and to the complexity and potential risks in undertaking CPAR within a top management team.

The AR being IAR within the EC also influenced processes such as facilitation, feedback and the critical approach. This was the effect of role duality and power relationships on the PR and on co-researchers. The PR had already identified these issues, but at this point he did not have any doubts about his conclusions and they were supported by some of the responses to review questions by co-researchers.

An interesting and positive view by the PR after the review session was that group members were more open and honest than in many group sessions. Considering this when writing the story indicates that actually group members used review and some reflection sessions for open and honest statements and feedback, so this approach was present at various stages throughout the AR. This is a positive description of the behaviour of the group members. It is also supportive of the AR practice of having opportunities for reflection and review as the AR progresses.

Given the PR's reason for taking a critical approach to the AR in order to facilitate an empowering approach, the positive statements in the review on empowering service users were encouraging. The fact that similar statements and discussion took place on

this subject in the final group session and then in this review session strongly suggested two advancements. One was in the thinking of group members about actually empowering service users and the other was that there may have been advancement for some co-researchers in their view that they could now make stronger statements and proposals on the subject because of the changed views of other co-researchers.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has told the story of the research as it was conducted with and by the members of the executive committee as a research group. It should help readers to understand how the principal researcher and the group worked through the research, what worked well in the research and what was challenging. It should also contribute to the readers' understanding and analysis of the findings from the research and the discussion and conclusions. The reflection and sense-making sections following the story of each cycle demonstrate the development of the principal researcher's reflections and of his sense-making through the writing of the story. These and the implications of the findings will be further advanced in the final chapter of the thesis.

## **Chapter 5. Findings**

### Introduction

There are two main areas of findings:

The first area concerns the role of the Executive Committee in relation to service development. There are four elements to be considered: the current role of the EC in relation to service development, possible changes to the role, a possible future role and actions to be taken to change the role. The findings in relation to the role are reported using the headings of the themes that emerged in the research. These themes are listed below.

The second area concerns how the AR approach worked in enabling the group to address the role issues using AR as both change and research methodologies within the same process. There were three major cycles in this research, within which there were many smaller cycles. The three major cycles were identified during the AR as large stages in the topic and process. They are referred to as Cycles One, Two and Three (C1, C2 & C3). There is a section on each cycle, beginning with a figure to illustrate it. This is followed by a short summary of how the cycle proceeded and then the findings for that cycle. These sets of findings are followed by findings in relation to critical participatory action research (CPAR) and insider action research (IAR).

### **5.1 The Role of the Executive Committee in Relation to Service Development**

The Executive Committee's current role was considered under the headings of its formal role and its role as enacted.

#### **5.1.1. The Formal Role**

The formal role of the EC was that which was set out when the Committee was originally established in the 1980s, and was changed or added to by the Board of

Directors, the Chief Executive and the full EC. The research group identified that the EC had responsibility and accountability for service development in the organisation. The aspects of the responsibility that were most agreed on were leadership and management, making major decisions and appointing and managing project leaders. Accountability to the Board of Directors was identified by the group as a responsibility.

### **5.1.2. The Role of the Executive Committee as it is Enacted**

How the role was enacted was usually described by the co-researchers as 'How the [Executive Committee] does service development', so this perspective is about the practice of the EC and of the members of the EC in their different management roles. This was considered by the research group from an historical perspective, in relation to current practice and in relation to changes that should be made to develop a future role.

## **5.2. Findings on the Role**

The results of the role aspect of the group action research are principally presented using themes that were identified from the group's work, including reflection, discussion, analysis, actions and review. Based on the number of times the themes were discussed and the amount of individual and sub-group work on them the themes can be described as major and minor themes. At the end of each section on a theme the actions agreed by the group are identified.

### **5.2.1. Themes related to the role**

The themes in relation to the ER's role began to emerge in the first group session of the main research. The emergence of these themes was contributed to by six ideas and questions: three related to the current role and three related to the potential future role. These issues came from the PR's preunderstanding and from the group

discussions in the pre-step. The PR presented them to the group for reflection at the beginning of the research. These ideas and questions are summarised in Table 6.

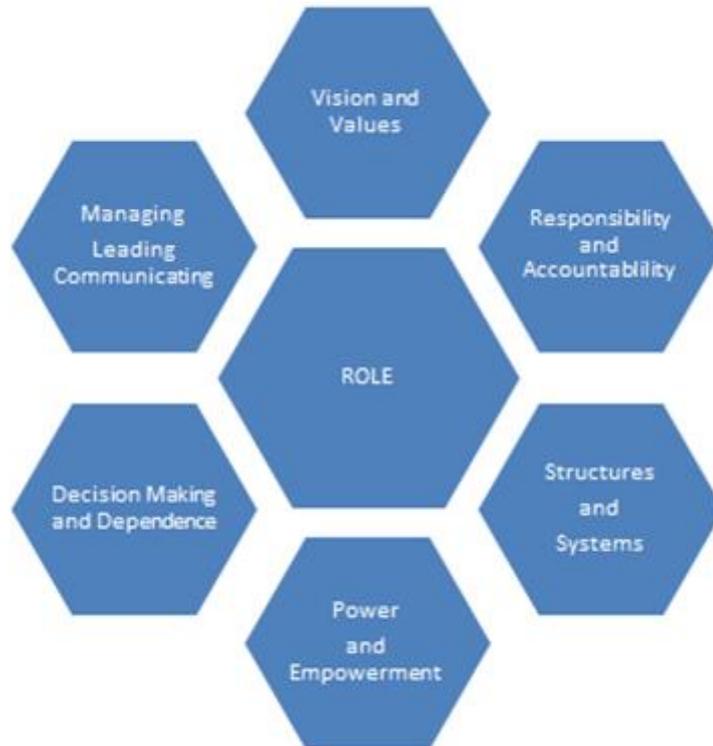
<b>Current</b>	<b>Future</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current episodic approach to service development</li> <li>• The dependence of current service development projects on initiatives and decisions at the top of the organisation</li> <li>• The impact on service development of small continuous changes made at local level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need for an organisational process to support continuous service development</li> <li>• Processes for empowering and supporting staff and service users to lead and work on service development</li> <li>• What would enable everyone to contribute to the development of high quality, innovative services?</li> </ul>

**Table 6:** Principal Researcher’s ideas and questions at the start of the research

The themes that emerged from the consideration of the ideas and questions and the contributions of the co-researchers:

- a) Responsibility and accountability
- b) Decision-making by and dependence on the Executive Committee
- c) Structures, systems and processes
- d) Power and Empowerment
- e) Communication between the Executive Committee and other stakeholders
- f) Vision and values and mission
- g) Leading and Managing Service Development
- h) The current context and environment

These themes, other than the context and environment, are summarised in Figure 10.



**Figure 10:** Themes related to the role of the Executive Committee on service development

#### 5.2.1.a. Responsibility and Accountability

The research group agreed that the EC had responsibility and accountability for service development in the organisation. The aspects of the responsibility that were most agreed on were leadership; management; making major decisions; appointing and managing project leaders. Accountability was acknowledged within the group, but the only stakeholders referred to in this context were the Board of Directors. This was clearly part of the EC's formal role.

A number of changes to the role of the EC were suggested. These included responsibility for enabling service development at a local level in ways that empowered staff working closely with service users to respond to their needs and wishes and that enabled staff to be more creative. Another proposal was that the role

would include the empowering of service users themselves in relation to service development.

Further changes that were identified concerned improving the enactment of the role rather than changing the role. These proposals concerned changing, improving and strengthening the structures and systems for carrying out the EC's responsibilities and accountability. These suggestions were made across the three cycles by a minority of co-researchers and, for example, some included the need to address the lack of 'robust' structures and systems.

#### Agreed Actions

Although group members were in agreement on the EC's responsibility and accountability, this did not result in a group agreement leading to specific actions within the AR.

#### 5.2.1.b. Dependence on the Executive Committee and its Decision- Making

This theme refers to the dependence of service development on EC permission, prioritisation, funding and support. It also refers to the process of making of major or significant decisions in relation to service development.

Some co-researchers considered that service development was dependent on the EC. They considered that that dependency and the decision-making processes that were in place were limitations on service development. This was because they considered that emergent service development by local creative and active staff was not enabled, was restricted and in some instances such emergence was blocked. The dependence on the EC that was identified was often related to formal processes, for example responsibility for allocating funding, or assigning responsibility for the management of a project to a member of the EC rather than to another manager or clinician.

Despite these reservations it became clear that at least some service development did take place without any decision by the EC. Examples of such projects were given by the members of the research group with direct responsibility for managing regional services. Decisions on those projects were made at a geographical regional level which meant that at least one member of the EC was part of or led the decisions. The members of the research group with direct responsibility for managing regional services gave clear explanations of how the dependence on the EC worked for local staff, how local staff could or could not address this issue and how some service development happened without involvement of the Committee. One issue noted was access to and communication with the EC. This was seen as problematic because of the communication structures, but also because of the level of communication and influencing skills of some frontline managers. The second issue identified was that there was no 'graded decision making process' and that this reduced the opportunity for decision making 'down the line'. A rather contradictory view was that there is a lot of service development happening 'below the radar'.

Not everyone agreed that there was dependence on the top. Those who did not agree also said that whatever dependence there was, was appropriate to the role and responsibilities of the EC, to the need for leadership and staff competence or resistance to change.

It is clear from the different views and evidence presented that service development did take place without EC agreement, even if one member of the Committee was involved more locally and that some service development was slowed or blocked by the Committee's structures and systems for decision making.

In the final session of the AR there was enthusiastic discussion on this theme which included some repetition of the problems raised at the beginning, description of an example of a significant service development that did not involve the EC in any way and thoughts on what the Committee was and was not doing to enable local leadership for service development.

## Agreed Actions

The agreed actions in relation to decision-making and dependence were all for further discussion and presentations on how service development worked at that time. As a result of the different views there was no group agreement on this theme and there were no conclusions as to whether any actions or what actions should be taken in relation to these issues as the AR progressed. Despite the enthusiastic discussion in the final group session, no plan to address the issues following the end of this AR was proposed or agreed. The results in relation to this theme were that there were strong views put forward, there was some discussion and some learning across the AR, but no agreement or action on change.

### 5.2.1.c. Structures, Systems and Processes

Structures, systems and processes were included in both group discussions and in sub-group work during the research.

Some people felt that the EC did not have as clear and robust structures and systems for service development as it did for other areas of responsibility such as finance, human relations and health and safety. This was acknowledged, and even though there was a range of views and ideas there was agreement that appropriate systems and structures for addressing service development were not in place for the EC.

Examples of the current structures and systems, including problems in relation to them, were given by co-researchers early in the process, including:

- 'How we do service development' is reflective of the existing organisation structure and how it works and the reality of running a service
- The structure limits change. The effect of the size and the geographic spread of the organisation is that it is difficult to allow people to change in one area
- Administration and bureaucracy is a dead hand when it comes to intellectual freedom and radical service development
- Systems that are strong and lead people in a certain direction and systems that are seen as blocks

There was little focus on these problems in group discussion on the current enactment of the role.

As the research progressed a number of other points in relation to the current structures and systems were made. These points were:

- [The Executive Committee] has a peripheral role. There is no dedicated section in its minutes on service development
- There are no service development reports for [the Executive Committee]. Critical service development decisions are not coming back
- Process exists alongside [the Executive Committee's] work.
- The process for service development at [the Executive Committee] is currently not formal.

In discussing the future role of the EC, the view that structures and systems should be in place to improve the role and to carry it out effectively was put forward. This point was made a number of times during the cycles and there was general, but not specific, agreement. It did not receive equal attention in the process. Some co-researchers focused on this much more than others. Suggestions as to whether the structures and systems for service development should be the same as or different from those for the other areas were made, but not discussed in depth or agreed by the group.

One of the specific structural matter areas that were discussed was the creation of a post with responsibility for service development. The discussions on this possible position and role explored the organisational history of this responsibility and produced a number of views and future options. However, there was no agreement that setting up such a post should be acted on. While there was a proposal that an 'office' for service development should be established, this faded from discussion, was presented again in the final session of the AR but did not result in any agreed action.

By the end of C3 the overall view was that service development needs to become part of the role of the EC as much as other areas of work, such as service delivery and

financial management, and that there need to be systems, processes or structures in place to manage this (there were different views as to which or all of these should be in place).

It was also proposed that there should be a system of reporting to the EC on service development. This was tacitly agreed, but there was no detailed discussion and no proposal to take action during the research. However, there was little focus on this in discussion on the current enactment of the role.

#### Agreed Actions

The examples and issues identified regarding the current role and the discussions regarding the future role did not lead to any group agreement on action within the AR to develop or change the structures, systems or processes. Nor was there any group agreement on the development of plans for change actions following the research.

#### 5.2.1.d. Power and Empowerment

The empowerment of staff and service users in relation to service development was one of the issues put forward by the PR for group reflection in GS1, C1. The other power issues emerged from contributions by co-researchers. Power was a major focus of all co-researchers in relation to the enactment of the EC's current role, as it also was in relation to other aspects of the research.

#### Power Relationships within the Executive Committee

The power relationships within the EC were acknowledged by a majority of co-researchers as having significant effects on how service development is enacted. The desire on the part of some co-researchers to make some changes to the power relationships within the EC emerged clearly. However, this desire, what the changes might be and how they might be achieved were not strongly articulated. Some statements on the power relationships and their effects on the AR were made to the PR in individual meetings with co-researchers. They were subsequently made in group reflective sessions and in a small number of main group sessions. These statements did

not lead to any proposals for changes within the EC in order to improve or change the role.

#### Power relationships between the Executive Committee and Stakeholders

When the current enactment of the EC's role was discussed, power relationships between the Committee and other stakeholders were frequently raised by most of the research group. It was agreed that the EC had power when its relationship with other stakeholders was considered. This was identified both as appropriate and as restricting service development, indicating that the EC's power can have both positive and negative consequences. There were also different views about the changes that should be made with some co-researchers indicating that power should be in the EC or with the Chief Executive and others focusing more on empowering service users and, to a lesser extent, empowering staff who worked directly with service users.

Three areas related to power and empowerment was addressed in considering the future role of the Executive Committee:

#### Empowering Service Users

Empowerment was commented on early in the process with one researcher talking about empowering service users and another about empowering staff. At the beginning of C2 the PR put empowerment forward as a lens for analysis of the themes that emerged in C1, when it was indicated by a co-researcher that further data analysis was necessary. Although the use of this lens was agreed it was not used by co-researchers following some critique of the focus by an individual co-researcher. There was no group consensus on changes that should be made in relation to empowering service users. However, some individual co-researchers made strong recommendations, with ideas for giving more power to service users and for enabling and supporting them. Thus, agreement on the importance of empowering service users advanced across the three cycles. There was a sense of more acceptance of this concept in discussions near the end of the process.

### Power relationships within the Executive Committee

The second area was power relationships within the EC. There was no real discussion on these relationships. There were a small number of comments, but these did not lead to discussion. In two or three sessions there were strong statements on the 'reality' of the power position of the Chief Executive. Power, including power within the EC, was one of the areas addressed in a number of documents produced by the PR and co-researchers following group decisions for their production. These documents did not lead to any significant discussion or proposals for EC power relationship changes.

### Delegation of Power and Responsibilities

The third area was a small number of proposals that service development should be managed in ways that delegated responsibilities and power to regional teams and to organisational levels below that. These proposals would, in theory at least, give more power to the members of the EC who had responsibility for the geographical regions. As understood by the PR these members were the least powerful members of both the EC and the research group at the time of the AR. These delegation proposals were neither agreed nor disagreed on by the group and were not acted on.

### Agreed Actions

There was no group agreement on actions for making changes to the power relationships between the EC and other stakeholders. Neither was there any agreement on the proposals that were made in relation to delegating power to teams at levels below the Committee. There was no group agreement during the AR to take specific actions in relation to the empowerment of service users. Nor was there any agreement on a plan for action on such empowerment following the research. The group did not agree that any actions should be taken regarding the power relationships within the EC. All of the group agreements on these sub-themes were in relation to the production of learning, review and proposal documents to contribute to the AR.

#### 5.2.1.e. Communication

Some co-researchers displayed a strong interest in communication, especially communication between the EC and other staff and teams in the organisation in relation to service development. While the total number of statements on and references to communication was not as high as for some of the main themes, analysis clearly linked it to major themes. These included Decision Making and Dependence on the Top, Power and Structures and Systems and Processes.

Communication between the EC and the organisation was initially raised in C1 and was also referred to in the later cycles, especially C3. The co-researchers who raised the issue identified current communication systems and practices as a limitation on service development. This was not acknowledged as a problem by all members of the research group.

Statements made by pairs and sub-groups in C1 are examples of what was said about communication. While these points may not be quotations they do come from the records of the group discussions:

- Structure limits upward communication.
- Structure, including geographic structure does not facilitate communication
- Different people communicating differently
- Frontline services operate in a parallel universe.
- Communication systems initiative may have to come from the top

The specific focus in the statements and discussion was on poor 'Up and Down' communication regarding service development. This was described as making the initiation of service development more difficult and not providing support for or appreciation of service development work. It was indicated that there needed to be a system or systems that enabled better 'Up and Down' communication in addition to making changes in practice by members of the EC. From the overall discussion on communication it could be assumed that a majority of the research group wanted to

change how the EC communicated and facilitated the communication of other stakeholders. However, it was not agreed by the whole group that this was a problem or that it needed to be addressed.

#### Agreed Actions

In C2 & C3 there were a small number of proposals for a model or a structure for communication up and down and bringing ideas or proposals to the EC. However, no clear proposal was made and there was no agreement on how communication should happen with a new EC role, so no change actions were agreed.

#### 5.2.1.f. Vision and Values and Mission

Vision emerged as a significant issue in the first session when it was raised by an individual co-researcher. It was not more fully addressed until well into C2, by which time it had been raised a number of times, usually by the same co-researcher. Current limitations on shared vision were identified by some co-researchers, while some others stated that all members of the EC had a shared vision and shared values.

#### Agreed Actions

Ultimately a majority of the group agreed that work needed to be done on vision, values and mission. These were seen as important underpinnings to the role of the EC and to the AR to enable the Committee to make changes to its role. It was also agreed that this work would be beneficial to service development. The whole group agreed to actions being taken and this work began in mid-C2. It was led by two co-researchers who carried out work on the area between group sessions and made verbal and document presentations to the group. The initial work addressed both vision and values. The vision and values and the mission statement were identified as being influenced by national policies and by national cultural changes in relation to people with disabilities. This was in addition to the organisation's own philosophy and culture. As C2 came towards the end of 2010 there was a dip in the energy given to the AR.

When C3 was agreed and established, following more work on vision and values it was agreed that they should be taken out of the AR for consultation with stakeholders. The focus moved to the development of a new mission statement. While this could contribute to the role of the EC it would not have the same value or importance as a developed and agreed vision. This difference was not acknowledged by the group. The work on the mission statement was led by one co-researcher. This produced six alternative mission statements. Through discussion the group reduced this to three alternatives. It was agreed that as the group was now close to the end of the AR project these options for a mission statement would be taken out of the AR and that stakeholders, including the Board of Directors, would be consulted before a new mission statement would be chosen and launched.

#### 5.2.1.g. Leading and Managing Service Development

This was an important theme in the context of the EC's role and its relation to other themes such as accountability and responsibility, structures, systems and processes and power and empowerment. However, it was not a major theme in terms of the amount of group time spent on it. There was agreement in the group that changes in how members of the EC led and managed service development were desirable changes in the role. These were topics that were discussed throughout the research. The views of how leadership and management should be changed and how they should be significant aspects of the new role varied across the group. These ranged from having stronger and more structured and systematic management to having management that enabled service development at different levels and in different settings in the organisation. While sub-groups agreed on what changes should take place when they worked on this topic, following their presentations there was no full group agreement on that or on making particular changes as part of the AR.

The group's focus on the concept of enabling service development achieved a stronger position by the end of the AR. Some co-researchers when discussing leading and managing placed an emphasis on enabling. The proposed approaches to enabling included delegating responsibilities, enabling local initiatives and creativity and

improving the communication between the EC and other staff. Some of these co-researchers also put forward the ideas of focusing on the lives of service users, empowering them to be involved in service development or empowering them through service development.

Proposals of this type were presented and discussed across C2 and C3. While there may not have been agreement or consensus within the whole group, by the end of the research there were elements of a broad agreement. There was a significant focus on the value of enabling service development at the level of the organisation's regions, among 'experts' and at the level of local staff. While the enabling aspect of leadership and management was discussed at length there was no final agreement on what the EC's role in relation to enabling it should be.

#### Agreed Actions

The differing views on leadership and management meant that there was no agreement on actions to be taken during the AR. There was no agreed plan for action following the AR. This was partly because there was no overall plan for such action, but also because there was no group agreement on the EC's future role in relation to leadership and management.

#### 5.2.1.h. The Context and Environment

The external and internal environments and the context of the time during which the AR was taking place were all considered and included in the discussions and decisions by and within the group on the EC's role. The environment and context also had significant effects on the AR process and findings regarding this will be reported in that section of the chapter. The effects of the context and environment on the current and potential future role of the EC are explored in more detail in the Discussion and Conclusions Chapter. Two external environmental areas were identified as affecting the organisation and therefore the Executive Committee were: National Legislation, Policies and Standards; Funding cuts and moratorium on staff recruitment

### National Legislation, Policies and Standards:

The group recognised that any role in relation to service development would be influenced and affected by national changes in how services will be provided and the positions of service provider organisations in the context of legislation, policies, funding and national standards. It was identified that work was already being undertaken in relation to these areas outside the AR. This meant that while the thinking and discussion were influenced by the environment, it was less likely that decisions would be taken on these areas within the AR.

### Funding cuts and moratorium on staff recruitment:

These factors were having major impacts on the work of the EC in parallel with the AR. They also influenced at least some of the thinking and decisions within the AR. There were individual and sub-group points on the situation made during C1. Examples of these are that reduced funding was having a negative effect on a significant and ethically important service development project; that the EC was using active methods for dealing with the financial cuts and for working on service delivery, but that there were threats to service delivery because of the financial cuts.

## **5.3. Findings in relation to Action Research Processes and Practices**

This second main section details the findings about the AR processes and practices during the group AR. In order to present these findings it is necessary to summarise the progress through each of the three major cycles in the AR spiral, so this will be done in the first sub-section of the findings. As explained in the Methodological Process Chapter there are smaller cycles within the major cycles and sometimes there is more than one small cycle in progress at the same time. The second sub-section details findings on the Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) and the Insider Action Research (IAR) approaches to the research as it was conducted. These are presented separately because there are specific findings under each heading, although there are relationships and crossover between IAR and CPAR.

### **5.3.1. Processes and Practices during the Spiral of Action Research**

#### Introduction

The AR process involved a sequence of sessions in which the full research group participated. Work by individuals and sub-groups of two or three researchers also took place between full group sessions. This individual and sub-group work arose from the activities in the group sessions and the group decisions about what was necessary as a next step. The process also involved first person AR by the PR. This included preparation for the group sessions, facilitation or support actions within the group sessions; management of the session records; guidance, frameworks and support for individual and sub-group work; individual meetings and electronic contacts with the group. There was participatory work on many of these processes by co-researchers and this increased as the research progressed. These findings relate to the operation of AR as practiced by the PR and by the whole research group.

The three figures below (Figures 11, 12, 13) illustrate the research processes in the sequences in which they took place for each of the three major cycles. Group sessions and inter-session work are depicted in parallel, with the connections between the two elements illustrated by a curve. The figures provide short descriptions of the steps in progress through each cycle.

#### 5.3.1.a. Cycle 1: October 2009 to April 2010

This cycle consisted of five full group sessions (GS) and individual and sub-group inter-session work between group sessions as illustrated in Figure 11.

<b>Group Session</b>	<b>GS1</b> 23. 10. 2009 Reflection and discussion on Current & Future Roles		<b>GS2</b> 09. 12. 09 Discussion on Roles Decision to do more analytic work on Roles		<b>GS3</b> 05. 02. 2010 Pairs presented: Discussion on roles Proposals for change actions - within and outside AR Decision on presentations on knowledge of & current service development No decision on change		<b>GS4</b> 24. 02. 2010 Four presentations on service development Discussion on service development No group decision on action		<b>GS5</b> 09. 04. 10 Group worked through AL cycle Group agreed: Higher level of participation Plan to enable Cycle 2 to begin Plan for start of Cycle 2 Meeting outside AR
<b>Inter - Session</b>		Pairs reflection and discussion on Current & Future Roles		Pairs did analytic work on Roles PR developed themes from records		3 Co-researchers developed presentations on service development PR summary of literature on service development		PR developed Action Learning cycle to review Cycle 1	

**Figure 11:** Cycle 1: October 2009 to April 2010

### Beginning the group action research

C1 began with the group considering the six ideas and questions put forward by the PR about the EC's current and possible future roles on service development. These were based on his understanding of issues that were significant, taken from his preunderstanding and from the group discussions in the pre-step sessions and were worth reflecting on as a starting point for the research. They are summarised in Table 6: Principal Researcher's ideas and questions.

The group's work on this proceeded through three group sessions with inter-session work being done by pairs of co-researchers and the PR. By GS3 there was valuable information, reflection and learning in relation to the current service development situation. The future role was reflected on, considered and discussed. Proposals were made for change actions both within the AR and outside it. At this point the group decision was that more should be learned about service development before proceeding with action. The purpose of this was to enable the concept of service development to be examined in more depth; to share the members' experiences and understanding of it; to relate this to the wider knowledge of service development and to agree the group's understanding and description of service development. This work was done and shared with the group by the PR and three co-researchers. No decision on action followed this session.

### Review of Cycle 1 Action Research: Group Session 5

Following these short cycles the PR decided that to assist the progress of the AR there should be a group review of the significant amount of work that had been done with the ongoing focus on consideration, analysis and reflection. An Action Learning cycle was used by the group to review all aspects of C1 and to learn from them in order to contribute to the planning for and the carrying out of the next major cycle using an AR approach.

The review contributed to the development of a higher level of participation by co-researchers in future cycles of the research. The review also helped to confirm

significant content themes and strong focuses by individual co-researchers on how the EC's role was enacted (see findings on this in the first main section of this chapter), on the AR process and on power issues for the group.

A short plan for action to enable C2 to begin was agreed. This included further data analysis, individual meetings between the PR and co-researchers and a meeting between the Chief Executive and three co-researchers outside the AR. It was also agreed that the initial focus of C2 would be to question 'where we go next'.

#### 5.3.1.b. Findings in Relation to Action Research Processes in Cycle 1

C1 produced most of the themes that were the focus of the rest of the AR:

- The role as it is enacted
- Responsibility and accountability
- Decision-making by and dependence on the Executive Committee
- Power and Empowerment
- The context and environment.

It showed that there were different views within the group in relation to both content, as presented earlier in the chapter, and in relation to how the AR was proceeding and should proceed.

The emerging group approach was to work through repeated cycles of review and analysis, reflection, learning and discussion, with no conclusions or action on the role resulting. This can be seen across group sessions one, two and three and the related inter-session work.

The group decided that from the beginning of C2 there would be an increased level of participation. This agreement was contributed to by the experience of the co-researchers in C1, the wish of the PR and an individual co-researcher criticism.

The power positions and relations within the research group were already illustrated within this cycle. Examples of these were:

- Which co-researcher proposed action to be taken at the end of group sessions
- Which co-researchers spoke most in the sessions
- Which co-researcher criticised the principal researcher
- The Chief Executive arranging to meet three co-researchers outside the action research

#### 5.3.1.c. Cycle 2 May 2010 to March 2011

This cycle consisted of nine full group sessions (GS) and individual and sub-group inter-session work between group sessions. There was also a three month period during which only the PR and one co-researcher carried out work.

c) Cycle 2: May 2010 to March 2011

<b>Group Session</b>	<b>GS1</b> 20. 05. 2010 Challenges to PR Reporting on CEO meeting Report on data analysis Further analysis agreed		<b>GS2</b> 02. 06. 10 PR presented proposal Group decided not to make connection Group decision to work on proposals		<b>GS3</b> 27. 07. 2010 Proposals made, reviewed and discussed No agreement to act on any of the proposals Agreement to do another learning	Three month gap between GS3 and GS4	<b>GS4</b> 03. 11. 2010 Presentation and discussion of Learning document Decision to develop proposals for action		<b>GS5</b> 25. 11. 10 Discussion of proposals Agreed that PR & 2 co-researchers would develop one set of proposals
<b>Inter-Session</b>		Empowerment analysis not undertaken PR developed proposal for connection between AR & environmental issues		3 pairs developed proposals		Learning from Cycle 1 document produced by PR & one co-researcher Individual meetings		4 sets of proposals Summary of Learning document	
<b>Group Session</b>		<b>GS6</b> 16. 12. 2010 Debates on two other topics Discussion on proposal Agreed focus and actions on vision & values PR to interview CEO on vision & values		<b>GS7</b> 20. 01. 2011 Work on vision and values ongoing		<b>GS8</b> 17. 02. 2011 Presentation on work by co-researchers Discussion Agreed to examine how Executive drives values No specific actions agreed			<b>GS9</b> 03. 03. 2011 Final Session of Cycle 2 Change of CEO Discussed how Executive drives values No agreement on next actions
<b>Inter-Session</b>	PR & 2 co-researchers developed proposals further		Work by 2 co-researchers on vision and values		Co-researchers working on vision and values		No inter-session work		

Figure 12: Cycle 2 May 2010 to March 2011

### Increase in Participation

Co-researchers began to record group sessions and work with the PR on reviews and learning, writing documents and on preparing for group sessions. They continued to do other types of inter-session work begun in C1.

### The Start of Cycle 2

There was a difficult start to C2 with an individual criticism of the PR's approach following feedback on his data analysis. Feedback on the Chief Executive's meeting with three co-researchers which arose from issues raised in C1 also caused tension. Further data analysis by all researchers using an empowerment lens was agreed as a next step, but did not happen. In recognition of the rapidly deteriorating operating environment and of the organisation's entry into a challenging time in terms of finance, staffing and service demands, the PR proposed a link between the AR and this environmental crisis. The group did not agree to this as they did not wish to make this connection.

### Cycles of Working on Proposals

Following the difficult start to C2 the group worked through a number of cycles to develop and agree a change plan and actions based on the plan. The first small cycle did not produce agreement on change actions. Instead, the group agreed to revisit the learning from C1. One member of the group, the Director of Psychiatry, retired in July and agreed to have relevant records kept within the research. After the first three sessions, progress was interrupted by a three month gap (August to October 2010) in the group AR. Work was done in this time on the Learning from Cycle 1 document by the PR and one co-researcher. The PR held individual meetings in order to enable and support the re-start of the research. Following a presentation and a group discussion on the Learning from Cycle 1, it was agreed that four researchers would work on proposals for action. Group discussion of their work led to agreement that the PR would work with two co-researchers on the proposals and set out a short list of proposed actions. Presentation of the proposals led to agreement to start with work on vision and values, with two co-researchers doing the out-of-group work. Following

their presentation in GS8, there was group discussion on vision and values and this was followed in the next session by discussion on how the EC drove values in the organisation.

#### 'Dip' in the Action Research

The time, energy and attention given to the AR by the co-researchers and by the PR dipped at the end of 2010 and for the first couple of months in 2011. This was contributed to by the ongoing pressure in relation to the national environment. However, the main cause was the retirement of the Chief Executive and the selection and appointment of a new Chief Executive who was already a co-researcher. Combined with the three month gap in the autumn, this meant that there was about six months during which there was limited or no AR being undertaken.

#### 5.3.1.d. Findings in Relation to Action Research Processes in Cycle 2

C2 demonstrated the understanding of the co-researchers of the high level of participation expected in this form of AR and the wish or willingness to participate in that way. Examples of this were:

- Work on proposals and plans individually, in pairs and in a sub-group
- Working with PR to produce the Learning from Cycle 1 document (Appendix 7)
- Work on vision and values
- Recording group sessions

As in C1 the group demonstrated a practice of working through a number of small cycles in order to achieve an agreed outcome. There were two forms of small cycles in C2:

- Agreement to do inter-session work on proposals and plans, discussing those in the next group session and deciding to do further work on proposals and plans
- Making a decision to undertake a different element of work next (e.g. producing the document on Learning from Cycle 1), following a group agreement on inter-session work and discussion of this work

Both of these approaches led to a return to discussion and the generation of further ideas.

The Learning from Cycle 1 document which was produced during C2, using a framework developed from Kemmis's (2008) CPAR definition, was used to inform the agreement to the sub-group proposal for a plan and subsequent actions on that plan. It was also referred to at various later points when this learning could help progress, for example in the record and document review carried out in C 3.

The three month gap between GS3 and GS4 required specific actions by the PR in order to re-activate the AR. These included:

- Having individual meetings with co-researchers
- Linking with his collaborating co-researcher on preparation for presentation of the learning document to the group
- Re-organising the next group session

In this period, changes and disturbance in the environment and the organisational context included:

- The impact of government and funding agency actions in relation to funding, employment and service provision
- The Chief Executive's focus on corporate restructuring
- The retirement of the Chief Executive who was a co-researcher and the appointment of another co-researcher as Chief Executive

This disturbance in the context and the environment had significant effects on the AR.

These included impacts on:

- Time, focus and attention
- Power dynamics
- Risk taking

5.3.1.e. Cycle 3: March 2011 to October 2011

This cycle consisted of eight full group sessions and individual and sub-group inter-session work between group sessions (Figure 13).

<b>Group Session</b>	<b>GS1</b> 24. 03. 2011 Group discussed continuing with AR Group agreed: -continue with AR -focuses of Cycle 3 -potential timescale -process for when co-researchers on leave		<b>GS2</b> 31. 03. 2011 Plan and timescale discussed Agreed to continue work on vision and values Agreed immediate steps for this		<b>GS3</b> 13. 05. 2011 Presentations on vision and values Discussion Move to Mission Statement Agreed Inter-Session actions		<b>GS4</b> 15. 06. 2011 Presentation on Mission Statement Discussion Agreed to take Mission Statement out of AR Discussion on role Inter-session work on role agreed		<b>GS5</b> 08. 07. 11 Presentation re role Discussion Agreed review of records and documents Agreed on review and reflection at end of AR
<b>Inter-Session</b>		No inter-session work		Work on vision and values by individuals and sub group		2 co-researchers worked on mission statement PR & one co-researcher identified all work done on vision, values & mission		One pair worked on role One pair did not work on role	
<b>Group Session</b>		<b>GS6</b> 23. 07. 2011 Complex discussion on role Proposal to take work on role out of AR now Proposal not agreed Further work on role agreed		<b>GS7</b> 02. 09. 2011 Discussed document Discussed role 'from here on' Agreed needed group agreement on role Agreed on inter-session work		<b>GS8 (Final Group Session)</b> 05. 10. 2011 Longer session than normal Structure based on CPAR definition 4 sets of questions First set discussed most In-depth discussion of some issues No consensual conclusions No agreed post-AR plans			
<b>Inter-Session</b>	PR produced model for review 3 co-researchers & PR worked on review PR produced summary of review		2 pairs worked on role		PR & co-researcher created structure for GS8 Documents on CPAR & Critical Theory Consultation with co-researchers				

Figure 13: Cycle 3: March 2011 to October 2011

### Agreement to Continue the Action Research

C3 was a new major cycle principally because of the change of Chief Executive, but also because of the 'dip' in actual action in the research in the last phase of C2. In March the new Chief Executive agreed in principal to continue with the AR. The group met and considered the options of continuing the research or ending it. Following discussion the group decided to continue with the research.

### Plan and Timescale Agreed

The group agreed that it would complete the work on vision and values and would address a number of aspects of the EC's role with the intention of completing this cycle in the autumn. Given that this cycle would be running over the summer an approach to managing the work when not everyone in the group was available was agreed. It was also agreed that there would be a review of the AR project following the end of this cycle.

### Potential Co-researcher

The principal researcher met the acting replacement of the member of the EC, the Director of Psychiatry that had retired in July 2010. This person had not initially been included in the research because the PR had anticipated that it would have been completed by the end of 2010 or the beginning of 2011. Following discussion it was agreed that because the research was so advanced and the remaining timescale was short this person would not join the research group.

### Vision and Values and Mission

Having agreed to continue the work on Vision and Values and Mission an action plan was agreed and other members of the group became involved. The organisation's policies and strategy and approach were reviewed by co-researchers and were compared to national policies. Following discussion on this there was a majority agreement on a proposal to take the work on vision and values and mission out of the AR and to work on it as EC rather than action researchers. It was also agreed that the

Agreement to Continue the Action Research

C3 was a new major cycle principally because of the change of Chief Executive, but also because of the 'dip' in actual action in the research in the last phase of C2. In March the new Chief Executive agreed in principal to continue with the AR. The group met and considered the options of continuing the research or ending it. Following discussion the group decided to continue with the research.

#### Plan and Timescale Agreed

The group agreed that it would complete the work on vision and values and would address a number of aspects of the EC's role with the intention of completing this cycle in the autumn. Given that this cycle would be running over the summer an approach to managing the work when not everyone in the group was available was agreed. It was also agreed that there would be a review of the AR project following the end of this cycle.

#### Potential Co-researcher

The principal researcher met the acting replacement of the member of the EC, the Director of Psychiatry that had retired in July 2010. This person had not initially been included in the research because the PR had anticipated that it would have been completed by the end of 2010 or the beginning of 2011. Following discussion it was agreed that because the research was so advanced and the remaining timescale was short this person would not join the research group

#### Vision and Values and Mission

Having agreed to continue the work on Vision and Values and Mission an action plan was agreed and other members of the group became involved. The organisation's policies and strategy and approach were reviewed by co-researchers and were compared to national policies. Following discussion on this there was a majority agreement on a proposal to take the work on vision and values and mission out of the AR and to work on it as EC rather than action researchers. It was also agreed that the group would undertake work on rewriting the organisation's Mission Statement.

Following inter-session work on the Mission Statement options for the statement were agreed and a broad consultation plan outside the action research was agreed.

#### The Executive Committee's Role

The group's focus now returned to the EC's role. Following discussion and limited inter-session work it was agreed that records from across the AR, including all group session records, would be reviewed. This was to be done in order to have a better understanding of the views, learning and agreements in relation to the role and to contribute to the outcomes of the AR and to potential post AR work by the EC. These records were divided between and reviewed individually by three co-researchers and the PR. The review, including a summary document by the PR, contributed to the knowledge and understanding of group members on what had been addressed during the AR, what still needed to be addressed and how the group had acted. It also contributed to the final actions by the group. The review led to a strong group discussion on the EC's role and a debate on a proposal to take this work out of the AR now. Ultimately it was agreed to do further work in order to come to conclusions on the role and on what service development means. This was followed by inter-session work, a further group discussion and detailed preparation for the final group session based on Kemmis's (2008) definition of CPAR. In the final session the group discussed the EC's current and desirable future role in some depth. However, it did not come to any consensus on what the EC's role should be following long discussion. Nor did it agree to any plans and changes to be undertaken by the EC after the AR.

#### 5.3.1.f. Findings in Relation to Action Research Processes in Cycle 3

The full group made a positive decision to continue the AR.

The group made a well organised decision on what to work on, the order of the work, the timescale and how to manage the work in a challenging period.

The work on vision and values was not completed in a consensual way, but by following strong individual proposals.

The work on vision and values was not completed by producing any document or documents that could be used within the EC or by the EC with the wider organisation in work on vision and values following the AR.

The work on a mission statement did produce a short document that could contribute to organisational consultation.

There seemed to be strong group agreement to come to conclusions on the EC's role by the end of the cycle, but this was not achieved.

As in the previous cycles, the group demonstrated a practice of repeated small cycles on proposals and plans and on further review without coming to consensus on a conclusion or on a plan.

This final research cycle ended without group agreement on:

- The EC's role on service development
- How to address significant elements of the EC's role
- A plan for further work on the EC's role following the AR
- A plan for further work on service development following the AR

#### **5.4. Findings in relation to Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)**

This section identifies and describes the findings in relation to the use of CPAR in this research. The three main sub-sections are:

1. The Use of CPAR
2. The Role of Power
3. Empowerment

#### **5.4.1. The Use of CPAR**

Action research in general, and particularly CPAR, was not a research approach with which the group was familiar. In the pre-step/pilot the PR worked to develop the group's understanding of AR in general and CPAR in particular. A number of concepts were focused on in introduction to the pre-step:

- That the research would be participatory and that the members of the research group would be co-researchers rather than subjects
- That the research would have empowering and emancipatory focuses
- That the AR would be critical, both in how it examined service development and in how the project would be conducted
- The cyclical AR process was explained
- The importance and usefulness of reflection were introduced

In the main research the concepts of communicative space and group decision making were introduced and the concepts previously introduced were revisited.

##### **5.4.1.a. Communicative Space**

The use of CPAR included working to create a Communicative Space to enable and facilitate ideas and opinions being put forward, discussed and debated. Communicative space is advocated by Habermas (1986) and seen as the way to achieve consensus orientated communicative action. A space for communication was created and developed during the AR. Ideas and opinions were put forward by all co-researchers, even if some tended to make short statements while others made much longer and more frequent contributions. However, debate or dialogue involving the whole group was less frequent than debate between two or three co-researchers on a particular topic and short statements by other co-researchers on their understanding, views or wishes. All co-researchers contributed whenever each person was in turn asked a question or asked for a comment. In reviews co-researchers expressed appreciation of the opportunity for them to make their points and also to reflect on

the research topic. The points made are illustrated by co-researcher quotes from the C1 review and from the Final Review following the group research.

Cycle 1 Review Session:

- *'The fact that everyone got equal airtime was valuable'*
- *'Different because of the protected time to discuss – openness, nobody blocking'*
- *'Good to have protected time'*

Final review:

- *'Reflective space important'*
- *'Very good for building trust / safe place / bonded team'*
- *'The engagement was new and had the potential to allow honesty to prevail. Opportunity to communicate at a personal level. Speak freely –“iceberg” analogy – took time to become confident in process.'*

#### 5.4.1.b. Group Decision Making

Any form of PAR, but particularly CPAR, demands a high level of participation by all co-researchers in decision making. This may well have contributed to the difficulties that the group had in making decisions on plans and actions because the PR operated in this context rather than repeatedly making proposals and plans. From his own experience as a member of the EC he understands that group members were more accustomed to making decisions on proposals made or requested by a more powerful member of the EC. This was noted in his reflective journal during the AR. In the review at the end of the group research one co-researcher made a similar comment. There were also comments in other reviews by some co-researchers that the research group was behaving in the same way as the regular EC did. This would have included how decisions were made. Participation was strongly influenced by the decision-making approach with which the members of the EC were familiar.

#### 5.4.1.c. CPAR as a Framework

Kemmis's (2008) definition of CPAR was used to create the framework for a document on The Learning from Cycle 1 produced by the PR and one co-researcher during C2 at the request of the group (Appendix 7). While there was interest in the learning document and it contributed to work following the circulation, presentation and discussion, there was no focus by the group on the CPAR concepts used. However, it should be noted that the PR did not 'push' the CPAR concepts either in presenting the document or in discussions on it, in an effort to avoid undue influence.

This definition was again used by the PR and one co-researcher to develop the structure for the final Group Session in the AR. This prompted more focus on the CPAR approach in the discussion in the final session, but this was limited. This was further evidence that group members displayed little interest in the specific concepts and actions of either AR or a critical approach.

#### 5.4.1.d. Researchers' Views on using CPAR

Comments by co-researchers (and the PR) in the review session following the end of the group AR show that there were mixed views among the co-researchers on the CPAR approach and also that there were limitations to its use in this research:

- *'Huge time investment and was not purposeful enough – too long for what we got back. Not purposeful enough – weakness.'*
- *'Rehashing - no different from culture of [Executive Committee] anyway – not down to participatory research approach.'*
- *'Only used approach marginally – there is a benefit in using it.'*
- *'Did we really use Critical Action Research Approach? Did we understand it? Conversations with [principal researcher] outside group helped. Used bits of it.'*
- *'People did not pick up on Critical Approach – I did not push it enough.'* (principal researcher)

### **5.4.2. The Role of Power**

Power is a significant focus of CPAR, relating to the operation of power within the research, the empowerment of participants in the research through the critical participatory approach and the empowerment of other organisational stakeholders. In this research power and power relationships predominantly refer to the situation within the research group and to the effects of power and the relationships on how the AR was used and how it progressed. There was obviously a strong link between the power and the relationships within the research group and within the parallel EC because all the group members were members of the Committee. The other power area on which there was a focus, and on which findings are presented, is the empowerment of people who receive services from the organisation.

The areas reported on here are:

- Dynamics and behaviour in group sessions
- Individual and sub-group work
- The views of co-researchers on power relationships and the effect on the AR

#### **5.4.2.a. Dynamics and Behaviour in Group Sessions**

The power relationships and dynamics had a significant effect on what co-researchers said, how they said it and how they interacted during group sessions. The session records show some co-researchers speaking at length and others most frequently stating their opinions in one or two sentences. While some sessions were more relaxed because of their particular focus and actions, the pattern of particular co-researchers speaking more or less than others persisted from the first group session to the last. In individual meetings co-researchers commented on the verbal contributions and interactions in the group sessions. Their comments suggested that the power relationships were an influence on the discussion and dialogue. However, the issues may have been personality issues rather than or in addition to power issues. The power roles and relationships within the EC were also commented on in group

sessions. Another power issue within the group was that the actions agreed at the end of group sessions tended to result from the proposals by particular co-researchers.

Another element of the group sessions on which power and group dynamics had repeated effects was when individual or sub-group co-researchers made presentations to the group or circulated documents that they had produced. There were two types of effect: one was that the full group discussion was slow and sometimes 'ran out of steam' and the other was that there was a shift in the focus of the discussion from the analysis or proposals made by the co-researchers to another topic or aspect of the topic. This shift was often led by the statements and behaviour of a more powerful co-researcher.

The effects of both power relationships and interpersonal relationships meant that only one of the co-researchers, identifiable as more powerful, challenged the PR in group sessions. These challenges occurred in C1 and early in C2 and related to the PR taking the session records, doing data analysis, influencing thinking, the need for him to be involved in the discussions and questioning the effectiveness of the AR process. In all but one of these cases, other co-researchers did not say anything to agree or disagree with these challenges. This suggests the relative power of both the challenger's position and that of the PR. In the individual meetings during C2 another co-researcher said that they did not see the PR interfering with the process. The other feedback on the PR's approach (which was not put as a challenge) also happened in an individual meeting. This was advice that the PR needed to make a written plan and to drive the research. The CPAR approach meant that the PR did not see himself to be a powerful researcher 'driving' proposals for action, as he would have been using some other AR approaches.

The power dynamics were a reason for proposals for particular plans or actions made by sub-groups not progressing when they were discussed by the whole group. Proposals to undertake particular inter-session work that were acted on were most often made by more powerful co-researchers and they were often for further data analysis or review.

In both data analysis and reflective journal entries the PR was identifying the effects of both the power of positions within the group and the use of power of particular co-researchers. The joint work on and the subsequent discussion of the Learning from Cycle 1 document confirmed for the PR that power was a major influence on the interactions in the group sessions. It was also his understanding that his views on power were different from those of the most powerful co-researchers.

#### 5.4.2.b. Individual and Sub-Group work

While all co-researchers did engage in individual and sub-group work, much of this work was done by less powerful co-researchers. In all cases where a single co-researcher worked with the PR – who did not choose this person – it was not one of the most powerful co-researchers. Pairs of co-researchers that included a more powerful co-researcher did do some work with the PR. When large pieces of work, such as the Learning from Cycle 1 document, the work on vision, values and mission and the review of all the AR records close to the end of C3, the work was done by people other than the most powerful co-researchers. Records of group sessions were taken by less powerful co-researchers and the PR took and/or edited the records following feedback.

#### 5.4.2.c. Views of Co-researchers on Power Relationships and the Effect on the Action Research

The power relationships within the EC and therefore within the AR group were referred to by most co-researchers. These statements and references arose in some reflective slots in group sessions, in group review sessions, in individual meetings with the PR and in some documents produced between group sessions, particularly review documents. The processes and areas commented on in particular were:

- The power and influence of the Chief Executive and the potential relationship between that and the AR

- The meeting held outside the AR by the Chief Executive with three co-researchers following the review session at the end of C1: This was identified as a block to progress in the AR and a potential loss to learning
- The effect of working to have shared power within the AR process: A co-researcher commented that the group was *'Used to someone (more powerful) making a recommendation that we can follow.'*
- The effects of power relationships on the dynamics within the AR group included the difficulty for a less powerful co-researcher if what they said was challenged by a more powerful co-researcher

#### 5.4.2.d. Overall Finding on Power Relationships

This evidence supports a conclusion that power relationships existed within the research group and that they influenced the behaviour and the dynamics in the group. What is also supported is that the power relationships within the research group were similar to those in the EC and that this was why the relationships operated as they did in the research group.

#### **5.4.3. The level of focus on the empowerment of those receiving services and how that related to the CPAR**

Empowerment is a particular focus of CPAR. The most common concern is the empowerment of the participants. While this was a focus of the PR, his major empowerment focus was in relation to people receiving services from the organisation. This was introduced by the PR in the pre-step, but there was no focus on it by the group as a whole for most of the research. A small number of co-researchers spoke about it from time to time throughout the research, advocating empowerment and a focus on the lives of service users rather than just thinking about providing services when working on service development.

Early in C2 there was a proposal that further analysis of the data collected during C1 was necessary. The PR proposed using an empowerment lens to do this analysis and

presented a model for doing this. The group agreed to do this individually between two group sessions. The PR was the only person to use this lens.

There was more focus on empowerment in group discussion close to the end of C3 and particularly in the final session, although there was no group agreement on this as a focus for actions. The focus on this in the final session may have been made more likely by the session structure based on the CPAR definition. While it was a repeated focus of one co-researcher, the group as a whole only discussed it from time to time and often briefly. However, many proposals and plans aimed at improving the services were provided. There was a difference in focus between improving services and empowering service users. In the review following the group action research there were two references to the empowerment of people with disability as something that would be taken out of the AR project for consideration of action. This suggests learning or a change of view on such empowerment as a result of the AR.

## **5.5. Insider Action Research (IAR)**

There are a number of issues that particularly arise in IAR and need to be managed, recorded and analysed (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). This section identifies and describes the findings in relation to these under the following headings:

1. Role Duality
2. Access
3. Organisational politics
4. Ethics.

### **5.5.1. Role Duality**

#### **5.5.1.a. The Role Duality of the Principal Researcher**

The PR was aware that there were likely to be role duality issues. This issue was initially discussed with potential co-researchers in the pre-step meetings before the main research. The potential co-researchers did not raise the role duality issue and

only some discussed it when the PR raised it. They did not express any concerns about the role duality. This was still the case when individual meetings were held during the main AR. In those meetings there was much more focus on power relationships and co-researcher behaviour in group sessions than on the role duality of the PR.

In the individual meetings in C2 two co-researchers identified that co-researchers were being supportive of the PR, with one suggesting that their focus was on his PhD rather than on service development. The PR considered his role duality in his reflective journal at various times throughout the research. There were four areas on which the role duality had effects:

- The research: It was noted early in the research that IAR was different from other research because of the role duality. *'I have to manage the research sessions very differently from how I would probably do it if I was doing AR with an external group (although it probably would not be totally different). The dual role piece is in my mind a lot.'* (entry following GS3, C1)
- The PR as a researcher and group member: His role in the EC influenced both his thinking and his behaviour in the AR. His parallel roles had a somewhat limiting effect on what he said and how he acted during the AR. On reflection he considered that this behaviour was less critical and less challenging than would be advocated for either IAR or any form of PAR.
- The PR in his organisational role: He noted that *'What I am thinking in doing the research is influencing what I am thinking in other aspects of the work. At times that is good, but at other times I am having to hold back on what I am saying.'* (entry following GS3, C1)
- The emotional effect on the PR: Repeatedly, both positive and negative feelings were recorded for the same session. These ranged from finding work in the session interesting and the work of co-researchers positive, to nervousness, anxiety, frustration and stress. One of the most significant headline recordings was that he wrote *'Worry, Concern, Devastation, Excitement and Exhaustion'* following an individual meeting while doing detailed preparation for the second session in C 2 with the aim of enabling the group to move on with the AR. These

terms illustrate the range of his emotional responses across the research as a whole.

#### 5.5.1.b. The Role Duality of Co-Researchers

Co-researchers initially identified role duality as well as power dynamics and personal relationships as potential issues for co-researchers. When the group reached the review session at the end of C1 some co-researchers were identifying that there were issues under these headings and they added politics in as an issue. Their views on role are illustrated by the following comments:

*'There is a line up there, a personal line: possible impact of what we are doing on that line'*

*'Challenging on a personal level – dilemma between day to day job and radical changes'*

These issues also arose in discussion about ethical issues, with the point being made that there were implications for each person in the group. These were seen as issues to be aware of and managed. In the Reflective Journal it was noted:

*'There was good reflection and discussion of the dual roles of all co-researchers, ethical issues and risks. This was a good piece of reflection and discussion on where the members of the group were in relation to IAR.'* (entry following review session at the end of C1)

#### 5.5.2. Access

Coghlan & Brannick (2005) define primary access as: *'the ability to get into the organization and be allowed to undertake research.'* and secondary access as: *'access to specific parts of the organization which are relevant to your research.'* (p. 67). The PR had access to the organisation and to the EC. He was authorised to undertake the research through getting agreement from the Chief Executive, through the pre-step

sessions with the whole EC and through approval from the organisation's Research Ethics Committee. Such relatively easy access to the EC was advantageous.

### **5.5.3. Organisational Politics**

IAR is identified as being affected by organisational politics because it becomes involved in a number of activities, including raising questions, intervening to change how work is done and it may identify insights that are not comfortable for members of the organisation to hear (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Roth et al., 2007). Organisational politics is also often an issue because of the number of elements of the organisation involved and their different positions. In this IAR project the issue of organisational politics were somewhat different from many others. This can be explained by the fact that the AR group was the whole EC and the PR was a full member of the EC. All of the AR took place within the group. There were no other staff or stakeholders involved in the AR or consulted about it, so there was no contact with any other stakeholders as part of or about the research. Because of these factors it was principally the politics within the research group that affected the AR.

Politics was identified by some co-researchers as part of how service development works because more than one and often multiple elements of the organisation are usually involved in service development. *'What service development is about is politics – the art of the possible'* (Quote from co-researcher at end of C1 Review Session). Politics was also linked to the role of the EC and there was a question about who has the power and authority to 'line up' political resources. In the experience of the PR and in comments, discussions and reflections by co-researchers, power, roles, group dynamics and relationships were all significant issues. Thus, while the focus during the group action research was on those elements, organisational politics can be seen as having ongoing relevance to and significant effects on the AR. The experience of the PR was that managing those politics solely within a small group of which he was a member was difficult in this parallel situation.

#### **5.5.4. Ethics**

Ethics and the type of issues that were likely to arise or might arise were discussed by a minority of co-researchers in individual meetings with the PR, in the review session at the end of C1 and at other review points. These discussions were general and no specific ethical issues for the group or for the PR were raised during the research. Protecting co-researchers from the possible results of risks influenced how the PR followed up on some potentially controversial statements and on how he gave feedback following analysis or review. Such follow-up was always low key and therefore would not always be viewed as critical. Confidentiality was considered to be an ongoing issue by the PR and so records and other documents were managed carefully and he avoided sharing any information with other colleagues.

#### **5.5.5. Summary**

Key findings in relation to the practice of the research group include:

- There was a high level of participation by the group throughout the three cycles. This began with participation in all group sessions and in sub-group work on analysis, development of proposals and producing information documents. It was increased to undertaking the recording of group sessions and adding planning and preparation for the next group session to inter-session work. This continued through the rest of the AR. In the second half of C2 and in C3 there was also participation in action. Participation was influenced and affected by power related issues, group dynamics, role duality and organisational politics. A significant aspect of participation and especially of group members acting as co-researchers was the high level of group decisions on next actions or on a wider plan made at the end of group sessions. The records show that such decisions were made in fifteen out of twenty two sessions. In another three there was broad agreement on the approach to take but not on specific plans or actions.

- The level of inter-session work demonstrated a high level of action by the co-researchers throughout the research. The process of sub-groups and individuals doing work between group sessions was good. This work included, analysis, review, information documents and presentations of proposals for actions, plans for actions and actual actions. The effects of this work varied. In some instances it led to agreement on a plan followed by actions from the plan and in others good proposals did not lead to group agreement on related action.
- During the group action research most analysis and review was done by co-researchers individually or in sub-groups. Sometimes this was done jointly with the PR and sometimes separately. C1 began with analysis done solely by the PR, but this changed as the level of participation increased. This change was advantageous in that the analysis and the views in the reviews were coming from the group rather than simply from the PR. However, it did demonstrate that the participatory approach allowed co-researchers to use their own methods for analysis and for review and this made coming to conclusions more difficult in some instances.
- When sub-group analysis was carried out, this sometimes led to the group deciding that further analysis or a review was needed. This demonstrated a group focus on deeper levels of analysis and understanding than simply one analysis of data. The three large reviews carried out during the cycles contributed to thinking and planning over subsequent sessions.
- All of the factors identified in the literature as affecting AR in organisations have been identified in this research: The environment and the context; the role of power; the group relationships and dynamics; organisational politics and role duality. The lack of experience of group members in taking part in AR, especially as co-researchers in IAR with a critical focus rather than as subjects, and the lack of experience of the PR in conducting AR, also contributed to how the cycles were worked through.

## Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusions

### Introduction

The Discussion and Conclusions Chapter highlights the outcomes and learning from work on the role of the Executive Committee in relation to service development. It also examines the findings in relation to the AR processes and practices throughout the research and specifically, in relation to the critical participatory and insider approaches. Important issues in relation to what has already been reported and considered in the findings chapter are developed in this chapter. The learning from this research is considered here.

This research had two main focuses. The first was identifying and examining the role of the Executive Committee of the organisation in relation to service development. This included consideration of whether and in what way the role should be changed and how this could be done using action research. The second focus was the use of action research as an inside researcher in a critical participatory manner with other members of the Executive Committee acting as co-researchers.

This discussion considers the experience of the research from three perspectives: the context within which the research was conducted; the action research processes and how they contributed to the outcomes of the research and finally the Executive Committee's role in relation to service development and the research outcomes on the role.

The discussion incorporates what the principal researcher has learned about the action research process, including role duality, and how this can inform other action researchers. There is an emphasis on the principal researcher's perspective in relation to this research project, action research and his research practices. The discussion is followed by the Conclusions

## **6.1 The Context of the Action Research**

Three features of the context influenced this research in particular and important ways. The research was conducted within the EC, the senior management team of the organisation. This meant that the implications of conducting IAR at this level identified in the literature were experienced in this research. Secondly the sudden and severe national financial recession had a significant impact on all publicly funded organisations. This financial crisis had significant effects on the EC and therefore on the AR group. Finally the early retirement of the Chief Executive who was a co-researcher and the appointment of a new Chief Executive who was also a co-researcher influenced the pace and sequencing of the research, the dynamics of the group and reinforced a view of power and authority that was in conflict with a critical stance. Each of these areas is discussed and this is followed by recommendations on recognising the impact of the context within which the AR is being conducted.

### **6.1.1. The Executive Committee**

This group was the top management team in the organisation. Status and role power were significant issues within the EC because of the different power levels and power relations between the members due to their specific positions. EC power levels and relationships influenced the role duality of the PR and the co-researchers in the IAR. Power relations influenced factors such as who could make proposals and what decisions were implemented. Group members had worked together for eight years or more and so were aware of the practices and behaviours of the group and individuals and of the effects of power levels within the group. These beliefs, practices, experiences and understandings within the EC inevitably filtered through to affect the same people as they undertook the research. Even though the AR was led by the PR and equality within the group was agreed as a key part of the AR approach, some of the practices in the research group suggested that not all individuals wished to change their status, power or relationships.

The IAR as a structure that operated in parallel with the EC and the role duality of research group members affected the AR throughout the group research. The EC role and power influenced the behaviour of both the PR and co-researchers through their understanding of their EC role and status and the behaviour of each individual group member within the research group sessions.

The influence of organisational politics and power relationships on IAR has been well-established by Coghlan and Brannick (2005) and Roth, Shani and Leary (2007). Although these authors caution that insider research is inevitably political, the scale and significance of such political factors were not fully anticipated by the PR. The authors who most fully reflect the magnitude of the political forces at work are Holian (1999) and Moore (2007), who were also executive level managers. In Moore's case, the position taken by the Chief Executive and the fact that Moore's undertaking of IAR '*upset the equilibrium of my previous position and relationships*' (p. 36). In Holian's case, the negative reactions by senior executives to her research led to conflicts and ultimately caused her to leave the organisation. She concludes that the politics, relationships and responsibilities can all have an impact on the research. However, she also concludes that IAR can provide positive outcomes.

While writers on IAR recommend that a researcher should work to manage the politics and the power relationships (Roth, Shani & Leary, 2007 and Coghlan & Shani, 2008), and Coghlan and Brannick (2005) identify that the types and importance of relationships depend on the positions of the researcher and of the participants as well as the research topic, there is little specific guidance in the literature as to how such difficult, complex and changing factors can be recognised, interpreted and worked with in the context of IAR. In particular, other than Coghlan (2007a, 2007b), Holian and Moore, there is little acknowledgement that the seniority and power position of the researcher may itself generate problematic dynamics which are difficult to resolve. There was significant learning for the PR about the complex nature of power dynamics, the difficulty in anticipating and managing these and the challenges of articulating how power is exercised without creating risks for research participants.

### **6.1.2. The National Recession**

The second feature of the context that influenced the AR was the sudden and severe national recession and its growing impacts on publicly funded organisations. This recession was not in place when the research was planned, but had already begun when the group work started and its effects increased rapidly as the research progressed. There is no doubt that this environment had significant impacts on the AR conducted with the top management team of the organisation which had responsibility for managing the organisation and delivering services in the new and changing environment which suddenly had significant government and HSE demands and requirements.

The national context and its impacts on the organisation influenced the thinking, priorities and behaviour of the members of the group. It triggered rapid EC changes in relation to finance, staffing and other areas, disturbing the existing equilibrium which the AR could seek to change. It influenced how the members of the EC behaved in the AR and how the AR group operated. Part of the rationale for the research was to allow the group members to look forward, but the crisis led to managerial reaction instead. The most obvious influences were that the norms and habitual practices of the group in the research became indistinguishable from its behaviour as EC in decision making and the pattern of repeating cycles of work on sub-topics ('going round in circles') was amplified. The implications for the AR were that there was less focus on equality within the group, more leading actions by senior members and less priority for the AR. The urgency and importance of the organisational crisis created by the recession strengthened support for top-down, directive leadership and reduced the opportunity and support for dissent, exploration or consideration of a range of views.

The EC management of the serious cuts to funding was prioritised and there was a consequent reduction in the time, attention and priority given to the research. The experience of the PR was that it became harder to make a strong claim for the research. The PR considers that the research would have ended when the financial crisis hit the organisation if the PR had not been a senior member of the EC.

Alongside a general reduction in attention and interest, the concrete impact on the research included the cancellation of planned research sessions, sometimes at short

notice. There were also long gaps between sessions. In C2, at the height of the funding crisis, there was a three month gap between sessions. This gap needed significant work by the PR to get the group focused on the research again. The gaps contributed to group members being less clear about the stage they were at, what had been decided, and their inter-session work. It therefore seemed to contribute to the practice of again working through steps that had already been taken: 'going around in circles' reflected both a practice of the group in this research and the intermittent and limited attention given to the process. Wolf (2001) argues that rapid environmental changes can cause deterioration in an organisation's performance. This helps to explain how an experienced and senior team could work less effectively.

The PR was conscious of the effects of the external environment on the AR. As the group began C2 he understood that these effects had increased since the research had begun. He attempted to acknowledge these effects with a proposal to link the AR to the financial crisis, in order to place the work of the AR in a realistic relationship with the EC and the environment. When his proposal was rejected by all co-researchers he understood from the attitudes, behaviour and the statements that some co-researchers wished to have the financial measures led from the top and not interfered with by the AR and others did not want the negative and stressful atmosphere of dealing with the financial crisis to have a negative effect on the positive aims of the AR. Despite their rejection of the linkage proposal made by the PR, some co-researchers proposed in the next group session that there should be a link between the AR and the financial crisis. This happened because people identified the overall impact of the financial cuts, and specifically the impact on the development of services. Despite the decision to keep the two areas separate, the reality experienced in organisational work and the discussions of pairs of co-researchers between the two sessions highlighted that the AR could only be conducted in the context of the organisational reality, which was dominated by the financial impact of the national recession. This understanding did not lead to any explicit linkage within the research.

All researchers – including the PR – acted as though the AR was not a priority as the senior management team moved into 'emergency' mode in response to the financial

crisis in the organisation. It can be argued that the group moved from talking and theorising about their role in relation to service development, earlier in the AR, to *enacting* their role through the immediacy, intensity and implementation of their decisions and action, as individual managers and as a management team. Although the group decided not to take the work of managing the crisis into the AR, the work of the AR, in the form of attention to the role of the team, was brought into the operation of the group in relation to the crisis. The difference between the decision and then the connection with the crisis could be explained by a wish to manage the crisis through the existing hierarchy of the EC and the overpowering effects of the crisis meaning that it was not possible to proceed with any work without taking account of the crisis.

The PR's understanding from reflection following the research is that having an explicit and acknowledged linkage between the AR and the current environment would have been helpful both to the articulated aims of the AR and to the role of the EC in managing the crisis. However, the utility of the AR and its contribution to the work of the EC had not been sufficiently established by the time the crisis hit and the group reverted to habitual practices of leadership, followership and group behaviour. While the literature acknowledges the importance of attention to the context (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) there is no examination of the impact of sudden and extreme changes in the context on the content and process of the AR, on the participants and on the PR. The learning for the PR was that AR is influenced by the context influences within which it is conducted and that changes in the context as the research progresses can have different effects on the AR. Following this research it is recommended that attention to the context and to changes in it is required throughout the AR and that the context and changes should be discussed with the participants. Linking the AR to the context may be a helpful approach and may enable better outcomes from the research. Whatever the approach of the AR the principal researcher and the group need to take account of contextual changes and adjust the AR processes in response to the changes. In this research, the changes were large and dramatic and it was impossible to avoid an appreciation of their impact. In other settings, the changes in the context might be more difficult to discern, and this would require greater attention and analysis to understand the impact on the research.

### **6.1.3. The Change of the Chief Executive**

The third significant feature of the context of the AR was the early retirement of the Chief Executive. The announcement was made almost immediately after the group AR resumed following the three month gap in C2. This ultimately brought C2 to an end, because to continue the AR with a changed group needed a new cycle to be undertaken.

The period from the announcement of the retirement of the Chief Executive to the appointment of the new Chief Executive was longer than three months. The decision and announcement of retirement affected the whole group during this time and had a particular impact on the Chief Executive and the two internal EC candidates for the post. There was a much reduced level of group AR in this time. The disturbance this caused within the group had a particular impact on the PR, who was one of the internal candidates for the post. During this time, the PR gave less energy to the AR and did less structured reflection than at any other stage in the research. The sense of 'going through the motions' which often characterised the behaviour of other group members during the research was also true of the PR during this period, when his focus was more on his organisational than his research role. There was an increase in tension for him between his different roles and it was impossible to reconcile the role duality arising from his position as PR, as Deputy Chief Executive and as applicant for the position of Chief Executive.

The PR was not appointed as Chief Executive and this, inevitably, had important personal and role consequences, not limited to his role as PR. Following the appointment of the new Chief Executive, the AR continued and progressed from C2. When C3 began the Chief Executive had retired, reducing the group numbers from six to five and a co-researcher had been appointed as Chief Executive, which changed their role in relation to all others in the group. The most obvious effects of these changes were in group dynamics, power relationships and role duality. The differences that could be noted, and for which there is evidence in the records, included discussions on the change of Chief Executive and its organisational influences, and proposals and decisions on next actions and on taking elements of the AR out of the

research. However, overall, the group process was not significantly different from that in the previous two cycles.

#### **6.1.4. Connections and interactions between the different factors of the context**

These three key elements of the context of the AR influenced the outcomes of the AR in relation to the EC's role regarding service development and resulted in them being quite limited. Each feature of the context had an impact by itself. However, the interaction between these changes also amplified the impacts and led to a 'perfect storm' of changes in the context of the research. The prevailing hierarchical and leadership structures and processes filtered into the AR rendering discussion and decisions somewhat constrained. The recession influenced the EC, how it worked, how it made decisions and what it prioritised and this influenced both the level of importance of the AR and practices within the AR. The hierarchical and leadership structures and processes influenced how the recession was understood and what needed to be undertaken in order to respond. The retirement of the Chief Executive also contributed to a reinforcement of the hierarchy within the EC and to the leadership role of the Chief Executive. This was an influence on how the AR was conducted from the time of the announcement. In contrast with this shift to and reinforcement of planned change, Ciao (2012) argues that to interact successfully with a turbulent environment it is necessary to develop continuous, knowledge-based change. The construct that continuous change is more effective than planned change was part of the PR's preunderstanding and how he introduced the research. Complexity Theory recognises that organisations are complex and advocates continuous change taking place 'at the edge of chaos' as the most effective way for change to happen. Given the environmental situation at the time of the AR, a continuous change approach in the project could have led to learning for the team which could have assisted EC to move to more effective change processes in a challenging environment. The AR project would have been a good setting in which to try out continuous change, providing a contained environment for the experimentation, learning and adaptation required for continuous change. As identified in other parts of the discussion, there was insufficient capacity for managing

uncertainty within the group, leading to an ongoing focus on maintaining the status quo.

The AR literature does not acknowledge that there may be several significant interacting factors within the context, or propose how these can be examined, understood and managed. McNiff (2002) and Cook (2009) both describe evolving nature of AR spirals, but their focus is on issues within the AR rather than on the context within which it is being conducted. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) identify both the internal context and the general context of the AR as important, but do not particularly focus on dramatically changing contexts over the course of the research. Contemporary organisational change literature (Håkonsson et al., 2013; Ciao, 2012) identify that changes in the environment and a turbulent and challenging environment affect how organisational change should take place. From the perspective of this PR, neither the literature on AR nor much of the consideration of organisational change sufficiently acknowledge the importance of context. In this research, the response to the crisis was to do 'more of the same', so that management processes became more hierarchical, more rigid and more directive. All of these were already established practices: they were what senior managers knew how to do. In a crisis, these understandings, approaches and behaviours were amplified. There was, effectively, no capacity to consider other possible ways of thinking or behaving. The AR, which, in its focus and process was fundamentally about thinking and behaving differently, was unable to act as a counter to the status quo.

Key learning for the PR is that it was difficult to recognise and understand the individual and multiple impacts of the changes in the context while these were happening. Despite the practice of reflection in action, as an embedded actor directly affected by these changes, the significance and impact were only fully appreciated in hindsight.

While McDaniel et al (2003) highlight the opportunity presented by 'surprises' and refer to such developments as 'gifts', the experience of this research is that surprises in the form of sudden changes in the internal or external environment, are not seen as

*'promising opportunities for new approaches to meeting organizational goals'* (p. 267), but, rather, as threats to be overcome. The advocacy of a *'willingness to question, explore, and experiment.'* (p. 275) in the face of surprise, by McDaniel et al, fails to recognise that such willingness and other forms of reflexive action and active reflection cannot be developed or mobilised for the first time in a crisis. Such capacities must be learned: developed, adopted, rehearsed and practised, established as routine practice, before they are available for use under the pressurised circumstances of an organisational threat or crisis. The AR process in this research might well have succeeded in changing the practice of the senior managers involved. However, there was simply too little time and too little exposure to ways of thinking and acting which were new and different, by the time the financial crisis hit the organisation.

Van de Van and Sun (2011) and McDaniel et al (2003) both recognise that disruption and surprises, or breakdown or interruption to the implementation of the most common models of organisational change are often seen as dysfunctional developments, to be avoided or corrected. The usual organisational response, as described by Van de Van and Sun, is to take action to correct the people or processes to make them conform to the model or the plan for change. Van de Van and Sun observe that:

*Although this strategy commands most of the attention in the literature, [...] in many situations managers and scholars might do better if they reflected on and revised their mental model to fit the change journey that is unfolding in their organization. (p58)*

This may well be true, but there is little recognition of the work and preparation required to develop this capacity for reflection and revision. This research suggests that such radical change in practice is not best undertaken under stressful and demanding conditions.

### **6.1.5. Recommendations Regarding the Context**

Arising from the experience of and learning from this research, it is important to consider how to manage the impacts of context that influence or threaten the AR process. These features may already exist or may arise during the AR. In general it is recommended that this management should be done through addressing the context at the stage of the pre-step (as recommended by Coghlan & Brannick, 2005), at the beginning of the main research and throughout the research process. As experienced in this research, attention to and reflection on the context and to the relationship between the research and the organisational and wider environmental context in which it takes place should be an ongoing feature of the research. So, while the context itself cannot be managed, the AR can be managed in ways that acknowledge the context and its impact and that aim to ensure progress with the AR. In this research, it was impossible to fail to recognise the impact of the changing features of the context: in other action research contexts the impact and mutual influence might not be so obvious. IAR, by definition, is embedded in the life of the organisation. When the context changes, everything changes: the focus of the research, its priority and the attention it receives – and deserves; the organisational and research roles of the principal researcher and co-researchers; the resources available for the research and the ownership and investment in achieving the goals of the research.

In considering and managing the effects of the context on the AR, the principal researcher must attend to the risks to the organisation and co-researchers first and only then to the jeopardy for the research process. This attention should include consideration, with co-researchers, to ending the research.

The learning from the experience in this research suggests that the influences of organisational politics and power relationships together with the position of the principal researcher should be interrogated before, during and after the research and that explicit supports and resources are needed to enable effective reflection by senior managers who take on a role of inside action researcher.

## **6.2. Action Research Process**

How the AR process worked in this research is examined through consideration of the distribution and exercise of power; the role duality of all group members; the structural duality of the group; the participation of co-researchers in the AR and the practice of reflection within this project.

### **6.2.1. Power**

The distribution and exercise of power within the research group was a factor throughout the AR. This was identified and experienced by the PR and by co-researchers. However, as observed by Walt et al. (2008), power was understood and experienced differently by different members of the EC/AR, depending on their position in the hierarchy of power in this setting.

The dimensions of power described by Lukes (2005) could all be observed at work at different times during the research and have been described in the Story and the Findings. Control of decision-making and political agenda; issues and potential issues; overt, covert and latent conflict; and subjective and real interests was dominated by the most powerful group members.

The influence and importance of power dynamics was strongly identified through the use of critical hermeneutics for data analysis. One of the purposes of using critical hermeneutics for analysis is exposing power imbalances (Kögler, 1996, Crotty, 1998 and Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg, 2011). Key learning arose for the PR through the use of Critical Hermeneutics as an approach to analysis: it revealed and increased his understanding of power relationships and dynamics as a factor within the AR and an influence on the processes within the research. Although the PR recognised the characteristic use of power in the group during the research, this deeper understanding arising from the application of a critical hermeneutics lens was too late to influence his behaviour within the group AR. Nevertheless, it helped to explain both the influences of power on the group behaviour and the relationships between power and the other elements of the AR process. During the research the PR was aware of power issues, however, but he was directly involved in these power relationships and

therefore he tended to accept the effects of power on the different elements of the AR. Having used critical hermeneutic analysis he could understand the power issues more clearly, including their influence on him in all his roles. . The analysis showed how each group member used their own power and dealt with the power of other members. This helped with the understanding of processes, decisions and individual actions. Power positions, power relationships and power dynamics were demonstrated as elements of structure of the group and of how group members made decisions and took actions. The group agreed to undertake participatory AR with a critical focus, i.e. CPAR. The group equality that is necessary for this approach to AR was not achieved, principally because of the established hierarchy of power in the research group/parallel EC. The PR's experience was that it was not possible to avoid power dynamics in IAR in this small top management team with different power levels within it. Whatever potential existed at the start of the AR to acknowledge and explore the operation of power in the group, the sudden onset of the recession led to a regression to the well-established configuration of power relations.

In this research, the personal and role power of the PR allowed him to negotiate agreement to begin and to continue the AR. However, his dependence on the group, especially the most powerful members, for the continuation of the academic research, reduced his influence on the content and process of the research. Specifically, the PR was fearful of challenging the influence of a powerful member of the group, in case that would result in a threat to the continuation of the research process. Less powerful co-researchers were also cautious in relation to challenging within the AR, related to potential negative influence on their EC roles. More powerful co-researchers dealt with potential influences on their EC roles and authority by avoidance, resistance and explicit defence of the existing hierarchy.

Power positions and relationships must be acknowledged as a dimension of all other significant elements of the AR process in this research, including the difficulty of taking a critical approach which challenges status and power.

The importance of power relationships are emphasised by several important AR writers, including Coghlan and Brannick, (2005), Roth, Shani and Leary, (2007) and Coghlan and Shani, (2008). They identify that doing research in one's own organisation is political and involve power relationship issues. However, from the experience of this PR, few authors emphasise sufficiently the central and complex influence of power dynamics on the AR process. Inside action researchers need to be aware of this and work to recognise and manage the power relationships and dynamics. This could be done through the principal researcher sharing the knowledge from the literature with the group and through reflection and organised discussions on how power relationships and dynamics are working. These processes could work for the group, but they could also create risks and so might not work to the expected levels.

There are multiple types of relationships and their relative influence depends on the staff position of the researcher, the research topic, participants and their roles, as emphasised by Coghlan & Brannick, (2005). Having a preunderstanding of the power structure and power relationships is identified by Brannick and Coghlan (2007) as helpful in conducting the research, but their commentary does not emphasise the requirement for attention to and negotiation of power relations throughout the research process. Moore (2007) identifies that there can be additional learning following the preunderstanding, giving rise to new understanding about both the participants and the principal researcher themselves. The experience of this PR corresponds with that described by Moore (2007) in his IAR: the management of power relationships by the PR was more constrained, less explicit and less critical than assumed in the literature especially where, as in this research, there is significant role duality and the approach is critical and participatory. When AR is being conducted as academic research, there is further complexity and, as in this case, the dependence of the PR on participants and sponsors will inevitably influence how the role of researcher is taken up. A further learning for the PR is that the relative power of all participants, including the PR, may increase and diminish in unanticipated ways in the course of the research.

### **6.2.2. Role duality**

Role duality, as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2005) was strongly and continuously experienced by this PR because of the two sets of relationships with his colleagues. He could relate his experiences to those of Holian (1999) who experienced tensions in conducting both her organisational and research roles. His role duality influenced the PR to be cooperative, friendly and restrained rather than critical and challenging, in both his research role and, later, in his executive role. His perception, having analysed the research, written the story and reflected on both processes, is that his own awareness of role duality led to inhibition and caution and this, in turn, increased the influence of other powerful co-researchers.

The literature focuses on the role duality of the principal researcher, the tensions, confusion and contradictions that this causes for the researcher and the fact that they have two sets of relationships with their colleagues. In this research, all participants experienced role duality. The awareness of this role duality and the associated risks were reported to the PR by some co-researchers. However, the PR's observation and experience was that all co-researchers saw a relationship between their EC role and their co-researcher role and that their research role was strongly influenced by their EC role.

In moving into the AR there was an additional role for all members of the group with new focuses on facilitating a change process and working in a different manner from their normal EC practices. Doing this alongside the operational management, especially in a crisis environment, presented difficulties, caused confusion and may have contributed to resistance. Luscher and Lewis (2008) and McWilliam and Ward-Griffin (2006) have identified these as factors when managers are trying to use an emergent change approach, which is inevitably part of a PAR or IAR approach.

One of the significant effects of role duality was related to power. By the end of C1, the inequality within this research group was clearly established. This was demonstrated by increased acceptance by the group of proposals made by more powerful members of the group and resistance by co-researchers who were more

powerful because of their EC roles. This influence on co-researchers' behaviour also had significant effects on the AR process and therefore on the outcomes.

The need for recognition of and emphasis on the role duality of all co-researchers, not the PR alone, is an important learning from this research and a clear contribution to the study and field of IAR. The impact of role duality on all participants is amplified when the research is conducted within a fixed organisational group with an established hierarchy of power and group members who have considerable experience of working together within their organisational roles.

It could be helpful for the principal researcher, for co-researchers and for the IAR if the concept of role duality is introduced to the research group in the pre-step or at the beginning of the research and openly examined as a factor influencing every participant. . The principal researcher should also support specific reflection on role duality and how it is affecting group members and the AR throughout the research.

### **6.2.3. Duality of Structure**

Role duality in this research should be considered in the setting of structural duality. Both the EC and the research group existed in parallel with the same group members throughout the group research. All of the elements of the EC structure were a background to and an influence on the structure of the research group and therefore affected how the group operated. On reflection, it is apparent that the almost perfect correspondence of the structures of the AR with the structures of the EC helped to reinforce and maintain the 'EC-related' behaviours and relations and reduced the possibility of acting differently in the context of the research. The literature on parallel learning structures (Bushe & Shani, 1991; Schein, 1995) addresses the need for different structures in bureaucratic organisations to enable thinking, talking, deciding and acting differently learning from the normal work setting. A similar parallel setting for a top management team and the IAR could also help the research to be more effective.

The PR was disappointed in the lack of creativity and experimentation in the research. Uzzi and Jarret (2011) and others who have studied the relationship between team composition and performance have found that relationships among collaborators are a reliable predictor of creativity and group success. Critically, Uzzi and Jarrett found that both lack of familiarity and over-familiarity created similar difficulties. In the AR project, lack of familiarity led to problems in collaboration and exchange of ideas; over-familiarities or 'repeat relationships' meant that participants thought in similar ways, anticipated the contributions of others and interacted in recognisable and predictable ways. It seems that the work of the research group/EC in this research suffered from over-familiarity of the participants and that this, combined with the unwillingness of the PR to challenge the group and the absence of structures and processes which interrupted and disturbed the routines of the group, led to 'business as usual' rather than the hoped-for innovation. Again, a parallel structure could be helpful and enable changes in group practices.

#### **6.2.4. Participation**

PAR means that those involved in the research are participants, take part in the research and have a role in setting targets, planning, taking decisions, being involved in actions and coming to conclusions.

Important learning from this research demonstrates that it is possible for participants to take part in IAR, to give it considerable time and effort and to use their expertise and knowledge without using AR practices, such as working through cycles. This may not be a significant problem if participants are being interviewed, having conversational partnerships or being involved in focus groups. However, this research suggests that, if the participants are co-researchers, then knowledge of and use of AR practices are necessary in order to support equality of participation and to produce the intended action research outcomes.

The PR's understanding is that the members of the EC participated in the research because of the PR's EC role and because the Chief Executive was the sponsor for the research project.

As the participation continued through the research it continued to be influenced by the PR's role duality and was also influenced by role duality generally, by established power relationships, by lack of knowledge of AR and by not learning about it during the research. It was also influenced by changes in the context.

The participants did not use AR processes. They did not work through AR cycles. Using the example of the Coghlan and Brannick (2005) cycles they did not work through the steps of diagnosing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action. The group tended to use the group's normal work habits and, in individual work, the individuals often chose their own individual approaches. The PR's understanding of why this happened is that participation followed habitual patterns, these were strongly asserted and defended by more powerful group members and the PR failed to draw attention to or challenge these patterns as they emerged throughout the work. The AR literature does not particularly discuss the problem of groups following habitual patterns rather than using AR practices. However, Jacobs (2010) identifies that addressing issues of power and power relations are significant aspects of managing PAR and Coghlan and Brannick (2005) identify the same challenge in IAR. The researcher's understanding is that there was a strong connection between the power dynamics of the group and the failure to adopt and use AR processes, with each element maintaining the other.

In this research, where often only the PR used AR processes, there was not sufficient use of the processes to achieve the outcomes that were desired.

Participation was greater for some co-researchers than for others. This related to their role duality and to power positions. The PR undertook most of the work and co-researchers in less powerful EC positions undertook more work with, or for, the PR than co-researchers in more powerful positions. The PR undertook so much work because of his anxiety for the AR to continue, because he accepted proposals that he should undertake particular pieces of work and because of his reluctance to place demands on co-researchers. This acceptance of proposals without disagreement or challenge was another element of his inhibited approach.

The PR's learning in relation to the level of participation is that it was facilitated by a lack of critical feedback from the PR on how co-researchers were participating and on the differences in participation within the group. The PR was not positioned, or did not position himself, with enough authority to critique participation levels as the inequality in the group became obvious. All of these experiences suggest that, as with other factors in the research, participation was influenced by role duality, existing power relationships and power dynamics.

Coghlan (2007a, 2007b) is the only author who identifies that IAR at executive level is more difficult and more challenging than other IAR. This PR would go further and say that a group with well-established norms and power relationships can only change if there are significant supports for attention to existing behaviour and for changed behaviours. Such supports, which did not exist in this research, might include a different physical setting; a different group membership; external facilitation and a focus for action that did not correspond to the day-to-day work of the group. These proposals are supported by Habermas's (1986) concept of Communicative Space as a different setting; the involvement of different groups of stakeholders in PAR (Iisahunter et al., 2013) and Parallel Learning Structures literature which describes a focus for action that is different from operational action (Bushe & Shani, 1991; Schein, 1995). In this research, the research group had a long history as EC and were part of the same group, meeting in the same room and addressing matters related to their EC roles and focuses. The structure and processes designed to support the AR were not sufficient to overcome the normal EC structure and group processes.

#### **6.2.5. Reflection**

The literature identifies reflection as a key element of AR (McKernan, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000). Kakabadse et al. (2007) and Coghlan and Brannick (2005) explain that AR requires both reflection in action as it is happening and reflection on action which has already happened. They also emphasise the importance of reflection by group members as well as by the principal researcher. In this research the tools for reflection were the reflective journal, reflection in action and reflection on action. How

the PR and the co-researchers used reflection and the approach to critical reflection are also considered.

### Reflective Journal

The PR began to keep a reflective journal at the pre-step stage and used it throughout and beyond the group research. He introduced this practice to the group as part of his briefing and guidance on AR.

The PR found the use of the reflective journal helpful throughout the group research and during analysis and writing. During the research, this practice helped him to understand what was happening, to cope with challenging and stressful events and to decide what action he could take next. It helped him to identify emerging patterns and characteristics, including patterns of events in the research and his own reaction to these. It helped because it identified experiences, his reflections on them and his conclusions from those reflections to an extent that he could not have achieved without using the journal. He did not use his reflective journal to help him to adopt and develop a stronger position from which to challenge both co-researchers and himself. The learning for the PR is that, while the reflective journal was helpful during the group research, he did not exploit it as a resource as is advocated within the literature. This, in some part, reflects his limited experience in using the tools of reflection as a first-time action researcher. It also reflects his power relationships with co-researchers and the overall pressures and distractions of the context of the AR.

The reflection supported by the reflective journal provided an additional stream of data to contribute to the analysis. It was an essential element of writing the story and moving from description to sense-making in that writing. In reviewing it after the group research it contributed to insights into what he understood was happening and why at different stages of the research. It also gave insights into the effects on his behaviour of role duality, group relationships and conducting academic IAR in this setting and on how reflection contributed to changing or guiding his behaviour in relation to these factors at different stages in the research. Thus, the PR exploited the reflective journal as a resource more during the analysis and writing than during the group research. Having had this experience and reflecting on it, the PR would be in a better position to use reflection if he conducted further IAR. Thus, he believes that

another researcher conducting their first IAR project should work to learn how to gain most from their reflection during the early part of the research and should seek feedback on how they are using it from their supervisor or a critical friend.

#### Critical Reflection

Despite the articulated adoption of a critical approach, the PR was unable to use critical reflection as recommended by Meynell (2005) and others. The role duality of all group members and the power and work relationships between the members created constraints for the PR. He did not believe that he could engage in his own critical reflection and feed back to the group in a transparent manner. His judgement was that such feedback would be experienced as threatening to and critical of members of the group. He did not believe that he could continue with the AR or with his EC role if he acted as recommended by Meynell by reflecting critically on his own practices and those of co-researchers and sharing those reflections with the group. In the context of top management team relationships and the role duality of all members of the group, such critical reflection and feedback, not initially discussed and agreed, would have caused conflict and challenged his roles as he apparently challenged those of co-researchers.

Reflection after the research has led to understanding that using reflection in a different manner in working with the group could have improved his research practice and the group's practices. Insights arising from writing the Story and the Discussion have suggested that at least some critical feedback from his reflections could have driven stronger decision making by the whole group and improved progress or changed the direction of the research or ended it. This would have helped to clarify what the group really thought and intended in relation to the EC's service development role.

#### Co-researcher Reflection

Reflection within the group can be considered under the headings of private and public. The private reflections of group members take place both in action and following action, but are not necessarily shared with the group. In this research it is

likely that group members who took actions such as making proposals, resisting proposals or accepting the lack of group equality were reflecting privately as well as following habitual routines or making automatic responses. The use of private reflections can also be identified through the changes in behaviour within the group. For example, in moving from C1 to C2 there was a move away from the AR practices established in C1 to more standard EC practices. These changes suggest that co-researchers had reflected on the processes in the research and identified them as risks to the EC status or to their own positions and roles.

Reflection in public happens when individual reflections are shared with the group. All group members shared thinking throughout the research, but the sharing was often limited and predictable. Much of this sharing can be identified by the PR as arising from individual co-researcher's existing beliefs, approaches and professional backgrounds, rather than from reflection which developed or changed thinking. There are some examples of sharing of ideas, analysis and learning that came from reflection. The major instances of this were the reflection slots and the sessions or periods for reviews. Reflection in these circumstances was enabled by the space for reflection, by the fact that all group members were asked to reflect and all were sharing their thinking and by prompts from the PR such as specific topics, approaches or actions in the session.

Even though he did not enact a critical approach, the PR did plan reflection spaces at the end of research group meetings. Both the PR and group members often ignored this and managed to 'run out of time' before there was any attempt to engage in reflection. There is no reason to suggest that this was deliberate, conscious or contrived. Rather, the unconscious and ingrained habitual practices of all group members were enacted to defend against perceived threat: to the status quo, for more powerful members of the group and to the research process for the PR. When reflective spaces did happen, the reflection by co-researchers was more about content rather than about the AR process and practices that had just been undertaken. The limited feedback on processes and practices was likely to have been influenced by the social system as recognised by Complexity Theory. Houchin and MacLean (2005)

suggest that the rules that determine interactions are socially constructed: as everyone has a psychological state, when infused with memory, desire or other emotional states the role and nature of feedback and the distinction between positive and negative feedback become blurred. Such blurred understanding is likely to have led to resistance to giving and receiving feedback.

In reflection following the group AR the PR could recognise several other factors combining to resist this opportunity: there was no existing experience of reflection as a tool for learning; it was seen as a 'theoretical' part of AR and thus the responsibility of the PR; the PR failed to sufficiently model the practice and to 'bring it to life' for the co-researchers and, critically, the openness and frankness required for group reflection ran counter to the culture of the group and was perceived as threatening to the status quo. The PR must take primary responsibility for a failure to articulate the resistance to using reflection: it was his fear of criticism and risk to the research and his habit of being part of the group and accepting its behaviour that prevented him from taking up his role.

#### Reflection in Action and Reflection on Action

The PR used reflection in action during the group sessions, as advocated by Coghlan and Brannick (2005) and Kakabadse et al. (2007). This 'in vivo' process was an internal, mental process occasionally captured in brief written notes. His reflection in action contributed to decisions that he made as he worked through the group sessions. These decisions related to a range of process and practice issues within the session including what proposals he should make or accept in order to move ahead with the research. In looking back at how he acted, it is apparent that he was taking a cautious approach: reflection in action was dominated by his own concerns about the continuation of the research. This meant that he almost consistently avoided critical or challenging feedback, statements or proposals. Reflection in action is such a rapid and instant process, unless it is recorded and later reviewed and connected to other reflections and to learning, the reflection in action may not contribute to general learning or increased insight. Without documenting the reflection in some way, the risk is that the

reflection in action just leads to instant responses which may primarily be for the purpose of keeping the AR moving. In this research the PR managed to do limited recording of his reflection in action during sessions because of all the other activities in role, in action. This meant that his learning and decisions on what actions to take relied more on his reflection on action and his reviews and reflections on the records of the group sessions. Within research sessions, his reflection in action influenced his next actions and contributed to the quite calm space in most sessions and to the continuation of the AR. However, he did not use it effectively to challenge his own practices or to feedback to the group on changes in its practices that would be helpful for the AR.

The PR focused on reflection on action rather than in action in introducing reflection to the co-researchers. The introduction was intended to establish a practice to enable reflection and the sharing of reflection and did not deliberately avoid reflection in action. When he built reflection into sessions it related to reflection on action or on the topics and issues being addressed. This meant that he did not actively model or actively support reflection in action by the co-researchers. It can be argued that reflection in action permeates all group activity, regardless of whether it is part of AR or not. There is evidence that all members of this group attended to what was happening as it was happening and acted to ensure that the group behaviour stayed within the conventions of the group and that their own behaviour responded to perceived threats or, at least, did not increase the risk for themselves. In AR, these reflections should be made conscious and shared either as the group process proceeds or at reflection times in the sessions. From the analysis and writing of the Story the PR is more aware that co-researchers must themselves have been reflecting in action, but he is doubtful that it was consciously used.

#### **6.2.6. Summary**

The exercise of power was an influence in this AR because of EC positions, group relationships and dynamics. It was managed by the PR in a manner that was constrained by his awareness of role duality and his fears about the continuation of

the research. This research demonstrated the power of the status quo and how difficult it is to make changes that affect the status quo. The research demonstrated that awareness of role duality can have negative as well as positive effects. It also demonstrated that role duality was a factor for all members of this group and that structural duality was also a factor. Participation took place in support of the PR. However, there was unequal participation and there was little use of AR practices by co-researchers. These factors were influenced by the group membership and relationships and by the reluctance of the PR to challenge the group and its practice. Reflection contributed to how the PR was able to analyse, learn and make decisions as the AR progressed and to his analysis and concluding following the group research. There was limited sharing of reflection in action or reflection on action within the group and this undoubtedly led to missed opportunities for more effective group decisions during the AR.

#### **6.2.7. Recommendations**

The learning from this research and the suggestions and recommendations in relation to the action research are discussed in some detail through the sections of the discussion above. The following is a summary of the recommendations.

##### **Conducting IAR at executive level**

Building on Coghlan's identification of IAR at executive level as more difficult and challenging than other IAR, it is recommended that there should be significant supports for paying attention to existing individual and group behaviour and for changed behaviours. For the principal researcher, this means detailed consultation with their supervisor if it is academic research, and having one or more critical friends who can advise them and support their process management and changing practices. For the group, the supports might include a different physical setting, adding to the group membership or establishing connections to specific stakeholders, external facilitation and focus on action that is different from the routine, day-to-day work of the group.

### **Role Duality**

This research demonstrates the need to recognise and acknowledge the role duality of all AR group members. If this concept is introduced by the principal researcher in the pre-step, then it may be possible for all the group members to recognise this reality and to manage it as the research progresses. Ideally the group should agree to pay explicit attention to role duality and how it is affecting all group members as the research progresses.

### **Organisational politics and power relationships**

The learning from this research is that the influence of organisational politics and power relationships should be interrogated by the principal researcher and group throughout the research. The potential risks for group members should be made explicit and recognised. It would also be useful to agree that the power dynamics being enacted in the research process would be examined by the group during the research and that this would be facilitated by the principal researcher.

### **Participatory levels and practices**

The principal researcher should give feedback to the members of the group on their participation. In a group setting, this should be done to the group as a whole rather than to individual co-researchers to avoid causing conflict between co-researchers and the principal researcher or between co-researchers. Such feedback could help to manage the AR and to contribute to useful practices being used and better outcomes being achieved.

### **Reflection**

The experience of this research supports the value of reflection. As recommended in the literature, the principal researcher should use reflection throughout the research and should share reflection with all group members. Co-researchers should also be supported to reflect, use and share their reflections. This reflective practice would assist co-researchers, and therefore the group, to progress the AR more successfully, would make the group setting more open and would support the principal researcher

to share their reflections. This needs group agreement from the beginning of the research as there are risks for any group member in sharing their reflection.

A researcher conducting their first IAR project should seek support for their learning about reflection during the early part of the research and should seek feedback on how they are using it from their supervisor and/or critical friend with specific experience of reflection.

### **6.3. The EC Role regarding Service Development**

This section discusses the outcomes that were achieved during the research. The limitations of action are also discussed. There is a particular focus on what was and was not achieved during the long C2.

#### **6.3.1. The outcomes achieved**

By the end of the third session in the research, the group agreed that the EC had a role in relation to service development, that the current role in relation to service development was less clear than its role in relation to other areas of responsibility and that the role should be clarified and should change. This agreement was an important outcome by itself. The development of clear and agreed aims was positive, but difficulty in moving on from thinking and discussion to action was already apparent. Taking experimental action on the EC's service development role would have enabled the group to experience and reflect on different leadership and management approaches to service development in a complex and changing organisation. This could have contributed to better AR outcomes in relation to the role.

The group readily identified the core themes of the role in relation to service development which needed to be clarified or changed including: dependence and decision-making; power and empowerment; structures, systems and communication. These have already been described in detail in the Findings Chapter. However, there was no agreement on how to address any theme. The range of views on each theme could broadly be categorised as reflecting top-down and bottom-up approaches to

management which are identified by Bamford and Forrester (2003) as being elements of planned change and emergent change theories.

The group achieved these initial outcomes because of how the work was structured and facilitated by the PR and intensive work by all co-researchers. The PR understands that the group also achieved this outcome because it did not initially identify the risks, to the status quo of change actions arising within the AR. These risks included establishing more equality within the group and changing to a more democratic relationship with the rest of the organisation.

The second outcome achieved during the AR was agreement on revised and developed statements of *vision, values and mission* and the proposal to consult with stakeholders on these concepts outside the AR. This outcome was achieved through work on *vision, values and mission* undertaken in a plan eventually agreed during C2. The group was satisfied with this work, while the PR saw it as positive but incomplete. His perception is that it was not completed during the AR because there was pressure within the group to finish the work and to take it out of the AR for completion by the EC.

The third major outcome in relation to the EC's service development role was a set of agreements in the final group AR session. The first agreement was a repetition of the need to change the EC's role. The other agreements were on the need for empowerment and enabling. These were progress from the group's mixed views earlier in the research on whether empowerment and enabling should be an aim of the EC in relation to service development. The final agreement was that staff should be enabled to have more significant roles in relation to service development and that service users should be empowered through involvement in service development, especially the development of their own individual services.

This progress and these agreements were achieved because of a significant amount of work, during and between the last four group sessions. In addition, the final session was given a critical action research structure in its design by the PR. Even though the group had not taken a critical approach overall, the PR understands that the design of

the final session facilitated the development of the focuses on empowerment and enabling. This was done through the briefing on CPAR given by a co-researcher and basing the questions for the group to address on Kemmis's (2008) definition of CPAR. The PR understands that the agreements were finally achieved because of the development of co-researchers' thinking during the research, the experience of co-researchers in relation to service development projects outside the AR and the imminent end of the AR. They were also achieved because they avoided controversy and did not challenge the status quo or the power within the EC. In addition they were only a limited challenge to the power relations between the EC and the wider organisation. The disappointing aspect of these decisions is that they had no impact on services or service development because of when they were made and the fact that they were made without any agreement on action and it was hard to predict if there would be any impact.

### **6.3.2. Why was there not agreement on the new role and action on the changes to be made?**

The review of C1 reinforced the hierarchy of the EC and presented challenges to the PR on his guidance of the group and the AR process. The risks for co-researchers in undertaking the AR were identified in the review. Given that some of these risks, such as role duality, only arose in the research, it is likely that these identifications came from individual thinking and reflection as well as from previous group discussion. C2 began at a point where the financial crisis had escalated and had increased impacts on the EC and, in turn, on the AR. Between the review of C1 and this start of C2, the hierarchical structure of the EC was articulated and demonstrated and it was confirmed that the structure would not change.

The PR's understanding is that risks to the EC power structure and status from the AR were implicitly identified by some co-researchers as the C1 sessions progressed and this contributed to lack of progress in action and to the criticism in the C1 review. If changes to the EC service development role happened within the AR, they could lead to the possibility of changes to other aspects of its structure or processes. This concern

was further influenced by the escalating financial crisis and the risks that this created for the EC. This shifted some co-researchers' positions from being part of full group agreement to taking a stronger top-down position. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) observe that because doing AR in one's own organisation is political, it may be seen as subversive. This is particularly so because of the qualities of AR such as examining everything, stressing listening and endorsing democratic participation. The PR understands that in this case, the IAR was not seen as deliberately subversive, but that it was potentially subversive because of the PR's attempted democratic participation approach and because changes could happen through the AR rather than through the EC structure. He also understands that some other co-researchers, who experienced the impacts of the financial crisis, recognised that there was a change within the group and began to take a more cautious position because of their role duality.

The PR's understanding is also informed by being an insider: he was part of the group and the EC during this time, sharing some of the feelings and observing the effects of others. His perception now is that it would have been worth taking the risk of sharing his thinking about the changing thinking within the group and inviting the group to consider how it could address the aims of the research in this more challenging and less equal group setting. He did not do this because of his role duality and because, at that time, continuing the AR was more important, for the academic research, than risking ending it so early in the spiral.

### **6.3.3. Summary**

The role of the EC in relation to service development was the main focus of this research. The outcomes from the research in relation to the role were limited when compared with the proposal made by the PR and the agreement by the group on the need to change the current role. The fact that the group agreed on the need to change the role and that there were several proposals on what those changes should be, created the impression that there would be changes during the AR. This impression changed as the group, including the PR struggled to agree on how to address the role. The ultimate outcomes were limited, given the time and energy invested in the

research. These outcomes and the struggle in reaching them demonstrate the difficulty in considering or changing specific aspects of the role of a top management team through action research rather than through the formal structure of the team.

## **6.4. Conclusions**

### **6.4.1. Executive Committee Role regarding Service Development**

The group established that the Executive Committee had a role in relation to service development. It agreed that this role was not set out or enacted as effectively as its other roles. It was agreed that the role should change.

It was not agreed what changes should be made to the role. There were a number of alternative options proposed. The difficulty in agreeing to specific changes was influenced by the range of approaches that were proposed, from top down planned change to bottom up emergent change. The only two changes that were clearly agreed by the end of the research was that staff should be enabled to initiate, build and implement service development and that service users should be empowered to become involved in service development, especially of their own individual services. No action had followed these agreements by the end of the research.

The examination, analysis and reviews of the current and potential future roles enhanced the information, understandings, learning, options and conclusions of the group. These could be used in post-research work on the service development role and on service development more generally. The enhanced awareness and understanding of a range of issues can be considered early conscientisation of members of the group, in Freirean terms.

### **6.4.2. Learning about the Executive Committee**

The work on the role and the action research processes confirmed that the Executive Committee operated as a group with members with different levels of power and authority. In particular it was confirmed that the Chief Executive was in charge of the

Committee. This learning clarified that the Committee did not operate as a group of equal members.

This work confirmed that the group was willing to give considerable time and effort to working on an issue, even when there were different views as to what the aims should be, what should be done and how it should be done. This willingness did not translate into tangible change.

The research confirmed that the co-researchers with responsibility for the service regions had extensive knowledge of service development in their areas and in the wider organisation. The emergence of these levels of experience and knowledge through the research identified Executive Committee members who could plan and take action on future changes to service development and to the Executive Committee's role in relation to it.

#### **6.4.3. Undertaking Inside Action Research with the Executive Committee**

Conducting IAR with the Executive Committee of which the principal researcher was a senior member was complex and challenging.

Members of the Executive Committee agreed to take part in the action research primarily to support the principal researcher in his academic research. The group did not have experience of participating in action research. The undertaking of the research and the subsequent analysis and reflection demonstrated that the members did not really examine what they were agreeing to in terms of the critical philosophical approach and the action research processes. The limited attention to and learning about the action research processes influenced how the research was conducted and the outcomes. The stated goals and intentions of the group were not achieved.

A number of aspects of the research had significant effects on both the conduct of the research and its outcomes. Some of these are described in the literature and others have not been identified. These are:

#### **6.4.4. Role Duality**

The role duality of the principal researcher influenced his research role, his Executive Committee role, the boundaries between the two roles, the work relationships with co-researchers, ethics and emotion. The role duality of the PR influenced the group agreement to undertake the research, the approach to the research, how it proceeded and for how long it continued. These experiences confirmed the importance of the focus on this issue in the literature, especially the significance of role duality at executive level.

The role duality of the co-researchers was also important and influential. The co-researchers were aware of this. For a group to carry out insider action research, with all members having researcher roles and the parallel roles of members of the Executive Committee meant that the issue of role duality was a challenge for every member of the group. The principal researcher needs to manage their own role duality with external support and to work with the group to enable the members to recognise, acknowledge their role duality and then support the members to carry out the AR in that context.

The action research literature does not acknowledge the importance of the role duality of participants who are co-researchers. Identifying participants' role duality, being aware of it during the research and taking appropriate actions to support equality and to protect participants who are at risk is an important consideration for action researchers.

#### **6.4.5. Power and Politics**

The exercise of power and organisational politics influenced the research focus, process and progress. Organisational politics interacted with power issues, with role duality and with structural duality. Organisational politics were difficult to recognise and manage, because the influence was not always obvious or easily understood. The literature highlights the importance of attending to power and politics, offers guidance on recognising, understanding and managing these issues in the action research

process. However, it proved difficult to apply this knowledge in an effective way when working within a small executive group as a member of that group for the reasons outlined.

#### **6.4.6. Structural Duality**

The structural duality of the research group and the Executive Committee, operating in parallel on different strategies and tasks, over a two year period, also influenced how the members of the research group behaved, how the research progressed and the ultimate outcomes. Action research challenges and requires participants to behave differently. If habitual structures and processes are being strongly maintained and reinforced outside and in parallel with the action research, it is very difficult for the action research process, no matter how well conducted, to effect a change. The action research literature does not emphasise the impact of structural duality and this focus is an important consideration for action researchers.

#### **6.4.7. Investments and Outcomes**

An important conclusion is that willingness, optimism and the investment of time and hard work on the part of the principal researcher and co-researchers cannot by themselves overcome group norms and habitual practices, especially in relation to the exercise of power, unless these are explicitly named and acknowledged. In this research, these factors contributed to disappointing and limited outcomes.

#### **6.4.8. Taking a critical participatory approach**

##### Participation

Members of the group were interested in and wished to have participatory rather than subject roles. They readily agreed to undertake the roles of co-researchers. Despite this, group members did not adopt a CPAR approach, they resisted or ignored aspects of the approach or they took their own group or individual approaches. Participation was also influenced by a range of factors including inequalities of power, role duality,

structural duality and the environmental context. This meant that while there was participation in the form of presence and activity in group sessions and inter-session work, much participation did not happen as intended in PAR or CPAR.

The principal researcher's own understanding of participation, his preoccupation with consensus and his dependence on the group for his academic research, led him to tolerate inequality in participation and contribution and to fail to sufficiently challenge the exercise of power in the group which worked against equality in participation.

#### A critical perspective

The practice of critique, as the understood in the literature on action research, was, in practice, difficult to establish or use. Neither the PR nor the group were familiar with the critical perspective and, while it agreed to adopt the approach, the group did not study it or seek input on how to enact it. In order to take a critical approach the inside action researcher requires a thorough knowledge of the critical approach and a significant dialogue with the research group. The inside researcher must also be prepared to reflect critically and to share their reflections with the participants. Adopting a critical perspective requires an openness to change, recognition that the status quo is imperfect and a willingness to offer and be subject to a critique of attitudes and behaviour. This stance carries risks for all group members. In this study, the prerequisites for a critical perspective were not established or supported.

#### Combining IAR and CPAR

It was difficult to combine these two approaches to action research, especially with an Executive Committee and involving only this small group. While both approaches focus on democracy and high levels of participation, there are also differences. The principal researcher has more of a leadership role in IAR and a more facilitating role in CPAR. CPAR is not normally small group research and normally involves more of a mixture of participants. In order to combine the two approaches effectively with a top management team, it would be more effective to involve other stakeholders. A conclusion is that to conduct PAR or CPAR with a top management team as an insider

requires high levels of knowledge of all of the approaches before the research begins and a more extensive preparatory pre-step aimed at building capacity for understanding, practicing and reflecting on key features of the approach as the research progresses. This work should include discussing and then agreeing to work as a group with internal equality; agreeing to the roles of the principal researcher and the co-researchers to enable good practices by all the group members and engaging in open reflection and feedback to contribute to effective processes and to develop insight and knowledge.

#### **6.4.9. The Principal Researcher's Approach to the Action Research**

The principal researcher's approach was influenced by ethical, role duality and power related issues throughout the research. He was conscious of risks to himself and to co-researchers and avoided taking actions involving risk. Overall his approach was more restrained than in his normal Executive Committee role. Paying attention to these risks contributed to other kinds of risk in the group: over-caution, reluctance to challenge, criticise or put at risk co-researchers and fear of being criticised. These approaches to risk influenced how other co-researchers behaved and had a restraining effect on the progress of the action research.

#### **6.4.10. The context within which the action research was being conducted**

It is impossible to separate the action research from the organisation and the wider context in which it takes place, especially when these elements of the context become more complex, uncertain or threatening. The national context, its escalation during the AR and its impacts on the organisation influenced the thinking, prioritising and behaviour of the members of the group. It influenced how the members of the Executive Committee behaved and how the research group operated. This action research operated differently from how it would have operated if the environment had been calm and less threatening.

The three changing elements of the context of the research: the Executive Committee, the national environment and the retirement of the Chief Executive interacted with each other and combined to shape the research and its outcomes.

Although the group decided not to make an explicit connection between the financial crisis and the action research, the demands on the Executive Committee and the response of the committee and individual members to the crisis were brought into the action research and influenced how the group behaved.

## **6.5. In Conclusion**

The discussion and conclusions are not intended as criticism of the group or what it did in this action research. This was lengthy, challenging and sometimes painful research for those involved. It took considerable time and effort on the part of all members of the research group over a long period of time.

The expressed intentions in relation to the research were not achieved. This was influenced by working in parallel with formal Executive Committee work and by the rapidly changing, demanding and risky operational environment. For the most part, the action research was not permitted to challenge the ongoing practices of the group. It was also influenced by the group's lack of experience of action research and by the fact that the topic and focus of the research were not experienced as urgent, especially in the national and organisational context.

While the outcomes were not what were intended, the group did learn about service development, about itself as a group and about its practice in addressing a complex issue in a participatory manner. It can be argued that in the challenging context of the AR, it would have been helpful for the group members to have reflected on their mental models in relation to service development and to organisational change and to have discussed these reflections openly. Such reflections and discussions could have enabled them to understand and revise their mental models in ways that would reflect the changing environment of the organisation.

This research contributes to the knowledge about carrying out IAR with a top management team. It demonstrates that there are significant role duality issues for the

principal researcher and for co-researchers and that this influences how the AR is conducted.

In order to conduct successful insider action research at senior management level in challenging external and internal environments it is necessary for the principal researcher to have experience of, and skills in, action research and to have support with expertise in action research.

Addressing change through action research is challenging when the issue being addressed is complex, not urgent, and is in competition with urgent changes being taken by the same participants outside the action research.

## 7. References

- Altricher, H., Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Zuber-Skerrit, O. (2002). The concept of action research. *The Learning Organization*, 9(3), 125-131.
- Applebaum, S. H., & Wohl, L. (2000). Transformation or change: some prescriptions for health care organizations. *Managing Service Quality*, 10(5), 279-298.
- Argyris, C. (2004). *Reasons and rationalizations : the limits to organizational knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1996). *Organizational learning II*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
- Bamford, D. R., & Forrester, P. L. (2003). Managing planned and emergent change within an operations management environment. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 23(5/6), 546.
- Bargal, D. (2006). Personal and intellectual influences leading to Lewin's paradigm of action research: Towards the 60th anniversary of Lewin's 'Action research and minority problems' (1946). *Action Research*, 4(4), 367-388. doi: 10.1177/1476750306070101
- Bartunek, J. M., Balogun, J., & Do, B. (2011). Considering Planned Change Anew: Stretching Large Group Interventions Strategically, Emotionally, and Meaningfully. *Academy of Management Annals*, 5(1), 1-52. doi: 10.1080/19416520.2011.567109
- Bate, P., Khan, R., & Pyle, A. J. (2000). Culturally Sensitive Structuring: An Action Research-Based Approach to Organization Development and Design. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 23(4), 387-391.
- Benton, T., & Craib, I. (2001). *Philosophy of social science : the philosophical foundations of social thought*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Bostock, J., & Freeman, J. (2003). 'No limits,: doing participatory action research with young people in Northumberland. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 13(6), 464-474.
- Bradburn, J., & Mackie, C. (2001). A foot in the door: a collaborative action research project with cancer service users. In R. Winter & C. Munn-Giddings (Eds.), *A handbook for action research in health and social care*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Bragg, M. (Writer). (2013). Complexity [Radio Broadcast]. In T. Morris (Producer), *In Our Time*: BBC Radio 4.
- Brannick, T., & Coghlan, D. (2007). In Defense of Being "Native": The Case for Insider Academic Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 10(1), 59-74. doi: 10.1177/1094428106289253
- Brännmark, M., & Benn, S. (2012). A Proposed Model for Evaluating the Sustainability of Continuous Change Programmes. *Journal of Change Management*, 12(2), 231-245. doi: 10.1080/14697017.2012.672449
- Bridges, J., & Meyer, J. (2007). Exploring the effectiveness of action research as a tool for organizational change in health care. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 12(4), 389-399. doi: 10.1177/1744987107078635
- Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., & Eikeland, O. (2006). Editorial. *Action Research*, 4(1), 5-8. doi: 10.1177/1476750306060537

- Bullock, R. J., & Batten, D. (1985). It's Just a Phase We're Going Through: A Review and Synthesis of OD Phase Analysis. *Group & Organization Studies (pre-1986)*, 10(4), 383.
- Buono, A. F., & Kerber, K. W. (2010). Creating a Sustainable Approach to Change: Building Organizational Change Capacity. *SAM Advanced Management Journal (07497075)*, 75(2), 4-21.
- Burgess, J. (2006). Participatory action research: First-person perspectives of a graduate student. *Action Research*, 4(4), 419-437. doi: 10.1177/1476750306070104
- Burnes, B. (1992). *Managing change : a strategic approach to organisational development and renewal*: Pitman.
- Burnes, B. (1996). No such thing as ... a "one best way" to manage organizational change. *Management Decision*, 34(10), 11-18.
- Burnes, B. (2004a). Emergent change and planned change - competitors or allies? The case of XYZ construction. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 24(9/10), 886-902.
- Burnes, B. (2004b). Kurt Lewin and complexity theories: back to the future? *Journal of Change Management*, 4(4), 309-325. doi: 10.1080/1469701042000303811
- Bushe, G. R., & Shani, A. B. (1991). *Parallel learning structures : increasing innovation in bureaucracies*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
- Castillo-Burguete, M. T., Dolores, V. d. A. M., & Dickinson, F. (2008). Changing the Culture of Dependency to Allow for Successful Outcomes in Participatory Research: Fourteen Years of Experience in Yucatan, Mexico. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 522-533). Los Angeles, Calif.; London: SAGE.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Chiu, L. F. (2006). Critical reflection: More than nuts and bolts. *Action Research*, 4(2), 183-203. doi: 10.1177/1476750306063991
- Chiu, L. F. (2008). Health Promotion and Participatory Action Research: The Significance of Participatory Praxis in Developing Participatory Health Intervention. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 534-549). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Ciao, B. (2012). Knowledge-based changes in turbulent environments: categories and effects on value creation. *Strategic Change*, 21(1/2), 23-40. doi: 10.1002/jsc.1893
- Coghlan, D. (2007a). Insider action research doctorates: Generating actionable knowledge. *Higher Education*, 54(2), 293-306. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-5450-0>
- Coghlan, D. (2007b). Insider action research: opportunities and challenges *Management Research News*, 30(5), 335-343.
- Coghlan, D. (2008). Authenticity as first person practice: An exploration based on Bernard Lonergan. *Action Research*, 6(3), 351-366. doi: 10.1177/1476750308094649
- Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2005). *Doing action research in your own organization* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

- Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2014). *Doing action research in your own organization* (4th ed.). London: Sage.
- Coghlan, D., & Casey, M. (2001). Action research from the inside: issues and challenges in doing action research in your own hospital. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 35(5), 674-682. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2648.2001.01899.x
- Coghlan, D., & Rashford, N. S. (2006). *Organizational change and strategy : an interlevel dynamics approach*. London: Routledge.
- Coghlan, D., & Shani, A. B. R. (2005). Roles, Politics, and Ethics in Action Research Design. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 18(6), 533-546. doi: 10.1007/s11213-005-9465-3
- Coghlan, D., & Shani, A. B. R. (2008). Insider Action Research: The Dynamics of Developing New Capabilities. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 643-655). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Collier, J. (1945). United States Indian Administration as a laboratory of ethnic relations. *Social Research*, 12(3), 265-303.
- Cook, T. (2009). The purpose of mess in action research: building rigour though a messy turn. *Educational Action Research*, 17(2), 277-291. doi: 10.1080/09650790902914241
- Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (1993). Through the lens of a critical friend. *Educational Leadership*, 51(2), 49.
- Coughlan, P., & Coghlan, D. (2002). Action research for operations management. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 22(2), 220-240.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research : meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: SAGE.
- Cummings, T. G., & Worley, C. G. (1997). *Organization development and change* (6th ed. ed.). Minneapolis/St. Paul: West Pub. Co.
- Davis, J. M. (2007). Rethinking the architecture: An action researcher's resolution to writing and presenting their thesis. *Action Research*, 5(2), 181-198. doi: 10.1177/1476750307077322
- Dawson, P. (1994). *Organizational change*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Dennett, B. (2001). Developing client-focused work with people with profound learning disabilities. In R. Winter & C. Munn-Giddings (Eds.), *A handbook for action research in health and social care* (pp. 116-130). London ; New York: Routledge.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998a). *The landscape of qualitative research* (Fourth Edition. ed.).
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998b). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage.
- Dick, B. (2002). Postgraduate programs using action research. *The Learning Organization*, 9(3/4), 159.
- Doyle, M., Claydon, T., & Buchanan, D. (2000). Mixed Results, Lousy Process: the Management Experience of Organizational Change. *British Journal of Management*, 11(3), S59.
- Dunphy, D. C. (1996). Organizational Change in Corporate Settings. *Human Relations*, 49(5), 541-552. doi: 10.1177/001872679604900501

- Dunphy, D. C., & Stace, D. A. (1988). Transformational and Coercive Strategies for Planned Organizational Change: Beyond the O.D. Model. *Organization Studies (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG.)*, 9(3), 317-334.
- e Cunha, M. P., & da Cunha, J. V. (2006). Towards a complexity theory of strategy. *Management Decision*, 44(7), 839-850. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00251740610680550>
- Eden, C., & Huxham, C. (1996). Action Research for Management Research. *British Journal of Management*, 7(1).
- Elias, N. (1998). *Elias Norbert on Civilisation, Power and Knowledge: Selected Writings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Elrod, P. D., II, & Tippett, D. D. (2002). The "death valley" of change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 15(3), 273-291.
- Esain, A., Williams, S., & Massey, L. (2008). Combining Planned and Emergent Change in a Healthcare Lean Transformation. *Public Money & Management*, 28(1), 21-26. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9302.2008.00614.x
- Fals-Borda, O., & Rahman, M. A. (1991). *Action and knowledge : breaking the monopoly with participatory action research*. New York: London: Apex Press ; Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Fayol, H. ( 1948). *General and Industrial Management*. London: Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd.
- Feldman, M. S. (2000). Organizational Routines as a Source of Continuous Change. *Organization Science*, 11(6), 611-629.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness* (1st American ed.). New York,: Seabury Press.
- Freire, P. (1993). Foreword. In P. McLaren & P. Leonard (Eds.), *Paulo Freire : a critical encounter*: Routledge.
- French, S., & Swain, J. (2000). Good intentions: reflecting on researching the lives and experiences of visually disabled people. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 2, 35-54.
- Friedman, V. J., & Rodgers, T. (2008). Action Science: Linking Causal theory and Meaning Making in Action Research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed. ed.). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Georgiades, N. J., & Phillimore, L. (1975). The Myth of the Hero-Innovator and Alternative Strategies for Organizational Change. In C. Kiernan & F. Woodford (Eds.), *Behaviour Modification for the Severely Retarded* (pp. 313-319). New York: Associated Scientific.
- Gersick, C. J. G. (1994). Pacing strategic change: the case of a new venture. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(1), 9-45. doi: 10.2307/256768
- Gill, J., & Johnson, P. (2002). *Research methods for managers* (3rd ed. ed.). London: Sage.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory; strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago,: Aldine Pub. Co.
- Greenwood, D. J. (2012). Doing and learning action research in the neo-liberal world of contemporary higher education. *Action Research*, 10(2), 115-132. doi: 10.1177/1476750312443573

- Gronhaug, K., & Olson, O. (1999). Action research and knowledge creation: merits and challenges. *Qualitative Market Research*, 2(1), 6-14.
- Gummesson, E. (2003). All research is interpretive! *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 18(6/7), 482-492. doi: doi:10.1108/08858620310492365
- Gustavsen, B. (2008). Action research, practical challenges and the formation of theory. *Action Research*, 6(4), 421-437. doi: 10.1177/1476750308094130
- Habermas, J. (1986). *Knowledge and human interests*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Håkonsson, D. D., Klaas, P., & Carroll, T. N. (2013). The Structural Properties of Sustainable, Continuous Change: Achieving Reliability Through Flexibility. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 49(2), 179-205. doi: 10.1177/0021886312464520
- Hayes, J. (2002). *The theory and practice of change management*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Heen, H. (2005). About feelings in action research: An experiment in first-person inquiry. *Action Research*, 3(3), 263-278. doi: 10.1177/1476750305056002
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2008). Extending epistemology within a co-operative inquiry. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 366-380). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Higgs, M., & Rowland, D. (2005). All changes great and small: Exploring approaches to change and its leadership. *Journal of Change Management*, 5(2), 121-151. doi: 10.1080/14697010500082902
- Hilsen, A. I. (2006). And they shall be known by their deeds: Ethics and politics in action research. *Action Research*, 4(1), 23-36. doi: 10.1177/1476750306060539
- Holian, R. (1999). Doing Action Research in my own organisation: ethical dilemmas, hopes and triumphs. Retrieved 29/3/2009, from <http://www.aral.com.au/ari/p-rholian99.html>
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (1972). *Dialectic of enlightenment*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Houchin, K., & MacLean, D. (2005). Complexity Theory and Strategic Change: an Empirically Informed Critique. *British Journal of Management*, 16(2), 149-166. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8551.2005.00427.x
- Huber, G. P., Sutcliffe, K. M., Miller, C. C., & Glick, W. H. (1993). Understanding and Predicting Organizational Change. In G. P. Huber & W. H. Glick (Eds.), *Organizational change and redesign : ideas and insights for improving performance* (pp. xiii, 450 p.). New York ;: Oxford University Press.
- Humphrey, C. (2007). Insider-outsider: Activating the hyphen. *Action Research*, 5(1), 11-26. doi: 10.1177/1476750307072873
- Hynes, G., Coghlan, D., & McCarron, M. (2012). Participation as a multi-voiced process: Action research in the acute hospital environment. *Action Research*, 10(3), 293-312. doi: 10.1177/1476750312451278
- Jacobs, G. (2010). Conflicting demands and the power of defensive routines in participatory action research. *Action Research*, 8(4), 367-386. doi: 10.1177/1476750310366041
- Johansson, A. W., & Lindhult, E. (2008). Emancipation or workability?: Critical versus pragmatic scientific orientation in action research. *Action Research*, 6(1), 95-115. doi: 10.1177/1476750307083713

- Kakabadse, N., Kakabadse, A., & Kalu, K. (2007). Communicative Action through Collaborative Inquiry: Journey of a Facilitating Co-Inquirer. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 20(3), 245-272. doi: 10.1007/s11213-006-9061-1
- Kemmis, S. (2008). Critical theory and Participatory Action Research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner* (3rd ed. ed.). Victoria, Australia: Deakin University.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2000). Participatory action research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 567-605). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Khan, K. S., Bawani, S. A. A., & Aziz, A. (2013). Bridging the gap of knowledge and action: A case for participatory action research (PAR). *Action Research*, 11(2), 157-175. doi: 10.1177/1476750313477158
- Kincheloe, J. L., McLaren, P., & Steinberg, S. R. (2011). Critical Pedagogy and Qualitative Research: Moving to the Bricolage. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed. ed., pp. 163-177). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Kögler, H.-H. (1996). *The power of dialogue : critical hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning : experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Kotter, J. P. (2012). ACCELERATE! (cover story). *Harvard Business Review*, 90(11), 43-58.
- Krim, R. (1988). Managing to Learn: Action Inquiry in City Hall. In P. Reason (Ed.), *Human inquiry in action : developments in new paradigm research* (pp. 144-162). London: Sage.
- Lant, T. K., & Mezias, S. J. (1992). An organizational learning model of convergence and reorientation. *Organization Science*, 3(1), 47-71.
- Ledwith, M., & Asgill, P. (2000). Critical alliance: Black and white women working together for social justice. *Community Development Journal*, 35(3), 290-299. doi: 10.1093/cdj/35.3.290
- Lewin, K. (1939). When facing danger. In G. W. Lewin (Ed.), *Resolving social conflict* (1st ed., pp. xvii, 230 p.). London: Harper and Row.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action Research and Minority Problems. In G. W. Lewin (Ed.), *Resolving social conflicts : selected papers on group dynamics*. New York: Harper.
- Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Channels of group life; social planning and action research. *Human Relations*, 142-153.
- Lillis, C. (2000). How one school is fulfilling the vision of Peter Senge's 'Learning Organisation'. In J. McNiff & J. Whitehead (Eds.), *Action research in organisations* (pp. 285-296). London: Routledge.
- Lippitt, R., Watson, J., & Westley, B. (1958). *The dynamics of planned change*. New York,: Harcourt.
- lisahunter, emerald, e., & Martin, G. (2013). *Participatory activist research in the globalised world : social change through the cultural professions*. Dordrecht ; London: Springer.

- Long, B. (2000). Understanding my work as a group leader in employment counselling. In J. McNiff & J. Whitehead (Eds.), *Action research in organisations* (pp. 173-176). London: Routledge.
- Lukes, S. (2005). *Power : a radical view* (2nd ed. ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Luscher, L. S., & Lewis, M. W. (2008). Organizational change and managerial sensemaking: working through paradox. *Academy of Management Journal*, 51(2), 221-240. doi: 10.5465/AMJ.2008.31767217
- MacIntosh, R., & MacLean, D. (2001). Conditioned emergence: Researching change and changing research. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 21(9/10), 1343-1357.
- Maguire, P., Brydon-Miller, M., & McIntyre, A. (2004). Introduction. In M. Brydon-Miller, A. McIntyre & P. Maguire (Eds.), *Traveling companions : feminism, teaching, and action research* (pp. xix, 202 p.). Westport, Conn.: Praeger.
- Maguire, S., & McKelvey, B. (1999). Complexity and Management: Moving From Fad To Firm Foundations. *Emergence*, 1(2), 19.
- Marshall, J. (2004). Living Systemic Thinking: Exploring Quality in First-Person Action Research. *Action Research*, 2(3), 305-325. doi: 10.1177/1476750304045945
- McDaniel, R. R. J., Jordan, M. E., & Fleeman, B. F. (2003). Surprise, Surprise, Surprise! A Complexity Science View of the Unexpected. *Health Care Management Review*, 28(3), 266-278.
- McEvoy, P., & Richards, D. (2006). A critical realist rationale for using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 11(1), 66-78. doi: 10.1177/1744987106060192
- McInnes, P., Hibbert, P., & Beech, N. (2007). Exploring the complexities of validity claims in action research *Management Research News*, 30(5), 381-390.
- McKernan, J. (1991). *Curriculum action research : a handbook of methods and resources for the reflective practitioner*. London: Kogan Page.
- McLaren, P., & Leonard, P. (1993). *Paulo Freire : a critical encounter*: Routledge.
- McNiff, J. (1988). *Action research : principles and practice*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2000). *Action research in organisations*. London: Routledge.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2002). *Action research : principles and practice* (2nd ed.). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- McWilliam, C. L., & Ward-Griffin, C. (2006). Implementing organizational change in health and social services. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 19(2), 119-135.
- Melrose, M. J. (2001). Maximizing the Rigor of Action Research: Why Would You Want To? How Could You? *Field Methods*, 13(2), 160-180. doi: 10.1177/1525822x0101300203
- Meyer, C. B., & Stensaker, I. G. (2007, 2007/08//). *MANAGING MULTIPLE CHANGE PROCESSES: CHALLENGES AND INTERVENTION TECHNIQUES*.
- Meynell, F. (2005). A second-order approach to evaluating and facilitating organizational change. *Action Research*, 3(2), 211-231. doi: 10.1177/1476750305052146
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis : an expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed. ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage.

- Miller, D., & Friesen, P. H. (1982). Structural Change and Performance: Quantum Versus Piecemeal-Incremental Approaches. *Academy of Management Journal*, 25(4), 867-892. doi: 10.2307/256104
- Miller, E. J. (1993). *From dependency to autonomy : studies in organization and change*. London: Free Association Books.
- Mintzberg, H., & Westley, F. (1992). Cycles of organizational change. *Strategic Management Journal*, 13, 39-59.
- Molineux, J., & Haslett, T. (2002). Working Within Organizational Cycles—A More Suitable Way to Manage Action Research Projects in Large Organizations? *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 15(6), 465-484. doi: 10.1023/A:1021060603452
- Moore, B. (2007). Original sin and insider research. *Action Research*, 5(1), 27-39. doi: 10.1177/1476750307072874
- Morck, L. L. (2000). Community Based Action Research: Essay Review. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 2, 196-199.
- Moss Kanter, R., Stein, B., & Jick, T. (1992). *The Challenge of organizational change : how companies experience it and leaders guide it*. New York: Free Press ; Maxwell Macmillan International.
- Neilsen, E. H. (2006). But let us not forget John Collier: Commentary on David Bargal's 'Personal and intellectual influences leading to Lewin's paradigm on action research'. *Action Research*, 4(4), 389-399. doi: 10.1177/1476750306070102
- Ní Mhurchú, S. (2002). How Can I Improve My Practice as a Teacher in the area of Assessment through the Use of Portfolios? In J. McNiff & J. Whitehead (Eds.), *Action research : principles and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 73-84). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Ó'Muimhneachain, C. (2002). Expect the unexpected. In J. McNiff & J. Whitehead (Eds.), *Action research : principles and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 120-125). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Olesen, V. (1998). Feminisms and Models of Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (Fourth Edition. ed.). London: Sage.
- Orlikowski, W. J. (1996). Improvising Organizational Transformation Over Time: A Situated Change Perspective. *Information Systems Research*, 7(1), 63-92.
- Ospina, S., Dodge, J., Foldy, E. G., & Hofmann-Pinilla, A. (2008). Taking the Action Turn: Lessons from bringing Participation to qualitative research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed. ed., pp. 420-434). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Oswick, C., Grant, D., Michelson, G., & Wailes, N. (2005). Looking forwards: discursive directions in organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 18(4), 383-390.
- Peters, T. J., & Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In search of excellence : lessons from America's best-run companies* (1st ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (2012). Context and Action in the Transformation of the Firm: A Reprise. *Journal of Management Studies*, 49(7), 1304-1328. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6486.2012.01054.x

- Pettigrew, A. M., & Whipp, R. (1993). Understanding the Environment. In C. Mabey & W. M. Mayon-White (Eds.), *Managing change* (2nd ed. ed.). London: Paul Chapman.
- Pfeffer, J. (1981). *Power in organizations*. Marshfield, Mass.: Pitman Pub.
- Pfeffer, J. (1992). *Managing with power : politics and influence in organizations*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.
- Plowman, D. A., Baker, L. T., Beck, T. E., Kulkarni, M., Solansky, S. T., & Travis, D. V. (2007). Radical change accidentally: the emergence and amplification of small change. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(3), 515-543. doi: 10.5465/AMJ.2007.25525647
- Plowman, D. A., Solansky, S., Beck, T. E., Baker, L., Kulkarni, M., & Travis, D. V. (2007). The role of leadership in emergent, self-organization. *Leadership Quarterly*, *18*(4), 341-356. doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004
- Pretty, J. N., Guijt, I., Thompson, J., & Scoones, I. (1995). *Participatory learning and action. A trainers' guide* London: Institute for Environment and Development.
- Rahman, M. A. (2008). Some trends in the praxis of participatory action research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 49-63). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Wirth, K. (2007). Developing a pedagogy of opportunity for students and their teachers: Navigations and negotiations in insider action research. *Action Research*, *5*(1), 75-91. doi: 10.1177/1476750307072878
- Reason, P. (2003). Pragmatist Philosophy and Action Research: Readings and Conversation with Richard Rorty. *Action Research*, *1*(1), 103-123. doi: 10.1177/14767503030011007
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008). *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Reason, P., & Rowan, J. (1981). *Human inquiry : a sourcebook of new paradigm research*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Reid, C., & Frisby, W. (2008). Continuing the Journey: Articulating Dimensions of Feminist Participatory Research (FPAR). In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed. ed., pp. 93-105). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Revans, R. W. (1982). *The origins and growth of action learning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur; Bromley : Chartwell-Bratt.
- Richie, J., & Spencer, L. (1994). Qualitative Data Analysis for Applied Policy Research. In N. Bryman & B. Burgess (Eds.), *Analysing Qualitative Data* (pp. 173-194). London: Routledge.
- Rigg, C., & Trehan, K. (2008). Critical reflection in the workplace: is it just too difficult? *Journal of European Industrial Training*, *32*(5), 374-384. doi: doi:10.1108/03090590810877094
- Romanelli, E., & Tushman, M. L. (1994). Organizational transformation as punctuated equilibrium: an empirical test. *Academy of Management Journal*, *37*(5), 1141-1666. doi: 10.2307/256669
- Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Roth, J., Sandberg, R., & Svensson, C. (2004). The dual role of the insider action researcher. In N. Adler, A. B. Shani & A. Styhre (Eds.), *Collaborative research in organizations : foundations for learning, change, and theoretical development*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage Publications.
- Roth, J., Shani, A. B., & Leary, M. M. (2007). Insider action research: Facing the challenges of new capability development within a biopharma company. *Action Research*, 5(1), 41-60. doi: 10.1177/1476750307072875
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing : art of hearing data*: Sage.
- Schein, E. H. (1995). Learning Consortia: How to Create Parallel Learning Systems for Organization Sets. *Reflections: The Society for Organizational Learning Journal*, 3, 74-84.
- Schein, E. H. (2008). Clinical Inquiry/Research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 266-281). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner : how professionals think in action*: New York : Basic Books, c1983(1991).
- Shani, A. B. R., David, A., & Willson, C. (2004). Collaborative Research: Alternative Roadmaps In N. Adler, A. B. Shani & A. Styhre (Eds.), *Collaborative research in organizations : foundations for learning, change, and theoretical development*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage Publications.
- Shotter, J. (2010). Situated Dialogic Action Research: Disclosing “Beginnings” for Innovative Change in Organizations. *Organizational Research Methods*, 13(2), 268-285. doi: 10.1177/1094428109340347
- Smith, J. D. (2004). A précis of a communicative theory of the firm. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 13(4), 317-331. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8608.2004.00373.x
- Smith, L., Bratini, L., Chambers, D.-A., Jensen, R. V., & Romero, L. (2010). Between idealism and reality: Meeting the challenges of participatory action research. *Action Research*, 8(4), 407-425. doi: 10.1177/1476750310366043
- Stacey, R. D. (1996a). *Complexity and creativity in organizations*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Stacey, R. D. (1996b). *Strategic management & organisational dynamics* (2nd ed. ed.). London: Pitman.
- Stacey, R. D. (2007). The challenge of human interdependence. *European Business Review*, 19(4), 292-302. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09555340710760125
- Stacey, R. D., Griffin, D., & Shaw, P. (2000). *Complexity and management : fad or radical challenge to systems thinking?* London: Routledge.
- Stengers, I. (2004). The challenge of complexity: Unfolding the ethics of science In memoriam Ilya Prigogine. *Emergence: Complexity & Organization*, 6(1/2), 92-99.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research : grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Swantz, M. L. (2008). Participatory Action Research as Practice. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Taylor, S. S. (2004). Presentational Form in First Person Research: Off-Line Collaborative Reflection Using Art. *Action Research*, 2(1), 71-88. doi: 10.1177/1476750304040493

- Torbert, W. R. (1988). Developing wisdom and courage in organizing and sciencing. In S. Shrivastva & D. L. Cooperrider (Eds.), *Organizational wisdom and executive courage* (pp. 222-253). San Francisco, CA: The New Lexington Press.
- Torbert, W. R., & Cook-Greuter, S. R. (2004). *Action inquiry : the secret of timely and transforming leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Torbert, W. R., & Taylor, S. S. (2008). Action Inquiry: Interweaving multiple qualities of attention for timely action. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 239-251). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.
- Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On Organizational Becoming: Rethinking Organizational Change. *Organization Science*, 13(5), 567-582.
- Uzzi, B., & Jarrett, S. (2011). Collaboration and Creativity: The Small World Problem. In M. Kilduff & A. V. Shipilov (Eds.), *Organizational networks* (pp. 4 volumes). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Van De Ven, A. H., & Poole, M. S. (1995). Explaining development and change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 510-540. doi: 10.5465/AMR.1995.9508080329
- Van de Ven, A. H., & Sun, K. (2011). Breakdowns in Implementing Models of Organization Change. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 25(3), 58-74. doi: 10.5465/AMP.2011.63886530
- von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). *General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*. New York: George Braziller.
- Walt, G., Shiffman, J., Schneider, H., Murray, S. F., Brugha, R., & Gilson, L. (2008). 'Doing' health policy analysis: methodological and conceptual reflections and challenges. *Health Policy and Planning*, 23(5), 308-317. doi: 10.1093/heapol/czn024
- Watkins, J. M., & Mohr, B. (2001). *Appreciative inquiry : change at the speed of imagination*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.
- Weaver, Y., & Nicholls, V. (2001). The Camden 'Alternative Choices in Mental Health' project. In R. Winter & C. Munn-Giddings (Eds.), *A handbook for action research in health and social care*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks ; London: Sage Publications.
- Weick, K. E. (2000). Emergent Change as a Universal in Organizations. In M. Beer & N. Nohria (Eds.), *Breaking the code of change*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.
- Weick, K. E., & Quinn, R. E. (1999). Organizational change and development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50(1), 361.
- Whitehead, D. (2005). Project management and action research: two sides of the same coin? *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 19(6), 519-531.
- Williams, V., St Quintin, P., & Hoadley, S. (2006). 'Take your partners': Reflections on a partnership project in learning disability research. *Action Research*, 4(3), 295-314. doi: 10.1177/14767503060666803
- Wilson, D. C. (1992). *A strategy of change : concepts and controversies in the management of change*: Routledge.
- Winter, R., & Munn-Giddings, C. (2001). *A handbook for action research in health and social care*. London ; New York: Routledge.

- Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data : description, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage.
- Wolf, J. A. (2011). Constructing rapid transformation: sustaining high performance and a new view of organization change. *International Journal of Training & Development*, 15(1), 20-38. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2419.2010.00366.x
- Zand, D. E. (1974). Collateral Organization: A New Change Strategy. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 10, 63-89.
- Zuber-Skerrit, O. (2001). Action learning and action research: paradigm, praxis and programs. In S. Sankaran, B. Dick, R. Passfield & P. Swepson (Eds.), *Effective Change Management Using Action Research and Action Learning: Concepts, Frameworks, Processes and Applications* (pp. 1-20). Lismore: Souther Cross University Press.
- Zuber-Skerrit, O., & Fletcher, M. (2007). The quality of an action research thesis in the social sciences *Quality Assurance in Education*, 15(4), 413-436.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O., & Perry, C. (2002). Action research within organisations and university thesis writing. *The Learning Organization*, 9(3/4), 171.

## **Appendix 1:** Ethics Documents for Pilot Project

A DCU Research Ethics Form

B DCU Research Ethics Declaration



**Appendix 1. A.**

**DCU Research Ethics  
Form**

**DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**Research Ethics Form 2007**

**In this section, we ask you to give some general information about your proposed primary research. To give you some guidance as to what is required, you'll find an example of a completed form in the appendix to this form.**

Student Name and ID Number

David Kenefick                      56121148

Degree Programme and Year

Professional Doctoral Programme                      Year Two

Project Title

'An action research study on the role of the senior management team of an organisation providing services to people with intellectual disabilities in the continuous development and review of services'

Supervisor/Lecturer

Dr. Melrona Kirrane

Aims of Research

Under this heading, please give an outline of the significance of the proposed project and an explanation of any expected benefits to individuals, organisations and/or the community in general (100-150 words approximately)

The aim of the research is to examine service development and the role of the senior management team in leading, developing and reviewing how it is done in the organisation. As an action research project it is expected that the project will provide the opportunity for improvements in how service development is carried out in the organisation. The action research approach that is being taken is emancipatory and critical so it should provide opportunities for involvement for those who receive services and opportunities for all stakeholders to critically examine how service development is currently carried out.

This stage of the research is a pilot project for the main research and will be conducted as an action research pre-step.

The purpose of the pre-step is to:

- Set out the researcher's understanding of the need for this research project
- Establish the view of the executive management of the need for the research
- Negotiate agreement with the executive management to collaborate in the research
- Obtain the agreement of the executive management to:
  - Using action research
  - Using an empowering and emancipatory approach
  - Using a critical approach

### Proposed Methods

Under this heading, please give an outline of the proposed methodology, including details of how potential participants will be approached, data collection techniques, tasks participants will be asked to do, and the estimated time commitment involved. This section will vary in length depending on how many different research techniques you intend using and how many different groups of participants you intend involving in your study. However, you should be able to summarise your research methods adequately in under 600 words.

As part of the action research pre-step participants will be asked to give their views on the research topic and on the proposed research approaches to be taken. They will also be asked for their agreement to the main research project going ahead, to their collaboration in it and to the proposed research approaches.

There is only one group of participants and they are all part of the same management team as the researcher. Participants have already been given preliminary information about the research and the pre-step. They will be asked to participate in two group meetings to address the issues listed above. The total time for the two meetings will not exceed four hours. The Chief Executive will be asked to have an individual meeting with the researcher prior to the two group meetings.

The two group meetings will be audio recorded and transcribed. Individuals will not be identified in the writing up of the pilot project and any extracts from the transcripts will be anonymised.

Ethical Implications of My Study and Steps Taken to Protect Participants:

Under this heading, please describe the ethical implications of your research and provide an overview of the various methods you have used to protect participants in your study from risk. This section will vary in length depending on the ethical implications of your study. However, you should be able to summarise these procedures adequately in under 600 words.

Participants will be asked to view their views and possible agreement in relation to the main research under the headings set out above. Individuals, other than the Chief Executive, will not be identified individually and the identification of the Chief Executive will be very limited.

Direct views, comments, agreements or disagreements will not be included in the document. Extracts from the transcripts will be included as appendices and will be anonymised. The pilot study will not be published, so participants will be further protected.

All participants will be asked to sign letters of consent to participating in the pilot project.

If elements of the pre-step are included in the final thesis, individuals will not be identified and their agreement will be further checked as part of the ethics process for the main research.

Once you have completed the sections above to your own satisfaction, please sign TWO copies and submit them to your supervisor.

Please include copies of the following with your form:

- Your informed consent letter(s)
- Where appropriate, a draft of your questionnaire
- Where appropriate, a draft of your interview questions or in the case of open-ended interviews, your topics

Name of Student:

David Kenefick

Signature of Student:

Date:24.01.2008.

Please note that we ask you not to engage in any primary research until your supervisor has contacted you . If you undertake any primary research involving human participants without first submitting a completed research ethics form *and* assessment by your supervisor, this research cannot be considered for examination by the University.

**Appendix 1. B. DCU Research Ethics Declaration**



## Research Ethics Declaration

**We ask all students engaging in primary research with human participants to attach and sign the following declaration. The signed declaration should be incorporated into each copy of your bound project, thesis or dissertation, before the contents page. The following words, in their entirety, must be used. Your project, thesis or dissertation cannot be accepted or graded without the inclusion of this signed declaration.**

Declaration by Researcher

*The information contained here is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in the attached application in accordance with these guidelines, the University's policy on conflict of interest and any other condition laid down by the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee or its Sub-Committees. I have attempted to identify all the risks related to this research, that may arise in conducting this research, and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants.*

*I have declared any affiliation or financial interest in this research or its outcomes or any other circumstances which might present a perceived, potential or actual conflict of interest, in accordance with Dublin City University policy on Conflicts of Interest.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 2:** Ethics documents for the main research

- A. Information Document Transition Phase**
- B. Consent letter transition phase**
- C. Plain Language Statement**
- D. DCU Informed Consent document**
- E. Consent to retention of research data letter**

### **Action Research on the EMC Role in Continuous Service Development: Transition Phase Information Document**

The overall research will be inquiring into the role of the executive management committee in the continuous development of services and supports. It will examine, and may change, such things as how the executive understands its role in relation to service development, how the executive chooses or takes part in choosing the overall direction of services, its role in leading and/or facilitating both broad and local service changes and how it does this over time..

This is a transition phase of the research, working with the EMC members, who are the focus of the research, in order to carry out a number of actions:

1. Feed back to the committee members on the pilot project conducted with them. The focus of the pilot was to carry out an action research 'pre-step' (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005), in other words to examine the context of the potential research, to explore the interests and focuses of the participants and to obtain their agreement to participate in the research. The feedback will include a presentation of the data collected, an analysis of the data and the researcher's reflections and conclusions.
2. To explore the response of the committee members to the feedback and to explore how this might influence their thinking about the focus of the main research project.
3. To revisit and engage in dialogue about the proposed Critical Participative Action Research approach and the potential implications of this for how the research will be conducted and for the committee and the organisation
4. To engage in dialogue with the committee members about the research question or questions to be explored in the main research project.
5. To engage in dialogue with the committee members about their levels of participation on the research
6. To engage in dialogue with the committee members about whether stakeholders outside the committee should be invited to participate in the research. These participants could involve people in one or more of the following categories: staff, people with intellectual disabilities receiving services or supports from the organisation and family members of people receiving services or supports
7. To examine the ethical issues that are involved in this research
8. To agree a broad plan for the research

David Kenefick

October 2009.

## Appendix 2. B. Consent letter transition phase

Dear

The research I am conducting for my Doctorate in Business Administration in Dublin City University is into the role of the Executive Management Committee in relation to continuous service development in the organisation.

The research is being undertaken using an Action Research approach. The Pilot Project, in which you participated, was a pre-step for the research. The next phase of the research is a transition from the pilot project to the main research. It will include feedback from me on the pilot project and discussion of that feedback, the research question(s), possible other participants in the research, the research approach and the overall plan for the research. This is set out in the accompanying document.

I am now seeking agreement from you to participate in this transition phase. The information collected and the agreements obtained or disagreements noted will be reported in the writing up of the research in relation to the group as a whole. Individual members of the group will not be identified.

While I have the support of the organisation to conduct this research you do not have to participate in this phase if you do not wish to. Choosing to participate or not will not affect your position in the organisation in any way.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter and the accompanying information document. If you would like to know more about the study before deciding whether or not to participate I am available to give you more information. If you would like to participate please sign the attached certificate of consent. Please let me know if you would like a written summary of my findings.

Yours Sincerely,

David Kenefick

**Certificate of Consent**

I have read the forgoing information and the accompanying information document. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to participate in this phase of the study and I understand that I can withdraw from it at any time without any impact on my position in the organisation.

Signature:

Date:

## Appendix 2. C. Plain Language Statement

### **Action Research on the EMC Role in Continuous Service Development Information Document**

The research will be inquiring into the role of the executive management committee (EMC) in the continuous development of services and supports. It will examine, and may change, how the executive understands its role in relation to service development, how it chooses or takes part in choosing the overall direction of services, its role in leading and facilitating service changes and how it does this over time.

This research will take place using a critical participatory action research approach. This means that the organisational research project will be undertaken collectively by members of the EMC. It will be a process which will provide opportunities for communication and critical reflection and self-reflection in relation to the topic being inquired into. It will have practical aims and provide the opportunity for exploratory action. It is intended to have empowering outcomes for the committee members and potentially for other staff and, ultimately, for service users.

The research will involve group sessions of EMC members. These will include dialogue on relevant topics, presentations on my perspectives and understanding, opportunities for reflection and feedback. It may also involve planning for changes in service development processes, experimenting with these and reviewing this work. The EMC members may at some point choose to include in the work people from outside the committee (staff, service users, family members). Decisions on what directions are taken in the research and how much time is devoted to it will be for decision by all members of the EMC.

**Potential Risks:** The researcher is not aware of any risks to the participants beyond those involved in everyday work.

The benefits to the participants in being involved in this research may be that you have an opportunity to examine how service development is done in the organisation, to consider how our approach might be developed or changed and an opportunity to explore implementing and reviewing such changes. This may provide benefits in

learning and knowledge, in your satisfaction with how services are developed and with the outcomes for service users.

Data collected for this research will be kept on the researcher's personal, stand-alone computer and in paper files in the researcher's study. Because of the small size of the group involved in the research study and the significant role of the EMC great care will be taken to preserve confidentiality and anonymity. When data are shared with DCU faculty, members individual participants will not be identified.

When the thesis is complete the participants will be consulted about preservation and /or destruction of data. The intention is to keep the data for 10 years and then to destroy it. Members will be consulted regarding the possible necessity of seeking restrictions on access to the thesis and regarding publications arising from this research that may identify the executive management committee or the organisation will not proceed without the agreement of the members of the EMC. If staff, service users or family members become involved in the research then EMC data will not be shared with them without full agreement from EMC members. Participants should note that confidentiality of data may be subject to legal limitations

Participation in the research study is voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research study have been completed. Involvement in or withdrawal from the project will not affect any organisational position, role or assessment.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

***The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o  
Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin  
9. Tel 01-7008000***

David Kenefick

November 2009.



DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

**Informed Consent Form**

**I. Research Study Title**

An action research project on the role of the executive management committee of a voluntary organisation that provides services and supports to people with intellectual disabilities in the development of services and supports, with a particular focus on continuous development.

**Principal researcher:** David Kenefick

**DCU School:** Business Studies

**II. Clarification of the purpose of the research**

It will examine, and may change, such things as how the executive understands its role in relation to service development, how the executive chooses or takes part in choosing the overall direction of services, its role in leading and/or facilitating both broad and local service changes and how it does this over time..

**III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement**

**Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)**

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement  
Yes/No

Do you understand the information provided?  
Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?  
Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?  
Yes/No

Are you aware that your meetings / interviews may be audio taped?  
Yes/No

#### **IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary**

Participation in the research study is voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research study have been completed. Involvement in or withdrawal from the project will not affect any organisational position, role or assessment.

#### **V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

Data collected for this research will be kept on the researcher's personal, stand alone computer and in paper files in the researcher's study. Great care will be taken to preserve confidentiality and anonymity. When data are shared with DCU faculty members individual participants will not be identified.

The participants will be consulted about preservation and /or destruction of data; the possible necessity of seeking restrictions on access to the thesis and publications arising from this research.

If staff, service users or family members become involved in the research then EMC data will not be shared with them without full agreement from EMC members.

Participants should note that confidentiality of data may be subject to legal limitations

**VI. Other relevant information**

Because the research approach is that of Critical Participatory Action Research all members of the executive management committee will be involved in decisions about the direction of the organisational research project.

**VII. Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

**Participants Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name in Block Capitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Consent to Retention of Research Data and Records**

### **Research Study Title**

An action research project on the role of the executive management committee of a voluntary organisation that provides services and supports to people with intellectual disabilities in the development of services and supports, with a particular focus on continuous development.

**Principal researcher:** David Kenefick

### **Retention of Data**

I confirm that on my retirement from the Executive Management Committee retention of my data is voluntary and that I have agreed to the data being retained and analysed with the data from other co-researchers.

I understand that the Executive Management Committee will be consulted about publication of results of the research

### **Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to all records of my participation in the research may be retained by the principal researcher

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name in Block Capitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 3: The research proposal to DCU**

### **Research Proposal**

#### **Outline of the nature of the intended research**

A study of how the senior management of the organisation develops a strategy for the development of a new model of service and support to those who receive services and supports from [the principal researcher's organisation]. The study will be a piece of action research so it is intended that what is learned at each stage will influence future stages of the work.

The influences examined will include literature reviews, information on best practice in other service organisations in Ireland and elsewhere, information that has been gathered through the individual planning process with service users in [the organisation], from the quality accreditation process conducted with the organisation by the Council on Quality and Leadership and from a number of consultation processes with staff.

The first major shift in the model of service and support is in the direction of a much more individualised package of services and supports. This is very much in line with Government and Health Service Executive strategies. It is also in line with the most advanced thinking in the area of services to people with disabilities. The second major shift is towards supporting people with disabilities to obtain their services, to work and to enjoy recreation and other activities in their local communities and alongside peers who do not have disabilities. Examples of this are the growing numbers of pupils that the organisation is supporting to attend mainstream primary and post-primary schools and the growing number of adults who are being supported to work in ordinary jobs.

These shifts in focus present great challenges to an organisation such as [the principal researcher's organisation] in how funding is obtained, allocated and accounted for; in how services and supports are planned, delivered and accounted for; in providing appropriate

training management and supports for staff and in informing, educating and supporting schools, employers, community organisations and other bodies.

The areas examined could include:

- How senior management develops a strategy to address the area of service
- How information is gathered from the various stakeholders
- How stakeholders are involved in the change process and how they are enabled to contribute
- How new models of service and support are developed, piloted, implemented and evaluated
- How information about new models and their effectiveness is disseminated
- How development work is done without reducing the level or quality of current services

The focus of the research will be on the organisational and strategic level rather than on the individual and programme specific level. For this reason it is hoped that the learning from the research whether it focuses on one, several or all of the projects outlined below will be of benefit to the organisation in its overall programme to change services and supports in the directions of individualisation and mainstreaming.

## **A Rationale for Choosing This Area**

The organisation has already embarked in developments and changes in the areas outlined above and I have a key role in this work.

[The principal researcher's organisation] has for a number of years been working to improve the quality of service through a quality improvement system that has a major focus on outcomes for individual users of the service (Personal Outcome Measures). In May 2005 the Council on Quality and Leadership accredited the organisation. I had a major role in that development work and continue to have a key role in applying the learning from the accreditation process and in preparing for the next accreditation visit in 2007.

The organisation has recognised the need for it to have a strategy for the delivery and support of education to all the school age children who attend our own services and the pupils we support in mainstream schools. This is a major piece of work that is being done in the context of national changes in legislation, organisation and provision as well as in the context of issues identified by the organisation. It will take at least two years to complete. I am chairing the

organisational group that is steering the project and those leading the various strands will be reporting to me for that work.

[The organisation] is beginning a major project this September to examine the sheltered workshop services and the vocational training services in the organisation and to develop new and more appropriate models of services and supports. A senior manager has been seconded to work on this project and again I have overall organisational responsibility for driving and managing the project.

We either have or are about to embark on work in a number of other areas of services and supports. These include:

- Support services to young children and their families
- Supporting service users to access and use mainstream community and recreational activities
- Widening and increasingly individualising provision of residential services and supports
- Developing more individualised and appropriate daily activities and options for adults who have severe or profound intellectual disabilities

As can be seen from the above this is a very good time at which to be examining and learning from how the organisation and in particular its senior management researches, develops, implements and manages radical changes in the models of services and supports.

## **Applicant's Relevant Professional Experience**

I have been in a senior management role in [the organisation] since 1984 managing a range of services and departments. I have had responsibility for the overall management of services to the organisation's 1,400 service users since 2001.

I have experience of developing and/or implementing a range of service models, improvements and shifts in the development of services. Examples include:

- The implementation of a behaviour approach to working with children and adults with severe and profound intellectual disabilities. This work was done in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
- The setting up and development of a staff training department in the early 1980s and cooperating with the Research Department in the development and evaluation of staff and parent training programmes.
- While Divisional Manager for Residential and Respite Services (1984-1995) developing new models of supports. These were supporting more independent service users to live in their own homes; recruiting, training and supporting host families to provide breaks to adults and

developing an individualised service to support service users to access other services and to support families with significant difficulties. All these services are now taken for granted.

- Taking organisational responsibility for and managing the project leader in a project to develop and change the model of service delivery to very young children and their families (1999-2000). This new model is now well established and delivering significantly improved services.
- Taking organisation wide responsibility for the development of the quality improvement system and preparing for accreditation in 2005. This work made many changes in how services are delivered and how safeguards are put in place and monitored. One of the most significant shifts was the implementation of a system based on Personal Outcomes for developing individual plans for every service user. This involved developing appropriate tools and supports, piloting the approach, training staff and managers, developing a system for recording the plans on computer and for aggregating data from individual plans and ways of monitoring the making and implementation of these individual plans. I believe that this system will be a key driver in changing how services and supports are developed and delivered.

### **Demonstration of Access**

I have outlined above that I have a key organisational role in managing existing services and in sponsoring or managing existing or planned service development projects.

I am attaching a letter from [ X], Chief Executive of [the organisation] indicating organisational support for me to undertake this programmes and the organisational research involved.

### **How the Proposed Research Might Benefit the Applicant and The Organisation**

The proposed research will benefit the applicant in identifying and modifying appropriate strategies for undertaking the work outlined, in learning about and applying current thinking and best practice to the work and in measuring and influencing actions as the projects proceed.

The proposed research will benefit the organisation because it will enable the most up to date thinking on strategic change and organisational behaviour to be applied to the work and it will mean that the work is done using an action research model that will both measure results and inform developments in other service areas.

## **Appendix 4: Briefing Document for the Executive Committee for the Pilot Project**

### **Briefing Document for EMC on Doctoral Research.**

**David Kenefick      February 2008**

Service development is a key responsibility of the EMC. We frequently talk about this area; significant work is done on it and we are aware of gaps and missed opportunities.

As everyone on the EMC is aware I am undertaking the Professional Doctoral Programme in DCU. This programme, which is research based, is aimed at senior managers and offers the opportunity to develop one's own knowledge, undertake transformational research in one's organisation and contribute to knowledge in the chosen area.

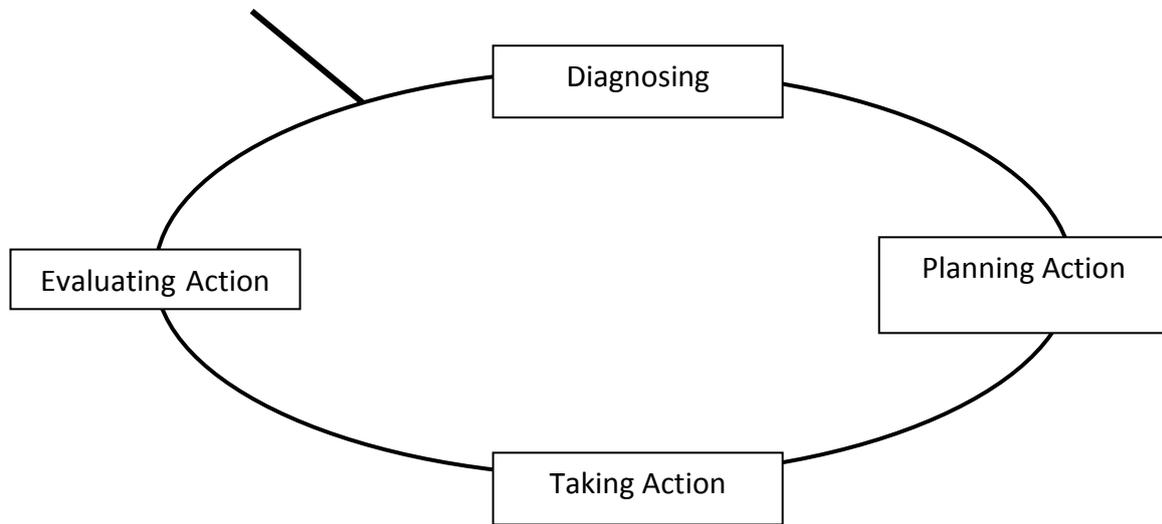
I am now in the second year of the programme and am about to begin my research. My working research topic is: An Action Research study of how the EMC develops models of services and supports with a focus on continuous development and review. I believe that this is a useful topic to explore.

I will be taking an Action Research approach to the work. Action Research is research in action rather than research about action. There are two broad aspects of the approach that I need to bring to your attention:

1. The first is that I will be undertaking the research as an insider. This means that I will not be a neutral, external observer. Action Research by people who are permanent and full members of an organisation has developed in Ireland and elsewhere over a number of years. David Coghlan of the School of Business Studies in Trinity College has written extensively on this approach, known as Insider Action Research.
2. The second is that the implications of the philosophical basis for my research approach means that it will be:
  - Collaborative, i.e. EMC members will be co-researchers rather than subjects
  - Empowering and emancipatory
  - Critical, both in how it examines service development and in how the research project is conducted

Action Research works in cycles with the four steps in every cycle being Diagnosing, Planning Action, Taking Action and Evaluating Action. Typically these cycles work as spirals during the research and at some points more than one cycle may be in operation at the same time. Reflection is a critical part of Action Research and can contribute to learning at every stage of the work.

### **Context and purpose**



The Action Research Cycle (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005, p.22)

Before the first step can begin it is necessary to establish the context and purpose of the research. This is usually described as the pre-step. This must be done with those involved in the research.

For the pilot project I want to engage in the pre-step with the EMC. This involves:

- Establishing the willingness of the members of the EMC to collaborate in the project
- Exploring issues of collaboration and engagement in the project
- Examining the context and purpose of the project, including the forces driving it, the present picture, the desired future and the gap between the two.

Much of what is covered in the pre-step will be explored in greater depth in the main research project. Before this begins I will feed back to the EMC on the pre-step and members will then be able to contribute to the development of the main project.

This research should help us to understand how we as a team lead and support the development of services and assist us in improving how we do this work. The project is, therefore, not simply aimed at developing new services but at influencing in an active way how the executive enables such development.

## **Appendix 5: The principal researcher's preunderstanding**

### **The Principal Researcher's Preunderstanding of the EMC Approach to Service Development, July 2009**

The EMC view is that successful service development is planned and organised from the top of the organisation down and that this is the only way to do it properly.

The views of EMC members in relation to change and management tend to be traditional. The review of change literature and complexity theory literature made it clear to the principal researcher that the theories set out by those taking a continuous change approach or including complexity theory in their thinking are not included in the current thinking of EMC members. Probably the theory that most challenges the thinking of EMC members is that of Complexity Theory as developed by Stacey. This is because he challenges systems approaches and instead focuses on small individual interactions between people as the way to make progress in an organisation. The EMC does not see the possibility of small changes happening in a continuous fashion leading to major changes in how services are delivered.

Creativity for service development is blocked or slowed in the organisation because of the societal, HSE and organisational shift to risk aversion and because there is much more focus on systems than on individual actions that may produce good results for service users. It is easy to blame the organisation for being risk averse, but the demands made on service providers in relation to safety, risk management and compliance seem to be growing all the time. When there was less risk aversion the organisation both took and allowed staff to take more risks and this led to more creative service development. SMH has gone from a time when it could create, try

things out and do what it chose to a time when the HSE and DOHC are much more demanding as to what it does, how it does it what it reports, etc.

[...] is now a large organisation with a lot of staff and so there are very diverse views and approaches to what services should be like and how they should be developed and delivered. There are pockets of creativity and there are people with great energy and enthusiasm for change.

The organisation says that it involves staff in change and it does, but often in a very controlled way using plans and templates.

Service development is happening in the organisation. It tends to happen in a way that is clearly identified in the literature on organisational change. There are multiple separate projects. Some link and overlap, while others do not.

One of the biggest challenges experienced is the competition between managing the operation of the delivery of service and the management of service development and change more generally. Crises and urgent situations, especially the demand for residential services put a particular emphasis on operational management. So there is a tension between meeting the needs now and meeting them appropriately over time. The work on meeting the needs now can take away from work on the future. There can also be an impact from some of what happens now on what may / will happen in the future, e.g. buildings.

Is seems to be difficult for the EMC to develop and agree on a vision for what services should be aiming to achieve and what they should be like. Within the EMC there are different views about what service models should be developed, different views about how to make changes and different understandings of what service development is about.

Service development is happening, but is the EMC learning about how this works well. Learning about Action Research has reinforced this as a question for the principal researcher.

Intermittent change and especially punctuated equilibrium is how much service development happens. A good example of this is the [...] project. In the 1980s this project transformed day services for people with severe and profound disabilities with the establishment of small local centres. This model has not developed since its establishment and Regional Directors are now identifying the need for substantial change.

The organisation is more inward looking than before, so it probably learns less than before from what other services are doing and what research produces.

There are issues for the EMC in managing family involvement and service user involvement in the service and in service development. Nobody in the organisation has been studying this, or if they have they have not been sharing it.

People work very hard on very good service development. Recent examples include V leading on moving the service for children with severe and profound disabilities from a health service; M establishing a new school for pupils with intellectual disabilities and significant autism; E working on improving individual plans for service users and the Community Support team for making big changes for people who wish to live independently.

There is a major link in people's minds between additional resources and service development. This is not necessarily shared by the EMC. It is the principal researcher's view that service development should be able to happen without additional resources or with only short term funding for research, a project leader or bridging activities.

Service developments often seem to depend on the person or people involved. These people can have a significant impact on the focus, the approach and the outcome of

the project. Three approaches are identified by the principal researcher: a professional approach, that is one which is strongly influenced by the discipline of the person or people leading the project; a managerial approach (which tends to be a traditional managerial approach); 'my' approach, which is the individual approach of the person leading the work. All three of these approaches may have difficulty fitting with the emancipatory approach being proposed by the principal researcher as a major focus of this research.

The starting point for the research is that the organisation needs to have in place a culture and a social system that encourages, enables and supports changes that are thought of and developed locally. This means enabling people to have a deeper understanding of what the services are about and enabling people with a deeper understanding to use that understanding to develop the services. The principal researcher believes that these ideas fit with the concept of emancipation – for services users, families and staff.

**Self-analysis of how the principal researcher enacts his role on the EMC.**

He is too conforming. He is not sufficiently good at advocating for, planning and supporting radical change in services. He takes on too many different projects and major tasks and so some do not get properly addressed or some things get left for significant periods because he does not address them. He is constantly trying to balance what he sees as the over control by some other members of the EMC. He is currently trying to engage in service development that is more participatory, more empowering and more emancipatory through the [...] project.

## **Appendix 6: Briefing document for the Executive: Main Research**

### **Briefing document for the Executive Committee for the Main Research: My Perspective**

#### **Session 1 with EMC October 2009**

##### **Research**

This research is being undertaken as part of the Professional Doctoral Programme in DCU.

The broad focus of the research is the role of the EMC in service development

The approach that I am taking to the research is Critical Participative Action Research (CPAR). This means that it is about research in action rather than research about action and that there is a focus on change, empowerment and emancipation. It also means that the core research group (the EMC) has as much say as it wishes in the research project. The academic strand of the research is my responsibility. It is important to note that if the EMC wishes the research project may continue well beyond the thesis research.

##### **My role as an insider**

Because I am an insider, not just in the organisation but particularly in the core research group I must manage this through taking account of what is known about Insider Action Research and marrying this with the CPAR approach.

My insider role gives me advantages: knowledge and understanding of systems, structures, practices, relationships, etc. in the organisation. It also blocks my views of some things and processes and/or shapes my understanding of them. Moore (2007) says that an insider action researcher is as partial, prejudiced and ignorant as everyone else.

## **Questions**

*What questions do you have at this point about the research topic, the research approach and my dual roles?*

## **Plan for the three scheduled meetings**

### **First Meeting [Today] (1.5 hours)**

- my perspective: why I thought that it would be useful to do this research
- your reflections on my perspective

### **Second Meeting (2 hours)**

- reminder of what the pilot project was about and what we did
- feedback on the discussions in the pilot
- feedback on the processes in the pilot
- your reflections on the feedback
- my reflections on the pilot and
- impact on the design of this research

### **Third Meeting (1.5 hours)**

Description of how research process will happen

Group reflections on this approach

Description of CPAR approach

Group reflections on CPAR approach

Discussion on the possibility of getting views from outside the EMC at a later stage (to enable me to get Research Ethics Committee approval)

Plan for work to clarify what we understand by service development (This work may mean a fourth meeting in this phase)

## **My Perspective on Reasons for Undertaking This Research**

- Reasons for undertaking this research
- The characteristics of how current significant service developments occur
- Characteristics of the approaches to service development include

### **Reasons for Undertaking This Research**

This organisation believes that it should provide services and supports to people that meet their needs and wishes

This is an organisation that provides services to a large number of people. What services are developed and how they are developed is very important because of the influence and impact on the lives of a large number of people. Also, because of its size, ethos and capacities the organisation has the possibility of leading service development more widely and of influencing other service providers

EMC members are aware of at least some of both the positive features and the deficiencies in our service development processes, but have not had the time to properly review and positively develop both the processes and the EMC's role in those processes. This research will afford the members of the EMC and possibly other staff and users of the service opportunities to do constructive and rigorous work on these processes.

The organisation is currently carrying out significant service developments.

### **The characteristics of how these developments occur include:**

- The EMC identifies the need for major service development, agrees to it being prioritised and a member of the EMC takes a lead role in the project or manages a commissioned person to lead the project
- Other service development ideas may be discussed at the day and residential services approvals committees or other committees. Priorities are identified there and planning for service development is agreed there or is taken to EMC for discussion and agreement

- Significant resources of time, money and personnel are put into projects that are prioritised by the EMC
- People leading projects and the teams working with them bring very significant energy, expertise and commitment to the projects
- Major projects may be supported by an external consultant
- Service development projects are always competing in terms of time, expertise and resources with operational work (this is normal in any organisation). They may also be competing with projects in areas such as organisational structure, human resources or savings and efficiencies

#### **Characteristics Of The Approaches To Service Development Include:**

- Service development work tends to be episodic, respond to significant needs, demands or environmental requirements. It tends to happen through separate projects each of which focuses on a specific area of service (narrow or broad) and achieves success, progress or failure in that area. Some work is done to try to connect different pieces of work together
- Different projects may overlap in timescale raising the danger that the earlier project is not fully completed or loses the attention of executive management
- Some service development proposals may take a long time to be turned into projects and for implementation to begin
- When other staff have good service development ideas they generally have to be approved by the EMC if they are seen to have policy, funding, risk, structural or other implications. There is currently no recognised way of empowering and supporting staff at or closer to the frontline, service users or family members to initiate service developments. One of the implications of this is that it may take a long time for even small service developments to happen and this may discourage people from making efforts to change the services that they plan and deliver.
- Methodologies for reviewing and assessing the progress and success of projects are applied to very few service development projects

## **Areas for Reflection**

### **Current**

- The current episodic approach to service development
- The dependence of current service development projects on initiatives and decisions at the top of the organisation
- The impact on service development of small continuous changes made at local level

### **Future**

- The need for an organisational process to support continuous service development
- Processes for empowering and supporting staff and service users to lead and work on service development
- What would enable everyone to contribute to the development of high quality, innovative services?

### **This research as an opportunity**

- Overall how do my perspective and your reflections on these questions influence your thoughts about this research?

**Appendix 7:** Learning from Cycle 1 Document

**Paper for the EMC**

**on**

**The Learning from Cycle 1 of the Action**

**Research on the Role of the EMC in**

**Relation to Service Development**

**David Kenefick & F [co-researcher]**

**6<sup>th</sup> September 2010**

# Learning from Cycle 1

## Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Themes in Cycle 1**
- **Framework**
- **Identification of Learning from Cycle 1**
- **Thoughts about Next Steps**

## Introduction

This paper is written at the request of the EMC as core research group following Session 3, Cycle 2. The purpose of the paper is to assist the group to identify its learning from Cycle 1 of the Action Research project. It is hoped that the group's identification of this learning will assist it in deciding how to move forward with the research.

The group agreed that a framework should be constructed for identification of the learning. David Kenefick set up the framework for identification of the learning and wrote a draft of the paper. F separately identified learning. The framework and the learning were reviewed and discussed by both people and the paper was substantially revised. The final sections on themes and links between themes and the summary of possible next steps were added following this discussion.

**The structure of the paper is as follows:**

- The themes explored in Cycle 1
- A framework for identifying and describing the learning is set out

- The learning was identified using this framework to study the records of the group sessions, the work in pairs and the individual meetings in Cycle 1. David Kenefick's entries in his Reflective Journal following each session and following Cycle 1 were also used.
- In each case the learning is considered in relation to the content of the work and the process of how the work was addressed
- What was learned about service development is also set out
- Possible next steps in the research as already identified by the group in Session 3, Cycle 2 and as emerging from the learning from Cycle 1

## **Themes in Cycle 1**

Five major themes were identified as focuses in Cycle 1. In the context of examining the learning from Cycle 1 it is useful to identify the themes and when they emerged and to also identify the minor themes on which the group focused less.

In Session 1 DK presented six areas/issues that he thought needed to be reflected on.

These were:

- Episodic change
- Small, continuous change
- Establishing a process for continuous change
- Dependence on decisions at the top
- Empowering and supporting
- Contributions that people could make

Only one of these areas was focused on as a theme by the group. This was dependence on decisions at the top.

Structure, Communication and Changes to Make emerged as themes during Session 1 and remained a focus during the remaining sessions. Power emerged in Session 2 and in the pairs work between Sessions 2 & 3. Empowerment, which had been raised by DK, became part of the discussion on Power.

Three of the themes, Power, Structure and Dependence on Decisions at the Top were explored in quite a lot of detail. Only some aspects of the themes Communication and Changes to Make were explored.

**The five major themes were:**

Dependence on Decisions at the Top

Structure

Communication

Power

Changes to Make

**Four minor themes** (i.e. that were clearly identified but discussed very little) emerged between Session 1 and Session 4. These were:

- Creativity
- Vision
- People's lives
- How the EMC works

## **Framework**

It was agreed that a framework or set of criteria should be used to structure the way in which the learning is identified and set out. As the approach being taken to the research is that of Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) based on Critical Theory it was decided to use a contemporary definition and description of CPAR (Kemmis, 2008) as the framework and criteria. In order to make this clear the next section of the paper gives a summary of Kemmis's definition and sets out the headings developed to work on the learning.

**Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR):**

**is research undertaken collectively by participants** in a social practice to achieve effective historical consciousness (both as individuals and as a group) of their practice as morally informed, committed action that responds wisely to the needs, circumstances and particulars of a situation

**as a process in which they reflect critically and self critically on:**

- praxis/practice (informed, committed action/habitual or customary action)
- understandings (including shared understandings) of their practice
- conditions of their practice and the settings and situations of their practice

**by opening communicative space** – that is, space for collective reflection and self-reflection aimed at intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding and unforced consensus on:

- how practice has evolved and is intertwined with cultural, social, material-economic and personal dimensions and
- common concerns from lifeworlds, language, shared assumptions and systems

**by intervening through exploratory action** to investigate shared reality in order to transform it and then investigating the consequences of the transformed reality

**with the practical aim of acting rightly and with wisdom and prudence** - meaning that it aims to produce good results both for individual people and for the wider groups involved

**with emancipatory aims:** critical-emancipatory reasoning reaches beyond technical and practical reason and manifests itself in reflection, theorizing and action directed towards reconstruction of the setting

### **‘Critical’**

The notion of critique in critical theory means exploring existing conditions to find how particular perspectives, social structures or practices may be irrational, unjust, alienating or inhumane. It also means finding how they are interlinked in ways that cause them to produce such consequences.

In CPAR participants aim to be critical in this way, trying to find how particular perspectives, social structures and practices combine to produce untoward effects,

with the further aim of then finding ways to change things so these consequences can be avoided.

(Kemmis, 2008, pp. 125, 135-136)

**The headings that have been developed and used to frame the learning are:**

1. Questioning the thinking behind what happens
2. Reflexivity
3. Communicative space and consensus
4. Transformative change (Intervening through exploratory action)
5. Practical aim of acting rightly
6. Empowerment and emancipation
7. Service development

## Identification of the Learning from Cycle 1

### 1. Questioning the thinking behind what happens

Content	Process
<p>There were a number of questions about how the EMC works and how this relates to service development.</p> <p>There were comments and questions about the EMC – Frontline relationship and the effects of power, structures and communication on this relationship.</p> <p>There were questions about how the making of decisions at the top of the organisation and having a vision for what the organisation should be doing and where it should be going relate to each other.</p>	<p>Some of the points are really assertions rather than questions</p> <p>The questions about how the EMC works were taken out of the research and a meeting was held between the CEO and the Regional Directors. The potential learning from these questions may have been missed.</p>

<p>A significant question near the end of the Cycle was: Will issues that have been surfaced in discussion influence what happens in the research?</p>	<p>There was very limited self-critique by the group</p> <p>Questions were raised in a number of sessions about David Kenefick’s influence on the research.</p>
<p><b>Learning</b></p> <p>The focus on how the EMC works and on the dynamics within the group and the relationship of these factors to service development is potentially a significant piece of learning. However, in order to really contribute to change it should continue to be examined as Cycle 2 progresses.</p> <p>The comments and questions about the EMC – Frontline relationship identified valuable learning about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Problems with communication up and down the organisation</li> <li>- The ability of others to influence service development is very mixed and can depend on their skills, on their “profile” in the organisation and on their access to decision makers</li> <li>- The absence of a graded decision making process</li> <li>- The potential impact of the stalling of the decentralising of decision making</li> <li>- The obstacles to service development created by compliance and avoiding risk</li> </ul> <p>The importance of Vision for the organisation’s future, for the EMC and for service development was raised strongly by one person, but was not explored and so no learning was identified by the group.</p> <p>Some of the issues that were raised were not explored and were not agreed as significant issues (e.g. vision and communication).</p> <p>Questions about DK’s influence on the research are important as both he and the core research group must be aware of his perspective and approach in an ongoing way. Part of the value of PAR is that these issues can be raised and addressed as the research proceeds.</p>	

## 2. Reflexivity

Content	Process
<p>Potential learning from the past was identified. Two examples of this are:</p> <p>The question about whether the management position was too strong in the interactions that took place with the clinic in the 1990s.</p> <p>How the Director of Research and Service development post was established, the limited power that it may have had and how the role was carried out.</p>	<p>Less time was given to reflection, than to any other activity. This was partly due to how the principal researcher structured the sessions and partly to how much time and thought people gave to reflection. An example of the later is the reflective time at the beginning of Session 2 when most statements by people were more thoughts about service development, than reflections of the process.</p> <p>As indicated under other headings, there were repeated statements from individuals, but the complexity of issues were not generally worked on.</p> <p>There was no reflection recorded as people worked on themes, thus there was no 'reflection in action' which is a key element of action research.</p>

	<p>Reflexivity was demonstrated by the raising of issues in an early session or early pairs' work and developing the thinking on these issues over the cycle, e.g. power and authority.</p> <p>Statements and comments on how the EMC works and the relationship of this to service development demonstrate reflection. However, this was not reflected on in depth or critically by the group.</p> <p>The identification in Session 5 that we surfaced issues but did not go into them in detail also demonstrates reflection.</p> <p>The greatest amount of reflection took place during Session 5, which was the review session at the end of Cycle 1 and used an Action Learning Cycle as the structure for the session.</p>
<p><b>Learning</b></p> <p>The opportunity to learn from the past was identified in the first two questions above, but these were not explored in a way that enabled learning. This was because the questions and ideas put forward were not discussed and conclusions were not come to.</p> <p>Reflection on what we do and how we do it <u>as we work</u> is not part of our normal practice. It is an essential part of effective action research. When this AR is led by the core research group as a whole, both individual and group reflections are important. In order to move the AR on and to both use it effectively and to learn from it, it is essential that we both put reflective processes in place and practice reflection to develop our skills at it.</p>	

### 3. Communicative Space and Consensus

Content	Process
<p>The need for honesty was highlighted</p> <p>A number of people highlighted the value of 'equal airtime for everyone' and of having an 'open space'</p> <p>The suggestion that we should 'synergise the different perspectives [and] compromise' contradicts the concept of consensus within a communicative space</p> <p>Ethical issues for group: The dynamics and relationships between participants as members of EMC was the subject of discussion. There was some disagreement as to whether they have any impact. They could influence how open people are prepared to be.</p>	<p>People saying (a small number of) things that they had not said in routine settings.</p> <p>There was constant tension for DK as the principal researcher in trying to both ensure that everyone had input and to enable dialogue.</p> <p>Power, status and intra-group relations all had an impact on dialogue</p>

## Learning

Creating a communicative space has real value. However, in order to maximise its value people need practice in using such a space while managing power relationships.

The group has learned some of the value of communicative space, but not enough to enable us to make maximum use of its value.

The learning by the end of the first cycle is that the group was not yet able to reach a consensus on what it agreed and what it disagreed on and how it could proceed in that context.

Because communicative space is created in CPAR it is important to monitor and manage ethical issues as the research proceeds.

## 4. Transformative Change and Exploratory Action

Content	Process
<p>A number of proposals were made under the theme of Changes to Make that suggest possible transformative change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Developing a model for bringing ideas to the top</li><li>- How staff access the power base</li><li>- Develop decision-making</li><li>- Allow for risk taking</li></ul> <p>Two other points also suggested a view that transformative change is needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Changes that we make should be changes for service users' lives</li><li>- The future of the organisation should be a driving question for</li></ul>	

<p>the EMC (This statement was part of the view of the importance of vision by the EMC for service development)</p> <p>Themes emerged as a key part of the whole process. The identification came as a result of group work and work in pairs. There seems to be agreement that we cannot proceed without taking on board these themes.</p>	<p>Does the lack of discussion about vision suggest a lack of focus on transformative change?</p> <p>The work in pairs was productive</p> <p>People have stuck with the research process. This suggests that we want change. However, it is not clear whether we think this change should be transformative or simply instrumental.</p>
<p><b>Learning</b></p> <p>While the thinking on these possibly transformative changes was developed in the pairs' work it is important to note that they were initially raised by Regional Directors. The learning here may be the importance for service development of Regional Director's roles, their experience and their thinking.</p>	

The lack of certainty or agreement by the end of Cycle 1 about what actions to take suggests that it is difficult for the EMC to agree what and how to change in a transformative fashion.

The learning from the work in pairs would suggest that this is a positive experience and leads to good material for the larger group to work on. The sharing of this information in advance of sessions is particularly useful.

### 5. Practical Aim of Acting Rightly

Content	Process
<p>Some of the proposals already noted above clearly indicate that people have the practical aim of acting rightly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing a model for bringing ideas to the top</li> <li>- How staff access the power base</li> <li>- Develop decision-making</li> <li>- Allow for risk taking</li> <li>- The importance for service development of the EMC having a vision</li> <li>- Changes that we make should be changes for service users' lives</li> </ul>	<p>The weakness of this as an approach was that how these proposals could be implemented or tried out was not discussed. Thus, while individuals had the aim of acting rightly the group as a whole initially missed the opportunity to try to do this as part of the second research cycle.</p>
<p><b>Learning</b></p> <p>The major learning under this heading is that while individuals highlighted actions to take, the group as a whole struggled with moving from raising questions, presenting opinions and discussion to action with the practical aim of acting rightly. Is this because it is more used to making pragmatic choices between two or three presented options?</p>	

## 6. Empowerment and Emancipation

Content	Process
<p>The theme of power emerged in Session 2 of Cycle 1 and developed as the sessions progressed.</p> <p>A range of points were raised in relation to power. The most significant were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Power sits at the top</li> <li>- The impact of power</li> <li>- Access to power</li> <li>- Power within the EMC</li> <li>- Power not devolved as planned</li> <li>- Dictatorial / not dictatorial</li> <li>- Regional Directors – power and authority</li> <li>- Informal power of some frontline staff</li> </ul> <p>It was identified that the level of compliance imposed by the outside environment and then internally has increased significantly over the past few years (e.g. Health and Safety, Employment Legislation, Absenteeism, Census Returns, Notifiable Events). It can influence the way in which services are developed and what options are available to us. The Corporate Governance agenda is also having a significant impact on how the organisation functions.</p> <p>There were differing views on the dependence of service development on the top of the organisation.</p>	<p>Did power have an impact on what came from the work that was done in pairs?</p> <p>The meeting between the CEO and the Regional Directors did not fully address the</p>

	<p>issues of how the EMC works – was this related to power?</p>
<p><b>Learning</b></p> <p>Power was identified across the group as an issue in relation to service development. This related to power within the EMC, the power relationship between the ‘top’ of the organisation and the rest of the organisation, the power of other roles and groups in the organisation and the impact of the informal power of some frontline staff.</p> <p>While it was agreed that power is a significant issue in relation to service development there were differing views on the dependence of service development on the ‘top’ of the organisation and these differences were not explored.</p> <p>The impact of the governance, compliance and risk averse climate on all levels in the organisation, including the EMC, was clearly identified.</p>	

## 7. Service Development

Content	Process
<p>What service development is was originally discussed during the Pilot Project. This discussion and the descriptions of service development in the literature were revisited in Session 4. From the discussions and the literature review it was clear that service development is a broad concept and that the term is used to mean different activities in different settings.</p>	<p>Very good documents were produced by all three Regional Directors describing instances of service development and / or their conceptualisation of service development.</p>

<p>From the literature review the group learned what the literature does and does not focus on in relation to service development.</p> <p>There were different views about whether service development and how the EMC works are different or the same.</p> <p>Related to this were the Regional Director's presentations in Session 4 which indicated that there is service development happening outside the knowledge of the EMC.</p> <p>The influence of national policies and of new models and approaches in the external environment were notes both in the literature review and in presentations.</p> <p>The relationship between service development and the organisational strategy was noted in discussion.</p> <p>The focus of the research on the EMC's role in relation to service development was raised a number of times, including in the review session (Session 5). The complexity of this role was noted by one participant.</p>	<p>This was the one time in the cycle where information from DK's literature review informed the thinking of the group.</p>
--	---

## **Learning**

Service development as a concept is not clear or simple in people's thinking or experience or in the literature. It is therefore important that the service development focus of the research is agreed and made clear.

The exercise in identifying actual developments and linking to literature expanded the thinking on what service development actually is and helped identify different types of service development.

Service Development can be piecemeal and not linked to an overall strategic approach. A particular Region can address an issue or a Working Group might be established to tackle a particular problem. There is a reactive approach to service development and while the organisation does have a Strategic Plan, it is broad in its parameters so as not to exclude such an approach. However, it does not necessarily inform service development.

The complexity of how the EMC identifies, agrees and carries out its role in relation to service development was clearly identified by a number of people in the group. The factors involved include:

- The role and influence of the Board of Directors
- The role and influence of the Chief Executive
- How the EMC works
- The relationships within the EMC
- Service development activities outside the EMC

## **Thoughts About Next Steps**

As the decision to request this paper was to assist the group to move forward with the research in Cycle 2 it was decided to review the pairs' work done for the last session (Session3, Cycle 2) and the discussion at that session and to identify the areas on which there seemed to be agreement and to include this in the paper. A review of these by members of the group and then by the group as a whole may assist us to make decisions on the next steps we should take.

**The main points on which there seemed to be agreement or a common focus were:**

**Themes**

All three pairs said that work should be based on / done in the context of the Themes from Cycle 1.

**EMC's Role**

All three pairs said that there should be a focus on the EMC's role in relation to service development. The learning from Cycle 1 also identified how the EMC works and the relationship of that to service development as an important issue

**Examine how we have done / how we do service development**

All three pairs identified this as something that we should do (in different ways). The learning from Cycle 1 also identified that there is an opportunity to learn from the past and to look at how we have done service development. This focus is important in the context of the Exploratory Action focus of CPAR.

**Cuts/Census/Efficiencies**

All three pairs said that the work should be done taking account of the context of cuts, etc. One pair focused more on this than the other two.

Two pairs suggested examining contrasts between work on cuts, etc and work on service development.

**Learning**

Two of the three pairs suggested agreeing on and using learning from Cycle 1.

**Do we want to change?**

While not all pairs asked the question in this precise way, all three did have a question or questions about us deciding if we want to change how we do service development.

**Service Development Project**

Two of the three pairs suggested focusing on a specific service development project. The third proposed more of a focus on cuts / efficiencies and / or the crossover between these and service development.

