Creating Space to Co-Create Management and Leadership Development Conversations in

the Workplace

An Action Research Study

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Abstract

This thesis is a written account of a qualitiative action research learning study with a group of managers undertaken in a charity that delivered drug and alcohol services in the midlands over a period of 12 months. The charitable trust had experienced unprecedented growth after winning large scale contracts to deliver services in the substance misuse sector. As a result the charity had grown to twice its size in the number of staff that were in the organisation. Whilst there was an emphasis on training and development for practitioner the same did not exists for managers. Neither as it emerged were managers and leaders of the organisation receiving support or supervision. The Cranfield University Training Needs Analysis (2003) in the substance misuse sector undertaken prior to this case study confirmed this nationally. Managers were being driven externally by multiple demands for assurance and data on performance from the NTA and from the commissioners. There was a sense that everyone was working at a fast pace without much time to reflect on what this meant in terms of the development of the charity. Manager's were also talking about experiencing tensions from within the charity with a lot of confusion as to how to improve their people management practices which was key to a growing workforce within the charitable trust (Parry et al, 2005). A review of the organisational management infrastructure was also underway.

Method

A strengths based appreciative approach was used to develop a positive learning climate within the AR learning group. This enabled managers to develop a mindset towards positive management conversations and moving away from deficit based conversations that were problem orientated. Managers were engaged in the action research methodology by being orientated into the research process as part of an initial workshop. Learning was supported by the availability of reading material for the participants on the dialogic methods of Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry. Participating managers collaborated as co researchers. Conversations were written up in the form of narratives from the AR learning group conversations and were thematically analysed by the participants through the cycles of the AR process. Over the period of twelve months other conversationally based data gathering methods were used such as interviews with managers about their career stories, a training needs analysis and other organisational narratives in the form of emails and reports. The eight sessions formed eight iterative learning cycles.

Results

The AR learning group ran for twelve months and a total of eight sessions were held of which each one represented an iterative action research cycle. The sessions were held every 6 weeks at different service sites across the organisation. Each session tells the story through the session notes as to how the creating of a space to co create

conversations in management and leadership development embodied the lived experience of the participating managers. Conversations as part of a dialogic approach to change were wide and varied covering a range of organisational issues which managers were contending with every day. The research study which was grounded in a dialogic methodology resulted in learning on a number of levels from an individual, group and organisation as documented in this thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

AR   Action Research

ACEVO   Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations

AI   Appreciative Inquiry

CEO   Chief Executive Officer

CQC   Care Quality Commissiom

DOO   Director of Operations

DAAT   Drug and Alcohol Action Team

HR   Human Resources

NTA   National Treatment Agency

NDTMS   National Drug Treatment Monitoring System

OD   Organisational Development

PHE   Public Health England

PWE   Positive Working Environment

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the background of the study to give some understanding as to the contextual issues that were under consideration and the challenges that the organization was facing. It will also provide an understanding of the public policy developments that led to the growth and change in the drug and alcohol treatment sector in the UK in recent years. In addition the chapter sets out the history and rationale leading up to developing the AR learning group. The aims and the objectives of the research are also set out in this chapter and the rationale for the AR research study. Finally, the chapter provides the structure of the overall thesis for ease of reading and reference.

1.1 Context of the Study

The Drug treatment sector has undergone a significant period of investment and growth over the last 14 years, evolving into a thriving vibrant community of practice from one that was once fragmented and under resourced. Funding for alcohol treatment was not a priority at the time of undertaking this research which meant that these services nationally remained the poorer partner in terms of investment and development. A shift in commissioning in the public sector meant that charities were more in the delivery of health and social care service delivery, no more so than in the drug treatment sector. As a result a contracting and performance management culture was evolving which was impacting on the growth and development of voluntary sector

organisations. There was a rapid expansion as a result of the government's investment in drug treatment at this point in time. This was putting pressure on a previously under resourced and under developed sector to respond quickly to develop, expand and mobilise services when winning new contracts. It was a demanding though exciting time for the growth and development of charities in particular opening up opportunities to engage in bidding for new services. The charitable trust was one of those that chose to be opportunistic and innovative during this time winning a large multi million pound contract in delivering drug treatment clinical services in shared care with General Practitioners. This was challenging for the charity in this research and for the managers trying to deliver on these new services with the same management infrastructure which was in place when the charity was half its size. Operational and strategic delivery demands were growing for managers and the need to review capacity was becoming an important priority. A review of central services had been commissioned with external consultants and underway at the time of the research aimed at primarily looking at what management capacity was needed to take the organisation forward during its growth period.

In regards to the proposal to undertake research within the organisation, action research (AR) was the chosen approach as it is complimentary to organizational and professional development. The research paradigm of AR is the basis for the methodology of the DBA as it 'recognises the integration of social science inquiry' in the organizational context (DBA, 2004). AR is described as a method that seeks to resolve important social as well as organizational issues of inquiry by integrating the perception as well as experiences of those who are directly involved with the issue under

investigation in a collaborative way (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). AR is considered as the most effective research method that can be undertaken in an organization with the intention to improve the situation and in improving professional practice at the same time. In this particular study, the AR methodology played a significant role in developing the space to where managers were able to hold conversations about the issues and challenges they faced within the organization. The rest of this chapter provides a deeper contextual description and provides a description of the rationale to conducting an AR case study on the lived experiences that were having an impact on managers at that time.

1.1.1 An organisation and a sector in flux

This thesis is a written account of an Action Research (AR) study with a group of managers working within a drug and alcohol charitable trust in a state of transition and flux undertaken over a twelve month period. This research was undertaken as part of the award for the Doctorate in Business Administration. This study has also built on the foundations and experiences of a previous AR project as part of an MSc award in Organizational Development and Management Learning completed in 2004 within the same charitable trust (Williams, 2004). The previous research study was focused into inquiring into the continuing professional development of staff and their well being through supervision. This previous study has informed and laid the foundations for this doctoral AR research study.

There has never been a greater need for organizational flexibility (Mullins, 2007). As a result of the changes and demands of substance misuse service delivery and the rapid growth in services has meant this has impacted greatly during last decade. Initially this was driven by the previous Labour Government and has continued at a pace through the coalition government. Changes in policy direction towards recovery and investment have shaped delivery of drug and alcohol services beyond recognition. Even after the tapering off of the unprecedented investment in the sector, there was a continuing growing contractual demand for services to be more responsive in terms of delivering recovery orientated services and higher quality care. However without the right support and professional development opportunities for the managers and staff delivering these services then this pressure will ultimately lead to increasing stress levels, low morale and the potential of experienced staff exiting the sector. In order to retain skilled and experienced staff it is important priority from a human resource perspective to provide innovative and creative development opportunities to keep staff motivated and engaged working in the charitable organisation.

The first drug strategy in 1998 brought with it as previously highlighted the significant government investment into the drug treatment sector over a sustained period of time. The policy of the Labour Government at that time was focused into increasing the availability of drug treatment and the reduction of drug related crime through increasing the numbers of people in drug treatment programmes. The National Treatment Agency (NTA) a specialist National Health Service body was formed in 2001 and was established to drive both the commissioning and development of drug treatment services as part of the Drug Strategy. As part of a change in responsibilities by the Coalition

Government on April 1st 2013 the NTA was dissolved on the 31st March 2013 after 10 years and drug and alcohol programme delivery became one of the responsibilities of Public Health England (PHE). The drug and alcohol grant distribution and oversight of the delivery and outcomes of drug and alcohol services is now the responsibility of Public Health England. The NTA at the time of this research being undertaken had the responsibility for overseeing and monitoring the ring fenced grant allocation for the expansion of drug treatment services. This also included responsibilities for the performance management of commissioning and delivery of services to meet government Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) through the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) a national performance data base. The main aims of the NTA were to increase access and availability of treatment services in England, reduce drug-related deaths and reduce waiting times for access into drug treatment sector through the new investment at that time.

As previously stated, the effect of this investment meant that the sector expanded rapidly. The history of drug and alcohol service provision prior to this was one that was under resourced and patchy in delivery and provision across England. There were many areas that were underserved and it was a postcode lottery for people who wanted to access drug treatment, with some areas having no provision at all. In the space of three years and after winning two new large drug contracts the charitable trust in this research study had grown rapidly. It was double its original size within twelve months in terms of both revenue and staffing levels. This was having an impact as the management infrastructure had remained the same as when the charitable trust was half its size. A review of central services had been undertaken by an external human resource

consultancy as the expertise did not exist within the organisation which was one of the challenges. Recommendations were being phased in to increase capacity in the central management and resources function at the time of this research study to meet the demands of the expanding agenda of service delivery.

1.1.2   *The History of the Charitable Trust and the context*

The charitable trust itself was established in 1968 as a small alcohol counselling agency in the Midlands and its income was reliant on grants and some NHS and probation services funding received from commissioners who wanted to purchase alcohol services to address local needs. An opportunity arose for the charitable trust to bid for the development of new community drug services delivering within primary care for a large inner city and a tender was submitted. This tender submission also meant that the charitable trust would be moving into delivering health services and medical treatment for drug users in partnership with local GP's and this was a completely new area of service delivery for the organisation. This was an indicator of changing times with the contracting of public health services with the not for profit sector. An unprecedented decision was made by commissioners to award the contract to the charitable trust where this type of contract would ordinarily have gone to an NHS organisation because of the medical element of service delivery. An income of over £3m was secured over three years to deliver drug treatment services. A second phase of implementation of primary care services was also awarded to the charitable trust in 2005, and further increased contracted income. The effect was that the workforce and organisation grew rapidly

literally overnight. This generated a lot of work around recruitment as the numbers of staff employed increased from 120 in 2003 to 185 at the beginning of 2005. The overall financial picture of the charitable trust was healthy one buoyed with these contracts in place and increased the overall revenue from £3m to nearly £6m within three years. I was invited to join the trust as a board member at this time of growth and in particular because I was the only board member with clinical experience in delivering drug and alcohol treatment services.

When the proposal for the AR study was first discussed with the Director of Operations (DOO) and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) there was a shared agreement as to the recognition of how recent organisational growth and rapid change was impacting on the managers and the workforce in the trust. I had insider knowledge as a trustee of the charity from an operational and governance perspective. Information was being regularly reported through to the board by the CEO and I had a good relationship with both the CEO and the DOO who were essentially the organisational gatekeepers who would give me access to undertake the research (Gummesson, 2000). Both the CEO and DOO were regularly in contact with me outside of board meetings to ask my advice and guidance on the new service developments. I have worked in the sector since 1994 and this meant that I had well established relationships and networks in terms of knowledge and intelligence both nationally and internationally. It was also clear from colleagues in the field that that a number of other charities were also growing rapidly as a result of winning new contracts with government investment into drug treatment services. A competitive market was opening up.

After the increase in investment, the message was clear that at the end of this period that there was an expectation that any future developments and improvement in the drug treatment delivery would need to be driven by better use of existing resources. The increases in public funding for drug treatment had a ceiling and this was being reached. Higher quality, cost effective and value for money service provision was the future expectation of providers in the sector. Service performance was becoming the focus for contract management with potential penalties for underperformance. A different set of management skills would be needed from managers to balance the maximise efficiency and continuously improve the quality of service delivery which would be a different set of skills than those that were developed during the growth period and this was going to be a challenge.

Conversations with commissioners in other areas at the time revealed that the effect of funding levelling out meant that there was an increasing potential for services to be retendered. A unit costs analysis exercise undertaken across England enabled a benchmarking of the costs of comparable services. Services would need to be more effective by demonstrating improved outcomes for service users. As a result pressure was increasing on organisations and their managers to demonstrate the impact of service delivery through improved performance metrics and outcomes. Therefore organisations needed to engage more with service users using the service for feedback on their experiences of treatment. The pressure to keep costs down, demonstrate effectiveness and still be able to develop and motivate the workforce to keep delivering high quality, effective treatment services was going to be a challenge.

Performance data

The collation of substance misuse performance data through the national data system NDTMS and the setting of key performance metrics has played a pivotal role in the shaping of drug treatment organizations and services. The data forms part of quarterly performance reports on specific national measures and these were driving contract reviews and commissioning decisions. The NTA led the way with the driving through the national programme of data collation through performance management of commissioners. The funding formulae for drug treatment services was based on the success or not of service delivery and meeting the expected outcomes within respective regions driven by the NTA. At the time of this research study there was an increasing pressure on managers to ensure services were delivering as part of the evolving performance management culture in the sector. This was having a direct impact on the workplace as managers needed to translate this for staff so as to understand what their role and contribution was in terms of contract performance and delivery.

Human Resources

From a human resources perspective the charitable trust was underdeveloped in terms of the depth of expertise in the organisation. With a lean management structure most of the people management work fell onto the shoulders of operational managers. Recent investment in this area in charitable trust's management

structure had culminated in the development of one specific human resource manager post. The expectation was that managers would continue to develop their human resource skills and knowledge in this area to as to develop and manage their staff teams. Yet there was no specific management and leadership development programme in place to develop these skills in managers. A proposed management restructure was suggested from the recommendations of the consultancy and this was sorely needed to help develop the infrastructure. There was an urgent need to develop human resource processes to support the growing number of new staff coming into the charitable trust. The organizational restructure and proposal of new senior manager posts were just beginning to be implemented at the time of AR research study commencing which was not going to be a quick fix.

There was also at the same time a noticeable movement of staff leaving the charitable trust to work for other drug and alcohol organisations. This was becoming a risk in retaining skilled and experienced staff. The challenge for managers was to develop themselves as well as develop competent practitioners from people new to the field whilst trying to improve staff retention. Salary incentives were being offered from other organisations in the sector to attract the experienced and knowledgeable staff away and this was creating a competitive employment environment. So the result was that experienced managers and practitioners were applying for other jobs as they were able to increase their earning potential elsewhere as the pool of expertise was being depleted with the expansion in the sector. This was a threat to the charitable trust as their managers who had years of knowledge and expertise were leaving the organisation to take advantage of new management opportunities in the sector. The response of the charitable

trust managers was to promote practitioners into key management positions with little or no experience in the management and leadership of drug and alcohol services. There was a real difficulty in recruiting suitable managers, often ending up promoting staff with no management qualifications or experience (Mills and Parry, 2003 145). Overnight a practitioner would go from carrying a caseload of clients and the next day be promoted into a management position expecting them to delivering a portfolio of complex services and managing diverse staff teams.

The Learning and development of managers was becoming an important issue within the charitable trust as there was an increasing recognition of the potential inexperience of operational managers and the need to incentivise to retain experienced staff. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Director of Operations (DOO) in the charitable trust had also expressed their concerns as to the impact this could have on the organization as it was a live risk that could affect their ability to deliver on the new services. The development of managers as well as the need to develop the whole drug and alcohol workforce natuionally were becoming an important focus in addition and resulted in the publication of a workforce development strategy (NTA and Home Office, 2006). This was further supported by the findings of the National Cranfield Training Needs analysis undertaken in 2003 across drug and alcohol services nationally (Mills and Parry, 2003). The report confirmed that the voluntary sector was experiencing the highest degree of difficulty in recruitment (Mills and Parry, 2003). From the needs analysis the recruitment difficulties in relation to managers were referred to and were attributed to lack of experience and insufficient applications to management posts. New managers in post were clearly in need of workplace learning and development opportunities.

Managers needed development to help support them in delivering services operationally and to be able to lead and manage the increasing demands of the new services and staff teams. The numbers of people working in the drug treatment sector in England had increased from 6,794 in March 2002 to 10,628 in March 2007, surpassing the original 2008 NTA target of 9,000 personnel in the workforce. This was an increase of 3,834 new staff in that period across the sector in a range of roles including managers (www.nta.nhs.uk website, accessed 2011). The link between the lack of experience of managers and the risk of not being able to deliver effective services was becoming increasingly obvious. There was an expectation that inexperienced managers would run complex drug services. This would ultimately result increase in stress levels and potential burnout not to mention the increase in service delivery risks and potential for failure to deliver operationally.

As highlighted earlier at the beginning of this thesis, a further tension existed within the charitable trust as the same level of investment had not been prioritorised for the development of alcohol services. This was leaving this area of service delivery within the charitable trust under-resourced and with less staff to deliver as a result. Alcohol service delivery within the charitable trust was literally becoming the 'poorer partner'. Politically at the time it was just not a government priority as the perception was that a greater proportion of harm was being attributed to illicit drug use. The lack of investment in alcohol service provision was having an impact on staff morale for those working within the charitable trusts alcohol services. Managers were also reporting an increase in activity in alcohol services and they were struggling with the lack

of staff capacity to meet the demand. Ring fencing of grants for drug services meant that this money could not be used to fund already stretched alcohol services.

From a financial perspective the charitable trusts reserves were increasing as a result of the new contracts delivering drug services and were standing at over £1m. The charitable trust board was keen to ensure that the charity was financially stable and there was a committement to making sure that from a governance perspective that contracts were viable and robust to keep the risks reduced and to ensure organisational stability. Using charitable reserves to support alcohol services with reserves as revenue was not seen by the board as a wise approach to managing the issue of underfunding in other areas of service delivery. This was also not deemed as good governance practice financially by the Charity Commission (Charity Commission SORP, 2005).

1.1.3 Workforce Development in a Changing Drug and Alcohol Field

In 2006 during the life of this research case study as previously mentioned a joint workforce strategy had been published between the former NTA (now Public Health England) and the Drug Strategy Directorate. The strategy set out its intention to focus on workforce development as a priority in recognition of the growth of the workforce in England. The main objective of this plan was also to ensure the delivery of the Home Office (HO) Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets (2004) which were to:

- Reduce the use of Class A drugs and the frequent use of any illicit drug among all young people under the age of 25 especially by the most vulnerable young people.

- Reduce drug-related crime, including as measured by the proportion of offenders testing positive at arrest.

- Increase the participation of problem drug users in drug treatment programmes by 100% by 2008, and increase year on year the proportion of users successfully sustaining or completing treatment programmes.

A number of work streams were underway in England to develop a qualifications framework for the sector and included the development of Drug and Alcohol National Occupational Standards (DANOS, 2005, 2014). This gives some context as to how under developed the sector was to deliver such an ambitious programme of change required at that time of this research case study. Drug treatment services were to be performance managed through the National Treatment Agency and commissioners through contracts on the delivery of expected staff development targets. The key target areas that were being focused on for workforce development were: -

1. The recruitment, retention, training and competence issues in relation to the growth of service provision

2. That drug treatment workforce needed to be appropriately skilled to deliver the objectives of the adult drug treatment plans as a requirement of the former NTA

3. Training and development needs of local commissioners were needed to be taken into account and addressed as well as treatment staff in service provision

4. That priority needed for workforce development was clearly going to underpin the achievement of the national key priorities

Workforce development targets announced by the NTA in 2006 were to be achieved by 2008/9 (NTA and Drug Strategy Directorate 2006). National performance indicators for workforce development included that;

- 75 per cent of non professionally trained staff are undertaking or have achieved NVQ 3 or equivalent

- 60 per cent of professionally trained staff are undertaking a programme of continuing professional development , including professional development awards

- 90 per cent of managers are undertaking or have achieved an appropriate management training programme as defined by their employers

There would be a time lag between implementation and achievement of these targets as it would clearly take time for people to get onto training courses and complete. However the opportunity to look at developing an AR learning group for the development of the charitable trusts managers was being discussed at an opportune time. Management training was to be defined by their employers and the research study could meet this. It had been some time since any management development programme had been undertaken within the charitable trust and as previously stated there were no plans to commission any management training in the near future at that time.

The Research Proposal

The development of the AR research proposal would provide an opportunity for managers of the charitable trust to come together from across the organization to collaborate and hold conversation about their lived experiences as managers and leaders through an AR learning group. It would be formed as a peer led network. It would also enable managers to have an opportunity to be able to converse and explore the main key issues they were encountering in their current working environment. These managers were also key leaders within the charitable trust. In creating this conversational space for managers to meet as peers, it would also provide an opportunity for them share their knowledge and experiences with each other related to their roles as managers within the context that they were working in.

The research proposal and design was also informed by the evaluations of a leadership programme commissioned by the NTA in 2002 and 2003 for managers. Deloitte had been commissioned to design and deliver a leadership programme for service managers and commissioners in the drug treatment sector. The first of two programmes was delivered on a national basis and there was capacity to engage up to 600 participants across a range of venues in England. A second advanced leadership programme was delivered a year later. The Leadership development programme model was stated to have been developed specifically for the drug and alcohol sector. The programme contained a mix of four modules which included: pre work, leadership workshop; workplace learning, and ongoing development. What emerged from the evaluation report on the programme was that it was reported that;

There was mixed feedback on the participants view of the programme and there was a significant drop in attendance from the intake into both programmes (Deloitte 2004)

From a conversation held between myself and the DOO she had shared that she had attended one of the Deloitte Leadership programmes and that her experience was that the action learning set process had not worked well because of the distance that people had to travel across the UK to meet. The DOO felt that coming together with other managers had been an important part of the learning approach even though it was not sustained. The DOO was of the view that a local approach to action learning with peers may have reduced the attrition rate. In addition the programme was very prescriptive from the DOO's perspective. The managers in the course had little input into what they felt was needed to do their job and that it was theory laden with leadership models that did not necessarily fit with the sector.

Other supporting evidence for the AR study was found in the Cranfield University Training Needs Analysis of the drug sector in England (Mills and Parry 2003), which was funded by the former NTA. The study examined the training needs of the workforce through mapping the qualifications of the workforce which included practitioners, service managers as well as commissioning managers and community care assessors across the whole of England (excluding London). In terms of the managers, the outcome of the report highlighted that the overwhelming outcome was that management training was identified as a high priority. Most managers within the study identified that that they had been promoted from a practitioner post with little, if any opportunity for development and therefore needed support to develop the skills for effective management (Mills and Parry, 2003 119). The AR inquiry was also being

developed to clarify if this was the case with the charitable trusts managers and to better understand what their needs were to support the development of their leadership and management practice within the charitable trust.

What would emerge out of the AR Learning Group's inquiry could not be predicted as the methodology is an inductive one as it would need to be flexible enough to account for the messiness of complexity in organisational life. AR as a qualitative approach would meet this requirement.

1.2 Contracting to develop the Action Research study

In using the term 'case study' I am using Simons definition as cited within the paper which sets out a typology of case studies authored by Gary Thomas (2011) and he states that the;

"Research is an in depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real life' context (Simons, 2009, p.21 cited in Thomas, 2011)."

Thomas (2011) further states that the research should not be seen as a method in or of itself, that it is a design frame which may be made up of a number of methods. AR is the overarching methodology in this thesis and a range of other methods described in the methodology chapter (See Chapter 3) will underpin this approach to provide a learning climate that would support reflective conversation between managers to gain better understanding of the situations being studied. From a human resource perspective, the growth in the number of employees within the charitable trust was evidence of the challenges that managers were facing. Managers were under increasing

pressure to take the lead, manage, motivate and develop an expanding base of practitioners who were sometimes inexperienced in the delivery of this type of work. The core work of the charitable trust was focused into conversations about health and well being. This was set against the backdrop already highlighted of a depleting pool of experienced practitioners and managers with which to recruit from. The charitable trust had developed in response a locally recognised internal competency development programme for practitioners which was held in high regard by commissioners and nationally for its outcomes and yet there was no equivalent development programme for managers.

An initial discussion was undertaken with the DOO and the CEO to discuss the potential for undertaking another AR case study and was met with great interest and enthusiasm. The DOO acknowledged there was a real need to develop the charitable trust managers and to find a way to share local knowledge, best practice and experience across the organization. Potential benefits for managers interested in engaging in the AR case study were discussed and thoughts as to how their attendance could be sustained over time so that the attrition risk was reduced in comparison with the Deloitte leadership programme experience. The DOO offered to be the senior manager lead and point of contact in supporting the AR research case study and committed to actively encouraging managers to engage in the process. The proposal and potential outcomes of the research study were discussed and agreed which were incorporated into the final DBA proposal. The AR research study would set out to;

1. Create space for managers to reflect, analyse and explore who they were and their experiences through the development of an Action Research inquiry group.

2. Enable managers to explore how they learn and develop their own professional practice to meet the demands of services they manage.

3. Develop and evolve the goals and outcomes of the research collaboratively with the participants as these emerged.

Undertaking the research project presented an ideal to opportunity to provide managers with the space to share conversations on local management and leadership knowledge, experience and best practice across the organisation.

1.3 The Focus for the Collaborative Action Research Learning Group

Managing the demands and increasing responsibilities of growing staff teams and in some services addressing reduced funding streams was making manager's operational roles challenging. Organisational and management capability needed developing to help support adaptation during a period of continuous change. Ensuring the efficient and effective performance management of the organisation was of utmost importance to continuously improve the quality of service delivery and retain key contracts.

Without the right support and professional development for the charitable trusts managers then the delivery of services may be put at risk lead to increasing stress

levels and job dissatisfaction and potential loss of contracts. There was already a risk that had been highlighted as to how experienced and skilled staff were already leaving the charitable trust in a mobile employment environment. The need for space to engage managers in a conversation about their development and share experiences within organisation therefore supported the need to undertake the AR case study. This would also enable the charitable trust and its managers to share a better understanding as to what was working well and also what the current challenges were operationally across the organisation with the aim of considering potential solutions to the issues under study.

The intention here was to gain a deeper understanding and some clarity as to the participating manager's lived experiences and avoid the limitations of a traditional research method approach by using AR. Trochim and Donnelly (2006) assert that the research philosophy should be selected in accordance with the aims and objectives of the study as well as in accordance with the nature of the issues under investigation. Examination into the impact of the recent growth of the charity by engaging in conversations with managers about their work experience would hopefully enable a better understanding as to their lived experience and generate knowledge about the organisation.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The overall research case study is set out within this thesis across five chapters which interconnect and aim to explore the lived working experiences of

managers working in a developing UK charity in the field of drug and alcohol service delivery. The chapters are summarised as follows;

Chapter 1: The introduction has already set out the background of the study to help orientate the reader enhance their understanding of the context that the charity was operating in and further of the detail around what was happening internally as a result.

Chapter 2: The second chapter describes the *Methodology* and the rationale to the selection of AR as the most suitable approach in which to explore the manager's workplace learning experiences in a growing charitable organisation. I will describe the process and stages of the research and how the data was collected and analysed. I will also outline the ways in which experiences and conversations were captured as data through storytelling and other relational approaches undertaken in the study. A further description is set out of other research methods that were used to orientate participants and create a positive and strengths based climate develop a reflective space. I will then examine the ethical issues and considerations in undertaking this study and how rigour has been built into the methodology and was demonstrated.

Chapter 3: Chapter three sets out the *Literature Review* in relation to the study. I will be exploring the concepts and theory that have informed and influenced my thinking giving shape to this thesis. In addition practical examples of similar research are cited where available from previously conducted studies to inform the review. I will introduce the concepts of Organisational Development (OD) and Change and Leadership and

Management from a relational perspective. The literature is explored in relation to the development of OD and recent thinking comparing traditional Diagnostic and Dialogic OD approaches which are conversationally based. Building on the theoretical and practice base, consideration is given as to what interventions from a leadership and management perspective can be effective in improving the quality of daily interactions, workplace relationships, work climate and encourage learning and reflective practice through collaboration. The theory and application of positive psychology in relation to the workplace is also examined.

Chapter 4: The fourth chapter of the study is aimed at setting out the *Findings* of the study. As the data emerged how this was then analysed during the life of the AR Learning Group is explained and the main themes that were revealed. The findings chapter is supported with thematic narrative conversationally based descriptions contributed by participants on their experiences as managers working within the charitable trust. The thematic analysis of the data and what emerged from this is also described.

Chapter 5: The fifth chapter *concludes the overall findings* of the study and serves to summarise the overall research processes. This chapter will also identify where the research outcomes both planned and emergent cane from within the findings that were as a result of the conversations and dialogue held between managers participating in the AR Learning Group. The limitations and unexpected challenges of the research are also described. The research concludes with an evaluation from the participants as to the

changes that they felt had occurred for them during the AR Learning group research study. A description is given about where this study has contributed to a body of knowledge across the headings of; literature, context and action research which concludes this final chapter.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe how the Action Research (AR) group case study was developed as a methodology with the primary aim of maximising opportunities for learning through conversation. I aim to justify why AR was the chosen approach and will set out the range of methods and interventions used to allow the emergent generation and analysis of the data. I will refer to the managers group as the 'AR Learning Group' and 'participants' from this point forward. The AR Learning Group was designed with the participant's involvement as co researchers in the process. It was designed as a space where they would be able to safely talk about and explore management experiences through conversations with their peers. The AR learning group participants would have an opportunity to identify areas of self defined mutual interest and inquiry with a view to taking action to create change and improvement. Learning and reflection through conversation is the central theme in this study. The methodology was designed to provide the best opportunity for a protected conversational learning space and to provide the basis for participants to gain a deeper understanding of their environment and their lived experiences that they were encountering on a daily basis.

An integrated and blended approach to AR was developed to provide the best opportunity to for participants to come together as a group to share their knowledge, experiences and perspectives on the organization through their lived experiences. My own developing practice as a consultant and researcher and the impact of this on the research is a part of the AR methodology. Documenting this experience in

a reflective diary allowed me to record my thinking and reflections and was also supported by engaging with peers in communities of practice contributing to the rigour of the study in the spirit of openness. It was a real challenge in writing up this thesis to separate my own professional development and the impact this had on the research being as it was a practice doctorate. As an insider researcher in the process I was also part of the AR study. My reflections and thinking were still captured and formed an integral part of the basis of my reflective paper which is written separately from the main body of the thesis.

As a social research approach, AR is described as paradigm which allows you to develop your knowledge and understanding as part of practice (Dick and Swepson, 1997). This was the basis for my engagement and the participants in this doctoral research study. I wanted to improve my own professional practice and learning as a consultant and manager. I also wanted to create the conversational space for the participants in the AR group to be able to have the same opportunity. From my experience of developing conversational learning spaces I was also cognisant of the importance creating the best group climate that supported this. I was also aware from previous experience that there would be different layers of learning occurring which would be on an individual, group and organizational level during the research process (Reason and Bradbury, 2006).

There were some important considerations about the approach to developing the study such as talking with participants to elicit what they wanted to gain out of being participants in the AR research process. I also wanted the opportunity to explain how AR research proposal would meet the requirements of the DBA criteria.

Ethically this needed to be balanced with meeting the needs and expectations of those participating in the study. Early engagement and discussions with managers to agree the methodological process was an important part of achieving this and orientating participants as co researchers in a collaborative inquiry. Gaya Wicks and Reason (2009) write about the importance of creating the right communicative space to give the AR study the best opportunity of establishing well. Some of this has been considered within the introduction to the thesis and I will discuss this further as I describe the methodological approach.

I want to begin by talking through the philosophical underpinnings of AR within social constructionism in contrast with a positivist perspective in relation to choosing the right approach. The perspective of the researcher and the researched within these two different positions has an impact on how the research is undertaken. To further understand how AR works well within organizational and management development means that there is a need to understand the epistemological positioning between the two main schools of thoughts positivism and social constructionism. This helps explain as to how organisational research fits within a social sciences approach (Easterby - Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2008).

2.2 Underpinning Research Theory and Philosophy

The selection of the appropriate research theory and philosophy was an important part of developing the right approach to the research study. Social researchers use an AR approach with the intention to overcome the limitations of the traditional research.

However, it should be taken into account that social researchers also face challenges when applying an AR approach in order to investigate social issues of interest. Some of these issues are the result of a combination of human action and nature which can be complex in presentation. Critiscms about AR as a research approach are discussed further in this chapter.

2.2.1   Positivist and Social Construcionist positioning

Within positivist thinking one of the key assumptions is that mind and reality are separate (Reason and Bradbury, 2006) and that there are universal truths which means the research goals are to discover the laws of the universe from an objective perspective. Positivism is the epistemological position that suggests researchers 'observe' objectively, what is social reality. The assumption of the world is that 'reality' is out there and distanced. Generally this approach whilst valid will involve a highly structured methodology with large samples under study. The main argument for this approach is the ability to generalize results and replicate studies elsewhere. Positivist research designs are particularly concerned with ensuring that results provide an accurate reflection of reality. Whereas social constructionists believe that there is no universal truth, there is instead a reality that we all contribute to making which we construct through language, sense making and meaning.

Social constructionism in relation to qualitative research is predominantly focused into the internal world of the mind where surfacing meanings and making sense is seen as part of what is being experienced through relationships and conversations. Qualitative research starts from the assumption that there is no absolute truth and the researcher will illuminate different truths and perspectives through the

research process which is generative and conversationally based (Easterby–Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2012). Because it is predominantly grounded in conversation and looks beyond the obvious; the world is viewed as being socially constructed (Gergen, 1999, Berger and Luckman 1967). Social constructionists view knowledge as being constructed through dialogue and sense making with the aim of find the meaning generated from within this process (Gergen, 1999; Berger and Luckman, 1967, Weick, 1995). Qualitative researchers look to investigate with people who are living in the situation. This is undertaken through collaborative dialogue where constructing meanings, understandings and interpretations which emerge out of complex and messy situations. In relation to work and organisations people will likely perceive situations in different ways as a result of their own view of the world and their perspectives as social actors. In practice, a collaborative inquiry from a constructionist perspective would create an opportunity to surface participants differing views in the context that they are working in which is situated in the writing of Habermas thinking on communicative action (Habermas, 1984). Social constructionism embraces the idea of different perspectives existing in the world (Gergen, 2009). Gergen (2009) further suggests that social constructionism defines individuals through their political, culture and historical evolution.

Burr (1995, 1) argues that a social constructionist perspective is one in which human life exists through engaging in social relationships. Gergen (2009, 4) on social constructionism argues that we construct the world we live in as we communicate with each other. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) suggest that business research is often conducted with a mixed philosophy of both positivist and social constructionism

and this will impact on the choice of methods and approaches that a researcher will choose in undertaking research.

2.2.2 Rationale for a Constructionist Philosophical position

Social constructionism is the theory of knowledge and communication and its philosophy has a number of assumptions underpinning this which supports the research approach. These can be explained (Lock and Strong, 2010) as being focused into;

- Making meaning and creating understanding

- That meaning and understanding begin in social science

- Meaning making is specific to time and place

AR as an approach to undertaking research is a co productive process and centres on making meaning and creating understanding through the participant engaging with the process. The intention in this AR case study was to gather the experiences of the participants through sharing of knowledge and stories about their lived world which aligns itself with a constructionist philosophy. Trochim and Donnelly (2006) assert that the research philosophy should be selected in accordance with the aims and objectives of the study. Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry as a conversational approach which I will discuss in more depth in this chapter are approaches which are grounded in the philosophy of constructionism. Both approaches are dialogic by nature so the underpinning research philosophy was suited the aims of this case study as organisation is viewed as a social context.

2.3 Action Research

Kurt Lewin was credited with having first used the term Action Research in 1946 (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). What has emerged since is a diversity of approaches to undertaking AR which developed over the last 70 years. These approaches have emerged dependent on the social contexts that it operates in. Hart and Bond (1995) on AR in health and social care talk about a typology that spans from experimental AR to social constructionism, with each area meeting the need of a particular context and research philosophy. AR is described as being;

"A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes grounded in a participatory worldview" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008 1).

Reason and Bradbury (2008) also view AR as an orientation and not so much a methodology. Reason and Bradbury (2008) state that AR is more of an;

"Orientation' to inquiry that seeks to create participative communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on practical issues" (2008, 1).

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, 5) describe AR as a form of collective, self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations and that it is a democratising process. Critical awareness or reflection has mainly been in the domain of adult education though forms an important part of AR in terms of rigour. AR is described as a particular practice that comprises of change and intervention and aims to generate knowledge and practical solutions to problems in the context that it is being undertaken in (Reason and Bradbury 2006; Elden and Chisholm 1993; Greenwood and

Levin, 2007; Lewin 1946). AR is undertaken to improve the situation of interest by designing iterative action – reflection cycles through a participative and collaborative effort involving both researchers and participants.

AR in this context is a useful research approach for organizational and management development as it is a change design focused into learning and professional practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2008; Heron and Reason 1988). According to Gummerson (1991) in undertaking AR, a researcher generally comes with a preunderstanding of the research topic and setting. Gummeson (1991, 57) refers to preunderstanding as being situated in people's knowledge, insights and experience. Having an understanding of the organisation, local knowledge on the politics and processes, access to local information and contacts can assist with undertaking adding local knowledge into the research. It can have a beneficial impact on the research as pre understanding will add richness and depth although arguably this can also create the conditions for research bias. This is where the rigor is introduced through the reflective process. Research bias is also addressed by having access to critical peers to talk through and reflect on what is being experienced during the research process and supporting the ability to challenge thinking where this may be arising.

2.3.1 Action Research and Adult Education

Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Mezirow (1990) have a common starting position in conducting their research and describe three different types of AR practice based on Habermas knowledge-constitutive interests. Each of these practices has a different focus and outcome because of the underpinning emphasis on what these practices are trying to achieve. These are; *technical, practical* and *emancipatory* action

research. Carr and Kemmis (1986, 2002) and Mezirow (1990) suggest that AR within adult education settings is described technical AR as practice that focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of practice. This is strongly led by the researcher (teacher) in terms of positioning. Practical AR is described as a facilitation of practitioners in an action research process, sometimes known as process consultancy. The researcher (teacher) is generally external and is brought into undertake the research or facilitation. Whereas emancipatory AR is described as where it is the practitioner together with the group is taking responsibility for the development of their own practice and the context that they are working in. Emancipatory AR is further described as an empowering process for those engaging with knowledge generation.

Participants question their taken for granted assumptions through reflective practice with the aim of changing themselves so as to change the context they are working in. Mezirow (1990) on critical reflection in adulthood asserts that it is through conversations with each other that we attempt to understand what is being said by others so as to confirm or disconfirm what we are thinking. It is within emancipatory AR in terms of learning and education that this study is situated.

2.3.2 Approaches to the implmentation of Action Research

In its simplest form AR is aimed at enhancing the understanding of area of interest under investigation and so creating change in the context that it is being applied in studying it. In terms of implementation it is suggested that there are three levels of inquiry and audiences where the impact of research can be focused (Reason and Bradbury 2008; Torbert, 2001). First-person AR is described as focused on the inquiry

into one's own professional practice and personal development. Second-person AR is the ability to work with and inquire with others in resolving the organizational issues through mutual inquiry. Third-person research is where practice aims at creating communities of inquiry, involving a wider group of people beyond the second-person inquiry. This could also be described as the engagement of the organisation in transferring learning or changes or within the partnerships that impact on the work of the organisation. McNiff (1996, 30) suggested that within a researcher's own organization that AR is able to offer advantages at each of these different levels. Reason and Bradbury (2008) suggest taking this one step further by developing an integrative approach to research that encompasses and informs all three levels to maximize impact. The aim with AR is to impact at a personal, group and organisational level.

One of the aims of the AR Learning group was to be able to test out of new ideas and thinking in practice to improve systems and processes. In order to do this then the practice of implementing cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) during the study forms an integral part of the change process (Dick, 2002). The cyclical nature of AR as a learning approach also allows for the refining of the focus of interest is and this generally occurs through the iterations of conversation and discussion. It also adds rigour to the process. The real world of work is often more complex than we originally see it and situations under study can take a different direction to what was originally thought to be under study. AR in this context as an approach needs to be flexible and adaptive allowing for emergence. This is much more in keeping with the reality and messiness of organizational life.

A central part of describing what constitutes AR is that it follows a method of inductive reasoning which generally describes where research and data is generated from the 'bottom up'. This is in direct contrast with deductive reasoning, often referred to as a 'top-down' process as this generally starts from a theory and is tested through developing hypotheses. This is different to the inductive approach of AR. Through an inductive method data will be generated and interpretative analysis will form part of the approach. Herr and Anderson propose that most action researchers prefer to engage in *naturalistic inquiry,* as there is an emphasis on letting the methodology emerge (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Heron (1996) writing on developing cooperative inquiry supports this view and cautions against being too rigid in adapting the AR cycle formally during the research process. Heron (1996) argues that sticking rigidly to the AR process can suppress spontaneity and creativity. Herr and Anderson (2005) view an emerging methodology as an assumption in the process.

Four common themes are proposed within the literature as to what makes up AR as a process (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007; Coughlin and Brannick, 2005, 2010);

1. That the purpose of research is *in* action rather than *on* action (Coughlin and Brannick, 2005, 2010)
2. That there is a collaborative democratic partnership which is created between practitioners and researchers in comparison with typical research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007)

3. AR is iterative in nature and there is joint approach between the researcher and co researchers to the analysis, planning, action and evaluation and so on. The focus of AR is on action (Coughlin and Brannick, 2005, 2010)

4. AR can inform other contexts so it so there is a fundamental need to be explicit that it will likely have implications beyond the immediate project (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

The outcome of the research process of AR is to enable participants to formulate local knowledge so as to promote learning in practice. Greenwood and Levin (2007) support this view and see AR as social research that is;

'Carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organization, community or network ('stakeholders') who are seeking to improve the participants' situation'. (Greenwood and Levin, 2007:3).

The participants in this study wanted to engage in a conversation within the AR learning group to better understand the complex challenges and demands they were facing. Their engagement in this was also important because there was nowhere for them to meet as peers at the time. The AR learning group would to provide the conversational space for the manager's to be able to reflect and learn from each other as a community of practice (Wenger, 2005). This was also moving away from being reliant on more formal approaches to learning towards a local knowledge based solution AR also naturally lends itself well to hosting and developing communities of practice amongst managers with the aim of creating space for their own professional development.

2.3.3 Action Research as a Methodology for Research in Organisations

There are a number of important reasons why AR adapts well as a research methodology within organizations as a learning vehicle. AR is notably is a family of approaches that is seen to be very well-suited to being undertaken in organizations where other research methods may be more difficult to use. In short the methodology had to, be flexible enough to account and accommodate periods of real uncertainty and change in the life of the organization. Bryman and Bell (2003, 302) argue that;

In Business and management, action research plays a particular role in bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners (by which it is usually meant managers).

This bridge between research and practice is critical to support the growth in written accounts of management experience as knowledge instead of just presenting university based research perspectives. In terms of the growth in literature on AR research Bob Dick's periodic reviews of AR publications wrote that during 2008-10 that here was a sign that AR was in growth phase (Dick, 2010 122). Literature was described by Dick (2010) as having covered a bigger range of areas than in previous reviews. The number of relevant specialist journal issues had also grown. Subject areas within the review covered wide ranging field of study which included organisational development. Key areas Dick (2010) cited were; Educational Research, Community Research and engagement, Rural and regional engagement, Organisational and systemic applications, Action Learning and Appreciative Inquiry.

Research in organizations is often messy, complex and not easily quantifiable meaning that traditional scientific approaches which do not fit so well. An example of this in practice was during this AR case study as the need for the methodology to be adaptable was an important factor. This also allowed for flexibility for participants to be able to continue contributing when attendance at the AR learning group sessions was compromised as their work demands increased.

Management research is described as being distinctive in that it can pose some unusual problems when trying to conduct this within work settings (Easterby-smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2012). For example where managers frequently have to work across many different organisational boundaries in terms of their work. So a manager's ability to be able to draw on other knowledge to help with thinking from a range of disciplines, such as social sciences and psychology both informs and enriches management practice. This knowledge and difference in perspectives also helps inform sense making process when attempting to better understand what is being encountered. Using the opportunity to incorporate other schools of thinking or perspectives to inform their practice also adds depth. During busy periods in organizations, making dedicated time for managers to engage in reflection about practice is not always a priority. Formal meetings which managers go to tend to provide the main forum for review of projects or processes and do not necessarily provide reflective space. Organisations often resort to more expedient ways of training and learning which are generally undertaken outside of the organisation and are taught. This is not always context specific and a missed the opportunity to engage with management colleagues within their own organization to share knowledge and practice.

Because AR focuses on working on organizational and social issues at the same time provides the basis for those who are affected by the study to work together collaboratively. As a methodological approach AR spirals through a process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on the areas of interest undertaken during an inquiry (Zuber-Skerritt, 2000; Dick, 2000; Revans, 1991; Lewin, 1946. Reason and Torbert (2001, 36) and Greenwood and Levin (2007) argue that AR is first and foremost, a way of "keeping the conversation going". The notion of conversation and interacton is fundamental to the foundations of AR and as part of Appreciative Inquiry as a methodological approach which is discussed later within this chapter.
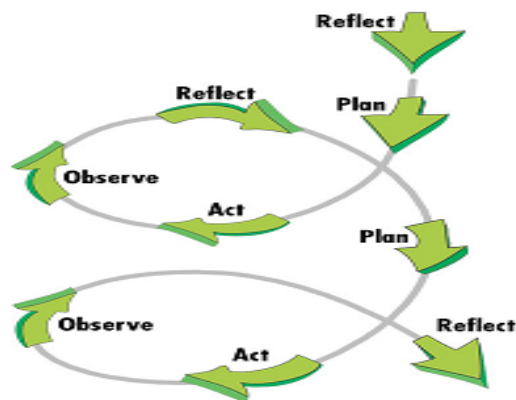
Figure 1: Action Research Cycle (Carr and Kemmis, 1986)

McNiff (1996) suggests that AR as an approach improves the ability to meet the objectives for business and as this kind of research is an ongoing process it acts to drive continuous improvement activities. McNiff and Whitehead (2002) suggest that AR is a scientific method of inquiry that is data driven, predominantly qualitative and aims to solve problems that are primarily related to organizational

behaviour. However it can also be argued that AR as described by Reason and Bradbury (2008) is also a way of being and thinking, a mindset. In terms of organisational research, AR in this case study is also concerned with the improvement of professional practice, the practice of managers who are leaders in the charitable trust. So this AR case study has two aims in terms of improving situations in relation to work and developing the managers and leaders of the organisation. AR after all is relational in its nature and is a social process (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000).

Reason and Bradbury (2008) suggest that those who take a strict, positivistic scientific view may argue that one of the limitations of this type of process is that the researcher may also an employee of the organization; so the traditional distinction between researcher and research is blurred. Role duality as this is know, is where the person undertaking the research must play both of the roles of researcher and employee of the organization as in the case of this research study. This research study crosses the continuum of the positionality of the researcher described by Herr and Anderson in so far as I was an insider researcher already within the organisation (2005 34). As an insider researcher can bring its tensions as this person is often an employee. However the pre understanding that this can bring to the research is invaluable as it can illuminate understandings. An important part of enabling the insider researcher to function well in this situation is being able to support the critical questioning as what is happening within the research which brings rigour to the process. This is also helped by having access to a pool of critical peers and good supervision with experienced researchers. In engaging with the research the researcher as an insider can work with what emerges by questioning and validating through a process of critical reflection and analysis. This can help surface

underlying assumptions about what is being encountered and enable the researcher to step back when in the field especially as an insider researcher is so close to the situation. Coghlan (2007 338) supports this recognising that insider action researcher needs to build on the strengths that the being close to the research setting can bring whilst balancing the need to create some distance in order to view what is happening critically. Good research supervision supports the development of rigour during the research process can to help the researcher navigate and surface the taken for granted assumptions and political dynamics at play within an organisiation as a result of this dual role.

Coghlan (2007) suggests that being an insider researcher can be challenging and can lead the researcher to experience feelings of role conflict or role detachment as a result of having to play both part of the researcher and being an organizational member. Navigating organisational politics is one part of the role that the insider researcher has to manage and interpret along with tensions this creates in terms the duality of the role as an employee. Coghlan and Brannick (2010, 40) refer to the importance of the concept of reflexivity and how this is applied within qualitative research to examine the impact of the researcher on the research. Self reflective practice forms part of this process and requires the researcher to be aware of and consider the cultural, political, theoretical conditions and implications that they are encountering as part of the research. This is a core component of the AR process and is discussed in more depth within the reflective practice report (Williams, 2014). There are essentially two levels of research working synergistically at the same time during this AR study; at the group level and also at the level of self reflective practice of the researcher. Reflective practice it can be argued is ultimately an inquiry into life process (Marshall, 2001). Zuber

Skerritt (1996 86) suggests that practitioner AR is essentially about the nature of the learning process in AR provides and provides the connection between self evaluation and developing professionalism and responsibility required as an aware manager.

2.3.4 Critiscms of AR

Critics of AR come from a predominantly positivistic perspective where concerns have been raised as to the rigour and validity of studies undertaken using this approach. Critiscms arise when it comes questioning the researcher's objectivity in the AR process which is fundamental to the positivists perspective. Qualitative data it is argued is lacking in this core research value of objectivity in comparison with working within a positivist paradigm. However as already argued in the last section of this chapter, the researcher as an insider will engage in supervision where perceptions will be questioned and challenged in the researcher's interpretations of emerging data. Evidence needs to reflect the phenomenon under investigation during the data collection and this can be supported or triangulated by the use of data from multiple sources. The interpretation and validation of the findings can also be confirmed and disconfirmed with participants through the analysis of themes emerging from within the research data.

A further critiscm is that the results of AR in organisational research are not generalisable studies and are often smaller in numbers for example comparison with a positivist methodology. However attention paid to a well recorded rich description of the research in the form of narratives gathered by the researcher would potentially enable the transfer of a methodology into a similar context. Critiscms have also been made as to the inductive method of qualitiative data gathering. It is argued that this process lacks validity and it is subject to bias through the collection and analysis process

as the researcher is so close to the research. On the one hand this is true though on the other building in reflexivity creates the space for critical reflection. Herr and Anderson (2005, 53) argue that the same quality criteria should not be applied in judging positivistic and naturalistic research as they are different in focus as to how data is gathered and presented. Herr and Anderson propose criteria for validity (Herr and Anderson, 2005, 53) which are set out in table 1 in the next section, along with an account as to how this AR study has sought to meet this.

2.3.5 Rigour and Validity in Action Research

Qualitative and quantitative researchers according to Seale and Silverman (1997, 379) have often had different ideas about their approaches to what is reliability and validity. Greenwood and Levin (2007) argue that AR is not a 'soft' or purely qualitative research; they view it as a multi method research which can incorporate quantitative methods additionally which can include metrics. The validity of AR is therefore tested in action. Within qualitative research, Seale and Silverman (1997, 380) argue the important aim is to gather an 'authentic' understanding of people's experiences. The responsibility to ensure that these accounts are authentic is within the gift of the researcher and needs to be evidenced by describing how the data is both confirmed by participants as an accurate representation of their understanding and lived experience. How this evidence is preserved to demonstrate authenticity and how it is presented is the researcher's responsibility to demonstrate this is the case. People's experiences described and constructed within conversations as dialogue are best gathered through interviews and notes from group meetings. This is helped by including open questions to allow for a free flow of conversation in comparison with quantitative methods where questions are

structured and may use scales (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010 73). The predominant data collection method within this study is the collection of conversations and quotes elicited from face to face semi structured interviews and the AR learning group which formed session notes. These were generated from engaging in conversations with the participants in the inquiry process. Emails and other organisational documentation also contributed to gaining a deeper understanding of organizational life. (See section 2.3.6 on data gathering methods.). Herr and Anderson (2005) set out five quality criteria to support the outcomes of the research.

Table 1: Quality Criteria and the Goals of Action Research (Herr and Anderson, 2005)

	Goals of research	*Quality /validity criteria*	*Evidence to look for in the thesis from the research*
1	**The generation of new knowledge**	Dialogic and process validity	Within the managers narrative in the thesis from the AR Learning sessions
2	**The achievement of action-orientated outcomes**	Outcome validity	At the end of each of the AR Learning Group sessions discussions and actions are captured.
3	**The education of both researcher and participants**	Catalytic validity	Evidenced within the managers narrative at the AR learning group sessions learning and final evaluation
4	**Results that are relevant to the local setting**	Democratic validity	Validated in the written narrative from the managers conversation in the AR learning group
5	**A sound and appropriate research methodology**	Process validity	Evidenced by the cycles of planning, reflection and action set out in the narrative of the thesis

Each of the five quality criteria aim to support the goals of research. These criteria were used as a framework throughout the undertaking of the research process in gathering evidence, so that validity was tested in action. A third column has been added to the criteria developed by Herr and Anderson and begins the

process of signposting where and how rigour and validity can be evidenced throughout this thesis Dick (2002) argues that it is possible to design AR processes in such a way that flexibility, commitment and rigour enhance each other. This is ability to demonstrate rigour will be shown through using;

- a cyclic process in which data and interpretation are integrated

- multiple sources of data and interpretation within each cycle

- and at all times engage in the vigorous pursuit of disconfirming evidence (Dick, 2002)

Evidence of methodological rigour is threaded throughout the thesis and in particular in the rich descriptions of the manager's narratives and stories gathered from within the AR Learning Group. This is documented throughout the findings chapter as the methodology is articulated in action. Even though AR as a methodology has its critics in terms of rigour and validity, work is continuing to develop and improve the quality criteria that support this approach. AR still remains a valid and growing research approach which works well with organisational development.

2.3.6 Data gathering methods

Data gathering in action research is generally qualitative although quantitative data is also used in addition depending on what is being studied and how this needs evidencing. As this is a research study focused into understanding the practice of managers there is a stronger qualitative focus on the data collection and analysis. Data was gathered through a variety of sources to bring together a wide range of sources of data to develop a thick description (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) and richness in describing detail as to manager's perspectives and lived experiences in the organisation during the

research. The main aim for using a wide range of sources for data was to also be able to confirm and disconfirm areas of inquiry as these arose. The main sources of where data was gathered were from were contained in the;

- Manager's Training and development questionnaires (See Appendix C)

- Written narrative accounts of each session of conversations, emergent themes and outcomes constructed by participant managers through the AR Learning group

- Participants emails

- Charities Business plans

- Charitable Board meetings minutes

- Charitable Trust Annual reports.

- Personal stories elicited from managers on their management and leadership experiences in their careers

- Managers appreciative evaluation questionnaires

Finally, I wrote a personal reflective diary as the researcher throughout the research process over the twelve months containing accounts of my own practice, thinking and actions in relation to implementing and experiencing the research process in practice.

How narrative informed the research

The concept of narrative describes the recounted spoken or written text at a point in time which does not necessarily tell the whole story. It involves a number of

sequences of events or actions (Maitlis, 2012). For the purpose of this research narrative was written up in the form of notes at each session and is contained in these historical written accounts of the AR learning group's conversations. Narrative accounts are also represented in the story telling interviews that managers gave about their management careers. Each cycle represents a single session of which there were eight building a picture as to how each session connected with the next. In the AR learning group narrative was gathered as way of capturing a historical picture of the meaning making process in manager's conversations and emergent themes over time.

Narrative and data analysis

A thematic analysis was undertaken by the participants in the AR learning group at the end of each session which resulted in identifying and narrowing down the common themes from emergent conversations. Boyatzis (1997) definition is employed as a description of thematic analysis as cited by Braun and Clarke (2006, 6).

"Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 6).

In undertaking a thematic analysis with narrative there is a tension between preserving the narrative in its historical sequencing versus breaking narrative up to support categorisation. The decision was taken to represent narrative as a sequence representative of each individual AR learning group session and within the writing up of this thesis which has sought to preserve the integrity of the conversations that were held. Emails received from participants post AR learning group sessions and in between each meeting were also used as narrative accounts. These emails in essence formed part of the

participant's reflective thinking and feedback on key conversations held by the AR learning group. Data gathering methods and storage as part of the implementation of the research process was underpinned by the Social Research Ethics guidance (2003). This is discussed and evidenced in more depth in later on in this chapter when discussing the importance of ethics within the research process.

2.4 Research Methods

Managers self selected for the research study and came from different areas of the organization so as to gain a wide range of perspectives from within service delivery. Eight managers originally agreed to participate. Each AR group meeting was designed to act as a cycle of the research in itself which guided the conversational process and outcomes. Each session opened up with managers developing exploratory conversations on either previous themes or new emerging experiences. A reflective section was constructed at the beginning and end of each session to develop and maximise reflective practice as participating managers were not keen on keeping a personal reflective journal. Notes from conversations were written up verbatim by the researcher of the conversations confirmed by the participants and emergent key themes agreed. These notes were also used as a part of developing reflective practice. Any agreed action steps were also written up to keep the group focused. These agreed action steps would then be implemented during the intervening period before the next AR session and then the cycle began again when the AR group met next. As argued by Dick (2002) the reflection in cycle plays an important part in ensuring the rigour and validity of the research.

Data gathering, analysis and interpretation of the data was agreed with the participants as a collective and this process was undertaken and completed with the research group participants within the sessions. Moving through the cyclical process, ideas were formed through analysing the previous and ongoing experiential learning conversations between managers' as to their work and practice experiences. Other sources of primary and secondary data were used inform the process of critical reflection such as articles on management practice and people management. Predictability in terms of the outcome of an AR meeting was not always assured as different themes emerged (Herr and Anderson, 2005). The process of critical reflection built into the AR cycle allowed for both the confirming and disconfirming of the evidence emerging through explorative conversations (Swepson, 1995). Undertaking cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting meant that the participants would be able to continuously seek to refine the data and interpretation in light of the understanding (Dick, 1999).

This was the most context appropriate approach and methodology for this area of organisational social research study. The management team ethos was one of a collaborative inquiry, which seeks as a social research method to pursue research and action at the same time. Participant managers were co researchers and the aim of this AR learning group being constituted was not in the primary aim of creating a body of knowledge rather that it is about changing a situation of interest in an informed and mindful way.

2.4.1   Developing the conversation to create a Positive Learning Climate

An important conversation with participating managers led to agreements as to how they wished to develop the learning climate of the group. In the

initial orientation meeting which was pivotal in engaging managers in the research process, I had provided participants with information on AR and Appreciative Inquiry as ways of creating the best learning climate to enhance the outcomes of the research study. The ethos and principles of 'Appreciative Inquiry' (AI) were incorporated into developing the conversation for change. The five key principles of AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001) were agreed to be the foundation for the inquiry which are broadly;

- The constructionist principle – Words construct and create our world

- The simultaneity principle – The way we ask questions; the language, the tone and intention affects the direction of the conversation

- The anticipatory principle – Creating positive and uplifting images of the future change means that we are more likely to take decisions and act to make this happen

- The poetic principle – What we focus on and the stories we tell can captivate and inspire us to make changes

- The positive principle – AI helps us look at the strengths, attributes and assets of the person, the organisation and the community. This helps us look at what is positive and vibrant as a positive core.

In further discussion with the participating managers about the methodology they chose not to use the AI cycle as the principles of AR made more sense to them as a foundational process rather than trying to interpret the 4D cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). So the participants agreed to utilise the principles of AI to develop a positive learning climate as the foundation for their conversational space and to develop

conversations around what they wanted more of in their work. Participants were fully consulted and engaged in discussions in taking this approach to developing the climate of the AR learning group as co researchers in the process (Dick, 2002). It was important to also clarify with the participating managers that whilst AI is a future orientated envisioning process focused into the positive, it did not ignore problems where they existed. Assurances were given that we would address any key emergent issues as they arose within this frame of thinking.

AI looks for what is working well and is strengths focused rather than into weakness and people's deficits being the dominant area for personal growth. There are a number of underlying fundamental beliefs in AI. AI as a dialogic OD methodology considers organisations as living human systems (Lewis, Passmore and Cantore, 2011 20). There is a belief that the power of appreciation helps promote growth in organisations and that;

- Conversation creates change

- The power of imagination will produce change and finally;

- The power of positive emotions creates energy.

Creating an open and trusting learning climate was an important as part of the methodology and the agreed ground rules with the participants. The rationale was that in creating the right climate that this would enable an open and honest conversation to about any emergent sensitivities or concerns that participants may be experiencing within the organisation. The evidence as to how this actually helped participants in practice in working with sensitive emergent issues will be discussed later in the findings. The main aim was also presented as an opportunity to move away from problematical deficit

conversations traditionally held within management discussions and organisational forums. This would also support a shift in mindset from the deficit-based conversational approach associated with AR as a problematised methodology and other problem focused diagnostic OD practices. It was also an important consideration in the construction of the methodology managers could see the connections in the research approach which were similar to the core work in service delivery in health behaviour change. So incorporating in the principles and practice of AI made sense to them in practice and would support the potential for a rapid adoption of this into their conversations and thinking as there was synergy.

AI as a dialogic based OD intervention also allows for the emergence of untapped rich accounts of what is a working well in organizations which also embraces people's historical storied accounts, experiences and recollections. It encourages strengths-based conversations which in turn create energy and momentum in contrast with traditional deficit-based approaches which can have the opposite emotional effect. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) describe a practice-orientated definition of AI as being;

> *The cooperative, co- evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves the systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization or a community when it is most effective and most capable in economic, ecological and human terms. (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005 8)*

The strengths of AI as an approach lie in its positive value orientation that lets go of problem-based management enhancing the ability to create shared understandings (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005). This emphasis moves away from focusing on what's wrong with the organization, the community or on a person's

weaknesses. Paying attention to the way questions are framed and how words are used to construct appreciative conversations were a part of the developing methodology to create the positive learning climate. Frequently the questions contained appreciative questions such; 'what is working well here?' Or 'what could be done differently and better'?

Organisational change framed within an appreciative approach is based around the engagement of people in a conversation framed with positive inquiry questions. This in turn elicits stories about the strengths and successes of an organisation prompting further inquiry and analysis where required. Developing an appreciative and strengths-based climate within the AR group would also hopefully enable managers to focus on what was working well within the charitable trust at a challenging time in its development and growth.

Diana Whitney (2007, 9 – 11) argues that there is a business case for feeling good at work. Citing Dr Barbara Fredrickson's research on positive emotions (2003) she goes onto say that this demonstrates a direct correlation between the presence and experience of emotions. To develop a positive emotional climate there are three fundamental shifts in thinking that need to made to increase organisations in developing more positive ways of relating and these are moving (Whitney, 2007 9-11);

- From critiscm to appreciation

- From fear to safety

- From rational to natural indigenous ways of knowing

The most recent literature in this developing area of workplace positive psychology demonstrates the tentative links being established as to the

importance of creating a positive organizational climate and positive work environments. The links are such that this can impact and influence improvement in performance (Ashkanasy et al 2011). Lived organizational values, it is also suggested underpin a positive organizational climate (Hartel and Ashkanasy 2011). Dialogic OD as a developing methodology of which Appreciative Inquiry is one approach is discussed in more depth within the next section of literature. However in dialogic practice the development of inclusive conversations is an area of common agreement amongst dialogic practitioners according to Bushe (2014).

Through the AR learning group I wanted to gain a better understanding as to what the strengths and achievements were of those managers who were participating in study. I wanted to further understand how they were able to build a healthy resilience into their working lives in navigating through internal organizational challenges and external changes in the drug and alcohol sector.

2.5 The Participants and Co-Researchers

Initially there were eight managers who wanted to participate as co-researcher in the AR case study as already referred to in the introduction. However this number reduced to six within the first two sessions. From a gender perspective there were three males and three females. The managers were drawn from across the organisation (See Appendix B, p.210). Reporting lines for the managers were to the Head of Operations except in Birmingham where there was an Operational Manager. So the cohort of managers was a mix of both senior and middle managers within the organisation. The managers backgrounds in terms of what brought them to the role within

the charitable trust is looked at in more depth in Chapter Four (p.115) as part of the findings gathered through individual management career stories.

In terms of their defined portfolio of work within the charitable trust as, the participants were a mix of operational with some strategic responsibilities though in the main each had a key operational element of the delivery of core services (See Appendix B, p.210). The range of the participating manager's operational responsibilities included;

- Delivery of housing support services in Birmingham to drug and alcohol users

- Implementation and management of a second phase of service provision for drug treatment in shared care with General Practitioners in Birmingham and a new open access service for drug users

- Service and data administration for the delivery of information to the National drug Treatment Monitoring system and subsequent delivery of performance data for commissioners and the National Treatment Agency

- Delivery of Alcohol counselling services, alcohol open access provision and Young People's substance misuse service delivery

None of the participating managers had actually undertaken or been engaged in research prior to this study.

2.6 The Researcher and host

My role within the case study was one of in hosting the space where the conversations would take place with myself as a co researcher. I brought with me in my preunderstanding of the organisation, my organisational development consultancy

experience in the field in developing conversations for change, clinical knowledge in substance misuse, and my experience as a trustee on the board of the charitable trust. In my own consultancy business I have a wealth of experience in undertaking consultancy assignments both internally and externally. I have designed organisational and business development initiatives to maximise business impact, change and develop sustainable improvement interventions. A large proportion of this consultancy experience had been gained through assignments which were undertaken using improvement cycle methodology in the redesign and development of substance misuse and health services. I have also developed strong interpersonal skills gained through my role in clinical work resulting in a deep understanding of human dynamics and proven experience in the clinical application of well being and personal change approaches which I have been translating into my conversational work within organisations. My thinking is also informed and influenced by the literature that I have and am still engaging with as part of my own professional development both within the practice doctorate context and my consultancy practice. I have developed a good understanding from my consultancy practice as to what is needed to create and maximise the development of a positive work place climate through using appreciative and strengths based methodologies. In turn playing to people's strengths and appreciating what they bring to their role releases up untapped resources and potential. This will be expanded upon in more depth separately within my reflective paper.

2.1 Insider Action Researcher

My position within the research study and in the organisation as already referred to earlier in this chapter was that of an 'insider' researcher. I was a trustee on the board and had been for four years. I had also worked in the drug and alcohol sector for twenty years with the last twelve years in consultancy. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) acknowledge that whilst insider AR is an exciting prospect that it can also be daunting for the researcher. Insider AR research has received a lot of critiscm in academic circles in that it lacks rigour and quality because of a lack of objectivity in being so close to research. Insider researchers have the benefit of having a preunderstanding of the organization, its power structures and politics and in knowing the terrain can find ways to manage these (Coughlan, 2007). Conversely this is where this can create tensions for the insider researcher in knowing what to do with the knowledge or situations that are revealed during the research process which may have a potential impact on both the researchers' position and have ramifications for the organisation. As a voluntary trustee on the charitable trust board at the time I was also very much involved in the development of the strategic direction of the charitable trust through board meetings and other additional projects. I had access to documents relating to the development of the organisation and the operations which I gained permission to use. An important part of the insider role is in the managing of the ambiguities and conflicts that may emerge during the research project. This happened at particular points in AR learning group and will be described in more detail later in the findings section of this thesis and within the reflective paper. As an insider researcher being able to connect to a

support network outside of the organization was another important part of managing the tensions that arose during the research and being able to bring in new knowledge and experience. I was a member of the European Appreciative Inquiry Network, the Appreciative Inquiry List serve, a member of the Appreciative Inquiry Commons and had a regular subscription to Bob Dick's AREOL action research programme and learning set which runs four times a year. I was a member of the International Network of Motivational Interviewing Network and part of a virtual international learning community. I was also part of an online AR community of practice facilitated by Bob Dick so had access to resources and knowledge that helped inform my practice and the research. Research supervision provided by my university supervisors was also an important part of supporting my role as an insider researcher and having additional access to further support from colleagues within particular specialist subject areas through communities of practice.

Herr and Anderson (2005) acknowledge that most insider action researchers undertaking an inquiry whilst continuing to carry on with the' rest of our workloads'. This was true for my role in this study as I was undertaking this as part of a part-time Doctorate in Business Administration and trying to balance the competing demands of working full time in a busy consultancy business. The tensions as an insider researcher are very real particularly if the politics that the role can bring with it are not handled well. This is a challenge in itself. As an insider researcher I was already immersed in the organizations business. I had built up knowledge over time about its function and operations and I was very much aware of the changes and challenges that were being faced at the time of the AR research study. The tensions that were being encountered

were part of my reflective practice process which was a key part of the methodology. This will not be covered within this thesis and is fully covered in a separate reflective practice paper written to support the AR Learning Group study as part of this submission.

2.2 Research ethics

The DBA proposal along with the research ethics consent form for participants was ratified at board level before embarking on the engagement process and orientation process with senior managers. The ethics consent form was constructed so as to ensure that the research study met ethical standards as set out by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for Research Ethics (2003, 2009, 2010, and 2012). Both of these key documents set out in writing the standards for undertaking research so as to ensure that; participants were recruited appropriately and that they were provided with information on the study so that they were fully informed and protected during research. In addition, my commitment to ensuring managers were understanding of and engaged with signing the ethics consent forms was as a lived and informed process. Assurance was given to the participants that they would be protected in terms of anonymity both individually and organizationally in the writing up of the account of the research as a thesis. Participation by managers was wholly voluntary and the ethics consent form (See Appendix A) was signed by each participant after a full explanation of what the study would entail and their role within it.

For transparency the consent form also set out the contact details of the researcher and the university supervisors. Information about the research study was included and how the study would benefit the participants and meet the DBA

requirements. Information was clearly set out as to the expectations of participants in terms of their role and expected contribution to the study so that there was a full understanding of what they were agreeing to be involved in. Additionally, the consent form set out a committement to the way participants would be treated, ensuring that they were respected at all times and that due care and attention would be taken to ensure no harm came to the participants as a result of engaging in the research.

The approach to the research, methods of data generation and collection were also fully explained within the document along with the anticipated outcomes and benefits from engaging in the case study. Assurances on data protection and how the data would be securely stored were also set out. The expectations about the participant's contribution in terms of commitment to time and tasks were made explicit. The consent document also explained that participants had a right to withdraw consent at any point meaning that they could physically withdraw from the research. The code of research ethics web address was included so that the full SERA guidelines could be accessed in PDF format by the participants. The consent form was signed by both the participant and myself and a copy given to participants with a further copy kept with the research file for examination.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter sets out review and discuss the literature in relation to a range of key theories and concepts that have informed the AR study as it evolved with particular reference to the theories of Organisational Development Change, Motivation, Leadership and Management learning in the workplace. These overarching concepts are then narrowed down into further sub headings for further exploration and this also reflects my line of thinking as it developed during the research process. Throughout the review I am weaving in and linking back into theory and practice, in relation to the research utilising an iterative approach. Whilst comprehensive it is also broad as the review covers additional framing concepts that emerged during the research and writing up process which informed my thinking. Emergent thinking included; how to develop an appreciative work environment, the impact of a negative manager's mindset on staff, positive and negative detractors in emotions, how they manifest in the workplace and supporting mental well being as core components to developing a positive work climate. Some of the early literature reviewed was important in informing the development of the AR Learning group in relation to the learning climate. Though as the research progressed, the themes that emerged from conversations which prompted me to look at other areas of literature which continued beyond the research study into the write up of this thesis. In terms of reviewing the literature in relation to AR, this has been situated within the methodology chapter as this formed a key part of the research approach. The limitations, critiscms and strengths of theories are explored in relation to

practice and are discussed with relevance to the charity delivering public health services in the drug and alcohol service sector in England.

I will open up this chapter by looking at a range of literature which offers different perspectives as to what Organisational Development (OD) is its relational humanist underpinnings and its applicability to practice. The concept of OD is considered with particular reference in its application to the charitable trust and the not for profit sector delivering drug and alcohol services in health and social care. The charitable trust and many voluntary sector organisations in the field are distinctly different in size and make up from the larger scale public sector organisations such as the NHS and local authorities in the UK. Health and social care delivery has become increasingly inextricably linked through the development of integrated commissioning processes. This has resulted in an increased need for partnership working as part of delivering wider health and social care programmes to meet government reforms in the UK. The substance misuse sector has led the way with creative ways of contracting to deliver integrated solutions. I will go onto discuss what is understood about main theories in relation to change which goes hand in hand with OD. I will also consider how differing theoretical literature perspectives can impact on the construction and content of OD interventions. This is fleshed out when discussing the two different theoretical perspectives of Diagnostic and Dialogic OD (Bushe, 2009) that have emerged in recent journal articles and OD texts and the comparing and contrasting these are described.

This leads onto a broader discussion as to how emotions are relationally experienced at work and have an impact on organisational climate. I will also broaden the conversation as to how the experience of change in practice can have a

negative or positive impact on the emotional experience of employees as a result. Taking this one stage further I discuss what the results can be of experiencing negative manager mindset and behaviours and how this could impact work climate and on employee motivation and engagement. The results of negativity deficit based conversations both spoken and acted out within the workplace can further lead to job dissatisfaction, stress and de motivation which ultimately can impact employees and on the outcomes of health behaviour change programme delivery.

In the second part of the literature review I move onto to discuss the two concepts of leadership and management in the context of the relational nature of work. I will further look at the role of conversation and interaction as relational phenomena and will describe this as a social experience in leadership. I will also discuss the concepts of motivation and engagement in relation leadership and management responsibilities in creating a positive workplace climate. I will then finally cover literature on positive psychology and present recent research and thinking as to how developing strengths based working climate can improve the motivation and engagement of staff. I will explore how a positive mindset and conversational actions from a person in a leadership and management position are important to developing a healthy and workplace environment which contributes to a motivated workforce. This kind of approach can in turn impact positively on the experience and performance of staff and service users. There is also a brief examination of relevant research to the sector from other studies that are transferrable and where this has implications for leadership and management development within health and social care workplace settings in particular within the drug and alcohol sector.

3.1 Organisational Development (OD)

OD is examined here as a concept in the context of its historical theoretical beginnings and more recent developments. I will also look at research in relation to OD and its relevance from similar organisational areas of health and social care delivery.

3.1.1   OD research in the Drug and Alcohol Sector

To date very little has been published in regards to OD studies and the impact on organisations delivering in the sector as a result of the increased investment into the sector in the drug and alcohol sector in the UK. There are four specific pieces of research of which three were predominantly focused into Human Resource Management practices in the voluntary sector between 2005 and 2009 from the same authors. All three studies were large scale. First was a Training Needs Analysis conducted by Cranfield University conducted in 2003 substance misuse treatment services in 2003 (Mills and Parry, 2003). The outcomes of this research in relation to management development has already been examined within the introduction (pp. 16-17) and gave a clear message that managers wanted training and development to be able t manage and lead services well. The second piece of research in 2009 was concerned with the voluntary sector responses to increased resourcing challenges on the delivery drug and alcohol services (Parry and Kelliher, 2009) and the impact on human resource management which was published after the completion of this AR research study. A mixture of both postal survey questions and interviews with human resource managers

and Drug Action Team managers were undertaken. The results showed that the charitable organisations had made progress in developing human resource management 'good practice' by having a range of human resource policies in place. Some progress had been made in achieving quality standards in drug and alcohol services (QuADS, 1999), although it was reported that many struggled to recruit and retain suitable staff.

A further key piece of research from the United States that also informs OD for drug and alcohol service delivery was undertaken in the UK by Texas Christian University in 2011 (Lehman et al, 2011). This was also published after the completion of the research study for this thesis and has relevance. Research was undertaken with 44 voluntary and statutory drug and alcohol treatment services in and around Manchester, Birmingham, and Wolverhampton. Client readiness for change was examined within services and counsellors were assessed for their perceptions of the service they worked for, their own professional functioning and needs. The conclusion made links between the organisational health of the service and client engagement. Drug and Alcohol findings (a leading ezine on drug and alcohol research in the UK) review of the research in 2011 stated that;

This work, which represents the most wide-ranging investigation of the organisational health of British drug and alcohol treatment services to date, found clients engaged best when services fostered communication, participation and trust among staff, had a clear mission, but were open to new ideas and practices (Drug and Alcohol Findings, 2011).

This research has implications for managers of health and well being services such as drug and alcohol service delivery in terms of developing the kind of climate with employees that fosters these key attributes. Most of the research undertaken within drug and alcohol service delivery has looked into the effectiveness of medical prescribing and psychosocial treatments. This has been a missed the opportunity to look

at what constitutes positive organisational development approaches to help support and develop the staff delivering these services. Studies have also been undertaken to look at the impact and outcomes of the clinical programmes on clients and clinicians impact on clients in terms interventions on treatment outcomes. The conundrum of how to successfully engage people in effective conversations about health behaviour and lifestyle changes into recovery is the main focus of service delivery in drug and alcohol services. And yet very little research has been undertaken in regards to what kinds of conversations do the managers and leaders of these services need to have to support their own professional development or how to contribute to providing the most conducive people management practices to create a positive working climate.

3.1.2   What is OD and its origins

The theory of Organisational development (OD) has evolved into an interdisciplinary field drawn and developed from variety of schools of thought including psychology, business, engineering, sociology and human resources. Positive Psychology and Positive Organisational Behaviour are more recent developments in thinking. OD is rooted in its humanist values which emerged from its classical foundations and was first associated with the work in social and behavioural psychology of Lewin and Tavistock (Jones & Brazzel, 2014). Some of the early ideas explored by Lewin (1951) in regards to the study of social psychology were focused into change, resistance to change, group dynamics and open systems which still remains strongly represented within the literature. This work has been credited in enabling the shift from the scientific based management practices associated with the work of Frederick Taylor (1915) towards a more humanistic approach drawing on the fields of social psychology,

psychology and behavioural sciences. The metaphor of organisation as a machine has dominated the thinking behind scientific management where OD has been strongly situated until there was shift in thinking towards the development of humanist dialogic approaches such as Action Research). Business and management language today is still littered with words that refer back to this era. The relevance of Lewin's contribution is important here in terms of the translation of OD from theory into practice as someone who wanted to create spaces for conversations about change. In particular with health and social care service delivery as this is far removed from a manufacturing environment.

Within the literature there are many different definitions as to what OD is described as, as a concept and this becomes confusing when attempting to translate into the real world of practice. Theory on OD not only appears within business OD texts and Social Psychology, it is also strongly featured within texts on Organisational Behaviour. Different theoretical models have evolved within the literature and tend to have a different emphasis on what is seen as important elements of what OD is. It is also dependent on the author's professional background as to how this has influenced their thinking and the construction of different models of OD. OD has been described in a number of ways such as;

'OD is a planned and systematic approach to enabling sustained organisation performance through the involvement of its people.' (CIPD, 2012)

OD is a systematic process for applying behavioural science principles and practices in organizations to increase individual and organization effectiveness (French & Bell, 1999).

Organisation Development is a planned process of change in organisations culture through the utilization of behavioural science technology, research and theory. (Burke, 1982, p.10)

An effort (1) planned, (2) organisation-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organisation effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organisation's 'processes', using behavioural science knowledge. (Beckhard, 1969, p.9)

There continues to be no real consensus within the field as to what OD actually is (Marshak, 2014), however it is clear that behavioural science and psychology has had a strong influence within the construction of the language that explains existing definitions. Cheung – Judge and Holbeche (2011 17) suggest that there a number of common characteristics that help construct a framework for thinking about how OD works in practice. These suggested core characteristics are;

- System wide;

- Made up of planned change efforts;

- Focused on the total system and not just one aspect of it

- Targeted at the human side of the enterprise;

- Aimed at improving organization effectiveness

However within these characteristics there is an inherent assumption that *change* within OD is viewed as something that needs to be being planned and episodic and does not take into account perspectives where *change* is seen as a continuous, complex and an emergent part of organisational social life. An example of this has been the changes the charitable trust was going through as a result of externally driven change from the government, National Treatment Agency and the growing commissioning focus which was shaping needs led service delivery.

3.1.3   OD and the dominant grand narratives in theory

Garrow (2009) highlighted in a paper written for the Institute for Employment Studies in the UK that there has been a turn in thinking in OD back towards more humanistic practice. This has coincided with a shift in the narrative from the metaphor of organisations as machine and has been influenced strongly by the increasingly dominant discourse of the behavioural sciences.   More recently the description of organisation as a meaning making system has emerged as part of constructionist thinking (Bushe, 2014). The development of more humanistic approaches to OD is attributed to the work of Lewin (1951) who was a Gestalt Psychologist and the work of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in the UK. This can be traced back to 1960's and this began a shift in thinking about OD practice.   Positive outcomes were further attributed to these emergent humanist practices and were supported by reports of increased job satisfaction and a reduction in employee turnover which began to evidence and reinforce the relevance of this approach.

The emergence of social constructionist thinking and narratives in its emergence has developed another perspective that builds on the work of the humanist movement. Emerging within the literature during the last 35 years social constructionism has challenged dominant ideologies to establishing new ways of thinking about OD as being relational (Burr, 2003; Berger & Luckman, 1996; Gergen, 2009). The biggest shift is from the language of medicalisation in OD towards a more social and relational way of conversationally describing the world. This shift in thinking about human systems and organizing as ways of relating is providing another way of viewing OD through the lens of social relationships. Social constructionism has also provided a platform for opening

up thinking in terms of mental health and psychology challenging old paradigms that were medically focused. Social constructionism embraces diversity and difference acknowledging multiple perspectives with no one specific way of viewing the world. The emphasis in social constructionism is on social relationships in organizations. Organizing is described as being constructed through meaning making and conversations (Burr, 2003; Berger & Luckmann 1996; Gergen, 2009). It has also led to the questioning of the existence of an objective reality which counters the dominant grand narrative within posititivist scientific community that reality is out there. I have covered social constructionism in more depth previously in chapter 2 as part of the justification for the methodological approach within this case study. Thought leaders in relational and conversational practice such as Patricia Shaw (2002), Robert Marshak & Gervase Bushe (2009) have challenged the positivistic dominant discourse that organisations are rational and predictable (Garrow, 2009). This has had an impact in opening up new ways of thinking about creating conversational spaces and dialogic methods within OD such as AI, open space and world cafe. Marshak & Grant (2011) suggests that in recent years interventions to 'change conversations' in organisations have become an important focus area for OD.

3.1.4   *Moving beyond defintitions to a mindset and philosophy in working relationally in OD*

OD it is argued is in a state of transition (Garrow, 2009; Marshak, 2014) and is evolving into a rich tapestry of practices and perspectives. Marshak (2014) further argues that there is a need to move beyond multiple definitions of

OD as they are not necessarily helpful in explaining what OD is. Rather Marshak (2014, suggests that it would be better to get a better understanding of required dimensions of knowledge and values a practitioner needs that will produce the practice of OD. Marshak (2014, 4 - 6) further suggests that there are three key areas of knowledge are required by OD practitioners which are an understanding of;

1. Social Systems

2. The How's and Whys of change

3. The role of the a Third-Party Change Agent (OD Practitioner)

Marshak (2014) advocates that an OD practitioner's mindset is one where there is an understanding of organisations as a social system which is a lens for understanding organisation and organising. In addition an OD practitioner needs an understanding of the range of how's and why's of change to inform the methodology and subsequent interventions. In practice the third area of knowledge of the Third Party Change Agent may not always necessarily be represented as a specific role in this way. OD practice is not necessarily sited within the exclusive domain of a Third Party Change Agent within all organisations and maybe an insider as discussed in the methodology chapter earlier. OD interventions could be undertaken from within a variety of different roles such as; through human resources function, within general operational management or as in my case within the charity as a board member.

On examining the more recent literature, two differing theoretical perspectives are emerging in terms of current thinking about OD and suggest there is a

fundamental shift in mindset required from traditional deficit based problematised approaches. Bushe (2009) writing on these two perspectives defines them as Diagnostic OD and Dialogic OD. Diagnostic OD is generally described as being focused into anlysing an open system and consists of a process of diagnosing issues, gathering different types of data with a view to putting together change programmes as interventions to resolve the problems identified. Most OD interventions constructed within this perspective have been based around planned change initiatives with the assumption underlying this that change is static rather than being dynamic. Analysis and problem solving is described as being at the centre of the intervention. Within this perspective this does not take into account the impact on an organisation of change outside of the sphere of control like externally driven change. Changes in government policy and public funding streams are a good example. This perspective also comes from what is described as a deficit based position looking at what the problems are within organisations and how can we fix them rather than what is working well as in Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 2005). The literature evidences many different theoretical models developed for Diagnostic OD by leading thinkers and practitioners in the field (Lewin 1951, Burke – Litwin 1992; Pascal & Athos, 1981). Theories such as AR grew from observation of group work in practice within the field of social psychology; others have grown from theoretical foundations and not from practice. Generally the change effort is described as being aimed at an individual, group and whole organisational level. Interventions are generally designed to identify and resolve problems or address the need for change in the organisation. Bushe (2009) argues that OD is now developing in a different way to how it was originally intended and that the

value base that it was built on is no longer consistent with the some of the original, basic premises of OD which were much more humanistic. Bushe (2013, 1) suggests instead that;

Rather than a focus on open systems, Dialogic OD is based, in part, on a view of organizations as dialogic systems where individual, group, and organizational actions result from socially constructed realities created and sustained by the prevailing narratives, stories, metaphors, and conversations through which people make meaning about their experiences.

Dialogic OD is influenced by foundational OD practice, social constructionism, complexity sciences and the linguistic turn in social sciences. It is viewed as being an emergent process rather than one that is directed as within a Diagnostic OD approach which is strongly influenced by the behaviourist school of thought. Bushe (2013, 14) argues that the design of the change process has to ensure that two key things happen:

a. *The people who will ultimately embody and carry out the change are engaged, along with leaders and other stakeholders, in discussing what changes ought to occur.*
b. *Members self identify, individually and in groups, the changes they want to take responsibility for.*

The position of the OD practitioner in the dialogic process is more aligned to hosting a space rather than directing it as with an OD facilitator (Cantore, 2013). This is in direct contrast to Diagnostic OD where the role of an OD practitioner or manager is seen more as the expert in terms of knowledge and is often prescriptive in approach. The traditional boundaries of OD are challenged in this context as Dialogic OD values the voices and the expertise of the people engaging in the process as a shared experience which is much more aligned to collaborative AR. Bushe argues that the

change focus has an emphasis within Diagnostic OD on changing behaviours and what people do whereas Dialogic OD has an emphasis on changing mindsets and what people think (Bushe & Marshak, 2014). Holman (2013) describes Dialogic OD practice succinctly in that she argues that;

Change occurs through changing the conversations in the system (Holman, 2013, p18)

Holman goes on to argue that in the face of complex and conflicting challenges in social systems. Dialogic OD offers a promising approach through the conversational engagement of those people working in organisations.

3.1.5   *Critiscms and tensions in OD theories and practice*

Marshak (2014, 18) suggests that there are a number of tensions and ongoing dilemmas within OD today. Some of the critiscms of OD have been that it is under defined and that the concept is too broad in that it describes a multitude of approaches rather than having a specific focus. This is also advantageous in that it has provided the field with rich and diverse practice. In addition that there has been considerable overlap in the activities and interventions listed in most OD textbooks (Worley, 2001).   On encountering the literature there is a sense that it is also difficult to define what OD can do for different types of organisations because it describes such a broad array of interventions.   The literature also leads to questions as to how an OD practitioner or manager can hope to learn become competent in undertaking interventions with such a wide ranging menu of approaches and practices. Marshak asserts that OD is both a simple and complex field of practice and states that once values, skills and

knowledge are understood and mastered then OD will be so much more straight forward (Marshak, 2014, 22).

Another important area of departure within OD is how change is viewed. The use of a particular change theory has a direct correlation to the choice of OD interventions used and is still very much dominated in many OD texts by Lewin (1951). From a critical perspective the idea that change can only occur through controlled and episodic interventions within the workplace ignores the reality that change is happening continuously through conversations.

OD has also been criticized for being too 'touchy feely' (Brazzel, 2011) because of its strong humanistic values and that there is an inherent tension in balancing those values with for example the business goals. There is a further critiscm that OD is based strongly on Western values so there is a question as to whether it can be translated and applied in other countries and cultures. Though it is argued that because of the values of OD described as; respect, inclusion, democracy and empowerment for example, that these can be transferred in other settings. So arguably it is the value and philosophical base that affords adaptation of OD interventions sensitively to other countries and cultures.

In this next section of this literature review I will consider the importance of taking account of emotions at work as managers in practice and link this in with the impact of a negative manager's mindset and behaviour on an employee's emotional and psychosocial well being. I will also cover how considering how emotion in the workplace can inform OD interventions to improve the health and well being of staff at work.

3.2 Emotions as relational

Waldron (2007, 65) has suggested in the first instance that there needs to be a reframing of emotion as a relational phenomenon which has an impact on how a manager needs to take responsibility for their psychological impact relationally in what they say and do when working with people. Hornstrup et al (2012, 51) assert that emotions are a social construction and are therefore relational. Hornstrup et al (2015, 51) go on to say that the systemic-constructionist perception of emotions is presenting new ways of understanding emotions as a way of connecting and communicating. This is particularly relevant to public service delivery and in particular drug treatment. Thinking in this way opens up new possibilities for considering how to work with the impact of emotion within organisations as a more natural part of communicating. Hornstrup (2015) suggest that the three main principles which can be considered in practice when dealing with the potential of challenging emotional interactions are;

1. To meet

2. To put it in perspective

3. To co-create new perspectives.

So creating a conversational space where appreciation of the other person or person's perspective could develop into a deeper exploration of what is happening helping foster the co – creation of new perspectives.

Waldron (2007) also suggests that emotion can be a resource through which organisational relationships are constructed and created in the context of performance. The interdependent nature of work roles means that there is also a need for shared or collective emotional performances. This is important for example within the charitable trust where a collective performance accumulates into an overall performance outcome such as the collation of NDTMS data for drug and alcohol services to meet national quality outcomes. A good example of this is also within sports coaching in teams to harness a winning spirit.

Bolton (2005) has been critical about the way that emotion is written about within organisational research in so far as there is;

A general lack of attention given to the subject of emotion as anything other than an irrational force that is to be developed and channelled into certain forms by management. (Bolton, 2005 p.22)

In the last 10 years the relationship between emotions and the experience of work have featured more in OD literature. One area that has relevance to managers, is the link between a negative management and leadership style and how this impacts on employee's mental health and emotional experience. Poor management and leadership mindset and behaviour can result in having an impact on people's mental health by creating; feelings of helplessness and alienation, stress and distress, burnout and depression (Carson & Barling, 2008; Donaldson & Feilder et al, 2009). A manager interacting negatively with an employee and being overly critical or the managers style of leadership which over uses control can result in a poor relational response and increased stress on behalf of the employee (Carson & Barling, 2008). Waldron (2007) talks about these incidents as flashpoints within work relationships.

From a practice perspective constant negative and critical management conversations can also impact heavily on the workplace resulting in the development of a toxic workplace climate (Lipman – Blumen, 2005; Frost, 2007), increased employee stress, sickness and absence. Employers are also responsible under law in the UK for preventing harassment and bullying behaviour in the workplace and reducing work related stress. It is the responsibility of managers and employees to ensure that work relationships are respectful, collaborative and built on trust.   The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitrary Service (ACAS, 2013) give a number of examples of what bullying and harassing behaviour include:

- spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone
- exclusion or victimisation
- unfair treatment
- deliberately undermining a competent worker by constant criticism

To put the impact of harassment and bullying behaviour and its context, ACAS (2013) reported that in a study in 2011 of 6,000 staff revealed that six out of 10 public sector workers in the UK had either been bullied themselves or had witnessed bullying in their workplace. Unfortunately the costs to a business are high in a number of ways such as low morale, high employee turnover, absenteeism and inefficiency let alone legal challenges.

Over the last two decades there has been a shift from the emphasis on the impact of the physical environment at work on health towards taking into account the psychosocial factors (Fielder & Podro, 2012). Stress has emerged as one of these key areas at the forefront of questions about the impact of manager negative

behaviours that contribute to stress in the workplace. People management interventions are increasingly moving towards the supporting and enhancing a person's well being at work with a number of strategies in recent years that have helped this shift such as; Dame Carol Black's review of the health of Britain's working age population (2008), the Mental Health employment strategy (2009), changes in employment laws regarding equality and discrimination and health and safety. The following definition is used to describe well being quoted from the Foresight Mental Capital and Well Being Project (2008) and cited within Public Health Guideline 22 (2009);

> *'Mental wellbeing is a dynamic state in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to their community. It is enhanced when an individual is able to fulfill their personal and social goals and achieve a sense of purpose in society (2008)*

Never has health and well being in the workplace been so increasingly at the forefront of day to day management and leadership as it is today. More so in the public service sector where the impact of tightening budgets is being felt and greater demands for higher quality service delivery with less resources. The Chartered Institute for Professional Development (CIPD, 2012) and Health & Safety Executive (HSE) published standards for managing work related stress. Research evidenced that there was a direct correlation to support the use of management standards approach to support tackling workplace stress (Kerr, McHugh and McRory, 2009 574). In addition an online stress management tool was made available in partnership with AXA in 2013 which is aimed at promoting and developing positive manager mindset and behaviours in the workplace to reduce stress (CIPD, 2012). Guidance has been published from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2009) for implementation in the workplace and supports the promotion of mental well being through productive and

healthy work conditions. A set of key recommendations emerged from this recent body of work related to the development of line managers ensuring there is recognition as to the importance of this role in supporting health and well being in the work place. The actions that are recommended also set out as part of positive mindset and managerial behaviours and competencies such as;

- *Promoting a management style that encourages participation, delegation, constructive feedback, mentoring and coaching*

- *Ensuring that policies for the recruitment, selection, training and development of managers recognise and promote these skills*

- *Ensuring that managers are able to motivate employees and provide them with the training and support they need to develop their performance and job satisfaction*

- *Increasing understanding of how management style and practices can help to promote the mental wellbeing of employees and keep their stress to a minimum*

- *Ensuring that managers are able to identify and respond with sensitivity to employees' emotional concerns, and symptoms of mental health problems*

- *Ensuring that managers understand when it is necessary to refer an employee to occupational health services or other sources of help and support*

- *Considering using the competency framework developed by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the Health and Safety Executive and Investors in People as a tool for management development*

(National Institute for Clinical Excellence guideline PH 22, 2009)

A further report based on research undertaken by Aston University and Rand (2009) has also supported the advancement of well being strategies for employees in the workplace. In particular within the NHS links between well being, better practice and ultimately better outcomes of service delivery for patients have been established (Michie and West, 2009). The research clearly demonstrates the implications

of maintaining or improving the health and well being of NHS staff in terms of the benefits both financially and in terms of improved quality of patient experience. Supervision and development of staff are at the heart of this. The core business of organisations such as the charitable trust is the delivery of health and well being programmes for service users who come to services looking for help with their drug and alcohol problems. So in terms of gaining benefits for organizations such as the charitable trust, the idea of well being needs to be at the centre of OD developments and is an important area for consideration. Working in a more emotionally aware way as a manager who coaches and brings out the best in people, will provide the foundations for more positive and productive working relationships with employees and an improved performance.   Armstrong (2004, 11) asserts that every organisation is an emotional place because it is a human invention. Kiefer (2005) cited within Smollman (2012) whilst reviewing studies on emotions in organisations found that most of emotional responses cited within texts were negative one's.   The development of applications in positive psychology approaches such as strengths based coaching (CAPP, 2015; Biswas – Diener, 2010) may start to create a shift in thinking in organisations and managers minds about the importance of generating and harnessing positive emotions to energise individuals and teams.

Fineman (2007, 102) suggests that within work relationships the required ability of mangers to work with emotions should be part of a range of skills or competencies. In particular in the field of health and social care where emotional competence is becoming more important feature in conducting work relationships. There is a need to acknowledge that there is a clear role for managers in understanding and

working with emotions in the workplace and this is becoming much more relevant to management and leadership today. In particular in understanding how in practice creating a positive work climate is linked with improving the quality of service delivery in health and personal change programmes.

Most models of management and change are represented and informed by logic and rationality. Emotions are not considered in most of the literature in management except in a number of recent discrete texts on the subject area. Ideas have dominated the literature and emotional control or emotional leverage on behalf of a manager has arguably been the main discussion of texts rather than how working with emotion positively can enable an organisation. More has been written about the effects of negative behaviour and emotions in relation to work than harnessing the benefits of developing positive life and work enriching emotions that benefit workplaces. The development of workplace guidance on well being from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (PH22, 2009) in the UK demonstrates the shift in thinking in the UK. The links between stress and emotional ill health have been established. So the focus now is on well being, the steps that can be taken to reduce the prevalence of ill health in relation to work. There is a greater need for managers to have a better understanding of people's emotions and their emotional impact on the workplace from both a positive and a negative sense. There is a need from a management practice perspective to be being more aware of the emotional responses of people who are experiencing the constant drive of change initiatives in public service contracting and commissioning such as the charitable trust. However further research needs to be undertaken to look at what positive

emotions can do for the workplace in terms of successful in change initiatives and enhancing performance and innovation.

3.2.1   Perspectives on change and motivation

There are a number of key theories about the two concepts of motivation and change. These two concepts are not distinctly separate as together they can create a set of conditions that enable change to occur whether individual, as a group or an organisation. Whether that change is episodic or continuous is an area of contention. However the reality is that from an individual, team and organizational perspective the trail is littered with change initiatives that have not worked. Some of this it could be argued is because of the ways that change and motivation are thought about and the theories that have dominated have in fact limited exploring other possibilities.

Organisational change

Organisational change is mainly interpreted in two ways in the literature as being in a state of either *episodic* or *continuous*. Brazzel (2011) writing on organization change theories and models in OD argues that there are five theories to be considered which have differing assumptions and these will potentially inform OD interventions;

- *Adaptive and Unpredictable Change Theory* where the change is assumed to be unplanned so organisations adapt and grow to survive;

- *Planned Change Theory* where action is taken by the organisational senior managers in collaboration with other members of the organisation.

- *Developmental and Staged-Based Change Theory* where change occurs as sequence of phases in organisational life.

- *Conflictive and Power- Based Change Theory* where change results from tension and conflict.

- *Narrative- Based Change Theory* where organisations interpret their world and construct reality on an ongoing basis.

(Brazzel, 2011, 255)

Brazzel (2011) argues that having an awareness of each of these five theories and different perspectives gives the OD practitioner different lenses with which to view organizational change. Weik & Quinn (1999) were critical of the idea of a linear change as suggested by Lewin (1951), unfreeze – change – refreeze model and shifted the emphasis from episodic change towards the idea of continuous change as a theory. Lewin is also credited with coming up with the term action research in 1948 as a method of addressing social action and change. Based on a cycle of steps which culminates in taking action for change, this model has become a core research approach and is at the heart of this study. Action research has been discussed in detail within the methodology chapter 2. At the heart of these perspectives though is a belief that organisations both suffer from both inertia and resistance to change which is a deficit based world view. This is contrary to the belief in AI for example where the OD practitioner is looking for what gives organisations life (Cooperrider, 2005). Cummings & Worley (2009 29) propose a mixed approach to change that includes Lewin's Planned Change Model, AR and a Positive Model adapted from Appreciative Inquiry (Appreciative Inquiry see methodology chapter 2). Cummings & Worley (2009) criticise

both the Lewin and AR Model as being deficit based in language and approach as it focuses on organisational problems and how these can be solved. The positive model they argue focuses on what the organisation is doing right although does not ignore what might not be working so well. Cummings & Worley acknowledge this approach to change as being consistent with a growing movement in the social sciences as part of the linguistic turn. However on re reading Cummings & Worley they also advocate the development of a positive approach to envisioning change and yet seem to counter this by suggesting that there still needs to be an organisational diagnosis to find the problems as a basis to plan change efforts on. There is confusion in this methodological approach.

In the real world of work, planned change is not always necessarily a reality as this can be occurring as a direct result of other drivers from inside the organisation which are not always known or influenced from outside the organisation. For example in this case study managers were working in dispersed delivery sites with complex commissioning and contracting processes. Managers were trying to respond to the plethora of demands as a result of external changes in health and social care delivery which were impacting internally and were beyond their sphere of control. So a certain amount of change flexibility was required to build in systems and processes to meet the demands. Some of the many externally drivers having an impact on the organisation were; changes in legislation from a people management perspective, changes government legislation in terms of social care funding, increased investment into the drug and alcohol sector and demands to keep up with gathering data for a national database linked into funding and contract delivery to commissioners. In terms of the literature and change models is that there is a gap in thinking as to the lack of consideration as to the emotional

impact of change on people within organisations and the range of emotional responses that this can generate.

Change as relational

An alternative model proposed in thinking about change comes from the social constructionist perspective suggests that change is situated in conversations. Dialogic OD as proposed by Marshak & Grant (2011) is part of this developing theory. Marshak and Grant suggest that there are two main concepts in thinking about OD which are Diagnostic OD and Dialogic OD.

Marshak & Grant (2011, 3) argue that in;

Changing the existing dominant discourse (s) will lead to organisational and behavioural change.

Ford & Ford (1995) also argued in an earlier article that communication plays a role in the production of change and put forward the idea that this occurs through the act of conversation in relation to each other. Ford & Ford (1995) also suggested that conversations that managers have with their teams can create the focus for change and this can result in successful intentional change within the workplace. Shaw (2002) adds to this idea of change through conversation in her seminal work on this key area. Shaw (2002) talks about having less structured conversations and the value of 'just talking', being free to work in the moment and not being afraid of talking without an end result. The emphasis from Shaw (2002) is on the quality of the exploratory conversation allowing you to go into places you may not have thought of before, free flowing. There are some similarities in lines of thinking evolving within the psychology of health

behaviour and personal change that inform developing change communication approaches. *Motivational Interviewing (MI)* is the talking approach that has been used successfully as an intervention for *personal change* (Miller and Rollnick, 200, 2013). MI originates from within the practice *of personal change* and has something to offer thinking about conversations that help create personal change. In the application of MI, engagement and respect for the client's worldview are conveyed as key elements of the conversational process. Resistance is not viewed negatively; rather it is seen as a reason for the client to sustain their current position of thinking. This is seen as the practitioners need to change the conversational emphasis to get the conversation flowing again. This is contrary to thinking about resistance within traditional OD models. This method seeks to enable the conversation to flow again by gaining a deeper understanding of the other person's worldview so as to find a way forward.

Change for the purpose of this research is viewed as relational and situated in the act of conversation that occurs between people. The focus is on a conversation that is not deficit based and negative in focus towards an appreciative approach used to create change through a Dialogic OD intervention. Conversation is a core part of making sense of the world in organisation and creating meaning (Weick, 1995). Skillful articulation in conversing is an important skill which will create the right conditions conducive for change conversations and acts in making sense of the lived work e

Motivation and change

Turning to motivation in relation to change, dominant theories about work motivation are embedded within organisational theory texts originating from psychology. Bolton (2005, 20) cites that Herzberg (1966), Maslow (1954) and McGregor (1960) stress 'organisational man' as 'social man'. In terms of what is required to motivate people at work the focus is on developing coaching approaches, creating more opportunities for collaborative contribution, increasing autonomy and control and receiving recognition. These are viewed as important ways of working with people today and that monetary incentives are not necessarily the main driver for employee commitment. This is especially the case within health and social care and the voluntary sector, where contributing vocationally is viewed as part of a greater social purpose. Concepts of motivation are tied into a number of key lines of questioning such as;

- What motivates a person?

- How does motivation change and shift?

- What helps with or gets in the way of people being motivated?

Mullins (2007) suggests that there are competing theories that attempt to explain the concept of motivation at work and that these are divided into two main areas; content and process. Content theories have an emphasis on what motivates a person through identifying what people's needs and strengths are and the goals that they want to pursue. Process theories are more focused into the actual process of motivation such as expectancy based models and goal theory. Other theories include Herzberg's two factor theory (what satisfies from what causes dissatisfaction), McClelland's achievement

motivation theory (need for achievement power and to be liked), McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y (where the managers assumptions matter as to how they will respond and treat employees). Hackman & Oldman's (1975) theory for example also focuses into the design of the jobs that can make a difference to an employee's motivation. Motivation is also generally referred to as being either 'intrinsic' (from within the person) or extrinsic (externally driven). Deci, Ryan and Keoster (1999) in a Meta analysis study on the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation and came to the conclusion that in fact there was a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation.

From a critical perspective Roberts (2008, 57) argues that the knowledge that managers have about motivation theories gives them the power to use the theory or ignore it. The impact of manager's behaviour and mindset is a major factor as to how motivated or demotivated employees may be in the workplace. Managers can and do misuse their position power in the workplace and this can create a deficit based negative work climate. Roberts (2008) suggests that the unspoken story about motivation is actually about power. Mullin's (2008) points out that whilst theories of motivation offer different perspectives on explaining what may motivate a person, the dominant theories and assumptions still need to be questioned. An example cited by Townley (1994) on power, ethics and gender bias deconstructs the validity of some of the key research studies informing organisational behaviour in particular Maslow's hierarchy of needs; A Theory of Human Motivation (1943). Townley is particularly critical as to how universal statements were made from the research undertaken as part of the Hawthorn Studies. She goes onto say that statements have been used as the basis for inferences for

outcomes of other research studies even though the population recruited for the groups were *just male*. Townley (1994, 91) citing Cullen (1992) is critical of Maslow's model of needs (1943);

Some of the more blatant voyeuristic and sexist stereotyping on motivation and categorization of self actualisation, not only remained unnoticed, but formed the basis of future theorizing (Cullen, 1992)

Further critiscms exist as to the effectiveness of these theories, and the power relations inherent within them. A critical question here is in whose interests do these theories serve? On the one hand you would hope that from a humanist perspective that these theories help inform how you can coach and get the best out of the people you work with. On the other hand inherent within management is the issue of the potential of misuse in exercising management power and control. Other factors that have not been considered wthin theories in relation to individual motivations are meaning and values which are often situational and relational. Levels of motivation can vary between different individuals and at different times. Finally there are critiscms as to the applicability of these theories to the real world of practice. For example motivation is not static state within a person and both internal and external experiences can cause a change in motivational state depending on the situation.

More recent way of thinking about motivation is through the concept of engagement. The Chartered Institute for Professional Development (2012) defines employee engagement as follows:

'Being focused in what you do (thinking), feeling good about yourself in your role and the organisation (feeling), and acting in a way that demonstrates commitment to the organisational values and objectives (acting).'(Lewis et al, 2012 4)

The Chartered Institute for Professional Development (2012) funded research which brought together two existing frameworks in relation to enhancing employee engagement and reducing stress at work. The outcome of this research was to develop one framework; managing for sustainable employee engagement. A set of competencies were developed from the research focused into enhancing positive manager thinking and behaviours in the workplace. The evidence on engagement and well being is abundantly clear. As previously argued it is the case that positive employee engagement is important for performance although this will be unsustainable without consideration for employee well being (CIPD, 2012; Fielder & Podro, 2012). The experience of positive manager behaviours and thinking are cited as being important to positive employee engagement through promoting well being and reducing the risk of stress manifesting in the workplace (Kerr, McHugh and McRory, 2009).

3.3 Leadership and Management as relating

Linking through the previous key areas already discussed within this literature review there is the common thread being drawn through of relating and connectedness with each other in the workplace. This is particularly relevant to management and leadership in terms of enhancing the engagement of staff in their work to meet the desired outcomes in service delivery. I will move onto discuss some of the literature on leadership and management as relating. Some of this I have already covered in some of the key areas that are identified as being transferrable to leadership and management in the previous OD literature review.

Despite the many descriptions of what leadership is, there are no generally agreed definitions and little agreement about the best strategies for developing leadership in the workplace (Bolden, 2004; Northouse, 2013). There is no consensus either as to whether there are differences in leadership and management processes. This lack of an agreed definition has given rise to many interpretations of leadership development practices over time. Traditional leadership has focused on an individual's traits, skills, and knowledge, whilst transformational leadership has focused on developing leaders who can develop followers (Northouse, 2013). The plethora of public sector government modernisation reforms that have been underway since 1990's has had an impact where new ways of organising, managing and leading are required. The impact of reforms have been particularly felt within the not for profit sector as more charities have developed and grown through taking on work in health and social care delivery. There is no one size fits all model of leadership and what works in one organisation will not necessarily translate through into another as the individual organisational nuances may require different approaches. More forward looking and creative ways of managing and leading are needed as organisations decentralise, work is geographically dispersed and decision making falls closer to the frontline. Large scale changes within organisations that deliver health and social care in England are already underway. Though interestingly hierarchical structures within the NHS and local authorities are still prevalent and the norm. For a manager, developing the skills and ability to lead and coach people through continuous rather than episodic change are paramount. The ability to work with organisational complexity both within and outside in terms of other influential partnerships and stakeholders is also an important part of

management and leadership today. The abilities of managers and leaders to relate and engage with staff so as to conduct positive conversations where there may be difficult messages to deliver are important in deescalating conflict. Most leadership training programs are developed around a specific theory or theories. The literature seems to treat leaders and leadership development in similar ways and the focus tends to be on developing and/or improving skills and behaviours of the individual. As leadership theory has evolved, distinctions have been made between types of leadership. Each type being defended as the right way and many of these models have not been evidenced by research as the origins are conceptual.

The challenge is to develop leadership programmes that meet manager's needs within the context of where they work. And a further challenge is to develop manager's mindset and behaviours that support employees positively from a psychosocial perspective. In the evaluation of leadership development programme (Deloitte, 2003, 2004) for drug and alcohol managers previously referred to in the introduction of this thesis, respondents stated that they felt that the content of the course was aimed at the retail sector which was unrelated to the drug and alcohol field. This was supported anecdotally by two of the managers from the charitable trust who had attended the leadership courses run by Deloitte in 2003 which was commissioned by the National Treatment Agency for drug and alcohol service managers in 2003. The biggest critiscm from their experience was that the leadership and management theories that were used within the programme did not fit with manager's needs in coping with the challenges of the developing drug and alcohol provision. An examination of the programme pre-work material on leadership development was mainly focused into leadership styles which

included transformational leadership and did not address the complexities services working through rapid organisational growth and change. There was a lack of focus on people management practices in supporting service delivery. There was also no reference to how managers needed to be aware of the psychosocial consequences for staff as a result of working in these rapidly growing services and an often challenging client group.

A reference was made to incorporating Daniel Golemans six leadership practices and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000) into a leadership approach though did not elaborate on how in practice this could work. The programme may have been more attuned to what was needed if there has been a deeper look at the developing which of the manager's abilities that would support them in constructing positive work relations with employees. However in a recent research report by the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD, 2010) value has been placed on the outcomes of a study into Emotional Intelligence (EI) and how this translates into the workplace in the form of soft skills. The research supported the development of manager's in adopting a mindset and behaviours that would enable them to interpret and work with emotions that arise in the workplace in terms of people management. CIPD described how these skills can be developed;

Soft skills are experientially acquired self, people and task related behaviours that complement the use of 'hard' technical knowledge and skills in the workplace, and enable individuals to navigate successfully the requirements, challenges and opportunities of their job role in pursuit of professional, team or organisational goals (CIPD, 2010 17).

The evidence is there in that there are the strong links between the health and well being, motivation and engagement of employees in relation to manager's workplace interactions and relations. One key area that both leadership and management

have in common is that both concepts are reliant on building relationships with others which are socially constructed through dialogue. Developing skills in coaching can add value and form that bridge especially when developing staff to be the best that they can be in their work. The linear view of communication is argued as being an outdated model a from a constructionist perspective and is viewed as a relational experience (Hersted & Gergen, 2013). Hersted and Gergen (2013) suggest that we need to look at communication differently in that;

Communication is process of mutually moulding meaning – a process of continuous coordination (Hersted & Gergen, 2013, 9)

Managers who develop their coaching skills in positively working with emotions in the workplace will create an opportunity to construct more productive and hopeful conversations in relation to work. Not that this is just the domain of managers as it needs to apply to everyone as we consider working together as relating. However it begins with managers who are in a position of power to take responsibility in developing their self awareness by becoming reflexive in the workplace to address negative thinking present in conversations and negative behaviours that detract from developing a positive workplace climate. As already highlighted earlier within the literature there is a link between positive and negative interactions and the psychological impact on each other at work, in particular with managers. This next section sets out some of the origins of positive psychology and applications to enhancing workplace climate for improved outcomes.

3.3.1 Positive psychology applications to work in health and social care

There is a growing body of work and research on the application of Positive Psychology in relation to work that has been published in the last decade culminating in some influential key texts and leading writers in the field in Europe, USA and the UK. For the purpose of this literature review the application of positive psychology is focused into the potential motivational impact that it can have on developing leadership when applied into conversations between managers and staff in the workplace. I will also set out some of the critiscms and limitations that positive psychology has also attracted.

Martin Seligman (2002) known as the founding father of positive psychology stated that psychology was *"half baked"* and there needed to be more focus on the good in people. The case for positive psychology it is argued begins with balancing psychology out and making the discipline more rounded (Lopez and Gallagher, 2009). Within traditional psychology and within many texts related to organizational development the focus is on what's wrong and what the problem is rather than building on what is right (Linley et al, 2010). However Ulrich (2010, xviii) in the forward of the Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology suggests that scholars such as Douglas McGregor and Peter Drucker have played a key part in setting out to emphasize the positives in how leaders can think and behave. Positive psychology also has its roots in social constructionism. Any research conducted in the field of positive psychology has the potential to be beneficial for the organization specifically with respect to focusing in on individuals' strengths and abilities, leadership, team and group development, well being and work identity. A number of solutions are being studied by positive psychology

researchers where there is more of a focus on; self-efficacy, employee engagement, and creating an optimal experience in the workplace. It is suggested that these factors could have an impact on reducing the rates of turnover of staff, develop talent within the organisation and support for employee well being ultimately resulting in improved engagement employee job performance (Yousef-Morgan and Bockorny, 2014; Stairs and Galpin, 2010). Well being interventions as already referred to in their literature review are making an impact.

Positive psychology applications it is argued and evidenced through research can have a real impact in terms of creating a positive and supportive climate where people can flourish. Being able to create a positive workplace which supports the delivery of high quality services and high performance in the face of reducing public sector budgets is critical for any service or organisation at this point in time. Being as the majority of service delivery in the drug and alcohol sector is delivered through counselling, psychosocial and psychological interventions supported by some pharmacological interventions, positive psychological approaches in particular strengths based interventions to support personal change makes sense. So why would the same principles of positive psychology to support people management not apply within the workplace? In addition, the work is on the one hand rewarding and on the other hand stressful and distressing at times. The right working environment for staff teams to be able to function at optimum levels so as to ensure that the psychological and psychosocial element of service delivery is effective. The support for staff well being is important to enable them to continue to be positively engaged and motivated in their work. Strong evidence exists of the positive health benefits of engaging in treatment programmes

resulting in positive outcomes for users of services and this is what commissioners are looking for. Focusing into the psychological assets and strengths of employees is of real importance as this too has a direct impact on service delivery and the experience for service users. A high performing organisation made up of staff teams that are confident, healthy and skilled as a workforce gives the competitive high performance edge to those who are contracting for new services. The Enterprise for Health Network defines what a healthy organisation means in terms of work environment;

> *"The concept of a 'healthy organisation' is increasingly used to describe an employer whose culture, management, working climate and other business practices create an environment that promotes the health, effectiveness and performance of its employees," (Enterprise for Health network, 2008 63)*

Ashansky & Hartel (2011, 87) have extensively written about Healthy Human Cultures as Positive Work Environments (PWE) and have identified important characteristics that enhance this. Ashansky & Hartel (2011) argue that these characteristics are in the form of the kind of values that would be embedded in the organisation that exhibits positive working attributes such as; openness, friendship, collaboration, encouragement, personal freedom, and trust which lead to elevated levels of employee cognitive and affective involvement with the organisation. They go onto say that they also recognise that negative emotions have a part to play in organisation and these can act as a barometer for when things may not be going so well so that there is awareness as what's occurring at that point and the ability learn from it. From a practice application perspective the theory of *Flow* developed by American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997) has been used in research to study work teams (Li-Chuan et al, 2012). Csikszentmihalyi (1997,) describes flow as one that;

Many people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 29)

These optimal experiences it is suggested can help in developing strong team dynamics and give more creative and positive results. Further contributions in the applications of positive psychology from a strengths perspective have been led by Alex Linley who was the founder of the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology in the UK. Linley was responsible for developing Realise2, a comprehensive strengths assessment profile used for recruitment, coaching and organisational development. This has been used to develop a whole range of strengths based human resource practices and has had application to strengths based coaching for individuals and teams. The data that has been gathered over a 5 year period from the Realise2 tool and is informing the application of strengths based practice in the workplace. In 1998 Donald Clifton along with Tom Rath created the online Clifton Strengthsfinder and authored the seminal book on 'now go discover your strengths' (2007). Martin Seligman also developed the online Values in Action Inventory (VIA) of Strengths, formerly known as the VIA which has been available free online since 2001. To date over 400,000 people have been reported as completing it.

Critics of positive psychology argue that there has been a split between positive and traditional psychology rather than it being viewed as an integrative approach. Furthermore critiscms that positive psychology ignores the negative aspects of experience has been counter argued by Seligman (2011) that positive psychology has redressed the balance with flourishing and happiness instead of just being focused on illness and disease. Cooperrider was also criticized for this with Appreciative Inquiry and

a clarification was made that AI is in fact a generative approach, envisioning a new future (Bushe, 2007). Linley from the Centre of Applied Positive Psychology in the UK interviewed by Aaron Jarden (2012) stated that there were a number of other areas where there was critiscm for positive psychology. One area was that positive psychology omitted to acknowledge humanistic psychology and that has now changed. A final area of critiscm has been the disconnect between writing about positive psychology and undertaking research versus the demand being able to apply this in the real world to which there is now a growing number of practice applications.

3.3.2   *Reflective Practice and Learning through conversation*

Reflective practice and learning through conversation is one of the main approaches utilised within this research study and the AR Learning set. Baker, Jensen and Kolb (2002) assert that there is a difference between the terms 'dialogue' and 'conversation'. Dialogue as described by Schien (1993) is focused on the thinking process and how perceptions and cognitions are formed by past experiences. Whereas the term 'conversation' focuses more on human understanding and experience than abstract knowledge about ideas (Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 2002). Isaacs (1999) in describing dialogue views this as a practice for deliberately and consciously evoking powerful conversations (Isaacs, 1999, 70). Isaacs (1999, 419)) argues for developing new capacities for behaviour and skills to be used in group dialogue;

- Voicing

- Listening

- Respecting

- Suspending

Dialogue is also central to where a group of people who come together from diverse and different backgrounds to think and converse together in relationship with each other which is similar in thinking to Wenger's notion of Communities of Practice (2007). Wenger (2010) describes communities of practice as part of a broader conceptual framework to thinking about learning. Conversation, Isaacs (1999) asserts is made up of three levels of human interaction and action in a dialogue. This helps thinking about how change is situated within conversing (Isaacs, 1999, 35);

1. The production of coherent actions and behaviour

2. The creation of fluid structures of interaction and an ability to predict problematic ones

3. Provision of wholesome atmosphere and understanding of the space out of which conversations arise.

Learning in a conversational group is a powerful form of individual, team and organisational development. By merely bringing people together in one space can expand the possibilities for different ways of talking and thinking about work and self organising. It is in the richness of the content of these conversations held about the nature of work and organisation that is the most powerful catalyst for learning and change. Heron (1989) asserts that reflection in learning is an important part of experiential learning in a cooperative inquiry. Reflection can occur in action as part of the AR cycle which fits well the notion of conversation as experiential learning. Although Kolb (1999, 56) is clear that simple reflection is not enough to enable learning rather that doing something with it takes it to the next level. This results in a deeper more critical reflective process and learning from what has been reflected upon in action.

Baker, Jensen and Kolb (2002 54) proposed a dialectical stance on conversational learning. Kolb explains that conversation is viewed as a meaning making process drawing from his theory of experiential learning, Kolb (2002) proposes conversational learning as an experiential learning process as it occurs in conversation. Participants are able to construct meaning from their experiences in their conversing. Kolb describes learners moving through the cycle of experiencing, reflecting, abstracting and acting, as they construct meaning from their experiences in conversations. This iterative cycle runs in parallel with the AR cycle where reflection and action are connected through conversations about making changes and improvements in work situations and practice. Group and individual learning and development are actioned through conversation on reflective practice. Implicit assumptions and previous experiences are then able to be reframed into more explicit knowledge. Reflection is the process of stepping back from experience to question what is happening, surfacing taken for granted assumptions and habits to gain insights and understanding with a view to planning further action. Reflective conversations also provide the impetus for taking future actions by linking experience, judgment, and action. It is an opportunity to create new possibilities and new levels of interaction and understanding. An important part of individual learning is uncovering implicit assumptions and making explicit what one has learned.

From a group development perspective, group participants learn together and develop skills that are transferred to the workplace by working on real organizational areas of interest. Groups take action at their respective level, assessing the impact of action taken through the reflective process and taking further action where

indicated. Management learning groups can be made up of different participants from different parts of the organisation, bringing with them different perspectives and experience that contribute to building managerial capability. Individual learning takes place when something is understood cognitively, new skills are applied, and the person is developed through changes in beliefs and values. This is especially important in today's organizations, which operate in an environment which are subject to continuous internal and external change. Through the process of questioning and sharing together, learning can build a powerful relational cohesion among the participants.

From an OD perspective peer group conversational learning spaces provide organisational participants with a realistic appreciation of the environment they work in on a day to day basis. Managers also have an opportunity to engage in OD within their own organisations by influencing to make changes possible. Additionally, participation by organizational members can lead to positive social change. Being creative and innovative depends on people being supported with developing alternative perspectives for consideration within conversational spaces. Ultimately learning is about achieving results, whether it is personal development or organizational transformation.

3.4 Trusteeship and Management Intervention

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (2014) stated that;

We acknowledge that poor performance and standards failures have occurred in the public sector – indeed much of this Committee's past work has been reviewing such failures and making recommendations for improvement. But now as public services are increasingly being delivered by those outside the public sector, we

wanted to test the expectation and assurance of ethical standards in the public service market.

The role of being a trustee in the charitable sector has evolved over the last 20 years and in the face of a raft of high profile cases where organisations have faced major governance issues meaning that governance has had to improve. The Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) describe good governance as;

'The systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, effectiveness, supervision and accountability of an organisation' (ACEVO, 2010).

This has also led to questions about whether boards and trustees are fit to govern effectively (Cornforth, 2003). Organisational governance is growing area in the literature however through a search of the academic journal databases there are very few practice examples or studies as to how boards and board members actually undertake their role in practice. In recent years as a response to concerns about governance of charities a raft of guidance has also been published which has included a governance code by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO, 2005, 2010). This has also been underpinned by increased financial regulation and other changes in legislation aimed at developing good governance of boards as a lived experience.

One area of research undertaken in 2003 by Cornforth & Simpson aimed to understand some of the issues facing charities at that time. Although over 10 years old it still has relevance to understanding board configuration and function. Based on the income of charitable organisations which ranged from £10,000 turnover to £10m and over, a random sample was taken of five hundred charities across these income ranges and evidenced that there were changes occurring in the sector over time. The

results revealed for example that the average board size was 9.5 in comparison with 7 in a previous survey undertaken a decade before. The structure and frequency of board meetings were reported to have been varied and were on average held between 5 and 6.8 meetings a year. The charitable trust that I was a trustee of in this case study had 8 board members and met 5 times a year with an additional Annual General Meeting (AGM) annually. In regards to the roles of trustees and the availability of job descriptions was reported to have varied between 32 per cent and 65 per cent. Within the charitable trust at the time of this research study I had been working with board colleagues and with an external consultant to develop job descriptions and a governance handbook to help us better understand what our role was in terms of the management and governance responsibilities as trustees of the charity.

Charities have also benefitted in terms of the growth in reprocurement opportunities in the substance misuse sector. There continues to be an increasing shift in the contracting out of services to the charitable sector from a commissioning perspective which has traditionally been delivered by the public sector such as the NHS. The charitable sector tends to be values led which is more aligned to that of the public sector (Parry et al, 2005) so there is synergy. From a trustee perspective in terms of control and management, there has been an increasing need to ensure that contracts are viable and that the organisation and its services are delivering against what is required from a performance perspective. The board needs to receive assurances as to the viability and performance of service delivery and that the relationships with commissioners are constructive to ensure that there is stability in charitable income streams. Additionally retaining contracts has become a key area of risk with increasing

procurement activity in the sector and market competitiveness amongst leading providers. Charities have traditionally been used to generating their income through grant funded routes though as a result of the shift in contracting over the last ten to fifteen years increasingly taking on public health and social care service delivery. This has also driven further need for charities and boards to become more businesslike in the conduct of their relationships with commissioners. This has had in turn a further impact on board responsibilities from a management and leadership perspective. The tension between the boards need to be able to control management by holding to account and also be a partner in making decisions can be a source of role conflict for trustees (Cornforth, 2003). Cornforth (2003) takes this argument further and sets out that the relationship between the role of the board and management is viewed differently when compared with different theoretical perspectives;

> *The agency, stakeholder and democratic perspectives stress the importance of the board monitoring and controlling the work of managers (the executive). In contrast, stewardship theory stresses the role of the board as a partner to management, improving top management decision-making. The need to both control senior management and be their support and partner in decision-making can be a source of role conflict and tension for board members. (Cornforth, 2003, p.15)*

Whilst these theories are helpful in thinking through positioning of a board and its members, this does not take into account the complex context that charities are operating in. Neither do the theories take into account the internal regulation that is required for good governance or the impact of outside influences such as the changes in government, commissioning and regulation of health and social care delivery. Board trustees have had to adapt to a constantly changing environment and addressing the different risks and expectations from commissioning and regulation. Trustees of some smaller charities might take on a more proactive role with the management and

development of the charity. In larger charities where there is a greater income, trustees will often delegate the day-to-day operations and the range of functions that may also be in place such as finance, IT and data support and human resources. The charitable trust in this case study was a good example of where governance was becoming increasingly complex and was needing to consider developing an integrated approach because of taking on contracts for the the delivery of clinical services. With the charity providing services within Primary Care this brought with it a new emerging risk related to the delivery of clinical activities and controlled drug treatments into the organisation. This has been a knowledge gap within charities that have traditionally run social care activities and yet are now in some of the major national drug and alcohol organisations delivering clinical substance misuse services which are also subject to Care Quality Commission (CQC) regulation. There has been a need to bring in both trustee and to pay for clinical expertise to be brought into charities to help advise and guide on the development and safe running of clinical services.

Trustees have traditionally joined charities as guardians who were entrusted to look after the resources of charities though with increasing reports of fraud within the sector, this has become a legal duty in directing the affairs of the charity (ACEVO et al, 2012). In terms of the estimated cost of fraud in the charitable sector ACEVO (2012) in a recently published Charity Fraud guide has set out that;

> *Since 2010 the National Fraud Authority has published an* ***Annual Fraud Counter*** *(AFI), which estimates that the cost of fraud in the sector. In 2012 the AFI estimated that fraud cost the UK £73 billion per year and of this, £1.1 billion was the estimated loss to the charity sector. Whilst this is a sobering figure, the estimated percentage of charity turnover lost to fraud (1.7%) of a £64.6 billion combined annual turnover) is broadly comparable to the private and public sectors (ACEVO, 2012. p3)*

This has culminated in the need for tighter regulation of the financial activities of charities driven by Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP, 2005). The vetting and scrutiny of trustees who apply to sit on boards has also had an impact (Charity Commission, 2012). Recruitment processes of prospective trustees have needed to improve and become more rigorous.

In a recent publication on ethical standards in public life (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2014) Nolan's Seven Principles of Public Life (1995) were cited as having had a major influence as a foundation for governance. The changes that have occurred as a result of Nolan and the Nolan Principles have been developments in a Code of conduct (ACEVO, 2010), robust recruitment processes, National Occupational Standards for board members (NCVO, 2006) which clearly set out expectations on minimum standards and competencies for both the required knowledge and conduct of trustees. These standards were focused into four key areas which has given some definition as to the management and leadership expectations of trustees as board members of charities;

1. *Safeguarding and promoting the values and mission of the voluntary organisation*
2. *Determine the strategy and structure of the voluntary or community organisation*
3. *Ensure the voluntary or community organisation operates in an effective, responsible and accountable manner*
4. *Ensure the effective functioning of the voluntary or community organisations board of trustees.*

(National Occupational Standards, 2006)

The issue of when do trustees intervene in terms of their role is defined by the level of risk that is being tolerated within the organisation whether assurances or management interventions provided will mitigate this. The holding of a risk register by

the board helps define this and the actions that need to be taken if the risk level increases. And as in this case study mitigation may be accepted where a trustee may offer to undertake bespoke work to support development of the staff and organisation by utilizing their skills and expertise to benefit it.

In summary the literature examined predominantly covers theoretical aspects as the functions of boards and the relationship between the board and the organisations managers. There are gaps in applied research in the UK as to how boards and trustees and management work in practice as case studies.

3.5 Summary

Within this literature review I have covered the main key conceptual areas identified as part of the initial research proposal and other emergent themes that came up during the research process which have led to further iterative conceptual exploration. The literature has both informed and illuminated this AR research study. I opened up with OD and its timeless relevance of action research as an OD approach. I set out some of the major theories and critiscms in relation to current thinking about OD as a school of thought with a historical reflection as to where the conversation about OD originated from. I argued that some of these theories inform thinking about the differing theoretical positions and assumptions contained with them which are often confusing. However a point of departure occurs in these theories when taking into account the theory of change and how that informs every day practice. I also argued that how change is viewed by the practitioner will inform the kind of approach and the choice of interventions that will be used to maximise impact. From more recent

literature, I set out where the divergence in thinking is occurring in relation to Marshak's (2007) post modernist perspective and provisioning organisational development. Marshak's (2011) proposes the idea of Diagnostic OD and Dialogic OD. In terms of this research study this has helped to refine my thinking in relation to the developing field of practice in conversations for change. Organisational discourse is becoming an influential stream of thinking (Marshak and Bushe, 2011) and interest is increasing on the focus and role of language in OD. This research study utilised a methodology of action research and appreciative conversation for change, so change being situated within conversation in practice makes sense. A description of key differences between the two theories of Diagnostic and Dialogic OD have been described. I argue that there is a clear movement in OD literature from a constructionist perspective moving away from idea of deficit based OD to a strengths based collaborative dialogue for change. Although OD texts and literature are still strongly dominated by deficit based language, thinking and problematisation. In searching for literature in OD and the concept of emotion in the workplace there was a clear disconnect between the two concepts within management texts. The literature regarding emotion in the workplace was cited elsewhere in psychology and social sciences and not within business texts. This was illuminating with the recent growth in the study of positive emotions which is leading onto a better understanding of people management practices. The links have been made as to the benefits of creating a positive work environment to maximise results in the programme delivery for example in people management practice in the NHS. And yet managers have a significant role to play in this by being aware of their own positive and negative thinking and subsequent behaviours and how this impacts on the workplace. Positive

mindset and emotions enhance performance and work outcomes and a negative mindset and management behaviour as in bullying can detract from the workplace climate causing stress, sickness and absence. So developing a collaborative and consultative workplace that emphasises the development and contribution of everyone in developing an energised positive work climate makes sense. Everybody has a responsibility and a role to contributing to a healthy workplace.

Then I moved onto consider concepts of change and motivation questioning some of the grand narratives and dominant ideologies of behaviourism moving towards motivation and change being constructed and situated in conversations. Again it is clear whilst theories on motivation have relevance, they are primarily behaviourally focused and the models have no real evidence base. The idea that a strengths based conversation creates energy is appealing rather than having a deficit based change critical conversation which has less of an impact. Why wouldn't you want to have a positive conversation about what is working well? In practice you can see problem orientated conversations drain energy away from people and strengths based conversations energise. Drawing on the example of motivational interviewing as an example of a communication skill in change, MI shows how the practice of constructing communication to enhance decision making in personal change works well. In the AR learning group, AI as the basis for conversations for change and evaluation were part of the methodology. AI had an impact as to how the managers then felt about evaluating the benefits they gained as member of the group (Findings chapter 4). I then argued that more recent thinking about engagement as a relational process is relevant moving away from motivation as the only way of thinking about how you bring about change.

I move in the second part of the review onto the concepts of leadership and management and argue some of the limitations of thinking about the theories in leadership as many of the models have not been developed from practice. Rather that the theory has driven practice rather than informed practice. I suggest thinking about Leadership and management as relating and argue that building effective relationships is the key to good practice. I offer the idea of EI integrating positive psychology into management practice to develop more productive and hopeful conversations whilst building positive work environments (Ashansky and Hartel, 2011). I have outlined some of the growing body of research and practice applications of positive psychology in relation to work and considered some of the current critiscms in the field. I then draw from some of the key theories in developing experiential work based learning and reflective practice developed through creating conversational space. This type of work based learning approach I argue provides an opportunity for development, learning and growth of managers or any other professional group which was the basis of the methodology in this research study.

Finally I conclude the literature review with a summary of key thinking about trusteeship and management interventions in particular within the charitable sector. There are gaps in applied research as to how boards and managers work together in practice. I argue that there is in fact no clear definitive line between the trustee and the board and the senior management team that the sharing of skills and knowledge adds value to an organisation. What is important is the conduct of the board in working with charities managers in how they both manage and mitigate the risk which has traditionally been financial and now requires more complex and integrated governance processes.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter sets out the findings from the research. A number of methods were utilised to gather data as previously referred to in the methodology chapter. This chapter is written up as an account of what came out of the different sets of data gathered and the emergent themes on engaging with this. The findings will cover research detail across the following areas which will give context to both the manager's experiences and their working settings;

a. Managers people management responsibilities which set out the size of each managers staffing portfolio.

b. Mapping managers training and development – Responses to an electronic questionnaire manager's qualification and future aspirations.

c. Stories from semi structured interviews with managers on moving into management as a career.

d. Managers aspirations for the AR learning group grounded in an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach

e. The evolving story of the experience of managers working in the charitable trust through meeting as the AR learning group and the outcomes set out across the eight sessions.

f. Participant attendance during the learning set.

The findings are set out and supported by the data gathered during the research process over the period of twelve months. As described within the methodology, narratives were gathered from the AR learning set participants over the

eight sessions which are written up chronological order within this findings chapter. Each session tells the story through the notes recorded of the conversations held with the participating managers and forms a cycle of the AR process. Descriptions of what occurred at the meetings and within conversations were varied and cover subject areas such as; how the group evolved, to what the key issues were arising at that point in time, how managers interacted with each other at the sessions, managers reflections as a result of the conversations and sense making and the actions that were taken as a result. What needs to be borne in mind in reading through these accounts is how managers actually took 'action' as this emerged in many different forms. 'Actions' will be presented as accounts of; personal and professional changes for managers which occurred as a result of engaging in further iterations of conversations with other staff and managers during the AR Learning Group experience. Some of the actions were also generated and followed through as a group.

This chapter also provides the evidence as to how the data approaches set out in the methodology contributed to the generation of this qualitative data. How the literature, research and context informed is brought together as a summary at the end of each session.

One further key issue that needs to be borne in mind which arose at the beginning of the research was that participating managers did not want conversations to be recorded digitally as they felt uncomfortable with this method. An agreement was made to record the discussions by capturing snapshots of sections of conversations in writing. The limitations of this approach meant that the full depth of discussions was not captured in the same way that would have been if recorded digitally.

However the participating managers had a right to exercise the choice not to undertake it in this way which was agreed through the ethics consent process. Themes and quotes gathered from the conversations held were captured in writing which participant managers then reviewed, added to and agreed as an accurate record. Other narratives gathered were through the medium of emails between sessions enriching the impact of the AR learning sessions on managers from a reflective practice perspective.

Emergent issues such as the manager's attendance over the twelve month period and its impact on the AR Learning Group are discussed at the end of this chapter. The outcomes and learning from the implementation of the methodology with the AR learning group are discussed and form the thematic conclusions in the final chapter which is threaded back through to the original aims of the research. The findings within this research are predominantly qualitative and at times complex and messy, which has been a challenge to represent in the text of this chapter of the thesis. Through this every effort is made to represent the authenticity of the research process and data as it emerged from engaging with the participating managers. These findings in this chapter are an account of the twelve months spent with this group of managers participating in the AR Learning group.

4.1 Findings

4.1.1   Manager's people management responsibilities

Information on the manager's responsibilities for people management is shown as the number of staff that they had as reports within their services. The aim of gathering this information was twofold. Firstly, to better understand the level

of management responsibilities and reports each managers had and secondly to share this information with colleagues in the AR learning group to gain a deeper understanding of each other's work.

The numbers of staff that managers were responsible for varied across each manager's portfolio (See table 3, p.117)

Table 3: Manager's People Management Responsibilities

Managers Role	*Number of Staff managed*
Office Manager	6
Area Supporting People Manager	5
Team Manager Alcohol Service	16
Area Senior Manager	17
Locality Manager	22
Senior Team Manager - Alcohol Service	14

The findings from this analysis were that the team where the manager had the greatest number of reports was in the largest contracted service in the midlands in the organisation. This was also the most recently operationalised and a very complex area of service delivery due to its clinical complexity with the prescribing of drug treatments. This was new to the charitable trust moving into healthcare and the size of the contract constituted a third (£2m) of the total charitable trust's income. The office manager within the AR Learning group also worked in the midlands service and had responsibility for team of six administrators and data officers. The Office manager reported to the locality manager who was also a member of the AR Learning group. In

other areas of the organization the required data collection was undertaken by practitioners not administrators or data officers as in the midlands. The reason given for this was that service budgets were smaller in other areas so the infrastructure of administrators and data officer's was not affordable. The other managers within the group had responsibility for much smaller areas of service delivery in comparison with the midlands service. These ranged from community alcohol services to delivering to housing support. On reviewing the questionnaires participating managers in the AR learning group noticed that manager's titles were all different across the organisation. There was no coherence to the management structure. Managers did not have any understanding how this had developed in this way and that it may have been historical. Further reference was made to this anomaly as an emergent issue by participants during session one of the AR Learning group. There were no reported plans at that time for a review of this level of the management structure except for the Central Services review (2005) already referred to in the introduction.

4.1.2   Mapping Managers Training and Development history

The main aim of this mapping was to gain a better understanding of manager's professional development both before moving into a managerial role and after. The results were shared between the participating managers in the AR Learning Group. This was undertaken early into the AR Learning group meetings so as to help orientate each other and to gain a better understanding of the skills, experience and abilities that these managers held. I also wanted to build a sense of community and cohesion within the group as these managers had no understanding of each other's background as they had not met in this way before. Training and development for practitioners,

administrators and managers in general was mainly brought in from outside the charitable trust in the form of training days. Other professional development initiatives reported by the DOO were made up of:

1. Appraisals and professional development planning on a yearly basis.

2. A small pot of funding was available for professional development which was applied for through line managers.

3. A supervision model for both management and clinical staff recently developed through a quality group resulting in management and clinical supervision being delivered separately.

4. Limited places on a time bound leadership development programme commissioned by the National Treatment Agency in 2003/2004

5. A short management development programme which was commissioned by the CEO for the charitable trust after a review in 2003.

The training and development mapping questionnaire was developed in an electronic format and emailed out to the participating managers. There were a total of sixteen managers in post across the charitable trust including senior managers at the time of this study (Charitable Trust Annual Report, 2005 - 2006). Seven of the managers from across the organization received a mapping questionnaire (See appendix 3). Six out of seven of the managers completed with only one manager not completing as they had exited the AR Learning group just prior to this survey. On analysis of the responses, managers reported that they had been employed in their role in the charitable trust between one to three years at the time of engaging in the research study. Three of the managers were originally professionally qualified as a social worker

or a nurse prior to moving into a management role, so half were from a practice background. Three managers had undertaken a business or a management or administration qualification. One manager was completing a service specific course focused into voluntary sector management. Five out of the six managers had aspirations to either complete or undertake a further management course within the next two years.

The responses from managers as to the type of training and development that had undertaken within the last two years were varied. Responses ranged from attendance on day courses to more formal university management courses. For example one manager had responded as having undertaken a two day course on disciplinary skills and dealing with difficult staff in supervision. On further examination of the responses to the questionnaire very few managers had undertaken any people management courses from a human resource and employment law perspective. Managers also identified skill gaps in finance, management and leadership. This supported the findings in terms of the research into the training needs of managers within the national Cranfield Workforce Needs Analysis (2003) which was referenced to in the introduction in this thesis.

Managers also identified during one of the sessions about the training and development analysis that they were actually not receiving any regular management or practice supervision from their line managers. This was interesting finding as managers reported that they were expected deliver practice and line management supervision to their staff though were not receiving any supervision themselves. From a health and well being perspective managers were not given any protected space with their own line managers for their own supervision let alone having

no direction in terms of performance expectations and development of management and leadership practice. Neither were managers they receiving management support in terms of dealing with people management challenges or service issues which could lead to risk for services and contribute to manager's stress. Managers admitted that they had to deal with their own stress and cope with not receiving any support in relation to day to day work. From the results of the mapping each manager committed to action to go back to discuss their training and development needs and request supervision for support.

4.2 Managers Management Career Stories

The aim in undertaking the semi structured interviews with the managers from the AR learning group was to gain an understanding as to how each of them had moved into management as a career. Using semi structured questions as prompts each manager was asked to recount stories in relation to the following areas;

a) *Experiences in your career/work life and your journey into this line of work*
b) *Mentors and role models that may have inspired you in your management and leadership development?*
c) *What management and leadership development have you undertaken?*

Notes were gathered from interviews, written up and emailed back to participants to amend or confirm as accurate. I will set out the themes that emerged from the manager's stories in more detail using narrative from managers transcripts to highlight where the themes were elicited from. A thematic analysis was undertaken with the data from the stories gathered with managers and the reoccurrence of particular themes were looked for. These key areas are presented in the next section.

4.2.1   *Emergent themes and Reflections from Manager's Stories*

Five main themes emerged out of the data and are set out in the next few pages with extracts from the recollections of individual managers from their interviews.

Early experiences of being in education

Several of the managers interviewed talked about their experiences of learning and education and how this affected their decisions in terms of careers. One female manager described that for her in the face of early negative schooling memories she had then decided to take advantage of adult learning opportunities. Describing this experience in her story she recalled;

"By then I had my teaching certificate, diploma in social care, counselling certificate and number of other qualifications that helped me to develop a career plan. When I got the job with the charitable Trust it was the first time I had worked with clients with substance misuse problems and found the work immensely interesting and rewarding. I decided to enrol on a part time counselling degree course to enhance my work skills and was delighted to leave the negative early schooling experience behind when I graduated 2:1 BSc (hons)." (Extract from managers story narrative)

This manager described coming to work at the charitable trust as being an important turning point for her in her career. In spite of the challenges she faced at school that she had been able to find the direction she wanted in terms of work. This manager stated that her recent completion of a counselling degree course was also an important turning point for her and that she was now considering doing a masters course so that she could move out of her management role back into clinical practice.

Another female manager recalled a negative experience in school although she had passed her 11 plus and described managing to get through with gaining her GCE's. What had been important for this manager was that she had met a role model who had encouraged her when she felt she was losing direction with her career. She recounted this as being her significant turning point which was when she decided to undertake a degree in Criminal Justice.

Entering into working in the voluntary sector

A number of managers interviewed in terms of their work experience had backgrounds in different sectors prior to moving into the voluntary sector. One manager had come from a private sector background unrelated to the drug and alcohol service delivery. She described bringing with her very different experiences from her private sector experience into the charity and the work that she is now involved in. Another female manager described having mainly worked within mortgage sector and became a temp after being made redundant. She had come to the charitable trust in the role of temporary administrator which had really appealed to her working within an alcohol charity. She recalled that she was surprised to be offered the job and was really pleased it had happened for her. She also talked about her experience of working in the charitable sector as being very different to her previous experience of working in the private sector which she inferred was less relaxed;

"The work ethic is relaxed (in the charity) in comparison to the private sector."

One of the male managers described themselves as being politically active and wanted to give back to the community. He described himself as

having a strong value base in equality and justice. He undertook a degree community management and also did a counselling certificate which formed part of the course. After working in a bail hostel he became more involved in the clinical side of treatment for heroin and harm reduction interventions such as needle exchange.

Experience of being line managed

Some of the content of the stories shared by group participants opened them up emotionally in discussing some of their negative experiences of former line managers. In particular managers recounted specific instances where they had experienced both negative and demotivating line management. This emerged in response to responding to the question about whether they had any mentors and role models as managers. Several stories detailed recollections from manager's about their experiences of being treated badly by former line managers. Several managers described experiencing what they described in their own words as bullying behaviour by former line managers. I received an email back from one manager after his interview saying that the reading his story back in black and white caused him to reflecting further on what were difficult memories and was an emotional process for him.

Another male manager described how his manager had not supported him in his professional development as described this experience through his story;

"I decided to do a degree in managing voluntary sector organizations. I was out one day a week at university. I went off from work one day to complete some assignment work and put on the in/out board 'University'. I went home to work on my assignment. My manager saw me the next day and raised concerns that I had not been to university. I explained to my manager what I had been doing and he stated that he was suspending me and would investigate further into time I had taken off. I did not know how to handle this."

This manager described how the line manager had eventually suspended him so he decided to apply for another job. On successfully gaining a job with the charitable trust he described this as a significant turning point for the better. He described how it had affected him and how he felt;

"It was a difficult time for me emotionally and I found it hard. The hardest part was going back to work. The first few weeks were the hardest. Now 12 months on I still feel angry. What did I learn from this? This does not define me (work). It taught me to dot the I's and cross the T's. I have not had any positive role models in terms of leadership or management."

This had clearly been a very difficult point for him in terms of his working life and how this had impacted on him personally. Although what had been positive for him was that the senior managers at the charitable trust had been very supportive of his application, leading to him securing a managerial role.

Moving into a management role

Four out of the seven managers had entered into the drug and alcohol service sector as health and social care practitioners with casework prior to becoming managers. This confirmed the Cranfield Workforce Needs Analysis findings (2003) in so far as these managers had moved from a practitioner role into a management role without any prior experience or formal training in managing people and services. One of the manager's recalled what this experience was like through her story where she recounted what is was like for her moving from a practitioner to a senior manager role in the charitable trust over a short period of time;

"A senior practitioner post came up for the north of the service cluster and then I went to the midlands cluster for an interview for the Floating Support Service and was successful in gaining the post as manager for north and the midlands, it was exciting."

Another manager described her experience of moving into a manager role literally overnight and with the same team that already knew her in the previous practitioner role. This manager reflected as to how this had impacted on her and the kind of development she would have liked to have had at the time;

"On reflection I would have liked some mentorship; I came from out there (community practitioner) to managing. There was no transition from practitioner to manager. I would not do it again with a team I had worked with and knew before I became a manager, I was one of their mates. It was hard going from practitioner to manager, I was not sure what skills I needed or what the role really was."

This was not an easy transition for this manager and indicative of the gaps in the human resource and training infrastructure within the organisation.

A positive story recounted from one of the female managers was about her experience of meeting male manager who became a role model within the charitable trust. She described being inspired by her into moving into a management role from a being a practitioner. She recalled;

"I then met a Senior Manager at the charitable trust and thought what an inspiring guy and service, the trust was a new service, implementing models of care, care planning and providing structured treatment. I applied and joined the charitable trust as a senior practitioner. I moved into management straight away as within four weeks of being in post the role and job description was changed and I was managing eight people. The manager left two months after I started and I then moved onto do this role as well as my own. I was also impressed with other managers there. These were the three main people who were mentors for me. I went on a course focused on 1st line management as part of management development about 2 years ago. I am now interested in doing my Diploma in Management Studies."

Management and leadership development

Some of the managers talked about having received very little management development to date in the charitable trust and one manager described how this experience had impacted on him in moving into a management role;

"You come in as a drug and alcohol worker then move onto be a manager. That's great but you need more training, you can be good at your job as a drug or alcohol worker but management is different. It requires different skills, knowledge and experience like doing a management course. If I was to go to my manager and ask if there is a budget, would they want to support people to do that, there needs to be more of a push from Central Services."

From this managers perspective he felt that management and leadership development within the charitable trust was not being factored into planning for the workforce even though this was clearly a priority from a national perspective. Managers were aware that there was a specific workforce target for the development of managers as a target which needed to be met (National Treatment Agency and the Home Office, 2006). Two of the managers talked about having had already started to make decisions about how they were going to undertake management development for themselves. Both managers had explored the idea of undertaking more substantial courses at college and university that would lead to a management and leadership qualification.

In another manager's response to the question about her future professional development she described her current needs in terms of helping her to undertake her management role;

"The development need that I feel I have at the moment is in management training. Although I enjoy supervising colleagues I feel that I could develop my skills in project management and finance management in order to feel more confident in my current role."

The story telling process gave not only myself as the researcher a better understanding of these managers previous experience in other organisations, it gave myself and the managers a chance to get to each other better. These managers also got to know each better by sharing their stories for the first time with each other. Some of the information that came out of the stories correlated with the Cranfield University analysis of the Training Needs of the sector (Mills & Parry, 2003) in that some of the managers had experienced being promoted from practitioner to manager without development. These managers had to learn on the job. In addition the skills gaps that had been identified nationally also emerged with these managers who were citing a need for developing better people management skills in particular in human resources.

4.3 The AR Learning group meetings and conversations

This section will set out the findings of the AR learning group. In the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, firstly in this part of the findings section I will set out what the manager's aspirations were for the AR learning set. I will then move onto look at the AR learning group conversations and themes over the eight sessions. This is represented as eight AR cycles within the figure 2 on page 131. This was underpinned by an Appreciative Ethos which was developed collaboratively through the conversations within the AR learning group sessions. Each session was deemed as a protected space where participant managers would come together to converse and explore issues of interest in relation to themselves as managers and leaders with their peers from across the organization. As the conversations in these sessions developed between managers in the

group, there was a process of questioning, confirming and disconfirming of their experiences and concerns in keeping with the AR process. This was prompted on a conscious level by myself through facilitating and with the group participants. As in the AR process the aim was to clarify through a process of reflection if what was being discussed was actually an area that was of interest enough to take action. In keeping with the spirit of AR, what that action consisted of became clearer as the meetings progressed after further discussion and exploration had taken place. Each session is written up as an abridged version of conversations held during the AR learning group and are summarised with agreed themes and reflections from managers at the end of the written account. A final brief summary completes each cycle based on my engagement with the literature, context and the action research process.

Figure 2 - Implementation model of action research
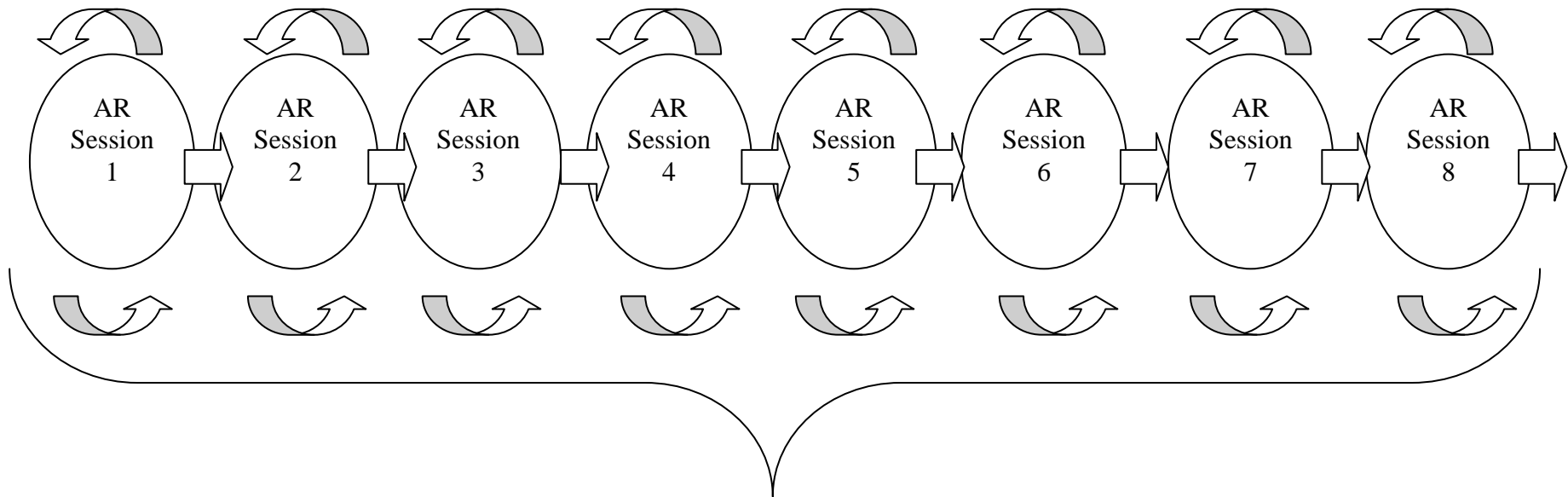
Appreciative Inquiry Ethos and Experiential Learning Conversations

4.3.1   Manager's Aspirations for the AR Learning group

When the group was first set up, participant managers were asked to consider appreciatively what their aspirations were for the AR learning group. The aim was to elicit what each of the participant's hopes and aspirations were as part of engaging in the group over the next twelve months. (See table 3, p.132). Each person's aspirations ranged from being able to gain from a professional development perspective as a manager to being able to take time to reflect on what had happened as a result of the growth of the organization.

Table 3: Manager's Aspirations

Manager's Role	Aspirations
Office Manager	To reflect on what has happened at the charitable trust and become more effective
Area Supporting People Manager	A lot of changes within the charitable trust – I want to take a breather and step back
Team Manager - Alcohol	A lot of changes within the team in the next 12 months and there will be more change. I want to stabilize the team.
Area Senior Manager	Reflective time for practice, gaining solutions to every day practical problems
Locality Manager	Bridge the perceived gulf with central services, to build links with other charitable trust services and explore disparities.
Team Manager for Floating Support	To look at our practice, what we can do better, what we can change and identify blockages.
Senior Team Manager - Alcohol Service	Consolidate a lot of change in our local service

Another manager talked about the need to stabilise his working area and consolidate the team after so much change within his service as he felt this was a concern for him. Each manager's aspirations in a sense represented their individual potential outcomes at the end of the study and there was agreement that these would be used as a

reflective tool as to whether group participants had achieved their aspirations through the final evaluation at the end of the study (See table 5, page 187)

4.3.2   First AR learning group meeting

From the first meeting the conversations between participants were free flowing as they were orientating themselves to the AR and AI dialogic process. A broad range of management experiences and issues were talked about by participants. Each manager came with their own perspective (Gergen, 2009) on what was being experienced in their respective part of the organisation and workplace. There were many agreed similarities between accounts that emerged as I listened. Conversations initially lacked focus as this was part of exploring thinking and of the sense making process. This is an account of the first session.

I opened up the session by asking the group to explore through sharing experiences of working in the organisation as to what made sense and was important to them in relation to their management and leadership practice. Quotes and comments were captured on a flipchart capturing thinking.   Initially managers began by discussing that how they felt that the organisation could benefit from learning from their experiences and knowledge from an operational perspective if this could be fed back in, in some way. A key area of concern for one participant was in relation to how much they were able or allowed to contribute as a manager to help generate consistency in the administration of the organisation. It was suggested by one participant that there needed to be more of a corporate approach to the writing up and application of organisational business policies and processes as the experience was that these lacked a coherent format. Another example given by one of the managers who were concerned that the human

resource policies were 'inoperable' and that the way that they were written made it difficult to implement in practice. I asked what the other manager's experiences of this were and if it was similar or different? The response was that they were constantly being met with mixed and often confused messages in terms of human resource management advice. Managers described this as frustrating and sometimes felt services were being rendered as 'inoperable' when trying to manage staff teams. Another example was given of trying to get information on policies. A participant cited his experience about having asked a senior managers advice on policy and received a response by email that was directive rather than an opportunity for discussion as to how this could be resolved. Emails were cited as the main tool for communication rather than senior managers picking up the phone to discuss or have a conversation about changes or challenges in service delivery. A similar experience was recalled by another manager and confirmed each other's thinking giving voice to their sense of frustration with the situation;

"We need consistency – corporate consistency" and *"We need consistency across services."*

Another manager endorsed this perception from their experience;

"There is a corporateness policy, and yet there are things that go on I do not know about. Corporateness is there to mainly protect the organisation, and the political environment and not in other aspects."

It was also highlighted by two managers that through examination of the role titles that these were different across the organisation and there was no coherence when examining the mapping outcomes of manager's roles and responsibilities (Table 3,

p. 117). This was in contrast to the published organisational structure (Appendix B, p.210).

"The titles of managers are different".
"There are many different administration levels".

Further concerns raised by managers were about the perception of a changing relationship with the organisation. Some managers were questioning the purpose of the charitable trust as to what it represented for them and expressed this by saying;

"I am not sure what the organisation is?"
"Who came up with this (organisation)?"

This theme of 'the organisation' as being something managers were not feeling part of continued. The discussion moved onto concerns that there was a perception that charitable trust exercised its 'power' over employees. Managers talked about feeling 'disempowered' and disconnected as a result of the recent organisational growth period. I noticed that when referring to the organisation that managers referred to the charitable trust was referred to as a third party, as 'it'. None of the conversation was about 'who' was responsible for creating this feeling that the organisation had power over managers. Continuing to free flow in conversation another manager stated that they felt *'the behaviour of 'some' of the senior managers'* was a worry although they did not want to elaborate any further. This was clearly sensitive and was creating some discomfort. As it was early into the first meeting of the AR Learning group I did not feel that it was the right time to ask these managers to elaborate in more depth on some of the relationship difficulties they were experiencing. My thoughts during the process were that group

participants may not have felt confident in disclosing more sensitive information about senior managers openly just yet. As this was the first session this was also about building trust between managers and with me in my role as an insider researcher.

The discussion continued along the theme of the organisation as being something that was separate from the managers and a perception of them being disconnected recently with the changes. Managers also felt that they did not get much opportunity to speak to each other about what they were experiencing that so this led to amplifying the feeling of being disconnected. Further views were emerging from conversations from managers as to how they felt about their day to day encountering of the organisation. Managers stated that they were feeling a sense of disempowerment within the organisation. Three of the manager's comments were similar as they were agreeing with each other. They developed this theme further by saying that;

"The organisation is thing that tells me what to do"
"It's a luxury to have that emotional buy in here"
"I do not feel fully invested in the organisation although I am fully invested in the team"

Group member's comments were highlighting a sense of dissonance towards the charitable trust. I asked managers to further elaborate on this further and they attributed some of these thoughts and feelings to the rapid growth of the organization as it had doubled in size over a 2 year period. The conversation between group participants as I listened was stark and honest as they related with each other's experiences finding shared thinking. Considering that the managers had not all met before this first AR Learning Group, their thoughts were strikingly similar to each other and were in

affirming each other's perspectives and experiences. There was a sense of discomfort being articulated as a result of the growth of the charity and of being overwhelmed;

"This was a small charity where you knew people now we are caught in a 'Hinterland'"
"The feeling of coziness does not exist anymore"
"We are now a huge organisation with a huge budget"

We discussed the recent Central Services Review (Keenan & Taylor, 2005) the consultants reported that there was recognition that the capacity and infrastructure was insufficient to meet the future needs of the organisation. There restructuring was planned over a period of time to improve performance and reduce the potential for risk (Keenan &Taylor, 2005). In response one manager talked about not knowing who the central team comprised of and this reinforced from this manager's perspective a continued feeling of distance from the *'growing centre'* of the charitable trust. Two of the group participants reflected this in their comments;

"We have outgrown Central Services and it does not work"
"I have not got a clue who works in Central Services".

Managers also went on to state that the perception of distance from Central Services had been heightened. The senior management team along with administrative and finance support functions had moved into new offices recently which were 15 miles away from the old premises where they had previously been based for over 30 years. So this perception of distance from the centre was aggravated by the geography of the new premises.

I asked the participants felt they were experiencing tensions between meetings the needs service users and government (Noorden, 2004). Group

participants stated that coupled with the challenges of the changes within their own organisation they additionally did not have a grasp or properly understand the external environment that they were connected to as it felt unquantifiable. Group participants went on to further describe having many 'masters' from their perspective both internally and externally. Managers in the group described a recognition that they had a different accountability to stakeholders external to the charitable trust such as the National Treatment Agency (Now Public Health England, 2013), National Drug Treatment Monitoring System, Commissioners, General Practitioners, Criminal Justice agencies, Housing and other service delivery partners who were involved in developing and delivery of drug and alcohol systems. There was a general sense of confusion as there had been no time to reflect on what this meant for services and the organisation. Managers stated that they had noticed that there were increasing demands on the services working in partnership and this was creating further work from their perspective to attend meetings and to develop joint working protocols with services that they had to work in partnership with to deliver integrated services. In terms of service users or the clients of services, they were described by managers as being at the centre of developing provision in theory. Though in practice within the charitable trust there was very little evidence of consultation or service user's feedback on their experiences of service delivery. We agreed to map this conceptually as what these connections were including what was demanding manager time both internally and externally to gain some visual sense of what this environment looked like that they were encountering (See diagram 3, p.127). We discussed who the customers were and again there was confusion amongst the managers

as to who these were and who the clients were. One manager summed this up when they said;

"Customers and clients – who are the customers? Funders/Commissioners, Staff Group, service users

The diagram of external and internal organisational relationships was drawn as a mapping made up of circles that overlapped each other as group participants wanted to represent the interconnectedness and complexity of the network of stakeholders as experienced in their work. On reflection as I was drawing the diagram up after the session it was interesting that I then noticed was that the charitable trust was absent from this picture (See figure 3 , p.139).

Figure 3   Mapping manager's external and internal relationships

```
        _____
       (      Government         )
    _____/____
   (        NTA (Now PHE)           )
  _____/__
 (         Commissioners            )
  _____/__
   (          Services             )
    _____/__
   (         Service Users          )
    _____/
```
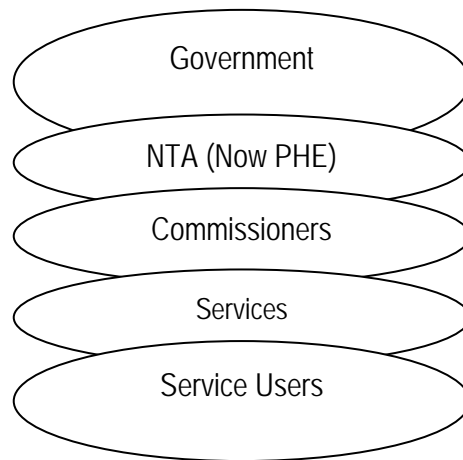
In drawing the first session to a close there were a number of key themes beginning to emerge from the discussion identified by the group participants and they agreed that they wanted time to reflect on what had been discussed. A further agreement

was made to continue to define these key thematic areas and revisit what had been discussed at the next session.

Reflections and Themes discussed and agreed with managers post the first AR Learning Group Meeting

During the intervening period between sessions participant managers had reflected on what had been emergent thematic areas of the discussion. These were discussed briefly by email for continued discussion at the next session. The initial thematic areas to be explored through continued conversation with colleagues were;

- What is consistent practice in terms of doing business and establishing corporateness in the charity

- Concerns about experiences of negative behaviours towards each other within the workplace and the impact on the culture and climate of the organisation

- Understand how the growth of the organisation was impacting on the perception of managers experiencing this.

- Further understand the perceived issues of distance from Central Services and a feeling of being disconnected

Notes were written up from this session capturing the themes and comments and were disseminated to group participants. It was further agreed that each meeting would act as a cycle of AR in itself as part of the methodology and conversational themes emerging from each session would be iterated at the beginning of

the next and each subsequent meeting with a view to taking action at the end of each session.

Summary from session 1;

The context was that there was a good attendance at the first AR learning group meeting with only one person having dropped out permanently from the process due to ill health. In undertaking the first AR learning group session it was important to create the right environment which would supported participants to be able to free flow in their thinking and conversation rather than get stuck on a rigid process which could affect creativity (Heron, 1998). The conversation was constructed using an appreciative approach based on;

- Recognising the best in people
- Perceiving the things which give life
- Affirming past and present strengths, successes, assets and potential
- Increase value

The initial conversations in the opening session revealed that there was a sense of frustration emerging from the participant's that was related to how the organisation was constructing its people management practices. There was a shared and relational frustration that the application of management practices were feared not to be consistent because of poorly written policies. A further strong feature of this session's conversation was the participant's descriptions of their experience of leadership and management behaviour within the organisation as this was perceived to be negative and was impacting on the culture and climate. Within the literature Carson & Barling (2008) cite this as a type of behaviour in the workplace experienced by employees which

arguably can impact on their well being resulting in increased stress levels. Waldron's (2007) assertions that managers need to consider how emotions are relationally constructed through people's interactions is also supported here. Emotions were felt in the room and in the conversation as participants described a shared frustration that there had been no protected time to reflect on management experiences to make sense of the impact of organisational growth. That was until the opportunity was presented to undertake the AR learning group within the organisation. There were concerns expressed by managers as to how growth had affected the organisation and the increased numbers of employees who needed inducting, developing and supporting into new roles.

In terms of AI as a dialogic method, whilst the questions I was using to generate the conversation were appreciative, the participants responses were emotionally laden with a pervading sense of negativity which was captured within the narrative. Bushe (2007) argues out that it isn't all about the positive and that it is not always the right or appropriate time to create this in conversations. However Bushe (2007, 4) argues that AI does not mean that you; *'Avoid the anxiety of dealing with real concerns, or suppress the expression of dissent'.* Rather that you are able to guide the participants to think about what's missing and what they want more of which aligns with the Principle of Positivity in AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001)

This session was a shared relational experience described within the social constructionist paradigm (Gergen, 1999; Berger and Luckman, 1967, Weick, 1995). Commonalities and differences in perspectives about participants concerns were surfaced. My facilitation and the 'hosting' of the space (Bushe, 2007) during the session allowed for emergence. This was achieved through creating an environment where

participants felt safe and open to sharing ther thinking which accords with undertaking Dialogic OD method rather than with Diagnostic OD problematised approach (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). Using AI also aligned with the AR method of focusing on improving the situation through practical knowing, conversation and reflection (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) combined with an appreciative mindset (Bushe, 2007).

n terms of the AR process and the AR cycle there was an agreement in session one that the narrative gathered would to be used as a method for planning and enabling a further iteration of what was emerging to flow conversationally into session two. This was then informing the group reflective process and their subsequent thematic analysis in the first session (Braun & Clarke, 2006).   The method was agreed alongside participants as co researchers that each AR learning meeting would act as a cycle of research (Dick, 2013). The planned intention set out by the group to work in this way to achieve a full AR cycle at the end of each session which would generate narrative to feed into the next. The act of planning for session two with the participants in terms of revisiting and continuing the conversational themes created a cycle within the AR process (See figure 2, p.131) and followed the methodological approach cited within the literature (Zuber Skerritt, 2000; Dick, 2000; Revans, 1991; Lewin, 1946). This was how this actually happened in practice within the first session and at the end of this the participant's reflections were discussed and themes drawn out. The narrative captured was translated into agreed actions through further discussion creating the AR first cycle. This narrative was then agreed by participants to be then be drawn through to inform thinking in the second session. This narrative would be iterated again at the beginning of the next AR learning group session. The first AR cycle had been completed.

4.3.3 Second AR learning group meeting

At the second group meeting, the quotes and comments from managers that had been captured in a written narrative from the first meeting on a flipchart I had typed up onto A4 sheets of paper and then cut these up into the sections of narrative. The aim was to work with these slips of paper with manager's comments on them and to arranging them into further themes on a large flipchart. I explained that the aim was to give the group participants the opportunity reflect on what had been discussed at the first session and continue to talk about and make sense of their experiences. I also reintroduced the previous session's areas for discussion into the conversation by talking through and reflecting on the notes with group participants from the first session In addition that they would be able to do some further work on working through their comments and hopefully both remind and gain clarity about their conversations that were emerging as agreed from the last session. In working with these paper comments, this stimulated the conversation again between the managers which was creating a reflective discussion. A further example of how the reflective process was an important part of this session was when managers were validating each other's experiences as they recalled the discussion on the growth of the organisation. The act of affirming each other's experiences with of feeling of disconnected from the centre of the services was described as an important part of their conversation in this session. There was also recognition on reflection from group participants that this ability to share and affirm their experiences with colleagues was an important part of being able to meet.

Conversational themes were used in the discussion from the previous learning set meeting and further developed upon between group participants. What I noticed was that feelings were running high amongst some of the participants who were stating that they were really concerned about the culture of the organisation and their experience of how they were being treated by managers. This seemed to be at the fore front of their minds this session. When I asked participants to develop the concerns further that they were talking about, one of the participants talked about this in relation to their experiences of what senior manager's said to each other. There were examples of dialogue content that contained words that were critical of another person and was personal. This seemed a sensitive area of the conversation which had been raised in the first meeting through not elaborated on. Going further this time participants stated that it was their day to day experiences of senior manager's negative mindset and behaviour within the charitable trust that was causing them concern. Participant's voices became raised and discussions more animated when they were talking about how a negative culture was being developed within the organisation. There was a clear agreement between those present that this was a cause for concern. Participants also described having a lack of trust in senior managers as a result of the negativity and critiscm;

"I have to check everything out! It feels like I have had the ability to make decisions taken away from me and I am not trusted"

One of the group participants who managed the alcohol service to the north of the cluster described his experience of the behaviour of some of the senior managers without saying who this was;

"My experience of senior management is one of a feeling of being emasculated. I feel like I am being treated like a boy instead of a man."

I asked the manager if they felt comfortable in talking about where he thought this originated from and in what form this behaviour was taking. This manager along with some of the other managers within the group also talked about having the experience of receiving emails where the written word was curt and directive in response to organisational queries. One manager felt that they were being bullied through emails as a result. The source of these emails was cited as originating back to the Chief Executive (CEO) which was leaving managers in what was described as a difficult situation. Because of the seniority this person this was not a comfortable place for these managers. One of the manager's from the midlands service said that they had not had experienced this type of behaviour with any of the senior managers in their services. There was a senior operations manager on site in the midlands service which was a unique role because of the size and complexity of the service delivery whereas there was no equivalent in the north cluster. This meant that the north cluster would deal more directly with the CEO than in the midlands where the senior operations manager would be first point of contact. The locality manager from the midlands service described having a very positive relationship with the senior operations manager as a result of developing close professional working relationships.

Group participants in making sense of this experience realised that coming mainly from the north cluster of services not across the entire organisation. These managers in the north had more direct contact with the CEO because there was no other senior manager in post in comparison with the midlands area. One of the manager's from

the north stated it was a concern for him and he did not know how to deal with this situation. It later emerged that this manager had talked about his experience with his previous line manager which had been negative and this manager had been highly critical about his work so he had left his previous organisation as a result. So this was already a sensitive issue for this manager because of his previous negative experience. His concerns were that;

"There is no union representation within the organisation, so what about how staff are treated where do they take this?"

Another manager wanted to understand what was in place for them to be able to use to deal with concerns around bullying;

Is the policy on bullying within the organisation working in practice?

This was clearly an emotional session and tensions were being surfaced as a result of these concerns being aired about the negative experiences of managers by a senior managers and a leader within the organisation. There was also evidence from comments made during manager's conversations and captured in the narratives that there was an underlying lack of confidence in some of the senior managers to lead as a result of their behaviour. The conversation was becoming focused into the negative which I reflected back to group participants although I did not want to appear to be dismissive of their concerns or feelings. The participants refocused their conversation into what could work well in this kind of scenario from a people management perspective. How they could make a difference and be more aware of what they could do to counteract a negative mindset and behaviour in the workplace. Participants suggested

that this could be countered by modelling out positive pro social behaviours as leaders of their services.

One participant proposed;

"The action research group could be a vehicle for change, I want to make changes, try it out, we are a cross organisational group. This is the first time that managers have come together with a representation from across the organisation."

There was a lack of clarity or suggestion from group participants as to how they would do this and was reflected by one of the manager's final comments in this session where she said that;

"I am not sure how to achieve this. I want something from this group, policies are decided by senior managers and we are not being consulted consistently."

As the group session was drawing to a close noticed that the slips of paper on the flipchart had been arranged across it so to capture this work and I agreed to type up for the next meeting (Figure 4 p.152). Although no specific actions had been agreed at this session participating managers reaffirmed the process as to how they would take forward future actions from the AR Learning group once agreed. It was agreed that in terms of consulting with senior managers that myself and a member of the AR group would take discussions forward when the groups feels it is confident and a clearer about its route of inquiry and action steps.

Reflections and Themes discussed and agreed with manager's post AR Learning Group Meeting

There were continuing thematic areas that were seen as important to the AR Learning group and these were focused into;

a. Manager's behaviour towards each other and how to handle this.

b. The containing sense of disconnection with Central Services and senior managers.

c. The growth of the organisation and the impact on them as managers.

In emails sent after the AR Learning group session, two of the mangers set out their thoughts on the session after receiving and reflecting on the issue bubbles collated;

"In response to your posted letter, it seems to me that looking at the chart of what has been raised so far, we need to be looking at organizational issues. Out of the 40 or so 'issue bubbles' about 25 of them seem directly or indirectly concerned with organizational stuff, rather than issues around government. Not to say this isn't important (it is) but I think for me really the big issues are around consistency, equity, consultation.

I think at the moment there is not a forum where the 'big issues' can be discussed, which is probably why we see the AR group how we do, there is simply no where else this stuff gets talked about. So for me, if I thought that something practical and positive were to come out of this (and at the moment that could look like some kind of pan charitable trust forum) I would consider it worthwhile".

Summary from session 2;

The context here was that only five participants had attended this session and the group was also still early into its conversations about their shared and different experiences. From an AR process perspective the narrative from session one had

been typed up and shared in the intervening period between session one and session two. Sending out the notes to participants also allowed for a further reflection on the themes emerging conversation from the previous meeting which were generative (Coughlan & Brannick, 2005, 2015). The session had begun with reflections on what had emerged in the conversations held in the previously AR learning group session. During this session the themes were presented back to the participants as an iterative process and created an opportunity to 'look at' the narrative as written words on paper as described within the session interpretation. Participants were talking about how they were feeling about their experiences which had resulted in the generation of the manager's issues bubbles (Figure 4, page 152).

There were expressions from participants verbally and could be seen in their body language of heightened emotions when talking about the participant's experience of the behaviour of 'some senior managers' (Speaking in the third person). In particular where participants gave accounts of their experience of verbal critiscm about their work. This was cited as having featured strongly in the conversations from senior managers back in the workplace. Whitney (2007) citing Fredrickson's (2003) work on positive emotional climate as referenced to earlier in the literature review in this thesis where she argues that more positive ways of relating in organisations means that there is need to increase the amount of the positives conversations more and reduce the negative in practice.

In relating this to leadership thinking and behaviours within the organisation, the participant's conversations had led to a disclosure identifying the senior leader of the organisation as someone who was responsible for constructing negative

conversations which were very critical. This supports Waldron's (2007) assertion in the literature that leadership is a relational phenomenon. This was the lived experience of the participants and an example as to how a overtly critical communication and a negative mindset can permeate throughout an organisation from one to another, impacting on a person's experience of work. Drawing ideas from a positive conversational reframe elicited how the participants were able to then suggest different ways of being with each other in the workplace that could counter the negativity by modelling out a positive mindset through their workplace conversations (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2011).

From an AR process perspective the session was predominantly exploratory conversation allowing for continued emergence of themes. The narratives gathered in the session and were discussed with participant for themes which they thought were emerging in the conversations. These were to be iterated as planned for the purpose of stimulating and informing further conversation and reflection forming the next AR cycle in session three. A further AR cycle had been completed.

Figure 4 - Managers issues bubbles generated from conversations in session 2

Feels like there are lots of other people in the room besides the service user

It hard has to work in an environment with clients and child protection, mental health and other legislation

I am concerned that the AR group will not be heard

Cultural issues in the organisation

Feel emasculated – treated like a boy not a man

Clients need longer term work and this does not fit in with SLA's

Tension for practitioners with service delivery to clients with legislation and organisational constraints

I have to check out every decision that I make

How people treat each other as managers

Bullying culture

Decision making is with the senior managers, a long way away from the client

I need to keep this person coming back

Concerns re behaviour of managers

Changes in the voluntary sector

Experiencing bullying in Coventry and Warwick not in Birmingham

Is the policy working in practice?

Funders need to be clearer about what they want we need to be more assertive with the funders

The changing face of the voluntary sector

Pressure of performance management and service level agreements

How do policies get agreed round here?

Arms length from central office

Meeting the needs of service users and government

Employment rights

Inequity between Birmingham having larger pot of money in comparison with Warwick services

What about workforce development and NTA

Managers modelling Pro social behaviour

I need to be informed especially on legislation

I am Concerned at how the AR group will be received and supported by senior managers

Not always consulting on policies

Manager's behaviour and development could be assessed and have potential for developing 360° appraisal process Though the environment needs to be conducive/safe

I attended a half day course on employment law

Policies are decided by senior managers

Could use AR group to look at how policies are agreed and consulted upon in the organisation

What about how staff are treated here

I want a voice in the organisation

AR Group vehicle for change

Sword of Damocles hanging over me

There is no union rep in this organisation

I want to create change

Senior managers tend to do the talking with funders

No service user consultation on services as yet

I want to get something out of this

4.3.4   Third AR learning group meeting

By the third session group participants were becoming familiar with the working process of the AR Learning group and had agreed to lead this session. I agreed to step back and facilitate with appreciative reflective questions and summarise discussions at key points. Managers reflected on the previous session's notes that had been recorded and agreed these as accurate for validity including their work on the 'issue bubbles' (figure 4, p.152). This helped re orientate participants back into the AR process as it had been six weeks since the last session. Group participants used the emergent themes to from the comments that had been collated and continued their sense making discussions around these. In particular they identified that they wanted to focus in on;

- Communication

- Managers behaviour and experiences of bullying

- Culture of the organisation in particular the management and leadership style (how senior managers manage staff, hypercritical and belittling)

- Lack of understanding as to how policies were formulated and agreed within the organisation

- The growth of the charitable trust and the impact this had on service delivery

The conversation opened up between group participants with the theme of the impact of the growth of the charitable trust. In particular focusing in on communication and a perception that there was a lack of understanding from senior manager's perspective as to how this was impacting on managers trying to run their

services. Not all managers worked in the midlands so they were unaware for example of what was developing and happening within the new service in the Midlands. And in addition were not always aware of what was going on in other areas of the organisation as services are so geographically dispersed. However it was noticed that as a result of this group meeting that this intelligence was being shared. There was no formal communication process in the charitable trust such as a team briefing or meetings to share information and best practice. There used to be a quarterly charitable trust magazine written by the CEO which gave an up to date staffing list and updates on services across the patch. This had stopped being written and published six months before the AR Learning Group commenced. Group participants had noticed that as they were meeting across the organisation regularly and talking to other management colleagues outside of the group that they were starting to build a picture about common issues across the services. One manager stated from their perspective that;

"There tends to be 'us and them', feels like we are working separately and differently".

Another manager gave an example of their experience as a result of the growth in staff teams where they were based, Car parking was becoming an issue in some services as they were out growing their premises. Managers had examples of where this was an issue.

"The building that houses all of the services that are currently in the north cluster has been outgrown, we were trying to fit in the trainees and there was no more room, it is not costed in".

"Services have grown, there were 35 people in the organisation originally and now there is 160 – 180, the north cluster has grown (staffing) and the car park has not.

Most of the buildings were the original sites that staff team's had been working from for many years except for the more recent new service in the midlands where office space and car parking was factored into the plans for accommodating the size of teams. There was a sense of unfairness amongst participants as senior managers and Central Services had moved into a new building and there were plenty of parking spaces. Acerbated by feeling isolated from the 'centre' managers were feeling resentful at having to cope with less than adequate buildings. The conversation progressed on to discussing the potential impact of the Central Services review and proposals for new staffing. There was a lack of clarity as to how many posts there were going to be and what posts were being created. There was also a concern as to how managers would be able to communicate with the new managers such as the 'Director of Quality' and what this person would be doing in that role. There was a further concern that training and development was not covered within the services review and that this from managers perspective within the group was a critical area that needed to be addressed. There were increasing staffing levels as new staff joined the organisation and performance targets were an important focus for service delivery which staff needed to be held to account for.

'We need a full time post for training and development, the training policy states that the charitable trust will fund 60% of a course providing you take the time back and sign up to stay in the organisation after you have completed. Is this is right?"

From a human resource perspective Managers had noticed that there was an increase in sickness and absence. One manager shared their experience of what had worked well in managing this situation and how they had resolved this which was a good example of sharing practice;

"Staff were going off sick with stress and an employee assistance programme that cost £2,500 has proven to be invaluable, it has helped with managing staff and has been really helpful covering managers."

The conversation returned to and linked in with previous concerns raised at the last AR Learning group meeting regarding the lack of accessibility to the charities human resource and operations policies and how important these were in being able to manage growing staff teams. Although managers were aware that work was being undertaken by the Head of Human Resources to bring these policies up to date, managers did not feel that the work was being undertaken quickly enough. There was a general view that this was not addressing the day to day challenges in delivering services with human resource policies being described as inoperable in some cases. One manager cited his experience of using the policies;

"We have one policy on supervision in theory, though this is full of spelling mistakes, and they are confusing, they exist on the P drive, and there are also 5 different job descriptions for each job! "

There were further frustrations about where the information was being held electronically;

"There is confusion with information that is stored electronically; information can be null and void"

Communication and lack of voice in terms of consultation in the organisation continued to be a central theme.

"We want to be consulted with and listened to"

"Whose role will this be? We want to be taken seriously, real consultation with managers, a focus group that will be used to consult, identify key areas that need to be changed, covering a wide range of issues, policies and employee assistance, and are consultation.

I summarised the discussions at that point and then asked a reflective question as to what were the group participants going to do about what they had discussed such as the policies?   The Office Administrator manager proposed that the participants could think about what had worked in other organisations where they had previously worked. They wanted to better understand how quality improvement groups had been developed elsewhere and how these had worked. The Office manager gave an example from her experience;

"There were different departments (from across the building society) involved in the group drawn from finance, mortgage and administration, consultants. This model reported to and had the influence of the operational manager who had the financial resources and could make the decisions needed to action agreements."

The discussion moved onto experiences in other organisations that already have quality manuals which assisted with reviewing and improving service delivery. In addition another manager cited an example where the model of Central Services delivery was a resource to services and responded within a set number of days to queries or need for support with resources available through specific people within human resources, marketing and finance to respond to these queries. Managers commented that this was different to what they were experiencing within the charitable trust currently although they understood Central Services to be a resource; they were not clear how that worked though.

Another manager also gave an example about the benefits of being a member of another knowledge sharing group which was working well. This was led by the midlands (DAT) Drug and Alcohol Action Team and met regularly to work with

developing the accuracy of data collection within the services required by NDTMS. As a cross agency group they were working much more pro-actively to get on top of live working issues as it was mainly administrators who were heading up the inputting of the data on behalf of practitioners. There had not been a group meeting in December as a result a major issue that would have been discussed there had not been and was now having a big impact on the collection of information. The learning was that if the group had met then these issues would have been addressed earlier.

Group participants discussed these examples further and considered whether any of these models could be developed in a similar way for the charitable trust which could be worked up as a cross organisational group. There was general consensus from participants that this could also improve communication because of the current membership of managers attending from across the organisation. This group would also provide central point for feedback and discussion to find solutions for cross organisational operational management challenges. Managers agreed that any learning could be fed back into developing improved organisational processes as a learning organisation. I asked if they would work through what this model would look like and how it could influence and bring about change? The group participants worked through on a flipchart as to how this could look in terms of an initial draft model. Group participants drafted a diagram and included what they saw as core values in terms of how this could work (See Figure 5, page 158). The core values also picked up on some of the gaps that they wanted to bridge in developing a cross organisational group.

Figure 5: Cross Organisational Group - Core Values, Consistency, Consultation and Quality

The Board

Central Services

Cross organisational group of managers
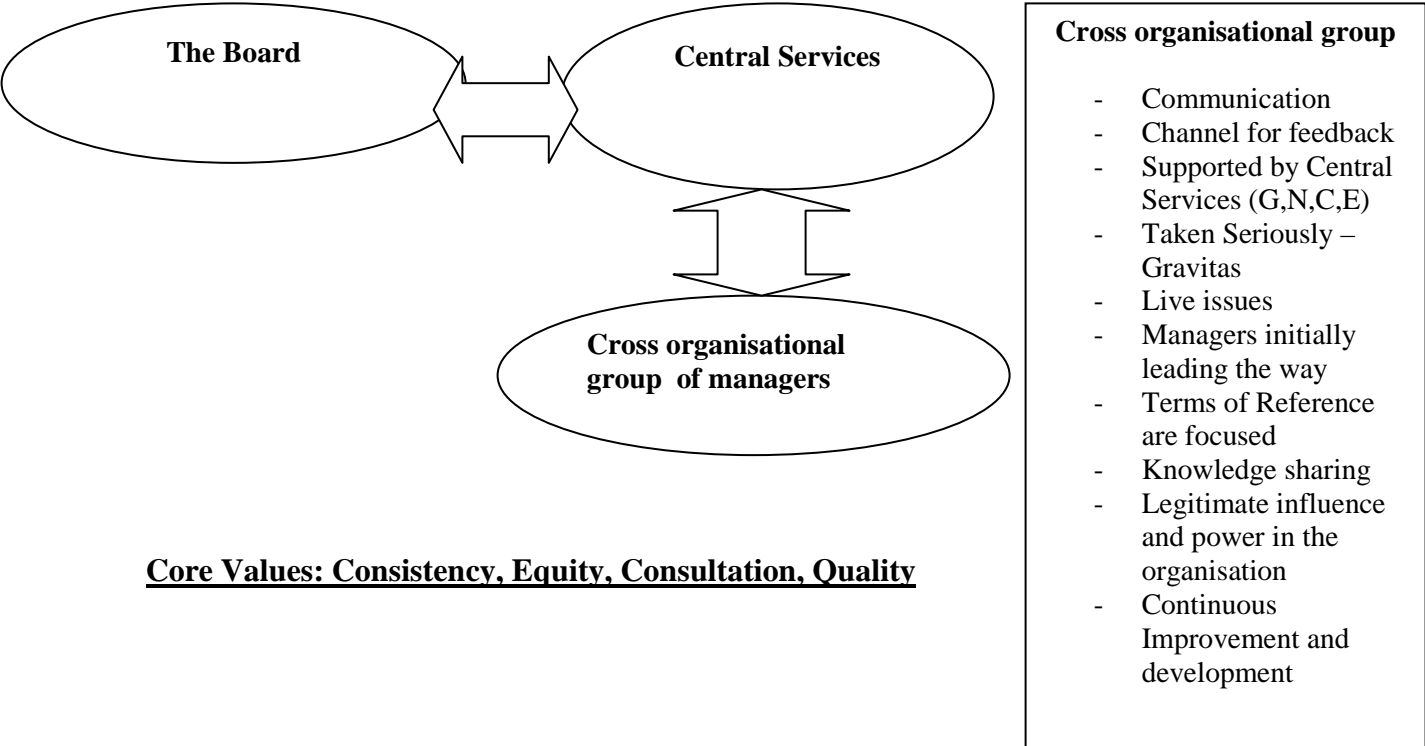
Core Values: Consistency, Equity, Consultation, Quality

Cross organisational group

- Communication
- Channel for feedback
- Supported by Central Services (G,N,C,E)
- Taken Seriously – Gravitas
- Live issues
- Managers initially leading the way
- Terms of Reference are focused
- Knowledge sharing
- Legitimate influence and power in the organisation
- Continuous Improvement and development

Reflections and Themes discussed and agreed with manager's post AR Learning Group Meeting three

Group participants fed back that they felt that they had been able to have conversations about difficult and challenging areas of their work that they felt needed to be addressed and were each feeling more confident and clearer about what these issues were. Several of managers felt committed to going back and raising this with senior managers and human resources.

Reflections by the AR learning group on the session

Group participants shared that ending with a hopeful and positive focus on the development of a longer term managers learning forum in the organisation was motivational. The group felt that this session was a positive group's experience in terms of interactions.

- It has been good to discuss the Issues that we have faced and needing senior manager's agreements. It's rare we have the space to do this

- Last time we talked about one thing, we don't want to deal with one issue, we want to deal with all issues eventually through this

- It's been really good talking things through and trying to better understand what is happening

- This is not about bashing manager's, it is about considering what we need to do about issues

Commitments by participants as to the next set of action steps were agreed. Participating managers agreed that participants would;

- Agree a learning model and check out with absent colleagues if this was what they wanted.

- Further work would be undertaken around developing a pitch to deliver the proposal to senior managers

- Participants would go away and research similar cross organisational group models in other organisations, at least two if possible and feed back into the group

- Participants would draft a document outlining aims and objectives as to how this cross organisational group would work

Summary from session 3;

The context here was that it had been six weeks between session two and session three as the date had had to be rearranged due to work exigencies. In reality it was already becoming quite challenging to make sure that the AR learning group was a continued priority for the participants. In addition the DOO as the senior manager and 'key influencer' who was an important part of driving and supporting ideas generated from the AR learning group, was off work for a period which could impact on the outcome of the research. The main concern discussed within the group was there was no identified person who would be the broker to take forward learning into the organisation. However it was agreed that this would not impact on group and individual reflection and learning from a first and second person perspective would still be a focus (Reason and Bradbury,2006).

What had emerged in the conversation in this session was how the participants as co researchers had managed the political tensions emerging from the knowledge sharing about their experiences. In particular to the disclosure and sharing thoughts about the actions of the CEO who as the key leader of the organisation was the one sending out critical emails impacting on their work experience (Herr & Anderson,

2005). Bushe in talking about the importance of the constructionist principle of AI (2011, 7) cites the saying that was made popular in AI circles that *'words create worlds'*.

From an appreciative mindset the session was focused on what did the participants wanted more of and challenged them to consider critiquing this experience further to come to a view as to what they would do with this knowledge (Take action). I asked a reflective question which caused them to think about what action could be taken, 'so what would you like to do about this?' This was well received and resulted in the group reflecting on what they could do (Take action) which resulted in a proposal to begin working on a conceptual model to develop a cross organisational development group (see figure 5, p 158) which would continue post research. A potential development of a community of practice (Wenger, 2005) was being co constructed by participants.

Baker, Jensen and Kolb's, (2002) notion of recursively returning back to what interested them in terms of the emergent themes intrinsically factored in this session as they had emotional investment in wanting to change what they were experiencing (Kolb, 2002). Participants were recursively returning (Kolb et al, 2002) back to the same themes of negativity which were emotional for them as they wanted to further understand more about their experience. The recursive nature of the learning conversations clearly enabled participants to delve deeper into what is causing this level of interest and for them to gain a better understanding.

As described within the most recent literature on the development of Dialogic OD methods (Bushe & Marshak, 2014) there was a shift in the participant's mindsets as to how they could impact on the wider organisation for the longer term by addressing the thematic areas that were causing frustration. This also

evidenced that the participants were beginning to think and talk through how they could create system wide influence and sharing of knowledge for change and improvement which accords with the OD literature and the core values of OD (Cheung – Judge & Holbeche, 2011).

This outcome of the third cycle through reflecting on what the participants were learning resulted in the determination and a commitment to act on the idea to develop a pan charitable wide group though the actual model had not been agreed this point when or how this would happen. A further AR cycle had been completed with the gathering of written reflections and narrative from participants to flow into session four as an iterative process.

4.3.5 Midpoint AR learning group review

In between the session three and session four I reviewed the notes written up from AR learning group for progress and emergent themes from the manager's discussions. These are my observations from the analysis.

Conversations

The first two sessions had primarily been exploratory in terms of conversations although there were clear themes that were emerging. The 'managers issue bubbles' were made up of comments that had been made about issues of concern and had been mapped onto a single document which captured thinking at that time (figure 2, p152). The conversations had been predominantly focused into a number of key areas that were impacting on the manager's ability to undertake their role. There had been frequent references to;

a. Managers feeling disempowered and lacking the ability to contribute in terms of leadership of the organisation with senior managers. A feeling of disconnection from the 'central services; where the senior team and support services are located.

b. A lack of 'voice' in the organisation with senior managers about organisational changes. In particular the recent organisational service review. Email was the primary communication tool.

c. Experiences were cited as to how some of the senior managers were behaving in a negative way towards which was reported to be impacting of the organisational culture and climate. References were made about the manager's management and leadership style as being negative. Examples were given as to; how senior managers were acting negatively when working with managers, references to senior managers being hypercritical and belittling towards managers.

d. A general lack of understanding as to how people management policies were formulated and agreed within the organisation and feeling unsafe with the way current policies were written.

e. The growth of the charitable trust and the impact this had on service delivery and pressure points. Concerns that service level agreements were driving service provision to the detriment

AR learning group process

Looking at the feedback and reflections from participating managers at the end of the sessions, there were clear statements that they were gaining benefits from engaging with each other in the AR learning group. This was the first cross organisational group for managers within the charitable trust and this was an outcome in

itself. From the first meeting through dialogue knowledge was being shared and confirmed between managers who had not met as a group before. The AR learning group participants had felt able to discuss sensitivities that they have been experiencing in the organisation in a safe space amongst colleagues. There has been nowhere to be able to talk about these kinds of issues previously. The climate within the AR learning group had remained positive with attention being paid by group participants to work in an appreciative way. This had not detracted from being able to talk about their negative experiences; working in an appreciative way has actually supported the participant's ability to articulate their experiences. There was a real level of maturity being exhibited by managers who instead of potentially defaulting to a critical blame culture, they were instead trying to find other ways to address some of the issues so that they could go back into the workplace to make changes in relationships. In terms of the AR cycles actions had been very much focused on reflecting between sessions, working to make changes in relationships and addressing policy issues. The last session marked a turning point with the AR learning group as they wanted to ensure there was a legacy with the group and wanted to develop a proposal to go to senior managers to gain support in establishing this organisationally.

Emotion

Participants had been able to talk about how they had felt in regards to some of the sensitivities within the organisation. Incidents and experiences had been shared with each other during conversations about experiences of senior managers behaving in a bullying and belittling way. Frustrations around the lack of good people

management guidance and policies were hampering managing staff teams. The participants had not really talked about how the negativity was impacting on their day to day lived experience and their stress levels although there was a sense that they did not always feel safe about their position. Participants supported this in that they were talking about how this was impacting on them because of their experience of living with the ambiguity and negativity.

4.3.6   Fourth AR learning group meeting

There had been a gap of two months between the last AR Learning set meeting as managers had cancelled due to the exigencies of the operation of services and meetings. In addition the DOO was also now off work due to a sudden bereavement so the link with senior management was tentative. I was no longer clear on how we were going to be able to feedback progress from the AR learning group. I was trying to engage with the CEO instead who also had limited capacity to support us as a result of the DOO being off. I agreed with the CEO to keep working with the group and hold off on any actions emerging from the AR Learning set until the DOO returned.   As a result of increasing work demands and a pending maternity leave, two other managers announced that they were leaving the AR Learning group and this meant that there were now only four managers left. This situation had a direct impact on managers left within the group and a large proportion of session four was taken up them engaging in a conversation as to whether those who were left wanted to continue with the AR study.

This situation had impacted on their confidence and the remaining managers were concerned as to whether or not they would be able to continue with

making the AR learning group work for them. Each manager individually expressed their disappointment, especially as this would mean less representation from the whole of charitable trust which had been an important asset of the AR Learning group. Emotionally some of the group participants were visibly frustrated and angry. I proposed that we work this through amongst those that were present and this was agreed. This was a test of manager's ability to reframe their mindset and see this as an opportunity for continued collaborative working. The group participants discussed how they felt about continuing with a smaller number of people and felt that there were decisions that needed to be made as to whether everyone had the energy and commitment to continue. In addition consideration was needed to be given as to whether this was the right point to recruit more managers if the group were to continue. I asked the group participants to reflect on how important the AR learning group was to managers now? The group participants responded that they considered that the AR Learning group as a space that they needed, especially as it was the only working group that met that covered a cross section of the charitable trust. So there was a group agreement made that the remaining manager's would choose to continue the AR Learning study as an agreed action point and monitor how this was progressing when the group met next. There was a further agreement for agreed action to aim to recruit more managers when the current group participants had finalised the proposed longer term AR Learning group's aims and objectives. Group participants wanted to gain a good cross section of people from within the charitable trust participants wanted a group of at least six managers. There was agreement to approach managers from the Criminal Justice team, Floating Support team and Children and Young Persons service. The group participants present agreed to

continue with the AR Learning group in light of these agreements. Clearly the remaining managers were determined to continue with the AR Learning Group and had worked through the pros and cons of continuing arriving at a consensus on a way forward, staying true to their commitment of being solution focused.

Once the future of the group had been agreed, participants then refocused back into the emergent themes from the last session aiming to cover the following key areas to clarify if there were issues and what would then need to happen next.

a. Communication

There was a recurrent theme here identified by the managers within the group from a communications perspective that was drawn from the experience of managers working in the organisation. From their perspective of a lack of cross organisational communication meant that issues were not always discussed, addressed or consulted on in full. An example of this was when group participants recalled was the supervision policy which was sent out to only one part of the organisation though not all resulting in feeding back. One of the managers suggested that on reflection that Central Services may be under the impression that communication is better than it is and this raised a number of questions;

– Why are people afraid to feedback or why don't they bother?

– Is the feedback disregarded anyway?

– Resulting in what's the point!

b. Experiences of managers mindset, behaviour, actions and experiences of bullying culture in particular through the management and leadership style.

These themes led back into the previous discussion about group member's experiences of senior manager's mindset and behaviour being negative and the CEO had been identified as one of the key perpetrators in this. The conversation evolved between the managers as they voiced concerns as how they were viewed by certain senior managers and how this then affects;

"You're standing and reputation within the organisation as a manager."

Acknowledging their concerns I handed out an extract from a newsletter article which I had read recently written by Dr William Miller (2006) who developed 'Motivational Interviewing' as a leading evidenced based approach to developing health and lifestyle change conversations. Miller (2006) had written an article about how Motivational Interviewing principles of communication could be transferred by managers into creating a positive working climate for employees in an organisation. A reflective conversation by group participants was that this made sense and yet did not seem to be used or had not been translated into management practice. There was a general view that not all managers actually paid attention to the climate they were developing in their work area. This discussion led onto reflecting onto a number of manager's questioning as to each other's experience of the charitable trust being a 'closed culture, a culture of secrecy'. The reason for this managers explained was that it seemed that communication was perceived as being poor as referred to previously and that this seemed like information was being held back which was getting in the way of being able to be open

with staff about what was going on. So the perception was that there was a closed culture between senior managers and operational staff.

c. Lack of understanding as to how policies were formulated and agreed within the organisation.

The group further discussed the current policies and procedures that they had tried to get a better understanding of what the issues were from the last AR Learning session to help clarify if there were the priorities in this key area. Each manager had been back into their workplace after the last AR Learning group meeting and checked out if staff knew where these policies and procedures were held, if were they up to date and the quality of written policy document. The outcomes of this resulted in the following discoveries that;

- Not everyone knew where to find them

- Policies and procedures both new and old policies were on P: drive

- There was no clarity on version control, when they were finalised

- The policies were not on reading fit for purpose.

As a result of this conversation managers within the AR learning group meeting were ready to draft out the initial aims and objectives for the evolvement of the group on a flipchart into a formal pan organisation wide managers learning forum. These initial aims and objectives were that;

The AR learning group seeks to

- *Take an active interest in collective welfare of the organisation*
- *To support organisational change and be a collaborative part of that change*
- *To share skills, knowledge, and good practice within the management team in order to promote the model of consultative management practice*
- *Recognise that this may involve some difficult conversations and conflict and find ways to manage this effectively*
- *To establish the groups credibility with Senior Managers, colleagues and staff group by tackling issues within a realistic time frame to conclusion or / and initially taking a lead role in the consultative process involving one issue.*

The group participants committed to having drafted initial aims and objectives and how the group would undertake a presentation to the Head of Operations on an agreed date. I also agreed with managers present to send out a recent article from ACAS (The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) on a bullying case that had been presented to court under the Protection from Harassment Act (1997). This case had been won by the complainant suggesting that these kinds of incidents were being taken seriously in the law courts. This was to inform thinking about the consequences negative manager and co-worker behaviours for information purposes.

Reflections and Themes discussed and agreed with managers post AR learning group meeting

Group participants wanted to document what they felt they were gaining from participating in the AR Learning group at the end of this session. They drafted their thoughts onto a flipchart which I constructed this with the participants into a

diagram capturing what they had written and how this was to be laid out (Figure 6, page 172).

Figure 6 Midway evaluations - from the group member's perspective
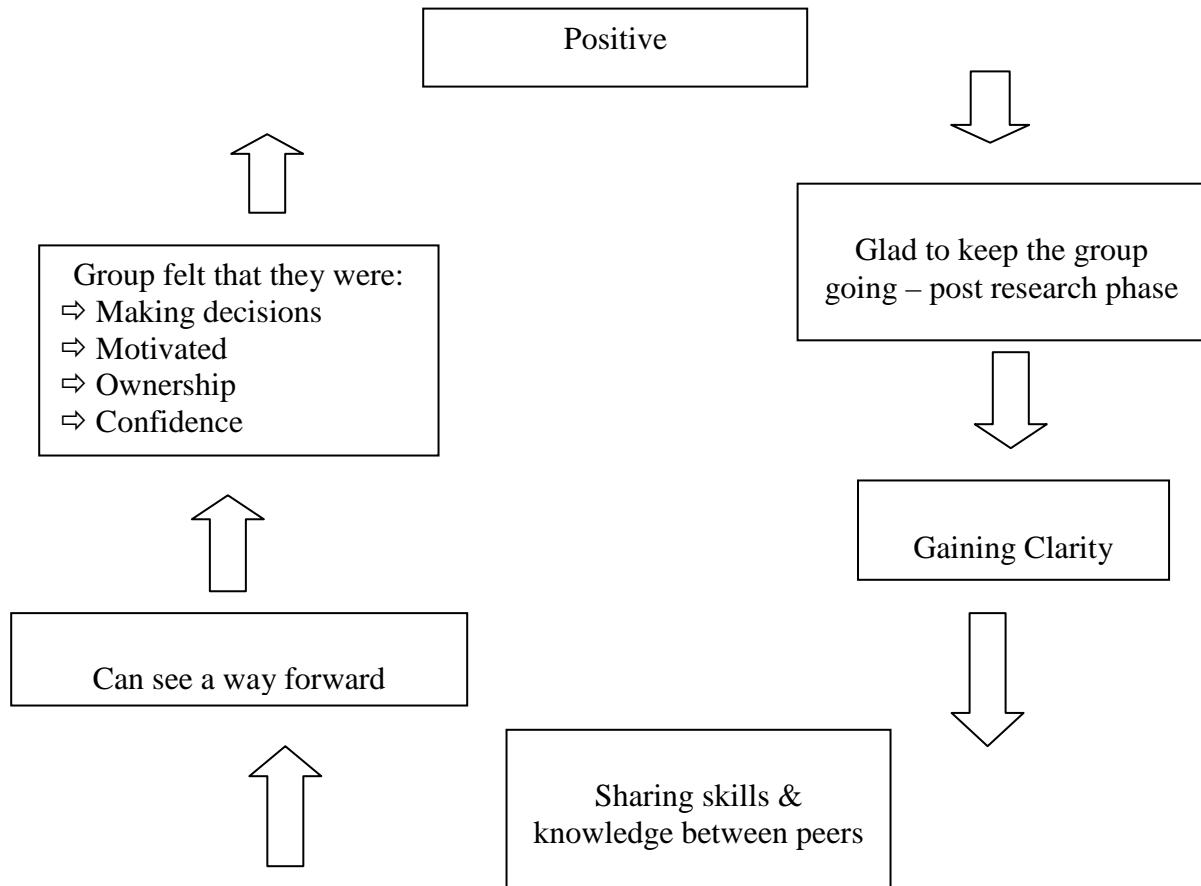
It was clear that the group participants present felt that they were gaining from participating in the AR Learning set in a variety of ways. There was also a clear commitment to keep the AR Learning group going beyond the research phase in whatever form that would take which needed to be worked on. The sharing of skills and knowledge amongst peer group participants was an important part participating in the group.

Summary from session 4;

        The context leading up to session four was that there had been a further gap in the AR learning group meeting as a group as a result of operational exigencies, though the fourth session was still well attended. The DOO was still off work so any potential areas for changes being discussed within the group was somewhat slightly hampered as the ability to feedback about progress was not in place. Two managers also announced they were leaving the AR group, one due to operational demands and the other for maternity leave. This was a critical juncture for the AR learning group as there were now only four participating managers left in the group although this was still 25 percent representation of the total number of managers in the organisation. A large part of the session's conversation was focused on whether to continue with the group and what to do next. This critical juncture featured as part of the AR method in so far as the participants chose to focus on this emergent issue so that they could make a choice about how they would continue. Holman (2013) and Ford & Ford (1995) suggest that the basic assumption of dialogic change practice is that change occurs through changing conversations in a system. The participants through their deliberations chose to continue with the AR learning group. These deliberations were held in the spirit of a collaborative conversation and agreement reached as described by Saunders et al (2007). This was testament to the value that they held in regards to the space. This approach also demonstrated rigor in AR process in regards to democratic validity as part of the research goals (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

        In terms of the AR process there are no written AR practice examples advising on what needs to happen at a critical juncture in the research such as

when participants drop out. I had to take advice with my university supervisors whether this would still be a good representation of the organisation. The fact that the participants had taken responsibility for considering their options was factored into this discussion as it was their conversational space. There was no guidance on how many people need to be a part of a group conversation, however it could be argued that at least two people would be needed as this was not a focus group.

As part of the iteration and reflection on the previous conversation the participants disclosed that they had been out into the workplace to confirm and disconfirm with other colleagues if their experience was accurate in relation to the issue with the lack of coherence in the organisational policies and procedures. This had been confirmed (Dick, 2014). As a result of this participants reflected back into the group that they were gaining clarity as an outcome of this session (Figure 6, page 165). A further AR cycle had been completed with the narrative and reflections from this session flowing into session five.

Briefing meeting between myself and the DOO outside the AR Learning group

Before the fifth AR Learning session I was able to set up a review meeting with the DOO with the agreement via email of the managers in the AR Learning group when she had returned back from compassionate leave. This was a pivotal point for the AR learning group as they had not had an opportunity to discuss how the AR learning group was progressing and where they needed help to move key themes forward within the organisation.

I discussed the recurrent themes that were coming up and the challenges that they were facing on a day to day basis. I also talked through some of the politically sensitive concerns regarding the mindset and behaviour of the CEO as to how he was constructing his emails and creating tensions between himself and his managers. She was also unaware as to the difficulties managers were having with policies as she believed this process had been resolved with human resources. The DOO asked me to email through what we had discussed.   She agreed to meet with the AR Learning group at the next session to discuss the emergent themes. I emailed the group to let them know what the next steps would be in meeting with DOO. It felt like this was an opportunity to progress manager's discussions with a senior manager to make some progress.

4.3.5 Fifth AR learning group meeting

Session five began with reflecting on the notes from the last session and group participants were again revisiting feeling negative about the managers that they felt had dropped out of the AR Learning group. One of the managers suggested that it may be a statement about what the priorities are in terms of work. This negative start was countered when the office manager wanted to bring some positive news to colleagues. She had from a personal perspective decided to enrol and commence on an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) course at college. She was also pleased that it would be covering recruitment and selection which was important in her work currently which was a recurrent theme within the AR learning group. I also fed back into the group the positive discussion with the DOO as she was back at work and that she wanted to meet with the managers to review what had emerged from their work so far. The DOO was

also keen to hear the proposal and agree the next steps. So preparing for this meeting at this session was an important part of consolidating what was to be presented in terms of the proposal. The two managers' from the north cluster had shared that it had become increasingly difficult recently as there had been a cut back in funding and this was resulting in major reconfigurations of provision and the potential for redundancies. This was impacting on morale in this part of the organisation. The experience of these two managers was of frustration in not being consulted as to how to do this;

> *"We are expected to undertake redesign and reconfiguration of services and for the first time I am involving service users with no guidance in place as to how I am supposed to do this."*

> *"There is a perception that the north cluster is a good service, we treat people properly yet why am I not involved in the meetings to talk about reconfiguration? There are still budgeting problems although the local authority and the commissioner are reviewing the situation now."*

The group participants talked about a general feeling that skills and experiences that managers have not been harnessed as strength or a resource in the organisation. Rather that there is more critiscm about what is not right rather than what has been done well. This was not helping managing the difficulties of reducing budgets and the potential impact on service provision such as redundancies. Morale was low in these services.

It also raised the issue again that there were still gaps in human resource support service for managers and no movement as yet with updating human resource policies and procedures. Numerous requests for this to happen had been met with no action. Redundancy was now becoming a real risk because of impending funding cuts so managers were keen to have legally correct policies in place to follow. It was further

discussed that this is where a formal development forum to take this to was needed to ensure that action would be taken to resolve this. Comments from participants in relation to human resource issues in the charitable trust were indicative of the frustration that was being felt;

"Managers need to be more assertive and proactive. We should be developing a list of what we need from HR and then feed through as to what we need to do our job."

"HR needs to be taking the lead with policies and procedures."

Participants talked about being frustrated with the lack of communication with HR personnel as emails were not being responded to. There was a perceived lack of consultation with the managers who were responsible for the affected services.

"I have emailed HR and I have not been getting responses regarding certain issues around contracting and one of these coming to an end with a staff manager."

"One of my staff was given extra 'carers leave' without consulting the locality manager."

"Two of my staff has been on temporary acting up contracts for 12 months or more."

There was an acknowledgement that there was not enough capacity in terms of human resource support in spite of frustrations.

"I am constantly chasing people in HR although I know there are capacity issues."

I asked the group participants; what are we going to do about it and how are we going to prepare to meet and feedback concerns discussed on the previous session with the DOO at the next session? Comments were gathered and discussed between the group participants and captured on flipchart;

> *Session 5 AR Learning Group*
>
> - *We need and value the regular protected time for managers to consult*
>
> - *Dialogue about management issues and development*
>
> - *Whatever we develop needs to have feedback into service managers built in*
>
> - *We can work with the themes, such as policies and procedures and establish what current best practices are*
>
> - *It may about culture and we may want to assess the organisational culture through a questionnaire or focus groups to see where people are*
>
> - *It will be a cross organisational learning dialogue*
>
> - *Managers can be invited in*
>
> - *We need communication to cascade up and down and engage with business support functions*
>
> - *Group norms and boundaries and culture will need to be established like we did in the AR learning group*
>
> - *We may want to take an appreciative and solutions focused approach as we have so far*
>
> - *We need a 'can do attitude' the way we managed the process of change and acknowledgment from the Head of Operations that we can do this.*

Actions agreed for the next session (6) in developing the cross organisational charitable trust manager's development forum

Group participants agreed that they would take away actions from this meeting and that they would complete written aims, objectives and values for the proposed cross organisational Learning and Development Forum for the next meeting via email. Group participants would also formulate a brief review of the learning experienced within the AR Learning group and its successes to date for the DOO. Group participants

would also draft out proposed managers membership of the future Learning and Development Forum.

Reflections from Managers post AR Learning Group meeting

Extracts from comments sent by three of the participants reflecting on session five writing that:

"Although the theme of the meeting reverted frequently to one of criticism of the organisation & the consequential pessimism, powerlessness & anger, the final fifth of the meeting was such that I was not left feeling negative at all."

"The end part of the meeting moved towards looking at action to be taken by the group in preparation for the meeting with Head of Operations. This, I feel, was positive & something that (I think) all of the more successful of the meetings have done."

"I think looking back over the last six sessions that there has been some very valuable knowledge and practice shared, and I also think that this is just a small part of the potential of a cross organisational management group."

Summary from session 5;

The context for this session was that four managers attended and the brought with them a feeling of continued negativity and disappointment because fellow participants had left the AR group. There was a feeling of loss and being let down. However the news that the DOO had returned back to work was uplifting as the mood shifted in the session. I shared that had been able to review progress of the AR learning with the DOO after gaining agreement with the participants to do this. This was also important in terms of ensuring and evidencing democratic validity in the research process. I was also adhering to the ethical agreement I had with the participants as co researchers in the process (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Further clarity was gained during the session as to some of the managers lived concerns with the organisation and the

meeting to review the progress of the AR learning group had been arranged to be undertaken after the fifth AR learning group session. This changed the emphasis and the energy of the group's conversations positively after feeding back the discussion with the DOO back to the participants.

First person and second person AR learning and outcomes as described by Reason and Bradbury (2006) were evidenced during this session both at an individual (Participant starting a new course) and at group level (The act of writing aims and objectives for the proposed Managers Learning and Development Forum). However the negative feelings about the organisation were recursively (Kolb et al, 2002) returned back to the conversation as there had been news of impending cuts in funding which the managers had not experienced handling before. The concerns about having the right policies to work with in particular in managing human resource practice had become more urgent.

The 'simultaneity principle' in AI is translated into practice as how we construct the way we ask questions when working with people. How we construct the language, being mindful of the tone and intention affects the direction and the energy of the conversation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). Using this principle in guiding the conversation towards a future vision of the group, the possibilities flowed easily when talking about how participants would construct the aims towards what they wanted more of. This was an example of AI following the 'Anticipatory Principle' (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). This visioning approach would essentially broaden out into third-person AR as described by Reason and Bradbury (2006) at organisational level through the development of a cross organisational manager's development group. In

terms of moving towards research action in the AR process (Dick, 2014), participants continued the development of the proposal in between the AR learning group meetings. From an AR process perspective the narrative captured from the meeting was shared with participants to reflect on in between sessions and at the beginning of session six. Reflections from participants in between this session and session six indicated that the conversation had started negatively and recursively returned to continued critiscm of the organisation. Although the participants reflected in writing the feeling of *'powerlessness, pessimism and anger'* at the beginning of the session. By the end of the session the participants described as being left with a sense of optimism. A further AR cycle had been completed and the reflections and narrative would flow into the next session.

4.3.6 Sixth AR learning group meeting

The group participants had decided to meet earlier to prepare for the meeting with the DOO with the feedback on the AR Learning group and to review and refine the proposals for developing the cross organisational manager's development and learning forum within the organisation. The aims had been sent to the group participants by one of the managers who took the lead via email prior to the group meeting. The key areas proposed by managers for the focus of the conversation with DOO when they met were to cover what the purpose was of developing the cross organisational meeting. The meeting would aim to;

1. Establish the principles of the group which would focus on developing an organisation wide conversation ensuring there was feedback between the proposed group to central services and out to services in the organisation to consult with staff and make things happen.

2. Clarifying the role of the new senior management group meeting commencing in November and what the purpose of this group is in comparison with the AR Learning group

3. Having a cross organisational focus

4. Bridging the strategic and operational functions so that there was a meeting point

5. Ensuring that honesty and safety were central to any conversations so as to address some of the challenges facing services and the organisation

6. Using an Appreciative and strengths based approach

7. The focus would also into Management Development and Leadership

What now follows is an account of the discussion between the DOO and the AR learning group and the proposal to develop a cross organisational group.

Meeting with the DOO and AR Learning group on proposed developments

The DOO joined the group and there were three managers from the AR learning group. One of the managers outlined what the purpose of the meeting was in developing the group. He went on to say that the group recognised early on that it was an under used resource and that they could contribute knowledge and resources to the organisation as a whole. He stated that the AR learning group was valued amongst managers and so could be a vehicle for management and leadership development. He proposed that if the group is to exist formally then managers wanted to be clear about what was expected and how their work could benefit management and leadership development and benefit the organisation.

Bridging the divide with Central Services and senior managers

Using the metaphor of the bridge and 'check point Charlie', he described that the bridge had central services on one side of the bridge and operational managers on the other side. Elaborating on this the managers as a group had learned that there needed to be meeting place for managers. He then said 'I am going to put my head above the parapet' as there are barriers with the dialogue between central services and operational managers. He was very honest and acknowledged that some of barriers had been created by themselves (managers) and that maybe they were 'part of the problem' although some were created by central services. He gave an example where managers had identified within the learning group that emails had replaced face to face and telephone conversation in the organisation. Everyone was communicating mainly in this way and less by telephone conversation now. There was agreement around the table that this was the case and by the DOO.

Supporting the review and development of charitable trust policies and procedures

One of the other managers led the next section of the discussion and added that they had also recognised that there were areas where managers were underused from a consultative point of view in such activities as policies and procedures. The group could demonstrate its resourcefulness and could 'manage to lead' by being involved. She went on to say that there could be better ways of working. That they (Managers in the AR learning group) could be better leaders and managers by being involved in making sure that their experience both positive and negative in using the charities using policies and

procedures could be fed back into human resources. The DOO said that she had thought of using the AR Learning group as the 'Child Protection focus group' which has been convened to review the policy, however then managers exited and the group unfortunately ended up not a big enough group/representation of the organisation.

Training and development for managers

The third manager led the next section and said that she thought that there could be provision within the group for in-house training and development for managers. She went on to set out that what stops managers from moving forward sometimes and talking about issues is the 'fear factor'. She stated how she has benefited from being in the group and that she would 'put her head above the parapet in saying for example that the email from the CEO she had received she would have reacted by 'bitching about it'. She further explained that the DOO had helped her to deescalate the situation. She stated that she realised now that she was not isolated and on her own as a middle manager by being part of the AR Learning group. The DOO then asked if everyone saw the use of email in the same way and managers agreed that they did. Managers said that they had become an organisation that is reliant on email and that managers and staff do not pick up the phone enough to talk to each other.

Resolving the issue of the negative emails

Finally all three of the managers stated that there was a need to become a more interpersonal organisation rather than emails and that there are 'power differentials' which needed to be addressed. The DOO said it was her experience that she gets copied

into emails and has no understanding why, other than there is an expectation that she will do something about it. She did not see this as a constructive way forward. One of the managers said that that as they saw the CEO as setting the tone for the culture of the organisation and the value base. One of the managers added;

"I am not sure it carries through. More thought needs to be given to the 'tone' of emails."

Another manager stated

"There needs to be time to reflect before sending emails out."

Along this theme;

"It is so easy to write an email which appears emotionless and yet can be misconstrued as having another meaning. The immediateness of email means that it is all too easy to respond too quickly without thinking sometimes."

The DOO reflected back to the Managers in the group by saying;

'Email has become a real issue in a negative way, it's being used like a paper trail, and what does that say? Why is a person not acting on an email, rather than sending out another email and copying everyone in? There needs to be buy in so that we recognise we share the same problem, and we need to look at how can we work together to be more appropriate in our responses."

The participants suggested that the group could provide this, as a service development focus group. The DOO went on further to say that she recognised that the emails from the CEO had created a barrier around the discussion on policies and procedures, when she was keen to be involved. There needs to be recognition of the barriers on both sides. Finally one of the managers went on to say that within the AR learning group there has been the opportunity to speak frankly and openly and managers had learned to take on challenges and constructive critiscm.

Developing a formal proposal for a cross organisational managers development group

The DOO suggested that next set of work that was needed to be undertaken was to;

- *Clarify the purpose of the group*

- *A piece of work on how you see it working*

- *To ensure there is honest feedback kept in the group*

- *Ensure that the focus is not too broad*

- *Factor in that the senior management group is new and this group [AR] has an opportunity of dovetailing with this group – A proposal needs to be worked on in light of the learning since its beginning*

- *Another manager is working on a quality and performance framework within the organisation and this may sit in with this work also or inform it*

- *Option of NVQ management and leadership development training could be run through this group*

DOO asked that the managers from the AR Learning group to invite her in to meet again when this work had been drawn up and completed as a full draft proposal. Group participants agreed to go away and undertaken this work in the next session and to then arrange to meet with the Head of Operations on completion.

Reflections and actions discussed with Managers post AR Learning Group meeting

One of the participants sent an email after receiving the notes from this meeting and reflected that;

"The meeting started with a bit of a feeling of panic and once again asking what the purpose of the group has been and will be post research stage. As with all

previous meetings this initial forming/storming stage sets the agenda for creative thinking about the role of the group within the organization and the responsibilities of the individual within the group",

"We are all clear that we see the group as an opportunity to input into maintaining the integrity of the service we deliver to clients and workers that we supervise, the organization and individually."

"We all feel that we have more to offer the organization that is currently being utilized and we all expressed concern that there are barriers some of self construct others imposed by a rapidly developing organization with an increasingly distant senior exec."

"I am in a role where having a sense of team cohesion is essential, I often complain that in my current role I feel isolated and yet when someone takes the pressure off for a while I am very uncomfortable."

"I was pleased and not surprised that the DOO was supportive of the group's aspirations. I think we clearly established the difference between the organizational development group and the senior management group and the next step is to see if others across the organization feel able to invest in something that will provide professional challenge and opportunity for development."

"Great group dynamics!"

Summary from session 6;

The context for this session was that in preparation for presenting the proposal, that the participants had been working on the development of the cross organisational development group. This was evidenced to have continued by participants via email in between sessions in preparation for the meeting with the DOO. This was viewed as a key session for participants in meeting with the senior manager and brought with it renewed energy as possibilities were emerging. In terms of AR process, the group participants reengaged with the group more proactively and conversation was more action focused as they believed this was an opportunity to make a difference so were optimistic.

The themes were presented to the DOO and participants developed a reflective conversation with the DOO based on the emergent themes from the AR learning group sessions in the form of narrative. The participant's set out their ambition in this meeting to collaborate in creating a space to support manager's development so as to contribute to the development of the organisation. This accorded with the quality criteria of 'outcome validity' cited by Herr & Anderson (2005). Herr & Anderson (2005, 55) argue that *outcome validity* in action research, rather than solving the problem challenges the researcher to reframe the problem in a more complex way. In this case study the co researcher's proposal was to create a space that would support the development of managers through shared analysing and reframing of issues to find a resolution. This purposeful process would contribute to the improvement in the operationalising of services and the organisation. The value of having conversational space for change was presented by the participants as a meaningful endeavor and a continuous knowledge exchange which could benefit the organisation.

From an action research process perspective in the sharing of the themes with the DOO, this created a reflective process for the participants and a further analysis which was another example of the iterative process in the AR cycle (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). From a relational leadership perspective, re engaging with the DOO was important as by the nature of her role she as a key *'influencer'* and a *'decision maker'* within the organisation as a result of her position. The participants in suggesting this development were proposing to be key OD implementers (Cheung – Judge & Holbeche, 2011). The act of having a conversation with the DOO was aimed at facilitating change in the spirit of a dialogic intervention, Dialogic OD in action (Bushe, 2014b). Bushe

contends that any specific instance of OD practice is a product of the mindset of the practitioner (Bushe, 2014b, 1). The mindset of the participants was one that they wanted more access to the organisation that would create a conversational space for change in action. By gaining an agreement to develop a formal development group from the AR learning group would create the vehicle to begin this process. The development of a collaborative intervention in the form of the development group proposal would impact at an intra unit level (various sub units need to learn how to support each other) as described by Cheung –Judge & Holbeche, (2011) to enable improved management and leadership practices.

One of the key points in this session wass in regards to what the participant had learned about conducting challenging conversations. This was related to where one of the managers had raised a concern as to how managers were setting the tone for communicating in the organisation in particular through electronic emails. This was related to their experience of the CEO's critical email responses to them. The conversation with the DOO from the participants was grounded in the desire to improve and learn how to communicate better with each other respectfully in the spirit of an appreciative dialogue (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). As a result of how this conversation was framed an opportunity was created to talk openly about the negative tone of emails sent from the CEO from the participant's perspective. The DOO acknowledged that she had recognised that this had created a barrier in being able to address concerns around policy and procedure. This was an example of where within an AI framework, addressing the negative with what the participants wanted more of was the approach rather than problematising or blaming (Bushe, 2007).

The outcome of the meeting with the DOO was a positive one as already described within this section and the participants were to go away and develop the formal proposal to go to back to DOO. A further AR cycle had been completed.

4.3.7 Seventh AR learning group meeting

The session began with the opportunity to reflect back on the last meeting when they met with the DOO for the first time since she had returned back to work. There was recognition by the managers that there was work that needed to be undertaken in working up the proposal for the group. There was agreement that this would be completed during this session. One of the managers stated that she was relieved that the DOO recognised the value of the group. The other manager reflected on how she has realised since we last met that the AR Learning group had been a valuable teaching tool and that by reading the reflective notes she learned from them. There was a realisation that there was need for commitment of those managers who were going to be invited as depleted attendance had affected the group's confidence with the other managers exiting. The concern was that for the new group to be legitimized it required the commitment of managers to attend;

"there is a real need to free people up to do this, that I am amazed at the skill sets and qualifications there are within the team and yet, they do not always want to do anything."

The value of reflection was reiterated through the AR learning group and that this had been a space that didn't have a cost associated with it apart from

"It's important to have the time to reflect, we don't have to pay for this, training is often one day and then the knowledge gets lost afterwards."

"We now have a responsibility for where this starts and ends."(In relation to the proposed cross organisational group)

I explained that there was only one session to go before the AR learning group concluded its work and there was a concern raised that the new group would not be up and running quick enough. One of the managers said;

"It's important that we can still have this support as managers as we don't get supervision'.

This had been a theme throughout the research that managers were not receiving supervision probably because the infrastructure of senior managers was just not there. So the peer approach had filled that gap. Trust was an issue for managers in having the right supervision. Managers were looking for more constructively critical feedback in regards to performance though how that was delivered was important.

"I need to trust that person (to have supervision), that maybe I wouldn't because I may not have a relationship with that person.' 'I do need more telling me where I was going wrong'. 'Supervision is more like a chat, they [managers] don't get it, and it's not at the top of my list. It's more like a catch up with what's going on and direction'."

I asked how many of them had supervision and how frequent. All four managers stated that they did not get supervision very often, where there was supervision it was infrequent unlike with what they had to deliver for practitioners. I added that it was my experience in my work that many managers do not get 'supervision' and don't engage in reflective practice. One of the managers raised concerns that senior managers did not get supervision either, why was this case? Was it the case higher up the management ladder you go the less you need supervising?

"It is often that we do not get supervision and that they do not get supervision either (senior managers) so how can they know how it is needed to be done?"

We agreed that supervision for managers would be picked up by the group as an area for development for managers within the new group. I was conscious that we only had one session left and I asked group participants to consider what they had been advised to do by DOO for next time we meet. I handed out the recorded notes from the meeting when we met last time. I helped focus the work by drafting the outline for the session on the flipchart and the group started to work from this. I suggested that it might be helpful to cut up the aims and objectives already written by group participants into strips as we had done before and work together to elicit the elements that would be helpful in drafting the terms of reference of the group. The outcome of the work within the group is set out below (See Table 4).

Actions agreed to take forward for the final session

To undertake to present to DOO the proposal of the framework for the Manager's cross organisational development group and the final AR Learning group with an appreciative evaluation.

Table 4 Proposal for Cross organisational managers group

Membership:-

Managers will be invited to participate and will be broadly representative of the whole organisation to ensure a cross organisational approach.

The role of the group and its member's are to be: -

1. A conduit into the group, representing managers areas, views and themes, experiences of their particular area of the charitable trust
2. Use the group participants to explore strengths in services and resolve issues in a positive way through dialogue and action
3. Discuss emergent service and organisational issues through dialogue
4. Be action orientated
5. Consultative and explorative through organisational research/consultation in managers own areas to inform the larger cross organisational picture.
6. Use a 'solution focused' and 'appreciative' inquiry approach that is strengths based
7. Supported by the Head of Operations (Senior Manager) and legitimized through her championing the group.

Learning Forum Climate

- The group will develop the climate that is a learning culture
- Be positive and solution focused in approach
- Celebrates people's strengths
- Develop working ground rules that ensure that the group has positive closure at the end of each session.

The value base of the group will be embedded within the organisations current value base as detailed on the website (Extracted from charitable trust website December 2006)

Charitable Trust seeks to….

Recognise that people are its greatest asset and seek to use its Directors/Trustees, Staff and Volunteers in a supportive, realistic and professional manner.

Seek to be a "learning organisation" developing its work in the light of experience and new knowledge and seeking to contribute to the wider field of interest but at all times striving to ensure that research, publications and material disseminated by the Agency meets acceptable ethical standards.

Summary from session 7

The context was that this meeting followed on after having met with the DOO and participants were feeling more upbeat, optimistic and feeling valued as a result of having their concerns heard. This conversation was focused into the responsibility that lay with the participants as change agents through the AR process and how they take the work forward to make it happen.

The one overriding concern that emerged was that there was only one session left of the AR learning group and the participants had viewed sessions as something similar to receiving group supervision. The AR cycle in this session began with a reflection on the issue of trust, which is fundamental to any dialogic relational intervention and how this could be developed beyond the AR learning group. Carl Rogers (1970) argued for the importance of acceptance and building trust in relationships. The participants and myself had been developing trust between us over the period of time we had been working together on the research. Baker et al (2002, 48) writing about conversational learning as a process argue that the lack of safety and trust can impede learning. In this case the trust that had been developed within the AR learning set in creating a safe place to talk had enabled learning to happen which was evidenced by the participants over time contained within their reflections and then in the narrative of the final appreciative evaluation (See table 6, page 219). Focusing the conversation appreciatively in this session on what the participants would want more of (In terms of their future supervision) an agreement emerged to take this forward into the new cross organisational group as an area for development for managers.

In terms of action research process in this session the previous notes and narrative informed the development of the actions that came out of this cycle of inquiry. These included taking forward the development of supervision for managers and further work was undertaken on the proposal for the cross manager's organisational development group to completion. The development of the new cross organisational group contained key principles which the participants had learned and valued about AR and AI as a methodology and a mindset. These methodologies were viewed by participants as valued ways of creating productive conversations for change in practice that impacted on and had contributed to the development of the AR learning group. The participants also saw the synergy between these methodologies and the value base within the charitable trust's espoused values so this was also embedded in the proposal. The literature that predominantly informed this session and production of the proposal was drawn from the groups research on and knowledge gained in the method and principles of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001), Action Research (McNiff, 2002) and their experience of Conversational Learning (Kolb et al, 2002).

4.3.8 Final AR learning group meeting

The final learning group was focused into meeting with the DOO to present the work that the participant managers from the AR learning group had developed into a proposal for the new cross organisational group for managers. Unfortunately there were only two managers present that morning and this was the lowest attendance of the eight sessions. The other manager had rung off sick.

The DOO joined the group and she was taken through the proposal that had been developed since they last met. The DOO reported back that that this proposal for the cross organisational group had been floated for an in principle agreement at the Senior Management contracting and compliance group meeting. The good news was that there had been complete support by the senior managers to take this forward because it had been developed from the experience of the managers engaging with the AR learning group. This new development group would be seen as running parallel to the contract and compliance group which the DOO said gave it equal status and importance in the organisation.

The managers talked through the aims and objectives that they had developed and how they felt that best practice would be shared across the organisation. They added that the communication flow would feed up and down from the group. A model of sharing information would need to be agreed as it would an important part of disseminating learning about best practice. The HOO asked if part of the new groups remit could be to look at the role of central services, such as what goes on within the support services like developing improved employment practice. How Central Services would support managers in the organisation to run their services had been an important area for development for the AR learning group participants. This was a real solution to the issues that managers had raised in relation to human resources. The DOO also suggested that the newly appointed Human Resource support officer may be the right person to invite in to the new group.

One of the managers talked about how important developing the right climate in the new group meeting was as one of the most important areas that the

group participants had learned. How to create a 'sense of safety' in terms of the climate without fear of critiscm was key to how the AR learning group had worked well. Group participants within the AR group were also able to be open about where they needed to develop for themselves and this helped create a learning culture. He also talked through how the ethos of the new development group was based on the charitable trusts value base as written on the website and that these values informed the climate of the group as 'we see it'.

The DOO shared her first comments in response to what had been presented and there were several key areas that she thought that this proposal could assist with;

"It is along the lines that I hoped that it would develop – it's really good. Maybe we also need to consider the involvement of the board in this given the developments recently in terms of governance. This would enable more of a connection with the board and provide more of a connection and lead from board members. More focused. It will also depend on what you are dealing with the group at that point in time."

Training and Development

"Training and development is a very big issue for the group to deal with, though it has to link in with the organisation. It is driven by different things, such as the 'NTA Workforce development targets, management training and development.' We want this to be committed to and the lead could come from the board which will be dependent on how the governance arrangements work out and what they can help with".

Resolving issues in a positive way

"Resolving issues in a positive way means that you have to be clear about what the issues are for example not being about individual employees, more about operational activity, so there needs to be a decision on what is appropriate and what isn't for the new development group. There will be different levels of management expertise and it's about how you manage challenges, and how you bring newer managers on board."

Links in with the rest of the Charitable Trust

"There needs to be links in with the organisation, links into where the organisation is going so that you can pick up on an area in the organisation and there is a coming

together. That the new development group could be tasked with things that need to be dealt with such as policies and procedures for example, that there is a locality focus, spent time working on things that are coming up in the organisation or localities."

Attendance and participation

"Finally, how are you going to keep up the enthusiasm and motivation with group members? What level of managers are you inviting in?"

The DOO further suggested that the proposal was now taken forward by group participants to the Senior Managers meeting so the idea can be consulted on.

Final reflections with AR Learning Group managers

After the meeting with the DOO, I asked both managers how they thought experience of the meeting had been for them. Both managers said that they were pleased with the outcome in terms of taking the new development group forward with the commitment of support from the DOO. We then agreed as a final review of the AR learning group to engage in an appreciative evaluation of the year long experience of being involved in this. The questionnaire which was in hard and electronic copy (see chapter 5 conclusions) was semi structured containing appreciative evaluation questions. The outcomes of this evaluation are presented within the final conclusions chapter. The AR learning set was concluded.

Summary from session 8 final meeting;

The context of the final session in the AR learning group was that only two managers were present as one manager gave their apologies as they were unwell on that day. However the work that contributed to this proposal had developed over the full case study period of twelve months which began with the participation of seven

managers What had been developed into the proposal was formed from the eight iterative cycles of the AR learning group sessions emerging as a recommendation for a formal approach to transitioning the legacy of this work into the organisation. The presentation and recommendations from the participant's proposal resulted in this being received positively as an outcome of the work of the AR learning group. There was an agreement in principle with the DOO that once the new development group had been formed that it would sit alongside the contracting and compliance group so would have equal status and importance in the organisations governing processes. The proposal was positively affirmed by the DOO's own acknowledgment of her aspirations when she stated that; *'it is along the lines that I had hoped that it would develop'*.

From an action research process perspective the session and the end of the case study was brought to a close by an evaluation of the participant's experiences and learning through an Appreciative Evaluation. This captured the outcomes at the end of the AR learning process succinctly in comparison with the aspirations of the participants at the beginning of the process. The manager who was not present due illness contributed electronically (See table 6, p.219). In terms of quality and validity criteria in conducting the AR case study, the evidence gathered throughout the process is presented within table 1 (p.44) in the methodology section that sets out how this was met. The literature that informed this was predominantly informed by Herr & Anderson (2005) which was one of the key texts that informed and guided my thinking in the writing up of this action research thesis. Descriptions of where AI as a Dialogic OD method (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001) played a key part in the conversational

construction and mindset have also been evidenced in the summaries where the literature informed the practice.

4.4   Managers attendance at the AR Learning Group Meetings

The AR learning group commenced with seven managers which was just fewer than 50% of a total of sixteen managers working within the charitable trust at the time of the AR case study, which included the senior manager team. Venues for the AR group had been arranged by the lead manager in each geographic area and were rotated across the sites. The sessions were agreed with participants to run for half a day and were booked ahead over the twelve month period. By the end of the year a number of sessions had had to be cancelled and rearranged. This meant that there was a significant gap of several months between meetings at one point which had an effect on the continuity of the conversations. Eight sessions were held in the end out of a planned number of twelve over the period of the year.

The actual attendance for the AR sessions was varied during the year for a number of reasons. After the initial session attendance numbers then fluctuated as a result of operational demands, meetings being called at short notice by senior managers, maternity leave and managers leaving the organization. Two AR learning group sessions were cancelled for two consecutive months in the middle of the study due to the exigencies of the services operationally and convening of last minute senior management meetings. On reconvening the AR group, two managers had then exited due to demands of the service and one other went onto maternity leave so by session 4 there were only 4 managers remaining. The last two sessions comprised of three managers in

attendance and the final meeting had only two managers present as the third manager was off sick although she contributed electronically by email to the evaluation.

Table 5: Manager's attendance over twelve month period of the AR Study.

Session number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number of attendees	7	5	6	4	4	4	4	2

The reduction in the numbers of the charitable trusts managers attending the AR learning group became an issue by session four. This resulted in a need to undertake a review with participants as a critical incident and to make a decision as to whether the AR learning set should continue. The remaining participants were asked whether or not they wanted to continue with the study. They decided that they were firmly committed to continuing to the end of the study. The CEO was not available to support the AR Learning group as the DOO was off after a bereavement though given the sensitivities raised about the actions of the CEO this may not have been the best option at that time. This was later resolved when the DOO returned back to work. Those participants who were left in the AR learning group agreed to carry on as they did not want to lose what they had begun to shape in terms of their work.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions and summary

This AR thesis and case study set out to explore and discuss how in forming an AR Learning group could help managers reconstruct their conversations to create change both for themselves and for the organisation. This was enabled by carving out a learning and reflective space made up of managers who were peers from across the charitable trust as an organisation. This space gave them valuable time where they could make sense of themselves and their impact on their working environment and the organisation and develop themselves as managers and leaders in the process. These managers were visible as there were only 16 managers in the organisation at the time so had a major role in terms of leadership. The space that was created used an AR approach as a collaborative way to have conversations about change grounded within an AI approach.

The main conclusion here is that in spite of challenges that emerged in many guises during the life of the AR learning group, was that when it was appreciatively evaluated by the participants it was viewed as a being successful learning environment and reflective space for those that engaged in it. Whilst only three of the remaining seven managers completed the final evaluation, this was further supported during the research process from the individual reflective accounts from the other managers previously engaged with the AR learning group. The story is told chronologically in this thesis as to how the complexity and messiness of organisational life was experienced by myself and the managers over the 12 months we were collaboratively participating as co researchers together. What emerged from

conversations created within the group gave a sense of the wide ranging variety of challenges that these managers were facing within their services on a day to day during the organisations growth experience. Using an ongoing iterative thematic analysis during the AR process meant that the themes emerging giving a broader understanding (making sense) and context as to what managers were experiencing and living within their places of work. In reframing and reconstructing conversations through an appreciative approach participants were able to construct positive and meaningful changes in their lived management and leadership experiences. This helped in building resilience to counter the challenges that they were facing where appreciative conversations resulted in change both personally, as a group and finally within the fabric of charitable trust itself.   In these final conclusions I will set out a summary of what emerged from the successes and the challenges in relation to the overall research and how this then contributes to body knowledge as a doctorate. Finally I will outline the limitations of the AR study.

5.1 The DBA AR Outcomes

Context

As set out in the introduction the charitable trust had experienced unprecedented growth after winning large scale contracts to deliver services in the substance misuse sector. and as a result had grown to twice its size in staffing at the same time. Whilst there was an emphasis on training and development for practitioner the same did not exists for managers. Neither as it emerged were managers and leaders of the organisation receiving support or supervision. The Cranfield University Training Needs Analysis (2003) in the substance misuse sector undertaken prior to this case study

confirmed this nationally. The outcome of the managers training and development history evidenced in this thesis showed that this was ad hoc and led by the individuals not the organisation. Leadership models suggested by Deloitte (2003, 2004) in their Leadership training commissioned by the NTA when evaluated by participants felt that in their experience that these did not fit the sector of service delivery. As a trustee with experience of being an OD consultant and interim working in the substance misuse sector I was concerned that managers were not receiving the reflective practice and development space that they may need to understand what they needed to deliver on. I saw manager's being driven externally by multiple demands for assurance and data on performance from the NTA and from the commissioners. There was a sense that everyone was on overdrive and working at a fast pace without much time to reflect on what this meant in terms of the development of the charity. Manager's were also talking about experiencing tensions from within the charity with a lot of confusion as to how to improve their people management practices which was key to a growing workforce (Parry et al, 2005). A review of the organisational management infrastructure was underway although this had not yet delivered. I was concerned for the managers and wanted to use my consultancy and research skills to support these managers in their work endeavors. Appreciative Inquiry and strength based approaches were a core part of my consultancy work as was Action Research.

Literature

The literature that was informing my thinking was focused into Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry. There was few written practitioner examples

that showed how AI was being translated in the workplace which meant that implementing this was experiential in terms of the AR learning set. Whilst the literature guided on principles. One of the only key practice texts available at the time was guidance on '*Positive questions'* (Whitney et al, 2002) which were predominantly focused into the 4D cycle. So further practice guidance on *Appreciative Teambuilding* (Whitney, 2004) was the main text informing the development of ways of working with and creating positivity with the group. The participants were given Action Research ebooklet by Jean McNiff which was freely available on the website and articles by leading thinkers in the field of AI at the time. This helped orientate us all as to the methodological approach. Kolb's work (2002) on *Conversational Learning* informed the development of the conversational space as did the work by Shaw (2002) on changing conversations in organisations. These were early adopters of conversation as a medium for change along with Ford & Ford (1995) culminating as what is now known as Dialogic OD (Bushe, 2007). Methods such as storytelling and Action Research are conversationally based methods that as part of the methodology and I was clear these methods would engage people in discussions about their lived experiences and elicit narrative which opened a window to the worlds of those participants I was collaborating working with. Social constructionist (Gergen, 1999; Berger and Luckman, 1967, Weick, 1995) thinking was the foundation for the approach that was taken in that our worlds are socially constructed through conversations and our words. In addition literature on reframing leadership as a relation process informed the need to think about this in a different way. In so far as it is the quality of conversations, the mindset as to how one sees the world can influences positive and inform strengths based interactions with others

and supports people in work to reach their full potential. It is this that contributes to being a positive leader. The evolution of dialogic methods and the emergent thinking around conversationally based OD has had a strong influence on my thinking in writing this thesis.

Action research

The action research process was emeregent by its cyclical nature and its evolutionary process. The managers who participated within the AR Learning group did not know what would emerge as this was the first time that they had met from across the organisation. The managers did not have an understanding of each other's worlds or experiences and were a diverse group. The managers as participants of the AR learning group were able to share and learn about AI and the AR process. They were also able to explore how they learned and how they developed their own professional practice in the workplace. The research study and the creation of the AR learning group gave them the opportunity to share perspectives and challenge each other's perceptions and/or assumptions about what they were experiencing in the workplace through this process. This was enabled through the developing manager's conversations within the protected AR Learning space. Learning about the world they were working in and developing professional practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2008; Heron and Reason, 1998) was constructed through the manager's conversations. This occurred through talking about their management challenges and solutions, sharing management experiences and management practice as peers within the learning group. The implementation of the AR methodology formed the basis for experiential learning

conversations as a social research approach (Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 2002; Reason and Bradbury). This gave the participating managers a process to follow to establish a work based learning approach. In developing the AR learning space managers created an appreciative approach (Whitney et la, 2004; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Ashansky & Hartel, 2011) to constructing positive conversations as a dialogic method so as to focus on what was working well within their management practice and what they could be doing differently. The iterative nature of the AR learning group meetings also enabled managers to build a space that supported the practice of critical reflection (Mezirow, 1990; Carr and Kemmis, 1984). Evidence of continuing development of manager's practice was further enhanced outside of the meetings through the exchanges of emails between AR learning group participants and the opportunities to increase contact between each other.

In terms of AR being a democratising process and having democratic validity (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Herr and Anderson, 2005), this group of managers were engaged in a collaborative process from the inception of group and represented nearly 50% of the total of sixteen managers within the organisation. Managers talked about perceptions of not being involved in what was happening in the organisation strategically, that they were lacking voice and not feeling valued as managers at the beginning of the study. Internal organisational politics made managers feel uncomfortable with the negativity and experiences of belittling comments which was being cited from their experience as emanating from the CEO which was sensitive politically.

The lack of supervision for managers and senior managers was cited as an issue, so reflective practice and professional development space was absent within the organisation. Managers talked about experiencing being on the receiving end of a critical leadership style rather than acknowledging focusing on what was working well and this was disconcerting for them. As highlighted earlier there was a feeling of disconnection from the centre and a frustration with senior managers based within Central Services. This was acerbated by critical emails from senior managers culminating with some of the managers within the AR Learning group not feeling valued or supported. Managers did feel that they were making a difference with their respective services and teams. There was also a growing anxiety and a lack of consultation around the growing central infrastructure of the charitable trust and not being clear on what the increased senior management capacity meant on a day to day basis in terms of leadership.

So the perception of managers in regards to the impact of their leadership skills was one of being limited. This changed over time as the longer term view of developing a permanent leadership and management development forum emerged and managers were hopeful that this would deliver for them.

5.1.1 Critical Reflections on the AR Learning Group

Attendance and attrition

A critical point arose during the time that the AR learning set was operating when the attrition rate escalated and this was a concern for both myself and the participants. This with the AR Learning group as to what was the best course of

action and there was a general consensus to continue meeting and this was supported by the university after discussion with my supervisors. What this did do whilst not detracting from the purpose of Dialogic OD, it did reduce the number of voices and perspectives in the group which was less than ideal. This was also an important part of being able to undertake reflective practice as part of the AR cycle though this did continue.

Absence of DOO support

The DOO went off for three months on bereavement and this meant that the link with senior managers was lost in terms of any actions that were coming out of the AR learning group. This became another area of concern during the study. Not having a senior manager as a conduit between the managers in the AR learning group and the senior manager group at Central Office hampered the speed that any change initiatives being considered could be implemented. This was further acerbated because of the concerns about the mindset and behaviour of CEO towards some of the managers at that time. This made it difficult to approach the CEO and feel confident that suggestions about changes coming out of the research from the AR learning group would be taken seriously. This was a very politically sensitive issue to handle from my perspective as the CEO was supportive of the research study and yet his negative style of engaging in conversations about his beliefs and judgment about some of his managers was uncomfortable to hear. After an open discussion with the participants about how this could be handled from their perspective there was an agreement to engage with the CEO to involve him when the managers were clear about what support they were looking for.

This resolved the issue in relation to the research and by the time the participants had come to a point where they had developed a proposal the DOO was back off bereavement leave. A major step forward was taken by the managers in the AR learning group was when they addressed the concerns about the CEO's negative critical style with the DOO when she returned to work and met with the group. There was a commitment from the DOO to address this with the CEO.

Ethical itches

Being a board member and a trustee whilst in a position of facilitating the AR Learning group created tensions on number of occasions during the research process. One example was on hearing the experiences of managers and the challenges that they were facing and knowing that these were not being discussed with the board especially around policies. These tensions are discussed further within my reflective paper though I wanted to highlight that there were tensions foe me being an insider researcher. It was an enlightening time for me and gave me a very different view of the organisation and the actions of the senior managers which sometimes differed on a day to day basis from how they presented at the board.

Managing sensitivities in the research process

Finally an important critical learning point occurred during the research process from an ethical perspective. This happened after conducting an interview with one of the managers on their career story. I had sent the notes from the interview for the manager to read and confirm as accurate. The manager wrote back to me requesting that

the interview transcript was replaced with an abridged account of this story. The manager felt that they had shared too much personal information. It was explained that the main issue for this manager was that they felt that it made them too easily identifiable from the story. The manager went on to say in the email that;

'This experience has taught me that I need to be more guarded in the information that I give as I found reading your account very distressing. This is not necessarily a criticism of you but an observation of me." (Extracted from the managers email)

Anonymity was an important consideration for managers on setting up the AR Learning group. The ethics consent form gave the participants the right to withdraw their information from any part of the research study at any point. This was an agreement made with all of the participants through the signing a form for ethical consent from the outset of the study. I contacted this manager to talk through their concerns and to check out if she was ok after the experience. The manager shared with me that that it had been quite an emotional personal journey so that when reading back and reflecting on their story and they then wanted to withdraw the account as they felt vulnerable and exposed. This action was undertaken as requested. I will discuss this further within my reflective practice paper accompanying this thesis

5.1.2 Appreciative Evaluation

As part of evaluating the AR Learning set, I developed a short questionnaire containing five appreciatively framed questions for those managers present at the session to complete and I emailed those managers who were not present. Those that had participated in the AR Learning group wanted to undertake an Appreciative Evaluation of the last twelve months as it would give them feedback and for the DOO as

to what each person had felt that they had gained or not through the experience. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths based approach used within organisational development and change and is explained with the methodology of this thesis (Chapter 2), Preskill & Catsambas (2006, 45) believe that AI share several concepts, values and goals with AR;

Participatory, collaborative democratic, empowerment, responsive learning orientated approaches to evaluation

The questions were constructed in an appreciative style (as followed;

1. What were the high points for you taking part in the inquiry?

2. What do you think contributed to make this happen?

3. How did it feel to be part of it?

4. What's been the most important thing you have learned or perhaps re-learned by taking part in this inquiry?

5. What surprised you?

There were four completed forms in total and these comments were collated into a table under each question that was responded to (see Table 5, p 190). A conversation took place between with those that were present about their responses in the spirit of appreciative inquiry.

The high points question had a number of responses that were very much focused into the experience of the group effort in spite of the dwindling numbers towards the end of the research study. The conversation and colleagueship was expressed as being a high point. This had contributed to participants feeling that they had learned from each other and felt valued in the process which was something that some of the managers had

questioned for themselves at the start of the study. Having access to protected time and space to talk and think was highlighted as something that made the AR Learning group happen along with commitment from those managers who continued to attend. The supportive nature of being part of a peer group and are energising effect from meeting was also highlighted although this was countered with the very real experience of people dropping out of the group over time. Important areas that participant learned or relearned by taking part in the study were highlighted as; being able to focus on key areas of interest and working to finding solutions. A respondent talked about the positive approach within the group and yet still being able to open up to discuss the negative things with the ability to turn these around. Another respondent talked about relearning a lot their own ideas and acquiring new ones about change management.

Finally in response to the question about what surprised participants generated responses as to how for example one manager felt 'cross' as people were leaving the AR Learning set although there was a recognition that their colleagues had concerns about the tension between attending the group and their working conditions at the time. Other areas that surprised participants about participating in the group such as how practising being reflective helped them understand how much had been learned and how long it took to get to action phase. This was an interesting reflection as the participants of the group wanted to make sure that they demonstrated that something had come out of meeting and that it was not just a 'talking shop'. So space for conversation may still not necessarily be valued as much as being able to demonstrate an outcome for the time spent together. Or maybe it needs to be a mix of both? Yet the value of

communicating and what this generated as a result was actually acknowledged in the responses.

5.2 Contribution to a Body of Knowledge

This research is rooted in the act of undertaking AR using a Dialogic OD methodology (Bushe, 2007) method in a charitable organisation.

Context

My concern as a trustee was that managers within the charity I was on the board of did not have any formal learning and reflective space to support their development as managers and leaders. This resulted in offering to undertaking this AR case study research which was driven by my desire to co create a positive conversational learning and development space for the managers in the charitable trust. I have a strong commitment to my own personal and professional development and that of those that I work with in management and leadership roles in substance misuse and mental health. This research has aimed to contribute to a body of knowledge in leadership and management development.

Action research

As far as I am aware this is the only AR research study focused into a co creating a conversational learning space using AI and AR with a group of managers in an organisation in the drug and alcohol sector in the UK. My contribution to a body of knowledge is where I have demonstrated in this thesis using AR and AI as a methodology and the creating of space to co create conversations about management and leadership in

the workplace. This was primarily constructed for the development and support of a group of managers and leaders in an organisation going through continuous change.

Literature

The research has also aimed to contribute to the field of literature on management and leadership using an Appreciative Dialogic OD methodology within an action research case study. This case study shows how the participants learned how to work within a dialogic approach to creating collaborative conversations for change in the workplace. From my research I suggest that the value of creating space for learning and development of managers in the workplace is generative in nature because it is conversationally based and naturally sits well within organisational development. Organisations are made up of people, a living human system and relationships develop formally and informally as a result of the conversations that are held. These conversations can be naturally occurring or can be purposeful in capturing what gives life to organisations. I also suggest that learning and development is a lifelong conversational process with which I am committed to and will continue this journey beyond this doctoral award.

5.2.1 Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study were emergent. The first limitation arose alongside the concerns as to the reducing numbers of participant attending the AR Learning set. Although there is no specific guidance about the ideal numbers forming a group, there was a general concern that the group itself became limited in its influence as it no longer had the broad representation from across the organisation that it originally

started out with. However the work of the group did evolve into the proposal for a cross organisation wide group where recruitment and retention of the membership would be a key area that would be focused on as a result of the learning from the study. An AR learning group will only work if the full committement of managers and senior managers means that people can attend in spite of the tension of work demands.

A second area of limitation is the time between each session. This affected continuity to a degree as there was at least six to eight weeks between each session. It was important that comprehensive notes on previous discussions, key themes and agreements were written up and kept to re orientate group participants back to where they left off in the last session. This also helped with the reflective process.

A third area of limitation was the ability managers for managers engaged as co researchers in the research to actually create change and impact within the organisation. It was significantly affected by the DOO being off for a period of three months during the research period. This meant that the link with the senior management team for support and influence was temporarily lost. Attempts to engage the CEO were made though this was hampered as there were sensitivities that needed addressing first. These were addressed when the DOO returned.

5.2.2 Generalisability of the research to other settings

In terms of generalisability caution would need to be applied in relation to the findings as this research was undertaken in one organisation. However the through the documented account of this AR study within this thesis the ability to create a learning space for managers with the focus of management and leadership development in the workplace could be transferrable to other setting such as other drug and alcohol

services. Although the outcomes are not predictable and assured as the methodology is an emergent and generative.

Table 6 - Appreciative Evaluation

What were the high points for you taking part in this inquiry?	Achieving an outcome that will help best practice and ensure that frontline workers expertise is represented in charitable trust policy. Support from colleagues on the group. Learning about myself as a group participant. Learning from colleagues in the group
	Being part of a team but also respected as an individual. Coming out of meetings with so much enthusiasm. Wanting and believing that I can make a difference
	Realising that as a group we agreed about a lot and shared the same ideas and experiences
	The tenacity of group members to stay as part of group when work demands have been high. The insightfulness of colleagues
What do you think contributed to make this happen?	Protected time. Good facilitation. Commitment to the process and to each other of core group members
	Having the time and space to talk think and develop. An enthusiastic group
	Free rein to move away from the initial question. Flexibility within the discussions
	Commitment of the group members to make it happen when all was pointing towards it not happening
How did it feel to be part of it?	During and after each session I felt reenergised and enthused about my work and about the work of the group and organisation
	Moral boosting. Sometimes frightening when people were dropping out
	Supported, involved, part of a peer group. At times I really felt like I really could affect change
	A privilege, being part of something that was evolving and innovative
What's been the most important thing you have learned or perhaps re-learned by taking part in this inquiry?	I found the focus on appreciative inquiry particularly useful as well as the focus on solution. Having identified developmental issues, feeling listened to enough to move on to finding long term solutions. I have learned that I am quite an impatient group member. Although there is some learning and adjustments prompted by this learning I also feel it is probably why I opt to go for leadership roles
	Having a positive approach and opening up to the negatives to turn around will make things happen
	Relearned a lot of my own ideas and acquired new ones about managing change
	Management and leadership development can happen when you have space to explore practice at work
What surprised you?	How cross I felt with people who did not give the group the value above were making a point about their current working conditions. The only way to affect change is to engage fully in change dialogue. I was surprised how difficult I found being part of a group decision making process.
	How quiet I was. How reflecting on things actually shows you how much you have learned without knowing it.
	How long it took to get to an 'action' phase and that negativity led to positive action
	How much emerged from the sessions and how important communicating with each other is in work

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Appendices

Appendix-A Research Consent Form

DBA Research 2005/6 - Participants Consent form

<u>**Researcher**</u>

Name:

Contact details: Address –

Email address:

University: Central England – Supervisors are:

Contact details: University of Central England Post Graduate Business Department - 0121 331 5000,

<u>**Information about the research**</u>

1. **Aims and title of the research and proposed areas to be investigated**

   a) Title of the research

Creating Space to Co-Create Management and Leadership Development Conversations in the Workplace

The aims of this research project are to through collaborative conversations:

   b) Give managers space to reflect, analyse and explore issues through the vehicle of Action Research inquiry
   c) Enable managers to explore how they learn and develop their own practice to meet the demands of service delivery

2. **Research ethics**

As the researcher I agree to: -

   - Respect the rights and dignity of those who are participating in the research project

- Avoid any harm to the participants arising from their involvement in the research
- Operate with honesty and integrity

3. **The methods of collection and how it is to be conducted**

   - Questionnaires structured and unstructured
   - Interviews
   - Recorded focus groups using digital recorder and then transcribed
   - Reflective dairying

4. **Anticipated outcomes and benefits of the research**

   - Management and Leadership Development for participants individually, as an Action Research group, for the Charitable Trust and to the users of our services
   - Publication of the findings to contribute to the body of research into management and leadership development in particular with substance misuse services
   - 50,000-word thesis leading to the award of Doctorate in Business Administration

<u>Expectations about the participant's contribution</u>

1. **Informed consent**

   That the participant is fully informed of their role in the process and has given written consent

2. **How much time will be required in conducting the research**

   2-3 hours every 6 weeks

3. **What tasks the participant will undertake**

   Whatever evolves out of the action research and in context of management and leadership practice within the organisation, in collaboration and with agreement of the participants.

4. **What are the benefits of participating?**

   Please see the aims of the research and the outcomes

   <u>The right to withdraw consent</u>

Signing a consent form does not oblige you to continue in the role if, at some subsequent stage you no longer wish to do so. The consent for is not a contract that binds you in

helping to undertake the research – Should you wish to withdraw your consent at anytime during the research project you have the absolute right to do so.

<u>Confidentiality and the storage of data</u>

1. **Code of Ethics – The Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines (2003)**

   http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ethics03.pdf

   http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/respect_code.pdf

2. **Data protection**

   - Collect and process data in a fair and lawful manner
   - Use data for the purposes originally specified
   - Collect only the data actually needed
   - Take care to ensure the data are accurate
   - Keep data no longer than is necessary
   - Keep the data secure
   - Not to distribute the data
   - Restrict access to the data
   - Keep data anonymous

3. **Anonymity of Data**

   Data will be coded and not have names of participants on documentation. Any information to be shared or released from this work will be discussed within the AR group participants.

   <u>Signature of participant</u>

   I have read and understood the written details provided for me about the research, and agree to participate in the project for the next 12 months
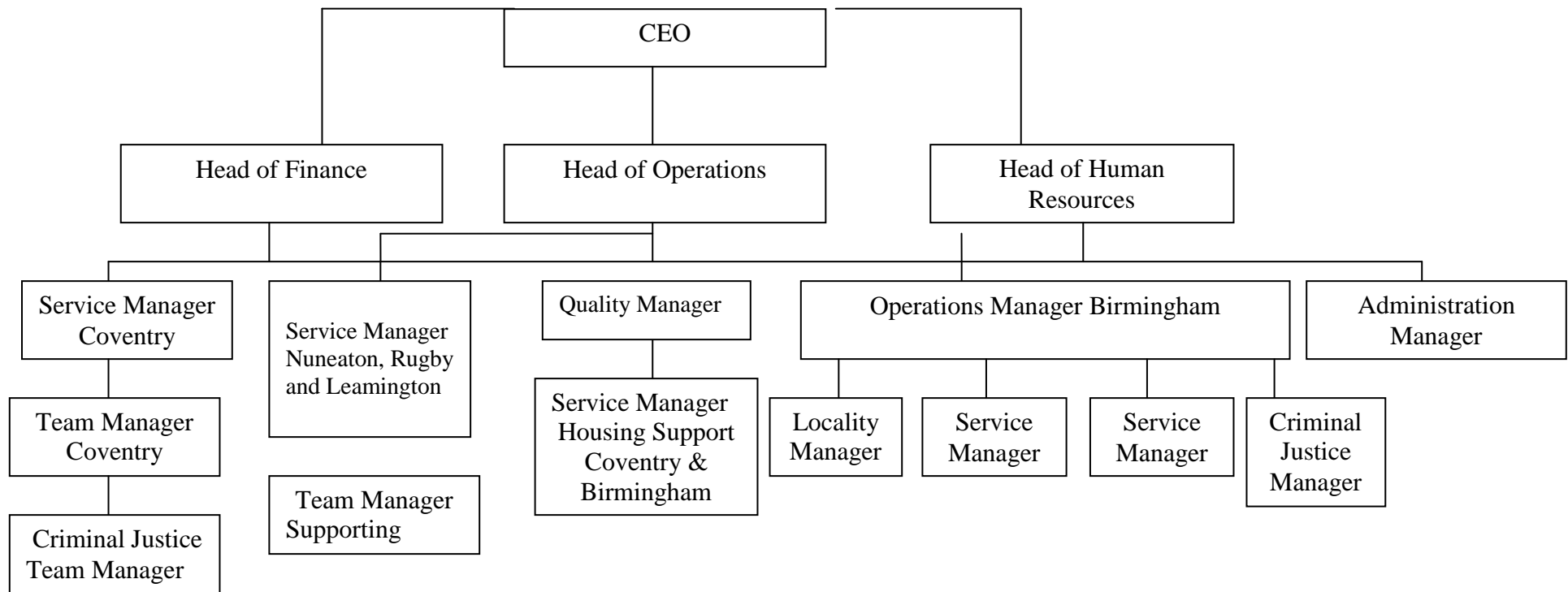
   Signed …………………………………………….date: -………………………..

<u>Signature of the researcher</u>

I commit to upholding my side of the agreement with regards to the research project, which has been clearly stated within this document and am bound by research ethics to act in an open, honest and transparent way during this process

Signed ………………………………………….date: -………………………..

Appendix-B – Charitable Trust Organisational Chart

Organisational Management re Structure during AR Learning Set

```
                                    ┌─────────────┐
                                    │     CEO     │
                                    └─────────────┘
            ┌─────────────────┬──────────────────┬──────────────────────┐
    ┌────────────────┐  ┌────────────────┐  ┌────────────────┐
    │ Head of Finance│  │Head of Operations│ │Head of Human   │
    │                │  │                │  │Resources       │
    └────────────────┘  └────────────────┘  └────────────────┘
```

| Service Manager Coventry | Service Manager Nuneaton, Rugby and Leamington | Quality Manager | Operations Manager Birmingham | Administration Manager |

| Team Manager Coventry | | Service Manager Housing Support Coventry & Birmingham | Locality Manager | Service Manager | Service Manager | Criminal Justice Manager |

| Criminal Justice Team Manager | Team Manager Supporting | | | | | |

Appendix C - Action Research Learning Group Manager's questionnaire

Role, training and qualifications mapping Questionnaire	
1. What is your role and how many staff are you responsible for?	
2. Do you hold any Professional Qualifications?	Yes/No
Please list in the right hand column	
3. Do you hold any Academic Qualifications?	Yes
Please list in the right hand column GCSE A Level Degree or equivalent Post Graduate Qualification Other qualifications please state	
4. Do you hold any NVQ's?	Yes/No
Please list in the right hand column NVQ 1 NVQ 2 NVQ 3 NVQ 4	
5. Do you hold any Management qualifications?	Yes/No
Please list in the right hand column	
6. Have you attended any Short Courses in the last 2 years?	Yes/No
Please list in the right hand column	

Any additional courses you have undertaken not included above

Please list courses and professional development training you would like to undertake in the next two years

Name	Date	Age	Gender	Ethnicity

Reflective Practice Report

Submitted as part of the DBA award – Birmingham City University

March 2015

Lyn Williams

Contents

1. Introduction

This reflective report is written as part of the assessment leading to the Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) award. The intention is to set out how in developing myself and the practice of others I have engaged in the continuous development of my own practice with reflective practice being a central part of this process. I will through writing this report aim to meet the university and DBA assessment criteria by meeting the six required areas outlined by;

1. Presenting some of the key areas that arose during the action research study from a professional perspective and how I addressed these through reflective practice as an OD practitioner;

2. Providing knowledge of and evaluation of a range of academic literature in the field;

3. Demonstrating my competence in reflective practice research methods, tools and techniques;

4. Making significant contributions in the area of analysis, reflection and applications and provide additions to the theoretical understanding of reflective practice and its implication the managerial professional practice;

5. Demonstrating creativity by displaying originality in devising new or adapting existing methods, perspectives or approaches to reflective practice;

6. Explore the role and impact of reflective practice on self and organisation.

I will set out and present some of the challenges and emergent issues that informed the development of ways of engaging in reflective practice. I will follow on

with a review of the academic literature in relation to the development of both reflective and reflexive theoretical underpinnings and practice. I will then lead into describing some of the reflective practice methods that were employed during the action research study and how these assisted in making a significant contribution in analysis and reflection. Finally I will set out the role and impact of reflective practice on myself, the managers in participating in the AR learning group and the organisation.

2. Undertaking the action research study

I want to begin this section by framing three key questions suggested by Kathryn Haynes (Haynes, 2012, 76) which will allow me to be open about my reasons for engaging in the research that I undertook. I will talk about;

- What motivated me to undertake the research;

- What underlying assumptions I brought to it;

- How was I connected to the research, theoretically, experientially, emotionally? And what effect did this have on my approach.

a. What motivated to undertake the research?

I had a number of reasons and motivations for undertaking the research study as part of the Doctorate in Business Administration. Firstly this was a practice doctorate and I wanted to further develop my practice as a consultant and as a manager after completing my MSc in Organisational Development and Management in 2004. I am a self confessed lifelong learner, am curious about life and always looking for new information and new ways of thinking. I have a passion for developing my own practice and I also want to be able to create opportunities for others to share this with me. What led me to undertake an action research study in the charitable trust was that I wanted to create an opportunity for managers in the charitable trust to shape their experience to meet their needs. From being a trustee on the charitable trust board, I was aware that managers were under a lot of pressure dealing with a number of tensions as a result of experiencing the growth in one part of the organisation and the tension of the

possibility of a reduction in services in the other. I am motivated by making a difference and am passionate about personal and professional development. These are values that are deep within me both personally and professionally. So the research needed to fit with my philosophy of the world. Having used an action research as part of my MSc I wanted work within the same philosophical approach in this next study.

b. What underlying assumptions did I bring to the research?

Action research creates change through iterating cycles of research and action. My assumptions of the worlds are that change is possible and that reality is socially constructed. Meaning is developed through people coming together to share understandings and worldviews unlike a positivist paradigm. Knowledge is constructed out of meaning as a result of what we learn from being connected with others and through the sharing of that experience. In terms of the research process, I was aware from previous experience of working within an action research approach that I am not separate from the research that I am a part of it. Action research is relational and my reflective practice is not just an introspective process, rather that it is inextricably related to others, I am connected. I believe that reality is subjective and the research will be revealed through individual perspectives and interpretations so that it will not necessarily be generalisable as a result. However by keeping written or textual accounts about methods and insights used in the process, there may be an opportunity replicate the study in a similar context.

Creating space to engage in reflective practice and management development conversations in a manager's day to day work is not always seen as a

priority. Doing management work is necessarily more important than the time to reflect on the impact of interventions. My belief is that ultimately positive management practice is about creating the right climate so as to get the best out of the people which will benefit both the organisation and the people that work within it. I also believe that in work people's health is also paramount and is negatively affected by poor management and working practices.

c. How am I connected to the research theoretically, experientially, emotionally? What effect did this have on my approach?

Taking these three key areas contained in the question, I will explain how I was connected to the research to make explicit what my interests were.

- **Theoretically**

From a critical perspective Alvesson & Sköldberg argue that traditionally research has been conceived as the creation of true, objective knowledge, following a scientific method (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, 1). Within academia research activity is strongly associated with the idea that it is an impersonal activity built on the positivist paradigm where the researcher is objective. From my perspective I am connected to this management research through my beliefs which are underpinned by a social constructionist theoretical position. Action research is a qualitative research approach grounded in a social constructionist epistemology and is a relational process. Therefore this research was conducted from a subjective position representing the perspectives of the participants engaged in the process. Using an appreciative approach (Cooperrider, 2005) aligned well with the theoretical underpinnings of action research which was also grounded within social constructionism.

- **Experientially**

My experience of my own personal and professional journey in research began as a result of being curious as to what good management practice looked like. By this I mean management practice is situated in health and social care settings where most of my working experience has been. The last nineteen years have been in the drug and alcohol sector. My need to understand what good management practice looked like was partly driven by having experienced some poor management practice and a lack of support for my work from line managers. Because of this experience I also wanted to engage with a discover knowledge about new ways of thinking from a management perspective. I wanted to understand how as in creating positive working climates rather than negative deficit based problematisation of management would help develop vibrant workplaces. I wanted to help minimise the impact of the stress that managers experience through their work and support them to be energised, productive and grow through their experiences. The idea for the research for the DBA came from this thinking. The basis of this was developed during the period of unprecedented growth in service provision in the drug and alcohol sector and was underpinned by the Training Needs Analysis from Cranfield University in 2003 (Mills, Parry and Tyson, 2003).

My own experience of reflective practice originates from within nursing which was grounded within Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) which on reflection I now realise is an objective and introspective approach. Reflective practice has formed part of the requirements for professional regulation since the mid 1980's. Interestingly my experience is that managers are not regulated in the health and social care sector and are not required in the same way as nursing, social work and teaching to develop

reflective practice as part of their professional development. In the late 1990's that continuing professional development and practice hours became an important part of the requirement for registration for nurses. Finlay (2008) highlighted this in a paper written about 'Reflecting on 'Reflective Practice' cited that;

'Reflection is highlighted as a pivotal skill to achieve required Standards and Proficiencies in nursing and other health professional education (NMC, 2004; HPC, 2004).

The professional self regulation of nurses was inextricably linked in with demonstrating the ability to engage with continuing professional development to remain registered. A code of conduct has always been a core part of setting standards and proficiency in the practice of nursing. On qualifying nurses in the 1980's had to be registered with the General Nursing Council for England and Wales (GNC) and this evolved into the United Kingdom Central Nursing Council (UKCC) in 1983 and then became the Nursing Midwifery Council in 2002. Yet surprisingly no equivalent regulation has existed for health and social care managers. A code of conduct for NHS managers was not developed for example until 2002 which was nearly 20 years after the Griffiths report (1983) and the subsequent implementation of a management structure in the NHS. The code of conduct for managers was developed as part of a response to the Kennedy Report (2001) following an inquiry into the quality of service delivery of children's services at Bristol Royal Infirmary. This resulted in a set of core standards for conduct expected of NHS Managers.

Regulation for managers still does not exist and unlike nursing and social work professions there is no regulatory body to report serious practice concerns about fitness to practice of managers. The Care Quality Commission as the

regulatory body for inspection of health and social care services provision has as part of its essential standards a requirement for assurances around staffing, quality and management and suitability of managers of registered premises. Whilst there are some professional bodies that managers can choose to be members of such organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Professional Development for Human Resource professionals (CIPD), the Chartered Managers Institute (CMI) and the Chartered Institute for Marketing, this is not a requirement. The recently published Francis report (Francis, 2013) into the poor care of patients on Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust has been a defining moment for NHS for managers and the debate continues about professional regulation.

- **Emotionally**

There has been a marked change in the types of organisations delivering public sector services through recent developments in the world of health and social care commissioning. This has led to many charitable and private sector services gaining contracts to deliver services for some of the most vulnerable in society. These services have traditionally been delivered by NHS and private sector organisations. This has caused me concern as to the professional development and the conduct of manager's who have the responsibility for the leadership and management of these services. Stories of the misuse of power, negative behaviour and a general lack of professionalism by managers in the NHS has caused concerns about conduct which has been highlighted within the Francis Report (2013). Yet managers within the drug and alcohol sector have been allowed to move into and work in positions of management responsibility after often been promoted without training, development or qualifications in management (Mills,

Parry and Tyson, 2003). These managers are often out of their depth in developing services with ever growing people management responsibilities which now also covers a consideration for employee's health and well being.

My own experience and professional development as a manager has been shaped by some positive and some very negative experiences of being managed as a nurse over the last 20 years. I left the NHS in 2001 disillusioned following a protracted negative period at work and experiencing being bullied by a senior manager. These events culminated in me deciding to make a choice to leave the NHS. I realise the profound emotional and psychological effect that this experience had on me and the way that I now view the importance of acting professionally as a manager. I have used emotion as a driver for both my own and other managers self improvement. I am passionate about professionalism in management and reflective practice a development. I aspire each day to be the best that I can be and I want make a difference in developing managers that I come into contact with through my consultancy assignments. When I left the NHS I initially took on roles working as an interim manager for several national charities, the private sector and the NHS. I challenged myself in my management practice exposing myself to unfamiliar working environments and was out of my comfort zone so that I would develop and grow in experience and knowledge. Sometimes this was challenging and an uncomfortable place to be as I was working in organisations that were not so well developed and resourced in comparison with my experience of the NHS. My academic journey has been an extremely important part in this as this and I have made it a priority in my life for the last 15 years by in being at university undertaking different

courses. Academically this has challenged my practice and redefined and reframed my thinking in relation to management learning and organisational development. I can honestly say that this has had a profound effect on my approach with the management research as I fundamentally believe that in engaging managers in a relational process such as action research can and will enable change and growth.

By setting out what has motivated me, my underlying assumptions to the research approach and how I am connected to the research, this gives the reader an understanding of my reasons for engaging in a doctoral research study. In the next section I will present some of the issues under consideration in the area of reflective practice.

3. Presentation of the issues in the area of reflective practice

This report is working on several levels in terms of the emergent issues in the area of reflective practice. There are three key areas that I am going to cover which will surface some of these issues in current thinking. These are;

a. Reflective practice and reflexivity
b. Management research as in action research
c. Management practice

The first issue is dealt with through exploring the literature, aiming give a better understanding as to what the differences are between reflective practice and reflexivity. This thinking has developed since I undertook the research. However there is still confusion between the two terms and overlaps as concepts as to how they are described. In aiming to get a better understanding as to how these key concepts are described, I will set out some of the different descriptions and critiscms. The second issue is in relation to the applicability of reflexivity to management research. This helps with thinking through the relevance of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings. Cunliffe (2011, 406) argues that most scholars writing on reflexivity describe it as being concerned with how we construct and use knowledge. Finally the third issue under consideration in terms of management practice is how reflective practice and reflexivity in understanding some of the differences are employed in day to day management practice not just in the domain of research. In the next section I will now move on to outline some of the key theories and thinking that have influenced and informed the development of reflective practice in relation to management research and practice.

4. An evaluation of the Academic Literature

Being reflective, critically reflective and reflexive; a number of definitions?

Literature on reflective practice in the business and management research field is growing as a body of work. It is seeking to define and extend how reflective practice and reflexivity relates to the field of business research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Easterby – Smith et al, 2012). However it is in examining how reflective practice relates to the field of management and management research that is interesting. Firstly in trying to get a better understanding as to the definition of reflective practice it becomes obvious that there are many differing interpretations and wide range of thinking as to what it is. This could be drawn from a variety of areas such as psychology, counselling, management research or education and teaching. Secondly, there are three main terms that are prevalent within the literature and these are; reflective practice, critical reflexivity and reflexivity. However for the purpose of this review I will be using the terms reflective practice and critical reflexivity or also termed as reflexivity.

Reflective practice

The term reflective practice as a concept is synonymous with the professional practice arenas of nursing, teaching, and social work and counselling and is referred to in organisational studies literature (Vince & Reynolds (2004). A large proportion of the literature on reflective practice originates from within the social sciences and professions such as nursing, teaching, counselling, psychology and social

work (Schon, 1983; Cunliffe, 2004; Etherington, 2004; Boud & Walker, 1998; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Reflective practice on the one hand is described as a solitary individual introspective process (Vince & Reynolds 2004) on the other hand it can also undertaken as part of a relational approach generally conducted between professional colleagues through a variety of dialogic methods. Reflective practice is described as an inquiry into one's own personal and professional practice to make changes, learn and improve. Etherington (2006) talking about her own experiences of moving from practitioner to researcher describes the impact of talking about her own stories and listening to others during her research;

As I tell you about my own stories and those of other people, I am also telling them to myself and I am changed by them (Etherington, 2006, 25)

Etherington suggests that from her experience 'she is changed' by her encountering these stories of people's lives which strongly supports the notion that personal change is a core part of the reflective process. Mezirow (1990, 354) describing critical reflection suggests that it is through engaging in a reflective dialogue that we attempt to gain an understanding of what we are encountering in practice. Reflective practice is described as a process of learning from experience so as to gain knowledge and understanding about one's own practice (Boud et al 1985; Mezirow, 1981; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In the context of business for example, the management practitioner through engaging in reflective practice may develop an improved sense of self-awareness in relation to the impact of their behaviour and practice. In particular how manager's mindset and behaviour impacts on staff when working with them in practice. Vince & Reynolds (2004) describing reflective practice within psychology research argues that reflective practice has moved towards an approach that takes into account the context and

history as key factors in the process. Explanations as to what reflective practice and the concept of critical reflexivity begin to separate when it comes to considering applications to research in comparison with application to professional management practice.

Critical Reflexivity

Coghlan and Brannick (2006) argue that the concept of reflexivity is vague and this is supported by the wide and varied number of different descriptions within the texts and journal. Finlay and Gough (2003, 3) describe reflexivity where researchers turn a critical gaze towards themselves. Hibbert, Coupland and MacIntosh (2010, 48) set out a helpful distinction of the two concepts of reflection and reflexivity;

'First, reflection suggests a mirror image which affords the opportunity to engage in an observation or examination of our ways of doing. When we experience reflection we become observers of our own practice. Reflexivity however, suggests a complexification of thinking and experience, or thinking about experience. Thus, we regard reflexivity as a process of exposing or questioning our ways of doing. As such reflexivity is related to reflection yet is qualitatively different from it. Finally, recursion suggests a return, a process of defining something in terms of itself and thus a returning to our ways of doing. Hence, reflexivity is more than reflection'

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) further argue that reflexivity means that;

'serious attention is paid to the different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements are woven together in the process of knowledge development, during which empirical material is constructed, interpreted and written.'

Hibbert, Coupland and MacIntosh (2010) suggest that recursion is core part of critical reflexivity. The actual employment of recursion is quite difficult to explain. However as a solitary act critical reflexivity tends to refer to revisiting the researcher's engagement and impact on the research which is a cognitive process. Critical reflexivity in this context relies on the researcher being recursive by being able to challenge one's own perspectives or frames of reference in thinking about the research.

However this is challenging in itself because if this does not occur well in practice then the process of reflexivity may not follow. This means that ways of thinking and of seeing the world in relation to the research remain unchallenged. Being critically reflexive from an individual perspective would require a great degree of expertise and commitment to engaging in self awareness activity. Some researchers may not be that cognitively developed in this process or on the other hand may not want to be. It may also be simply an unrealistic expectation. There is a greater opportunity for a deeper degree of reflexivity and recursion through a relational process Cunliffe, 2003). Both the researcher and the participants mutually affect each other during the research process (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2010 79). Being critically reflexive will open the researcher up to account for what they have experienced during the research experience with others. This can lead to challenging ways of seeing the world and enhance practice. Cunliffe (2010, 414) argues that critical reflexivity is where there is more of a collective construction of a shared reality and one that unsettles assumptions and surfaces power relations. Cunliffe (2004) argues the practice of critical reflexivity is not just about improving management practice and she views it as something deeper;

> *If we accept that management education is not just about helping managers become more effective organizational citizens but also about helping them become critical thinkers and moral practitioners, then critical reflexivity is of particular relevance.*

Cunliffe (2004) here is arguing for moral consideration as part of reflexivity by managers in their practice thereby enhancing the organisation rather than detracting from it through poor management practice. Cunliffe (2004) is arguing for a more morally attuned way of being and argues that the practice of critical reflexivity is

relevant if this is to happen. This is in the context of some of the thorny ethical issues that occurred within Enron and the subsequent scandals within the banking sector. More recently there have been questions raised about management practice in the UK in relation to patient care in the NHS (Francis Inquiry, 2013). Finlay and Gough (2003) describe the shift in practice from introspection towards a critical realism. In recognising that research is coproduced between the researcher and the participants, the epistemological and ontological position of the researcher defines the approach to reflexivity in practice (Haynes, 2012). From a research perspective to be engaged reflexively means that there is a greater degree of awareness as to the impact of the researcher on those engaged with the study (Haynes, 2012; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Cunliffe (2010) suggests that critical reflexivity is one of four approaches that can be brought into management research. These four approaches are described as self, critical, endogenous and radical reflexivity. Each of these approaches Cunliffe (2010) suggests form part of a reflexive continuum. The inclusion of the researcher is what sets these four approaches apart. At the one end of the continuum is self reflexivity and critical realism and at the other end radical reflexivity at the other.

In differentiating reflective practice as a concept from reflexivity, then reflective practice it is argued is a less intensive process. Haynes (2012) also sets reflexivity apart and describes it as beyond being a simple reflection on the research process. Rather that the workplace is seen as in a relational context where the issues of power and politics in professional practice are also taken into consideration. The rationale to this line of thinking according to Cunliffe (2004, 408) is one where in using a

critically reflexive approach managers think about their assumptions and actions on organisations so that the outcome will be that;

'We can develop more collaborative, responsive and ethical ways of managing organizations'

Reflexivity provides a way of peeling back the deeper complex layers of production of knowledge, the methods that are undertaken to elicit knowledge and the impact of the researcher upon the research. What further differentiates critical reflexivity from reflective practice is the richness of the account in encountering the research process and the way the world is viewed by the researcher practitioner.

Cunliffe (2011, 411) argues that she does not view reflexivity as a typology or a methodology, rather that reflexivity is a way of being as a person/ researcher/teacher/manager. This resonates with the thinking of writers in action research such as Judy Marshall, Peter Reason and John Heron. Cunliffe (2012, 414) suggests two initial framing questions to help inform choosing how we engage with reflexivity;

1. What are our assumptions about the nature of reality and who we are as humans?

2. What do we see as the nature of knowledge?

What the literature does not do so well is set out how reflexivity can be applied in management practice. Although Vince and Reynolds (2004) argue that reflective practice should be an essential part of a manager's day to day practice. They propose organising reflection which is a collective process and in practice would look like action learning set for example. Or as in this case study as action research. Vince and Reynolds (2004, 15) argue that;

"Reflection in its different but related aspects should be an essential part of the day-to-day life of managers, not a disconnected, separate activity but integral, supported by structures and the culture of the workplace, affecting decisions and choices, policies and activities and the politics and emotion associated with them. In this way to be reflective is not a technique, learned and sometimes applied, but part of what it means to be a manager."

From a practice perspective then to be engaged reflexively means that there is a greater degree of awareness by the manager as to their impact on those whom the manager engages with in the course of their day to day management practice.

Critiscms of reflective practice and reflexivity

Critiscms have been leveled at reflective practice arguing that there needs to be a balance struck between introspective naval gazing and self awareness (Finlay, 2008). The danger is that too much introspection in the absence of a more of a relational approach to reflective practice could lead to a person becoming stuck in their thinking. The practice of reflexivity is not straight forward in terms of its methods in translating this into professional management practice. Reflexive methodology is complex and potentially time consuming in practice mainly focused into research. This may work well for researchers engaged in a full time qualitative research environment; however this would not be ideal for a busy managers work environment. The translation of both of these concepts into management practice is a difficult one as the concepts overlap in many ways. In terms of practice, not all professions such as managers may be familiar with reflective practice in comparison with nursing or teaching or social work where this is more established. So there may be elements of reflective practice and reflexivity that can be conjoined.

Practical knowledge generation through reflective practice

Schon's work in relation to the development of the reflective practitioner sheds light on the value of 'practical knowledge' (Schon, 1983). Schon argues that theories are developed from practices and what is important is the generation of 'practical knowledge'. Schon (1983) describes the knowledge that we bring with us from earlier actions or experiences as our pre understanding. One of the most important contributions from his work on reflective practice was the identification of two types of reflection: reflection-on-action (after-the-event thinking) and reflection-in-action (thinking while doing). Schon (1983, 56) argues that much of the reflection-in-action generally hinges on the experience of surprise, what was striking. So in the case of reflection-on-action, professionals are understood to be consciously reviewing retrospectively, describing, analysing and evaluating their past practice with a view to gaining new insights to improve future practice. With reflection-in-action, professionals are seen as examining their experiences and responses as they occur and this requires a greater degree of being conscious and being present in the moment. Schon (1983) also acknowledges the role of 'intuition' as another way of informing knowing. These descriptions about knowledge theoretically actually help contribute as to how to practically apply a process to generate the richer deeper thinking required for reflexivity. Rather than reflecting after the event, the ability to be conscious in the moment and be able to change a course of action as a result of being present is maybe the key (Ghaye and Lilleyman, 2010). A further development in reflexive thinking could be the idea of 'taking an attitude of inquiry' as proposed by Marshal and Reason (2007).

An attitude to inquiry

Marshall and Reason (2007, 368) invite researchers to fully engage in self - reflective practice and drawing on their 25 years experience in the action research field suggest that there are some prerequisites that help with becoming a reflective practitioner. This resonates with Cunliffe's (2011) notion of reflexivity as a way of being. So here there is some synergy. It is suggested that it involves an acceptance about being open to questioning one's own and others practice. Marshall and Reason (2007) suggest that there is an *'attitude to enquiry'* which enables the research process. This attitude could be transferred into management practice. Marshall and Reason (2007, 369) go onto explain that;

The notion of taking an attitude of inquiry implies opening our purposes, assumptions, sense-making and patterns of action to reflection. These are challenging aspirations. We shall suggest certain qualities of being as significantly enabling this potentiality: curiosity, willingness to articulate and explore purposes, humility, participation and radical empiricism.

What is suggested here is that there are a number of qualities that can help develop an attitude to inquiry. These are;

- Curiosity,

- Willingness to articulate and explore purposes,

- Humility,

- Participation

- Radical empiricism.

Radical empiricism is described as multiple ways of knowing, of different positions held. So the importance of qualities in terms of ways of thinking and behaving are argued as an important facet to developing reflective practice. During the

research study layers of reflective learning were occurring both for myself as the AR researcher and for the co-researchers within the group. This was occurring as a result of us engaging in dialogue around key areas of importance to the managers. These conversations were iterated at the beginning of each session from the notes and at the end of each session. The managers within the AR Learning group also had a preunderstanding as to what reflective practice was because of the nature of the work delivered by the organisation which enabled them to have an open attitude to inquiring into their own practice as managers. Arguably reflective practice is an important part of developing one's own practice, self reflective practice in relation to others and hopefully the organisation.

In this section of the report I have covered the concepts of reflective practice and reflexivity and how these apply to management research. The gaps in the literature are in the application of reflexivity although I have covered some suggestions as to how to undertake reflective and reflexive practice could be undertaken in practice. I am now going to move on to talk about some of the reflective tools and practices that I put in place during the research study.

5. Reflective practice research methods used in the AR study

A number of different approaches were employed to undertake iterations of reflective practice during the life of the action research study. The first approach was the development of my personal reflective journal in which I kept accounts of emergent themes and issues that were occurring during the action research process. Secondly in the iterations of the action research cycle where the process of reflecting reflection-on-action (after-the-event thinking) and reflection-in-action (thinking while doing) were deliberately occurring as part of the work of the group each time we met. Thirdly the supervisory journaling with my university supervisors which added to my personal journaling and also added to the work of the group through me bringing back in thoughts and ideas about what may be occurring during the sessions. Fourthly there was an emergent area that I called 'Ethical dilemmas as reflective accounts'. These were situations that arose that took me by surprise initially as I encountered new experiences firsthand as to how the research process could impact on the participants creating ethical dilemmas. I will give an example of how this occurred in practice. A fifth and final area of reflective practice and knowledge sharing occurred with developing my relationships with peers in a number of communities of practice within which I became engaged as a result of my areas of research interest which were action research and appreciative inquiry.

a. Personal Reflective Learning Journal

I developed my reflective practice journal informed by my previous experience of journal writing and after reading a paper by Anne Cunliffe (2004) writing on developing critical reflexivity. She described how diarizing could work in practice

and suggested that there was real value in writing down thoughts and experiences during the research process;

> *A reflexive journal is based on assumptions that learning is meaningful and embodied, when we interweave theory and experience and when we focus on developing lifelong learning skills (Cunliffe, 2004 423).*

I was writing in two journals, one was my personal reflective accounts which I wrote in before the sessions and afterwards. The other was my supervisory journal with my university supervisors which was completed as my monthly supervisions. I kept an electronic copy of the twelve months accounts of the eight sessions that were undertaken and other conversations that were held outside of the AR learning group. I chose to write from the perspective of what I had been 'struck' by and what was emergent. Following the approach suggested by Cunliffe (2004, 424) I used a series of prompts for my thinking process when writing up such as; personal insights in term of my own and participants progress and challenges, moments that struck me or stood out. Then I described why these were important and what this raised for me in terms of my thinking. I also considered what the outcome was as to whether or not this created tensions and why. Then I considered what I would do next and whether this needed to be fed back into the AR learning group to inform developments. I am going to give three examples of learning points which came from my reflective journal during that period as a way of showing how my journal enabled my learning process. In the first example I talk about the first meeting and an assumption that I had made about the nature of the group of managers meeting for the first time. In the second example I talk through my experience of establishing the ethical ground rules and consent agreement. Finally in

the third example I reflect back to an issue that arose in relation to the recording of the

AR learning group sessions and how I dealt with this.

- **Example 1 - The context for the reflective account (Journal extract)**

The first session (AR learning group) I facilitated was mainly to orientate participants to the AR process and how we would begin to develop conversations that were appreciative in approach. I opened up with a get to know each other exercise which participants agreed to as they shared that this was the first time that they had ever met from across the organisation. This became a really interesting process observing the interactions as people introduce themselves to each other for the first time as I realised that these managers had not met each other before. I was acutely aware now that this was the first time that these managers had met from across the organisation.

- **What struck me?**

What struck me was my assumption that these managers had met across the trust through

meetings or as colleagues as part of their day to day work prior to the development of the

AR Learning Group. I was genuinely surprised and reflected this in my journal extract

below after the session.

(Extract from my journal) I remember thinking how surprised I was that people haven't met from across the organisation as managers. It made me start to question whether or not there was any other forum in place within the charitable trust that these managers could meet on a periodic basis to talk. I think the realisation and my assumption that these managers had not met before quite surprised me. I think I was also disappointed that with the organisation growing in the way it was and the demand it was making on these managers that senior managers had not thought to address this. These managers in effect were working operationally in isolation in their own services in a geographically dispersed charity. I also realise that I assumed that senior managers would have known this.

- **What was important about this and what impact did it have?**

Firstly this was an important learning point for me from a research

perspective as I think this was the first time that I really realised that I needed to assume

nothing. As a result of this experience my approach from that point forward was to

commit to asking questions that would help me gain a better understanding and a more accurate picture of what was happening for these managers. Secondly it also informed me about supporting the development of the relationships within the group. So in terms of the participants working together initially each session we agreed that we would need to be open up with reflections on what had been happening between each session so as to re orientate participants to the process.

- **Example 2 – The context for the reflective account**

This was a situation that arose at the first session of the AR learning group. I distributed the ethics consent forms prior to the session and then I asked each person to sign a hard copy which I had with me. This was the extract from my reflective journal as it emerged that the managers did not want to necessarily sign the agreement.

- **What struck me?**

(Extract from my journal) Actually getting the ethical agreements agreed and talking these through was also really interesting process. Particularly when several of the participant managers actually said that they didn't want a copy of the signed ethical agreement. I reassured them that at any point in time I would have a copy of this on the file and I had already sent these through electronically to each person prior to the session. Some of the managers didn't even want to sign the ethical agreement which I found really surprising. I guess I thought that maybe they trusted me and that's why they didn't want to sign it.

- **What was important about this and what impact did it have?**

I remember even now feeling vividly concerned that these managers did not see the importance of the ethics agreement. I was not sure why this happened. However I realised the importance of the ethics agreements later in the research when the manager requested her transcript to be withdrawn and replaced with an abridged account. I wrote in my journal what my approach was to deal with this;

(Journal extract) I still went through it (Ethics agreement) line by line with them to make sure that they understood what they were signing up to as that was my responsibility as the person undertaking research and it was important from an ethics perspective.

- **Example 3 – The context for the reflective account (Journal extract)**

This issue also arose during the first session and was in relation to how the sessions were going to be recorded. My aspirations and plans were that these would be recorded on a digital voice recorder. However this was not to be the case when the participants refused as they were unhappy with that approach. This was a learning curve which I recorded in my journal and I took back to my university supervisors as it felt like what I can only describe as if I had been thrown a 'curve ball'.

- **What struck me?**

(Extract from my journal) What was interesting was when I got to the point where we were making agreements about how the sessions will be recorded in terms of the conversations that would be held within the group. Some of the managers stated that they did not want to have me use a digital recording. I know I was pretty worried at this point because I was really concerned that how would I provide the evidence about the conversations that been had.

- **What was important about this and what impact did it have?**

(Extract from my journal post session) What I didn't consider and now on reflection I have thought more about as time went by after this session was that the participants had a right not to be recorded and actually by me stepping back they were happy for me to take notes which I then sent out to them. They were also happy to confirm these written notes as an accurate record of what we discussed and amended or make suggestions where they thought things needed to change because I knew that I was doing this in the right way for them.

All three examples were learning points for me in terms of my practice. My journal was an important place for me to reflect on the decisions I made in handling these key areas of practice. I want to set out a final emergent area within my journaling that caused me

some discomfort during the research process and this was in my relationship with the CEO and my conversations with him. It was these conversations outside the group during the time that the Director of Operations was off on bereavement leave that unsettle to me the most. My realisation that I was reliving previous negative experiences was a profound one for me seven years after this had happened. This was triggered after I had contacted the CEO to say that three of the managers were unable to come along to the meeting because of sickness. The CEO proceeded to speak very critically about some of the managers who were in AR learning group. In particular he talked about the lack of this manager's ability to manage. It was said it in a very critical belittling sarcastic way. I wrote in my diary I found this difficult because I'm working with the managers in the AR learning group and the CEO knew this. On writing in my diary that I was feeling very annoyed that he had put me this position and also as I knew how little management development the charitable trust had provided for them. I held the chief exec responsible for. On writing this into my personal journal I realised that this reminded me of the negative experience I had back in the NHS many years before. I had a manager who was hypercritical of my work and yet wasn't supportive of me starting my management development at University. I had asked my manager to support me and undertaking my diploma in management studies to which his response was not to take me seriously. I remember feeling very angry very undervalued and undermined. I didn't feel like I was being taken seriously. This discussion with the CEO also bought out some feelings for me as to how I felt my manager had disrespected me. I realised that I had not quite dealt with what had happened and that there was an opportunity to deal with this differently with the CEO. As I wrote in my diary at the time my frustration with leadership models and how

passionate I was as to surface the impact of darker side of negative manager behaviours and the impact of this on the people they work with. This was rooted in my own experience. .

> *I have been struck by the 'Pop Leadership models' that are around at the moment and that leadership is like this Holy Grail that everyone is seeking. What is failed to be addressed amongst all of the rara and pom-poms is that there is a Dark side of leadership is not very often spoken about. A world where bullying and abuse and oppression exists. This is what my research is really about, it is the reality of leadership and the in the 'cupboard behaviours' that are not talked about or challenged and are accepted. Then the leader moves onto another organisation to begin the pattern over again. Vulnerable people (employees) often the followers are the ones that suffer from the experience, the negativity that comes from this and its impact on the organisation.*

I realised that I was reliving my own experiences psychologically and emotionally through my research. I was becoming painfully aware that I needed to resolve some of my feelings and experiences in a constructive and positive way now. My commitment to action was to engage with the CEO in future and address the negativity by reflecting back the impact of these conversations on myself and in relation to how he thought about his managers. I began this process next time I spoke to him and the frequency of negative conversations began to reduce as I advised him to address any concerns he had with his managers. This was an important development in my growth and in building new ways of relating and engaging with some of those difficult and challenging conversations in particular with senior managers. The second area of reflective practice as an approach was as part of the cyclical nature of action research. Reflective practice was operationalised through the participants engaging in conversations in the AR learning set.

b. AR learning group and reflective cycling in practice

In action research practice, Dick (2013, online) in his online action research programme AREOL proposes a number of approaches that can considered for application during action research projects. This is suggested will provide the basis for reflection taking place as part of the AR cycle. Dick (2013) proposes;

- *Setting aside regular time for reflection, for example by using the first ten minutes of each meeting to reflect on what happened since the previous meeting, and using the last ten minutes of every meeting to reflect on that meeting*

- *deliberately following the experiential learning cycle during reflection*

- *using a mix of individual and collective reflection; some people prefer individual, some collective; almost all benefit from a combination*

- *whenever actions are planned, building ongoing monitoring into the plan so that reflection time is planned for.*

As referred to in the thesis account of the research at the beginning of each AR learning session and at the end of each session there was a protected period set aside for participants to engage in reviewing the previous session's notes and themes. An additional reflective process was also undertaken at the end of each session which resulted in agreement on themes and any further actions. The notes that were taken at these meetings were also available shortly after each meeting so that any of the participants who wanted to respond with reflections via email was able to. This did occur at several points during the research process. The reflections on the session were set out in the written session accounts within the thesis. Generative open reflective questions were used such as;

- What struck you from the last session?

- What were the strengths of what was discussed previously?

- What would you like to do differently as a result?

- What was the high point of the session?

During the twelve months that the AR research group detailed electronic notes were taken written by myself on my laptop during the meetings over the research period. I developed rapid touch typing skills and the ability to capture verbatim accounts of the conversations being held. As already referred to earlier in this report the managers participating in the AR learning group had declined to have the sessions recorded because they were feeling vulnerable at the time and were concerned about the ownership of the material. There was a great deal of importance in keeping these notes as the accuracy of recording these in the sessions would fulfill three functions during the life of the research;

1. Act as a tool for reflective practice with the managers

2. Act as a historical record of what happened within the AR learning group

3. Provide the evidence that the research actually happened!

These notes played a significant role in terms of reflective practice with the managers and also in the writing up of the historical record of the development of the group in my thesis. There were a number of key areas that arose during the action research study that were addressed through my reflections on my practice and also that of the AR learning group. The reflective interplay between myself and the group in our learning connectedness was evident during the sessions from the notes that were recorded.

c. University Supervisory Journal

My supervision played a key role in undertaking the action research study. I was supported by my supervisors in between each of the AR learning group sessions which gave space to reflect on what happened during the research process. My supervisor acted as a reflective peer and he was able to then advise me on my thinking and the decisions that I needed to make in terms of process. It also gave me chance to tap into his expertise and for him to advise and guide me on what might be the next steps in terms of what needs to happen within the group given the things that were coming up. Having supervision from the University was absolutely a really critical element in my reflective practice and repertoire of approaches. Being challenged at points during the research by my supervisor gave me the space to really think about what I was actually doing. Especially being challenged as to whether or not I could justify or give reasons as to why I wasn't taking a particular intervention or why I was moving in a particular direction. This for me was part of reflective rigour.

I wrote a reflective piece in my supervisory journal six weeks into the research process about my tensions in undertaking the doctorate as a part time student and being self-employed. This was tied into my feelings of uncertainty in running my business and still being able to generate consultancy work on a regular basis to support myself as it was precarious. This created extra tensions for me and was quite a stressful time during the research process and beyond. I wrote;

"Trying to juggle the DBA was working and I met consider going back into full time employment at some point if things don't change by February. It's been expensive undertaking the course in more ways than just the money side of it. But there is no itself and point of doing this (being self employed) was to give the time to the undertaking DBA and my research. There are hidden costs such as books time travel phone calls

administration the transcribing will likely cost. However I will evaluate my situation again soon and decide where to go from then."

I did consider whether or not to continue with the research and the DBA programme and then I decided to trust the process. My university supervision for the research and the DBA was an important part of my support mechanism as the DBA learning set did not continue beyond the first year of the programme. Supervision acted as a space for me to discuss my crisis of confidence dilemmas in undertaking the research. It was a time where I was acutely self aware and I had a heightened sense of intuition which was exhausting at times. The supervisory journal which I rigorously maintained after each session acted as an excellent tool for reflective practice for myself and my supervisors. I think they had a sense of what the AR learning group was experiencing with me. The written textual accounts I kept were a historical record of the 'in the moment' discussions in supervision as to the tensions and emergent issues within the research process. This contributed to my growth and learning in practice as well as acting as a strategic tool for guiding me through the research and academic process.

d. Ethical dilemmas as reflective accounts

A further key area for reflective practice as an approach was the learning from within the ethical dilemmas that emerged during the research. These were not predictable. The one key learning point for me was the importance of good preparation prior to undertaking the research process and paying attention to the importance of agreeing and signing off key areas with participants at the beginning of the research such as ethical consent. Inadvertently sometimes just the act of reflecting on an interview or session notes could raise ethical concerns such as how the information would

be used or shared in the organisation. These dilemmas were about relationships and trust and were essentially indicative of the sense of mistrust described within the organisation at the time that the research was being undertaken. However one particular issue emerged with a manager in relation to this after the third session which had been focused into storytelling about each of the manager's career history. This particular manager had disclosed some very personal information about her earlier life. On reflection after she had read this back in her transcript she became concerned that this would be detrimental if it got out into the public domain. She already had articulated concerns about how the CEO viewed her as a manager (I had experience of critical conversations about this manager emanating from the CEO). She was very worried that this information could be used against her which was indicative of how tentative her relationship was with the CEO. In my reflective journal I wrote;

> *The manager emailed and asked me to replace story with one that they had updated and for me to assure her that I would delete the original one she sent to me. She was very concerned that they would be recognised within the story and stated that if this was seen that it would result in them losing their job. I reassured her that this is not the case and that I respected her right to withdraw the information as laid out in the ethics consent form. I was also concerned that she might not want to continue the research, so I rang her to talk this through.*

This was a sensitive situation and I had been a party to a conversation with the CEO where he was overtly was critical of this manager both personally about her marriage and professionally as a manager. I found difficult to listen to as I did not have this same experience of her after working alongside her in the AR learning group for three sessions. I did not think that this was accurate perception of her by the CEO. This however was the underlying sub plot to the situation at that time and what was important here was the application of the ethics agreement. I understood her right to want to

withdraw the original transcript and acted on her request. I did not feel it was my place to question the origin of the negative relationship with the CEO, if there was a cause. My immediate priority was to act ethically on her request which I did. On a follow up conversation she described her sense of relief and that she had reflected on the situation and realised that she needed to be more guarded in what she disclosed in future in the organisation.

e. **Conversations with my peers in 'Communities of Practice'**

As an additional learning and reflective space I joined two international list serves which were as communities of practice (Wenger, 2002). Wenger (2012, 2) describes communities of practice as having three facets to it; the domain of practice, the community and the practice.

'It is where practitioners develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice.'

Each of the areas of interest and practice that I had in relation to the research I took responsibility to seek out and join an active community of practice. This opened up shared conversational spaces with other practitioners on specific subject areas. I was in contact with people who were reading, writing and thinking on action research and appreciative inquiry. There was an active sharing of resources, writing together, reflective thinking and face to face meetings that ran several times a year. It also included online virtual conferences and webinars. An absolute wealth of knowledge sharing occurred.

For example I joined the AREOL (Action Research and Evaluation Online Programme) developed and led by Bob Dick a leading writer and exponent in action research in Australia. This enabled me to not only learn about action research actively

alongside others in conversation across the world, it also put me on contact with fellow researchers in different fields of practice where we shared knowledge and learning. I also became part of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) list serve and subsequently became an active member of the European AI community where continue to attend AI practice meetings with fellow practitioners from across Europe. This has meant that I have been able to establish ongoing conversations with fellow practitioners about developments in the AI field of practice which has informed my research. During my early encounters I established links with Case Western University in the USA and was able to meet up with a group of students in London to share thinking. They were the first cohort of the AI university masters course led by David Cooperrider on appreciative organisational development. As part of engaging in sharing and reflecting on practice with these practitioners I was able to talk through and share my experiences and challenges of developing an appreciative space in my research.

I also attended a three day conference in Lugano in Italy to attend a lecture given by Kenneth Gergen on social constructionism and its implications for mental health practice. This is where I really started to understand how social constructionism was challenging the dominant medical paradigm and creating new future possibilities and conversations. I was inspired by listening to him as one of the main writers in the field and one of the leading sources of these ideas gave me a rare insight into his thinking

In summary I have covered some of the key approaches that I took in developing both my reflective practice and that of the managers who were participating in the AR learning set. I took full advantage of the knowledge and experience that were

available to me through the people that I was connected to through the charitable trust, the research group participants, the university, my supervisors, my peers that I established practice relationships and friendships with in far off places and through the internet and other learning spaces. The one key area that I would like to now improve on is to develop a deeper understanding as to how I can develop my skills and my practice in how to engage more deeply in my thinking by developing a more attuned reflexive practice.

6. Making a significant contribution in analysis and reflection on self, the participants and the organisation.

What did the participant managers learn from engaging with the process?

Reflecting back on the manager's aspirations at the beginning of the AR case study, each set out to use the space to reflect on what had happened within the charitable trust and consolidate where they were. Comparing this with the feedback from their evaluations I think they gained a lot more than they initially thought. Whilst there were challenges throughout the operationalising of the AR learning group the end result was that the managers learned that they valued having a conversational space.

Reflecting on management and leadership practice not just reflection for practitioners

I think that these managers also recognised the value of actually taking time to participate in a welcoming space. *A welcoming space supports people to participate fully* (Holman, 2013, 22). Furthermore the act of taking time out to reflect as managers and leaders in the charitable trust was enabled through the AR processes iterative cyclical nature. It certainly helped clarify participants thinking as they worked through their thoughts about their experiences rather than trying to constantly work through conundrums and issues when under pressure in the workplace. The act of actually creating a space to meet as peers became important to the participants. In so far as they wanted to make it a part of organisational life as a permanent vehicle. This

protected space had become important to them in so far as when at one critical point we were unsure as to whether the group would continue meeting due to dwindling numbers, the participants chose to carry on. There was a sense that this was happening because managers were making a point about their workload. This was reflected in the Appreciative evaluation when asked what surprised participants and one manager responded;

How cross I felt with people who did not give the group value above making a point about their current working conditions.

Leading on appreciative thinking - *modelling out what you want to see*

The participants were clear about their assertion as to the kind of organisation that they wanted to create and the climate that they wanted to work in. They further asserted on reflection not to accept the receipt of intimidating public emails and decided to address this issue in a way that had a constructive outcome all round. Setting out their expectation as to manager's behaviour towards each other was extremely important to them and had almost been nonexistent before the case study. As a result these managers were carrying emotions around with them about how they felt about this experience. This came up in the first session in the issue bubbles and words were used such as having a 'Sword of Damocles' hanging over me and 'feeling emasculated'. Participants were surprised at their depth of emotion they felt about not being valued, having no voice in the organisation until the development of AR case study.

I also think that the participants learned how think appreciatively and were surprised they were at how they felt when they came out of meetings

emotionally. Conversely descriptions of feeling more energized, enthusiastic and finding the focus through using an appreciative approach was described as being useful as well as the focus on solution. A feeling of belonging in being part of a peer group, being respected and learning from colleagues from across the organisation featured as a high point in the AR process.

Management and leadership as relational – a shared process

I also think the shared learning process featured highly for the participants as most of these managers had not met prior to the AR learning group. There was surprise expressed on numerous occasions when there was a realisation that the participants agreed with each other about their shared ideas and experiences. They felt heard by each other '*seeking coherence'* (Holman, 2013) in what they were saying to each other. There were also times when they did not have the same experience and were then equally surprised at what they heard and learned, especially when the north cluster managers were describing their experience with the CEO and the way that he was acting in a critical way towards managers.

As a collective the managers decided that they wanted to develop the space into a permanent management development forum. The managers had taken the learning in terms of the best of what they had experienced and what they valued about the AR learning process. This was captured in writing and incorporates into a developing narrative describing the ethos and approach for the new cross organisational group. This was the first cross organisational managers group in the organisation at the time that the

research study was being undertaken. In spite of dwindling numbers during the process, the group remained committed to developing the conversational space for reflective practice and learning for managers and leaders in the charitable trust. This was a significant contribution to for both the managers and the organisation as part of what had developed from the AR learning group.

Another key area of learning that was expressed by participants early into the AR learning set development was focused into the importance of communicating with each other verbally by phone and in the written word (email) in a respectful way. This concern had emerged because there was recognition that managers themselves had become reliant on email as the main form of contact. The written content of the emails that were being sent was a source of frustration and described as not being respectful of one another. This was a key area that was addressed and discussed with the DOO at a face to face meeting where the participating manager's learned that they had a voice.

Peggy Holman sums up the dialogic OD experience really well in her article 'A call to engage' (2013) when she says;

When issues are complex, stakes are high and emotions are right below the surface, these practices (of conversation) help us to engage with each other. (p.24)

Tensions of being an 'Insider action researcher'

One key area for myself in terms of a significant contribution was my own professional development. My biggest tensions and greatest growth came from being in the difficult position of being an insider action researcher. Fals Borda (2001 27) on being an insider researcher argues that this role can be challenging and can lead the researcher to experience feelings of role conflict or role detachment as a result of having to play both part of the researcher and also being an organizational member. Coghlan (2007 338) points out that insider action researchers need to build on the closeness that they have with the setting that they are researching, while, at the same time create distance from it in order to see things critically and enable change to happen. Good research supervision during the research process can to help the researcher navigate the political dynamics at play within an organisation as a result of this dual role and support the insider researcher to create space to enable critical thinking. I want to share my reflective diary and in particular some of what I experienced as an insider action researcher that eventually led to me resigning off the board not long after I completed the research process.

Context: This is an extract from my reflective journal that described my increasing tension as an 'insider researcher' as my awareness increased as to accuracy of the managers reported concerns raised in the AR Learning group. This was in complete contrast to what the board was actually being told by the CEO;

(Extract from my reflective journal) I have been to a recent board meeting and found it difficult to sit through as I am so aware that I have a greater understanding of what is happening in the organisation than most of the board members sat around the table. I am aware now how this information is being presented (to the board) and feel that it is sometimes a (board) ritual for 'who' this is being played out for (the audience). The CEO

is a very good actor, very clever and politically astute with regards to how he lays the information before the board and lines up his 'soldiers' (which includes me) to support his line of presentation. I know because I have been complicit sometimes with him when he comes to me to ask for support. I am critical of what I think and mindful of what I say, though am never sure if I am just being maneuvered into position as I have now seen and heard him talk to other people in that way.

This clearly sets out the tensions that I was feeling at the time. I was feeling very conflicted about what I was experiencing. It was realisation that as a board member that there was a process that the CEO took me through prior to board meetings. I would regularly receive a phone call prior to board meetings to discuss what was coming up and the CEO would seek my support on his direction of travel. What I had not realised until this point was my sense of growing discomfort as I felt that I was being complicit and allowing him to influence my decisions on the board. I realised that this was a political move as I was the only board member who had a really good understanding of the drug and alcohol sector. The other board members were either retired professionals from other areas of health and social care or were from a finance background. The tension for me in addition was that I realised that through regular conversations outside of the board meetings with the CEO was that he was very critical of his managers bordering on extremely personal and derogatory about their performance. The managers within the AR learning group were talking about their experience of the CEO being critical and belittling and I knew this was an accurate reflection of his behaviour. There was also a disconnection between the CEO's leadership and lack of engagement with the managers to understand what was happening on the front line. This could have been valuable intelligence to help inform the CEO's thinking and decision making. I was realising that this was maybe what he intended to happen, to discredit managers so as to remove any threat to his decisions. Of course I was not sure this was the case so I needed somewhere

to be able to talk this through to be able to go back and continue to handle this whilst thinking about how this could be addressed with the CEO sensitively.

I was thankful that I had the space in my university supervision to talk this through outside of the organisation. I was able to clarify my thinking about being caught up in this situation and to be able to work out coping strategies to handle the tensions between the research and my role on the board. It did not necessarily mean that I was able to actually do anything about the situation however being able to reduce my tension by airing this was an important part of my coping strategy. The ability to helicopter back and view the situation for what it really was which was political really helped me. I did get to a point where this was clearly making me think about whether being on the board was the right place for me. In a further entry I wrote;

I am considering resigning off the board after the research is completed as I am not sure that I want to do this anymore, when there are so many inconsistencies between what is reported and what is actually happening in the organisation. I keep talking about the need to develop integrated care governance and it is minuted (in board meeting notes) though no action is taken. The CEO says that this will be the role of the new Director of Quality and yet there has still been no decision on when this appointment will take place. Meantime we are still carrying the clinical risk. The Workforce development post has not been appointed to either.

I have been very privileged over the last 12 months to have had a rare insight into the organisation through the 'eyes' of eight managers, though this has created tensions for me sitting on the board also.

What I didn't then write up in my thesis or my reflective notes was that I had a subsequent conversation with the CEO about my experience of him and that I was concerned for him. My conversation was along the line of being concerned for his health and how he was acting at work to which he shared with me that he had been very stressed for some time, feeling unsupported and over burdened with responsibility. In short he was not coping too well. I suggested that he consider if continuing as CEO was the right thing

for him at this point in time. He disclosed that he had been considering his future and that maybe it was time for him to move on. Not long after I completed my research he agreed a compromise with the chair of the boards and recruitment was underway for a new CEO.

7. So what?

The role of reflective practice and impact in terms of my practice?
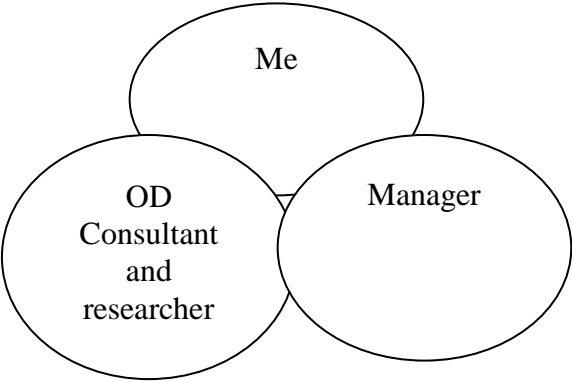
So what have I learned through this process? I learned that each of the roles that I brought with me into the research informs the other and can create tensions for me at anytime. How I choose to manage these tensions is an important part of developing a reflexive approach to reflective practice. Holding onto ideas lightly and being open to what emerges has held me in good stead when I mistakenly have tried to control the research process. It was not for me to control as it was a collaborative and democratic approach. The role of reflective practice for me has meant that I have developed my ability to engage better with people and really listen and attend. If I had not learned to do this I would have missed opportunities where situations could have turned out differently. My ability to think in-action has become my primary way of reflecting which was and still is a significant shift away from my nursing practice days where most of my reflective practice was retrospective. In reflecting in-action I am able to take the opportunities before me for creating change in the moment rather than walking away and saying to myself I wish I ....

As a result of this I have developed my interpersonal skills in terms of having difficult conversations which was one of the main areas that I wanted to improve

on when I came to university 15 years ago. My aim after such a negative experience in the NHS was one of transforming myself, my thinking, my responses to challenges and making real and lasting changes. As a result I am more politically astute, aware of ethical itches and have developed a heightened sense of intuitiveness that works well in my personal life and in my consultancy. I understand and work with the action research process better than when I was undertaking my masters! I have evolved, grown and have much more growing to do both personally and professionally.

Role of reflective practice for the managers and the impact on the organisation?

In terms of the AR learning group and what was its role in reflective practice for the managers, I think that the appreciative evaluation set out what those managers thought that they had taken away with them from the research process. The AR learning group had created a space for the first time for managers to be able to reflect on their experience and practice and then do something about it. It gave managers a safe space to be able to have the supervision that they were not receiving from their own line managers, to reduce the stress they felt as a result of feeling isolated. It gave managers a voice when they felt they did not have one within the organisation. The AR learning group gave them space to think about what they were experiencing and how they were going to construct something that would last beyond the research and be a permanent space for managers to continue to reflect and share knowledge and experience collaboratively.

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