

Inspiring Innovation in Australian Health Services Managers

This paper reports on a successful action learning approach to improve the innovation and leadership skills of health service managers.

Background

There is a perception that the health care industry has not been successful in innovating to improve the quality of the services delivered. Many recommendations have been made on how to improve health system performance, but health service managers have difficulty in making these changes. In the State of Victoria, Australia the Health Service Management Innovation Council was established by the Government to explore why limited progress had been made, and to establish mechanisms to improve management innovation within the health sector. The Council sponsored a series of action learning sets to improve management capabilities throughout the public health care sector.

Method

Over two years 84 managers from hospital and community health services across the State participated in learning sets. The evaluation framework included process, outcome and impact evaluation with pre and post quantitative analysis of conditions for work effectiveness and psychological empowerment.

Findings

In support of previous research, we found that the action learning approach, using learning sets, was successful in empowering the participants in their work roles. The participant respondents reported significantly improved levels of empowerment that were translated into more effective management practice that was confirmed through the qualitative analysis. The findings of this project suggest that an action learning approach is useful in assisting participants to enhance their empowerment to overcome aspects of their health service organisation that made it difficult for innovation in service improvement activities.