Reviewer's report

Title: Can learning organisations survive in the newer NHS?

Version: 1 Date: 11 May 2006

Reviewer: Kath Checkland

Reviewer's report:

General
Overall, I feel that this is a timely and thought-provoking analysis of some of the aspects of current health policy. It is well written, well structured and presents its message clearly. Although the usefulness of the concept of a ‘learning organisation’ is perhaps a little more controversial within the organisational studies field than this paper implies, I do not feel that the failure to acknowledge this wider controversy detracts from the overall message of the paper. The authors clearly set out the aspirations expressed in the early policy documents generated by the New Labour government of 1997, and show how these aspirations are compatible with the ideas that underlie the concept of a ‘learning organisation’. The contrast between these aspirations and the later development of policy is very nicely drawn, and the focus in the discussion on four apparent policy ‘contradictions’ ties their theoretical points to the reality of work within the NHS in a way that will be appreciated by clinicians and managers within the service. I would therefore recommend acceptance of this paper.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Reference number 7, Senge, in Sloan Management Review is incorrect - the volume number is 32 not 31.

2. I think that the use of subheadings could be improved. Abstract, Introduction and Discussion are in the same typeface, with 'key points 1-4', 'evidence of a learning organisation' and 'from 1998-2006..' in a different typeface. I suspect this is simply an oversight. My suggestion would be to label the headings as follows:

   ABSTRACT, INTRODUCTION, KEY POINTS ABOUT LEARNING ORGANISATIONS, with subheadings under this of key points 1-4, WHAT WOULD BE EVIDENCE OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION?, FROM 1998-2006: CAN THE CURRENT NHS etc and DISCUSSION.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.