

knowledge about learning organisations

Organisational structure (a)

Learning organisations have managerial hierarchies that enhance opportunities for employee, carer and user involvement in the organisation. All are empowered to make relevant decisions. Structures support teamwork and strong lateral relations (not just vertical). Networking is enabled across organisational and hierarchical boundaries both internally and externally.

Service user feedback and participation – questions

- What systems are in place for receiving, analysing and acting upon feedback from service users and carers?
- Is everybody equally committed to the idea of service user and carer participation and clear what is meant by it?
- How are service users and carers involved in policy development?
- How does the organisation help service users to be fully participative? Is there any funding set aside for this, or any induction or preparation?
- Is there any person in the organisation who has a specific responsibility to promote user and carer participation?

Illustrative examples

- One large voluntary organisation makes it clear to all service users that their views are valued, actively canvassed and carefully analysed. Their feedback is used not only to affect practice decisions but also to influence planning and policy.
- A conference on 'Working together to support children, young people and their families' is planned in such a way that parents and carers are keynote speakers and play a central part in the day. The views and ideas that emerge will be used in the development of services.
- Some local authorities employ a staff member with the specific remit of developing service user participation.
- Tokens of appreciation from service users and carers are often significant and can indicate useful and appropriate help.
- It is important to recognise that it is often difficult for service users to give feedback *whilst* receiving a service as they feel too vulnerable.
- Some service users/carers are able to participate in feedback more than others. Poverty, for example, can sometimes act as a barrier to service user involvement: this could skew the knowledge gained if only the most able or 'easiest' service users and carers participate.

Useful reference

- Harding, T and Beresford, P. (1996) 'The standards we expect: What services users and carers want from social workers', London: National Institute for Social Work.

Use the information and questions on the cards to think about a place of work as a learning organisation.