Reviewer's report

Title: The case study approach

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Reviewer: Willem Herbert van Harten

Reviewer's report:

The paper on "Case study approach" is meant to renew the interest in the case study approach as important element in health services research. In the introduction it presents objectives (first presented as "providing a practical reflection on...") and key questions to be answered, that do not exactly cover each other. The paper uses two cases that are superficially described in boxes and presents a list of pitfalls and a checklist as annexes that are difficult to relate to and distinguish in the text. The methodological question producing additional information would be when and how to do case studies as especially in organisational research we have relied to much on case study reports and the field would benefit very much form more thorough designs. (see Ovretveit but also Van Harten et al Health Policy 2001.)

Major compulsory revision

As case studies have been very common and hinder the acceptance of HSResearch results among clinicians, it would be advisable to reframe the objective of the paper into repositioning of the use of case studies ( compared with other designs) and optimising the benefits through thorough methodology. At present it is not clear what the added value can be compared to other more rigorous methods.

Major compulsory revision.

- The structure of the introduction can be improved by providing one set of objectives that are thoroughly described in the text (and not just or mainly in boxes)
- the Harvard business case method is mainly used for teaching purposes (according to my personal experience); the claim of being a research design should therefore be supported by references. It is not clear why Stakes' work should be the main body of knowledge that this paper is built upon.
- the various types of case studies could be presented in a more structured and comparable way so that the differences and benefits become more visible for the reader.
- the passages on collecting, analysing and interpreting data are not very innovative and can be shortened considerably.

As a consequence of this major comments I feel that it is not yet feasible to provide a detailed textual review. At present the paper is of limited interest.
Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.