Reviewer’s report

Title: Stability of Response Characteristics of a Delphi Panel: Application of Bootstrap Data Expansion

Version: 1 Date: 29 August 2005

Reviewer: Sinead Keeney

Reviewer’s report:

General

This is an extremely interesting paper and addresses an issue that has long been debated in the literature surrounding the Delphi technique. There are no universally agreed criteria for the selection of experts, other than they should meet the criteria set. Additionally, no guidance exists on the minimum or maximum number of experts on a panel. Linstone (1978) reports on studies using several hundred panelists to a Japanese Delphi that used several thousand panelists. This paper acknowledges this difficulty and provides evidence that a small Delphi panel can produce ‘stability’ of results.

The conclusions from this paper in relation to “effective and reliable utilisation of a small sample from a limited number of experts in the field of study” will be welcomed by many researchers using the Delphi technique who find it difficult or impossible to recruit a large sample of experts for a Delphi panel due to the fact that there simply are not many experts in their field of study.

Reference:

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

n/a

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

n/a

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

As this paper uses bootstrap sampling with replacement to create computer-generated results for two larger samples, it may be useful to have an extended section on the pros and cons of bootstrap sampling as (consistent with any technique) there have been some criticisms of the technique that may be relevant in this context. However, this is a minor point and does not detract from the importance of this study in terms of reporting that the results obtained from a small Delphi panel are stable in the light of augmented sampling.
It would also be interesting to explain more fully how and why only a quarter of identified experts were recruited for participation in this study. Was that a deliberate decision to keep the sample small or was it due to difficulty getting the experts to take part in the study. Either way, some discussion of this could add to the debate surrounding the difficulty of recruiting experts for numerous reasons or relating to the conclusion that "consistency of expert training may allow utilisation of small numbers of experts in fields where many experts may be available but participation of a limited number of experts on the Delphi panel may be more practical".

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests