Reviewer’s report

Title: Leading during change: the effects of leadership on sickness absence in a Norwegian health trust

Version: 1 Date: 21 February 2012

Reviewer: lotta dellve

Reviewer’s report:

This is an important paper that is contributing to an area in need of more research. Many choices of practical reasons have been made, which is common in this type of research. But, the authors need to describe some of them better.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

"The aim of this study is to investigate how the line manager’s behavior relates to sickness absence in a Norwegian health trust during organizational change."

ANSWER: OK, but leadership behavior might be different due to what kind of changes that has been made. Therefore you need to specify that kind of changes.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

ANSWER: Needs some improvements

Leadership behavior: The variable negative leadership is a poorly defined concept that could include many aspects. Try to be more precise and relate to existing theories.

Why did you not use one of the validated instruments of leadership behavior?

Sickness absence: The outcome variable is not clearly described and motivated. Did you include the cases of long term sickness absence, pregnancy-related sickness absence and all other kinds of sickness absence that are not related to organizational changes? Please describe better and motivate the choices you made.

The organizational change and setting can be better explained, what did it mean for various kind of functions/positions? Motives for change (open and hidden)?

Need to include aspects of traditions regarding how subordinates use to have been able to influence changes.

How was the results of leadership behavior related to the actual change, and the process of change? Where there differences between the studied units that could explain the variations?? Had they developed the change in equally manner?

3. Are the data sound?

ANSWER: The results seems sound but it is hard to really know due to the point I made above.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
ANSWER: Yes, seems OK

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
ANSWER: Yes, but see my point above regarding motives, kind of and traditions regarding organizational change.

The authors seems aware of the other limitations and has made a wise conclusion

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
ANSWER: Yes, many limitations are stated but seem not (see above).

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
ANSWER:
The authors state that "literature seldom on the importance of leadership for subordinates' health and well being" Yes, I agree, but I miss some important references in the literature review. The paper would benefit to include references from for example the nursing management literature, e.g. Avolio, Aiken, Cummings etc.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
ANSWER: Yes

9. Is the writing acceptable?
ANSWER: Yes