Author's response to reviews

Title: Opening the black box of quality improvement collaboratives: an ethnographic study of the problematisation process and measurement practices

Authors:

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Version: 2 Date: 9 July 2010

Author's response to reviews: see over
Title: Opening the black box of quality improvement collaboratives: an ethnographic study of the problematisation process and measurement practices

Dear Nina Titmus,

Thank you for considering our manuscript “Opening the black box of quality improvement collaboratives: an ethnographic study of the problematisation process and measurement practices” for publication in the BMC Health Services Research. We have revised the manuscript based on the reviewers’ suggestions, and hereby present the new version of the manuscript as well as a cover letter addressing the reviewers’ suggestions (see below in this document). All changes made in the manuscript are highlighted (in yellow). We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tineke Broer, Anna Nieboer and Roland Bal

Legend of cover letter: reviewer report is in black; our answers are in Italic.

Reviewer's report

Title: Opening the black box of quality improvement collaboratives: an ethnographic study of the problematisation process and measurement practices

Version: 1 Date: 19 May 2010

Reviewer: Tit Albreht

Reviewer's report:

Minor essential revisions

As the topic under research is rather complex and the authors are introducing a number of new concepts, it would be extremely useful to simplify the introductory and methodological parts in order to allow the reader to better grasp the issues and the topics under research. These changes would bring the paper to a higher level in its transparency and easiness in being understood. Such changes would help in making the findings more explicit.
As suggested, we have simplified the introduction and the methods section. Concerning the introduction, we addressed the question why a constructionist approach is helpful for opening the black box of quality improvement collaboratives. Furthermore, we clarified why a focus on the topic of the QIC and on the measurement practices is helpful. Concerning the theoretical framework, we provided more information on ANT and on the way we used it as a methodology for opening the black box of qic’s. Also, we provided additional information on our use of problematisation and performativity and gave examples to clarify these concepts. As for the methods section, we provided more information on the participating improvement teams in the projects and on data collection methods. We feel the revision of these sections enhanced the transparency of the article and its easiness in being understood.

**Reviewer's report**

**Title:** Opening the black box of quality improvement collaboratives: an ethnographic study of the problematisation process and measurement practices  
**Version:** 1  
**Date:** 21 June 2010  
**Reviewer:** Trisha Greenhalgh

We are pleased with the many positive remarks of this reviewer concerning our paper, its importance and its quality. In her report, this reviewer states some suggestions and concerns, and we will only address those points in our response below.

ANT is one of the most promising theoretical and methodological approaches for looking at complex change in health services. Its great strength is how it helps us think differently and hence reconceptualise issues and challenges. Its weakness is its undertheorisation of human agency and the assumption (at least by hardline ANT evangelists) that technologies and humans can be treated as “symmetrical” in the analysis, which is why many research teams (this one included) draw eclectically on ANT rather than apply it ‘by the book’.
Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Not really, and the addition of how ‘generic’ critiques of ANT might be applied specifically to their paper would strengthen what is already a very good paper.

As to the suggestion of stating the limitations of the article and especially of the use of ANT for this article, we wrote an additional paragraph in the discussion section to discuss critiques of ANT. We argue that ANT is indeed less concerned with the why or the intentionality question, for example with the question why the project was framed in a certain way or why the faculty team of the ‘social participation’ project urged professionals and clients alike not to classify professionals as clients’ friends. Instead we focused on the performance of a project and what consequences this performance has for the actors involved.

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

The introduction to ANT is good but I think it needs to be even clearer for this audience which will be largely naïve not only to ANT but to constructionist and recursive research more generally. I think the best way to do this would be to run the draft by some ‘conventional doctors’ and watch where they look puzzled!!

As suggested, we revised the introduction to ANT. Mainly, we provided some more background information (without aiming to make it more complicated by introducing concepts and insights of ANT that are not especially relevant for the analysis of our article), and provided more examples by which we expect the concepts of problematisation and performativity to become clearer also for a public not familiar with ANT.