Reviewer's report

Title: Bridges, brokers and boundary spanners in collaborative networks: a systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 12 December 2012

Reviewer: Justin Waring

Reviewer's report:

This is a timely and well structured review paper on an important topic that has been extensively researched in other settings but is gaining traction in healthcare, especially in relation to implementation science.

My comments are primarily in the order of minor and discretionary revisions.

As it common with review papers, they leave too much unsaid and unspecified, often using tables to express complex ideas (table1), and this is noticable here in the lack of theoretically grounded discussion on the differences between brokers, bridges and boundary spanners. This is probably beyond the scope of the paper and so the table works find, but I would have welcomed a little more sophisticated engagement with the different traditions from which these concepts spring.

This was a more general gap within the overall review, which does highlight really important aspects and implications of knowledge brokers, but there are quite different theoretical and methodological considerations that frame these points, and although often mentioned, they could be given more detailed consideration, ie. the difference between SNA and observational studies.

There were some interesting omissions in the literature which reflect perhaps the narrowness of the search criteria and use of data sources - I didn't realise IBSS was still functioning (ProQuest?) - and there are other relevant sources in the fields of information systems that might be benefit for a wider review paper.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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'