Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 16 December 2012

Reviewer: Stefano Calciolari

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The article is interesting and has a deal of potential to positively contribute to the debate about health service delivery development according to the challenges posed by emerging clusters of patients (e.g., chronic, frail, ...). However, I have some remarks that could better exploit the aforementioned potential.

Major compulsory revisions

- On page 6 you mentioned a slight difference between the concepts of “brokerage” and “boundary spanning”; in addition, on page 7 you talk about a “marked difference in the way bridging, brokering or ... positions are identified”.

I suggest to briefly explain these distinctions and discuss whether or not they have implications for your results (as your reviewed studies are either focused on the former or the latter concept).

- The discussion and conclusions sections are well designed to wrap-up the results, but they very limitedly explore the implications in healthcare. I am aware of the limits of such an effort when based on the results of a literature review. However, this is the added value that the readers of this journal are likely to expect. You can meet this request even only in a deductive fashion or in the form of further research suggestions. For instance, in your opinion, what are the most important examples of potential “key agents” in healthcare? (i.e., they could be the next research target) Can you provide some relevant (for the health policy maker or the health manager) examples, in healthcare, where innovation integration, knowledge brokerage and trust play a major role and you could hypothesize desired network structures (e.g., dense, sparse) and relative costs (e.g., bottlenecks, info distortion/hoarding, distraction)?

Minor essential revisions

- There are some typos: e.g., “conducted” instead of “reviewed” on page 1 (abstract, methods); “focussed” instead of “focused” on page 6.

- The limitations of social network theory/methods in analyzing and explaining the needs of connectivity in healthcare are not discussed.

- On page 9 (8th and 9th lines from the bottom) you mention “innovation involvement”: is it a synonym of “innovation integration”? If yes, please, use the same term to avoid confusion; otherwise, please, explain this further impact.

- On page 10, last two sentences before the “Knowledge brokerage” section
(from “Context…” to “… by more bridging ties”): this part is not clear to me.
- On page 11, last paragraph before the “Trust” section: you start with a situation where actors have to go through their managers to get info/advice and then you derive implications for managers that need to broker knowledge transaction; it is not clear to me if the actors are also managers and if information/advice is a synonym of knowledge transaction. Please, clarify the language and justify logically any deducted (or inducted) implication.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

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