Reviewer's report

Title: The structure of quality systems is important to the process and outcome. An empirical study of 386 hospital departments in Sweden.

Version: 1 Date: 28 February 2007

Reviewer: Allen Hutchinson

Reviewer's report:

General
This is an innovative approach to the use of Donabedian's triad, applying it to quality improvement data derived from a prior study. The paper is well written so that although the analysis is complex and uses analytic methods from a psychology tradition, the general reader can understand the process of the analysis. The statistical approach is satisfactory and the authors use the correct standards for their goodness of fit analysis.

There are a few minor essential revisions because some statements go beyond the evidence or there is a lack of clarity.

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

None

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

Page 4, analysis of non-responding depts. sentence 2 'this may suggest etc' There is no evidence for this statement and it should be removed

Page 6, discussion section, para 5, sentence 'for instance support from etc.' It is not clear what is meant by this sentence, particularly the section that says 'to which a quality system is evaluated'. Requires clarification for the reader.

Page 7, first para, last line. 'would probably have' goes beyond the evidence. The evidence for quality improvement to support guidelines is much weaker than for clinical practice guidelines (where the evidence is also weak). I would accept 'might' instead of 'would probably'. The next 2 paragraphs are examples of what the authors refer to in para ! and therefore should be more closely liked together, with a 'for instance' or a 'for example'

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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