Reviewer's report

Title: Development of an instrument to measure organizational context in healthcare: the Alberta Context Tool

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Reviewer: Cordula Wagner

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The paper describes the first stages of the development of an instrument, the Alberta Context Tool (ACT), measuring organizational context among various sub-groups of healthcare professionals in acute care/hospital settings.

An instrument like the ACT is important in future research to get more insight into the relation between the organizational context and the implementation of research evidence into daily practice.

Nevertheless, there are various questions and remarks.

Major

In general, the scope of the ACT could be made more clear at the beginning. It aims to measure organizational context as perceived by healthcare professionals, but, with regard what? ‘research evidence’ is a broad focus. Is it to stimulate performance, the implementation of innovation, or knowledge transfer, etc?

First the authors speak about health care settings, later on they focus on acute care hospitals.

It is not clear how comprehensive the literature search was that is described in the background section. I’ve got the feeling that the authors new some important studies and were mainly focussing on the PARiHS framework and Glisson. Then the selection would be based mainly on expert knowledge and preferences. This is even more visible in the selection of the additional concepts (organizational slack, structural and electronic resources, informal and formal interactions, and social capital).

The PHARiHS framework is based on three core elements (evidence, facilitation and context) which are important for successful research implementation. The latter is a very broad concept: what kind of research implementation? Clinical? Non-technical? Psychological? Health services? Does it matter what kind of research it is? Does the authors have specific research in mind?

The definition of culture in the PHARiHS framework does not match the definitions mentioned earlier in the background section. The definition: “the forces at work which give the physical environment a character and feel” does not really clarifies things.
The definition of leadership is also very broad: “the nature of human relationships”. Broad definitions like this does not guide the development of a tool that aims to be practical and short. The formulation of survey questions based on broad definitions is difficult and arbitrary.

The authors have chosen to measure the perception of context instead of measuring context in a more factual/objective way. What are the arguments for this? I am not sure that the literature states that the perception of context (instead of the context) influences the implementation of research evidence or innovations or improvements.

The sample items in table 2 show that the instruments mixes perceptions and questions about more objective procedures in an organization.

In Phase 1, the authors again describe the PARiHS framework as the selected framework for their tool. Most of the paper till that point describes the PARiHS framework. It seems clear that this framework has been chosen right from the beginning. So, why not be honest about that. The argument is prior experience with the framework, but that experience/research took place after Phase 1 of the development process of ACT (at least what I could conclude based on the years of publication).

The feasibility assessment and face validity testing is based on 20 professionals of four hospitals in Alberta. How useful are the items in the questionnaire for hospitals in other countries/health care systems/national contexts?.

The developmental period were finished in 2006. It seems that the instrument is ready by now and further tested. Why isn’t that described in the paper? Why only give sample items and not the whole instrument?

Table 2
This table should be checked very careful.

Why using ‘resonant leadership’? earlier the term transformational has been used. Why is leadership focussing on development of trust, relationship, etc.? Why not define leadership as ‘to get things done’ or ‘support professionals’?

The sample item is not clear.

Evaluation. Is the addition … and to achieve outcomes, important? Why?

Organizational slack. Is human resources the same as skills? What is meant by space as a resource? Definitions should be more specific and clear stated.

Questions as: How often …., are questions asking for facts and not for perceptions.

In the definition “Informal interaction” the term formal is used. This is not consistent with the concept.

Conceptually there is an overlap between informal and formal interactions and
the concept of social capital. The latter is also in the literature focusing on various networks and interactions.

Additional file.

Why are there no existing measures on evaluation. Examples of evaluation were performance indicators. Most countries or hospitals have measurement tolls/definitions for PI’s.

What would be a suitable item for linking social capital?? The authors could not find any in the literature. I could imagine that formal meetings of professionals of a ward/unit/department with the respective manager could be vertical networks that span power differences. At least at this kind of meetings there is a connection of professionals with people in positions of authority.

Minor

The authors state that they did not include concepts that were not modifiable. What concepts did they exclude based on this criterion?

In Phase 2, the authors describe that for some concepts there were validated instruments, but they did not use them. Why not even sub-scales??

Discussion

The authors should always write about ‘measure perceived organizational context’ (discussion section).

The authors did not find many reports where length of questionnaires is taken into consideration. This could be the case, because it is quit common to take the length into consideration. No researcher likes a low response rate.

The authors use the concept ‘organizational attributes’, do they mean ‘organizational context’? earlier in the paper they have stated that there are valid instruments on various elements of the concept of context. The added value of the new ACT tool could be the integration of various important elements within the concept of organizational context.

Recently, an article has been published in BMC-HSR describing a measurement instrument focussing on facilitation and resources for improvement teams by Duckers.

**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.