Author's response to reviews

Title: Capacity of Middle Management in Health Care Organizations for Working with People--A Case of Slovenian Hospitals

Authors:

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,
Here are explanations of improvements in my article. I read all reviewers opinion very carefully and made improvements which are described below. The improvements in manuscript are in red colour.
I hope that this will satisfy journal criteria and you will publish my article.
Thank you very much.
Best wishes,
Brigita Skela Savič

Reviewer: Diana Jamal
- The authors may wish to revise the abstract to ensure that it fully describes the paper particularly the methods section. I would have liked to find information on sample size, response rate, etc
  o Author answer: There is problem with word limitation in abstract which should not exceed 350 words. The sample size and response rate are well described in methods. In abstract we get information about largeness of sample. I went also over some other abstracts in this journal and this is comparable.
- I found the introduction a bit short, it did not really present the case for this particular paper.
  o Author answer: this wasn’t a comment from other three reviewers.
- The objective is not well articulated. In fact, it is currently in the methods section although a better place would have been at the end of the introduction. The phrasing of the objective can be improved as it is a bit vague. The use of the phrase “identify the current situation” can be changed to “assess current practices influencing leader-employee relationships”. The word “some fields” is also vague and needs to be more specific in describing the context of the study.
  o Author answer: I consider all content improvements.
- The section on sampling is informative but it is a bit difficult to follow. The authors may wish to consider summarizing this information in a table or a figure.
  o Author answer: We didn’t answer on this demand because the other reviewer didn’t suggest this and we have enough tables in article. The improvements are in methods.
- When it comes to the survey tool, was it piloted prior to data collection? Was it translated to the country’s native language?
  o Author answer: We didn’t make pilot study before data collection because we developed questioner from previous conducted researches in Slovenia. This is also answer for language. The improvements are in methods.
- It is commendable that the ministry of health supported such a study but did an ethics committee review the protocol? The authors did not mention a consent form? Were respondents informed of their rights as participants in this study? Were they fully aware of the voluntary nature of the study or of their rights to anonymity and confidentiality? Did they place the surveys in sealed envelopes prior to returning them? What measures did the authors take to protect the rights of respondents?
o **Author answer:** We first obtained permission to conduct the study from hospital directors, who took responsibilities for ethics permission for each institution by institution regulation (Professional council of each hospital which has responsibilities for researches on health care workers). The improvements are in methods.

- Respondents were informed of their rights as participants in this study by introductory letter which was the part of questionnaire (voluntary nature of the study, anonymity and confidentiality). They placed the surveys in envelopes prior to returning them on defined collection place. The improvements are in methods.

- In the results section, the authors use the term predictors to summarize findings in table 6. I do not think that is the appropriate term in this case as this table summarizes findings from a correlation not a regression model.

  o **Author answer:** Correlation analysis showed the following respondent characteristics: leader, male, higher education, health care provider, and higher age as statistical important. The improvements are in results.

- The results section is well developed and comprehensive but I do have some reservations on the discussion as it does not include a well developed section on study limitations. The authors talk about representative sampling and the response rate but not about the limitations of cross sectional studies, the issue of non response bias, or the fact that the data was collected in 2008 and might be slightly outdated. The authors may wish to acknowledge such issues in the next version of the manuscript.

  o **Author answer:** The improvements in text are: As with any survey research, the issue of representative sampling presents itself. The questionnaire was distributed to all leaders of participating hospitals; the latter were selected with a purposive sample. Employee sample was cross-sectional, *purposive and quote*. Possibly more critical is the response rate, and, speculatively, the opinions of those who chose not to participate in the research (48, 49, 50). We believe that, however, the response rate data has been appropriately presented (51). Even though response rates in participating hospitals differed to a large extent, the purpose of our research was not inter-hospital comparison but situation assessment for all hospitals. Future in-depth research is required on the impact of middle management for the performance and efficiency of health care organizations and the health care system as a whole. *The data was collected when global recession started in Slovenia; we suggest new researches in future to measure also impact of money reduction in 2012 and 2013 on performance and efficiency of middle management on health care organizations in Slovenia.* The improvements are in discussion.

- In the conclusion section, the authors highlight the importance of encouraging the accreditation of quality postgraduate programs. Although this is undoubtedly important, I do not see how it stems from study results.

  o **Author answer:** We asked respondent groups according to type of training and education programs, this parameter was important part of regression model and correlation analyses.

**Reviewer:** Mary O'Neil
- The methods are appropriate and well described. I am not an experienced researcher, but I assume that others with an adequate background, could replicate the work. As more of a layman when it comes to statistical research, I found it hard to follow and the tables difficult to decipher. I would advise that the authors re-format the article, making the results clear to a layperson, and putting some of the hard statistical analysis in an appendix. Discussion and conclusions could be presented more in terms of what a layperson can easily understand.
  
  **Author answer:** this is research article for professionals in this area, I couldn’t make simplifications. Other reviewer had good opinion about results.

**Reviewer:** Orvill Adams
- I suggest that the purpose of the study be changed slightly to make it more specific and clearer.
  
  **Author answer:** I consider content improvements.
- It is not clear if there was any follow-up to increase response rate. If not why not.
  
  **Author answer:** the purpose of our research was not inter-hospital comparison but situation assessment for all hospitals. For descriptive study we reach big sample which allow us to use appropriate statistical methods. A total response rate was 50.3%. The returned questionnaires presented 17% all personnel (population) in the participating hospitals.
- The discussion section could be strengthened with some information about the top down culture of decision-making. This make explain the lower interest of employees in the reform process, less knowledge about training opportunities and knowledge of the organization. A discussion about the bias towards males would provide important perspectives.
  
  **Author answer:** The gender distribution of respondents was predominately female (706 respondents were female, which is 80% of the sample). For this reason we didn’t focus on gender because the sample for man was little and nonequivalent. The gender distribution is reflection of situation that women are in majority in hospital professional work, especially in nursing.

**Reviewer:** Ana Maria
- the information concerning the fact that all hospitals are public should be in the beginning of the paper, and not appear only in the discussion.
  
  **Author answer:** we put this competition in methods and abstract.
- The methods are not too clear, either. For instance, it took me some time to find out what were the groups the authors were studying. How the questionnaires were designed and how they looked like should also be part of the article, to enable a proper understanding of the data.
  
  **Author answer:** we make some improvements (in red) in methods.