Reviewer's report

Title: Assessing Communities of Practice in health policy: A conceptual framework as a first step towards empirical research

Version: 1 Date: 6 February 2013

Reviewer: Maria Jansen

Reviewer's report:

Assessing Communities of Practice in health policy: A conceptual framework as a first step towards empirical research

Maria Paola Bertone, Bruno Meessen, Guy Clarysse, David Hercot, Allison Kelley, Yamba Kafando, Isabelle Lange, Jérôme Pfaffmann, Valéry Ridde, Isidore Sieleunou, Sophie Witter

Reviewer's report:

General remarks

The authors present an interesting article on a topic that is highly relevant in international health policy. Knowledge management and relations between diverse international experts is an important topic that has been on the agenda for quite some time. The authors are quite innovative in the sense that they try to establish a framework that facilitates close collaboration relevant to knowledge management and that gives dimensions and indicators for evaluative purposes.

When assessing the work, please consider the following points:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined? Yes, no remarks to this point

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

A major compulsory revision concerns the methodology. PubMed and Google Scholar databases were preliminarily searched for articles by key words. Thereafter a snowball technique was applied. The authors describe that “the search was carried out up to the point where the authors deemed that all elements relevant for transnational CoPs in health policy were included”.

My questions are: how many articles were found in the first round, based on key words; the second round based on snowball technique and how did the authors finally select the 25 articles they used. Was it based on a criteria list or words, phrases, methodological requirements or something else? Next to this point: literature search and selection of articles needs to be done by two independent researchers. Thereafter, both selections are compared and differences (mostly expressed in alpha) are discussed and should result in consensus. Has this procedure been followed. If no, why not? If yes, than please add it to the original text.
A minor revision point: the number of 25 selected articles is not mentioned at all, one has to count it based on Table 1. Please add it to the text, to make reading comfortable to the reader.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled? See remarks point 2

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Major revision: suggestions I would like to make:

Findings from the literature review on page 8 starts with two preliminary questions: (i) why is it necessary to assess CoPs?; and (ii) which methodological approach should be adopted for evaluating CoPs? Under the heading of “Findings…” the reader expects to read findings, not a digression on preliminary questions for almost a whole page. I think the answers to these preliminary questions should be part of the introduction (somewhat shorter). Besides, the two approaches for CoP evaluation i.e., qualitative and quantitative (page 9) are here described as two opposite extremes while most evaluative research today often is a combination of both methods. I would suggest to give explicit nuance to this aspect.

A minor revision point: on page 9 when discussing ROI I would advice to make some notes about the difficulty to measure the final impact because of the time delay. Knowledge and expertise resources will finally (hopefully) result in better health and welfare outcomes but the time in between can be more than 50 or even 100 years (e.g., knowledge about the negative health effects of tobacco came available around 1950s, but it took about 70 years to realize tobacco bans etc.).

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? In the discussion I should add a short paragraph about limitations of your study. A reflection on methodology (may be also results) may be used as input or suggestions for other research groups.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes, no remarks to this aspect.

7. Is the writing acceptable? Yes

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