Reviewer’s report

Title: Research Designs for Studies Promoting Healthcare Organization Change: Should Action Research Have a Place at the Table?

Version: 1 Date: 28 August 2007

Reviewer: Heather Waterman

Reviewer’s report:

General

This article attempts to make the case for action research as a methodology for organisational change. While it has potential to be an informative article a major rewrite is required. The problems begin with the title which does not reflect the focus of the article which appears to be on action research randomised controlled trials (RCTs). Unfortunately, the authors neglect to define and operationalise action research RCTs leaving the reader feeling confused. For example, it is unclear whether they are suggesting action research should be an intervention arm of a randomised controlled trial (NB this would defeat the object of action research) or whether an RCT is included as part of an action research project (this has been done before). It might be that action research RCTs is an accepted term in the US but it is not familiar to me as an international referee. The proposition of action research RCTs is also viewed unproblematically. However given the general rejection of conventional methods of research such as RCTs by many action researchers because these methods are viewed as elitist and not focussed on the needs of participants, the authors need to acknowledge and discuss that action research RCTs might be viewed as controversial. The authors argue that health care organisations are complex systems which is a good point. They might find it helpful to read Greenhalgh et al’s research on innovation spread where they make the case for action research as a methodology for the study of complex systems. Greenhalgh, T., Robert., Bate, P., MacFarlane, F. & Kyriakidou, O. (2005). Diffusion of innovations in health service organisations. Oxford: Blackwells

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

N/A

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

N/A
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Reject as not sufficiently sound

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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