Reviewer's report

Title: Institutionalizing evidence-based practice: An organizational case study using a model of strategic change

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Reviewer: Reuben McDaniel

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
The question is interesting and fairly well defined but it is not a new issue.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
The methods are not appropriate for the question nor do they support the conclusions. See the compulsory revisions below.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
Acceptable.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Acceptable.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
No. See the compulsory revisions below.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Acceptable.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes.

Please make your report as constructive and detailed as possible in your comments so that authors have the opportunity to overcome any serious deficiencies that you find and please also divide your comments into the following categories:

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

This is an interesting paper studying a significant problem. However, the
research methodology leaves serious doubts about the author's claims.

The authors are trying to "identify contextual elements and related configurations and relationships in an organization where EBP was perceived to be used routinely in contrast to one where it was not." They accomplished this goal by comparing two cases, "Role Model" and "Beginner". The cases were selected in such a way as to assure that one case had institutionalized EBP and the other had not. Therefore it was not surprising to find that they were different in terms of their contextual elements and related configurations. The nature of the differences found was consistent with what one might expect from both the literature of institutionalization of change and the literature of EBP. There were no surprises here.

The authors also addressed the question "What key contextual elements support and facilitate institutionalization ...." and they attempted to do this by comparing the same two cases. But, because of the way that the two cases were selected, there is no way for the authors to know if a completely different set of contextual factors might also support institutionalization of EBP. Nor do they know if the same contextual factors might exist in a situation where EBP failed. In other words, the research design used in this study just cannot answer the questions posed on page 5.

When two cases are selected on the basis that one has institutionalized EBP and one has not, then, the number of explanations for this fact may be quite large. Simply observing differences in organizational characteristics is not an adequate basis for asserting that these organizational differences explain differences in the institutionalization of EBP. For example, one of the hospitals is an academic center and one is a community hospital. One can make a convincing case that this difference, not the differences noted by the authors, is, in fact, the explanation for the differences in the institutionalization of EBP. Another possible explanation for the differences in the institutionalization is that one hospital had Magnet Status and the other did not. I am not asserting that these alternative explanations are better than the ones offered by the authors, only that I can make a convincing case for them and that the data does not support the author's explanations over many other possible ones.

The cross-comparison between cases is not particularly interesting given the research design and the sampling frame. The authors assert "The two cases were clearly different in terms of their organizational context, level of EBP activity and degree of institutionalization." Of course they were as they were selected because they were different on these very dimensions. The key contrasting themes were precisely what one would suspect given the selection criteria for the cases. So it seems that the findings were built into the sampling frame. I wondered what the themes for the "Beginner" organization would have been if the leadership had been assessed on the leadership provided for the efforts to achieve Magnet Status rather than for their efforts to institutionalize EBP. For example, would the Beginner's coherence of policy been more evident in this area? Would they have been more receptive? In other words, given the sampling frame, how could the cross comparison have been different?
The propositions listed in Table 7 are not particularly interesting in that none of them is surprising or new. I cannot think of anyone who would disagree with them, particularly the general propositions. Propositions developed from qualitative studies are interesting when they challenge existing beliefs about the world, not when they simply state what most people would say anyway. For example, who would dispute that "Key formal leaders can significantly influence an organization's culture to support EBP"? Or who would dispute that "A greater number of two-way inter-connections between key contextual elements will enhance an organization's potential for institutionalization"? Each of the propositions presented might well have been suggested by a MBA student asked to list factors she thought might influence the potential for the institutionalization of EBP. The authors need to make the case that the propositions that they say are a major outcome of their study are interesting.

The authors might wish to read Pfeffer, J. & Sutton, R. I. (2006) Hard facts, dangerous half-truths, and total nonsense: Profiting from evidence-based management, Harvard Business School Press, Boston MA. This book uses evidence to challenge several closely held beliefs about management. Pfeffer and Sutton help the reader to think differently about evidence-based management. I would encourage the authors of the present manuscript to help us think differently about EBP.

The authors of this manuscript have made a considerable investment in data collection and analysis. They have done a good job of presenting their observations. Now they must be more conservative about what they can actually say given the very limiting research design that they have used. They must try to determine what is truly interesting about their observations, vs. what is simply the expected. Conclusions from the study must be grounded in the observations and must provide the reader with new and valuable insights about the phenomenon in question.

**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.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interest.