Reviewer's report

Title: Evidence-based practice implementation: The impact of public vs. private sector organization type on organizational support, provider attitudes, and adoption of evidence-based practice

Version: 1 Date: 17 October 2008

Reviewer: Elisabeth Wilson-Evered

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Evidence-based practice implementation: The impact of public vs. private sector organization type on organizational support, provider attitudes, and adoption of evidence-based practice. By Gregory Aarons, David Sommerfeld and Christina Walruth-Greene

This paper represents a solid effort to test the application of two theoretical strands for determining antecedents of implementing evidence based interventions. Specifically, the manuscript reports a study on uptake of innovation and individual adopter’s values and beliefs and seeks to compare the relative contribution of organizational type (public/private) in model of adoption of evidence based practices. The methodology of the paper consists of a quantitative study of mental health services from 17 states yielding a sample of 170 clinicians who provided opinions on a questionnaire concerning their own and their organization’s experiences with implementing evidence based interventions in child mental health. The data were gathered from one field study in the United States of America comprising both public and private including not for profit mental health services. Data were collected using a quantitative survey designed by the first author and completed via snowballing technique to collect key participants. Email contact with the clinician respondents and a web link to the survey was provided in a second email. Data were analyzed using path analysis to derive the best fitting model. The major findings were that organizational support for evidence based practice (EBP) partially mediated the relationship between agency type and clinicians’ attitude to EBP and further that clinicians’ attitude to EBP was linked directly with its use. The contributions to theory and practice would suggest the critical role of context - in this case agency support - to shape clinicians’ belief in the value and adoption of EBP. The findings support previous research on the adoption of innovation and the role of agency; in this case the private agencies fared better than did public in terms of having positive influences on EBP adoption.

This is an interesting enjoyable and well written paper that makes a solid contribution to current work in EBP implementation. As such the manuscript is worthy of publication with some relatively minor adjustments.

The Abstract

The Abstract appropriately summarize the manuscript. There are no obvious
discrepancies between the Abstract and the remainder of the manuscript. The Abstract can be understood without reading the manuscript.

Compulsory

1. The two theoretical models on which the study is based should be made explicit in the abstract and subsequent discussion of findings.

The Introduction

2. The introduction is concise and the purpose of the study clearly defined. The authors provide a rationale for performing the study based on a review of the health and implementation literatures. The length was appropriate and there was good description of the terms used in the rest of the manuscript. The hypotheses were well defined.

3. The authors suggest that the study and hypotheses are based on two theoretical models relating to attitudes-behavior link and innovation uptake, or specifically role of agency support and type in impacting innovation uptake.

Compulsory

4. However it is not clear to me to which theories the author is referring. The authors link theories of context influences and theories of attitudes and beliefs and suggest both impact behaviors. However, more clarity and statement of the theories and theorists is required to ground the study and provide the framework for the paper. Moreover, the authors may wish to consider alternative theories that could conceivably influence the relationship between context (type and support), attitudes and behavior. Theories that may be considered are for a) Agency Type – Institution theory holds that type of institution affects social norms and actions of the members. b) Theory of Planned behavior describe the interaction between attitudes and behavior; c) Interactionist theory explains the interaction of context and individual differences; d) Social exchange theory (Blau) explains possible reasons for individuals to act in exchange for something the organization has done under the Norm of Reciprocity. Specifically, Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger) holds that individuals will act in favorable ways if they feel there organization is providing the support they need. Notes are supplied below on these theories.

The Methods Section

5. The method section was clearly described and given access to tools used could be replicated by another investigator reproduce the study. The authors should justify any choices available to them in their study design (e.g., choices of data collection techniques, analytic tools, or statistical methods. The hypotheses were effectively derived from a review of research and the statistical analyses were appropriate for their testing.

Essential

6. However, the authors could discuss other possible methods that could reasonably allow their hypothesis to be tested. Furthermore, moderation may be appropriately considered here, ie does support for EBP moderate the relationship between agency type and attitudes to EBP. Similarly, inclusion of the measure or
scales for assessing these variables would be helpful. Justification for using these tools in comparison to more standard measures of innovation or support (adapted ecologically) could be considered. Next, psychometric properties or rationale for the development of the predictor (Agency Type), mediator (Support for EBP) and criterion scales is warranted (Use EBP). Finally, arguably, the Training for EBP component of the measure of USE of EBP could serve as both a mediator and antecedent to Use of EBP. So separating these concepts and measures might be considered.

The Results Section

7. The results are clearly explained and the order of presentation of the results parallels the order of presentation of the methods. Similarly, the results reasonable and expected. The results that are introduced are preceded by an appropriate discussion in the Methods section.

Essential

8. Two questions arise for me in this section. First, the paper needs to make more explicit the rationale for testing two models, though intuitively conceivable that the mediation could be partial or full. A clear statement of the theoretical and empirical reasoning for this argument is required in this section. Second, the authors should include steps taken in the analysis described this section to overcome the effects of common source error. Specifically, the author should source and take appropriate action as referenced in the seminal work on this topic by (Podsakoff et al 2003) to manage common method variance.

9. One edit only; page 10 –Second last sentence “missing data were low (rather than was).

The Discussion Section

10. The discussion is of appropriate length and the authors clearly state that the hypotheses proposed were verified. The conclusions proposed by the authors were justified by the results found in the study.

Compulsory

11. However, the authors do not fully discuss nor reference the limitations of the study. More attention should be placed on same source bias and means to overcome this in the current and future studies. There additional limitations that should be noted with reference to the criterion and mediator variables. Importantly, consideration of alternative theoretical models, the role of individual differences such as personality or proactivity (Frese, Crant) of the clinician could be an important moderator of and influence on attitudes and behavior. The opportunity to collect the criterion data at a different time should be considered along with improvements in study design by including a longitudinal element and alternative measures of individual differences eg proactive personality, or context eg perceived organizational support.

12. Links to theory should be explained here and the way in which this paper endorses or extends the theories the authors suggested underpinned their reasoning for the study and its design/methods etc.
Figures and Graphs
The figures and tables appropriate and are they well labeled and show the important results effectively.

Optional
13. However, in both Figures 1 and 2 according to the structure of the figures, there are two mediators; however, only one has been assessed and reported. Specifically, Attitudes to EBP is being shown to mediate the relationship between Agency Type and EBP Use. Though clear in the text that the relationship analyzed in the model was a direct effect from Attitudes to Use (behavior), the manuscript should make clear that Attitudes to EBP was not assessed as a mediator.

Summary Opinion
The paper has a number of strengths. First, the study targets an important area of research; antecedents of uptake and use of EBPs. Second, the study is well designed and reported and very well written and constructed. Finally, the study contributes new insights into the importance of agency type and support for EBP in shaping attitudes and behaviors to using EBPs. The limitations centre on the choices of measures and constructs to answer the research questions, the theoretical grounding and the limited attention to actions to prevent and discussion of common method variance. Also further discussion could be held on other plausible relationships such as the moderating role of training in EBP and its influence on attitudes and behaviors. Based on the foregoing comments, I recommendation this paper is accepted pending revisions outlined above.

Theories for consideration in grounding the study methods, discussion and findings.

Core Assumptions and Statements
Theory of Reasoned Action/Planned Behavior suggests that a person’s behavior is determined by his/her intention to perform the behavior and that this intention is, in turn, a function of his/her attitude toward the behavior and his/her subjective norm. The best predictor of behavior is intention. Intention is the cognitive representation of a person’s readiness to perform a given behavior, and it is considered to be the immediate antecedent of behavior. This intention is determined by three things: their attitude toward the specific behavior, their subjective norms and their perceived behavioral control. The theory of planned behavior holds that only specific attitudes toward the behavior in question can be expected to predict that behavior. In addition to measuring attitudes toward the behavior, we also need to measure people’s subjective norms – their beliefs about how people they care about will view the behavior in question. To predict someone’s intentions, knowing these beliefs can be as important as knowing the
person's attitudes. Finally, perceived behavioral control influences intentions. Perceived behavioral control refers to people's perceptions of their ability to perform a given behavior. These predictors lead to intention. A general rule, the more favorable the attitude and the subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control the stronger should the person’s intention to perform the behavior in question.

http://people.umass.edu/aizen/tpb.diag.html#null-link

2. Institutional Theory: Attends to the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior. It inquires into how these elements are created, diffused, adopted, and adapted over space and time; and how they fall into decline and disuse. Although the ostensible subject is stability and order in social life, students of institutions must perform attend not just to consensus and conformity but to conflict and change in social structures.


3. Interactionist Theory: Building on Bandura's interactionist perspective that people and behaviors can act on the environment by influencing and creating it, proactive personality holds that the influence varies across people as well as situations (Bandura, 1977; Bateman & Crant, 1993). Individuals high in proactive personality, therefore, are more likely to identify opportunities and act on them, show initiative, persevere through obstacles, take action over accommodating and adapt to change (Crant 2000, (Crant, 1995). In contrast, those low in proactive personality are more passive, and will either “passively adapt (or)… endure their circumstances” (Crant, 2000, p. 439).

Additional References


**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.