Author's response to reviews

Title: Drawbacks and benefits associated with inter-organizational collaboration along the discovery--development--delivery continuum: A cancer research network case study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
May 2, 2012

Dear Drs. Mittman & Eccles,

Enclosed is our re-revised paper, “Drawbacks and benefits associated with inter-organizational collaboration along the discovery—development—delivery continuum: A cancer research network case study.” In responding to the reviewers, we made the following changes:

1. Clarified the interpretation around the geography barrier in the abstract, results, and conclusion and examined/revised other results for consistency in reporting
2. Revised the discussion section to list specific variables (with citations) missing from the study that may have aided in explaining patterns in the three networks

Changes are highlighted in the manuscript. Point-by-point responses to reviewer concerns are included below.

Thank you and the reviewers for your time and effort. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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Response to reviewers

Reviewer #1 (Shumate)

1. I would like the authors to be a bit more specific in their limitations section, identifying the variables that could provide alternative explanations and highlighting that reverse causality that is possible given the design (i.e., that perceptions may be the outcome of collaborations rather than the cause).

We added several specific variables (e.g., collaboration readiness, technology readiness, leadership, bureaucracy) and supporting citations to the discussion to specify some of the missing variables that may have aided in explaining the patterns in these networks. In addition, we clarified the causality issue in the abstract, results, and discussion, especially in relation to the geography barrier (see response to #2 below).

Reviewer #2 (Hall)

2. The most significant concern for the manuscript at this point is the discrepancy between the results and discussion section (and lack of interpretation in the abstract) related to the finding, “The only consistent association across all three was with the drawback of difficulty due to geographical differences, which was negatively associated with collaboration”. In the results section the finding is interpreted as: “only the drawback of geographical distance was significantly associated (b=-4.63; se=1.20) … The negative association between collaboration and distance indicates that organizations collaborating in this network were less likely to see geographical distances as a barrier” (p12 and again on 13). Yet the discussion section reads as follows: “the drawback to collaboration, difficulty due to geographical distances, was negative and significant across all three networks indicating that geography may be a major and consistent barrier to research collaboration, regardless of stage of research. These interpretations seem to be contradictory. Please clarify this and amend the text throughout (abstract, three subsections of the results and discussion).

Thank you for pointing this out; we agree that we were inconsistent in reporting this important finding. We have revised the abstract, results, and discussion to consistently report that those who collaborated identified geography as a barrier less often than those who did not collaborate. We reviewed our other findings as well to ensure consistency of language and reporting related to the direction of the relationship between collaboration and the benefits/drawbacks.

Abstract:
Major Compulsory Revisions
3. Clarification of findings related to difficulty due to geographical distances

We clarified these findings. See response to #2.

4. The phrase”…to people with cancer in need” is unclear
We clarified this phrase.

Background:
No further comments or concerns

Methods:
No further comments or concerns

Results:
- Major Compulsory Revisions
  5. Clarification of findings related to difficulty due to geographical distances for discovery, development, and delivery

We clarified these findings. See response to #2.

- Minor Essential Revisions
  6. Results (on page 12) include report statistical information (e.g., b=-4.63; se=1.20), but other sections do not. A consistent approach should be used for reporting such details (or not reporting such details) in the text.

Rather than adding beta/s.e. to all of the reported results, for consistency we removed the reporting of the beta and standard error from the two places they were reported. We believe this maintains the flow of the text and avoids redundancy with the table of results.

Discussion and Conclusion:
Major Compulsory Revisions
  7. Clarification of findings related to difficulty due to geographical distances

We clarified these findings. See response to #2.