Reviewer's report

Title: Using intervention mapping to deconstruct cognitive work hardening: A return-to-work intervention for people with depression

Version: 3  Date: 22 July 2014

Reviewer: Otto Melchior Poulsen

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Abstract: It should be clearly stated that the article presents a theoretical analysis (using intervention mapping (IM)) of components and mechanisms of cognitive work hardening (CWH).

Abstract; Results: The sentence “... how tools and materials of the intervention contribute to the overall goal of successful RTW for people with depression” may give the reader the impression that empirical data documenting the efficacy of the intervention are analyzed, but this is not the case. This first become clear at the very end of the Methods section. No references to studies demonstrating a positive effect of the intervention are given.

Discussion - third paragraph: Also in the discussion is should be made clearer, that this is a theoretical analysis not supported by empirical data. The sentence “... resulting in an increased understanding of the relation between the elements of CWH and their role in achieving the desired intervention outcomes” may again give the reader the impression that intervention outcomes were measured and related to (measured) element of CWH.

Minor Essential revisions

Background – first paragraph: CWH is not defined. A reference to the later section “Principles of work hardening” may help the reader.

Results; IM step 2: Matrices of change objectives; Tasks 1 and 2; Behavioural/environmental outcomes and Performance objectives – first paragraph: Reference to Table 3 is lacking. Change “Table 2 and” with “Table 2 and Table 3”.

Discretionary Revisions

Discussion: The article demonstrates the usefulness of IM for deconstructing the CHW intervention and identifying performance objectives and change objectives. In essence the analysis resulted in a structured and detailed program theory for the CHW intervention, but development of program theories for how interventions are expected to work has been recommended and used for decades (see e.g. Patricia Rogers, Anthony Petrosino, Tracy A. Huebner, Timothy A. Hacsi. Program Theory Evaluation: Practice, Promise, and Problems. NEW
DIRECTIONS FOR EVALUATION, no. 87, F all 2000 Q Jossey-Bass). Most frequently program theories are developed without the use of IM but still they may be highly structured and detailed and with a sound theoretical foundation. It may be helpful to the reader to discuss in some detail how the IM approach adds to the existing knowledge on program theory for intervention.

Discussion – forth paragraph: The authors state “The sequential deconstruction of CHW has the potential to highlight gaps in the intervention” but no examples of highlighted potential gaps are given making the sentence somewhat speculative.

Discussion – last paragraph: The authors state that the IM approach may gain insight to program description, evaluation and ultimately improved health outcomes. However, the analysis provides information on intervention elements (tool, materials and change processes) which may lead to the desired intervention outcomes, but no information on barriers and facilitators for actual successful implementation of the intervention. The authors may discuss this in more detail in relation to existing frameworks for process evaluation of complex interventions (see e.g. Carroll C, Patterson M, Wood S, Booth A, Rick J, Balain S. A conceptual framework for implementation fidelity. BMC Implementation Science 2007, 2:40 doi:10.1186/1748-5908-2-40; Saunders RP, Evans MH, Joshi P. Developing a Process-Evaluation Plan for Assessing Health Promotion Program Implementation: A How-To Guide. Health Promotion Practice 2005, 6(2): 134-147).

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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