Reviewer's report

Title: Using qualitative mixed methods to study small health care organizations while ensuring trustworthiness and authenticity

Version: 3 Date: 21 July 2014

Reviewer: Luigi Palestini

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Minor Essential Revisions

The Q-RARA approach is surely well described and appears to be an insightful tool in the analysis of primary care organizations: besides, we strongly advocate the integration of qualitative methods in organizational research.

However, there are some issues that should be addressed.

1. Qualitative methods are described as “least intrusive for the organization and the individuals within it”: in our experience this is not always true, especially when it comes to practice observation. The reason behind this choice should be addressed in a more detailed fashion.

2. Since health care workers are usually part of a team, I was surprised by the fact that the authors apparently did not take into account other qualitative methods, i.e. focus groups, that could be applied to structured work teams in order to investigate how a specific professional role is perceived and/or integrated in everyday practice. I guess that this could have been detrimental to the quickness of the approach, but I think that a reason for this choice should be given.

3. The main point in the discussion about the trustworthiness of collected data is a bit weak. Researchers have been invited to share private areas and let in on the use of “gallows humor” by the participants; besides, the Q-RARA approach is later described as “acceptable to participants and effective in collecting data […] without disrupting the practice”. Did the authors consider the idea of a quick anonymous survey to assess the impact of this approach on the participants? In other words, how can we be sure that this approach is really perceived as unobtrusive?

4. A detailed example of the results and how they could be interpreted should have been included, in order to give a clearer idea of Q-RARA’s potential (and also of its conceivable limitations). In this perspective, the details shown in figures 2-3 appear a bit too schematic.

5. As the title of the article implies, Q-RARA works better in small-scale organizations: do the authors contemplate the opportunity to test this approach in larger scale health care organizations?
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.