Reviewer's report

Title: The impact on healthcare, policy and practice from thirty-six multi-project research programmes: findings from two reviews

Version: 0 Date: 28 Dec 2016

Reviewer: Rita Banzi

Reviewer's report:

The paper provides an excellent contribution to the definition of the current status of the methods applied to measure the impact of health research. More importantly, the discussion is enriched by some considerations about the need for standardization in the research impact assessment and the risks associated to over-simple systems. The team of authors has a long experience in the field needed to address these complex issues. The readers of Health Research Policy and Systems (including myself) will be very glad to see this paper published.

I report below some minor comments aimed to improve the clearness of the paper.

Comments

Background

I would suggest to clarify what this paper adds to the reviews previously published by the same group. I understand the focus is on multi-project assessment exercise and I think the reader could be interested in knowing why a specific summary of studies that analyses this sample deserves a new publication. Some key aspects are already covered in the discussion/conclusion sections for example the issue of developing standard for the research impact evaluation.

Methods

The methods section would probably become clearer if it starts with the information about the methodology applied in the current review.

I found the paragraph "search strategy of the two original reviews" a bit misplaced. It reports the search strategies the previously published reviews and a brief description of the main findings. I support the idea to shortly describe the two original reviews, but I think this information (e.g., from page 3 line 39 to page 4 line 25) can be included in a dedicated box.
Results

The authors should explain if the "Factors associated with level of impact; comments on methods and use of the findings" reported in table 1 are those defined by the authors of the original reports as key factors that might help explain the level of impact achieved (page 7, line 25-34) or if this evaluation has been done by the review authors.

The authors could extract from the papers included one example of tangible impact for each category of impact they used in their conceptualization. This would help defining and understanding these categories better.

Discussion

The authors correctly acknowledged the difficulties in making a clear distinction between the studies included and excluded in this analysis. Thus, it would be useful if the authors report the list of the studies initially considered relevant and then excluded because the data cannot be "combined" with the others (page 8, line 44-48).

I would suggest a change in the paragraph order to report first the main findings of the review (page 9, line 48 to page 10, line 25), then the limitations (page 8, line 43 to page 9, line 46).

Level of interest

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
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I was the first author of a review in this field that was subsequently cited in the paper included in this review. I declare that I have no other competing interests.

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