Reviewer's report

Title: Quality improvement collaboratives and the wisdom of crowds: spread explained by perceived success at group level

Version: 1

Date: 29 October 2013

Reviewer: Andrew Quanbeck

Reviewer's report:

This article explores the reputation of QICs (Quality Improvement Collaboratives) as an intentional spread strategy. This is a potentially significant topic and the current study makes a contribution to a largely unexplored area of research. The results could have significant practical value for quality improvement practitioners. However, there are some problems that need to be addressed before recommending the study.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The authors conduct statistical analyses of ordinal data (success rating) that are somewhat questionable. For instance, Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for success rating when nonparametric methods should be used. A measure of correlation should be selected that is appropriate for ordinal data (Spearman’s Rho) rather than Pearson’s correlation.

2. The primary dissemination measure used: “number of units or patient groups where projects were implemented in the second year” is not very well described. Could the authors provide more detail on this measure and perhaps some examples to clarify its meaning? How does the measure ensure that “units” are comparable in one setting/project vs. another?

3. The methods section in general provides fairly minimal detail. One key question that needs to be addressed relates to handling of missing data. What were the characteristics of respondents (individually, organizationally) and how do respondents compare to non-respondents? This would seem to be an important question in a study with a 57% response rate. If such questions are impossible to address, then at least the limitations section should acknowledge the potential for bias.

Minor essential revisions:

4. Within the background section, the reader has some trouble understanding the scope and intent of the current study. There is a mixing of verb tenses and references to other studies that make it difficult to discern the subject of the current study vs. previous research in this area. For instance, Figure 1 is referred to in the background section and again at the end of the methods section, making it unclear whether Figure 1 pertains to past research or the current analysis (or both). This issue is compounded by the fact that the references are numbered rather than parenthetical, which makes the reader have to switch back and forth between the text and the reference list. For readability and clarity, I
would suggest the authors rewrite the background section to more explicitly
distinguish past research from the study at hand.

5. Finally, the paper would benefit from a more prominent discussion of how
policymakers and QIC planners could gather and use information on perceived
success when conducting QICs. For instance, could an early assessment of
success lead to channeling of resources towards projects that are most likely to
disseminate, and defund projects that are likely to fail?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.