Reviewer’s report

Title: Testing a theory of strategic implementation leadership, implementation climate, and clinicians' use of evidence-based practice: a five-year panel analysis

Version: 0 Date: 08 Oct 2019

Reviewer: Alicia Bunger

Reviewer's report:

I appreciate the opportunity to review this excellent manuscript. This study tests hypothesized relationships between leadership, climate, and clinician behavior and finds that leadership behaviors are key for triggering (potentially) causal chain of action that leads to EBP use. These findings have direct relevance for theory building, future research, and implementation practice. Notably, this study draws on a unique 5 year data set that is well-suited to address the research question, and exemplifies an innovative use of difference-in-difference modeling (which could be used more often to address questions in the context of naturally occurring implementation initiatives, in my opinion). My concerns/reactions focus on the implications of only focusing on the 30 largest organizations, the relatively minimal observed changes in key variables over time, and whether these changes, and the relationships among them are meaningful for implementation practice and theory building. These issues could be addressed mainly by digging into the discussion section, and including additional methodological details. My comments below are intended to enhance the presentation of the study and its contributions:

Abstract:

1. in Conclusions (increase leadership behaviors). Can you clarify here… do you mean an increase in the frequency of leadership behaviors, or some other dimension?

Introduction

2. I appreciated how the team highlighted the importance of implementation climate in non-routinized settings on page 6.

3. Page 7 - the distinction between implementation and transformational leadership is interesting. Can you say more about this? Is there overlap between these two types of leadership?

4. The intro might benefit from a little more development of H3 (that changes in implementation climate are not associated with increase of psychodynamic practices). Why is this important for building this theory, etc.

Methods/Results
5. Could you describe the premise of difference-in-difference approaches a bit more?

6. One of the study's strengths is the longitudinal nature (3 time points), but this raises some questions about whether there is existing evidence about whether/how implementation leadership and climate change over time, how long it takes to change, and what we might expect to observe over a 5 year period? The Table 1 descriptives and Figure 1 suggest that there are actually quite minimal observed changes over time…

7. One of the many things I appreciate about this larger project is the community-wide focus on implementation (over 100 organizations). However, this study only focuses on the 29 largest organizations and I think there needs to be greater detail, explanation of this decision, and perhaps a thorough acknowledgement of some of its limitations. For instance, what did you base your assessment of organizational size on (e.g. annual revenue, # of staff)? Were these private organizations that received public dollars? If so, what percent were private for-profit vs. private non-profit? Why were only 30% of the total organizational population selected? More importantly, what potentially do we lose by excluding smaller organizations? (especially considering how small orgs play a vital role in urban org ecology often as culturally specific, or niche service providers).

8. Is there value in describing the % of workers who were the same across waves? A little more detail about recruitment procedures would be helpful.

9. Appreciate the thoughtful description of data aggregation on page 15.

10. Significant control variables might be noted in results section (e.g. clinician experience)

Discussion

11. Would like to see significant expansion of the discussion - considering the rigor and the findings here, there should be substantial meat to dig into. For instance what do we learn about change over time and the lifecycle of implementation? Do these small changes mean that leadership and climate are not as malleable as we'd like? Could it be possible that they fluctuate much more frequently than captured in this study? I’m curious what your findings mean for advancing theory in this area. (eg, I find myself mulling over Aarons theory and Birken middle managers theory which both posit similar mechanisms re: leadership roles/behaviors and climate - can we reconcile them in any way? What else do we need to do to firm theory up here to move our science forward?). What do your findings mean for implementation strategies/practice? What's the significance of H3 in all of this?

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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