Reviewer’s report

Title: Producing Cochrane Systematic Reviews - a qualitative study of current approaches and opportunities for innovation and improvement

Version: 0 Date: 02 Mar 2017

Reviewer: Jordi Pardo

Reviewer's report:

Thanks for the chance to comment on this paper. This is an important topic on the elements involved on the production and editorial processes of research, specifically around systematic reviews. Although specific to the Cochrane Collaboration, it is probably relevant to other producers of knowledge synthesis. Congratulations to the authors to bring such important but usually neglected topic to the science arena.

The authors made a commendable job on trying to include on the paper as much information as possible. Unfortunately, that comes with a cost of neglected reporting of important methodological features. There are also some elements that could help improve the reach or conclusions of the materials.

- The most important comment is the lack of any formal results of the survey. All the results presented seems to come from the interviews. Dividing the results on a section for the survey and a section from the interviews, as it is done on the methods, will help. Alternatively, the paper can focus on the interviews as they can probably stand by themselves.

- The link to additional data is not working. That makes difficult to check on the decisions made for coding on emerging themes.

- Theme selection: The reporting quotes support the themes suggested, but one might argue a particular quote relates more to an undetected theme. Obviously, this is an inherent problem of qualitative research (different coders might reach to different themes) but there are no explanation on the efforts made by the authors to triangulate their decisions. Getting feedback from the interviewees on the decision of aligning quotes from themes might help. Alternatively or complementary to the above, an additional person can do some theme assignment on the most significant interviews for each of the stakeholders identified. That might enrich the analysis and provide better depth to the analysis.

- Conclusion vs discussion: the paper jumps from results to conclusion, without an attempt to interpret the findings. Conclusions from qualitative studies are always dangerous. I think that could be solved by labeling the section as discussion and avoid making conclusions and focusing on interpreting the data from their research team lens. Getting the thoughts on the implications of some of the themes identified, how they will fit in the current structure and if
relevant identifying barriers or potential adverse events from the suggestions made it will be
more interesting, from my perspective, than trying to reach conclusions.

- Thanks for providing a reporting guideline for interviews. I will strongly suggest that authors
pass the checklist to the paper before being accepted. It is possible some of this information
is addressed on the additional materials: if that's the case, it will be important to explicitly
indicate so in the published paper. Items 4, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28 did not seem
to be reported, and many others might benefit from additional explanation. As mentioned
before, the feedback from participants is the most crucial aspect: many of the others require
only to provide additional explanation in the paper: alternatively, can be added to an
additional material but reader should be prompted to it from the methods section.

- For the background, I think it will be important to set up in the paper in the context of the
research or knowledge we have on the topic; I assume they did a systematic review of the
previous work before starting the project and I suppose did not have enough space to report.
Evidence in this area is at best scarce, and most is "expert opinion" or reports from group
meetings, but it will be interesting to say if they did not identify anything. I'm not aware of
specific work of scientific rigor, but at the very least it will be useful to situate the paper on
previous analysis of the review process made at the organization level.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an
organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this
manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose
financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the
manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that
holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?
5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I'm employed by the University of Ottawa, but my work is focused on Cochrane Musculoskeletal. The findings of this paper might alter my role and tasks within the organization. Although it is not likely it will translate into either gain or lose financially, it is possible and might affect my work.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal