

## **Author's response to reviews**

**Title:** Research Designs for Studies Promoting Healthcare Organization Change:  
Should Action Research Have a Place at the Table?

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**Author's response to reviews:** see over

March 10, 2009

Dear Dr. Mittman,

On behalf of my co-authors, I would like to thank you for the reviewer feedback on our manuscript "Research Designs for Studies Promoting Healthcare Organizational Change: Should Action Research Have a Place at the Table?" We are grateful for the insights of the reviewers, and for the opportunity to respond to their comments.

We have significantly revised the manuscript to reflect reviewer concerns, as our revised title "Implementation research design: integrating participatory action research into randomized controlled trials" reflects. Specific reviewer comments, and our responses, are the following:

Reviewer Braithwaite:

**1. "Exploring action research as a method for facilitating organizational change is an important area of research... however, this literature review, while valuable, could be more tightly defined. There is an abundance of research questions, and some... seem too broad..."**

We have responded to these comments by following the reviewer suggestion of "tightening" the paper and focusing on aspects of the specific questions of how and why participatory action research can be integrated into the randomized control trial design in a way that leads to more effective implementation of organizational interventions. Subheadings of the manuscript reflect this focus, and include "Why there is a need to consider different research methods in healthcare organizations," "Similarities and differences between participatory action research and quality improvement strategies," and "How participatory action research may be integrated into implementation research design."

**2. "The very nice case study at the beginning is not dealt with to optimal advantage later..."**

We have removed the case study from the paper. We agree that it was not well-integrated into the paper, as the revisions of the paper evolved, the case study seemed extraneous.

**3. "There is a difference between action research and participatory action research, yet the terms are used interchangeably. Could this be clarified?"**

The term action research generally designates a reflective problem-solving process by individuals within an organization, whereas the term participatory action research refers more specifically to an interventional research methodology for change. We believe that participatory action research is more appropriate for use in this manuscript, and have edited the manuscript to make use of this specific term.

**4. “May of the statements made on page 4 could benefit from referencing.”**

In this revision, we have made every effort to better reference our statements.

Reviewer Waterman:

**“The problems begin with the title which does not reflect the focus of the article which appears to be on action research randomized controlled trials.”**

We agree that this was in fact the purpose of the manuscript, and we have edited our title to more accurately reflect this focus.

***The authors neglect to define and operationalise action research RCT’s... it is unclear if they are suggesting action research should be an intervention arm of a randomized controlled trial...”***

We have clarified our intention, which is to suggest that elements of the participatory action research framework may be applied to organizational randomized controlled trials, and that this application may be more likely to lead to effective implementation.

***The proposition of action research RCTs is also viewed is also viewed unproblematically... the authors need to acknowledge and discuss that action research RCTs might be viewed as controversial...***

We agree that the original manuscript did not address this important issue of the tension between the participatory action research philosophy and the application of this approach to a randomized controlled trial. In fact, at first glance, this approach may seem paradoxical. We have added a table that outline the contrasts between these two approaches and two paragraphs to our summary that address this specific issue and its potential reconciliation.

We appreciate the positive comments from both reviewers regarding the application of the complex adaptive systems framework to this discussion, and have strengthened the portion of the manuscript that discussed the application of this framework to healthcare organizations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to revise this manuscript. We would be happy to make any further revisions based on reviewer feedback.

Sincerely,  
Luci Leykum