

Reviewer's report

Title: What can management theories offer evidence-based practice? A comparative analysis of measurement tools for organisational context

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Reviewer: Maxine Robertson

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It is intuitively appealing to review the KM and LO literature to see what it may offer in terms of understanding the type of organizational context receptive to evidence-based practice in healthcare. In addition French and her colleagues do recognise that KM process and practice based perspectives /research may offer some insights and ways to promote the development of the necessary context to encourage the uptake of evidence-based research. However I have some conceptual concerns which challenge the contribution that this paper attempts to make which I believe the authors should address as major compulsory revisions.

Firstly, KM and LO literatures are premised on very different conceptual foundations (see Scarbrough, Swan & Preston 1998 for a review). Whilst there has been some convergence more recently, and a reference is made to Vera & Crossan's recent work in the paper, a clear definition of both KM & LO is required and the relationship between the two also needs to be explicitly defined. The very dated Crossan et al framework (1999) is insufficient in terms of explaining this relationship and to equate the two, as more or less one field, is rather misleading. In addition, there is more emphasis in the review on the OL literature – much of which is now considered very dated as it was published in the 1990s and the fields of KM and OL have both developed significantly. Referring to this quite dated literature is highly problematic because knowledge, in OL terms, was largely conceptualised as an individual, cognitive phenomenon (when mentioned at all) back in the 1990s. This may be compatible with the objective, structural perspective of knowledge but is totally incompatible with the process/practice perspective which the authors advocate throughout. I believe the major reason for the review drawing out dated OL papers is that the actual number of journal articles written on OL has declined significantly since the advent, rise and colonization of KM by different professional groups in the late 1990s (see Scarbrough, Robertson & Swan, SJM, 2005).

My second major concern with the paper is the development of Figure 2 which the authors derive from their review of the literature on research use and activity, KM & LO. One of the major organizing concepts used here is absorptive capacity and receptive capacity and the authors conclude by stating that “assessing organisational absorptive and receptive capacity is the first step in making (?) a research informed decision making culture” (:15). However these two constructs have not been defined and their relationship to the major constructs within the

inner circles has not been explained. It is also worth noting that whilst significant work has been conducted on the notion of absorptive capacity, far less research has been conducted on receptive capacity and findings here should be treated as such.

My final but perhaps most important concern with the paper is that the tools that have been selected as having content validity are all effectively rooted in the structuralist perspective on knowledge. Many of the KM & OL tools that are reviewed have in fact been developed by commercial companies or 'experts' (?) based on reviews of dated KM literature which, on the whole, did largely adopt the structuralist perspective. Recent work in the field of KM, other than in the IT field for example, would rarely if ever refer to the possibility of 'capturing' knowledge and skills. It is important therefore that the authors qualify the utility of these KM & OL tools and highlight that the items included in these tools can only ever be simplistic proxies for the very complex social phenomena they claim to measure. The authors have recognised that most of these tools were developed in the commercial sector and there are major differences between the two contexts. However the paper would be significantly strengthened if there were some detailed discussion of research approaches, perhaps other than survey instruments, that might better assess the appropriate actions of management, contextual variables etc. from the practice based perspective which could be adopted in healthcare. It is worth noting that benchmarking studies of practice have a lot to offer here.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.