Realist evaluation case studies of hospital management in Ghana

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Poor health service performance: Hospital directors can make a difference

The health workforce is the key to accessible and high quality health services.

Current approaches focus on isolated dimensions of health workforce performance
- Reducing the brain drain by developing international codes of conduct
- Improving national-level HR management capacity and databases
- Targeting health workers through quality improvement systems, performance management or financial incentives

Such approaches lead mostly to short-term results and ignore the capacity of health service managers to increase staff retention and organisational performance. Their responsive management can make a difference.

Study aim
To assess the role of (health workforce) management on performance of health care organisations

Methodological approach
- Realist evaluation
- Comparative case study design
  - Based on positive deviant case study principle
  - Comparing well-performing hospitals in Central Region and Volta Region (Ghana) with similar hospitals in same region

Findings in the well-performing hospitals

Intervention
Management teams implement a high commitment management bundle within a broad strategic perspective
- Strong shared vision on leadership
- Development of mission of the hospital that is shared by all staff
- Clear role distribution and organisational structure
- Implementation of HiCoM bundles with extra attention to ensuring staff have easy access to managers, and to delegation, information sharing and participative decision making

Outcome
- Motivated and committed staff who trust their management and are willing “to go the extra mile” (positive extra role behaviour)
- Improvements in hospital service production (volume, scope of services) and in revenue generation

High commitment management improves organisational performance, but little is known about its effect in health services of low- and middle-income countries

- High commitment management (HiCoM)
  - tackles many determinants of performance at the same time
  - consists of balanced bundles
    - selective recruitment, providing employment security and adequate remuneration, training, information sharing and decentralised decision making, self-managed teams
    - leads to reduced turnover, higher staff involvement and better organisational performance

Realist evaluation in practice

Start: Developing the initial middle range theory (MRT) on basis of literature review of high commitment management

Study design: Selection of well performing hospitals and comparison cases

Data collection: Mixed methods

Analysis: Searching for context–mechanism–outcome (CMO) configurations

Synthesis: Adaptation of initial middle range theory

Comparison of cases through comparison of CMO and MRTs

Mechanisms
Staff feel effectively supported by management (perceived organisational support)
- Instilling role and goal clarity through communication and good organisational structure gives structure
- Effective support by management to staff elicits commitment by stimulating reciprocity of staff
- Investment in human relations results in trust and commitment (social exchange)

Context conditions
- Competent managers and professional providers
- Reasonable working conditions & financial resource availability
- Commitment–eliciting management is costly in time
- Decision spaces need not be large

Study’s limitations
- Methodologically difficult to
  - assess the association between HiCoM and hospital performance, but commitment is known to be a determinant of performance
  - Identify and assess the importance of context conditions

Comparaison with the other hospitals
- Management teams miss the strategic perspective
- They focus on limited issues (clinical quality, financial performance) and invest little in human relations
- This results in widespread feelings of frustration and missed opportunities to improve the services such as the introduction of the National Health Insurance Schemes

CONCLUSION

Our real case studies suggest that management vision and practices matter: within severe budget constraints, the hospital management teams of the well-performing hospitals improved their performance by focusing on both structuring (hard) and commitment-eliciting (soft) dimensions of management.

Realist evaluation provides an appropriate approach to investigate management interventions in complex healthcare organisations.