

Managing evidence on communication in healthcare:

An introduction to Realist Reviews

Background

Realist reviews are important and innovative strategies to synthesize research results on complex interventions, e.g. in healthcare communication. Communication is a complex event, where outcome highly depends on the interaction between people and the context in which this occurs. Comparing to other systematic reviews, realist reviews focus on understanding the causal mechanisms (M) by which communication in context (C) produces outcomes (O). By describing the theories underlying communication mechanisms the opportunity is offered to explain what works, for whom, how, why, to what extent, in what circumstances. Workshop facilitators will use their experience with realist reviews to guide the discussion.

Learning objectives

Participants will gain insight into the consecutive steps of performing a realist review, compare strengths and weaknesses with other review types. Participants will practice to define context, mechanisms and outcomes in research papers. They will be introduced in analyzing selected papers with the final purpose to construct theories, based on the CMO concept. Finally, participants will learn to apply these insights to their own research focus.

Teaching methods

This session will be highly interactive. A plenary group discussion will lead to eliciting difficulties with other review methods and how realist reviews can answer these (10min). Then participants will practice to recognize and articulate CMO-concepts in extracts of research papers during small group discussion (20min), followed by plenary debriefing (10min). Analysis and theory testing will be practiced two by two (30min). Finally, participants will be given the possibility to translate their own research focus according to the CMO concept in plenary (10 min).

Teaching materials

Selected papers of realist research. Examples of analysis according to CMO concept from a current realist review in progress from the workshop facilitators. A background paper on the theory of realist review will be provided at the workshop's end.

Evaluation

Plenary reflection.