



CAMPBELL COLLABORATION

- International co-operation for the development, maintenance and dissemination of systematic literature reviews of the effects of interventions and social programmes in social work, criminal care and education

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Campbell Collaboration

Background

Campbell Collaboration (here termed C2) is an international network of researchers, practitioners and financiers for development, maintenance and dissemination of systematic reviews of knowledge regarding the effects of contributions and social intervention programmes for social work, criminal justice and education. C2 is modelled upon the global network of the discipline and practice of medicine, Cochrane Collaboration, which was established about ten years ago.

The overall purpose of Campbell Collaboration is to make the combined experience of international research on effective measures/interventions/programmes more readily available to practitioners/policy-makers and to take the responsibility for quality control scrutiny of research contributions. This means that

1. internationally expanding primary research is subjected to quality control scrutiny
2. research results are summarised and distributed to users and,
3. assessment of the need of further primary research is considered.

The initiative for starting Campbell Collaboration may be viewed chiefly with reference to at least three important areas: the growing volume of scientific publications, awareness of the importance of knowledge-based practice, and positive experience from Cochrane Collaboration.

Regarding the first factor, the number of journals, journal articles, books and other forms of publication in most areas of knowledge have grown during the past few decades. While engaged in a literature survey of social work and ethnicity, colleagues running a CUS database search revealed approximately 2,500 titles. Researchers who use meta-analysis and other types of literature survey for recidivism estimate that over 4,000 titles have been published in this field since the Second World War. Experience of meta-analyses conducted by Mark Lipsey (USA), Ted Palmer (USA) and Paul Gendreau (Canada) concerning the outcome variable recidivism show that the quality of the studies varies and that for this reason there is a need for systematic quality control scrutiny based on explicit criteria.

The research community have developed various systems for handling the enormous volume of publications. One technical instrument is the databases that systematically monitor a number of journals to assort, systematise and render accessible article titles and short summaries based on the keywords with which the authors characterise their articles. This instrument has been enormously useful for the past twenty years. However the security these databases may be assumed to afford the research community has been criticised. The handbook Evidence-Based Medicine, for example, states that MEDLINE¹ misses about half the randomised and controlled studies published in journals. This risk, however, may be considerably reduced if one goes through the journals beforehand looking for randomised studies (Sackett, Richardson, Rosenberg, Haynes, 1977). An internal study within Campbell Collaboration indicated the same type of problem with the ERIC database.²

¹ This database monitors and systematises medical and health-care-related articles from 3600 journals for biomedicine, biology, physics, the humanities and IT. It comprises articles published since 1966.

² The ERIC database monitors and systematises titles within teaching theory and educational research. Information is taken from about 750 journals and other publications. The database comprises articles published since 1966.

In this connection, a more sophisticated scientific method has also been developed: meta-analysis. Meta-analysis is a form of systematic literature review using statistical methods to summarise effects of inputs or social intervention programmes studied and reported in different contexts. The meta-study has been very infrequent in Swedish social science, while it is being used increasingly in e.g. contemporary American social-scientific tradition. Doctoral students in their first year at the Columbia University School of Social Work, for example, have already come into contact with meta-studies in their own subject areas. Meta-analysis itself, as a scientific method has undergone and is undergoing critical scrutiny. This means, for example, that the methodology is becoming more sophisticated. The technique of meta-analysis is being further developed and refined, and its ability to handle problems that are built into primary research reinforced.

The other significant experience is increasing interest from practitioners and decision-makers in being able to include, in decision-making and action, scientifically-/empirically-based knowledge on efficacious contributions/programmes ("What works"). Here opinions certainly differ greatly within the three areas affected, social work criminal care and training – both in Sweden and internationally. To give two examples, there is extensive systematised knowledge on what "works" to reduce recidivism in criminal care. The information indicates that the view of the efficacy of more severe punishment is incorrect. This extensive information, however, has not been adopted within American criminal justice system. Another example is the discussion on knowledge-based social work in Sweden. The government commission to the National Board of Health and Welfare to present a programme for development of a knowledge-based system of social services exemplifies central decision-makers' increased interest in, and awareness of, the value of knowledge-based social work. This interest has also been formulated and stressed in other connections, e.g. by the most recent government reports on the social services, within the scientific community and by practitioners. Also, the research strategy of the Council for Social Research asserts the importance of research on the effect of social interventions, which should be considered in this context. However, the issue of knowledge-based social work is still controversial: a historical controversy grounded in the debate on basic assumptions about the nature of social work.

The third important experience stimulating the initiative for C2 is the successful development exhibited by Cochrane Collaboration. In ten years Cochrane Collaboration has become a comprehensive global network of researchers and practitioners monitoring just over 50 areas of intervention or disease in medicine and related fields. The network is supported with fifteen communications centres of different sizes with methodological competence and infrastructure for automatic information handling.

Knowledge reviews are stored in the Cochrane Library after several quality control scrutinies. Cochrane Collaboration's good reputation and success was stressed in a speech to the Economic Social Research Council on 2 February 2000 by the British Minister of Education and the Labour Market. In the same speech the international initiative for Campbell Collaboration was emphasised as a promising network. Here we would also stress the noted positive role played by Sweden through The Swedish Council on Technology Assessment in Health Care (SBU) during the development phase of Cochrane Collaboration.

Campbell Collaboration

Campbell Collaboration is a network of researchers, practitioners and research financiers intending to establish a global network for development, maintenance and distribution of systematic literature surveys of studies of the effects of social programmes and interventions in the areas social work, criminal justice and education. The initiative is from Professor Robert Boruch, University of Pennsylvania, USA.

Campbell Collaboration is named after Donald Campbell (1917-1996), a famous American psychologist and method researcher who devoted a large part of his scientific career to

investigating and assessing the effects of social and educational experiments, as well as validity issues. The first meeting concerning C2 took place at University College, London in July 1999. More recently, a constituent assembly was held at the University of Pennsylvania in February 2000. The C2 international steering group has produced a document entitled “Checklist for Registering a New Campbell Collaboration Review Group” as a manual for groups wishing to join. The Campbell collaboration is in the process of developing examples of C2 protocols. Anthony Petrosino’s and Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino’s “Scared Strait Protocol is already available. Furthermore, a registry of reports and papers on randomised field trials and possibly randomised trials in education, criminology and delinquency, and the social behaviour sectors, the Social, Psychological, Educational and Criminological Trials Register, SPECTR (approximately 10 000 entries at present).

Campbell Collaboration has a home page on the Internet, <http://campbell.gse.upen.edu>, containing more detailed information on C2 and a number of background essays.

Guiding principles for Campbell Collaboration

Campbell Collaboration is based on the following central principles:

- *Collaboration*, by internally and externally fostering good communication, open decision-making and teamwork.
- *Building on the enthusiasm of individuals*, by involving and supporting people of different skills and backgrounds.
- *Avoiding duplication*, by good management and co-ordination to maximize the economy of effort.
- *Minimizing bias*, through a variety of approaches such as scientific rigor, ensuring broad participation, and avoiding conflicts of interest.
- *Keeping up to date*, by a commitment to ensure that Campbell Reviews are maintained through identification and incorporation of new evidence.
- *Striving for relevance*, by promoting the assessment of interventions using outcomes that matter to people making choices in the social and behavioral arenas.
- *Promoting access*, by wide dissemination of the outputs of the collaboration, taking advantage of strategic alliances, and by promoting appropriate prices, content and media to meet the needs of users worldwide.
- *Ensuring quality*, by being open and responsive to criticism, applying advances in methodology, and developing systems for quality improvement.
- *Continuity*, by ensuring that responsibility for reviews, editorial processes and key functions is maintained and renewed.

Organisation

Campbell Collaboration has an international steering group headed by Robert Boruch and based in Philadelphia, USA. Following the constituent meeting in Philadelphia (February 2000) C2 comprises five groups: Education Group (co-ordinator Philip Davis, Oxford University), Social Work & Social Welfare (co-ordinator Geraldine Macdonald, University of Bristol), Criminal Justice Group (co-ordinator Anthony Petrosino, American Academy of Arts and Sciences), Methods Group (co-ordinator Harris Cooper, University of Missouri) and Dissemination Group (Merry Bullock, American Psychological Association, Washington D.C.)³. All the groups have their own steering groups. One of the present applicants (HS) is a member of the international steering group and of the international steering group for Social Work & Social Welfare.

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Representatives of Cochrane Collaboration contribute their experience generously to stimulate the Campbell initiative. To avoid duplication, continued close co-operation with Cochrane Collaboration is being planned through co-ordination of resources and transfer of experience.

Campbell Review Groups

The actual work is carried out in Campbell Review Groups. At present all these are at the development stage. The work has progressed unevenly among the groups. For example, the Criminal Justice Group has made rapid steps thanks to the competence generated through meta-studies during the past twenty years. The Group for Social Work and Social Welfare has at present two developed Review Groups. One, the Cochrane Development, Psychological and Learning Problems Review Group (based in England) will also be registered as a Campbell Review Group; the other, Campbell Housing and Transportation Review Group, is based in Scotland. A further group with the working name Campbell Social Work, Social Welfare and Workfare Review Group, is being planned by the Danish social research institute in Copenhagen. Child Welfare Review Group is being developed by John Schuerman (j-schuerman@uchicago.edu) at the University of Chicago. The Centre for Evaluation of Social Services intends to initiate development of a Campbell Social Work and Ethnicity Review Group (haluk. soydan@sos.se; mari.forslund@sos.se).

The Methods Group

Campbell Collaboration has formed a special group for issues of scientific methods to handle both primary research and meta-analytical principles. This group includes competence from Cochrane Collaboration, but it's main job is to work on method issues affected by special conditions and circumstances in social-scientific research. To these belong such matters as quality of knowledge, poor access to randomised and controlled studies in some areas, the value of qualitative studies and co-operation in the development of databases for C2.

Particular attention will be paid to methodological questions affecting social work. Co-operation between the Campbell Methods Group and the Social Work & Social Welfare Group will be of great significance for the elucidation of relevant methodological questions.

Standards for meta-analyses

In C2 two projects are currently seeking to develop standards for meta-analyses. One, managed by Anthony Petrosino and Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino (USA) is a meta-analysis of randomised experiments with the "Scared Straight" programme (a popular American programme in which young people at risk of criminality were locked up in prison, and in this way scared). The other project is a CUS study by Mark Lipsey et al. at Vanderbilt University. This meta-study is based on Lipsey's database on client effect studies and sets out to investigate the effects of interventions in various ethnic groups in terms of a set of outcome variables. Both studies use meta-analysis standards codified by the Cochrane/ Campbell Developmental, Psychological and Learning Problem Review Group. The studies will be completed during 2000.

Nordic Participation in Campbell Collaboration

For Sweden and the Nordic area the advantages of taking part in C2 are evident. In many places there are signals of increased interest in knowledge-based material for political decisions and professional action. Practitioners and decision-makers/policy-makers are more and more expressing the need for systematised and readily accessible scientific knowledge of practical relevance to them. For the research community it is of growing interest better and more efficiently to keep in touch with the leading edge of international research, thus also reducing the risk of unnecessary and costly empirical studies. Better and more contact with leading international expertise – and hence more efficient scientific transparency – should lead to increased awareness of, and a more skilled

approach to, methodological quality issues. The interest of the Council for Social Research in meta-analyses may be viewed as an expression of the same spirit.

Against this background, combined Nordic participation in Campbell Collaboration is important. In the first place it is valuable to have Nordic participation in the various review groups since Nordic participants can then bring their knowledge of relevant Nordic studies, possibly with C2 standards. By no means least, it is valuable for Nordic researchers and practitioners, as for research financiers, to have opportunities of reporting topical research and, it is hoped, internationally interesting interventions/programmes.

Getting C2 to function may perhaps be compared to getting a modern aircraft off the ground in a safe manner. Globally well-functioning C2 co-operation presupposes that many parts function well simultaneously. The quality and value of the Nordic part naturally increase if the global C2 gets a good, active start and vice-versa. This in turn requires economic resources from research financiers the world over. Campbell Collaboration and its development found interest among people from other Nordic countries represented at the Stockholm meeting in December 1999.

Commitment and work tasks between 1 July 2000 and 31 December 2002

The Centre for Evaluation of Social Services, and the National Board of Health and Welfare are committed to:

1. a limited support to global C2
2. a limited support to the global steering group for social work/social welfare
3. a temporary function as Nordic information centre for global C2 work
4. develop a Campbell Ethnicity and Social Work Review Group and support for the envisaged literature reviewing.

Reference

Sackett, D. L., Richardson, W. S., Rosenberg, W. and Haynes, R. B. (1997) *Evidence-based Medicine. How to Practice and Teach EBM*, New York: Churchill Livingstone.