Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluating a facilitation model to promote organisational development in primary care: The Maturity Matrix.

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Reviewer: Fraser Macfarlane

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General

This is a study which looks to evaluate a facilitation model to promote organisational development in primary care using the maturity matrix practice development tool.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

Yes, the question is new and well focused. It is “to evaluate how facilitators are best able to support general practice teams in stimulating organisational development using a quality improvement instrument called the Maturity Matrix. Although the main body of the paper seems to answering a different research question – which should be re-stated as “To compare the approach of maturity matrix facilitators with a model of facilitation developed from the literature.”

I am also slightly confused about whether the stated research objectives are really consistent with the stated research question. p4 “the aim of this study is to evaluate how facilitators engage and support practice teams in organisational development using the maturity matrix”. This is supported by the following objectives: “The first objective for the study is to develop areas that describe an effective model of skills for the facilitation of the maturity matrix assessment process. The second objective is to evaluate how and to what extent the facilitators employ the skills describe by the model”. This is not about evaluating how facilitators are best able to support general practice teams, it is about comparing the performance of the facilitator against a theoretical framework. There seems to be no attempt in the study to determine the effectiveness of the facilitation intervention in terms of outcomes for the practice.

I am also confused about what the authors mean by organisational development? Do they mean the development of a general practice as a learning organisation? If so, this should be said. There are many aspects of organisational development and this area needs clarification.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Given that the study seems to be focused on answering a different question, namely evaluating the performance of the facilitator, I’m not sure analysing verbal transcripts of the facilitator’s performance is the best way to undertake this research. Surely this misses issues such as non-verbal language which are recognised to be important in the role of facilitating. There is no attempt to get the practice team to evaluate the facilitator and no other indication/measure of whether the facilitation was successful ie achieved its objectives by moving the practice forward against the criteria in the Maturity Matrix.

The sampling strategy could be better – it appears to be a convenience sample based on practice
size. Surely the role of a facilitator will vary with how well the practice complies/scores with the Maturity Matrix. This should be reflected in the sampling framework. In determining the sampling strategy would it not be better to look at factors which might influence the performance of the practice against the maturity matrix – for example work load (list size, deprivation score, inner city vs rural), teaching status (does the practice have students/registrar?), research status? At the very least this should be acknowledged as a weakness of the research study in the section on limitations.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

The section on data collection is very descriptive and it is quite difficult to comment on the reliability and validity of the approach adopted. It would be helpful to have more details here (for example: when was the data collected, did practices/facilitators know about the evaluation at the time of data collection, what was the drop out rate, how many practices refused to participate, what was the data analysis technique?). In particular, I would question whether analysing transcripts of audio tapes is the most effective approach for evaluating the performance of a facilitator. This role, as the researchers have identified, relies on much more than verbal skills. Therefore this approach may not be the most effective way of analysing this data.

I would also like to have seen extracts/quotes from the transcripts inserted into the text (as opposed to being in a separate table) in order to support the analysis presented.

p12 indicates that the facilitators did not use the higher order facilitation skills with have the practices. I have two problems with this. First, as this is an interpretation, should it not be contained in the discussion section? Second, there are other interpretations which could be considered as well. For example, even though the facilitators were experienced, they could also have low levels of competence (experience does not always correlate with competence). Therefore, they were not able to demonstrate these skills in the more challenging practices. One way to resolve this alternative interpretation is to provide more data/analysis of the individual practices and the facilitators.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The reporting of the methods of data collection and analysis is somewhat unscholarly and does not give the reader the necessary detail to make an informed decision about the robustness of the research process. I would like to see much more about:

(i) dates and times of the facilitations
(ii) details of the practices
(iii) details of the facilitators
(iv) refusal and drop-out rates of the practices
(v) outcome measures for the practices following the intervention (ie how effective was the facilitation process
(vi) data describing the practices’ views on the facilitators

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

As suggested in section three, there are cases where alternative interpretations could be applied to the data and where assertions are made without supporting evidence (p12: “facilitators were particularly sensitive to the views of reception staff whose perspectives were often overlooked…”). I am also concerned that the results section contains interpretation that should be presented in the discussion section. p13: “it might be expected that for every maturity matrix dimension…..there was
potential to improve… but those conversations did not always automatically take place [this is data analysis], possibly as a result of the wider context within the Maturity Matrix session was held [this is interpretation].

The interpretation should be moved to the discussion section.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

My only concern here is that the research question does not adequately reflect the research process reported and that the authors should consider revising the question.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

Overall, the paper is reasonably well written, although I have a few minor suggestions:

(i) Ignore the first two sentences of the abstract as they don’t seem to be relevant to the paper/study and start at the third sentence.

(ii) Need to define organisational development? Do they mean the development of a general practice as a learning organisation? If so, this should be said.

(iii) Is it necessary to state that “all tapes were listened to by the researcher and found to be audible….” (p6)

(iv) p15 doesn’t really capture all of the weaknesses of this study and I can’t see if point one is a strength or a weakness

(v) Layout of references – shouldn’t they be tabbed?

(vi) In the list of references, where the authors cite a book, does this refer to all of the book or to specific pages/sections? If the latter, they should include the page no. (for example refs 6 & 7)

(vii) Ref 21 – is there a title to this paper?

Overall, this paper is potentially useful and I would recommend that the authors be asked to revisit it, revise and resubmit.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests