Reviewer’s report

Title: Building capacity for evidence informed decision making in public health: a case study of organizational change

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Reviewer: Anita Kothari

Reviewer’s report:

This paper presents findings from a case study of a public health unit in Ontario that implemented a ten year strategic initiative to support evidence-informed decision-making. Findings reflect early implementation efforts, and are drawn from interviews, focus groups and documents. The importance of this paper is that it describes EBDM change efforts at organizational levels, reflecting current recommendations by scholars to implement change at this level. Most previous studies have been focused on the individual level of practitioner change. Another strength of this study is the multiple data sources collected at two points in time, adding to the rigour of the findings. This is a very well written and presented paper.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The findings would be more credible if the authors explained DM’s role (given that he is an author as well as the head of the study site). Perhaps this was conceived as an integrated knowledge translation project with knowledge users? If so, this ought to be explained briefly.

2. Numerous documents were reviewed (137) but hardly any reference is made to them in the findings section. In contrast, there were repeated descriptions of what the “informants” or “participants” said (often emphasized with direct quotes). Is there a way to describe which findings are derived from the documents, or where the documents converged and diverged from focus group and interview data? Alternatively, on page 9 there is mention of a cross-document thematic table – is it possible to combine this table with thematic findings from the focus group and interview data so that readers can see the extent to which triangulation occurred?

An even more radical option would be to remove the document analysis from this paper and present those findings in another paper. The questions asked of the documents, listed on page 9, suggest a systematic extraction process using very interesting analytical questions. These findings might make for an informative paper.

3. One of the difficulties I had as a reader was trying to wrap my head around what the initial initiative actually consisted of, a priori. I appreciate that changes were made along the way, as described in the text, but it would be very helpful if more information was provided upfront about what the starting point was (and I also appreciate that another paper will describe a 10 step model). Maybe these
elements could be listed in a table (what were they and what their objective was).

4. Pg 4, the (first) paragraph ends with the intriguing sentence, some health care settings have taken up this challenge. Could the authors elaborate on what has been tried, in which contexts and with what effectiveness? This information helps the reader understand how the current literature informed the study, and it extends the somewhat brief literature review at the front end of the paper.

Minor Essential Revisions
1. In the first paragraph under Design and Setting, reference 25 should actually be reference 21.

Discretionary Revisions:
1. The term “evidence review” is used throughout the paper, but I suspect that there may be some readers who are unfamiliar with what you mean. Perhaps the term could be changed to “systematic review of the literature”, or the term could be defined at the outset.
2. Pg 3, The last sentence of the first paragraph, about EIDM as a priority in Canada, requires a reference.
3. The first sentence in Design and Setting refers to a “holistic” case study. Can a sentence be added to describe what is meant by holistic?
4. Pg 10, paragraph 2, the authors mention EXTRA’s ‘focused intervention project’ – this was unclear.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'