Reviewer's report

Title: Opening the black box of quality improvement collaboratives: an ethnographic study of the problematisation process and measurement practices

Version: 1 Date: 21 June 2010

Reviewer: Trisha Greenhalgh

Reviewer’s report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
Yes, and it’s important

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Yes and yes. ANT is one of the most promising theoretical and methodological approaches for looking at complex change in health services. Its great strength is how it helps us think differently and hence reconceptualise issues and challenges. Its weakness is its undertheorisation of human agency and the assumption (at least by hardline ANT evangelists) that technologies and humans can be treated as “symmetrical” in the analysis, which is why many research teams (this one included) draw eclectically on ANT rather than apply it ‘by the book’.

3. Are the data sound?
The methods are sound and the data (i.e. interpretations and insights) appear reasonable.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Not applicable. The “data” in this complex case study mainly comprise interpretations.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Yes, they are very elegant

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Not really, and the addition of how ‘generic’ critiques of ANT might be applied specifically to their paper would strengthen what is already a very good paper.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes, very elegantly and without overburdening the reader with obscure references.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes, it’s a very high quality paper overall

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Apart from the need for technical editing yes.

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)
The introduction to ANT is good but I think it needs to be even clearer for this audience which will be largely naïve not only to ANT but to constructionist and recursive research more generally. I think the best way to do this would be to run the draft by some ‘conventional doctors’ and watch where they look puzzled!!

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

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
N/A

Declaration of competing interests:

- Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper, either now or in the future?
No

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No

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No

- Do you have any other financial competing interests?
No

- Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?
No

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.
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