Reviewer’s report

Title: The key role of facilitation in the implementation of research findings: a qualitative evaluation of facilitation experiences in the Veterans Health Administration

Version: 1 Date: 9 June 2006

Reviewer: Lars Wallin

Reviewer’s report:

General
1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
   The question is not new, but well defined and appropriate as earlier studies have not provided sufficient answers. To explore the concept of facilitation is an excellent idea. Facilitation is an emerging method, associated with positive expectations, but the concept is not well understood, neither well researched.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
   The method is well described and details clearly expressed. The choice to seek for data/information on the facilitator role from researchers that have practised this role in several research implementation studies can be discussed. These respondents have thorough experiences of performing the facilitator role (which is good), but this can also lead to bias in that it might be harder to take a critical view with such a background. The authors are however aware of this problem and discuss it satisfactory. Another approach (for maybe another study) of exploring the facilitator role could be to interview the persons that in this paper are called internal change agents, that is, the persons “receiving” facilitation. It might be a more fruitful approach for also understanding the impact of facilitation.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
   As this is a qualitative study it is not convenient to talk about “well controlled data”, but as participants in this study are involved in reviewing results, and finally appear as authors, it seems in a way appropriate to describe data as “controlled”. Generally, data appear to be collected and processed in a sound and meticulous way. Content analysis is an appropriate analysis method for this kind of study. The group of study participants is small, but might be enough for the purpose of the study. There is a case for some confusion as the author ML appears as both interviewee and note taker in the other interviews. It is a mix of roles which I am not sure it is healthy for the study.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   I am not aware of standards for reporting qualitative studies. In this paper findings are thoroughly presented in the main text but also thematically presented in tables. This gives the reader a comprehensive and useful picture of perceived main ingredients of the facilitator role. However, disadvantages, shortcomings, and other unsuccessful stories on facilitation are mainly invisible in the findings section, probably because of the selection of study participants.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   The discussion is well balanced and focuses nicely on the main findings. An issue is made if facilitation is a distinct entity and a function apart from other change agent roles. The conclusion is also tentative and underline that there are still many questions to answer. However, in the conclusion in the abstract it is more fixed that facilitation should be considered a distinct implementation intervention. I think the more open reasoning in the discussion should also be used in the conclusion.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   The title captures content in a good way. Abstract is also fine, but my notice in the section above should be observed.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
   The article is easy to understand and follow, and for a non-native English reader writing is more than acceptable. What I noticed however is that author signs (CS, JR-M, etc) are not presented in a consistent way. For example, CS is at another place CBS.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
See my comments under question 5-7.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable

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