Reviewer’s report

Title: Mapping New Theoretical and Methodological Terrain for Knowledge Translation: Contributions from Critical Realism and the Arts

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Reviewer: Phil McEvoy

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Major Compulsory Revisions

I have two main criticisms of this paper, the first concerns it’s central thesis. The authors set themselves the ambitious target of mapping a new theoretical and methodological terrain. I thought that many of the arguments that they put forward had considerable merit, including the sections that discussed the importance of identifying generative mechanisms and the adoption of active engagement strategies. However, I regret to say that I did not think that the authors achieved their primary objective. That is, when I judged the paper against the type of criteria that I consider to be essential for appraising the value of a theoretical development. For example, explanatory depth, scope and unifying power, inherent limitations and internal contradictions and empirical adequacy. In my opinion, the paper would be much stronger if the authors adopted a narrower frame of reference, one which concentrated on providing a coherent rationale and justification for their CRARUM framework.

My second criticism relates to the way in which the authors employed critical realism as a logic of justification. The suggestion was made that “critical realism can assist researchers in effectively aligning interventions with the social environments in which change efforts are undertaken.” What this statement seems to imply is that there is a direct link between the adoption of a critical realist perspective and the choice of a particular method. I think that this point needs to be clarified. As far as I understand it, the strength of critical realism as a philosophy of science is that it can be used to identify the source of common misconceptions and prepare the ground for theoretical developments by acting as an ‘underlabourer’. For critical realists the choice of method should be determined on a pragmatic basis, the key consideration being – is it the most suitable approach to deal with the problem at hand? For critical realists, it is the way that a method is used that is important rather than the character of the method itself.

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.