Reviewer’s report

Title: Validation of the Theoretical Domains Framework for use in behaviour change and implementation research

Version: 2 Date: 8 October 2011

Reviewer: diane dixon

Reviewer’s report:

This paper works to develop what is in essence a shared common language for the development, testing and implementation of interventions for behaviour change. It significantly progresses an earlier version of the theoretical domains framework through the application of more robust methods of analyses.

The introduction succinctly articulates the need for the framework and reviews existing work with the earlier version of the framework. This work illustrates the utility of this programme of research, which has already improved theoretical clarity within behavioural science and implementation research. The work in the current paper is likely to accelerate improvements in the design and reporting of interventions for behaviour change. Further, building a framework around existing theory and theoretical constructs ensures that the framework can be used to both integrate the existing evidence base as well as shape future work.

The methods and results are clearly described and the methods are replicable. The application of cluster and DCV analyses have ensured the new framework has greater conceptual clarity and has resolved many of the weaknesses of the original framework.

The separation of the domains ‘intention’ and ‘goals’ in the new framework is an improvement on the original framework’s collective domain of ‘motivation & goals’ and is consistent with the distinction between motivational and volitional phases of behaviour change. Similarly, the distinction between beliefs about consequences and contingent reinforcement concepts adds additional theoretical clarity to the new framework. In addition, the separation of trait like constructs (optimism) from variable belief based constructs (capability beliefs) is welcome. These features of the new framework will improve the design of interventions because the significant process pathways to behaviour change are separated in the new framework.

The other benefit of the availability of the framework, alluded to by the authors in the discussion, is that by integrating existing theoretical constructs into clearly defined theoretical domains enables researchers to better examine the limitations of current theory. Influences on behaviour that are not conceptualised by theory are more likely to be apparent when current theory is better organised and constructs clearly defined and interrelated.

I do not think any substantive revisions are required.
I think the following discretionary revisions might be considered.

1. On page 5 (1st paragraph, 2nd sentence) a reference remains to be inserted; this omission could be deliberate as it likely refers to a paper that is currently under review.

2. I found reference to Table 1 as a primary Table in the main text of the paper somewhat confusing as Table 1 is entirely within appendix 5. I would prefer Table 1 to be entirely within the main text or the tables to be labelled differently so that the first table to appear in the main text is not labelled Table 2. Table 1 is large and the authors nicely summarise the data therein so perhaps it would be better to re-label Table 2 rather than move Table 1 to the main text, however, I leave that decision to the authors.

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 have acted as a participant in other studies in this programme of work. I did not take part in the work included in this paper.