Reviewer's report

Title: Convergence and Divergence in Implementation Narratives: Analyzing Variation in Qualitative Data

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Reviewer: Tim Rapley

Reviewer's report:

This is a really nice paper that explores, in and through a very clear example, the need to explore and report on diversity. Centrally, the issue appears to be interlinked (and should be, if we take good analytic practice, where sampling is informed by ongoing analysis). Poor sampling practices, which do not seek to explore the phenomenon. Secondly, poor analytic practices, which do not respect or explore the (potential) diversity of the phenomenon. Thirdly, readers expectations of coherent narratives, that variance can represents problems, over opportunities for discovery.

Major compulsory revision

Page 8, 20 & 27: You note that ‘theoretical sampling’ was used. However, I’m unsure how what you describe – interviewing clinic leaders who then forwarded you to staff represent any version of theoretical sampling (either a priori or emergent – as in, the style of grounded theory). This appears to be, following Patton’s typology, an example of criterion sampling (criteria being clinic lead) followed by either critical case or intensity sampling. Or, you could, as you later refer to it, describe it as ‘stratified’ purposeful sampling.

Also, clearly in your study, ‘employee position’ was the key issue that enabled you to explore variation. However, in other sites, other issues might be central – say, closeness to day-to-day implementation of the intervention, or level of disruption to prior work practices … etc. Such factors may be relevant within practitioners of the same ‘employee position’.

So centrally, part of your call is for careful, thoughtful sampling to explore within and across-site variation. And clearly, as you note, this has a long history, not least within the ethnographic tradition (and more recently much of the case-study literature), where given the limited focus on a single or a few cases, such work was essential in claims making. This also has long tradition in approaches that argue for an integration of sampling and analysis in a mutually unfolding way, both in the (many varieties of) grounded theory tradition alongside just good qualitative analytic practice.

Minor essential revision

Page 10: I’m not sure what you mean by ‘redundant data’ when you say ‘Convergent narratives were supported by redundant data from all three
informant types.

**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