Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluation as evolution: a Darwinian proposal for health policy and systems research

Version: 3 Date: 16 February 2015

Reviewer: Sarah Morgan-Trimmer

Reviewer's report:

The additions to the article clarify the points made, and make the overall argument more balanced. I am happy where changes have not been made in order to keep the paper succinct, and with the decision to not reorganise the paper.

Discretionary Revisions:

The following sections in the ‘response to reviewers’ document were helpful in clarifying the overall aim of the paper; one or both of these paragraphs could be added to the paper (perhaps one near the beginning and one near the end):

The Darwin metaphor helps us think about the modification of innovations in different contexts and over time, as well as the accumulation of small innovations. The Darwin metaphor may also assist in understanding how an innovation came about, and why it was adopted and under what circumstances. This may help conceptually in health systems to think about health system innovation, adaptation, adoption and modification based on context.

Ultimately, we are proposing the metaphor to assist in alternative ways of thinking that allows a greater emphasis on the importance of implementation strategies (not just policy), evaluation of implementation strategies, and incremental selection of advantageous strategies that over time, cumulatively, and adapted to the local context – may assist in strengthening health systems.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests