Reviewer’s report

Title: Policymakers' experience of a capacity building intervention designed to increase their use of research: a realist process evaluation

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Reviewer: Bruno Marchal

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I really enjoyed reading this well-written paper that clearly presents the case for using the process evaluation approach. They authors also managed to present their results in a very clear way, making good use of tables, narratives, figures and additional files to explain how they applied realist principles in the analysis.

The discussion on what constitutes mechanisms is still raging in realist circles and one could argue that some of the mechanisms mentioned by the authors may be considered as process outcomes (such as ‘leadership’). However, such issues are mostly niggles that can only stimulate further debate and as such help realists to move on.

I just have a few minor issues. First, the term 'realist process evaluation' is central in this study. It may require some more explanation, as it is a relatively new term and used differently by different authors. The use of the term may need also need some streamlining: The authors use 'Realist process evaluation' on p. 6 and 'in-depth, mixed methods process evaluation on p. 7.

On p. 10, line 31: I would like to see some clarification regarding the relation between the initial programme theory and the conceptual framework, as I would have expected the latter to be integral part of the former. As the authors write, the framework was inspired by literature focusing on social processes and interaction, exactly the kind of elements of 'mechanism that I feel are now lacking in the initial programme theory.

On p. 9, line 7: "Where possible, realist evaluation tests … ": I would suggest to drop 'Where possible'. If this is not done, it is not a realist study.

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