Reviewer's report

Title: Why (We Think) Facilitation Works: Insights from Organizational Learning Theory

Version: 2

Date: 15 May 2015

Reviewer: Nick Sevdalis

Reviewer's report:

The authors present a conceptual synthesis paper, which aims to bring together the practice of facilitations within healthcare organisations and organisational learning theory. Their aim is to situate the former into the latter. In doing so, they present the basic tenets of organisational learning theory, and they also present the basic practices of facilitation. They then make 10 propositions on how the 2 are related.

This is an interesting paper, possibly more so for the conceptually orientated readership. The writing and overall clarity of exposition is good, especially given the complexity of the topic. I do not have major reservations about the paper – however I do feel it requires some further work prior to publication.

A major revision I would like to see is the addition of a concrete case study that illustrates some of the 10 propositions made by the authors. This could be a published report or quality improvement initiative known to the authors, for example, in which their propositions can be identified. The article is entirely theoretical at present and we need to see some real-world relevance and application of these propositions.

On a related note, I would expect removal of the PDSA figure (3) – it feels rather ad hoc at present, without a concrete underlying case study. The figure should be replaced in my view with the specific elements of the case study the authors choose to include.

A minor revision that is needed is some simplification and explanation of the nomenclature of figure 1 (eg see A, A', O and so on). Please avoid symbols that require detailed knowledge of a framework to be digested – spell out the terms and make the figure digestible by generalist readers.

Finally, the current structure of the sections of the paper also needs revision: the short section on Background followed by a very long Discussion section does not really reflect what the paper has to offer. Use section heading that reflect the content and logical structure of your argument.

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: none