Title: From novice to expert: A qualitative study of implementation facilitation skills

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Author’s response to reviews:

Thank you for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript, titled “From novice to expert: a qualitative study of implementation facilitation skills,” ISCM-D-19-00033, for consideration for publication in Implementation Science Communications. We appreciate the reviewers’ comments and thank them for validating the usefulness of our work. We have responded to their concerns below.

Reviewer 1

1. Methods: It is confusing to decipher what methods were part of the larger study and what methods were part of this sub-study; further, it was challenging to know what data was used from the larger study and what data was specific to this study. Suggest offer a bit more clarification. Perhaps a table could help to clarify this?

Response: We edited the Methods section in several places to clarify methods that were part of the larger study and the ones that were part of the sub-study being reported in this paper. To clarify that the study setting and data collection methods were all part of the larger project, we:

• replaced the word “study” with “the larger project” in the study setting section (see page 6, line 6); and

• added the words, “For the larger project” in the data collection section (see page 7, line 4).

To clarify that the data analysis methods were part of the sub-study being reported in this paper, we added the words, “For this study” at the beginning of the data analysis section, and clarified that the analysis was of the source data described in the data collection section (see page 8, lines 10-11).
2. **Analysis:** Suggest providing additional details on the initial code list of skills. Where did these skills come from? Clarify how many you started with from the literature and how many you added?

Response: We provide additional details about how the initial code list of skills was developed and how many codes were added. We:

- added additional information about the type of literature and materials that informed our initial code list in the Background section (see page 5, lines 11-15); and

- clarified in the Data Analysis section that because there was little empirical literature about facilitation skills but they had been discussed in conceptual literature, mentioned in descriptions of facilitation skills in projects that were not collecting data about or studying facilitation skills, reviews of literature, and publicly available training materials, we reviewed literature and materials that made any mention of facilitation skills and then inductively developed the initial code list and definitions (see p. 8, lines 12-23);

- added an Additional (supplementary) file of the literature and training materials that informed our code list; and

- provided the number of skills we added to the initial code list during the analysis process (see p. 8, lines 24-26).

3. **Analysis:** Please clarify who did the content analysis. On page 8, bullet points from line 18-45: Please provide some more details on whether two reviewers independently coded the data? How did the reviewers decide if a skill overlapped with another? Was it a group effort to draw the lines to show the overlap? What happened when there was a disagreement between reviewers?

Response: This study was part of a doctoral dissertation conducted by the first author (MJR) in consultation with the second author (LEP). We address the reviewer’s questions as follows:

- MJR applied the codes, consulting with LEP as new ones emerged from the data (see p. 8, lines 23-25); and

- MJR conducted the rigorous process reviewing the relationship between skills (see p. 9, lines 1-14).

4. **Discussion:** Important discussion of the overlap of skill set from this study and other facilitation taxonomies - this is important literature to integrate. Suggest adding a sentence or two to clarify the difference between a skill and a strategy? Many seem very similar, especially in the table (e.g., adapt a program to meet local needs; building learning collaboratives, etc.). How should they be conceptualized?
Response: To address the reviewer’s comments, we:

• first clarified that facilitators need the skills we identified to conduct facilitation activities that have been discussed in previous literature (see p. 12, lines 3-15);

• to clarify what a strategy is, we added, “In addition to viewing what facilitators do as “activities,” we might also view what they do through the lens of implementation science more generally. Although facilitation is considered to be an implementation strategy (Powell 2015), i.e., a method or technique “used to enhance the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of a clinical program or practice” (Proctor 2013), in reality, facilitators incorporate multiple other strategies into their efforts to support implementation.” (See p. 13, lines 4-9.)

Thus, the discussion is suggesting that literature discussing facilitation activities, as well as literature discussing implementation strategies, support the need skills we identified in this study.

5. Discussion: Context is a critical component of implementation, as outlined in the iPARIHS framework. Any consideration what conditions need to be in play to support skills? Is this something that needs further study or would the skill set work in all contexts?

Response: We agree that context is a critical component of implementation and have added a paragraph (p. 15, lines 12-26 and p. 16, lines 1-3) to address this issue. It is likely that even when facilitators are skilled, there is some baseline level of contextual support for implementation that is necessary for facilitation to be successful.

6. As this is a qualitative descriptive study, I suggest changing the language from generalizability to transferability. The aim is not to create generalizable evidence - instead, the aim to provide trustworthiness data that readers could see being applicable in their context.

Response: We replaced the word “generalizability” with the word, “transferability” (see p. 16, line 6).

7. Was any consideration given to the EF (also the first author) conducting a self-examination of their skills? It appears so, but I suggest making this explicit. Perhaps add how any biases were mitigated in the discussion section. This is important for future researchers who wish to reflect on their facilitation activities in a rigorous approach.

Response: We apologize if it was not clear in the text that the EF was the third author (JEK) and that our evaluation of her efforts was done independently. She saw and confirmed the findings for this study after the analysis was completed. We:
• added to the description of the larger project in the background section that we “conducted an independent evaluation of the strategy” (see p. 5, line 21).

• clarified throughout the data analysis section that all analytic activities were conducted by MJR and LEP (the first and second authors) (see p. 8, lines 12-26; p. 9, lines, lines 1-25; and p. 10, lines 1-3).

• edited the statement at the end of the Methods section to read, “The third author, who was the external facilitator, and one of the internal facilitators reviewed and confirmed all findings” (see p. 10, lines 3-5).

Reviewer 2

1. It would be helpful to include some description of the 5 skill groups in the text of the Results section and emphasize the value of the skills descriptions that are provided in the table, perhaps with an example of one or two.

Response: We added some description of the five skill groups (see p. 10, lines 6-24) and provided an example, the description of interpersonal skills (see p. 11, lines 2-6), in the text of the Results section.

2. Discussion paragraph 2 may warrant some additional reflection on how your skill lists are different than the process models cited. Although you mention that there is some overlap, it seems that your model goes beyond sequential process models that we typically think of in implementation science. It doesn't seem to be a determinant model, but I'm wondering if your capabilities list is an extension of a process model? Regardless of whether and how you categorize it, because of the discourse on process vs. determinant models, it may help to clarify whether you are actually talking about process models in the "Models, Theories and Frameworks" sense, because ultimately implementation will occur (or not) based on the degree to which these skills sets are executed.

Response: Implementation science models “provide a systematic structure for the development, management, and evaluation of D&I efforts;” framing a study within a D&I model can help explain why an innovation or implementation strategy works or not (Tabak et al. 2012). Process models describe or guide the implementation process and determinant ones specify what will influence implementation outcomes; some determinant models, e.g., iPARIHS, specify relationships between determinants (Nilsson 2015). We do not view the results of this study as a D&I model. Facilitation is one of the four constructs that influence implementation according to the iPARIHS framework (Harvey & Kitson 2015). What facilitators do can influence outcomes; and thus, whether they have the necessary skills can also influence outcomes. (We have stated this in the paper. See p. 5, lines 7-8.) Additionally, although the presence or absence of these skills will influence implementation, other factors may hinder the execution of these skills. For example, our work, in both research studies and clinical initiatives, suggests that some organizational contexts are so challenging that the most skilled facilitators cannot help them successfully implement innovations. We have added a paragraph in the
Discussion section related to context (see p. 15, lines 12-26 and p. 16, lines 1-3. We also do not view the other work we cited as D&I “process models.” The work of Dogherty et al (see p. 12, lines 7-10) and Powell et al. are taxonomies rather than process models. Our list of skills and skill types is similar. We therefore edited the text in this paragraph to clarify that we are comparing our list of skills and skill categories to other taxonomies (see 12., lines 3-15).

3. You have essentially created a well-thought out job description for facilitators. It would be impactful if you could reflect on how one might assess these skills in potential facilitators and evaluate a facilitator's competency in this area.

Response: In a separate upcoming project, we will be exploring how to assess these skills and evaluate competency. In the discussion section we added that how to combine and apply these skills has implications for “assessing skills in potential facilitators, and evaluating facilitators’ competency. In an upcoming project, we will be developing the processes for assessing skills and evaluating competency.” (See p. 15, lines 9-11).

4. Perhaps the discussion paragraphs in which your findings are confirmed in other literature could be condensed to make room for other discussion points.

Response: Even with the additional discussion points, the paper still falls within the recommended word count.

5. The tie to the ERIC taxonomy and its refinements are important, as your study further refines what facilitation is. I'm wondering if you would be in the position to suggest further refinements to the ERIC taxonomy based on how facilitation "fits" as an implementation strategy? For example, should there be tiers of implementation strategies? If Perry's refinement includes this, it might be a point to emphasize. This may also tie into your discussion of the complexity of facilitation.

We agree that the tie to the ERIC taxonomy is important. Aside from supporting the refinements Perry et al. made (see p. 13, lines 10-14), we do not believe that our study suggests further refinements to ERIC.

6. Check spelling and flow in "contributions to literature"

We have edited the “Contributions to the literature” section (see p. 3, lines 8-18).

7. May consider justifying decision to not audio-record interviews

We added the justification for not recording debriefing interviews: “Due to the large amount of other qualitative data collected for the project, we did not have the resources to transcribe recordings of these interviews” (see p. 7, lines 17-19).

Please note that the semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed (see p. 7, lines 25-26).
8. The EF and IRF abbreviations are introduced in the methods, rather than in the introduction, and detract from comprehension of the paper. Since the main focus of the paper is to understand facilitator skills/competencies in general, the distinction isn't necessarily one that is important to the field so doesn't need to be established. It's rather for convenience/space. If space isn't a constraint, it would be more helpful to the reader to just spell out the abbreviation and refer to them as "internal facilitator" and "external facilitator."

We replaced the abbreviations, EF and IRF, with external facilitator and internal facilitator throughout the paper.

9. Check grammar line 45 of page 10

We had originally used the terms used by Harvey & Kitson to organize facilitation activities. We edited those to make them grammatically correct (see p. 12, lines 10-12).

10. Note distinction between ensure vs. insure

We replaced the word “insure” with the word “ensure” (see p. 3, line 18 and p. 17, line 17).

Sincerely,

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