Reviewer's report

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

Version: 0 Date: 23 Oct 2019

Reviewer: Shellie Ellis

Reviewer's report:

This is a nice paper that contributes to the understanding and development of facilitation as an implementation strategy, a critical need in the field of implementation science. It represents rigorous qualitative assessment over a long period of time in the context of a larger implementation study.

The categorization of skills groups is quite beneficial, and the skills descriptions are an immensely valuable asset to others trying to replicate facilitation, as they well encapsulate the actions facilitators do and should take to encourage behavior change.

The paper is well written and well justified. Most of my comments are about identifying or emphasizing the potential impact of these findings.

Substantive comments:

* 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.

* 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.

* 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.

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

My minor comments include:

* Check spelling and flow in "contributions to literature"
* May consider justifying decision to not audio-record interviews
* 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."
* Check grammar line 45 of page 10
* Note distinction between ensure vs. insure

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