

## **Author's response to reviews**

**Title:** The role of facilitation in implementation of research findings: a qualitative evaluation of facilitation experiences in the Veterans Health Administration

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# The role of “facilitation” in implementation of research findings: a qualitative evaluation of facilitation experiences in the Veterans Health Administration

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the reviewers’ feedback on our manuscript. Below we have responded to the comments of each and indicated the changes which we have made in response.

Reviewer	Comment	Response
General		We have shortened the title, i.e., removed the words ”key” and “the”
Lars Wallin	Role of ML as interviewee and researcher	We have inserted the following text on page 21 in the study limitations section:  <i>The dual role of ML as an interviewee and note taker was a potential source of bias; however a number of steps were taken to minimize this. For example, ML was interviewed first and took a mainly passive role in interviews. Furthermore, an iterative checking process was employed throughout the evaluation [see Table 3]; and a third person acted as a critical reader, challenging or affirming data collection as well as analysis processes and outcomes.</i>
	Lack of discussion re unsuccessful facilitation experiences.	The barriers related to the success of the facilitation role and other factors specifically related to lack of success are explored in the paper. However, future research may more explicitly ask participants to comment on critical incidents of success and ‘failure’ in their facilitation role.
	Facilitation as a distinct implementation intervention – difference in tone between paper and abstract.	We have amended the wording in the conclusion of the abstract to reflect the more open and suggestive text in the discussion section of the paper regarding facilitation as a distinct intervention.
	Author signs	Now consistent
Luciana Ballini	Approach	The rationale for the methods approach taken is covered in the paper and its limitations are discussed in the study limitations section. The authors feel that the approach taken was the most appropriate for the research aims and questions. We discuss issues of transferability in the paper.

<p>Main fundamental point:</p> <p>Facilitation is not an implementation intervention</p>	<p>(Original submission, Table 1: <i>Implementation intervention</i> is defined as a single method or technique to facilitate change and thereby adoption of best practice recommendations, for example, an opinion leader, electronic clinical reminder, or interactive education program.)</p> <p>Our view, supported by others’ work (included in the paper) is that facilitation can be viewed as such a method or technique and thus a potential implementation intervention – albeit one that is complex and multi-faceted.</p> <p>We also recognize in the paper that there is still work to be done to differentiate between facilitation and other change agent/project management roles. We did explicitly address project management, both in the Reflective Questions [see the additional file] and the findings, but we did not address consultation. In terms of the latter, it is of note that in the Thompson et al [18] concept clarification article, the authors note that facilitators are often “outside consultants.” There may also be a case of different ontology and terminology between us and the reviewer.</p> <p>We have reviewed the paper throughout and attempted to be clearer about related arguments through minor amendments [e.g., see page 4 under the PARIHS framework]– additionally in the discussion section [p.23], the following text has been included to specifically address the reviewer’s comments about facilitation and project management:</p> <p><i>Additionally there may be some overlap between facilitation and project management. While participants in this study viewed their facilitation role as distinct from a project management role, in reality there may be some blurring of role boundaries and tasks undertaken. According to the findings of this evaluation and those of Harvey et al [9], the distinction between a facilitation intervention and project management role seems to be one of intention and scope. A facilitation intervention is concerned with enabling the implementation of evidence into practice using a wide repertoire of skills and a flexible approach to working with individuals and teams in an enabling way. On the other hand, project management</i></p>
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		<p><i>is not necessarily about enabling the process of evidence implementation, is potentially more restrictive in its scope, remit, and enactment. More research is obviously needed to determine the specific differences between facilitation and project management roles.</i></p> <p>Clearly these issues feed into the larger research agenda re: facilitation and multiple other roles. We have thus added the following to Table 8's list of future study questions:</p> <p><i>What are the similarities of and differences between a facilitator role and a project manager, consultant, and other change agent roles?</i></p> <p>.</p>
	<p>Role of implementation researchers</p>	<p>We agree that the issue of facilitation as a distinct role played by 1-2 members of an implementation study team raises critical questions. As a result we have added the following to Table 8:</p> <p><i>How does being a member of an implementation study team affect the external facilitator role and project effectiveness?</i></p> <p><i>What aspects of the external facilitator study role must be replicated by clinical leadership when they plan to use the results of a successful implementation study?</i></p>
		<p>We would look forward to seeing the above types of issues being discussed in the 'open' part of the journal, given the related interpretations that can exist about facilitation until further in-depth study.</p>