Supplementary material 9: Definitions of realist evaluation terms

Context: elements of the backdrop of the programme (factors of context that play a determining role on outcomes, but are not written into the intervention). Context is important because generative mechanisms can only work if the circumstances are right. Contextual layers include individual, interpersonal, organisational and intra-structural. Examples of intra-structural setting include NHS culture of busyness, staff emotional labour and high levels of psychological distress, and the Francis Report. Organisational setting includes time running rounds, audience and Rounds characteristics (see *Chapters 7 and 8*).

Mechanisms: are usually hidden, are sensitive to variations in context, and produce effects / generate outcomes.[1](p368)[2] The mechanism is a combination of (i) the resources offered by the programme – in our case by Schwartz Rounds - and (ii) the responses from attendees and other actors to these resources which lead to outcomes. Examples of mechanism resource is the group setting providing an opportunity for panellists and audience members to tell their story to a group of colleagues, which results in a response of sparking recognition of shared experiences and feelings and the giving and receiving of help and encouragement to each other.

Outcomes: are any intended or unintended impacts and reported changes in individuals (cognitively-attitudes/beliefs or behaviourally), teams or organisational culture generated by the mechanisms of the programme which can be proximal, intermediate, or final.[3] Outcomes depend on both the mechanism and the context; mechanisms interact with their context, which is why a programme can generate 'x' outcomes in one setting and 'y' outcomes in another.[4] Examples of Rounds outcomes include increased empathy for self (intermediate), colleagues and patients (final), reduced isolation, staff support; and 'ripple effects'; intended or unintended outcomes of Rounds resulting in cultural change/changes in practice (see below).

Programme: is the intervention itself, in this case Schwartz Rounds in the UK.

Programme theory: describes how the intervention is expected to lead to its effects and in which conditions it should do so, which is tested and refined. An initial programme theory is revised as a result of the research evidence (see below).

Initial programme theory: may be based on previous research, knowledge, experience, and the assumptions of the intervention designers about how the intervention will work. Ours was developed using all these approaches before main data collection / analysis *(see Chapter 8)*.

Evidence informed programme theory: is developed after data analysis as a result of testing of, and revision to, the initial programme theory during data collection and analysis.

References

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