

IT-enabled Governance Structures in Health Care

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Health care is one of those industries where computerization and networking processes are proceeding very fast. At the same time, cost justification pressures are very high, and personnel resources turn scarce in many countries. Add to this the fine-tuned ethical dimension of delivering at least minimum service to all citizens regardless of their income. No wonder the industry is in a turbulent situation, where new ways of organizing activities are badly needed and emerging too.

The minitrack “IT-enabled Governance Structures in Health Care” focuses on the organization of the steering functions of health care. How does and should information and telecommunication technology affect them? Business process redesign is related to the issue, but governance structures are at a higher level both in importance and interest: business processes happen within the frames governance structures give. Governance structures are stable and slow to change.

The minitrack contains three papers. The paper “Pay-per-use’ Concept in Healthcare: A Grounded Theory Perspective” by Abdullah Akbar and Peter K. Jimack discusses the possibilities of outsourcing health care services. In addition to cost effectiveness, outsourced services may be the key in getting shared databases and repositories running. A central concept in their paper is that of “Pay-per-use”, which aims at lower fixed costs for participating organizations - this is a practical suggestion to assist in the global challenge of reducing costs of health care.

The paper by Thomas Lee Rodgers, Timothy Manning, Evan Anderson and Ming Yuan also addresses the critical issue of cost savings in health care. We Europeans too know that publicly financed projects (say through EU grants) easily run into crisis and even terminate as the original finance is running towards an end. Drawing on an example from Brazos Valley Telehealth Partnership they maintain that the sustainability issue of once started projects must be given explicit and intensive management attention.

The paper “Adopting new IT by learning in groups. Applying group learning theory for groupware implementation in a hospital: results of discourse analysis” by Tanya Bondarouk and Huub Ruël tackles the important and difficult question of introducing new information technology into health care organizations. Based on two case examples from the Netherlands, they propose that new system introduction can be considerably improved by fostering actions building a collaborative group learning atmosphere.

The issue of governance structures is a decisive one for any industry. These three papers are just a scratch on the plethora of practical problems and issues met in the health care industry in this aspect. As these papers do, we believe that research on the issue, based on sound theoretical frameworks and theories, should be intensified and published a lot more.