

When doctors lead organizational innovation: lessons from a clinical directorate in Portugal

Tiago Correia

T Correia, JL Denis

ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

Contact: tiago.correia@iscte.pt

Background

The need of improving health services has brought professional leaders into management positions as hybrid managers (HMs). There is much discussion about the relative autonomy of HMs and if they effectively improve health services. We focus on health care service controlled by HMs to provide evidence on if and how HMs contribute to organizational innovation.

Methods

The case study focused on a public hospital in Portugal, which was in the process of establishing a clinical directorate, in which doctors had managerial duties. Data collection comprised one year of observations complemented with 18 semi-structured interviews with all general managers in the hospital's board of directors and surgeons in the clinical directorate.

Results

Specific, medical-based work models were found where professionals enjoyed advantageous conditions: the HM was given full autonomy over clinical and financial procedures, also benefitting practicing surgeons. The HM was key to understanding practicing surgeons' performance, accountability and commitment through trust-based relations that sheltered from external scrutiny. General managers supported this as clinical performance and quality had improved. Emergent risks were linked to fragmentation among medical wards and growing stratification in medicine.

Conclusions

Policies concerned with the governance of health services have to consider professionals' interference at the workplace level. HM are key to understanding organizational innovation and other professionals' commitment and accountability; this calls for more policies oriented towards these players. Organizational innovation was achieved through professional-based interests combined with managerial criteria, which ultimately reinforced medical autonomy and authority.

Key messages:

- Increasing medical autonomy in connection with management may drive organizational innovation
- More policy attention on professional leadership can promote organization innovation