Making sense of management innovation in health care

Relevance
Rising health care costs due to new technologies and demographic developments make health systems no longer sustainable. Our vision on health and care has changed. Combinations of new organizational models (management innovation) and technologies may result in better health outcomes for lower costs. However, their implementation is complex. Multiple stakeholders need to collaborate in integrated care networks that comprise multiple interdependent components across the health care continuum. While their impact is expected to be significant, actually little is known on implementing management innovations (figure 1).

Case study
This case study explores perceptions of stakeholders involved in implementation of a management innovation, a pre- and postoperative cardiac rehabilitation program, in a Dutch university medical center (figure 2). In 2018 16 qualitative interviews were held with a representative selection of health-professionals and managers of the Thorax Center, Rehabilitation Center and UMC staff on their vision on innovation in health care, the innovation process and underlying change mechanisms, critical success factors and results (figure 3).

Results
Management innovations are considered complex, but increasingly necessary. It is observed that stakeholders have due to different backgrounds partial and different understandings of new integrated care concepts. To make the innovation happen, the different perceptions have to converge. This happens in acts of sense making between stakeholders during the innovation process (figure 4). Management innovation becomes merely an emerging bottom-up change process that starts with an intrinsic drive for better care and emerges from how people frame what they see, relate it to their vision and values and act upon it in interaction with others in the local context. The willingness, necessity and ability to change determine the pace (figure 5).

Implication
Innovation in health care is often imposed top-down and assumed to follow linear patterns. However this case study shows that innovation is a human, subjective, interactive, emerging process that, if aligned with vision, values and intentions of people, can bring different stakeholders together in new and complex concepts of integrated care.

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