

A living lab approach for studying workplace innovation in elderly care

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Abstract

The sustainability of health systems is under pressure from the sharp rise in the ageing population and a simultaneous reduction of public expenditures. Also the Flemish health care system (Belgium) is in need of a strategy for sustainability. In order to stimulate innovation in the domain of elderly care, the Flemish Government recently initiated an extensive, three-year, 'living labs' based program (in Dutch: 'Zorginnovatieruimte'). A call was launched in September 2012, inviting (groups of) stakeholders to submit their proposals for 'living lab' projects on innovative processes or products for elderly care. The selected projects will be made known in July 2013, and the program kicks off in September 2013. A 'living lab' is defined as a structured testing environment in which organizations can apply innovative technologies, products, services and concepts, in a real life setting. A scientific consortium of universities and university colleges is entrusted with the scientific supervision, support, monitoring and evaluation of the various 'living lab' projects. The consortium combines expertise in the field of innovation characteristics, target group characteristics and needs, social integration and participation of elderly people, societal and ethical issues, innovation context and inter-organizational cooperation, organizing care, funding and feasibility, technological standards and design rules, participative methods, and evaluation of complex interventions. The paper will first propose the multidisciplinary, methodological approach that is being developed to study and support the 'living labs' program. Subsequently, we focus on the analysis of workplace innovation in the various 'living labs'. Thirdly, indicators for monitoring and evaluating aspects of workplace innovation are defined at three levels: the intervention, the organization and the employee. Finally, we discuss how the 'living labs' methodology can be linked to action research, knowledge transfer and policy advice.

** KIO is an interuniversity consortium studying innovations in elderly care in Flanders (Belgium). The consortium consists of Mark Leys (OPIH-VUB), Ellen Gorus (GERO-VUB), Ezra Dessers & Geert Van Hootegem (CeSO-KUL), Marc Jegers (iCher), Patricia De Vriendt (Arteveldehogeschool), Bart Jansen (ETRO-VUB), Bart Mistiaen & Bart Grimonprez (HOWEST). The consortium is financed by the Institute for the Promotion of Innovation by Science and Technology in Flanders (IWT).*