Enhancing elderly care through technology adoption: A case study of the 'Anders Werken in de Zorg' project

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Purpose The growing aging population, coupled with a shrinking workforce in long-term care, poses a significant challenge. 'Anders Werken in de Zorg' (AWIZ) aims to provide better care and a pleasant working environment with reduced time and effort. The program focuses on addressing workforce challenges and enhancing client and employee satisfaction in the long-term care sector by supporting the implementation of technological innovations. In 2019, the Anders Werken in de Zorg project was launched in the West-Brabant region, with twelve elderly care organizations collaborating to collectively adopt and evaluate technological applications. This collaborative approach aims to prevent each organization from individually starting the implementation process, reinventing the wheel. In 2023, the AWIZ project expanded its initiative to 11 regions. Within the AWIZ project, Vilans, the expertise center for long term care, conduct research for the West-Brabant region into those technological solutions that can make healthcare more efficient, effective, and less burdensome for healthcare professionals. In the year 2023, the research focused on technologies such as hip airbags, medication dispensers, medical bed sheets, support stocking aids, exoskeletons, virtual reality applications, and bed sensors. **Method** The AWIZ project adopts a collaborative approach, allowing participating long-term care organizations to select, test and implement several technologies that align with their needs. When organizations are planning to implement a technology it is crucial to reflect on the vision of the organization as well as the technology. Vilans developed a Honeycomb model to support in this reflection process with the aim to implement technologies fitting the organization (Suijkerbuik et al, 2021)). This model supports organizations during the implementation of (new) technologies. Depending on the TRL level of the technology but also on the needs of the organizations the implementation process will go through the different phases exploring the fit of the technology within the organization. For each technology project, collaborative work sessions are organized. During these sessions, participating organizations exchange experiences regarding the implementation or testing process, fostering a valuable platform for shared learning. The suppliers of the technologies and innovations are also involved in those sessions. Simultaneously, an elaborate research plan is crafted based on Vilans' 'waardewaaier-methodiek' (social-cost benefit methodology) (Bierhoff et al, 2023; van Erp & Schuitemaker, 2022). This involves mapping out care pathways, creating impact maps, establishing measurement plans, and conducting surveys, interviews, observations, and measurements. The outcomes of this comprehensive process typically result in both tangible and intangible cost-benefit matrices. **Results and Discussion** The structured program, including workshops, received positive feedback for its efficacy in promoting collaborative learning. The work sessions facilitated extensive experience sharing. Also the collaboration with technology suppliers was highly beneficial, often these suppliers to accelerate their development process leading to improvement of the technology. Additionally, comprehensive reports and factsheets have been written for each of the researched technologies, offering in-depth insights into their implementation and impact. In essence, the Anders Werken project facilitated a quicker understanding of technological possibilities for all organizations involved, emphasizing the supportive role technology can play in long-term care. Ongoing attention is crucial to sustain employee enthusiasm for technology adoption in the long-term care sector. The success of the research in West-Brabant has gained significant interest, leading to requests for expansion of the research into Midden-Brabant. Looking ahead to 2024, follow-up research initiatives are planned, encompassing a selection of previously examined technologies and introducing new ones. The technologies chosen are based on the specific needs and preferences of the long-term care organizations involved. Whereas in previous years the focus lied on one technology, in 2024 a shift has taken place in which multiple technologies will be evaluated within one fitting theme.

References

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