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The "Health Care product's" Infliction on the Network of Health Care Service

J.-E. Gasslander^{1,2}, T. Engström² and Å. Wiklund³

¹Faculty of Technology and Society, Malmö University, SE-205 06 Malmö, Sweden (jeg@ts.mah.se)

²Department of Transportation and Logistics, Chalmers University of Technology, SE-412 96 Gothenburg, Sweden

³Facilities Management, Chalmers University of Technology, SE-412 96 Gothenburg, Sweden

ABSTRACT:

This paper cross-fertilises the experiences and knowledge from the health care sector with mechanical industries, thus creating on one hand synergetic effects and on the other hand crystallising important future areas of research and development work. The theoretical and practical frames of reference utilised are fetched from the authors' professional work as responsible for industrial product development activities, research and development of production system designs, and an architect of health care building facilities. The article comprises (1) sketching a background which recapitulates some general recognised facts regarding health care service in Sweden, particularly in the county of Dalarna. Thereafter (2) some practical and theoretical frames of reference are explained in accordance with the authors' earlier publications within the problem area of health care service and hospital designs. Thereafter (3) the meaning of the "health care product" is elaborated by means of defining two matrixes. One matrix is composed of the treatment-oriented and care-oriented organisations compared with the care and the treatment-oriented "health care product". The other matrix is composed of treatment-oriented and care-oriented employees compared with treatment-oriented and care-oriented patients. These matrixes are a way of modulating the discourse regarding the meaning of "the health care product" and its interconnection to hospital designs.

1 Background

In order to roughly sketch the background of the problem areas and insights touched upon in this paper the following question summarises the present state of the art concerning various aspects of hospital designs and health care service: "How may we practically meet this demand and change our overarching structure for health care service, including design of hospital designs in the future?" This question pinpoints the multifaceted dilemma of the health care sector in Sweden today, which is derived from a number of preconditions.

Firstly, the health care service provided to Swedish citizens has traditionally been regarded as a public responsibility financed by governmental taxes. Thus, in Sweden there exists a long tradition of organising the health care service in a context of the whole society. Even though the country in the last decade has witnessed a trend towards private alternatives, the public sector is – and will continue to be in the future – the main actor responsible for providing this service.

Secondly, contemplating a map of Sweden, for instance from the beginning of the 1990s, we discover that there existed about seventy general hospitals and seven university hospitals. In this specific period of time it was already obvious that a restructuring process was inevitable, owing to facts like uneven and successively changing population density, various medical advantages, etc., which consequently implied a strained economic situation for many small-scale operations.

2 Some practical and theoretical frames of reference

Below in this section the problem area of health care service and hospital designs is treated by means of a matrix, previously explained by Engström, Gasslander and Wiklund (2002), but in this case elaborated by yet another column comprising the "health care product" (to the left in e 1). The matrix compares theoretical and practical frames of reference in both mechanical industries and the health care sector.¹

The matrix is based on some of the authors' recent experiences concerning participation in the building design (and construction) processes of university buildings. Initially, the matrix underlines the need to transform the traditional public building facility (the "facility product") by means of established industrial product development methods (i.e. industrial product") into a more advanced product (Engström et al. 2001). Thereby it will also be possible to define yet another product for analytical purposes, namely the "health care product".

| | THE "INDUSTRIAL PRODUCT": | THE "FACILITY PRODUCT OF TODAY: | THE "HEALTH CARE PRODUCT |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Market characteristics: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Market research is mostly carried out. - For consumer products, strong competition exists - For professional products and complete production systems there is an oligopoly situation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delimited market research is carried out. - An oligopolistic situation, or most commonly a monopolistic situation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delimited market research is carried out - Monopolistic and omnipotent actor |
| Product development characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fast product development for consumer products. - Slower product development for professional products and commodities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slow product development since driving forces are mostly lacking - Rational and systematic methods for product development exist but are mostly not used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very slow product development due lack of driving force except political - Ethical driving forces go more for than treatment. - Systematic product development product definition is scarce. |
| Product verification characteristics: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very complex and time-consuming product verifications which are carried out regularly. - The user (customer) takes part directly in the verification process even in the early phases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verification processes comprising user (tenant) participation are rare. - The user (tenant) does not always take part in the early phases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verification process comprising large groups of users (patients and employees) are rare. - The user is seldom involved in the early design verification phase |

Figure 1. Some comparisons between the "industrial product", according to the tradition within the industry, and the "facility product" of today, according to practice within the building trade concerning market, product development and product verification characteristics according to Engström, Gasslander och Wiklund (2002). In addition the matrix also comprises the "health care product".

There are obvious similarities between industrial product development processes and the development of health care service (i.e. the development of the "health care product"). Both contain concentrated activities during a given period of time with a given set of objectives, and in which a number of persons with expert competencies develop a product with a given methodology in a structured way.

Professional personnel responsible for developing the "industrial product" carry a role which is similar to their counterparts in charge of the health care service development. This especially becomes evident when observing that the industrial product development processes comprise so-called user-friendly products. It ought to be noted that it is a layman who is the consumer of the health care service, which also holds true for the "industrial product" in the case of consumer products. In the authors' opinion one of the merits of applying established industrial product development methods to the health care sector is that this will legitimise the restructuring process discussed above.

¹ The approach of letting the health care sector being mirrored with the mechanical industry should consider that a new manufacturing paradigm actually is at hand, and in fact it might be appropriate to use this knowledge as reference for the restructuring of e.g. the health care service.

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It might also be fruitful to elaborate the "health care product of the future" in accordance with the so-called "service product". Of course, certain unique characteristics have to be considered like privacy, personal integrity, ethical circumstances, etc. (See e.g. Eriksson 1987 and 1988.) However, this type of argumentation underlines the need for a deeper understanding of how to interpret the term "health care product" which is touched upon below.

3 Elaborating on the meaning of the "health care product"

The specific meaning of the term "health-care product" may be interpreted in a number of ways. Below the authors have further elaborated on this specific matter by defining a matrix, composed of the treatment-oriented and care-oriented organisations compared with the care and the treatment-oriented "health care product" in order to mirror how health care and hospitals may be organised regarding e.g. layout, work organisation, choice and location of equipment, but also in order to reflect upon how the patient is treated (see figure 2). The matrix may function as a way of modulating the discourse even though this kind of reasoning might be perceived as somewhat controversial for some readers.

| | Treatment-oriented organisation: | Care-oriented organisation: |
|--|---|--|
| The caring-oriented "health care product" | A: - A more traditional, general hospital, which concentrates its resources on patients who require a more comprehensive spectrum of competence, knowledge and equipment. This specific hospital will serve as a hub within the overarching structure for health care service. | B: - Health care service not necessarily provided at any sort of hospital, such as health care service not always carried out on hospital premises. |
| The treatment-oriented "health care product" | C: - Health care service not necessarily provided at any sort of hospital, such as dialyse carried out in the patients' homes. | D: - Health care service provided at the various decentralised nodes within the overarching structure for health care service. |

Figure 2. A matrix is proposed above for the modulation of the discourse concerning the definition of the "health care product".

To put it more specifically:

- The treatment-oriented organisation is mainly focused on direct treatment of the patients' illnesses leading to e.g. the employees in most cases prioritising immediate and objective results in form of the patients' recovery.
- The caring-oriented organisation, on the other hand, regards a well human being in a somewhat broader sense than just direct treatment. In this case the employees e.g. will in most cases prioritise the caring process itself in the form of an enhanced relationship with the patients, extending beyond the period of time required for direct treatment.
- The treatment-oriented "health care product" provides a speedy recovery and consequently the employees e.g. will in most cases support the patients' returning to ordinary life as soon as possible. This implies the perception of health care service as any other service product provided elsewhere.
- The care-oriented "health care product" aims at providing the patients with a service which underlines their expectation of sympathy, i.e. a personal confirmation of improved life, while not necessarily demanding a complete recovery. The patients will usually

accept a dependence on other people for a rather longer period of time than is necessary for the direct treatment.

The matrix will consequently define the following combinations:

- The treatment-oriented "health care product" combined with treatment-oriented organisation (sector A in figure 2), a combination which most obviously may be transferable to the mechanical industries frames of reference, as has e.g. been the case in analysing surgery (Holmberg 1995). This combination will focus on a more direct treatment and the patients will accept a minimum of caring facilities in exchange for fast and efficient treatment.

- The treatment-oriented "health care product" combined with care-oriented organisation (sector B in figure 2), which is a health care service not always carried out on hospital premises. This may include palliative care and hospice. This orientation of organisation and "product" will be less productive from a direct treatment point of view but contains caring services and personnel with special attraction to these services.

- The care-oriented "health care product" combined with treatment-oriented organisation (sector C in figure 2), which also is a health care service not always carried out on hospital premises, e.g. dialyse carried out in the patients' homes.

- The care-oriented "health care product" combined with care-oriented organisation (sector D in figure 2) represents health care service provided to patients with e.g. chronic diseases and who need regular daily care.

| | Treatment-oriented employees at the hospital: | Care-oriented employees at the hospital: |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Care-oriented patients: | <p>- The (1) patients flow is focused, whereas the patients' need for continuity and care is neglected and (2) fluctuation in patients flow causes big uncertainties for the personnel. Thus leading to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - patients flow fast or very fast. - short lead times. - the patient's psychosocial needs due to e.g. uncertainties are often neglected and - high mental and physical load on personnel. <p>- One example is ambulance and intensive care, due to the focus on treatment.</p> <p>- This situation may benefit by comparisons with e.g. logistics operations within the mechanical industry.</p> | <p>- An activity where the patients flow is slow. The caring process will be emphasised and much time and resources will be spent with the patients. Thus leading to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lead time less important. - social contacts dominating professional time usage and - many patients "in stock" and rational ways of handling the "stock". <p>- Examples: Geriatric and psychiatric clinics.</p> <p>- This situation may benefit by comparisons with production planning and scheduling operations within the mechanical industry.</p> |
| Treatment-oriented patients: | <p>- An activity where the patient flow is fast. Short lead times and little resources spent on caring services. Thus leading to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reduced number of looping (queuing) patients. - personnel competencies focused on treatment and - little social and administrative contacts between patients and staff. <p>- One example is surgery organisations in large hospitals.</p> <p>- This situation may benefit by comparisons with e.g. Just-In-Time principles and low stock of products in circulation used within the mechanical industry.</p> | <p>- The patient flow is slow, whereas patients expect a fast flow. Thus leading to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - too many patients "in stock" and patients are looping (queuing). - patients expect fast flow short lead times, and few revisits; and - high mental load on both employees and patients. <p>- One example is primary hospitals with social ambitions and expectations.</p> <p>- This situation may benefit by comparisons with traditional maintenance operations within the mechanical industry.</p> |

Figure 3. The matrix above exemplifies some typical activities within the traditional, general hospital regarding the interface in-between the patient and the employees at the hospital.

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To carry this discourse further: Along the lines of the matrix presented in figure 3 it is also possible to illuminate some characteristics and exemplifications of the interface in-between the patients and the employees at the hospital providing the health care service by defining a new matrix composed of treatment-oriented and care-oriented employees compared with treatment-oriented and care-oriented patients.

In short, the proposed matrix will for instance modulate the discourse specifically regarding how to interpret the term "health care product" which, if correctly communicated, in turn will facilitate an acceptance by both the patients and the employees, i.e. it will crystallise whether or not expectations between patients and employees are at hand.

This matrix takes the more traditional, general hospital as a point of departure. It also exemplifies some analogies with the mechanical industry. Within this industry a sharp borderline between maintenance and manufacturing activities is at hand (i.e. maintenance means continuous service and preservation of equipment and other facilities, while manufacturing deals with manufacturing of products). These activities are usually regarded as specific and different activities which call for quite different organisations and employees' competencies.

In general this restructuring may be interpreted as follows: Instead of a polarised network comprised of a few number of general hospitals, it is a network transforming into a larger variety of small- and large-scale nodes and functions in which one of the nodes provides to the needs of specialised health care service. This node, represented by the more traditional, general hospital will interchange health care service and patients with the "nearby-hospitals" and other nodes such as family doctors and homes of the patients.

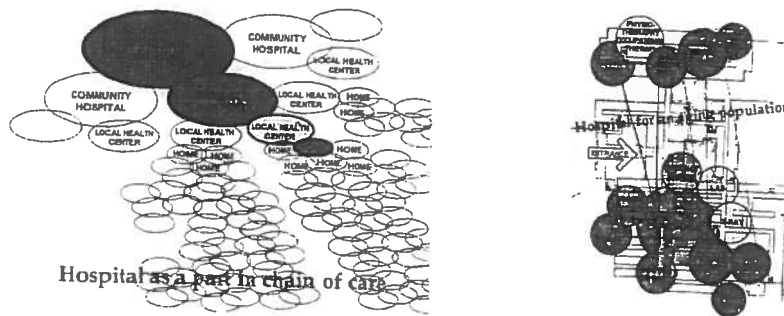


Figure 4. To the right, the restructuring of the overarching structure for health care service will create a new type of network comprising various types of new nodes, which in some cases will fulfil somewhat non-traditional functions. To the left, restructuring of overarching structure for health care service will influence the hospital design. For example, more traditional, general hospitals will be transformed into a number of more autonomous and complete small-scale organisations focused on certain medical specialities.

4 Conclusions and final comments

In conclusion the frames of reference brought forward in this article have been elaborated by means of sketching a background which recapitulates some general recognised facts regarding health care service. Thereafter some practical and theoretical frames of reference were explained in accordance to the authors' earlier publications within the problem area of health care service and hospital designs. And these frames of reference were then used as a basis for elaboration on the meaning of the "health care product".

For instance, the typology of "the zone-plan hospital" versus "the campus-plan hospital" is not sufficient to link the spectra of future hospital designs to their respective functions in the future overarching structure.

In addition, the modulations of the meaning of hospital designs (i.e. various types of master plans) will include a number of more autonomous and complete small-scale organisations,

focused on the concentration of certain medical specialities, such as cardiology, neurology and orthopaedics in various types of centres (Wiklund 1996 and 2001) in a manner that has only been vaguely hinted at in this article and which is even less recognised in practice. Future research and development work within the problem area of health care service and hospital designs ought to comprise a typology for such designs.

For example, it ought to be noted that patients today do not have much influence on the and patient-centred care (Adams, et al. 1998; Segesten 1997). Thus the restructuring of the overarching structure for health care service including hospital designs will probably not be based solely on traditional competencies and specialities already at hand within the health care sector; external insight will most likely also prove to be of significance. This has been the case in the restructuring of the mechanical industry where social science, by means of educational training and work sociology, has proved to master the key expertise required for reforming an industrial icon, the assembly line (see e.g. Medbo 1999).

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