

The pandemic as initiator for change: Findings from the conceptual phase of a User Experience pilot in a University Hospital.

Context:

The disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to bring change, of different kinds, to healthcare systems. The literature examines the expected changes; however, few investigate the circumstances through which change happens. This study presents the findings of the conceptual phase of a User Experience (UX) pilot study, which involves staff testing equipment prior to procurement, in a university hospital in Belgium. The aim is to disentangle the circumstances for this UX pilot to emerge, to better understand how the pandemic situation led to change and how an interprofessional shared decision-making process is conceptualised.

Methods:

Overall, the single longitudinal case study will consist of four data collection points over a two-year period to follow the pilot project from its conception stage to the final outcome. The aim of this first phase of data collection was to understand why and how this UX pilot had come into existence at this particular point in time. Therefore, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the persons (n=5) responsible and/or associated in the conceptual phase of the user experience pilot. The personnel interviewed included the hospital managing director, the deputy managing director, the head of the public procurement service, the quality and provider logistician and the senior head nurse. The interviews transcripts were coded and analysed in Maxqda software using an inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Results:

Our findings show that the UX pilot materialised as a side effect of a collaboration the pandemic brought about between the logistician and the senior head nurse. The collaboration happened as a result of the equipment shortage of the first wave and continues until this day. It allowed for knowledge and information transfer between the medical and logistical departments, which also brought to the fore the distance between the logistical processes and the healthcare workers. The UX pilot is seen as a means to include staff in the decisions concerning the equipment purchases, to give them a sense of responsibility and of involvement. However, it is not clear how much weight the results of the tests will have on the overall decision-making process, nor how hospital staff will respond to such tests.

Discussion:

The pandemic has exposed difficulties within healthcare systems and struggles faced by healthcare workers. Change is expected to happen, but it is important to study these transformations from their initiation to comprehend the underlying thought processes and understand the sense of the change and the potential impact. In the university hospital, the pandemic led to a new collaboration between two departments and through this collaboration, and the lived experience of the pandemic, the UX pilot was put into action. The idea of UX testing was not new, yet it had never been put into action prior to the pandemic. As such, the findings offer an insight into how change

came into effect through the pandemic, what was transformed by the pandemic, and it gives the possibility to think about change in a broader organisational sense.