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How to develop participatory research methods to assess health information management needs of families with small babies?

There is a growing understanding and a body of knowledge in information systems research and medical informatics giving evidence that information systems development and use in healthcare organisations, in order to be successful, should not focus only on technical aspects but should be context-situated and take into account factors related to the political, social and cultural environment of the organisation (see e.g. Lorenzi et al. 1997, Kaplan 1997, Kaplan et al. 2001, Markus 2002).

The health information systems research unit in the University of Kuopio has been developing for several years practical activity driven methods in order to combine work development with information systems design, drawing on activity theory, developmental work research and participatory design (e.g. Korpela et al. 1998, Korpela et al. 2004, Häkkinen and Korpela 2006).

Currently, the unit is involved in the implementation of a research project called "My Wellbeing" with several other universities in Finland, with the aim of developing a personal e-health tool for the use of all citizens. In the project the experience gained by the research unit so far will be taken further: the focus will turn from work and information systems development within health organisations to the development of health and well-being of individual families outside formal organisations. One of the intended beneficiary groups involved in the first phase of the research are families expecting a baby or living with small babies. An important step in the development of this new electronic tool is to find out what the health information management needs of these families are.

In my presentation I would like to report and discuss of the process of developing a suitable participatory method that would best fit in assessing the health information management needs of this specific group. The methodological development is based on several phases, such as literature review, expert interviews, pilot testing of the methods, reviewing the case context and participating groups, thinking of the topics to be discussed with the families etc. The aim of the presentation is to contribute to the methodological development of context sensitive information management needs assessment, which is an important step in any ICT tool development.

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