

Are doctors really resistant to becoming leaders?



The work of a doctor often involves managing a care team or coordinating teams. However, medical schools train their students to be medical specialists, often not providing formal training for future doctors to learn **essential leadership skills** such as how to lead a team and how to resolve conflict.

A new study, led by Prof. Marco Sartirana, of [Centre for Research on Health and Social Care Management, Bocconi University](#), provides important insights into creating healthcare centaurs, half doctors and half managers. "The development of these "hybrid" roles is an interactive process," says Prof. Sartirana, who also cites that an effective support network is key to helping doctors become good leaders.

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The study, published in the journal *Public Management Review*, says the reason many hospital doctors around the world struggle to make that transformation into "hybrids" is not because they are resistant to change, but due to the lack of effective support from the organisation. Where professionals who have adequate competence and motivation are effectively supported, according to Prof. Sartirana, we witness successful transformations. Doctors are thus able to become familiar with the [new management role](#), give it meaning, and legitimise it in the professional community.

The drive towards the managerialisation of doctors in top roles does not distort their job and professionalism, because it depends on the need to cope with social changes that have transformed the attitude of patients. Today it is necessary to work – and teach how to work – in **clinical teams**. It is also important to measure health outcomes to meet the expectations of citizens, who are increasingly searching the quality of a hospital or department before choosing it. And in this the key responsibility is played by doctors in top positions, because – as happens in any professional organisation – clinicians respond first of all to those colleagues who have clinical authority and hold leadership positions.

To learn more about the organisational actions that promote this kind of transformation among doctors, Prof. Sartirana and his colleagues analysed the success story of a large university hospital in the Netherlands. The research team identified these key areas of action that support the transformation process.

- **Healthcare professionals must have decision-making autonomy** and a budget to manage ("if the doctor is to become also a manager, he must be allowed to act as a manager")
- They must be surrounded by quality managerial profiles (for example, the head of HR of the hospital analysed had held the same role in one of the largest private companies in the Netherlands)
- They should work in teams and receive feedback from [qualified individuals from other professions](#) (in the Dutch case, the medical department director works in a collegial body which includes a nursing director, a research director and a financial director)
- They should be able to carry out adequate **management training** and have access to external coaches and fellow mentors who have held the same position in the past.

Source: Bocconi University

Image credit: Pixabay

Reference: Sartirana M, Currie G, Noordegraaf M (2018) Interactive identity work of professionals in management: a hospital case study. Public Manag Rev., 1 DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2018.1549269

Published on : Tue, 12 Feb 2019