

Leadership Saves Lives Evidence Brief: Measuring Organizational Culture

The Problem: Organizational culture is fundamental to achieving high performance. However, aside from measures of patient safety culture, no measure of organizational culture has been widely endorsed in the medical literature.

The Response: We sought to develop and test a scale for assessing organizational culture in the context of hospital efforts to reduce 30-day risk-standardized mortality for patients with acute myocardial infarction. The resulting 31-item scale revealed five distinguishable domains of organizational culture: (1) learning environment, (2) psychological safety, (3) commitment to the organization, (4) senior management support, and (5) time for improvement efforts. The scale demonstrated a high level of construct validity, internal consistency, convergent validity. The scale was feasible for implementation in the hospital setting, and detected statistically significant variability across hospitals.

Use of the tool to promote reflection and improvement

As part of the Leadership Saves Lives intervention study, we administered the 31-item scale to all members of each of the 10 hospitals' guiding coalition using a web-based survey platform. The tool was effective in identifying variation and changes over time in coalitions with as few as 15-20 members.

As a starting point for dialogue, results of the survey were reflected back to the members of the guiding coalition in workshops at the start of each project year. We presented the coalition's average overall culture score, as well as average scores for each of the 5 domains. We also presented the LSL-wide average (weighted average across all 10 participating hospitals) as a reference point to facilitate interpretation.

As the results were reflected back to each coalition, participants were asked to reflect on the extent to which the results were surprising to them. The conversation revealed that most participants felt that the results "fit" their experiences, and some gave concrete examples. In our experiences, participants who were surprised by less positive results tended to be more senior physicians and administrators, revealing an opportunity for facilitated dialogue to share perspectives across levels of hierarchy and power. In follow-up sessions, each coalition selected one domain of culture (usually their weakest) on which to focus through an experiential learning exercise, as well as throughout their work during the LSL intervention.

In this toolkit

Interested in measuring culture in your team or unit? The LSL toolkit includes a number of resources:

- List of survey items by domain
- Survey tool for adaptation and use
- Excel template for data management and analysis
- PowerPoint template for debrief with your coalition

Reference: Bradley EH, Brewster AL, Fosburgh H, Cherlin EJ, Curry LA. Development and Psychometric Properties of a Scale to Measure Hospital Organizational Culture for Cardiovascular Care. *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*. 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.116.003422>

