

# 2012 Study: Quality Structures and Operations

In 2012, Vizient sought to explore whether the **internal structures, operations, and leadership of quality departments** within academic medical centers (AMCs) served as a distinguishing factor for top-performing institutions. Building on earlier studies that highlighted leadership and culture as performance drivers, this analysis focused specifically on how quality teams were organized, staffed, and integrated into the broader hospital framework.

A survey was distributed to **75 academic medical centers**, targeting key functions and characteristics of **performance improvement departments**. The objective was to understand whether structural attributes of these departments played a measurable role in elevating institutional performance.

## Key Findings

### 1. Unified leadership over quality and safety functions

Most respondents indicated their quality and safety functions were consolidated under a single leader, ensuring streamlined oversight and strategy.

### 2. Hybrid organizational models

The most common structure was a mixed model—combining centralized oversight with decentralized execution, allowing for both strategic alignment and local adaptability.

### 3. Staffing levels not correlated with performance

Contrary to expectations, there was no direct relationship between the number of staff in performance improvement departments and a hospital's placement in the Vizient Quality and Accountability rankings.

## Conclusion

While this study did not uncover any breakthrough structural models or staffing strategies that predicted high performance, it reaffirmed a foundational principle from Vizient's earlier research: **a persistent, organization-wide focus on patient care remains a defining feature of top performers**.

The study also emphasized that **organizational design alone is not the differentiator**—but rather **how effectively quality leaders and structures are integrated into the broader culture and mission**. This insight supports the ongoing evolution of quality improvement strategies that are aligned, embedded, and purpose-driven across all levels of the organization.

Learn more about Vizient's work around [top performance](#).