

2010 Study: Better understanding of necessary capabilities to accelerate performance

To deepen insights from Vizient's 2005 study on top-performing academic medical centers (AMCs), this follow-up study focused on organizations that **improved their Vizient Quality and Accountability rankings by 20 or more positions**, moved into the **top 20**, and sustained that performance for at least **two years**. These AMCs were compared to institutions that remained in the **middle quartile** of rankings.

Key findings

This study reaffirmed the original five characteristics of high-performing organizations (from 2005), but also uncovered **two new drivers of sustained improvement**:

1. Expanded leadership scope

While the original study emphasized the CEO's role, this analysis revealed that leadership success hinges on a strong, cohesive senior leadership team—a collaborative coalition that includes not just the CEO, but executive leaders and the board. The power lies in aligned leadership, shared purpose, and coordinated action at the top.

2. Elevated role of quality and safety leaders

As quality metrics grew more complex, top-performing AMCs appointed dedicated subject matter experts in quality and safety. These leaders:

- Were empowered and supported by senior leadership.
- Focused on a narrow, actionable set of priorities.
- Acted as coaches and facilitators, enabling localized implementation of improvement efforts.

Conclusion

This study reinforces that **leadership remains foundational**—but it must be distributed, strategic, and inclusive of both executive teams and empowered quality leaders. The findings underscore the **importance of alignment, focus, and local activation** to move from mid-level performance into and sustain top-tier status.

These insights provide Vizient with an enhanced foundation to continue supporting members in their quality improvement journeys and to further investigate the evolving dynamics of high-performing academic medical centers.

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