

Quantifiable Performance Improvements Based on Cultural Transformation at a Major Hospital

Quantifiable cultural transformation at one of the Top 100 hospitals in the United States elevates employee and patient care, and other measures to astounding levels of performance.

In 1997, the board members of The Methodist Hospital in Houston, Texas committed to revitalizing the mission of the organization with a renewed focus on creating a spiritual caring environment, and they wanted to make it measurable. Achieving this goal became a truly transforming exercise for all facets of the hospital's operations. Using Richard Barrett and Associates (RBA) values-based Cultural Transformation Tools® (CTT), The Methodist Hospital has experienced an unprecedented cultural change that is bringing its vision of spiritual caring to reality – with quantifiable benefits to employee satisfaction, patient care, health and safety, and the bottom line.

Initiating a cultural journey at a large, complex, urban hospital

Rated as one of the “Top 100” hospitals in the United States, The Methodist Hospital is a Christian organization established by the United Methodist Church. This four-hospital system in the Houston area has over 9,000 employees, including hospital and corporate staff. As a faith-based hospital, the concept of spiritual caring has always been an integral part of its existence and operations.

According to Cindy Vanover, Project Director of Spiritual and Values Integration, defining the difference between one's perception of spiritual caring and the reality is something that is not easily measured. “How can you know if you have a spiritual environment of caring?” she asks. “What does it look like? We had come up with a mission statement. But how do you measure its impact? If you can't measure it, then you don't really know if it exists. That's when we started looking for a way to measure it.”

Measure culture to assess alignment between mission, values and day-to-day work

In 2001, The Methodist Hospital began a more “formalized” cultural transformation and values assessment exercise, beginning with the establishment of five core values under the acronym ICARE (Integrity, Compassion, Accountability, Respect and Excellence). RBA's Cultural Transformation Tools were then used to conduct the first value survey. “We felt the tools would provide a baseline to understand where we were versus our mission statement and core values,” explains Vanover. “It gave us an idea of how people at the hospital saw the ICARE values and demonstrated them in their work...or not.”

Words create worlds: unlock the meaning of values to support aligned thinking and action

The value survey provided quantifiable mapping of the gaps that existed between personal, current and desired cultural values. While this provided an all important baseline, the real value says Vanover is that the results from the survey provided a tangible path they could follow. “Once the first value survey was done, the next step was understanding what to do about it. There is no point measuring something if you don't do anything with the information you are given. The words selected by survey participants have special meaning. We need to unlock that meaning, share it with all parts of the hospital so common understanding and definitions emerge. Collaboration on values-based behaviours and attitudes, as well as performance benchmarks, gives clear focus and direction to ensure alignment.”

“While it’s easy to implement change where there is a close match between personal and desired cultural values, the real challenge is working on those areas where they don’t match,” she adds. “Working towards matching values is critical. Where a person’s values match your organization’s, you have a happier, more productive environment. Where they are exceedingly different, people are miserable.”

From orientation to retirement to impeccable patient care: Entrenching values into the culture

Following the results of the first value survey, The Methodist Hospital began developing programs to integrate further the five core values into the hospital’s value system. This included the creation of training programs on the core values for all staff – an initiative that continues to be part of all new employee orientation.

Extensive effort was put into clarifying and integrating definitions of the core values for the different units within the operation. This entailed a workgroup commitment process in which every unit under the leadership of its manager, engaged in team meetings devoted to generating value definitions. Posters were created for team members to include specific behaviors in their daily work life that would demonstrate that value.

Respect: What does it really mean and look like according to all employees?

“It was a way to help them – and us - understand what our values really looked like,” says Vanover. “How would you know respect was there, for example? We realized that every unit had its own personality, so what demonstrates respect for a biomedical engineer for example may not be the same as for a nurse or an accounts payable person. We wanted individual teams to come up with their own agreed upon behavior plan to demonstrate their commitment to each value.”

Entrenching cultural transformation an ongoing process

Since the first value survey, The Methodist Hospital revisits the process annually using the CTT system. With each iteration of the survey, the hospital can not only monitor improvements in the cultural value gaps, but also drill deeper into specific departmental issues as the project evolves.

“CTT is the measurement tool we use to create dialogue,” says Vanover. It gives words that people can use to describe their reality. Words that can lead to a stronger mutual understanding. But the process never ends. Even though we are seeing amazing alignment at the overall level, some individual units can have unique problems. Sometimes you find two identical units on the same floor can generate completely different results. Now we can take the results and go to those units to help generate dialogues and get to the core of what may be wrong and find ways to fix that.”

In 2003 and 2004, the hospital engaged RBA’s trainers to deepen and broaden the integration of the seven levels of consciousness model throughout the system and help ensure buy-in, explain the program and integrate the values. The Methodist Hospital has now completed four annual value surveys that continue to show progress in the alignment of personal, current and desired cultural values. Richard Barrett says “the commitment by The Methodist Hospital to a values-based culture is truly exemplary. The annual assessment continues show a strong values alignment that improves year by year. We are proud to have been part of this success story.”

Happy employees = happy patients and other tangible benefits

Now that the process has become an integral part of the hospital’s culture, Vanover says the board members and leaders have seen a number of tangible benefits. These include improved worker and patient health and safety, happier staff, reduced number of errors, and better access to training talent

– all of which can translate in cost savings and greater efficiency. In addition, the survey results are used to conduct behavioral-based interviewing to ensure that new hires are aligned with the cultural values.

“The survey helps us identify those individuals that embody the values. These are the ones who can be an invaluable resource in helping train others. After all, management doesn’t always speak the same language. One may be better than another at initiating or promoting cultural transformation. In addition, any research will tell you that if employees are happy, so are the patients. There is a very strong correlation between the two. And that ultimately translates into bottom line benefits.” One of the impacts of the values initiative has been to reduce turnover from 24 percent in 2002 to 15 percent in 2004, a 38% decline. Vacancy rates went from 6.7 percent to 3.1 percent over the same period.¹

An ongoing journey driven from the top

According to Vanover, the process of values integration is never completed. Future plans include additional coaching of managers and directors based on the Values Survey drilldown, continuation of aligning HR processes with values for the entire employee life cycle, and engaging physicians, medical students and residents.

Vanover says the key to the success is the buy-in of the executive team. “Not only do our employees take part every year, but so do our board of directors and CEO council. They continue to provide budget support and encourage everyone to take part, including participating in new employee orientation sessions. People have a keen radar and can tell the difference between slapping up a poster as part of a public relations program and what people really care about and mean.”

This Top 100 Hospital in the United States is not only attracting patients, The Methodist Hospital is also attracting leaders from other hospitals around the world to understand a new cure for traditional ills that deeply challenge many health care organizations and the entire system.

¹ Workforce Management, *True Believers at Methodist Hospital* by Mathew Gilbert, <http://www.workforce.com/section/09/feature/23/94/27/index.html>