

TRANSFORMING HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS USING THE HPO FRAMEWORK

Practical Research at Three Healthcare Organizations









Improving the quality of healthcare organizations has become increasingly important over the past decades. Three healthcare organizations (nursing home care and home healthcare organizations) sought frameworks that could assist them in enhancing their quality and chose to implement the HPO Framework. Over a period of three years, HPO diagnoses were conducted within these organizations. This provided insights into their status on the path to high performance and highlighted areas that needed attention to further assist them on their journey. Based on an analysis of the transformation process, the experiences and lessons learned from each organization were identified and summarized in this article.

The article presents the HPO Framework as an effective tool for quality improvement in the healthcare sector. Written by experts from the HPO Center and executives from healthcare organizations, the article offers insights into how the framework aids in identifying areas for improvement and in developing strategies for organizational growth. The article is particularly interesting for healthcare professionals and managers aiming for continuous improvement and efficiency in their organizations. It is based on practical research and provides concrete examples and results.

This article is a translation and summary of: de Waal, A., Mollema, E., Willemstein, E., Slagter, I., Schreurs, M., Hodes, M., and Boudewijn, P. (2023), "Achieving High Performance in Healthcare organizations: A Longitudinal Perspective," Paper presented at the British Academy of Management 2023 Conference, Brighton, September 5-6.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

-  Adopting the HPO Framework can greatly benefit healthcare organizations, as demonstrated by the case studies. It aids in identifying areas of improvement and developing strategies to bolster dynamic capabilities and organizational competencies.
-  Regular HPO Diagnoses are crucial to assess progress and adapt strategies for continuous improvement. Results can help determine the focus areas for growth, be it fostering better leadership, improving collaboration, or boosting organizational commitment.
-  The role of HPO Coaches is critical in the transformation process. They disseminate HPO knowledge, inspire employees and managers, and foster cooperation. However, the number of HPO Coaches and their position within the organization should be adequately chosen to prevent delays and ensure effectiveness.
-  The HPO transformation process must be context-specific and integrated with daily activities, making it more personal and less of an added burden.
-  Patience is essential in the transformation process. Change takes time, and people need room to adapt to new ways of thinking and working.
-  Despite challenges like rising healthcare costs and legislative changes, the HPO framework can help manage such external factors effectively and ensure a proactive, future-oriented approach.
-  The transformation results in more focused and professional organizations, less hierarchical and more decentralized management, enhanced inter-departmental cooperation, and improved client focus, making the organizations better workplaces.
-  It's beneficial to incorporate the HPO transformation as part of a larger quality improvement process, rather than a standalone initiative. This approach resonates better with healthcare professionals and integrates smoothly into their regular work.



Introduction

Improving the quality of healthcare organizations has never been more crucial. Factors like demographic developments put increasing pressure on these establishments to up their game in terms of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and the quality of care provided.

Concurrently, political and budgetary challenges make quality improvement a daunting task. Therefore, these organizations have been on a quest for frameworks that can help enhance their quality by bolstering their dynamic capabilities and organizational competencies.

Historically, the emphasis has been primarily on improving patient care to create high-performance healthcare, with little attention given to enhancing the quality of the organizations themselves. A deep dive into the challenges facing low-performing and failing healthcare organizations reveals that the issues are mostly organizational. These include weak leadership, a narrow focus on financial targets and penalty avoidance, poor organizational culture, a lack of a cohesive mission, and dysfunctional external relationships.

However, recent findings suggest that the performance of healthcare organizations can be positively impacted by the quality of the management practices they employ. The article introduces the High-Performance Organisation (HPO) Framework, a holistic tool for healthcare organizations to identify, develop, and strengthen the management practices and capabilities needed for quality improvement.

The HPO Framework

The HPO Framework is a proven structure that organizations can use to evaluate their performance and identify areas that need strengthening for sustained improvement. The framework emerged from an extensive review of high-performance publications and a worldwide survey involving over 3,200 respondents. This rigorous process led to the identification of five key HPO factors: Continuous Improvement and Renewal, Openness and Action-Oriented, Management Quality, Employee Quality, and Long-term Orientation.

The HPO research establishes a direct and positive link between these five HPO factors and competitive performance. To evaluate an organization's HPO status, an HPO Diagnosis is carried out involving the participation of both management and employees. The result of the diagnosis highlights the areas that need improvement for the organization to become a high-performance one.



Practical Research

The HPO framework was applied to three Dutch healthcare organizations as part of a larger study implementing the Nursing Home Care Quality Framework: Jah-Jireh Woonzorg, RijnWaal Zorggroep, and RST Zorgverleners.

Jah-Jireh Woonzorg is a foundation providing care for elderly and needy Jehovah's Witnesses. Originally a volunteer initiative, Jah-Jireh saw the HPO Framework as an opportunity to further develop and professionalize its organization.

RijnWaal Zorggroep, a significant player in nursing home care, neighbourhood nursing, and dementia case management, employed the HPO framework as part of a restructuring process to allow professionals to focus on their strengths and foster collaboration among all disciplines.

RST Zorgverleners, a reformed care organization, adopted the HPO framework to inspire and learn from experts and other organizations. This provided structure and content to become a learning organization, focusing on aspects that are important for their growth.

These practical applications of the HPO framework illustrate how the model can be leveraged to professionalize and improve the quality of healthcare organizations, ultimately leading to better patient outcomes.

Research results

Our first High Performance Organization (HPO) Diagnosis in 2019, across three nursing home care organizations, revealed that they were 64-70% on the way to becoming HPO, nearly on par with the average Dutch nursing homes (66%). However, to reach the HPO standard of 85% and higher, these organizations need to concentrate on improving certain HPO factors.



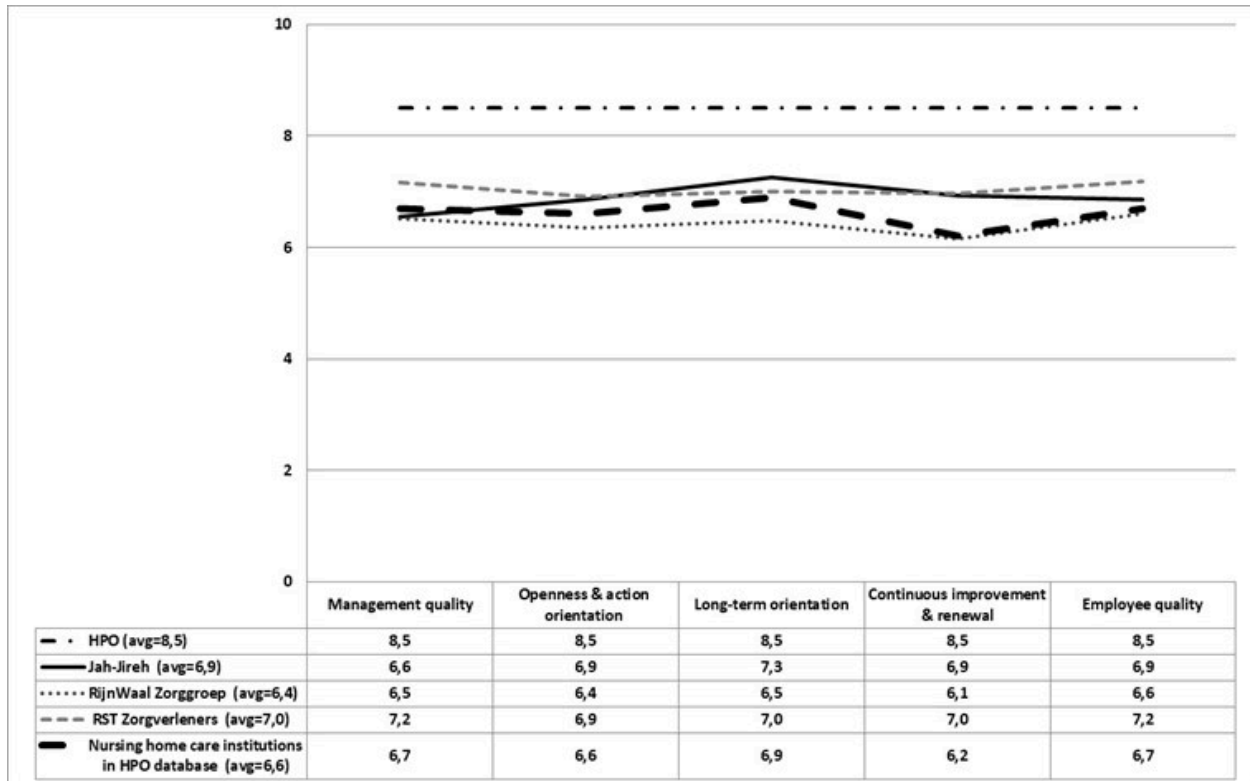


Figure 1: Results of the first HPO diagnosis at the three healthcare organizations

These were determined through semi-structured interviews with managers and employees.

For Jah-Jireh Woonzorg, the focus areas are:

- Enhancing leadership and management styles that foster learning and autonomy rather than micromanaging.
- Transitioning from an attitude of 'it's just work' to collaboratively improving the organization. Management should encourage proactive behaviour and eagerness to learn among employees.
- Improving the alignment of mutual expectations and engaging in more open dialogues to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty.

For RijnWaal Zorggroep, the areas of improvement are:

- The management team should strive to act as a cohesive unit, communicating consistent messages to employees.



- Increase collaboration across locations through joint consultations and standardised processes.
- Improve managerial competence, specifically coaching skills, to empower employees and cultivate strong bonds.
- Enhance employees' connection to the organization and encourage them to 'go the extra mile.' Key matters such as RijnWaal's vision, financial insight, and the importance of teamwork should be discussed.

For RST Zorgverleners, the improvement areas include:

- Boosting organizational commitment by fostering a sense of connection with the RST organization among employees.
- Encouraging internal collaboration, including team consultation and participation in learning sessions and training.
- Strengthening the learning process to improve job satisfaction and organizational performance.

Post these evaluations, the organizations started addressing these points. They appointed HPO Coaches from within the organization to lead the transformation. These coaches spread HPO knowledge, inspired employees and managers, promoted inter-location cooperation, and led the creation of the HPO Action Plan, which prioritized interventions related to the HPO attention points. This internal approach aimed to make the transformation feel more personal and motivate the employees.

The second HPO Diagnosis (2022)

The third part of the study discussed the second High Performance Organization (HPO) Diagnosis that took place three years after the first one, delayed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This diagnosis aimed to assess the progress of the three nursing home care organizations: Jah-Jireh Woonzorg, RijnWaal Zorggroep, and RST Zorgverleners.



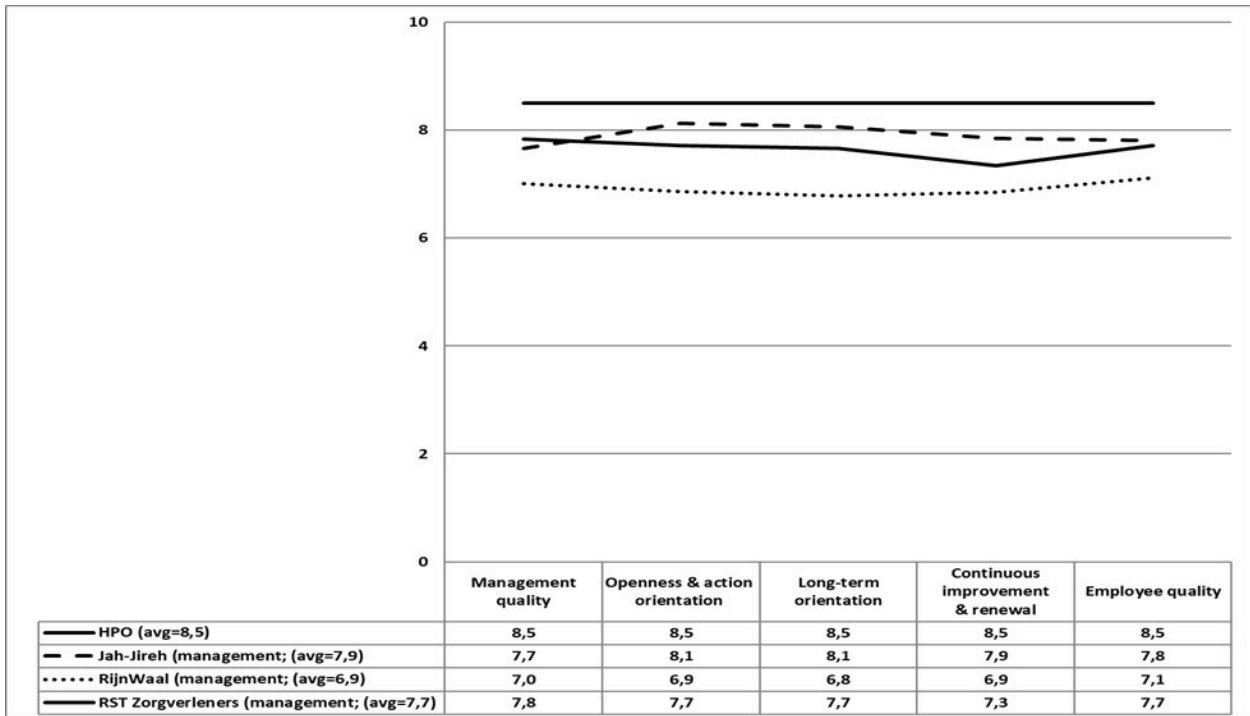


Figure 2: Results of the second HPO diagnosis at the healthcare organizations (for management)

For the second diagnosis, only the managers at RST Zorgverleners participated due to the low response from employees during the first diagnosis. Despite significant challenges such as rising healthcare costs due to the aging Dutch population, ongoing cost reduction pressure, increasing legislation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased staff turnover, all three organizations managed to increase their HPO scores modestly over the three-year period.



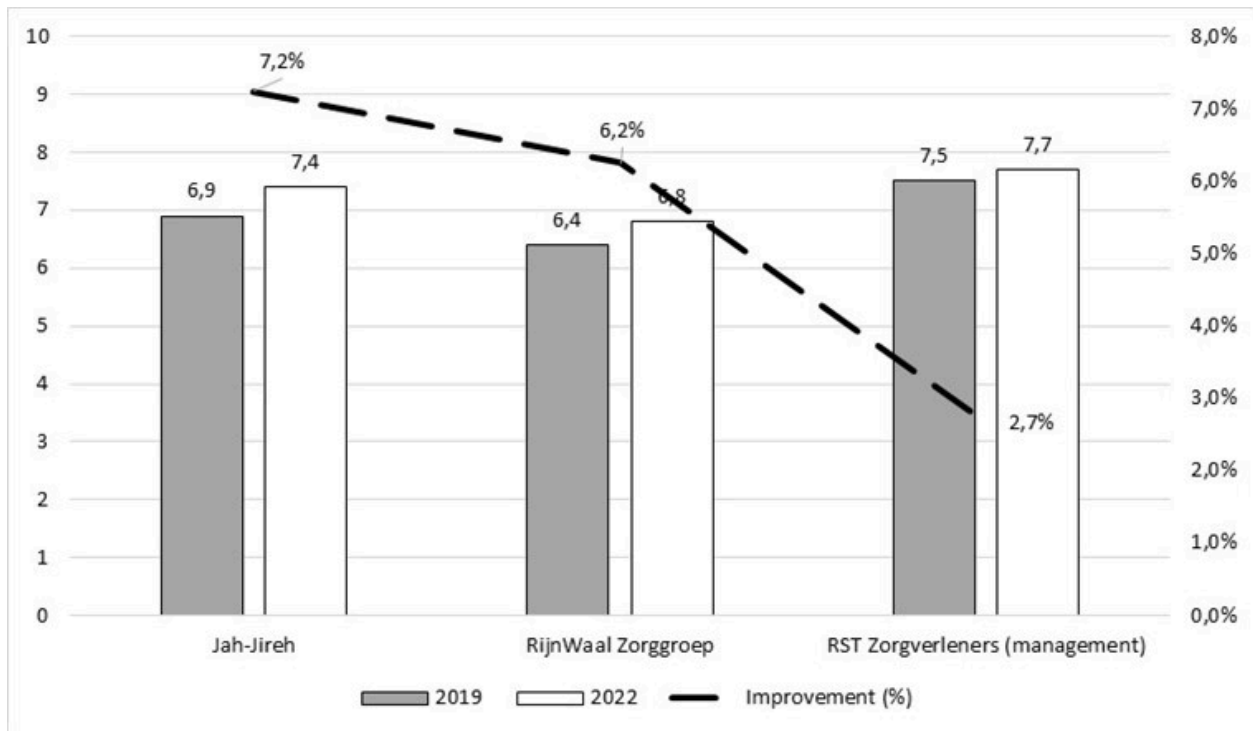


Figure 3: Increase in average HPO score and percentage improvement between first and second HPO diagnosis for the three healthcare organizations

The improvements were particularly noticeable in management and employee relations, as well as actions taken to strengthen these connections. Research indicates that improved relationships within an organization facilitate successful change.

Post-diagnosis interviews identified the progress made in three years and the main areas requiring attention. Each organization revealed specific focus areas:

- Jah-Jireh Woonzorg saw significant advantages from the HPO transformation, making the organization run smoother. The new focus areas include improving internal coordination, fostering unity in management styles and approaches, and developing a future-oriented vision for nursing home care.
- RijnWaal Zorggroep observed an enhanced structure and a sense of responsibility within the organization. They aim to strengthen connections between people and teams, work more professionally, and focus on personal growth and development.
- RST Zorgverleners incorporated HPO into their continuous quality improvement efforts. The future focus areas include preparing the organization for the future, strengthening internal collaboration, and integrating the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle into all activities.



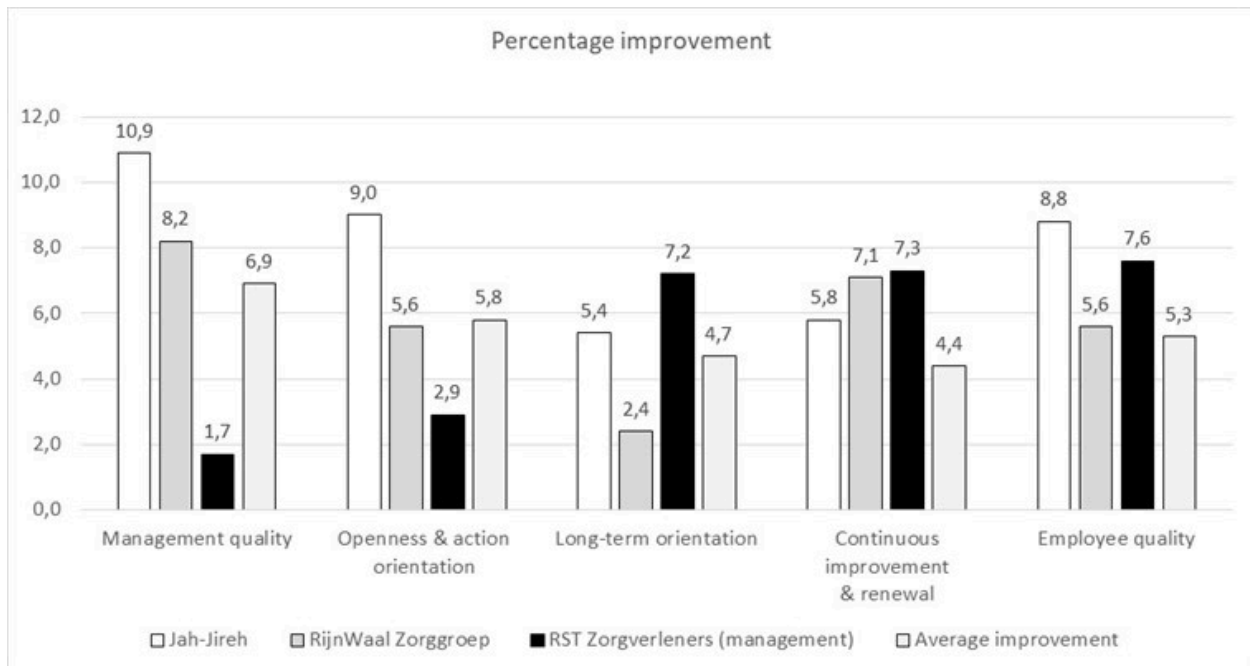


Figure 4: Percentage improvement between first and second HPO diagnosis per HPO factor, for the three healthcare organizations

Interestingly, the areas of attention could be grouped into three categories: connection (promoting internal cooperation), professionalism (working more professionally and better coordination), and the future (making the organization future-ready and encouraging professional development).

The study suggests that addressing these areas requires substantial time, which is to be expected given the complex nature of these issues. As the HPO transformation progressed, the organizations shifted their attention from immediate concerns to future-oriented thinking, thereby fostering a proactive mindset and better ability to manage external factors.

Upon evaluating the HPO transformation, the directors of the three organizations recognized its advantages, drew lessons, and affirmed their commitment to continue the HPO transformation.



The key lessons include:

- Jah-Jireh Woonzorg found peace of mind, better cooperation, and an enhanced focus on clients due to the HPO framework. However, they learned that the transformation process should be context-specific and involve a sufficient number of HPO coaches to avoid delays. They intend to continue with HPO to prevent reverting to inefficient ways of working.
- RijnWaal Zorggroep acknowledged increased cooperation, improved organization awareness, and reduced absenteeism as HPO benefits. They learned that involving managers as HPO coaches accelerated the transformation process. The group plans to continue with HPO as part of their 'RijnWaal Vital' quality program.
- RST Zorgverleners noted that HPO added structure to their operations and helped shift from a hierarchical culture to a more professional one. They learned that the HPO process needed more time and effective marketing to resonate with healthcare professionals. While they found the HPO questionnaire complex, they realized the value of appointing managers as HPO coaches. The group plans to continue with HPO as part of their quality goals, though they might not explicitly name it as such.

In summary, the second HPO Diagnosis revealed notable progress in all three organizations despite significant challenges. The process served as a learning experience, offering unique insights into the transformation journey. The HPO framework has become integral to these organizations' operations, driving improvement across multiple aspects, promoting professional development, enhancing employee engagement, and enabling a forward-looking organizational mindset.

Conclusion

When looking at the experiences of the three nursing home care organizations it is possible, despite their different circumstances and nature of the organisation, to distinguish a number of common threads in the advantages they experienced and their lessons learned. These threads can function as advice to other healthcare organizations contemplating a quality improvement impulse for their organisation.



The common advantages of the HPO transformation are:

- there is more focus on what is important to and therefore less ad-hoc firefighting in the organisation;
- the organisation has become more professional and capable;
- the organisation has become less hierarchical and more of a heterarchy (more responsibility to lower levels);
- there is more cooperation between the departments in the organisation;
- there is more focus on clients; and
- the organisation has become a better workplace where people have more fun.

Also in the lessons learned during the HPO transformation red threads can be distinguished:

- there has to be an adequate number of HPO Coaches who should be of the right function level (i.e. managers);
- take your time with the transformation, as people need to get used to the new ways of thinking and working;
- integrate HPO activities as much as possible with the daily activities taking place in the organisation;
- the transformation approach has to be tailored to the cultural context (i.e. sector, location) of the organisation; and
- in the healthcare sector it is wise to make the HPO transformation part of a larger quality improvement process, instead of a stand-alone initiative (which people often will feel as extra on top of their regular work).



Considering an HPO Transformation?

An HPO diagnosis provides insights into how your organization performs on the success factors of High Performance Organizations. This diagnosis not only shows where you stand on the path to becoming an HPO, but also offers practical improvement themes that can be tackled together with managers and employees. It helps you identify the critical areas of focus for realizing your strategy. Through this diagnosis, you strengthen the cohesion within your organization by jointly identifying and addressing improvement themes. Visit [our website](#) for more information.

Would you like more information about the HPO transformation at the three healthcare organizations?

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