

TITLE: Preparing an organisation for electronic clinical information systems: Does culture matter?

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Preparing for and implementing clinical information systems in health care organisations is a major challenge. The aim of this paper is to present Australian and international evidence about how understanding and accounting for organisational culture is an important element in the successful integration of clinical information systems. This will also include discussion of a framework for preparing a health care organisation for the implementation of clinical information systems.

Organisational culture can be defined as a pattern of basic assumptions that are taught to or absorbed by new organisational members as the way to perceive, think and feel in the organization. Sub-cultures inherent in health care organisations may be based on occupational, professional, gender, race or functional distinctions and can work with or against the dominant culture. They can tolerate, reflect or differentiate from the main organisational culture and can draw their values and beliefs from outside ties, for example medical sub-specialties. Organisational culture and subcultures are very powerful determinants of how work is undertaken within large hospitals.

Given the transformational impact which clinical information systems have on how health professionals work, it is not surprising that the organisational culture of a health facility has been proposed as an important factor for successful implementation. A constructive organisational culture, where members are encouraged to work cooperatively and to their full potential with high levels of motivation, satisfaction, teamwork and service quality is more likely to engage in and support the large scale change which is necessary with organisation-wide information system implementations. Studies more recently have quantified the relationship between culture and use of clinical information systems. However, many organisations still commence large scale information system implementations without acknowledging the importance of culture or devising a strategy for preparing the organisation to be 'culturally receptive' to the change being embarked upon.