

MEDIATING EFFECT OF JOB SATISFACTION ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TQM PRACTICES AND SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR HOSPITALS IN GUANGXI, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring medical quality and safety remains an eternal theme in healthcare management. Hospital quality management has always been an enduring concern, increasingly acknowledged and accepted by hospitals. Hospitals should focus on quality management to achieve sustainable performance. However, comprehensive quality management in hospitals is complex, and the evolving practices add to management challenges. Achieving the organic integration of social, environmental, and economic benefits for high-quality development remains challenging. This study, employs the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach to investigate the relationship between Total Quality Management (TQM), job satisfaction, and sustainable performance. Through a comprehensive examination of TQM practices and sustainable performance metrics, as well as exploring the mediating effect of job satisfaction, this study aims to provide insights. Reviewing the literature on TQM, job satisfaction, and sustainable performance, it develops a conceptual model to enhance understanding among managers, decision-makers, and TQM practitioners specifically for hospitals in Guangxi, China. Future research includes testing and validating this model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with primary data from hospitals in Guangxi to identify and analyze the mediating effects between TQM practices and sustainable performance.

Keywords: TQM, Sustainable Performance, Job Satisfaction, Conceptual Framework

INTRODUCTION

Scholars and managers have recognized the effectiveness achieved by implementing TQM in organizations (Tajouri & Lakhal, 2024). The importance of TQM in organizations stems from the need for continuous improvement of business processes, ensuring consistency in the quality of products and services, and ultimately achieving competitive advantage and customer satisfaction in the marketplace.

Previously, managers were primarily concerned with the quality of a product or service. Still, the quality revolution has changed this understanding, making quality a holistic practice involving all business aspects. These different aspects include, but are not limited to, processes, people, culture, customer practices, etc.

In the existing literature, TQM is considered an approach to achieve performance by following a set of practices and continuous improvement programs to meet the requirements due to the changing environment (Owusu-Kyei et al., 2024). Therefore, researchers have been focusing on the best practices, standards, or factors of TQM to positively impact various performance in different areas, including services, manufacturing, and so on (Akanmu et al., 2023; Ali AlShehail et al., 2022).

Scholars have provided evidence on the leading role of TQM in improving performance and the extent to which TQM best practices have been implemented in the healthcare sector (Tonjang & Thawesaengskulthai, 2022; Zehir & Zehir, 2023). However, scholars are still struggling to assess the impact of TQM practices on organizational performance and how different mediators affect organizational performance while considering these TQM practices (Barua et al., 2020; Sawaeen & Ali, 2020). The efficiency of TQM application in developing countries versus developed countries is also one of the concerns of scholars (Kebede Adem & Virdi, 2021). Although many studies have focused on the impact of TQM implementation and organizational performance, this study proposes a model for examining the effect of standard TQM practices adopted in the literature on sustainable performance while taking job satisfaction into account as a mediator.

This thesis also investigates how to improve the sustainable performance of hospitals to meet updated national and international standards to provide sustainable and high-quality healthcare services. Previous studies have shown a discrepancy between actual and expected applications. Therefore, this study helps to understand whether TQM practices can impact sustainable performance based on the hospital's sustainable inputs, which meet the expected level of satisfaction as specified by a particular standard, while considering the role of job satisfaction as a mediating factor.

Therefore, this study aims to provide the answers to the following questions:

(1) How do total quality management practices affect the sustainable performance of hospitals in Guangxi, China?

(2) What is the mediating role of job satisfaction between total quality management practices and sustainable performance of hospitals in Guangxi, China?

The research objectives are:

(1) To identify the impact of total quality management practices on the sustainable performance of hospitals in China.

(2) To analyze the mediating role of job satisfaction between total quality management practices and sustainable performance.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 TQM

TQM is a widely recognized strategic approach prioritizing continuous improvement in organizational processes, customer satisfaction, and overall business effectiveness (García-Alcaraz et al., 2021; Hussain & Khan, 2020). Martinez and Jimenez (2009) view Total Quality Management as a company-wide effort involving all employees, suppliers, and customers, seeking continuous improvement in product and process quality to meet customer needs and expectations. Mbatha & Garad (2022) regard TQM as a process, management philosophy, or culture. Riaz et al. (2023) propose

that TQM entails a system that involves management, employees, stakeholders, and even customers to achieve or exceed customer satisfaction goals. Bytyçi et al. (2023) define TQM as a belief system that meets customer needs. Organizations must create customer-centric operational technologies, allocate resources to facilitate customer positioning and fulfill their needs and desires. This concept encompasses various practices such as process improvement, employee involvement, customer orientation, and quality assessment.

Today, TQM is widely adopted and applied in the healthcare sector across many countries. In healthcare, the definition of TQM follows its universally accepted perspectives. Ali, Alzoubi, Dagasan, and Essel(2022; 2023; 2020) consider TQM a systematic implementation by organizational management to achieve customer/patient satisfaction and delight. It can serve as a strategy to enhance organizational performance in the era of globalization. In healthcare, it integrates quality orientation into all processes and procedures of medical services. In empirical research on quality management, the concept of quality management mostly appears in the form of Quality Management Practices. More concrete and easy-to-generalize practices are generally chosen for measurement in empirical studies. This study defines TQM as a management concept focusing on customer satisfaction, employee involvement, and continuous improvement in work processes, thereby enhancing organizational performance (Øvretveit, 2000; Sadikoglu & Olcay, 2014).

2.1.2 Sustainable Performance

Sustainable performance is the long-term competitive advantage in which businesses gain economic returns while considering their impact on the natural environment and human society without sacrificing the needs of stakeholders (Kleindorfer et al., 2005). In the future, the more successful a business becomes, the more sustainable it is (Permatasari et al., 2023). In the literature on corporate sustainable performance, previous research mainly focused on maintaining economic aspects of business operations but increasingly emphasizes the importance of environmental and social dimensions. The "triple bottom line" is widely used in measuring sustainable performance, comprising economic, environmental, and social performance (Elkington, 1997; Hua, 2022; Yadegaridehkordi et al., 2023).

Hospital sustainable performance is a complex and dynamic concept. Previous studies defined sustainable performance in healthcare systems focusing on continuous improvement, categorized into three main areas: (1) financial sustainability, (2) human resource sustainability and stakeholder acceptance of change, and (3) system adaptability and improvement (Zurynski et al., 2022). Measuring hospital sustainable development performance can utilize quantitative standards reflecting the organization's capacity, vision, and pursuit of sustainable development. A widely recognized expression of hospital sustainable performance is balancing economic, environmental, and social benefits, achieving the "triple bottom line" theory in performance considerations (Pederneiras et al., 2023). This paper believes sustainable development performance can be divided into three levels: economic, environmental, and social (Hua, 2022; Cui & Zhang, 2023).

2.1.3 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the psychological aspects reflecting an individual's feelings about their work. The higher their enthusiasm for their work, the higher their satisfaction (Aziri, 2011). Oshagbemi (2000) defined job satisfaction as "an individual's positive emotional response to any job." Employee satisfaction also implies enthusiasm and joy in work, key factors leading to recognition, income, promotions, and achieving other fulfillment goals (Rahman et al., 2019). Essentially, job satisfaction is an individual issue. Each employee's satisfaction will differ depending on their perception of the value system applicable to themselves (Sajim et al., 2024). Previous studies on employee job satisfaction have

shown that it relates to job performance, occupational burnout, and turnover intention (Bin & Shmailan, 2015). Wahyuhadi et al.(2023) focused on workers' compensation, job satisfaction, and performance in a hospital in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Job satisfaction involves the happiness employees experience in their work and their mental health, such as a sense of belonging, health, and overall well-being (Üstgörül & Popescu, 2023). Job satisfaction includes intrinsic and extrinsic (Alagarsamy et al., 2023; Watkins, 2024; Sabeng & Mensah, 2023). This research defines job satisfaction as the satisfaction of hospital quality management practitioners with their work, work environment, management, and organizational culture (Andrade & Westover, 2023).

2.2 Hypothesis Development

2.2.1 TQM and Sustainable Performance

In recent years, sustainability has garnered significant attention among stakeholders and organizations worldwide (Magd & Karyamsetty, 2021). It is widely believed that both TQM practices and corporate sustainable performance are crucial concepts in this field (Mohsin et al., 2024). The academic community has accumulated extensive research on how TQM practices can positively impact various aspects and levels of organizational performance.

TQM can generate sustainable competitive advantages in organizational performance (Silvestri et al., 2023; Wassan et al., 2022). Through implementing TQM, the manufacturing sector in China has been able to foster a positive work environment, promote employee satisfaction, and enhance performance levels. Mohsin et al. (2024) examined how TQM practices contribute to achieving sustainable performance in enterprises and found that TQM practices positively influence businesses' economic and environmental sustainability. A strong positive correlation exists between TQM and corporate sustainability (AlQershi et al., 2023; Sin et al., 2022; Saha et al., 2022). AlQershi et al. (2023) proposed that managers must take various measures to implement TQM to enhance sustainable performance, such as improving productivity, profitability, and cost reduction and striving to disseminate a quality culture throughout the organization. Akanmu et al. (2023) found that dimensions of TQM practices—practical implementation of continuous process improvement, benchmarking, quality assurance, service design, and information and analysis—positively and significantly impact corporate sustainability. Saha et al.(2023) found that TQM greatly influences organizational sustainable performance and its three dimensions (economic performance, social performance, and environmental performance).

In summary, the significant impact of TQM on the sustainable performance of manufacturing and other service sector enterprises has been confirmed by many scholars. Based on this, to further explore the relationship between TQM and hospital sustainable performance, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

Proposition 1: Total quality management practices have a positive and significant impact on the sustainable performance of the hospital.

2.2.2 TQM and Job Satisfaction

The relationship between Total Quality Management (TQM) and employee job satisfaction has been a topic of considerable interest, with a significant body of literature exploring various aspects of this relationship. Overall, research indicates a positive correlation between the effective implementation of TQM and increased employee satisfaction (Lepistö et al., 2024; Hamsinah et al., 2023). However, this relationship is complex and influenced by multiple factors.

Research by Addis et al. (2019) indicates a significant positive relationship between senior management commitment, employee active involvement, continuous improvement, and employee satisfaction. Senior management commitment, rewards, and recognition are the most significant factors influencing the impact of TQM practices on employee job satisfaction (Aminuddin et al., 2022). Employee job satisfaction increases when they see their efforts positively impacting customer satisfaction (A. Riaz et al., 2023). Research by Işık (2023) found a significant correlation between TQM and employee satisfaction in the healthcare sector. Through analysis of standard regression coefficients, it was found that for every unit increase in TQM awareness, employee satisfaction increases by 0.743 units. Alsalamah (2023) evaluated the impact of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices on employee satisfaction in the Saudi Arabian healthcare sector, and the results showed a significant positive correlation between customer focus, continuous improvement, process management, employee involvement, leadership, clear vision, communication, and integrated systems with employee satisfaction.

Proposition 2: Total quality management practices positively and significantly impact job satisfaction.

2.2.3 Job Satisfaction and Sustainable Performance

Job satisfaction is important in defining organizational success, especially in the service industry (Kurdi et al., 2020). Employee progress, community, and environmental factors play vital roles in the sustainable growth of an organization. Therefore, organizations constantly seek ways to improve job satisfaction and enhance performance. Employees are crucial stakeholders, and satisfaction is often seen as a critical factor in organizational performance and success (Ahmad & Raja, 2021). Successful organizations typically have satisfied employees, while poor job satisfaction can lead to organizational challenges (Galup et al., 2008). A survey by Alrazehi et al. (2021) found that employee satisfaction is a critical factor in the organizational performance of the Yemen International Bank. Employee job satisfaction is crucial for organizations as it impacts employee morale and productivity, influencing overall performance (Frutos-Bencze et al., 2022). Research by Deb et al. (2023) supports the positive impact of some aspects of employee satisfaction on organizational performance. Although not always fully evident in ordinary times, the effect of employee satisfaction becomes apparent when companies experience adverse shocks (Shan & Tang, 2023). Crucke et al. (2022) argue that perceived organizational support and the potential for social impact on PSM positively correlate with employee satisfaction and corporate sustainability.

Healthcare workers are the driving force behind the healthy development of the medical and healthcare industry and the primary practitioners of hospital reform. Their job satisfaction and enthusiasm directly affect the quality of medical services and hospitals' performance. Furthermore, enhancing hospital staff satisfaction and mobilizing their work enthusiasm promote the sustainable development of hospitals (Xu et al., 2018). Therefore, regarding the relationship between job satisfaction and hospital sustainable performance, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

Proposition 3: Job satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on the Sustainable performance of hospitals.

2.2.4 TQM, Job Satisfaction and Sustainable Performance

Previous research on the implementation of TQM and performance has examined the direct impact of these two variables and attempted to determine their relationship. Employee productivity behavior may mediate the effects of TQM on company performance (Hartono et al., 2023). Furthermore, Trivellas et al. (2009) state that employee job satisfaction mediates between TQM practices and

innovation performance. Hassis et al. (2023) studied the mediating role of CSR (Customer, Community, Employee) in TQM and organizational sustainability. The results show that CSR partially mediates between Total Quality Management and corporate sustainability. The mediating effect of employee job satisfaction between Total Quality Management (TQM) and performance involves multiple organizational factors.

TQM emphasizes continuous improvement and quality management, improving work processes and environments and enhancing employee job satisfaction. An improved work environment enhances employee loyalty and satisfaction, positively impacting performance (Khan et al., 2023). The results of Amin et al. (2017) indicate a significant relationship between TQM and employee job satisfaction and hotel performance. Leadership and customer-centric approaches are essential in improving employee satisfaction and hotel performance. Organizations need to strengthen Total Quality Management to enhance organizational performance by effectively meeting the needs of customers and employees (Abdullahi et al., 2020).

The mediating effect of employee job satisfaction between TQM and performance may be multifaceted and depends on the specific implementation of Total Quality Management within the organization. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed in this paper.

Proposition 4: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between total quality management practices and the sustainable performance of hospitals.

The study proposes a comprehensive conceptual framework based on existing research hypotheses and previous work (Figure 1).

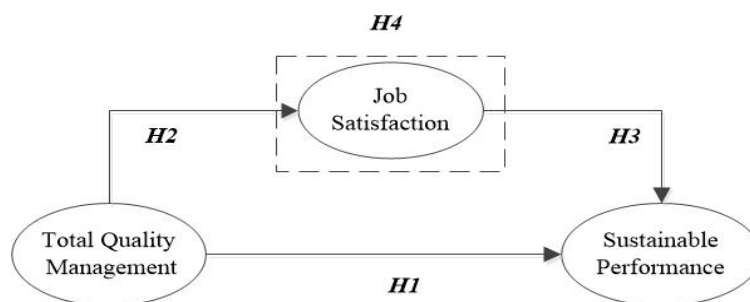


Figure 1 conceptual framework

CONCLUSIONS

Constructing a conceptual framework aims to deepen the understanding of these relationships to enhance hospital management and operations effectiveness. TQM practices encompass top-level leadership, process improvement, and employee involvement, crucial for hospital operations and service quality. Sustainable performance involves the hospital's long-term development and success in economic, social, and environmental aspects. The significance lies in providing a vital reference for hospital managers. Understanding the mediating role of job satisfaction between TQM practices and sustainable performance enables managers to formulate better strategies, improve employee satisfaction, optimize TQM practices, and ultimately enhance hospital sustainable performance. This conceptual framework provides an essential theoretical basis for future empirical studies, facilitating progress and innovation in hospital management and operations.

This study postulated the following research questions and on the basis of literature we have answers these questions:

(1) How do total quality management practices affect the sustainable performance of hospitals in Guangxi, China?

TQM to enhance sustainable performance, such as improving productivity, profitability, and cost reduction and striving to disseminate a quality culture throughout the organization. Akanmu et al. (2023) found that dimensions of TQM practices — practical implementation of continuous process improvement, benchmarking, quality assurance, service design, and information and analysis — positively and significantly impact corporate sustainability. Saha et al. (2023) found that TQM greatly influences organizational sustainable performance and its three dimensions (economic performance, social performance, and environmental performance).

(2) What is the mediating role of job satisfaction between total quality management practices and sustainable performance of hospitals in Guangxi, China?

Employee productivity behavior may mediate the effects of TQM on company performance (Hartono et al., 2023). Furthermore, Trivellas et al. (2009) state that employee job satisfaction mediates between TQM practices and innovation performance. Hassis et al. (2023) studied the mediating role of CSR (Customer, Community, Employee) in TQM and organizational sustainability. The results show that CSR partially mediates between Total Quality Management and corporate sustainability. The mediating effect of employee job satisfaction between Total Quality Management (TQM) and performance involves multiple organizational factors.

Future research entails data collection and empirical analysis, examining hypotheses regarding implementation levels and relationships in secondary and tertiary hospitals in Guangxi, China. The study will investigate how TQM practices contribute to hospitals' sustainable performance. Furthermore, the scope of future research involves testing and validating the model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) methods to collect raw data from secondary and tertiary hospitals in Guangxi, building upon a comprehensive review of TQM literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for invaluable help throughout this research.

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