

The Impact of Total Quality Management Practices on Operational Efficiency in Malaysian Hospitality MSMEs

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Abstract: Total Quality Management (TQM) is looked at as a possible solution in this study. Four main principles are looked at: leadership-driven, Involvement of People, Process Approach, and Mutually-Beneficial Supplier Relationship. The researchers used a quantitative method to create a survey with a questionnaire that looked at four different factors that affect operational efficiency: leadership-driven, involvement of people, process approach, and supplier relationship. This study employed a probability sampling method, namely simple random sampling, to target several supervisors and managers in one hospitality company located in the southern region of Malaysia. The sample size of this pilot study consisted of 36 respondents. The data were examined via SPSS, highlighting the reliability of both the independent and dependent variables. The study employed analytical approaches including descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The study's findings showed that "Leadership Driven" and "Mutually-Beneficial Supplier Relationship" did not affect how efficiently operations ran. However, a significant positive relationship emerged between operational efficiency and both the "Involvement of People" and the "Process Approach." These findings point to a clear strategy for several ongoing successes in the hospitality industry: fostering staff empowerment through active engagement and optimising internal processes through the implementation of TQM principles. This research provides valuable insights for addressing current operational challenges and positioning the hotel for enhanced performance in the future.

Keywords: *Total quality management, operational efficiency, leadership driven, involvement of people, process approach, supplier relationship*

1. Introduction

Micro, small, and medium-sized businesses, or MSMEs, are essential to a country's economic growth (Md Husin & Haron, 2020). Through the provision of countless goods and services, the expansion of regional markets and societies, the creation of job opportunities, the encouragement of innovation, and the promotion of market competition, MSMEs make a significant contribution to the national economy (Md Husin & Haron 2020). Malaysian MSMEs made a significant economic contribution to the country in 2021, contributing 37.4% of the GDP and generating RM518.1 billion in value added, according to Loo, Ramachandran, & Raja Yusof (2023). According to Md Husin & Haron (2020), a micro-sized business employs fewer than five people or has a sales turnover of little more than RM300,000. A small business, on the other hand, makes between RM300,000 and RM3 million in sales and employs five to thirty people. In contrast, a medium-sized business in the services and other sectors employs 30 to 75 people and generates between RM3 and RM20 million in revenue.

According to past trends in the hospitality sector, particularly in MSMEs, several problems and major obstacles exist in reaching operational efficiency because of several elements like human capital competency, service quality requirements, and resource limitations. This relates to the application of Total Quality Management (TQM) concepts and procedures in hotel operations to pinpoint the opportunities and obstacles influencing operational effectiveness. TQM is a well-known quality approach that, according to Khan et al. (2020), improves organizational performance and produces high-quality services and goods. Maintaining focus and implementing organisational improvement processes, necessitates the use of systematic tools and techniques for managing organisational processes with continuous improvements in quality and customer satisfaction. Additionally, structures such as quality improvement teams must be established (Boikanyo et al., 2019). To

improve customer satisfaction and grow their clientele, hotels employ a variety of quality management strategies to achieve perfection (Mp, 2021). However, despite several research on the topic, Pambreni et al. (2019) noted that little is known about how TQM implementation affects organizational performance in Malaysia, especially in MSMEs.

Al-Ababneh (2021) asserts that the literature on Total Quality Management (TQM) remains limited within the hotel sector. Khan et al. (2020) assert that companies in industrialised nations demonstrate superior quality and competitiveness as a result of the TQM methodology. Conversely, organisations in developing countries possess limited practical experience with the strategy. Previous studies indicated that these organisations fail to identify the barriers hindering the effective adoption of TQM practices. The absence of support from top management for TQM programs was identified as a major obstacle to effective TQM implementation (Al-Ababneh 2021).

For this reason, there is an urgent requirement to investigate the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles within hotel operations. These principles include Leadership Driven, Involvement of People, Process Approach, and Mutually-Beneficial Supplier Relationship. The goal of this investigation is to identify the obstacles and opportunities that affect operational efficiency. The findings of several studies, which revealed that Total Quality Management (TQM) is not merely a method or instrument, but also an entire corporate mindset (Kriemadis et al., 2021) provide credence to this assertion. The author went on to explain that Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management concept that emphasizes the ongoing enhancement of all areas of an organization, including its products and services, as well as its processes and systems. Everyone in the organisation, from upper management to frontline workers, is involved in Total Quality Management (TQM), which is founded on the idea that everyone has a part to play in the process of continuously improving quality. All things considered, this research acknowledges the necessity of conducting a comprehensive investigation into the operations of the hotel, particularly about issues such as the management of suppliers and the rising prices of purchasing. These challenges, which are symptomatic of broader issues that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia are confronted with, highlight the essential need to implement strategic initiatives that are anchored in the principles of total quality management (TQM). Through an examination of how TQM principles studied in this research affect operational efficiency, the purpose of this research is to provide answers to important issues concerning the specific difficulties and opportunities that exist within the hotel operational landscape.

The research aims of this study are to identify the attributes that contribute to operational efficiency toward MSMEs in the hospitality industry, as outlined below:

RO1: To determine a relationship between leadership driven, involvement of people, process approach and supplier relationship, and operational efficiency.

2. Literature Review

Leadership Driven

When COVID-19 hit the earth in 2019, it was the start of a chain of disastrous and unheard-of catastrophes. Businesses were compelled to transition from conventional to digitalised operations. Leaders found it difficult since they were largely unprepared for the quick change. Managers have to learn to adjust to the new environment and be more adaptable in their work practices to deal with the outbreak (Ar'anege, Montesinos & Núñez, 2023). A transformative leader would enable a smooth transition by swiftly adapting to such developments. The way transformative leaders manage their subordinates can be used to describe how they affect worker capabilities and competitiveness (Alrowwad, Abualoush, & Masa'deh, 2020). According to Al Doghan and Sundram (2023), operational efficiency will be impacted by prioritising resources such as time, people, equipment, supplies, and money as efficiently as feasible. Numerous studies have looked into the connection between various leadership philosophies, such as paternalistic, inclusive, and authentic leadership, and the vocal behaviour of employees. These studies consistently show that leadership has a significant impact on how likely employees are to express their thoughts and opinions (Ouyang, Zhu & Ma, 2022). Three different leadership roles—interpersonal, informational, and decision-making—exist in organisations and enterprises,

and each is essential to directing and overseeing the operations of the organisation (Anbu, 2019). The primary determinant of organisational activities is leadership. To guarantee the effectiveness of companies and organisations, entails influencing individuals to complete particular duties and making use of the available resources and instruments (Tegor, Johannes, Jaya & Thasimmim, 2023).

H1: *Leadership-driven has a significant relationship toward operational efficiency*

Involvement of People

According to Ansong and Ennin (2022), the hotel industry is constantly looking to improve services to meet and exceed the expectations of its patrons. As a result, the sector looks for workers with strong creative abilities to successfully meet the constantly shifting needs of clients. Individually, workers with creative tendencies are valued for their capacity to accept and move through the world of uncertainty with greater ease (Hensley, 2020). Research indicates that employee creativity fosters organizational growth and significantly affects a company's competitive advantage (Ansong & Ennin, 2022). According to research, a company's ability to develop is aided by its employees' inclusion. According to Okewukchy and Amaechi (2023), the degree of employee participation in decision-making affects hotel establishments' performance, productivity, and sales growth. Senior leaders may greatly raise social and shareholder value by highlighting the important advantages of high job satisfaction. This includes instructing managers about their important responsibilities and integrating relationships at work into performance reviews and management development. Managers can also be significant change agents by adopting servant leadership and showing kindness and genuine curiosity to all members of their business (Allas & Schaniger, 2020). Workplace motivation results from the interaction of internal and external factors that determine the shape, direction, intensity, and length of behaviours related to job performance (Ouyang, Zhu & Ma, 2022). To provide a better customer experience and achieve superior organisational performance, employee well-being can be crucial (De la Rosa, Armas-Cruz, Dorta-Afonso & García-Rodríguez, 2023).

H2: *The Involvement of people has a significant relationship with operational efficiency*

Process Approach

The hotel industry, like other sectors, is actively pursuing sustainable operations and embracing green consciousness. This encompasses the implementation of a process-oriented approach to optimise operational efficacy. The hospitality and hotel industry, as well as the entire global community, are all significantly affected by sustainability (Al Ghazali, Zaloumis & Khan, 2021). One of the primary goals of TQM is to improve the efficacy of processes by reducing costs, reducing service delivery time, and improving overall quality. This is accomplished by employing a comprehensive approach that takes into account all resources involved in the process, thereby facilitating a comprehensive perspective on process optimisation (Kowalik & Klimecka-Tatar, 2018). According to Rodriguez-Garcia, Ferrero-Ferrero, and Fernandez-Izquierdo (2023), hotels must develop strategies that effectively manage impacts, while simultaneously being responsive to the expectations and requirements of stakeholders and leveraging operational, administrative, and financial resources. Various issues can arise as a result of ineffective or inefficient processes, such as high employee attrition due to frustration, increased production costs due to defects and wastage, and the loss of customers due to lengthy delays, miscommunication, or subpar quality. A company's operational efficiency can be enhanced by reducing non-essential operations and eliminating inefficient procedures (Al Doghan & Sundram, 2023). There are numerous benefits to optimising processes, including increased productivity and employee engagement. We would then attain streamlined operations with minimal errors, fewer resource requirements, and reduced inventory costs. Furthermore, loyal customers are converted into enthusiastic brand advocates as a consequence of enhanced customer satisfaction. The optimisation of consistent and predictable outcomes is achieved through the efficient management of interconnected processes that operate as a unified system and a comprehensive comprehension of them. It is imperative to acknowledge and capitalize on the connections between operational procedures, information, and materials throughout the data generation chain. Additionally, the establishment of resilient connections throughout the system is facilitated by the vigilant monitoring and safeguarding measures that are implemented to ensure the integrity of these components (Sturtevant et al., 2022).

H3: *Process approach has a significant relationship toward operational efficiency*

Mutually Beneficial Supplier Relation

The term "supply chain management" refers to the process of managing a network that consists of three or more entities, which may be corporations or individuals, that actively participate in the efficient movement of products, assets, funding, and/or knowledge from the source to the ultimate customer. Specifically, it refers to all of the efforts and actions that have been performed by the business to facilitate a supply chain method that is seamless. According to Hinkosa (2023), the adoption of supply chain strategies is the source of rivalry in contemporary circumstances. Studies have shown that the major factor that contributes to the success of a company is a collection of unique resources that are highly valued, unusual, difficult to replicate, and cannot be replaced by other resources (Poku, 2022). According to Amaruddin (2021), it was discovered that the eight contemporary TQM principles are connected to ISO 9001 provisions regarding supply chain management (SCM). One of these clauses is the principle of supply chain management that is mutually beneficial to both parties. In a scenario involving a supply chain, the vast majority of businesses, and most of the outstanding firms in particular, are becoming increasingly dependent on their suppliers. According to the findings of a study, the factors that are primarily responsible for the supply chain system's inability to accomplish its objectives are inefficiency and ineffectiveness (Poku, 2022). Companies that have a network of linked supply chains generate more revenue than those that give the process of supply chain management less consideration, according to the author of the article. According to Sillanpaa et al. (2015), the performance and capabilities of suppliers are extremely important in ensuring that businesses still maintain their competitive advantage. Poku (2022) asserts that supplier relationship management has the potential to significantly enhance and simplify the sourcing procedures that are carried out between an organization and its suppliers. As a result of the necessity of taking into consideration risk, competitive challenges, sustainability, and cost effectiveness, the author went on to say that supplier management has evolved into an essential business activity. According to Hinkosa (2023), it is projected that the successful implementation of supply chain management would result in an improvement in the link between suppliers participating in the early stages of the supply chain and customers participating in the later stages. This will ultimately lead to an increase in customer satisfaction and overall company productivity.

H4: Mutually beneficial supplier relation has a significant relationship toward operational efficiency

3. Methodology

The target population for this pilot study is supervisors and managers in one selected hotel located in the southern region of Malaysia. Based on purposive sampling, 36 respondents were found. These respondents were obtained by sending surveys to staff members at the supervisory level and above. This allowed a full understanding of their thoughts and experiences on how well the hotel ran. By directly engaging with the participants, we aimed to gather firsthand insights and information related to TQM implementation, operational challenges, customer satisfaction, and overall performance within the hotel. In this research, all the variables were measured using scales derived from previous studies (Buthlezi & Zondo 2023, Hinkosa 2023, Rahimi 2017). The specific scale used depended on the section being assessed. The respondents gave their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding various attitudes, things, people, or events using the Likert Scale. The scale for operational efficiency, leadership-driven, involvement of people, process approach, and mutually beneficial supplier relationships ranges from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

4. Findings

Cronbach's alpha was carried out, and as shown in Table 1, the alpha value (α) for all items was above 0.6. Therefore, we can conclude that the items used in this study were both valid and reliable. Due to the α value being close to 1, it can be considered that the variables used have a high level of reliability. Next, Table 2 shows the breakdown of the respondents by gender, educational background, managerial positions, and tenure. Notably, 61.1% of the correspondents are males, while 38.9% are females. Thus, most of the hotel employees in this research are males. About 72.2% of the respondents possess tertiary education qualifications, indicating a workforce potentially well-prepared for adept TQM execution. Most employees have established roles within the hotel, with 66.7% having 2 to 5 years of working experience. A quarter (25%) have been with this company

for less than a year. While 2.8% have worked at the hotel for 6 to 10 years, 5.6% have worked there longer. This mix of experience levels can contribute both fresh perspectives and seasoned expertise to TQM implementation. Furthermore, the breakdown of managerial roles—i.e., 19.4% supervisors, 44.4% executives, and 36.1% managers—suggests a structured organisational hierarchy conducive to effectively implementing TQM strategies across different departments.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Leadership driven	5	0.949
Involvement of people	5	0.947
Process approach	5	0.838
Supplier Relationship	5	0.867
Operational efficiency	5	0.736

Table 2: Respondents' profile

Criteria	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	22	61.1
	Female	14	38.9
Education Level	Tertiary Education	26	72.2
	Secondary Education	8	22.2
	Others	2	5.6
Management Level	Supervisor	7	19.4
	Executive	16	44.4
	Manager and above	13	36.1
Working Experience	1 year below	9	25
	2 - 5 years	24	66.7
	6 - 10 years	1	2.8
	More than 10 years	2	5.6

Table 3: Result of Multiple Regression

Dependent variable: Operational efficiency		
Independent variables	Standardised Coefficient (BETA)	Sig.
(Constant)		
Leadership driven	0.187	0.315
Involvement of people	0.800	<.001
Process approach	0.436	0.016
Supplier relationship	0.274	0.123
F value	14.036	
R square	0.644	

5. Conclusion and Discussion

As shown in Table 3, the four important factors in TQM have β values that show that the Involvement of People ($\beta^2 = 0.800$) has the most significant effect on operational efficiency, followed by the Process Approach ($\beta^2 = 0.436$). It is backed up by a t-value greater than 1.96 (Involvement of People = 3.712; Process Approach = 2.557) and Sig less than 0.05 (Involvement of People = <0.001; Process Approach = 0.016), which means that both variables are significant (Hair et al., 2017). Multiple regression analysis shows that the observed relationship is statistically significant when Sig < 0.05, which is less than a 5% significance level. This means that it is unlikely that the observed results were caused by chance alone in the sample (Wiastuti et al., 2023). Employees believe that job performance motivates them to fulfill assigned tasks and adhere to their job responsibilities. Additionally, it fosters loyalty and encourages them to take initiatives to improve their performance (Wiastuti et al., 2023). Following our finding in this research, the involvement of people emerges as the most influential

factor, evidenced by a β value of 0.800. This suggests a robust, positive relationship between the engagement of individuals within an organisation and its operational efficiency. The substantial β value of 0.800 not only underscores the significance of people's involvement but also indicates that for every unit increase in this factor, there is a substantial positive effect on operational efficiency. Putranti et al. (2022) determined that job engagement plays a crucial role in operational efficiency, as it has a significant relationship and a negative effect on staff turnover intention. This underscores the fact that employees with heightened engagement typically exhibit increased motivation and a greater sense of job satisfaction, emphasising the pivotal role of people's involvement in optimising operational efficiency. As for the involvement of people, according to Amin et al. (2017), the Process Approach stands as a pivotal component in the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM). Similarly, Al-Ababneh (2021) deduced that an inclusive performance process involving employees is instrumental in attaining customer satisfaction. The process approach, characterised by a β value of 0.436, plays a pivotal role in operational efficiency. Although its influence is slightly lesser than the involvement of people, it underscores a significant positive correlation between structured processes and efficiency. Alshourah (2020) suggested a notable positive impact of continuous process improvement on the implementation of TQM. This finding resonates with the conclusions drawn by Al-Sabi et al. (2017) in their examination of the hospitality and hotel industry.

The data that was presented revealed that the two variables that were left had values that were greater than 0.05. These variables were Leadership Driven, which had a value of 0.315, and Mutually-Beneficial Supplier Relationship, which had a value of 0.123. Despite the robustness of the strong α , the contribution of the variables does not meet the criteria for statistical significance in this research. Even though leadership is an essential component in the process of cultivating a culture of quality, there is no guarantee that it will always have a direct and meaningful connection with operational efficiency in the hospitality business. It is possible that great leadership does not immediately affect operational efficiency, even though it is essential for determining the direction of the organisation and encouraging its people. There is a possibility that the benefits of leadership on efficiency will not become apparent for some time. If leadership is still in the process of implementing change, it is possible that efficiency improvements will not be observed immediately. This is especially true in industries such as hospitality, which are dynamic and strongly focused on customers. In addition, the particular leadership style (transformational, transactional, etc.) could not be compatible with the operational requirements of the company. For instance, a leadership style that emphasizes innovation and the empowerment of employees might not have a direct impact on efficiency measures such as the management of time, the control of costs, or the optimization of workflow.

Within the context of Total Quality Management (TQM), supplier relationships emphasize working closely with suppliers to maintain consistent quality, timely delivery, and cost-effectiveness. On the other hand, in the hotel business, the connections with suppliers could not always automatically convert to greater operational efficiency. This is due to several factors, such as the dependence and variability of suppliers, as well as the absence of integration in the supply chain. The operational efficiency of a hospitality firm, for instance, may be jeopardised by external circumstances that are outside the control of the business itself. These concerns may include delays caused by suppliers, problems with quality, or price hikes. Suppliers can face disruptions (such as problems with the supply chain or changes in the market) that can have an impact on the hospitality industry, even if the relationship between them is robust. Because a hotel, restaurant, or other facility is highly reliant on a limited number of suppliers, this dependence may result in inefficiencies if the provider is unable to achieve the standards that have been set. Some hospitality organisations operate with disjointed supplier networks that do not have integrated systems or communication with operational teams. It is possible for there to be inefficiencies in the supply chain if the suppliers do not meet the requirements of the company or if they do not exchange information promptly. For instance, ineffective communication between the purchasing department and the suppliers might result in stock shortages, delays in obtaining items, or overstocking, all of which affect the efficiency of the operating process. In conclusion, although leadership and connections with suppliers are essential components of Total Quality Management (TQM), the direct impact that these factors have on operational efficiency in the hospitality business may be minimal. If internal processes, market conditions, or external factors are more important to operational outcomes, then the focus of leadership on long-term strategy

might not result in rapid gains, and supplier relationships might have less of an impact on the outcomes of operations.

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