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The Impact of TQM on Sustainable Competitive Performance: A Mediating Role of Organizational Flexibility

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Abstract

The study aims to understand how quality management practices can enhance sustainable competitiveness, and how organizational flexibility can enhance this impact in Jordanian telecommunications companies. In this study, a quantitative research approach was employed. The study population consists of administrative and operational employees working in the telecommunications sector in Jordan, a representative sample of 355 respondents. To evaluate the collected data, the study utilized SmartPLS-4. The findings indicate that organizational flexibility mediates the relationship between TQM and sustainable competitive performance. This means that TQM initiatives improve flexibility thus improving competitive performance. Based on the study Organization must not only pay attention to TQM practices, but should also strive to incorporate flexibility into the organization. In order to take full advantage of these findings, several recommendations are possible. The results show that organizations in the telecommunications sector should particularly focus on training initiatives that prepare the workers in TQM Tenets & Techniques respectively. Such training can certainly improve service delivery and quality as well as the organizations' commitment to improving quality system wide. However, continuous improvement and creation of a culture that supports it would need to be developed. Promoting such a culture through feedback mechanisms and employee participation in decision making can further this practice optimize TQM as well as incorporate greater flexibility into the organization. Another internal factor that companies should consider is work flexibility.

Keywords: *TQM, Sustainable Competitive Performance, Organizational Flexibility, Telecommunications Sector, Jordan.*

Introduction

Telecommunications industry is recognized as a growing sector globally; however, due to intense competition and rapid transformations in the business environment, some companies opt to merge or exit the market shortly after entry because of challenges in attaining a competitive advantage (Mugo, 2020). Jordanian telecommunications companies significantly contribute to the country's economic and technological progress, generating substantial revenue of 1.075 billion Jordanian dinars. Organizations encounter significant challenges stemming from elevated tax rates, which hinder their ability to offer high-quality services at competitive prices (TRC, 2022). Jordanian telecommunications companies recognize that flexibility is essential for attaining sustainable competitive advantage in a complex and unpredictable market, as it facilitates rapid responses to fluctuating market conditions (Abu-Nahel et al., 2020). Flexibility is essential for achieving sustainable competitive advantage and ensuring survival in a highly competitive environment. It is widely acknowledged as a critical capability that improves performance and facilitates the attainment of sustainable competitive advantage (Barahma et al., 2021).

In today's rapidly changing business environment, Total Quality Management (TQM) has become critical to achieving sustainable competitive performance (Abbas, 2020). TQM is a comprehensive approach that focuses on improving quality in all aspects of an organization, which contributes to enhancing customer satisfaction, improving efficiency, and increasing productivity (Lepistö et al., 2024). However, the main challenge is how to integrate quality management practices with sustainable competitiveness. This study examines the impact of TQM on sustainable competitive performance, focusing on the mediating role of organizational flexibility. The study aims to understand how quality management practices can enhance

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sustainable competitiveness, and how organizational flexibility can enhance this impact in Jordanian telecommunications companies.

Literature Review

TQM

Total quality management has arisen and focuses on enhancing the holistic dimensions of companies. This is a unique phrase and reality lauded by successful firms and organizations operating both locally and internationally (Hashmi et al., 2022). Enhancing the quality of organization, performance, management, productivity, and efficiency is undeniably crucial for achieving the institution's objectives (Nwokeocha, 2024). TQM is an administrative philosophy aimed at incorporating product characteristics while fostering positive institutional changes. This encompasses a comprehensive array of organizational values, beliefs, administrative concepts, thought processes, behaviors, leadership styles, work systems, procedures, and evaluation and monitoring systems, all directed towards achieving a quality level that satisfies societal needs and requirements, with a continuous commitment to improvement and development (Khalil & Muneenam, 2021).

The primary emphasis of TQM is the ongoing enhancement of quality in products or services, as well as in employer-employee relationships and consumer-business interactions (Kinanu, 2022). TQM is a managerial style that emerged in the 1950s and gained prominence in the early 1980s. Total quality refers to the culture, mindset, and structure of an organization dedicated to delivering products and services that fulfill client requirements (Mutambi, 2022). Culture necessitates excellence in all facets of the company's operations, ensuring that tasks are executed correctly on the initial attempt to eradicate faults arising from operational errors. TQM is a crucial element for an organization's sustained performance. The execution of TQM has been a crucial element in enhancing organizational efficiency (Magd & Karyamsetty, 2020).

Sustainable Competitive Performance

Despite being an emerging notion, a definitive and well-established definition of sustainable competitive performance is absent in the present literature. Nevertheless, several academic authorities have endeavored to delineate sustainable competitive performance in several manners, including the capacity of firms to maintain and generate short-term advantages (Degong et al. 2018). Sustainable competitive performance differs significantly from competitive performance, the latter being defined as the ability to achieve returns on investment (ROI) that exceed the average (Ahmad et al., 2023). Similarly, organizational performance is defined as the degree to which it is typically assessed against its intended output, primarily encompassing financial performance, shareholder return performance, and product market performance (Kiptum & Ayuo, 2023). Sustainable competitive performance serves as a distinct measure of firms' performance, facilitating sustainability in competitive dynamics, which ultimately results in long-term profit and relationship building through superior performance (Kim et al., 2020). Several studies have examined the relationships of sustainable competitive performance across various dimensions. For instance, Degong et al. (2018) assessed the influence of international resources and capabilities on sustainable competitive performance within the context of Pakistan. Ying et al. (2019) examined the influence of supervisor's intangible capabilities and resource acquisition on sustainable competitive performance.

Organizational Flexibility

In the past few decades, flexibility has garnered the interest of scholars and managers due to its significant role in contemporary competitive advantage. Numerous factors contribute to this. The stability of the competitive landscape in the 1960s and 1970s has been supplanted by rapidly escalating uncertainty, with product life cycles shortening, customer preferences evolving more swiftly, and rivalry rising (Koçyiğit & Akkaya, 2020). Organizational flexibility enables effective management by recognizing and understanding different forms of flexibility. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) define organizational flexibility as a combination of organizational repertoire and managerial capabilities that enable organizations to adapt swiftly to environmental changes. Within organizational contexts, various forms of flexibility have been

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identified, including operational flexibility, structural flexibility, functional flexibility, and wage flexibility (Ramendran et al., 2013). Organizational flexibility pertains to the degree to which organizations can respond to internal and external influences. The organizational response to change acknowledges the underlying issues while emphasizing the significance of flexibility in promoting sustainable effectiveness (Laser, 2021). Organizational flexibility allows for the exercise of empowerment, involvement in decision-making, promotion of renewal processes, innovation, and commitment among employees (Al-Shalaldeh & Al-Sarayreh, 2022). In the context of recent global economic uncertainty, organizations have increasingly focused on adopting flexibility in decision-making regarding manpower utilization. Flexibility in leadership progression effectively dismantles siloed management models. When an organization perceives itself as a static monolith, it typically undermines any potential for efficiency that could be established.

Hypotheses Development

Total Quality Management is acknowledged as one of the most important business determinants for organizational effectiveness in both the public and private sphere. According to Wassan et al. (2022), it was revealed that comprehensive quality management and sustainability are the key approaches to improving the performance of manufacturing companies. Based on the above research propositions, the study finds that TQM and sustainability play a significant role in enhancing organizational performance. Based on these results, a framework was developed for investigating the link between the major operational practices of Total Quality Management, sustainable development, and organizational performance. There is no doubt that TQM, when implemented in its fullest sense, can lead to sustainable competitive status in organizations' performance. Muchlish & Tjahyono (2021) indicated that TQM had a significant positive effect on SCA. Rashid et al. (2020) indicated that HRM practices and TQM are favorably correlated with organizational sustainable competitive advantage.

According to the above, the following hypothesis can be reached:

H1: There is a positive impact of TQM on sustainable competitive performance.

Phan et al. (2019) explored the correlation between Total Quality Management techniques and flexibility performance in organizations. Alolayyan et al. (2013) determine the impact of total quality management (TQM) and operational flexibility.

According to the above, the following hypothesis can be reached:

H2: There is a positive impact of TQM on organizational flexibility.

The result revealed by Ni et al. (2020) suggest that organizational flexibility generates a positive impact on corporate competitiveness. This paper looks at the conclusion and realize that application of new organizational techniques is vital for the survival of companies and facilitating sustainable development. Organizational flexibility has been found by Anning-Dorson & Nyamekye (2020) as the strong mediator of the relationship between innovation capability and competitive advantage. The research explains that to get certain competitive advantage from organizations' innovation capabilities, it is necessary to create a flexible organization. According to Bhardwaj & Deshmukh (2013), there is conviction that organizational flexibility increases organizations sustainable capacity to compete through competitiveness in the emerging economies through green management practices. Therefore, further research should be directed to understanding the effects of the green management techniques on the sustainability and competitiveness of operating organizations.

According to the above, the following hypotheses can be reached:

H3: There is a positive impact of organizational flexibility on sustainable competitive performance.

H4: There is a mediating role of organizational flexibility in the impact of TQM on sustainable competitive performance.

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Methodology

In this study, a quantitative research approach was employed to examine the effects of TQM on sustainable competitive Performance: A Mediating Role of Organizational Flexibility. The research was designed based on a survey approach, targeting professionals such as Executive/practical and Administrative in Jordanian telecommunications companies who have experience in TQM, Organizational Flexibility and sustainable competitive Performance.

Population and Sample

The study population consists of administrative and operational employees working in the telecommunications sector in Jordan. This sector is of great importance to the Jordanian economy, as it contributes significantly to economic activity and employment of the workforce. This competition has led to the development of innovative services, making the sector a major area for entrepreneurial projects and competitive strategies aimed at achieving profitability and growth. According to Hayajneh et al. (2021), the total workforce in these companies exceeds 3,636 employees. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) suggest that for a population of this size, a representative sample of 355 respondents ensures a 95% confidence level, with a margin of error of ±5%. Consequently, the study employed a simple random sampling technique to select participants, ensuring that the results could be generalized to the larger population.

Data Collection

Data for this study was gathered through a structured questionnaire specifically tailored to address the research objectives. The questionnaire consisted of several sections, covering demographic information, TQM, sustainable competitive performance. when considering the mediating role of organizational flexibility. The selected participants received the questionnaire, and their responses provided the dataset for subsequent analysis. To evaluate the collected data, the study utilized SmartPLS-4, a statistical software tool suitable for structural equation modeling (SEM). SmartPLS-4 was employed to examine the relationships between TQM usage and its effects on the sustainable competitive Performance when considering the mediating role of Organizational Flexibility.

Study Instrument

In this study, a review of prior research and relevant literature was conducted to inform the research methodology. To gather data, a field survey was carried out, utilizing a questionnaire that was specifically designed for this study. A questionnaire, which consists of a series of written questions for participants to answer and return, provides a structured way to collect data. By employing questionnaires, data collection is organized and systematic, enabling the results to be generalized to the wider population, provided a representative sample is selected (Rattray & Jones, 2007).

The researchers distributed and collected questionnaires from participants through Google Forms, requesting that participants respond accurately to each question, whether open-ended or multiple-choice. The questionnaire covered the primary variables of the study, with TQM as the independent variable represented by 8 items, the Organizational Flexibility as the mediation variable by 7 items, and The dependent variables sustainable competitive Performance included 7 items.

The study used a five-point Likert scale to assess participants' levels of agreement or disagreement, with responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." On this scale, a score of 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree," while a score of 5 corresponds to "strongly agree," with options in between for varying levels of agreement. Following Subedi's (2016) approach, the category length was calculated as 1.3 using the formula ((5-1)/3). Based on this calculation, average scores are interpreted as follows: a low level is indicated by an average between 1 and 2.33, a medium level by an average between 2.34 and 3.67, and a high level by an average between 3.68 and 5.00.

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Results

This section presents the findings derived from analyzing the study data using SPSS 28 and SmartPLS-4 software. The first part provides descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographic information, while the second part examines the study hypotheses using SEM.

Demographic Data for Respondents

The following table presents descriptive statistics for respondents' demographic data including the frequency and percentage for each them:

Table (1). Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Data for Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	132	37.2
	Male	223	62.8
Age	20–29 years	68	19.2
	30–39 years	155	43.7
	40–49 years	116	32.7
	50 years and above	16	4.5
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	61	17.2
	5 to less than 10 years	63	17.7
	10 years or more	231	65.1
Educational Level	Diploma or equivalent	31	8.7
	Bachelor's degree	259	73
	Master's degree	59	16.6
	Doctoral degree	6	1.7
Job Title	Executive/practical	194	54.65
	Administrative	161	45.35
	Total	355	100.00

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the demographic data for the study's respondents. Regarding gender, the majority of respondents were male, comprising 62.8% (223 participants), while 37.2% (132 participants) were female. In terms of age, the largest group was aged 30–39 years, representing 43.7% (155 respondents), followed by the 20–29 years' group at 19.2% (68 respondents). The 40–49 years group accounted for 32.7% (116 respondents), and those aged 50 years and above made up 4.5% (16 respondents). When considering years of experience, the majority had 10 or more years of experience, comprising 65.1% (231 respondents), while 17.7% (63 respondents) had between 5 and less than 10 years, and 17.2% (61 respondents) had less than 5 years of experience. Regarding educational level, most respondents held a Bachelor's degree, representing 73% (259 respondents), followed by 16.6% (59 respondents) with a Master's degree, 8.7% (31 respondents) with a diploma or equivalent, and 1.7% (6 respondents) with a Doctoral degree. Finally, regarding job title, 54.65% (194 respondents) were in executive/practical positions, while 45.35% (161 respondents) held administrative roles. The total number of respondents was 355.

Description of Study Variables

In this section, several variables are examined to understand their impact on the research outcomes. These variables include gender, age, years of experience, educational level, and job title, each of which plays a significant role in shaping the overall findings. The mean (average) and standard deviation (SD) are used to describe the central tendency and variability of each variable, providing insight into the distribution of

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responses. The importance of these variables is assessed in relation to the study's focus, emphasized their relevance to the overall research objectives

Table (2). The Mean, SD and Importance for Study Variable

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Importance
TQM	3.58	0.61	Medium
Sustainable Competitive Performance	3.41	0.56	Medium
Organizational Flexibility	3.74	0.66	High

Table 2 presents the mean, standard deviation (SD), and importance of the study variables. Total Quality Management (TQM) has a mean of 3.58 and a standard deviation of 0.61, indicating moderate agreement with its practices, with a medium level of importance. Sustainable Competitive Performance shows a mean of 3.41 and an SD of 0.56, reflecting a slightly lower but still moderate perception, also rated as medium in importance. Organizational Flexibility has the highest mean of 3.74 and an SD of 0.66, indicating strong agreement and variability, with a high level of importance, emphasizing its crucial role in the study.

Internal Consistency of Reliability

Internal consistency reliability refers to the extent to which the items within a scale work together to measure the underlying concept (Sun et al., 2007). In organizational research, common tools like Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients are used to assess the consistency and reliability of multi-item scales (Peterson & Kim, 2013). This study employed Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the adapted scales for several reasons. However, Goetz et al. (2010) contend that composite reliability offers a more accurate estimate of reliability because it accounts for the varying contributions of each indicator to the construct, unlike Cronbach's alpha, which assumes equal weight for all items. A composite reliability value greater than 0.70 is considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2017). On the other hand, Cronbach's alpha values of 0.7 and above are deemed satisfactory (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

As stated by Hair et al. (2014), convergent validity evaluates how well the indicators of a latent construct are related to one another and how accurately they represent the intended construct. This is assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures the average variance shared between a construct and its indicators. For convergent validity to be confirmed, the AVE value must exceed 0.5, according to the general guideline (Barclay et al., 1995). The results presented in Table 3 show that the AVE values for all constructs exceed 0.5, confirming that convergent validity has been established. As shown in Table 3 and Figure 1, the composite reliability coefficients for the constructs in this study indicate satisfactory internal consistency, with all values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Table (3). Reliability and Internal Consistency Results

	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha >.7	Composite reliability > .6	Average variance extracted (AVE) >.5
Organizational Flexibility		**0.719**	**0.935**	**0.674**
Flexibility1	0.775			

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Flexibility2	0.746			
Flexibility3	0.805			
Flexibility4	0.832			
Flexibility5	0.877			
Flexibility6	0.864			
Flexibility7	0.838			
TQM		**0.813**	**0.93**	**0.625**
TQM1	0.799			
TQM2	0.819			
TQM3	0.798			
TQM4	0.835			
TQM5	0.767			
TQM6	0.864			
TQM7	0.827			
TQM8	0.799			
Sustainable Competitive Performance		**0.87**	**0.901**	**0.571**
sustainable1	0.793			
sustainable2	0.876			
sustainable3	0.812			
sustainable4	0.77			
sustainable5	0.788			
sustainable6	0.758			
sustainable7	0.721			

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity assesses the extent to which a construct is distinct and not redundant with other constructs, indicating that it is empirically separate (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In Smart-PLS-4, several methods are used to assess discriminant validity, with the Fornell and Larcker criterion being one of the most widely used. This method compares the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct with the correlations between constructs to ensure that each construct is sufficiently distinct. A more in-depth discussion of this method will follow in the next section.

Variable Correlation Using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion.

Table (4) presents the findings from the multivariable correlation analysis, utilizing the Fornell-Larcker method to evaluate the discriminant validity of the measurement model. As established by Fornell and Bookstein (1982), discriminant validity is confirmed when the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeds the correlation values between pairs of constructs. In simpler terms, the AVE values should be larger than the off-diagonal correlations in the corresponding rows and columns of the correlation matrix, as shown in this study. This ensures that the predictor variables demonstrate discriminant validity.

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Table (4). Reliability and Internal Consistency Results

	Organizational Flexibility	Sustainable Competitive Performance	TQM
Organizational Flexibility	**0.821**		
Sustainable Competitive Performance	0.693	**0.756**	
TQM	0.642	0.757	**0.791**

Hypotheses Testing

This section discussed the findings of the path coefficient used to test research hypotheses. The finding of direct effect hypotheses of The impact of TQM on sustainable competitive Performance: A Mediating Role of Organizational Flexibility (H1, H2, H3 and H4), presented in figure 1, and Table (5).

Table (5). Hypothesis Testing of Model

Hypo.	Direct effect	β	Mean	SD	T	P values
H1	TQM -> Sustainable Competitive Performance	0.532	0.539	0.081	6.597	0.000
H2	TQM -> Organizational _Flexibility	0.642	0.644	0.075	8.588	0.000
H3	Organizational Flexibility -> Sustainable Competitive Performance	0.351	0.349	0.094	3.726	0.000
	Indirect effect					
H4	TQM -> Organizational Flexibility -> Sustainable Competitive Performance	0.225	0.223	0.060	3.745	0.000

Table (5) presents the results of hypothesis testing for the model, showing the direct and indirect effects of the study variables. The direct effect of Total Quality Management (TQM) on Sustainable Competitive Performance (H1) is significant, with a β value of 0.532, mean of 0.539, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a positive impact. The direct effect of TQM on Organizational Flexibility (H2) is also significant, with a β value of 0.642, mean of 0.644, and a p-value of 0.000, showing that TQM positively influences organizational flexibility. Furthermore, the direct effect of Organizational Flexibility on Sustainable Competitive Performance (H3) is significant, with a β value of 0.351, mean of 0.349, and a p-value of 0.000, highlighting that organizational flexibility positively affects sustainable competitive performance. Finally, the indirect effect of TQM on Sustainable Competitive Performance through Organizational Flexibility (H4) is significant, with a β value of 0.225, mean of 0.223, and a p-value of 0.000, suggesting that organizational flexibility mediates the relationship between TQM and sustainable competitive performance. In conclusion, all hypotheses are supported, demonstrating the positive influence of TQM on both organizational flexibility and sustainable competitive performance, with organizational flexibility playing a mediating role.

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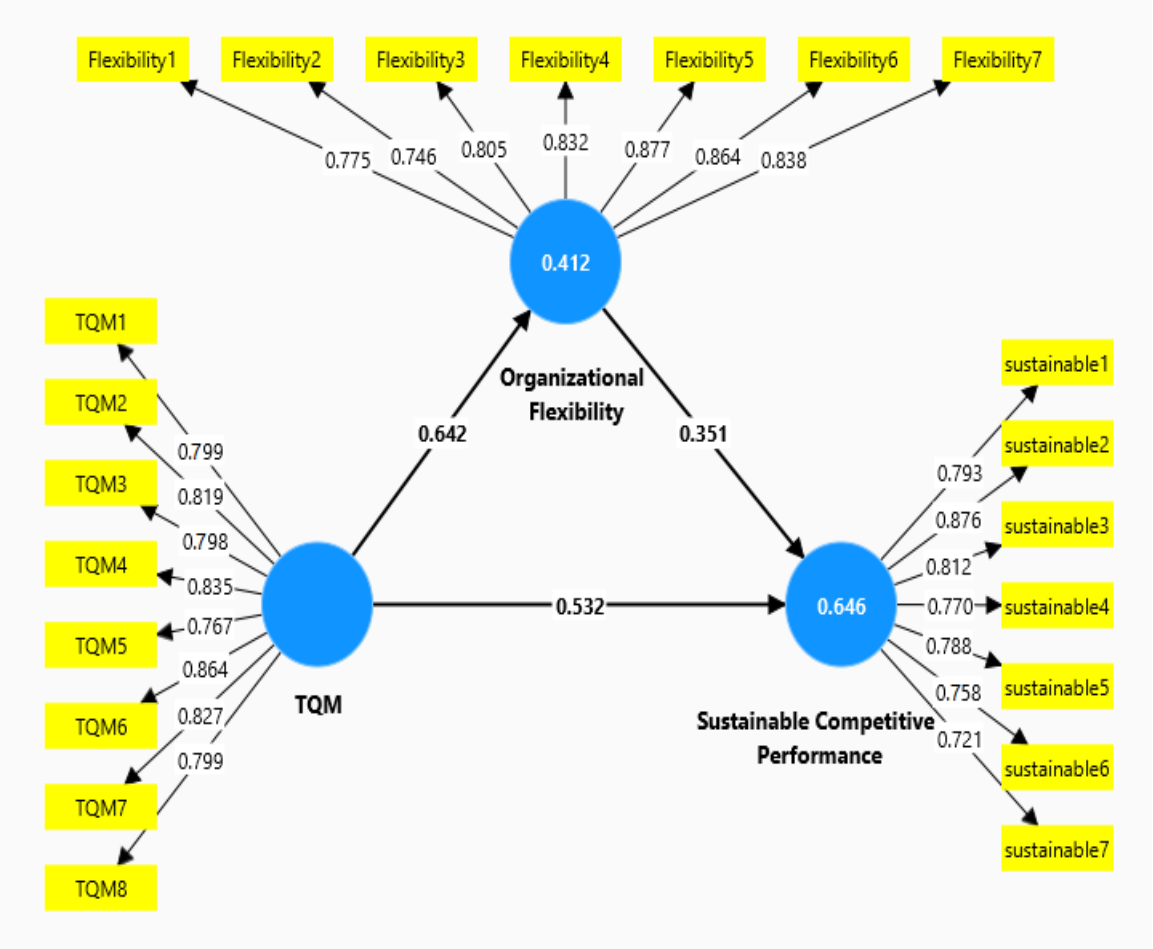

Figure 1. Structure Modeling

Discussion

It has been necessary to emphasize that several critical links between TQM, organizational flexibility, and sustainable competitive performance have been indicated by the results shown above. TQM which calls for constant change for the better, customer satisfaction and employee's input enables an organization to deliver superior performance over competitors in the long run. Many scholars agree that organizations that properly apply TQM may gain increased efficiency, improved quality of the offered products and services, increased customer satisfaction – all these factors are essential for businesses to remain competitive in the market. This is because the implementation of TQM supports creation of a culture that diversifies readiness for embracing change. It can be process, product, offer or service-related adaptability etc., that the organization needs to be willing to make. Business organizations, which implement TQM are likely to be in a better place to adapt to change as it may be very crucial in some industries such as the technological industries in addressing the needs or demands of their consumers.

Proposed relationship between Organizational Flexibility and Sustainable Competitive Performance, flexibility creates the ability to properly adapt the strategic directions as needed and results in increased performance and competitiveness on the market. That is why firms that managed to develop the principle of organizational flexibility can turn changes in the market into specific advantages, thus improving their competitive position, both in terms of the speed of activities, their quality and, last but not least, customer satisfaction. The findings indicate that organizational flexibility mediates the relationship between TQM and sustainable competitive performance. This means that TQM initiatives improve flexibility thus

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improving competitive performance. Based on the study Organization must not only pay attention to TQM practices, but should also strive to incorporate flexibility into the organization. This duality can help to build a better base for generating sustainable success and longevity in a more hostile organizational environment. The results also prove that it is possible for TQM, organizational flexibility and sustainable competitive performance to be intertwined. To organizations that plan to sustain themselves in the long run, adopting TQM practices that can improve flexibility could be, therefore, a good way to achieve higher performance. Goal formulation should focus on implementation of quality and flexibility since it should both be integrated into the organizational strategies.

Conclusion

The results of the study about the mediating role of the Organizational Flexibility on the relationship between the TQM implementation and Sustainable Competitive Performance have major implications for the telecommunications industry in Jordan. First of all, the moderating effect of TQM on sustainable competitive performance shows that if telecommunications firms embrace sound TQM practices, they can considerably build up competitive advantage. This advantage is especially strategic in an industry that is characterized by a fast growth rate, and where the needs of the consumers as well as technological forces are always dynamic. When implemented, TQM principles are likely to improve the service quality and customer satisfaction rates and in turn lead to customer loyalty hence improving its competition edge over rivals. Secondly, the interaction between the independent variables and organizational flexibility shows the importance of flexibility as a mediator in the current and future conditions telecommunications firms are likely to experience. Suppleness makes an organization better placed to accommodate changing rules, new technologies, and emergent customer needs – all key factors for the sustainability of any business. This pliability let firms deal with odds efficiently and go for new opportunities as they emerge. Further, the results indicate that there needs to be a strategic link between TQM and other improvements, particularly organizational flexibility. Developing this alignment contributes to a more robust organizational structure able to deal with competition. Flexible operation is an essential way of sustaining TQM practices as it enables organizations respond to pressures from within and outside the firm.

In order to take full advantage of these findings, several recommendations are possible. The results show that organizations in the telecommunications sector should particularly focus on training initiatives that prepare the workers in TQM Tenets & Techniques respectively. Such training can certainly improve service delivery and quality as well as the organizations' commitment to improving quality system wide. However, continuous improvement and creation of a culture that supports it would need to be developed. Promoting such a culture through feedback mechanisms and employee participation in decision making can further this practice optimize TQM as well as incorporate greater flexibility into the organization. Another internal factor that companies should consider is work flexibility, this may include flattening the organizational structure, involving cross organizations, less layers of management and faster decision making which will help meet the need of the market more often. Another of the major recommendations include use of technology. This means that by using better ways of analyzing data and better customer relationship management systems in place then firms are better placed to determine the most appropriate responses to such changes by virtue of the accumulated knowledge on them from the available data. Moreover, defining regular measurements of TQM and flexibility effect on competition performance will point to the need for enhancements of the strategy in the future. Last but not the least is managing customer/supplier and other regulatory authorities' relationships. Involving stakeholders can prove informative through highlighting key points which can further TQM best practices as well as work on the flexibility of the organization. Through the absorption of these recommendations, telecommunications companies in Jordan can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of both TQM and organizational flexibility to enhance sustainable competitive performance of the companies in a relevant and competitive industry.

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