

Promoting Firm Performance through Total Quality Management Performance

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Direct Research Journal of Management and Strategic Studies



Vol. 7(1), Pp. 98-105, March 2026

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Research Article
ISSN: 2787-009X

Received 18 January 2026, Accepted 3 February 2026, Published 27 February 2026

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices on firm performance, focusing specifically on the effects of strategic planning and continuous improvement. The objectives of the study were to assess the effect of strategic planning on firm performance and to evaluate the effect of continuous improvement on firm performance in selected manufacturing firms in Delta State, Nigeria. A sample of 240 respondents was drawn, with 219 valid questionnaires used for analysis after screening for completeness and accuracy. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analysed through descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis. The findings reveal that strategic planning significantly enhances firm performance ($\beta = 0.342, p < 0.001$), highlighting the importance of structured goal-setting, resource allocation, and proactive decision-making. Continuous improvement also demonstrated a strong positive effect on firm performance ($\beta = 0.375, p < 0.001$), indicating that fostering a culture of ongoing process enhancement, employee participation, and innovation contributes substantially to operational efficiency, quality, and customer satisfaction. The combined explanatory power of strategic planning and continuous improvement was substantial ($R^2 = 0.639$), confirming that these TQM practices jointly account for a significant portion of the variance in firm performance. Based on these findings, it is recommended that manufacturing firms formalise strategic planning frameworks, foster continuous improvement cultures, integrate TQM principles into daily operations, invest in employee training, and implement continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The study concludes that TQM practices, specifically strategic planning and continuous improvement, are critical drivers of firm performance and competitiveness. The research contributes to knowledge by empirically validating the positive relationship between TQM practices and firm performance in the context of Nigerian manufacturing firms, providing practical insights for managers seeking to enhance operational effectiveness and long-term organisational success.

Keywords: Total Quality Management, Strategic Planning, Continuous Improvement, Firm Performance, Manufacturing Firms, Delta State



Citation: Odiurho J.I., Aruoren E. and Kifordu A. (2026). Promoting Firm Performance through Total Quality Management Performance. Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies. Vol. 7(1), Pp. 98-105. <https://doi.org/10.26765/DRJMSS19117491>

INTRODUCTION

The modern business environment is characterised by intense competition, driven by the proliferation of firms offering similar products and services. This has compelled organisations to adopt efficient strategies, skilled workforce practices, and strong managerial coordination to remain competitive and meet rising customer expectations (Addis, 2019; Castagena et al., 2020). Total Quality Management (TQM) has emerged as a comprehensive management philosophy focused on continuous improvement of products, services, and organisational processes (Pattanayak et al., 2017). Its adoption has been widely linked to enhanced organisational performance, including improved operational efficiency, financial outcomes, and customer satisfaction (Panuwatwanich & Nguyen, 2017). TQM emphasises key principles such as customer focus, continuous improvement, employee involvement, and data-driven decision-making, all of which contribute to long-term organisational success (Amin et al., 2017).

Furthermore, effective implementation of TQM requires strong top management commitment, teamwork, and continuous innovation (Alzoubi & Ahmed, 2019; Haque et al., 2020). By integrating quality practices across all organisational functions, firms can improve internal processes, enhance competitiveness, and achieve sustainable performance. Overall, TQM remains a critical strategy for organisations seeking to improve operational efficiency and maintain a competitive advantage in today's dynamic business environment.

Study Problem

Inadequate implementation of management strategies can lead to low employee engagement, reduced productivity, and increased staff turnover. It often results in workplace conflict, diminished trust, and employee dissatisfaction due to lack of support and clear direction. Poor planning and weak resource management may cause delays, shortages, and inefficient use of resources, ultimately affecting organisational performance. Additionally, the absence of collaboration among team members fosters unhealthy competition rather than teamwork. Continuous improvement initiatives may also fail due to limited stakeholder involvement, lack of supportive organisational culture, and weak management systems. These challenges are further compounded by poor understanding of continuous improvement practices, ineffective monitoring mechanisms, and misalignment with organisational goals, leading to wasted resources and unsuccessful outcomes. The study aims to investigate the impact of total quality management on firm performance, with a focus on specific objectives such as assessing the influence of strategic planning on firm performance and evaluating the effect of continuous improvement on organizational outcomes.

Literature Review

Total Quality Management (TQM)

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a comprehensive management philosophy focused on achieving continuous improvement in organisational processes to enhance customer satisfaction and overall performance (Jimoh et al., 2018; Elvina et al., 2022). It is widely regarded as a strategic approach that enables organisations to improve competitiveness by aligning products and services with customer needs and expectations (Jalilvand et al., 2018; Aquilani et al., 2017).

In today's global and competitive business environment, quality has become a key differentiator, prompting organisations to adopt TQM practices to improve efficiency, productivity, and customer experience (Ghani et al., 2020; Hilman et al., 2020). TQM emphasises teamwork, stakeholder involvement, and the use of quality management tools to enhance both operational processes and business outcomes. Furthermore, TQM promotes a culture where all employees are committed to quality improvement across all organisational activities, focusing not only on final outputs but also on the entire production process (Shaibun & Anuar, 2021). By minimising defects, improving processes, and continuously enhancing service delivery, TQM helps organisations meet customer expectations, sustain competitive advantage, and achieve long-term success (Antunes et al., 2020; Tonjang & Thawesaengskulthai, 2020).

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the process through which organisations determine actions to respond effectively to external opportunities and threats, enabling them to adapt to dynamic business environments (Tawalbeh & Niqresh, 2021; Samad & Ahmed, 2021). It is a critical management function that guides organisational direction, enhances decision-making, and supports long-term success across various sectors. The process involves systematic steps, including environmental analysis, formulation of mission and objectives, strategy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Elbanna et al., 2020; Posch & Garaus, 2019). This structured approach helps organisations align internal capabilities with external conditions and make necessary adjustments in response to changes. Overall, effective strategic planning improves organisational performance by strengthening competitiveness, enabling efficient resource utilisation, and fostering sustainable growth. It equips managers with the tools needed to achieve long-term objectives and maintain a competitive advantage in an increasingly uncertain and competitive environment (Fuertes et al., 2020; Iborra et al., 2019).

Continuous Improvement

In the contemporary business environment, companies strive to maintain consistent peak performance, underscoring the importance of continuous performance improvement. Continuous improvement focuses on enhancing both the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational processes (Gonzalez & Van Aken, 2016). Research indicates that encouraging employees to adopt continuous improvement practices fosters innovation and strengthens organizational adaptability, which is critical for long-term sustainability (Message-Costa, Filho, Fredendall, José, & Paredes, 2018; McLean, Antony, & Dahlgaard, 2017; Gutierrez-Gutierrez & Antony, 2019). The concept has gained prominence due to dynamic changes in the business landscape, requiring firms to continuously improve processes to remain competitive and meet client expectations (Khan, Kaviani, Galli, & Pharma, 2019). Continuous improvement as a strategic philosophy originated in post-World War II Japan, becoming a central pillar of the nation's industrial sector (Singh & Singh, 2015). Effective implementation of continuous improvement enhances internal processes, such as manufacturing and service delivery, which in turn contributes to customer satisfaction and overall organizational performance (Ershadi & Soleimani, 2019). Consequently, for organizations seeking long-term success, embedding continuous improvement practices is essential to foster innovation, operational efficiency, and sustained competitive advantage.

Firm Performance

In today's competitive business environment, organizations strive for sustained peak performance, making continuous improvement (CI) a critical strategy. CI aims to enhance efficiency and effectiveness across organizational processes, fostering innovation and adaptability essential for long-term sustainability (Gonzalez & Van Aken, 2016; Message-Costa, Filho, Fredendall, José, & Paredes, 2018). The philosophy emphasizes engaging employees in systematic improvements, aligning internal capabilities with evolving customer demands and market conditions (McLean, Antony, & Dahlgaard, 2017; Gutierrez-Gutierrez & Antony, 2019). Originating in post-World War II Japan, CI has become a cornerstone of manufacturing excellence, supporting quality enhancement and customer satisfaction (Singh & Singh, 2015; Ershadi & Soleimani, 2019). Organizations adopting CI strategies benefit from optimized operational processes, higher employee involvement, and improved competitiveness, ultimately ensuring sustained organizational success in dynamic markets (Khan, Kaviani, Galli, & Pharma, 2019). From the reviewed literature, the variables of total quality management such as top management commitment, strategic planning, employee teamwork and

continuous improvement to a large extent influences organizational performance (Figure 1).

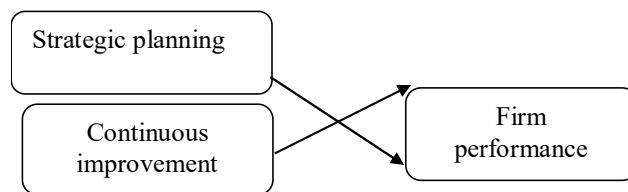


Figure 1: Conceptual model of study variables. Source: Researcher's Model (2026)

Strategic Planning and Organisational Effectiveness

Strategic planning is a critical management practice that ensures long-term organisational sustainability and enhances the ability to respond to potential threats and uncertainties (Ojha, Patel, & Sridharan, 2020; Huxley, 2020; Posch & Garaus, 2020; Abusharekh, Al Shobaki, Abu-Naser, & El Talla, 2020). By systematically reviewing and aligning organisational policies, goals, and resources, strategic planning improves efficiency, effectiveness, and overall firm performance (Al-Zaqeba, Hamid, & Muhammad, 2018; Al-Zaqeba & Al-Rashdan, 2020). It enables organisations to leverage their strengths, optimise resource utilisation, and adapt to dynamic business environments marked by instability and uncertainty (Alaarij, Mohamed, & Bustamam, 2017).

Moreover, strategic planning promotes employee participation in decision-making, enhancing job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Al-Suraihi et al., 2020). Empirical evidence highlights that implementing structured strategic planning processes contributes to sustainable competitive advantage, improved investment outcomes, and strengthened organisational performance (Almansoori, 2021; Tawalbeh, 2021; Altemh, 2021). Overall, strategic planning serves as a cornerstone for aligning organisational capabilities with environmental opportunities and challenges.

Continuous improvement and firm performance

Mohammed (2017) investigated the methods employed by nonprofit organisations to achieve continuous improvement, focusing on leaders in Delaware. The study selected participants based on their proven success in applying Continuous Improvement (CI) principles. Data were collected through in-person, semi-structured interviews with four nonprofit CEOs and analysed using inductive coding and methodological triangulation. The findings indicate that adopting a CI approach enables nonprofit leaders to enhance operational efficiency and increase revenue. Similarly, Lizarelli and Toledo (2016)

examined practices for continuous improvement in product development processes across multiple case studies. Their research identified key strategies, including recognising barriers to CI adoption, planning improvement initiatives, and promoting improvement activities, although challenges in execution remained. Despite these obstacles, all participating organisations agreed on the importance of integrating CI practices into product development. Furthermore, Luthra et al. (2020) highlighted that Total Quality Management (TQM) encompasses diverse management practices and requires organisational changes to foster a culture of continuous improvement. Such a culture is essential for ensuring quality, motivating employee skill development, and achieving complete customer satisfaction. Executives across sectors are encouraged to embrace a mindset of constant development to secure organisational growth and competitiveness.

Theoretical Review

Resource Based View Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) provides a strategic framework for enhancing firm performance by leveraging unique internal resources and capabilities to gain sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Falkenreck, 2010). RBV emphasizes that an organization's competitive edge derives from resources that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate, including human capital, technology, and organisational processes. Total Quality Management (TQM) aligns closely with RBV by systematically optimizing these resources to improve operational efficiency, product quality, and customer satisfaction (Winter, 1994). By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, TQM develops intangible assets such as tacit knowledge, employee expertise, and socially complex organizational practices, which enhance internal processes and overall performance. Thus, integrating TQM within the RBV framework allows firms to transform their resources and capabilities into measurable improvements in productivity, service quality, and long-term competitiveness, directly supporting enhanced firm performance in dynamic business environments.

Empirical Review

Wahyu, Ahmad, Hasyim, and Masurin (2022) examined the effect of Total Quality Management (TQM) implementation on managerial performance, using PT. X a leading wheat flour manufacturer in Makassar, Indonesia—as a case study. The study focused on three TQM principles: customer orientation, quality focus, and education and training. A sample of 120 participants was analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Findings revealed that TQM practices had a positive, albeit

statistically insignificant, impact on managerial performance, with causal relationships observed between each TQM dimension and managerial outcomes. Similarly, Wassan, Memon, Mari, and Kalwar (2022) investigated the influence of TQM practices on organisational sustainability and performance in Pakistan's manufacturing sector. Data were collected via questionnaire surveys and analysed using factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The study concluded that TQM and sustainability practices significantly enhance organizational performance, providing a framework for linking key TQM practices with sustainability and performance outcomes. Collectively, these studies highlight that TQM adoption fosters improved managerial and organizational performance, potentially offering sustainable competitive advantages.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the effect of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices specifically strategic planning and continuous improvement—on firm performance in the manufacturing sector. A correlational approach is adopted to examine the relationships among the study variables and to assess their predictive influence on organizational performance. This design is suitable for testing theoretically grounded associations between management practices and performance outcomes.

Study area and population

The study was conducted in Delta State, Nigeria, a region with a high concentration of manufacturing activities, including food processing, steel production, plastics, and construction materials. The target population consists of employees across managerial, supervisory, and operational levels in selected manufacturing firms, as these groups are actively involved in quality management practices and organizational processes. The total population comprises 460 employees drawn from four manufacturing firms: Flour Mills Plc (150), Delta Steel Ltd (120), Royal Plastic Manufacturing Ltd (100), and Global Construction Materials Ltd (90).

Sample size and sampling technique

A sample size of 240 respondents was selected from the study population using a stratified random sampling technique. This method ensures proportional representation of employees across different organisational levels, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings and minimising sampling bias.

A total of 219 valid responses were obtained, representing a response rate of 91.3%.

Data collection and measurement

Primary data were collected באמצעות a structured questionnaire administered both physically and electronically. The instrument was developed based on established constructs from prior literature and comprised three main variables: strategic planning, continuous improvement, and firm performance. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Strategic planning was assessed through items capturing organizational goal setting and resource alignment, while continuous improvement focused on process enhancement and innovation practices. Firm performance was measured using indicators related to operational efficiency and overall organizational outcomes.

Validity and reliability

Content and face validity were ensured through expert evaluation by three scholars in quality management and research methodology. Their feedback led to minor revisions to improve clarity and relevance of the instrument. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, with all constructs exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scales.

Data analysis techniques

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the study hypotheses. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships among variables, while multiple regression analysis was applied to determine the effect of strategic planning and continuous improvement on firm performance.

Model specification

The functional relationship between the variables is specified as follows:

$$FP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SP + \beta_2 CI + \epsilon$$

Where:

- FP = Firm Performance (dependent variable)
- SP= Strategic Planning (independent variable)
- CI= Continuous Improvement (independent variable)

- β_0 = Intercept
- β_1, β_2 = Regression coefficients
- ϵ = Error term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide empirical support for the role of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices as key determinants of firm performance in the manufacturing sector. The demographic profile (Table 1) indicates that respondents possess adequate experience and organisational insight, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings. The reliability statistics (Table 2) confirm strong internal consistency across all constructs, while the descriptive results (Table 3) suggest a high level of implementation of strategic planning and continuous improvement practices. The correlation analysis (Table 4) reveals strong and significant positive associations between strategic planning, continuous improvement, and firm performance, indicating that TQM practices are closely linked to organisational outcomes. These relationships are further substantiated by the regression results (Table 5), which show that strategic planning ($\beta = 0.431, p < 0.001$) and continuous improvement ($\beta = 0.389, p < 0.001$) significantly predict firm performance, jointly explaining 62.5% of its variance ($R^2 = 0.625$). This level of explanatory power underscores the strategic importance of TQM practices as core organisational capabilities.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 219).

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	138	63.0
	Female	81	37.0
Age	20–29	42	19.2
	30–39	91	41.6
	40–49	62	28.3
	50 and above	24	11.0
Education	Diploma	48	21.9
	Bachelor's Degree	119	54.3
	Master's Degree	43	19.6
	PhD	9	4.1
Position	Operational Staff	78	35.6
	Supervisory Staff	87	39.7
	Management	54	24.7
Years of Experience	0–5 years	61	27.9
	6–10 years	92	42.0
	11–15 years	41	18.7
	16 years and above	25	11.4

Table 2: The internal consistency of the scales was tested using Cronbach's alpha.

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Strategic Planning (SP)	6	0.872	Excellent
Continuous Improvement (CI)	5	0.861	Excellent
Firm Performance (FP)	7	0.889	Excellent

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics (Scale Level).

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strategic Planning (SP)	219	4.12	0.61
Continuous Improvement (CI)	219	4.05	0.65
Firm Performance (FP)	219	4.08	0.60

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	SP	CI	FP
SP	1	0.634**	0.712**
CI	0.634**	1	0.688**
FP	0.712**	0.688**	1

Note: p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

Table 5: Regression Results.

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Strategic Planning (SP)	0.431	7.882	<0.001	Significant
Continuous Improvement (CI)	0.389	7.011	<0.001	Significant
R ²	0.625	F = 178.6	<0.001	Model significant

The significant effect of strategic planning on firm performance is consistent with prior studies that emphasise its role in aligning organisational resources with environmental demands and enhancing decision-making effectiveness (Ojha et al., 2020; Elbanna et al., 2020; Fuertes et al., 2020; Samad & Ahmed, 2021). Empirical evidence further suggests that formalised planning processes improve organisational competitiveness and performance outcomes (Abusharekh et al., 2020; Almansoori, 2021; Al-Zaqeba & Al-Rashdan, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports the resource-based view, which identifies strategic planning as a valuable organisational capability that contributes to sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Falkenreck, 2010). In addition, strategic planning enhances organisational resilience and adaptability in uncertain environments (Alaarij et al., 2017; Huxley, 2020), particularly when supported by employee participation and structured implementation processes (Al-Suraihi et al., 2020; Posch & Garaus, 2019; Al-Zaqeba et al., 2018). Continuous improvement also demonstrates a significant positive effect on firm performance, reinforcing its role as a fundamental component of TQM.

This finding aligns with prior research highlighting the contribution of continuous improvement to operational efficiency, innovation, and quality enhancement (Gonzalez & Van Aken, 2016; Luthra et al., 2020; Sutrisno & Ardyan, 2020).

The strong association between continuous improvement and firm performance (Table 4) is consistent with studies showing that ongoing process refinement improves productivity and customer satisfaction (Ershadi & Soleimani, 2019; Gutierrez-Gutierrez & Antony, 2019). Moreover, continuous improvement fosters organisational learning and adaptability, which are critical for long-term performance (McLean et al., 2017; Hyland et al., 2007; Winter, 1994). The role of employee involvement in enhancing continuous improvement outcomes is also well established (Message-Costa et al., 2018; Mohammed, 2017). The combined influence of strategic planning and continuous improvement highlights the integrative nature of TQM.

The findings support the view that TQM practices are most effective when implemented as a coherent system rather than in isolation (Aquilani et al., 2017; Antunes et al., 2020). Consistent with prior empirical studies, the results demonstrate that TQM practices significantly enhance organisational performance across different contexts (Amin et al., 2017; Alzoubi & Ahmed, 2019; Ghani

et al., 2020; Hilman et al., 2020; Pattanayak et al., 2017; Jalilvand et al., 2018). Furthermore, recent evidence suggests that TQM contributes to sustainability, innovation, and long-term competitiveness in manufacturing firms (Elvina et al., 2022; Tonjang & Thawesaengskulthai, 2020; Wahyu et al., 2022; Wassan et al., 2022). Overall, the findings confirm that strategic planning and continuous improvement are critical drivers of firm performance in the manufacturing sector. Their joint effect underscores the importance of embedding TQM practices into organisational strategy and operations to achieve sustained competitive advantage.

Conclusion

This study set out to empirically examine the effect of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices specifically strategic planning and continuous improvement on firm performance in selected manufacturing firms in Delta State. Drawing on data obtained from 219 valid responses out of a total population of 460 employees, the study achieved a high response rate of 91.3%, thereby enhancing the credibility and generalizability of the findings within the study context. The demographic composition of respondents revealed a workforce that is relatively experienced, professionally engaged, and educationally equipped, with a significant proportion occupying operational and supervisory roles and possessing between 6–10 years of work experience. This lends support to the reliability of the responses, as participants are likely to have sufficient organizational exposure to meaningfully evaluate TQM practices and firm performance. Preliminary analyses confirmed the adequacy of the dataset for inferential analysis. The absence of extreme outliers, minimal missing data (less than 5%), and strong internal consistency across all constructs evidenced by Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.86 demonstrate that the measurement instruments were both valid and reliable. Furthermore, the descriptive statistics indicated a generally high level of agreement among respondents regarding the implementation of strategic planning and continuous improvement, as well as positive perceptions of firm performance. At the inferential level, the study established strong and statistically significant relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Strategic planning and continuous improvement were both found to be positively correlated with firm performance, suggesting that firms that adopt structured planning processes and foster ongoing improvement initiatives tend to achieve better organizational outcomes. More critically, the multiple regression analysis provided empirical confirmation of the predictive capacity of TQM practices. Strategic planning emerged as a slightly stronger predictor ($\beta = 0.431$, $p < 0.001$) compared to continuous

improvement ($\beta = 0.389$, $p < 0.001$), although both variables were statistically significant. The model's explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.625$) indicates that a substantial proportion 62.5% of the variation in firm performance is accounted for by these two dimensions of TQM. This underscores the centrality of quality-oriented management practices in driving performance outcomes in the manufacturing sector.

In substantive terms, the findings affirm that the integration of strategic planning and continuous improvement into organizational processes is not merely a managerial formality but a critical determinant of firm success. Manufacturing firms that systematically align their strategic objectives with quality management principles and cultivate a culture of continuous enhancement are better positioned to achieve sustained performance improvements.

The study therefore concludes that TQM practices constitute a significant strategic resource for manufacturing firms in Delta State. It is recommended that managers and policymakers prioritize the institutionalization of these practices to enhance operational efficiency, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability.

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