

Organizational Adaptive Responses to External Pressures: Employee Perceptions in QMS and Non-QMS Organizations

Derwin Chandra¹, Bisma Jatmika Tisnasasmita², Hastuti Naibaho³

^{*1,2,3} Magister Manajemen, Universitas Ciputra Surabaya, Indonesia

e-mail: ¹dchandra07@magister.ciputra.ac.id, ²bisma.jatmika@ciputra.ac.id, ³hastuti.naibaho@ciputra.ac.id

*Corresponding author: dchandra07@magister.ciputra.ac.id

ABSTRACT

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This study examines differences in employee perceptions of organizational adaptive responses to external pressures between organizations with and without formal quality management systems (QMS). A quantitative comparative cross-sectional design was employed. Data were collected from 211 employees across QMS and non-QMS organizations in Indonesia using a 26-item closed questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed via independent-samples t-tests. Four hypotheses were tested across regulatory, industry, customer pressure, and internal process adjustment dimensions. All four hypotheses were statistically supported ($p < 0,001$). QMS organizations consistently recorded higher mean scores, with the largest aggregate gap on regulatory pressure ($\Delta = 0.87$) and the smallest on industry pressure ($\Delta = 0.27$). Item-level analysis revealed that readiness for government inspection (TR5) produced the largest gap across all 26 items ($\Delta = 1.14$), while two items, competitive pressure (TI3) and customer-related rule adjustment (RA4), showed negative gaps where non-QMS organizations scored marginally higher. This study extends open systems and institutional perspectives by demonstrating that QMS influences adaptive responses differently across pressure dimensions. The identification of negative-gap anomalies challenges linear assumptions in adaptation theory, suggesting that formal systems may trade consistency for flexibility in specific operational contexts. This study examines differences in employees' perceptions of an organization's adaptive response to external pressures between organizations that have and do not have a formal quality management system (QMS).

Keywords: External Pressure, Organizational Adaptive Response, Employee Perception, Quality Management System, non-QMS Organization.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations today operate in increasingly complex environments shaped by regulatory change, evolving industry norms, and rising customer expectations. These external pressures are persistent conditions that influence how organizations structure processes, coordinate internal activities, and maintain operational continuity. From an open systems perspective, organizations

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continuously interact with their external environment and must adjust internally to remain viable and legitimate (Katz & Kahn, 2015; Scott & Davis, 2014). Yet organizations facing similar external pressures do not always respond in the same way, as adaptive capacity depends on the internal systems and mechanisms through which those pressures are interpreted and managed.

One mechanism associated with stronger organizational responsiveness is the use of formal quality management systems. ISO 9001, as the most widely adopted quality management standard, provides a structured framework for maintaining process consistency, supporting continuous improvement, and responding more systematically to stakeholder demands (Fonseca et al., 2017). Research has generally linked ISO 9001 with improvements in operational performance and organizational practices (Bakhtiar et al., 2023; Nurcahyo et al., 2021). However, the formal existence of a management system does not automatically guarantee consistent adaptive responses in daily work practice. When internalization at the employee level remains weak, quality management systems may remain symbolic or compliance-driven rather than genuinely embedded in operational behavior (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2011; Dick et al., 2008).

The consequences of operating without structured quality systems extend beyond internal operations. Empirical studies have shown that organizations lacking formal quality management systems tend to be less responsive to evolving industry standards and customer demands (Bakhtiar et al., 2023; Nurcahyo et al., 2021). In B2B markets, the absence of certification can represent a concrete barrier to market access, as institutional buyers increasingly treat quality standards as a supplier qualification prerequisite (Fonseca et al., 2017). More critically, Alič (2014) found that the loss of ISO 9001 certification is associated with negative effects on organizational performance and, in certain cases, firm liquidation, reinforcing that structured adaptation mechanisms are not merely operational preferences but determinants of organizational continuity. Despite these implications, prior research on organizational response to external pressure has largely focused on structural adoption, certification status, and aggregate performance outcomes. Comparatively limited attention has been given to how external pressures are translated into employee-perceived adaptive responses, particularly in comparative studies contrasting organizations with and without formal quality management systems. Employees are the internal actors who directly experience whether adaptation is reflected in actual work procedures, coordination patterns, and operational adjustments. Their perceptions provide an analytical lens for assessing whether formal systems are genuinely embedded in practice or merely documented (Scott & Davis, 2014). This distinction is consequential: if QMS organizations demonstrate consistently stronger adaptive responses under similar external conditions, then organizations without structured systems may face a widening capability gap in increasingly dynamic environments.

Empirical studies on ISO 9001 have predominantly focused on its impact on aggregate organizational performance in manufacturing and service sectors (Bakhtiar et al., 2023; Nurcahyo et al., 2021; Psomas et al., 2013). These studies consistently measure ISO 9001 as a variable influencing organizational outcomes, with limited attention to how external pressures are translated into daily practice by internal actors. From an institutional perspective, adoption of ISO 9001 reflects a response to legitimacy demands from regulators, industry, and customers (Greenwood et al., 2014; Oliver, 1991), yet most studies remain focused on adoption decisions

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and aggregate outcomes rather than on how those pressures shape employee-level experience and perception. Literature on quality management internalization suggests that employee interpretation of external demands is critical to organizational adaptive effectiveness (Scott & Davis, 2014; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2011). Nevertheless, comparative studies explicitly contrasting QMS and non-QMS organizations using employee perceptions as the primary analytical unit remain limited. This gap motivates the present study, which analyzes how differences in quality management context shape how employees perceive and experience organizational responses to external pressure.

Companies are open organizations, which are constantly receiving pressures that come from relatively similar environments, but can generate different organizational adaptive responses. Then it is connected to institutional theory where, external pressures are divided into 3 types, namely regulatory pressure, industrial pressure, and customer pressure. After that, it is connected to cognitive appraisal theory, where the pressure is not directly translated into a response, but is understood, studied, and made a response by employees as executors of tasks in the organization which is ultimately reflected as an adaptive response. Well, here it turns out, there has been no research that compares companies that implement ISO (quality management system) and companies that have not implemented ISO from the perspective of employees in generating these responses, and whether the difference is significant or not. This research was conducted in Indonesia, samples taken on the island of Java.

This study addresses that gap by examining organizational adaptive responses through employee perceptions across QMS and non-QMS organizations. It contributes to the literature by extending open systems and institutional perspectives into a comparative analysis using employee perception as the primary analytical lens. The objective is to analyze whether significant differences exist in employee perceptions of organizational adaptive responses to regulatory, industry, and customer pressures between QMS and non-QMS organizations, and to identify the specific dimensions and items where those differences are most and least pronounced.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Open Systems Perspective and Organizational Adaptation

Organizations can be understood as open systems that continuously receive inputs from the external environment, process those inputs through internal mechanisms, and generate outputs that sustain their continuity (Katz & Kahn, 2015). Changes in external conditions require organizations to adjust internal processes in order to remain operationally relevant. This positions adaptation not as an optional response but as a structural requirement for organizational survival under changing environmental demands.

Institutional Theory and the Nature of External Pressure

Institutional theory explains that organizational behavior is shaped not only by technical efficiency but also by institutional pressures arising from the social environment in which organizations operate (Scott & Davis, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2014). Organizations adjust structures and practices to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of external stakeholders. In this study,

external pressure is examined through three dimensions: regulatory pressure (compliance with government rules), industry pressure (conformity to sector norms and standards), and customer pressure (responsiveness to market expectations regarding quality, consistency, and transparency). These three dimensions represent the external stimuli that require organizations to make internal adjustments (Delmas & Toffel, 2008; Zhu & Sarkis, 2007; Oliver, 1991).

Cognitive Appraisal Theory and Employee Response

Cognitive Appraisal Theory explains how individuals interpret environmental stimuli before responding (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). When pressure is perceived as manageable, individuals tend to exhibit constructive adaptive responses. When perceived as threatening, responses become defensive or resistant. This framework is relevant because external pressures are not automatically translated into organizational action; they must first be perceived and interpreted by internal actors. Employee perception is therefore the mediating mechanism through which external demands are cognitively assessed and reflected in organizational behavior.

Employee Perception as an Analytical Lens of Organizational Response

Organizational responses to external pressure are ultimately enacted through the actions of employees who carry out daily activities. For this reason, understanding organizational response cannot be separated from how employees interpret and operationalize organizational policies and processes in practice (Scott & Davis, 2014). Employee perception provides an important analytical window into how organizations actually respond to external pressures in everyday operational settings, rather than merely how they are formally designed to respond.

Through their direct work experience, employees observe whether organizations adjust work procedures, manage change, improve coordination, and respond to environmental demands in practice. The use of employee perception as an analytical lens therefore enables researchers to assess whether formal organizational systems are genuinely embedded in operational routines rather than remaining confined to documentation. In this sense, employee perception is not merely subjective opinion but reflects lived organizational experience and reveals the degree to which adaptive processes are translated into daily work behavior. This analytical choice is particularly relevant in comparative studies examining whether formal management systems produce meaningfully different adaptive experiences for employees across organizational contexts.

ISO 9001 as Context Shaping Organizational Response

ISO 9001 is designed to help organizations maintain process consistency through documentation, quality control, and continuous improvement (Fonseca et al., 2017). In this study, it is not positioned as a performance variable but as an organizational context that distinguishes how internal mechanisms are structured when responding to external pressure. Organizations implementing ISO 9001 are expected to possess more formalized management frameworks compared with those that have not adopted structured quality management systems. However, such systems can remain symbolic when not sufficiently internalized at the employee level (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2011; Boiral, 2012).

Limitations of Formal Systems and Internalization at the Employee Level

Although formal quality management systems are designed to improve organizational process consistency, their existence does not guarantee that designed procedures will be effectively enacted by employees in daily practice. Research has consistently shown that quality management systems can function symbolically when not supported by adequate internalization at the employee level (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2011; Boiral, 2012). In such cases, the documented system and the lived operational reality become decoupled, with procedures maintained for audit purposes rather than embedded in how employees actually work. The gap between formal systems and daily work practice indicates that the effectiveness of a management system depends heavily on the engagement and interpretive involvement of internal organizational actors. Without effective internalization, a formal system may function primarily as a legitimacy device rather than as a genuine adaptive mechanism (Dick et al., 2008). This issue is particularly consequential for the present study: it establishes that the presence of ISO 9001 certification does not automatically produce stronger adaptive responses, and that the degree to which the system is actually experienced and enacted by employees is the variable that matters most. This reasoning directly motivates the use of employee perception as the primary analytical lens of this comparative study.

Hypothesis Development

Based on open systems and institutional perspectives, organizations facing similar external pressures may respond differently depending on their internal mechanisms. QMS is understood as a structured context that may shape adaptive responses differently from non-QMS contexts across regulatory, industry, customer, and internal process adjustment dimensions. Regulatory pressure requires organizations to comply with formal government rules and standards. Because QMS organizations are expected to have structured documentation, audit routines, and compliance monitoring, they may interpret and respond to regulatory demands more systematically than non-QMS organizations (Delmas & Toffel, 2008). H1: There is a significant difference in employee perceptions of organizational adaptive responses to regulatory pressure between QMS and non-QMS organizations.

Industry pressure reflects norms, standards, and competitive practices within a sector. QMS organizations, through formalized benchmarking and process evaluation routines, may align more consistently with industry expectations (Oliver, 1991; Zhu & Sarkis, 2007). H2: There is a significant difference in employee perceptions of organizational adaptive responses to industry pressure between QMS and non-QMS organizations.

Customer pressure involves managing quality, responsiveness, and consistency. Because QMS is designed to embed customer focus into operational routines, QMS organizations may respond more systematically to customer demands (Fonseca et al., 2017). H3: There is a significant difference in employee perceptions of organizational adaptive responses to customer pressure between QMS and non-QMS organizations.

Organizational adaptive response, understood as the internal adjustment process through which organizations convert external pressure into changes in work procedures, coordination

mechanisms, learning routines, and operational practice, represents the most direct expression of how environmental demands are processed and institutionalized within an organization (Katz & Kahn, 2015; Scott & Davis, 2014). H4: There is a significant difference in employee perceptions of internal process adjustment in responding to external pressures between QMS and non-QMS organizations. The following research model can be seen in figure 1. Below:

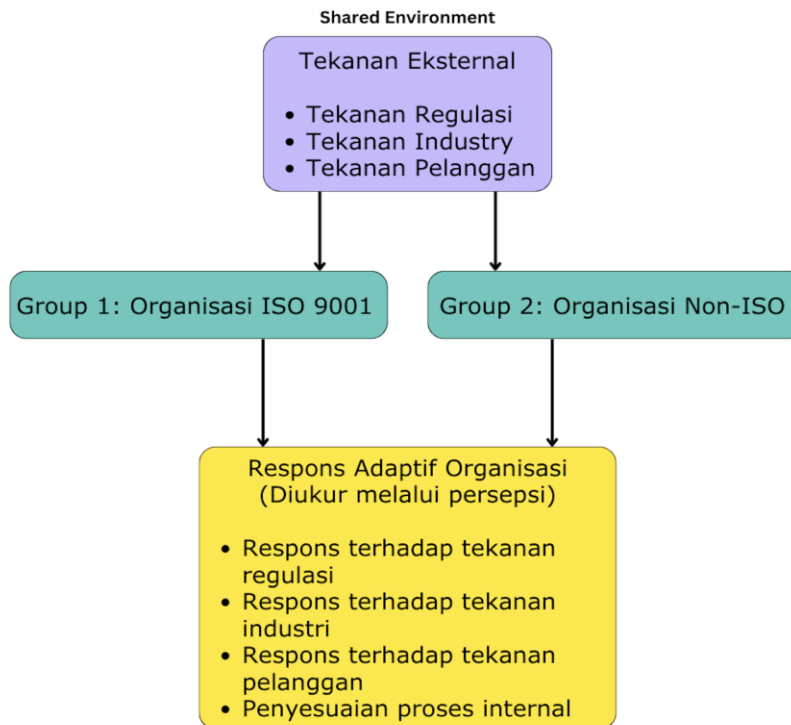


Figure 1. Research Model Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative comparative design with a cross-sectional approach. This design was selected to examine differences in employee perceptions between organizations that implement formal quality management systems and those that do not. A comparative design was considered appropriate because it allows two independent groups to be compared at the same point in time on predetermined variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). The population consisted of employees in Indonesian organizations with and without formal quality management systems. Non-probability sampling using a convenience approach was applied, as a complete sampling frame was not available. Referring to the rule suggested by Hair et al. (2014) of 5 to 10 respondents per measurement item, the recommended minimum for a 26-item instrument was 130 respondents. The final dataset consisted of 211 valid responses, with 108 respondents from QMS organizations and 103 from non-QMS organizations, after excluding employees with less than one year of tenure. Respondents were predominantly located on Java island (n = 200), and the majority held operational or staff-level positions (n = 133, 63%), followed by supervisors (n = 39, 18%) and managers (n = 30, 14%). This profile supports the analytical

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intent, as operational-level employees have the most direct daily exposure to the organizational responses being studied. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The 26-item instrument measured regulatory pressure (6 items, TR1-TR6), industry pressure (6 items, TI1-TI6), customer pressure (6 items, TP1-TP6), and organizational adaptive response (8 items, RA1-RA8). Indicators were adapted from prior literature (Delmas & Toffel, 2008; Zhu & Sarkis, 2007; Oliver, 1991; Teece, 2020). The questionnaire was designed without explicit reference to QMS status to minimize response bias. Validity was assessed using Pearson product-moment correlations, correlating each item with its respective variable total score. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha with a conventional threshold of 0.70, and a lower bound of 0.60 considered acceptable for social science research (Taherdoost, 2018). Independent-samples t-tests were used to identify significant mean differences between QMS and non-QMS groups on all four variables. All analyses were conducted using SPSS at a significance level of 0.05. Item-level mean comparisons were additionally examined to identify specific indicators with the largest and smallest gaps, as well as anomalous patterns.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Validity and reliability testing results are presented in Table 1. Pearson correlations showed that all 26 items were significantly related to their respective variable total scores, confirming construct validity. One inter-item correlation in the customer pressure construct (TP1 against TP4) was not statistically significant, but TP4's correlation with the TP total score was highly significant ($r = 0.733$, $p < 0.001$), justifying its retention. Three variables (regulatory pressure, industry pressure, and adaptive response) achieved Cronbach's Alpha above the 0.70 threshold; customer pressure was slightly below at 0.688, which remains acceptable (Taherdoost, 2018). The instrument was therefore deemed valid and reliable for further analysis.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Summary

Variable	Items	Validity Summary	Cronbach's Alpha
Regulatory Pressure	6	All items valid ($p < 0.001$)	0.903
Industry Pressure	6	All items valid ($p < 0.001$)	0.814
Customer Pressure	6	All items valid against total score; TP1-TP3 inter-item $p < 0.05$	0.688
Organization Adaptive Response	8	All items valid ($p < 0.001$)	0.875

Source: Research Data, 2026.

Table 2 presents the full descriptive results for all 26 items across both groups. QMS organizations consistently recorded higher mean scores than non-QMS organizations across all four variables. The pattern of gaps, however, is not uniform: the magnitude of differences varies substantially across items and variables, and two items produced negative gaps in which non-QMS organizations scored marginally higher than QMS organizations. These within-variable and cross-variable variations carry analytical significance that is obscured when only aggregate variable means are reported.

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Table 2. Descriptive Statistics by Item and Variable

Item	Description	Non-QMS	QMS	Δ
<i>Regulatory Pressure (TR)</i>				
TR1	Compliance demands from government	3.29	4.33	+1.04
TR2	Regulatory change frequency	3.33	4.06	+0.72
TR3	Work procedure adjustment from new regulation	3.55	4.27	+0.72
TR4	System and SOP update demands	3.43	4.30	+0.87
TR5	Readiness for government inspection	3.37	4.51	+1.14
TR6	Regulatory deadline compliance	3.58	4.34	+0.76
TR Total		3.43	4.30	+0.87
<i>Industry Pressure (TI)</i>				
TI1	Following industry best practices	3.97	4.34	+0.37
TI2	Industry practice alignment	3.94	4.14	+0.20
TI3	Competitive pressure maintenance	4.10	4.04	-0.06
TI4	Following industry standards	3.76	4.32	+0.57
TI5	Industry norm compliance	4.14	4.33	+0.20
TI6	Industry norms on operations	3.87	4.22	+0.35
TI Total		3.96	4.23	+0.27
<i>Customer Pressure (TP)</i>				
TP1	Quality demands	4.59	4.65	+0.06
TP2	Consistency demands	4.41	4.78	+0.37
TP3	Complaint responsiveness	4.36	4.67	+0.31
TP4	Transparency demands	3.72	4.36	+0.64
TP5	Rising service standards	4.33	4.59	+0.26
TP6	Feedback influence on processes	4.21	4.42	+0.21
TP Total		4.27	4.58	+0.31
<i>Organizational Adaptive Response (RA)</i>				
RA1	Work procedure change	3.84	4.16	+0.31
RA2	Work rule adjustment – regulatory	3.35	4.19	+0.84
RA3	Work rule adjustment – industry	3.79	4.17	+0.38
RA4	Work rule adjustment – customer	4.16	4.10	-0.05
RA5	Cross-functional coordination	3.91	4.40	+0.49
RA6	Periodic work procedure update	3.73	4.39	+0.66
RA7	Organizational learning	4.17	4.59	+0.43
RA8	Change implementation in daily practice	4.05	4.38	+0.33
RA Total		3.87	4.30	+0.43

Note: Bold items = largest gap or anomalous negative gap per variable. Δ = QMS mean minus Non-QMS mean. Source: Research Data, 2026.

Independent-samples t-tests confirmed statistically significant differences between QMS and non-QMS organizations on all four variables ($p < 0.001$). Table 3 presents the aggregated variable means and hypothesis decisions. Regulatory pressure recorded the largest aggregate gap ($\Delta = 0.87$), while industry pressure recorded the smallest ($\Delta = 0.27$). All four hypotheses (H1-H4) were supported.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypo.	Variable	Mean Non-QMS	Mean QMS	Δ	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
H1	Regulatory Pressure	3.43	4.30	+0.87	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Industry Pressure	3.96	4.23	+0.27	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Customer Pressure	4.27	4.58	+0.31	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Organizational Adaptive Response	3.87	4.30	+0.43	< 0.001	Supported

Source: Research Data, 2026

Hypothesis testing was conducted using an independent sample t-test to identify differences in perceptions between groups of organizations that implemented QMS and those that did not implement it. The results of the independent sample t-test showed that all research variables produced a significance value below 0.001, which indicates a statistically significant difference in perception between the two groups in each dimension measured. The QMS 1 group consistently showed higher average values across all variables than the QMS 0 group. The largest difference was recorded in the regulatory pressure variable, with an average difference of 0.87 points (QMS 0: 3.43 vs. QMS 1: 4.30). These findings suggest that employees in organizations that implement QMS have a significantly higher level of awareness of regulatory compliance demands than their counterparts in non-QMS organizations. The smallest difference was found in the industrial pressure variable, with a difference of 0.27 points (QMS 0: 3.96 vs QMS 1: 4.23), indicating that the two groups had a relatively more equal level of sensitivity to industrial dynamics, although the difference remained statistically significant. Based on these results, all hypotheses in this study, ranging from H1, H2, H3, and H4, were declared acceptable.

Discussion

Regulatory Pressure (H1)

Regulatory pressure produced the largest aggregate gap in the study ($\Delta = 0.87$), consistent with H1. The item-level pattern reinforces this finding with notable precision. TR5 ("Readiness for government inspection") recorded the largest gap across all 26 items in the study, with non-QMS organizations scoring 3.37 against QMS organizations' 4.51 ($\Delta = 1.14$). This result is theoretically coherent: ISO 9001 explicitly requires internal audits and periodic management reviews, creating a structured routine through which employees regularly rehearse compliance readiness. As a result, what may be perceived as an occasional or uncertain event by non-QMS employees is experienced as a normalized operational routine by QMS employees. TR1 ("Compliance demands from government are quite high") produced the second largest gap within the TR cluster (non-QMS: 3.29; QMS: 4.33; $\Delta = 1.04$), reinforcing that QMS strengthens not only specific inspection readiness but also employees' general awareness of the overall intensity of regulatory compliance demands. Employees in QMS organizations internalize regulatory compliance as a normal operational condition rather than an incidental external interruption,

consistent with the ISO 9001 requirement to continuously analyze external context and monitor applicable regulatory developments (Fonseca et al., 2017; Delmas & Toffel, 2008).

Industry Pressure (H2)

Industry pressure produced the smallest aggregate gap in the study ($\Delta = 0.27$), yet the item-level pattern reveals important variation within H2. TI4 (“Following industry standards”) produced the largest gap in this variable (non-QMS: 3.76; QMS: 4.32; $\Delta = 0.57$), suggesting that formal standards awareness is meaningfully stronger among QMS employees. This is consistent with the institutional view that certification aligns organizations more closely with normative sector expectations (Oliver, 1991; Zhu & Sarkis, 2007). More analytically significant, however, is TI3 (“Competitive pressure maintenance”), which produced a negative gap: non-QMS employees scored marginally higher than QMS employees (4.10 vs. 4.04; $\Delta = -0.06$). This finding is not a measurement artifact but an interpretively rich result. Non-QMS organizations may experience competitive pressure more acutely because the absence of formal systems exposes them to greater competitive vulnerability, while QMS organizations may perceive competitive pressure as partially managed through their structured frameworks. The small overall gap on industry pressure further suggests that benchmarking and competitive monitoring mechanisms in QMS may operate more prominently at managerial rather than operational levels, limiting their perceptual reach to frontline employees.

Customer Pressure (H3)

Customer pressure recorded the highest overall means in both groups (non-QMS: 4.27; QMS: 4.58), confirming H3 while indicating that customer demands are the most universally felt form of external pressure regardless of system status. TP4 (“Transparency demands”) produced the largest gap within this variable (non-QMS: 3.72; QMS: 4.36; $\Delta = 0.64$), which is theoretically coherent given that ISO 9001’s documentation requirements explicitly train employees to view process transparency as an operational standard rather than an exceptional demand. In contrast, TP1 (“Quality demands”) produced the smallest gap across all 26 items (non-QMS: 4.59; QMS: 4.65; $\Delta = 0.06$), indicating that the basic expectation for product and service quality is almost identically perceived by both groups. This pattern reveals that QMS adds its greatest value in the customer pressure dimension not by heightening awareness of quality itself, but by formalizing sensitivity to more nuanced expectations such as transparency, consistency, and feedback responsiveness, that require structured mechanisms to be systematically perceived and acted upon (Fonseca et al., 2017; Greenwood et al., 2014).

Organizational Adaptive Response (H4)

Organizational adaptive response produced an aggregate gap of 0.43 (non-QMS: 3.87; QMS: 4.30), supporting H4. The item-level distribution reveals the sharpest internal variation of

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any variable. RA2 (“Work rule adjustment – regulatory”) produced the largest gap in this variable and the second largest overall (non-QMS: 3.35; QMS: 4.19; $\Delta = 0.84$), directly mirroring the TR findings: organizations that perceive regulatory pressure more strongly also demonstrate stronger adaptive rule adjustment in response. This cross-variable coherence supports the theoretical argument that QMS functions as an internalization mechanism converting external pressure into structured internal response (Teece, 2020; Delmas & Toffel, 2008). RA6 (periodic work procedure update) also showed a substantial gap ($\Delta = 0.66$), consistent with the PDCA cycle embedded in ISO 9001 that routinizes systematic organizational updating. The most analytically significant finding in this variable and arguably in the study as a whole is RA4 (“Work rule adjustment – customer”), which produced a negative gap: non-QMS employees scored marginally higher than QMS employees (4.16 vs. 4.10; $\Delta = -0.05$). This constitutes the second anomalous result in the study alongside TI3. Its interpretation is counterintuitive but theoretically coherent: organizations without formal procedural systems may demonstrate greater situational flexibility in adjusting to individual customer requests precisely because the absence of standardized procedures reduces the friction of change. QMS organizations, by contrast, route such adjustments through formal change management mechanisms, which may introduce process latency even while ensuring consistency. This finding directly supports prior arguments about the trade-off between standardization and operational flexibility (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2011), and it opens a productive direction for future research on how QMS organizations can preserve flexibility within structured systems. RA7 (organizational learning) further distinguished the two groups ($\Delta = 0.43$; non-QMS: 4.17; QMS: 4.59), confirming that documentation of past experience and corrective action, a core ISO 9001 requirement, translates into meaningfully stronger learning-based adaptive capacity.

Synthesis of Findings

Taken together, the findings confirm that QMS creates a differentiated adaptive advantage across all four dimensions, but the magnitude and character of that advantage varies substantially. Regulatory pressure and regulatory-linked adaptive response show the largest and most consistent gaps, suggesting that QMS is most effective as an internalization mechanism for formal, explicit, and compliance-intensive pressures. Industry and customer pressure dimensions reveal smaller gaps and the emergence of anomalies where non-QMS organizations marginally outperform QMS organizations on specific items, indicating that competitive awareness and customer flexibility are not uniformly enhanced by formal systems. These patterns go beyond what aggregate means alone communicate and support the use of item-level analysis as a methodological contribution in its own right. The combined evidence is consistent with open systems theory (Katz & Kahn, 2015), institutional theory (Greenwood et al., 2014), and prior internalization-focused literature (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2011), while the anomalous findings extend and nuance those frameworks in ways that warrant further theoretical development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that QMS organizations demonstrate significantly stronger employee-perceived adaptive responses to external pressures than non-QMS organizations across all four dimensions examined. The largest adaptive difference appears in regulatory pressure and regulatory-linked internal adjustment, where QMS mechanisms such as audit routines, compliance monitoring, and systematic procedure updating are most directly engaged. The smallest difference appears in industry pressure, where competitive awareness operates more uniformly across organizations regardless of formal system status. Two anomalous items, TI3 and RA4, where non-QMS organizations scored marginally higher, provide a theoretically important finding: formal systems may enhance consistency and structured responsiveness at the cost of situational flexibility in certain operational contexts. This finding extends the linear logic of institutional and open systems perspectives by demonstrating that adaptive advantage from formal systems is neither uniform across dimensions nor absolute in every item. The study contributes empirically by applying employee perception as an analytical lens in a comparative QMS versus non-QMS framework and by conducting item-level analysis that reveals patterns obscured by aggregate reporting. It contributes theoretically by confirming that QMS functions as an internalization mechanism mediating between institutional pressure and organizational response, while also identifying boundary conditions, specifically flexibility-sensitive operational adjustments, where formal systems may be less advantageous.

For organizations that have not yet implemented QMS, the largest capability gaps are concentrated in two areas: regulatory inspection readiness (TR5; $\Delta = 1.14$) and regulatory-linked rule adjustment (RA2; $\Delta = 0.84$). These findings suggest that the first priority for non-QMS organizations is not full system certification but the development of basic compliance routines – periodic regulatory inventory, a small cross-functional team tasked with translating regulatory changes into procedural updates, and at minimum one internal audit simulation per year. These steps create the compliance foundation from which broader QMS adoption can proceed incrementally. For organizations that have already implemented QMS, two specific areas require attention. First, industry pressure benchmarking (TI3; non-QMS: 4.10 slightly above QMS: 4.04) signals that competitive awareness may have been muted by the perceived protection of certification. Managers should ensure that industry monitoring mechanisms in QMS, particularly the contextual analysis requirements of ISO 9001 Clause 4.1 – are operationally enacted at the employee level rather than confined to management reviews. Second, customer-related rule adjustment (RA4; non-QMS: 4.16 slightly above QMS: 4.10) suggests that change management procedures may be creating operational rigidity in customer-facing settings. Reviewing delegation authority in SOPs and ensuring that front-line supervisors have the authorization to accommodate non-standard customer requests without requiring full change control escalation would help preserve both consistency and flexibility. For future research, three directions are

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recommended. First, expanding respondent coverage beyond Java and increasing representation from middle and top management levels would address the geographic and hierarchical limitations of the present study. Second, longitudinal designs would allow researchers to assess whether the differences observed here reflect temporary conditions or durable structural capability gaps. Third, future studies should examine the specific mechanisms through which QMS organizations balance standardization with flexibility – particularly in customer-facing operations – as the anomalous findings on TI3 and RA4 suggest this is a theoretically productive boundary condition. Studies incorporating governance quality, stakeholder trust, and delegation structures alongside adaptive response measurement would substantially enrich understanding of how structured systems translate into real organizational capability.

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