



Improving Public Service Quality from an Internal Perspective: The Role of Process Management, Continuous Improvement, and Service Standardization in Local Government

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of Process Management, Continuous Improvement, and Service Standardization on Perceived Public Service Quality from an internal perspective. The research adopts a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey of 111 civil servants working in public service units within local government agencies in Ambon City, Indonesia. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that Process Management, Continuous Improvement, and Service Standardization each have a positive and significant effect on Perceived Public Service Quality. Among these, Service Standardization demonstrates the strongest influence. Furthermore, the combined effect of these practices explains a substantial proportion of variance in PPSQ ($R^2 = 0.945$), indicating that service quality is best understood as an outcome of an integrated quality management system. This study contributes to the Total Quality Management literature by positioning service quality as an internally driven construct and highlighting the systemic interaction of core Total Quality Management practices in public sector organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Public service quality remains a central issue in improving governance effectiveness and public sector performance. Governments are increasingly expected to deliver services that are efficient, transparent, and accountable in response to rising public expectations and institutional reforms. However, the dominant approach in evaluating public service quality continues to emphasize external perspectives, particularly citizen satisfaction and service outcomes (Osborne et al., 2013; Walle, 2018). While these approaches provide valuable insights, they tend to overlook the internal organizational mechanisms that fundamentally determine how services are designed, managed, and delivered.

From a managerial perspective, public service quality is not merely an outcome but a result of internal organizational capabilities. Within the framework of Total Quality Management, service quality is produced through the integration of structured processes, continuous improvement efforts, and standardized practices across organizational activities (Albadry et al., 2025; Bisho & Sam, 2022; Bouranta et al., 2019; Kareska, 2023). Total Quality Management conceptualizes quality as a system-level construct, where multiple internal practices operate in a coordinated manner to achieve consistent performance outcomes (Kaynak, 2003; Magd & Karyamsetty, 2020). In this regard, process management, continuous improvement, and service standardization represent core dimensions of Total Quality Management that collectively shape organizational quality performance.

Process management refers to the systematic design and control of organizational processes to ensure efficiency, consistency, and coordination. In public service contexts, well-managed processes reduce ambiguity, minimize variability, and improve the reliability of service delivery (Kregel et al., 2022; Maleyeff, 2020). Continuous improvement, on the other hand, reflects an organization's ability to evaluate its performance, learn from feedback, and implement incremental changes over time (Buresh, 2025; Singh & Singh, 2015). This capability is particularly critical in public organizations that must adapt to evolving regulatory demands and societal expectations. Complementing these practices, service standardization ensures that services are delivered in a consistent and transparent manner based on predefined procedures and criteria, thereby enhancing accountability and reducing service disparities (Caco et al., 2024; Mallory, 2025).

Despite the strong theoretical linkage between these Total Quality Management practices and service quality, prior studies have largely examined them in isolation or within private sector settings. Empirical research that integrates process management, continuous improvement, and service standardization as a unified system in explaining public service quality remains limited (Ming, 2023; Sousa & Voss, 2002; Talib et al., 2013). Moreover, most public service studies focus on external evaluations, leaving a significant gap in understanding how internal organizational practices shape perceived service quality from the perspective of service providers.

This gap is particularly relevant in local government contexts, where service delivery is often constrained by bureaucratic complexity, resource

limitations, and institutional variability. In regions such as Ambon City, Indonesia, these challenges are further intensified by geographical and administrative conditions, making internal management practices a critical determinant of service performance. Examining Total Quality Management practices in such a context provides an opportunity to extend the applicability of quality management theory while offering practical insights for improving public service delivery.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it positions Total Quality Management as an internal capability system that explains public service quality, rather than treating quality as purely an external perception. Second, it integrates three core Total Quality Management dimensions: process management, continuous improvement, and service standardization into a single analytical framework. Third, it introduces the concept of perceived public service quality from an internal perspective, capturing how service providers evaluate the quality of services based on organizational practices and standards.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how process management, continuous improvement, and service standardization influence perceived public service quality from the internal perspective of civil servants in local government agencies, as well as to assess the extent to which these practices collectively contribute to improving service performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Process Management and Service Quality

Process management refers to the systematic design, control, and improvement of organizational processes to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Within the Total Quality Management framework, process management is considered a foundational element that enables organizations to deliver consistent and high quality outputs (Kaynak, 2003). Effective process management ensures that service activities are well coordinated, clearly defined, and aligned with organizational objectives. It reduces variability, minimizes errors, and enhances operational efficiency, all of which contribute to improved public service quality. Empirical studies have consistently shown that organizations with strong process management practices tend to achieve higher levels of performance and customer satisfaction (Kohlbacher & Reijers, 2013; Zhang et al., 2020). In the public sector context, process management plays a critical role in addressing inefficiencies associated with bureaucratic procedures. By streamlining workflows and improving coordination across units, organizations can enhance service responsiveness and reliability.

H1: Process management has a positive effect on perceived public service quality.

Continuous Improvement and Service Quality

Continuous improvement refers to the ongoing effort to enhance organizational processes, products, and services through incremental and systematic changes. Rooted in the philosophy of Kaizen, continuous improvement emphasizes

learning, adaptation, and innovation as key drivers of performance (Buckler, 1996; Georgise & Mindaye, 2020; Lizarelli et al., 2023). Within the Total Quality Management framework, continuous improvement enables organizations to respond to changing demands and continuously refine their operations. It fosters a culture of problem solving and encourages employees to identify and implement improvements at all levels of the organization. Empirical evidence suggests that continuous improvement is positively associated with public service quality, as it allows organizations to adapt to evolving customer needs and improve service delivery over time (Koval et al., 2018; Monteiro et al., 2024). In the public sector, continuous improvement is particularly important for overcoming rigid bureaucratic structures and enhancing organizational flexibility.

H2: Continuous improvement has a positive effect on perceived public service quality.

Service Standardization and Service Quality

Service standardization refers to the establishment of formal procedures, guidelines, and performance benchmarks that govern service delivery. It ensures consistency, reduces uncertainty, and enhances accountability within organizations.

In the context of Total Quality Management, standardization is essential for maintaining uniformity in service processes and ensuring that quality standards are consistently met (Hsieh et al., 2002; Ming, 2023). Standardized procedures provide clear expectations for employees and reduce variability in service delivery, thereby improving reliability and trust.

Research has shown that service standardization is a critical determinant of public service quality, particularly in public sector organizations where transparency and accountability are paramount (Musaeva et al., 2020). By establishing clear service standards, organizations can enhance both internal efficiency and external perceptions of quality.

H3: Service standardization has a positive effect on perceived public service quality.

Integrated Effects of Total Quality Management Practice

Although individual Total Quality Management practices have been widely studied, there is increasing recognition that their combined implementation produces stronger effects than isolated initiatives. The systems perspective suggests that organizational performance is shaped by the interaction of multiple practices that operate in a complementary manner (Alam et al., 2024; Anil & K.P., 2019).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that the integration of process management, continuous improvement, and standardization leads to superior performance outcomes, as these practices reinforce each other and create synergies within the organization (Abubakre et al., 2020; Hassan & Jaaron, 2021; Wittenberger & Teplická, 2024).

In the public sector, where service delivery involves multiple stakeholders and complex processes, the integration of these practices is particularly important.

A holistic approach to Total Quality Management enables organizations to achieve consistent, efficient, and high-quality service delivery.

H4: Process management, continuous improvement, and service standardization simultaneously have a significant effect on perceived public service quality.

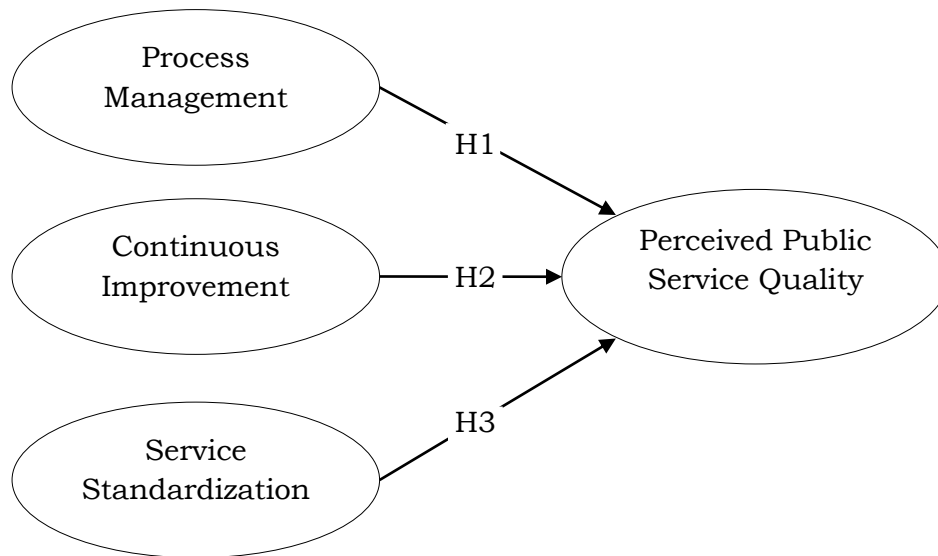


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory approach using a cross sectional design. The research was conducted in local government agencies in Ambon City, Indonesia, where public service delivery plays a critical role in governance effectiveness. The selection of this context is relevant due to its bureaucratic complexity and service delivery challenges.

The population consists of civil servants directly involved in service delivery. A purposive sampling technique was employed, resulting in 111 respondents with at least one year of work experience.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires measured on a five-point Likert scale. The constructs include process management, continuous improvement, service standardization, and perceived public service quality.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. The evaluation included convergent validity, discriminant validity, reliability, and hypothesis testing based on established thresholds (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model (outer model) was evaluated to ensure the validity of the indicators in representing their respective latent constructs. Convergent validity was assessed using outer loading values.

Table 1. Outer Loading

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading
Process Management	PM1: Service procedures are clearly defined	0.919
	PM2: Service workflows are easy for implementers to understand	0.875
	PM3: Service processes are carried out consistently	0.875
	PM4: Coordination among units in service delivery operates effectively	0.921
Continuous Improvement	CI1: Service evaluations are conducted regularly	0.768
	CI2: Procedures are improved based on evaluation results	0.905
	CI3: Public complaints are utilized as input for service improvement	0.892
	CI4: The organization adapts to changes in service demands	0.920
Service Standardization	SS1: Service standards are clearly available	0.867
	SS2: Service time standards are well established	0.877
	SS3: Service cost standards are clearly defined	0.829
	SS4: Services are delivered in accordance with established standards	0.868
	SS5: Complaint handling standards are in place	0.782
Perceived Public Service Quality	PSQ1: Service requirements are clearly defined	0.861
	PSQ2: Service procedures are easy to understand	0.815
	PSQ3: Service time complies with established standards	0.812
	PSQ4: Service costs are transparent and in accordance with regulations	0.810
	PSQ5: Service outputs match what has been promised	0.810
	PSQ6: Staff possess adequate competencies	0.839
	PSQ7: Staff demonstrate appropriate behavior in service delivery	0.815
	PSQ8: Complaint handling is carried out effectively	0.834
	PSQ9: Service facilities and infrastructure are adequate	0.842

These values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating that all indicators possess adequate convergent validity. No indicators were removed from the model, confirming that all constructs are valid and reliable for further analysis.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model (inner model) was evaluated to examine the explanatory power of the model and the relationships among constructs.

Table 2. R-Square Value

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Perceived Public Service Quality	0.945	0.944

The R square value of 0.945 indicates that 94.5% of the variance in perceived public service quality is explained by Process Management, Continuous Improvement, and Service Standardization. The remaining 5.5% is explained by other variables not included in the model. According to Hair et al. (2019), this value is categorized as substantial, indicating that the model has very strong explanatory power.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping technique, examining path coefficients (β), T-statistics, and P-values.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	R Square Adjusted	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1	PM \rightarrow PPSQ	0.185	2.494	0.013	Supported
H2	CI \rightarrow PPSQ	0.379	3.670	0.000	Supported
H3	SS \rightarrow PPSQ	0.455	3.263	0.001	Supported

All hypotheses show T-statistics greater than 1.96 and P-values below 0.05, indicating statistically significant relationships.

Effect of Process Management on Perceived Public Service Quality (H1)

Process management has a positive and significant effect on perceived public service quality ($\beta = 0.185$; $T = 2.494$; $p = 0.013$). Although the effect size is smaller compared to other variables, it remains statistically meaningful.

This result indicates that structured procedures, clear workflows, and effective coordination contribute to improving perceived public service quality. Well-managed processes reduce ambiguity, minimize errors, and ensure consistency in service delivery. This finding is supported by Kregel et al. (2022) and Maleyeff (2020) who found that process management enhances operational performance through process control and standardization. Kaynak (2003) also highlighted that process management is fundamental to achieving quality consistency and operational efficiency. In the public sector context, the relatively smaller coefficient suggests that while process management is necessary, it may not be sufficient on its own to significantly elevate perceived service quality without being supported by other quality management practices.

Effect of Continuous Improvement on Perceived Public Service Quality (H2)

Continuous improvement shows a positive and significant effect on perceived public service quality ($\beta = 0.379$; $T = 3.670$; $p = 0.000$). This finding suggests that continuous evaluation and refinement of service processes play a critical role in enhancing perceived public service quality. This result confirms

that organizations that actively engage in regular evaluation, feedback utilization, and adaptive learning are more capable of maintaining service relevance and responsiveness. In the context of public sector organizations, continuous improvement enables institutions to respond effectively to dynamic public needs and complaints.

This finding is consistent with previous studies. Lizarelli et al. (2023) demonstrated that continuous improvement is a core element of Total Quality Management that significantly influences service performance. Similarly, Koval et al. (2018) found that continuous improvement contributes directly to improved service effectiveness and customer satisfaction. In public sector settings, Singh & Singh (2015) also emphasized that ongoing improvement initiatives enhance service delivery outcomes. Thus, this study reinforces the argument that continuous improvement is not merely a supporting activity but a strategic driver of service quality, particularly in public organizations that face evolving service demands.

Effect of Service Standardization on Perceived Public Service Quality (H3)

Service standardization has the **strongest and most significant effect** on perceived public service quality ($\beta = 0.455$; $T = 3.263$; $p = 0.001$). This finding highlights the critical importance of clearly defined and consistently implemented service standards. Service standardization ensures that all aspects of service delivery, including procedures, time, cost, and complaint handling, are transparent and predictable. This clarity enhances internal confidence in service delivery and reduces uncertainty.

This finding aligns with Ming (2023), who emphasized that reliability and assurance are key dimensions of service quality, both of which are strongly influenced by standardization. Hsieh et al. (2002) further noted that standardized service processes improve consistency and perceived quality. In the public sector, Musaeva et al. (2020) also argued that clear service standards enhance accountability and trust in public services. The dominance of this variable in the model suggests that standardization serves as the backbone of service quality in public organizations.

Simultaneous Effect of Process Management, Continuous Improvement, and Service Standardization on Perceived Public Service Quality (H4)

The simultaneous analysis shows that Process Management, Continuous Improvement, and Service Standardization collectively have a significant effect on Perceived Public Service Quality, with a very high explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.945$). This finding indicates that perceived public service quality is best understood as the result of an integrated system of quality management practices, rather than the impact of individual variables in isolation.

This result is consistent with Talib et al. (2013), who found that Total Quality Management practices yield stronger performance outcomes when implemented collectively. Hassan & Jaaron (2021) also emphasized that the synergy among Total Quality Management dimensions significantly enhances organizational performance. Therefore, this study confirms that the integration of process management, continuous improvement, and service standardization

creates a robust quality management system that substantially improves public service quality.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the systems approach within Total Quality Management, which posits that organizational performance is shaped by the interaction of interconnected processes rather than isolated practices. This result also aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV), suggesting that the integration of internal capabilities, such as process management, continuous improvement, and service standardization, can generate a stronger and more sustainable service advantage.

From a practical standpoint, the findings imply that public sector organizations, particularly in Ambon City, should avoid implementing quality improvement initiatives in isolation. Instead, a holistic and integrated approach is required. In this context, process management ensures operational consistency through well-structured procedures, continuous improvement enhances organizational adaptability by enabling ongoing evaluation and refinement, and service standardization provides clarity and accountability by establishing clear service benchmarks. The integration of these three elements forms a robust quality management system that significantly enhances overall public service quality.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examines the influence of Process Management, Continuous Improvement, and Service Standardization on Perceived Public Service Quality within public sector organizations in Ambon City. The findings demonstrate that all three variables exert a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived public service quality, both individually and simultaneously. Continuous improvement enhances service quality by enabling organizations to conduct systematic evaluations and implement adaptive refinements, thereby improving responsiveness to evolving service demands. Process management contributes to service quality by ensuring that procedures are well-structured, consistently executed, and effectively coordinated across organizational units. Notably, service standardization emerges as the most influential factor, underscoring the critical role of clearly defined and consistently enforced service standards in shaping internal perceptions of service quality. Moreover, the strong simultaneous effect confirms that perceived public service quality is best understood through an integrated Total Quality Management framework, in which these dimensions function synergistically rather than independently.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. From a practical standpoint, public sector organizations should prioritize strengthening service standardization by clearly defining service procedures, timeframes, costs, and complaint-handling mechanisms to ensure consistency, transparency, and accountability. In addition, continuous improvement practices should be institutionalized through routine performance evaluations, systematic utilization of public feedback, and the promotion of adaptive organizational learning. Enhancing process management systems is also essential, particularly by improving workflow clarity, standard operating procedures, and inter-unit

coordination to increase efficiency and reduce service variability. Importantly, organizations should adopt a holistic quality management approach by integrating all Total Quality Management dimensions into a cohesive system rather than implementing them in isolation. From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the applicability of Total Quality Management in the public sector and highlights the relevance of internal perspectives in assessing service quality. Nevertheless, this study is subject to several limitations, including its focus on internal perceptions and its restriction to public sector organizations in Ambon City, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

FURTHER STUDY

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that open avenues for further research. First, this study relies solely on internal perceptions of public service quality, which may not fully capture the actual service experience from the citizens' perspective. Future research is therefore encouraged to integrate external evaluations, such as citizen satisfaction or user-based service quality measures, to provide a more comprehensive assessment. Second, the empirical context is limited to public sector organizations in Ambon City, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions or administrative settings. Subsequent studies should consider expanding the research scope to different geographical areas or conducting cross-regional and comparative studies to enhance external validity. Third, this study focuses only on three dimensions of Total Quality Management: process management, continuous improvement, and service standardization, without incorporating other potentially influential factors. Future research is recommended to extend the model by including additional variables such as digital governance, organizational culture, innovation capability, or employee competence, which may provide deeper insights into public service performance. Furthermore, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture dynamic changes over time; therefore, future studies are encouraged to adopt longitudinal approaches to better understand the sustainability of quality improvement initiatives. Finally, advanced analytical approaches, such as multi-group analysis or mediation, are recommended to explore more complex relationships among variables and strengthen the theoretical development of Total Quality Management in the public sector.

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