

## A Study on the Effect of Total Quality Management on Internal Customer Satisfaction within the Framework of Internal Marketing Theory

Esat SAYGIN<sup>a</sup> Metehan TOLON<sup>b</sup> Sabit UYGUN<sup>c</sup> Şahan SÖKMENSÜER<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Yüksek İhtisas University, Health Services Vocational School - Medical Promotion and Marketing Department, Ankara, Türkiye. [esatsaygin@yiu.edu.tr](mailto:esatsaygin@yiu.edu.tr)

<sup>b</sup>Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences - Department of Business Administration, Ankara, Türkiye. [metehan.tolon@hbv.edu.tr](mailto:metehan.tolon@hbv.edu.tr)

<sup>c</sup>Yüksek İhtisas University, Health Services Vocational School - Medical Documentation And Secretarial Department, Ankara, Türkiye. [sabituygun@yiu.edu.tr](mailto:sabituygun@yiu.edu.tr)

<sup>d</sup>Yüksek İhtisas University, Health Services Vocational School - Medical Promotion and Marketing Department, Ankara, Türkiye. [sahansokmensuer@yiu.edu.tr](mailto:sahansokmensuer@yiu.edu.tr)

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – The research reveals that internal marketing should be addressed through the fundamental dimensions of Total Quality Management (TQM) and internal customer satisfaction. While TQM practices represent the structural dimension of internal marketing as an indicator of quality-oriented approaches towards internal processes and employees, internal customer satisfaction constitutes the result dimension of these practices reflected in the perceptions and attitudes of employees.

**Design/methodology/approach**—Data obtained from employees in Polatlı Organized Industrial Zone were evaluated using quantitative analysis techniques. The relationship between Total Quality Management practices and internal customer satisfaction was tested using regression and correlation analyses.

**Findings** – It shows that TQM practices have a significant and positive effect on internal customer satisfaction. This finding shows that internal marketing should be considered as a multidimensional structure and that TQM practices can increase external customer satisfaction through employee satisfaction.

**Discussion** – The findings of this study reveal that businesses should structure their internal marketing strategies with a more holistic understanding. In addition, it makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by presenting a theoretical model that conceptualizes the interaction between TQM and internal customer satisfaction in the context of internal marketing.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, technological advances, easier access to information, liberalization of economies worldwide, rapid development in the financial sector and relatively easier access to capital, coupled with the proliferation of businesses and increasing expectations regarding meeting customer needs, have led to intense and fierce competition in the market. In such a competitive environment, it has become a necessity for businesses to ensure that all their units operate effectively and efficiently in order to continue their activities. In this context, in studies conducted on how businesses can be more effective and efficient, in addition to factors such as internal customer satisfaction, employee performance and organizational performance, it is necessary to focus on the prevention of errors, elimination of waste, quality, speed, cost and flexibility factors, and to ensure continuous improvements that will provide significant benefits to the business. In the contemporary business environment characterized by continuous innovation and fierce global competition, it has become mandatory for businesses to offer various benefits to their internal, external and global customers. It is imperative that these benefits are designed in a way that will satisfy existing customers and also surprise and delight new customers. Indeed, the fact that the ones who will realize the design in question are internal customers reveals

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the importance of their satisfaction in terms of internal marketing. In the marketing field, where the focus is mainly on external customer satisfaction and product quality, the possibility of ignoring internal customer satisfaction is alarming. This situation is contrary to the basic philosophy of the total quality approach.

In total quality management, the necessity of continuous development in meeting external customer demands and the importance of optimizing their use in this context cannot be denied. In order to ensure that resources are used effectively, efficiently and productively, it is essential to consider the controllability of the internal dynamics of the enterprise. This will facilitate the integration of external factors as well as the most important components of the system. In this context, it is imperative for enterprises to increase their employee and institutional performance. Failure to improve employee performance can lead to a series of problems, including waste of money, time and other resources. Total quality management (TQM), with its basic principles and philosophy, aims to increase superior business success capacity and thus encourage productivity through the synergy that emerges from training, continuous improvement and teamwork. This approach reveals scientific and participatory management practices within the organization.

Despite the above, it is very common for businesses to see quality activities as boring or as a source of additional costs. It is even possible for employees to see these activities as an additional workload. In such cases, two perspectives on quality management systems are expected to emerge and the following questions must be addressed. Do quality management systems reduce employee satisfaction? Do employees who engage in these activities, especially in quality circles, perceive them as a workload? Indeed, the success of a business depends on having qualified and productive employees with high satisfaction and motivation. The dominant view in the literature is that there is a direct relationship between employee satisfaction and business success or employee performance (Akkoç, Çalışkan and Timurç, 2012) and for this reason, it is imperative to prioritize employee satisfaction (Chow, 1994:3). In fact, the basic proposition of internal marketing is that employee satisfaction or internal customer satisfaction has a direct effect on external customer satisfaction. This claim is supported by numerous studies, including those conducted by Ay and Kartal (2003:19), Schneider and Bower (1993), Bitner (1990), Rucci, Kirn and Quinn (1995) and Lambert, Sharma and Lew (1997). However, it is important to note that although the primary goal of TQM is the satisfaction of external customers and the subsequent growth, it is the company's employees, namely internal customers, who facilitate the achievement of these results.

In the context of TQM, employees are conceptualized as internal customers and the implementation of internal marketing developed in accordance with this structure is defined as a business strategy that will significantly facilitate the achievement of goals (Çoban, 2004:85). Businesses are responsible for creating conditions that will ensure the satisfaction of their employees and customers in the target market for the continuity of their lives. This is directly related to the quality of goods and services (Kotler and Keller, 2014).

As a result, since employees are the elements that will produce outputs in meeting the demands and needs of external customers, businesses need to implement an efficient production process that will provide quality practices and employee satisfaction as well as external customer satisfaction. Gaining competitive advantage in the market can be a result of this. In achieving this competitive advantage, the impact of TQM practices on employee satisfaction under the roof of internal marketing activities is important.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, a literature review will be conducted to reveal the theoretical connection between Total Quality Management and Internal Customer Satisfaction from an Internal Marketing Perspective. In this study, the subjects of internal marketing, the concept of quality, Total Quality Management and quality circles, and internal customer satisfaction and its importance will be addressed. Thereafter, these subjects will be integrated to examine the theoretical link between Total Quality Management and Internal Customer Satisfaction from an Internal Marketing Perspective.

### 2.1. The Concept of Internal Marketing

In today's business environment, organizations use tools for business functions to maintain their existence, survive in tough competitive conditions and achieve power and success. Employees, who are seen as the main resource of organizations in each of these functions, are of great importance for the functioning of businesses. It is the duty of businesses to develop internal marketing initiatives that will increase employee loyalty and

reduce their tendency to seek other jobs (Yüce and Kavak 2017: 79). The term "internal marketing" is used to express the implementation of marketing strategies within a business (Collins and Payne, 1991: 2619). At this point, internal marketing is a tool that can be used to develop customer awareness among employees, satisfy them and motivate them. Thus, more efficient results can be achieved (Quester and Kelly, 1999: 217)

Effective people management is a prerequisite for successful customer management. Despite the increasing importance of technology and the conveniences it provides, the need for customer-focused and service-conscious employees to provide high-quality service experiences continues. The concept of internal marketing is based on the premise that employees constitute the primary internal market of the business. Not taking into account the expectations of internal customers sufficiently, and therefore not working to increase their satisfaction levels, will inevitably significantly affect the failure of marketing to the final external customers. The prerequisite for successful external and interactive marketing is internal marketing (Gronroos, 2016: 409)

It is imperative to motivate both external and internal customers and thus encourage a customer-focused approach within the company. The aim of internal marketing is to increase customer awareness, market and sales orientation, and to motivate employees through the application of marketing-like techniques by creating a positive corporate culture. As Berry (1980) also stated, the goals of internal marketing include recruiting and retaining suitable employees and maximizing their performance through the implementation of marketing strategies. It is seen that market research and segmentation, together with traditional marketing methodologies (e.g., advertising and sales), represent important components of internal marketing. Gronroos (1985) states that internal marketing activities should reflect traditional marketing practices, include coordinated efforts to direct and motivate employees towards a customer-focused mindset, and also attract the best talents to the organization (Gronroos, 1985: 42,43). Gronroos (1981) posits that effective service delivery necessitates not only customer-conscious employees but also effective coordination between liaison personnel and back-end support. In conclusion, the concept of internal marketing is regarded as a tool for integrating various functions that play an important role in customer relations (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1993: 220). The efficacy of internal communication can facilitate the provision of efficient and satisfactory services, encourage productive and harmonious working relationships, and increase employee trust, respect, and loyalty. In considering media tools, one must first acknowledge the role of internal newsletters and magazines, in addition to videos and private corporate television networks, which are owned by prominent companies such as FedEx and Merrill Lynch. Intranets, defined as private websites and email networks not accessible to the public, are also significant tools in this regard. Furthermore, face-to-face briefings and promotional campaigns that include awards and recognition programs are also employed (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011: 304).

Marketers must ensure that all organizational departments operate in harmony with a customer-focused approach. Therefore, the implementation of internal marketing initiatives should be prior to the evaluation of external marketing activities. For example, Kotler and Armstrong (2016) state that Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts begins its operations by hiring appropriate personnel and meticulously guiding and motivating them to deliver exceptional customer service. The aim is to ensure that employees believe strongly in the brand and thus sincerely fulfill the promise the brand makes to its customers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2016: 272). Customer focus, the fundamental principle of TQM, which emphasizes putting customers first, has played an important role in the widespread acceptance of this concept. In addition, the "employee customer" paradigm is widely adopted within service marketing (Gronroos, 1985).

Rafiq and Ahmed (1993: 222) show that the previous conceptual approaches to internal marketing have developed gradually in their study (Gronroos 1981, p. 237), (Berry 1984, p. 272), (Gronroos 1985, p. 42), (George 1977, p. 91), (Berry and Parasuraman: 1991:151), (George, 1990: 64), (Morgan, 1991), (Collins and Payne, 1991), (Harrell and Fars, 1992) and integrate the different perspectives that emerged. The scope of internal marketing emphasizes the relationships between employees rather than the relationship between the company and the employee in the TQM approach. In the service marketing approach, it also mentions the motivation of employees who are in contact with (external) customers with internal customer awareness. Thus, it is seen that a two-dimensional structure emerges with the integration of the two approaches. This integration covers employees who are involved in the work until the final product is produced and all the stages after it is produced. Therefore, employees who are not in direct contact with customers are motivated to act in a way that will provide better service to external customers. At the same time, it has been proven that the concept of internal marketing overcomes organizational resistance to change by harmonizing, motivating and integrating

employees to effectively implement corporate and functional strategies. This comprehensive approach accepts the idea that any change in strategy requires internal marketing efforts to overcome organizational monotony and encourage employees to adopt the necessary behaviors. Furthermore, given that certain strategies (especially marketing) can be applied in more than one functional area, this situation may require integration between functions (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1993: 221,222,223). Based on this, Ay and Karta (2003: 16) delineate the fundamental components of internal marketing as follows:

- The motivation and satisfaction of employees is a key consideration in any organisational context
- The focus of this study is customer orientation and customer satisfaction.
- The necessity for effective interdepartmental coordination and integration is paramount in any organisational context.
- The approach is reminiscent of marketing strategy.
- The implementation of specific corporate and departmental strategies is imperative.

Finally, considering that TQM doctrines encompass business processes, organizational culture, motivational qualities and employee activities that will ultimately lead to satisfied external customers, it is imperative to examine the impact of TQM on employee satisfaction in order to create effective internal marketing strategies.

## 2.2. The Concept of Quality

Dissatisfaction that occurs when customers are not satisfied with the quality of the goods or services they receive within the framework of the price they pay can cause a decrease in market share. In the production phase, low quality can lead to processes that will increase costs such as waste of resources, decreased productivity and the emergence of errors in the enterprise. Therefore, increasing competitive power and customer satisfaction by increasing quality, reducing costs is of great importance in increasing market share and profitability (Kayral, 2015).

As can be understood from the studies of many institutions, organizations and researchers, many definitions of quality can be identified in the existing literature. For example, it has been defined as 'fitness for use', 'conformity to requirements' and 'exemption from variability' (Kotler and Keller, 2014). According to the Japanese Industrial Standards (JIS), it is 'a production system that produces goods or services economically and responds to consumer demands' (Doğaner and Yüksel, 2003: 70). Although customer-oriented definitions are widespread in the literature, emphasis is often placed on the production system in ensuring customer satisfaction and the quality of outputs (Çoban, 2004:86).

While producers strive to produce goods and services that meet and exceed customer expectations, they also seek continuous improvement by reducing waste and errors, accelerating flexible and efficient production, solving internal problems, and minimizing and optimizing costs.

When all of these are considered, it can be said that production orientation has similar importance to customer orientation. When both the producer perspective and the customer perspective are integrated and a definition that will show a multidimensional and holistic approach is thus presented; Quality is the measure of ability and performance that emerges with the degree to which the product or service reaches physiological and psychological satisfaction in the effort to meet the desires and needs of customers, as well as the power to be waste-free and error-free in accordance with the planned functionalities; It is the power to achieve work and at the same time the level of satisfaction of the customer in return for the price paid (Saygın, 2017).

### 2.2.1. Total Quality Management and Quality Circles

It is the duty of businesses to analyze customer expectations in depth. For this reason, in the context of benefiting from goods or services, customers enter the evaluation process and the most important goal is satisfaction.

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a system that covers employees, suppliers, customers and society as a whole. It uses administrative and statistical methods to ensure continuous improvement in order to exceed customer expectations. The term "total" means that it covers all elements that it interacts with directly or indirectly. In essence, TQM covers every department, all employees, all business processes, all suppliers, all customer base and society in general, and TQM is based on the assumption that employees can work more

efficiently thanks to the methodologies it contains, the culture it creates within the organization and the modern management system, and therefore the resulting work can meet customer expectations (Serin and Aytakin, 2009:86). The development of TQM dates back to leading quality researchers such as Deming, Juran, Feigenbaum and Ishikawa (Mergen, 1993:28). Quality circles are widely accepted as a basic component of TQM. Juran, Deming and Crosby are among the leading theorists in the field of quality circles. Deming, in particular, placed significant emphasis on the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) in a managerial context, while Juran and Crosby focused more on its technical aspects (Gökçen, 2006:62). Ishikawa, who made a significant contribution to the development of the circles, defined them conceptually as small groups operating in the same enterprise and based on voluntary quality control activities (Dinç, 2001: 68 cited in Özbay and Sarıışık, 2015: 711).

The main purpose of quality circles is to develop and improve the business, and at the same time to promote a corporate culture that accepts human dignity as the most important value. This effort aims to increase the quality of life within the business and to optimize the use of human resources (Bayazıt, 1998:98). In circles, employees are provided with more opportunities because the logic of who knows the job best is established. Quality circles are defined as small groups of 5-10 employees, depending on the organizational scale, formed by volunteers who operate in the same professional field or work under the same unit (e.g. workshop service, office, laboratory, sales organization). The formation of these groups aims to encourage motivation and satisfaction among their members, while ensuring that they take pride in their work and create a greater perception of benefit (Efil, 1997: 4 cited in Özbay and Sarıışık, 2015:711). These teams carry out systematic problem identification, analysis and solution activities in order to increase the effectiveness of their work. They achieve this by working closely together and holding regular meetings, and then reporting their findings to senior management (Çetin et al, 2001:124 cited in Köksal,2011: 66).

The use of personnel skills in accordance with business goals is improved by implementing quality circles. The aim of these quality circles is to ensure that human resources are used to an extent that will increase the efficiency of all elements of the business. Activities carried out within the framework of quality circles ensure that personnel evaluate themselves not only in terms of their physical abilities, but also as individuals who contribute to the production process by emphasizing creativity and intellectual capacity.

The expected results of the implementation of quality circle activities are as follows (Tekin, 2004 cited in Akdağ, 2005:165):

- Improvement of working conditions,
- Contribution to the formation of team spirit in personnel communication,
- Solving problems that may arise as a result of lack of communication between employees and establishing a healthy communication environment in the workplace,
- Increased motivation of personnel,
- Decrease in costs arising from poor quality,
- Development of problem-solving skills of employees,
- Empowerment of employees to participate in decision-making processes affecting their immediate work environment.

This method ensures that the opinions of employees are taken into consideration and their suggestions for problem solving are utilized. As a result, the implementation of quality circles provides significant benefits for both the workplace and the personnel, and employees will not only limit themselves to their work, but will also realize that they are important for the business since they are consulted in the decision-making process. Therefore, it is anticipated that this approach will lead to an increase in internal customer satisfaction.

### 2.3. Internal Customer Satisfaction

The term “job” is understood as the sum of the tasks that an employee performs for material gain within a certain physical and social environment (Erdoğan and Sökmen, 2019: 247). The satisfaction of the person who performs the job (internal customer) expresses, in the simplest terms, how happy the employee is in his job (Bozkurt, 2008:2).

The rapidly increasing competitive environment has led to an increase in the demand for innovative, highly motivated and productive employees in businesses. However, contemporary business practices often result in employees experiencing low levels of job satisfaction and morale. A multitude of factors exert an influence on the satisfaction of internal customers. These include, but are not limited to, remuneration, opportunities for promotion, social rights, relationships with colleagues and managers, security, productivity and working conditions. It is incumbent upon management units to demonstrate a meticulous approach to these factors. This requirement is predicated on the assumption that internal customer satisfaction is defined as "the individual's response to the work environment" (Kök, 2006:291).

Job satisfaction (i.e. internal customer satisfaction) is widely regarded as a central concept in the fields of work and organisational psychology. It has been demonstrated that it functions as a mediator in the relationship between working conditions, on the one hand, and organisational and individual results, on the other (Dormann ve Zapf, 2001: 483). The subjective evaluation of working conditions, including responsibility, task variety and communication requirements, is a significant concern for individuals interested in internal customer satisfaction (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). It is hypothesised that internal customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by these conditions (Dormann and Zapf, 2001:483).

It is stated that the first studies on internal customer satisfaction started with the "Hawthorne Studies" conducted between 1924-1932. In the following years, the importance of the concept was recognized by businesses and the research on this subject increased (Çankaya, 2018: 409). However, although the first study on internal customer satisfaction began in 1930 with the Hawthorne studies by Elton Mayo, this study did not create a theory on its own (Türk, 2007: 71 cited in Açar and Yıldırım, 2019: 299).

The initial conceptualisation was proposed by Hoppock (1935: 47), who defined it as any combination of psychological, physiological and environmental factors that result in an individual expressing satisfaction with their employment. According to Hoppock's methodology, internal customer satisfaction is considered an internal issue, intertwined with the emotions felt by employees, although it is subject to the influence of many external factors.

Vroom (1964: 99) stated that employee satisfaction is a function of the harmony between the rewards offered by the work environment and the individual's reaction to these rewards as an emotional tendency. Locke (1969: 316) defines it as a pleasant emotional state resulting from the evaluation of a person's job as providing or facilitating the achievement of work values. Dissatisfaction is an unpleasant emotional state resulting from the evaluation of a person's job as restricting or preventing the achievement of work values or as including devaluation. In short, internal customer satisfaction is a function of the perceived relationship between a person's expectations from his job and what his job offers or requires (Locke, 1969:316). In Locke's definition, the importance of the relationship between emotion or feeling and cognition or thinking is implicitly expressed. When we think, we have feelings about what we think. The thinking process gives rise to emotions and, conversely, emotions lead to thinking. This connection between cognition and emotion is integral with both psychological and biological perspectives. When employees evaluate their professions, jobs and workplaces, both cognitive and emotional processes come into play, as in many important issues (Saari and Judge, 2004: 396).

It is defined by Schneider and Snyder (1975:319) as the perception of internal reactions, that is, emotions, through a personal evaluation of the conditions in the place where the person works (e.g. the quality of the job, all requirements of the job or the quality of supervision) or the results that arise as a result of having a job (e.g. wages and the sense of security provided by the job). Emotions consist of the individual's perceptions filtered and processed through the system of norms, values, expectations, etc. (Schneider and Snyder, 1975:319). Therefore, the appreciation of a person's profession or professional experience is also related to this emotional state (Erdoğan and Sökmensüer, 2019:247). As stated by Molla (2015: 155, 156), internal customer satisfaction is an indicator of a number of factors that lead to satisfaction.

Despite its conceptualization as a result of the individual's subjective evaluation or satisfaction level and the methodological nuances of these evaluations, the concept of internal customer satisfaction encompasses human experience and emotions, the relationship between the individual and their work and work environment. The experiences they see, live and achieve throughout their professional lives will have a direct

impact on their happiness and sadness. Therefore, satisfaction can be considered as the comprehensive structure of these attitudes (Erdoğan, 1999:231 cited in Kök, 2006).

Like other different attitudes, internal customer satisfaction is also seen to be affected by a complex combination of value judgments, behavioral tendencies, individual beliefs, feelings, emotions, etc., but it cannot be a monitored variable like other attitudes. Satisfaction can only be understood by the individual expressing it (Polat, 2014: 20). In addition, employees' perceptions of how well their jobs provide what they consider important also affect the result (Luthans, 2011: 141).

As a result, internal customer satisfaction is an indicator of how satisfied a person is with the level of meeting their expectations and demands from their profession and workplace in line with their feelings and thoughts and their desires and needs. Both professional needs and the requirements of the work environment affect internal customer satisfaction (Akıncı, 2002: 2-3; İmamoğlu, Keskin and Erat, 2004: 169; Cheney and Scarpello, 1985: 26)

The fact that the concept is defined in different ways by many authors can be attributed to the multifaceted nature of the dimensions that contribute to satisfaction. These definitions are expressed within the framework of these dimensions (Akdemir and Açı, 2018: 63).

Satisfaction is generally accepted to have three dimensions. Firstly, it is important to note that internal customer satisfaction is defined as an emotional response to a work situation. Consequently, it cannot be observed directly; it can only be deduced or inferred. Secondly, satisfaction is typically determined by the extent to which the outcomes align with or surpass initial expectations. For instance, if organisational participants believe that they exert significantly more effort than their peers in the department yet receive less acknowledgement, they are likely to develop a negative attitude towards their job, their supervisor, and/or their colleagues. This will inevitably lead to a state of dissatisfaction. Conversely, if employees perceive that they are treated well and remunerated appropriately, it is likely that their attitude towards their job will be positive. It is reasonable to assume that the subjects will be satisfied with their employment. Thirdly, satisfaction also represents interrelated attitudes (Luthans, 2011: 141). This is because employees have personal tendencies and emotional reactions to the physical and social environment of the workplace, as well as their professional obligations (Schermerhorn, Hunt, Osborn and Billy 2002: 162). As stated by Hong (1999: 1), these reactions are evaluative attitudes that emerge from the combination of thoughts (cognitive) and emotions.

The reason why employee satisfaction, which has a wide range of definitions, is expressed in different ways by many scientists is that there are many factors that provide employee satisfaction and the explanations are stated within the scope of these factors (Akdemir and Açı, 2018: 63).

For example, Luthans (2011: 141) has defined five factors that represent the most important characteristics of a job to which employees give emotional reactions over the years as follows:

1. The nature of the job itself, the extent to which it provides the individual with interesting tasks, learning opportunities, and the chance to take on responsibility.
2. The term "wage" is employed to denote the amount of financial compensation received, and the extent to which this is regarded as equitable in comparison to that received by others within the organisation.
3. The organisation provides opportunities for promotion and advancement.
4. The term "supervision" is defined as the process whereby a superior provides technical assistance and behavioural support.
5. The degree to which colleagues are technically competent and socially supportive is known as "technical competence" or "social support".

The five factors under discussion were formulated many years ago and have been widely used to measure internal customer satisfaction over the years. Concurrently, given the numerous interrelated behavioural factors encompassed by these five factors, the extant literature has been observed to categorise these factors into organisational and individual factors.

Organizational factors can be listed as the job itself, its quality, education, working conditions, management style, career opportunities, development and promotion opportunities, competition conditions, work

environment, payments made to employees, awards, promotions, type of supervision, communication level, collaborators and organizational environment. Individual factors include elements such as basic skills of the personnel, level of education, gender, values, age, belief, seniority in the organization, level of education, gender, values, age, belief, seniority gender, marital status, professional status, personality structure, intelligence and length of service (Çankaya, 2018; Çelik and Bilginer, 2018; Zengin, 2019).

When we look at the studies in the last thirty years in particular, emotional factors such as mood, negative or positive emotional state are taken into consideration among the factors affecting satisfaction (Çelik and Bilginer, 2018:143).

Another common approach in the literature is that internal customer satisfaction is divided into two different categories as internal and external satisfaction or satisfaction. Internal satisfaction is defined as the meaning that the job provides to the individual due to its nature. Satisfactions such as the feeling of success resulting from the use of basic skills during the performance of a task are explained as 'internal satisfaction'. For example, Weiss et al. (1967) put forward the propositions regarding internal satisfaction in the Minnesota scale as working independently, participating in various tasks, maintaining a consistent level of activity, being recognized as an important member of society, avoiding activities that are contrary to one's own principles, having a stable job, contributing to the well-being of others, providing guidance, using one's talents, using autonomy in decision-making, customizing one's work approach and obtaining satisfaction from one's professional efforts as the elements that contribute to the satisfaction of individuals in their professional lives.

The satisfaction (wage, economic rewards) that emerges and is obtained as a result of the effort shown by the individual is explained as 'external satisfaction or satisfaction' (Deniz, 2005: 311 akt. Zengin, 2019: 317).

It is seen that it is related to the satisfaction obtained from the environmental and organizational conditions of the person's profession. The relationship between internal customer satisfaction and external satisfaction is a multifaceted phenomenon. Weiss et al. (1967) put forward the propositions regarding internal satisfaction in the Minnesota scale as the quality of working conditions, the effectiveness of company policies, career development opportunities, recognition of extraordinary performance, wages and the rate of completed work, dynamics between coworkers, the way the manager addresses employees and the manager's decision-making skills (Weiss et al., 1967).

As a result, in today's high-performance era, internal customer satisfaction is essential for companies to meet consumers' expectations in order to compete and be successful. While the impact of internal customers on production and product quality is direct and important, the relationship between consumers and the products obtained from this production is also important. This situation requires the implementation of total quality management, which requires the joint efforts of the organization and its components to increase the quality of goods and services, continuously improve corporate processes and ensure consumer satisfaction (Schermerhorn et al. 2002:1). It is also clear that internal customers have a very important role in the correct determination and implementation of product, price, distribution, promotion, physical elements, process and most importantly human strategies. In this context, the satisfaction of internal customers is a prerequisite for the satisfaction of external customers. The success of marketing activities depends on the acceptance of employees as internal customers by the organization and the guarantee of their satisfaction.

### **2.3.1. The Importance of Internal Customer Satisfaction**

Internal customer satisfaction has a positive impact on various areas such as productivity, commitment to work, work-life balance, morale, wages, management style and relationships with colleagues (Ağar and Yıldırım, 2019).

Individuals who are positive and constructive towards their work and workplace have a higher sense of satisfaction; The fact that individuals who have a negative and destructive perspective towards their work and workplace have a lower sense of satisfaction draws attention to the importance of job satisfaction for businesses (Çetin et al., 2011: 89-90).

When successful businesses are analyzed, it is seen that the majority of them do their jobs well, enjoy their jobs, are proud of the importance of their jobs, receive the support of the management, embrace the goals and objectives of the business and that employees can integrate the goals of the business with their own goals. The



first step to achieving a corporate structure is to achieve and maintain employee satisfaction. Employees are the ones who will elevate the workplace, bring profit and take it to a significant business level in the market (Tor and Esengün, 2011: 55). Therefore, if managers act by adopting the view that “happy personnel are productive personnel”, it will provide an advantage for both the individual and the organization by providing the necessary opportunities. Internal customer satisfaction is an individual situation and can affect the productivity of the business by affecting the individual's business and private life (Zengin, 2019:317).

A dissatisfied employee becomes unhappy while doing his job and experiences unrest in the work environment. This negative situation can result in employees becoming psychologically, physiologically and socially incompatible individuals. Such dissatisfaction can lead to a series of negative consequences, including professional anxiety and a sense of hopelessness regarding future expectations (Toplu 1998: 32 cited in Naktiyok and Yıldırım, 2018:60-61).

Internal customer dissatisfaction is defined as the emotional state an employee experiences when they believe that their expectations from their job and the environment they work in are not sufficiently met. Dissatisfaction has harmful effects on labor productivity. Dissatisfaction can lead to a decrease in commitment to work and an increase in voluntary labor turnover, and it also negatively affects the employee's health. Studies have found that there is a relationship between satisfaction and the occurrence of nervous symptoms (e.g. insomnia, headache) and emotional breakdowns (e.g. stress, frustration) among employees. A significant correlation has been revealed between these symptoms and employee satisfaction (Madenci, 1992:119 as cited in Akıncı, 2002:3). Employees experiencing satisfaction problems are more likely to engage in behaviors that jeopardize productivity. Such behaviors may include withdrawal, burnout, and aggression at work (Spector, 1997; as cited in Ellickson and Logsdon, 2002:173). It has been determined that employee performance is one of the outcomes associated with their satisfaction. Conventional wisdom suggests that satisfied employees are expected to be optimally productive, and thus there is a positive relationship between their satisfaction and performance (Akçay, 2011: 127). Internal customer dissatisfaction has been identified as a factor contributing to a number of organizational problems, including low productivity, disciplinary problems, and hidden forms of work slowdown. It has been demonstrated that internal customer dissatisfaction weakens the organization's immune system, thus weakening or even eliminating the organization's response to internal and external threats (Akıncı, 2002: 3).

For example, in his study discussing the effects of internal customer satisfaction on organizational outcomes, Farrell (1983: 596-597) refers to the findings of various researchers and states that internal customer satisfaction is related to a large number of organizational behaviors. According to Farrell; Studies showing that internal customer satisfaction has an effect on turnover include Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978), Porter and Steers (1973), Price (1977) and Vroom (1964). Again, with reference to the study of Mobley et al. (1978), it is stated that there is a relationship between low organizational commitment and internal customer satisfaction. Farrell also based on the findings of Hammer, Landau, and Stern (1981) on absenteeism; with reference to the studies of Todor (1980) and Todor and Dalton (1982) on transfer requests; with reference to the studies of Adler and Golan (1981) and Farrell and Robb (1980) on tardiness; with reference to the findings of Petty and Bruning (1980) on error rates; based on the studies of Farrell and Petersen (1982) on internal political activities; and finally, referring to the studies of States (1970) and Hirschman (1970), it is stated that internal customer satisfaction is effective on organizational silence. As a result, employees may exhibit behaviors such as resignation, indifference to their professional obligations, tardiness, absenteeism, and expressing concerns depending on their degree of satisfaction with their work environment (Farrel, 1983:596).

As a result, it is not possible to satisfy external customers with dissatisfied internal customers or to produce quality goods or services that meet the demands of external customers and the target market. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the effect of TQM activities on internal customer satisfaction, which is the most important component of internal marketing, by examining the factors affecting internal customer satisfaction.

#### **2.4. Theoretical Linkage Between Total Quality Management and Internal Customer Satisfaction in Internal Marketing Perspective**

A significant body of research has considered employees as customers, emphasizing that an expanded definition of customers may be necessary to optimize the benefits derived from a company's marketing initiatives. This recognition is based on the fact that internal customers bear a significant resemblance to

external customers in the context of internal marketing. Thus, internal marketing has been applied in areas such as management information systems and training to show how professional personnel can promote products and services, including within their own businesses. Indeed, in contemporary business discourse, it has become increasingly accepted that employees are viewed as the internal customers of the business, and that internal marketing is emerging as a crucial element in providing value to the business and thus to the end consumer (Harrell and Fors, 1992: 299, 300).

In order to ensure external customer satisfaction through internal marketing, the following elements should be emphasized (Telli, Işıkkay and Demir, 2022: 76 - 77):

- Focusing on the demands and requests of employees
- Developing effective internal marketing practices by taking advantage of changing technologies and the data obtained
- Creating a significant number of loyal employees in businesses
- Reducing the resistance of employees to change within the organization
- Increasing employee productivity in businesses
- Securing the visibility and continuity of businesses in the sector
- Developing an integrated marketing culture in businesses

In order for these elements to produce successful results and for the business to achieve its marketing goals and objectives, the understanding that quality practices increase employee satisfaction, which has become the dominant view in the literature, should be examined.

The degree of internal customer satisfaction may depend on the changing conditions of the business and the employee's individual tendency towards their job. Because the concept of internal customer satisfaction is subjective and may vary from person to person. Perceived job characteristics can also be affected by the individual's attitude and changes in organizational conditions resulting from the evaluation of working conditions and emotional experiences at work (Brayfield, 1963: 324 cited in Demirer and Polatçı, 2018:1).

It is clear that internal marketing should motivate not only traditional service marketing principles, employees who interact with external customers as the first basic basis, but also all employees by integrating Total Quality Management (TQM) principles. Thus, carrying out internal marketing activities in an efficient and effective working environment makes a significant contribution to the satisfaction of all employees and the ability to produce outputs in accordance with a well-defined purpose. This approach is also compatible with subsequent developments in the literature.

The dominant theoretical frameworks emerging from the existing literature can be synthesized as follows.

Within the scope of service marketing, employee satisfaction, the relationship between employees and customers, and the strength of communication have a positive effect on business performance. Therefore, businesses attach importance to initiatives aimed at improving their relationships with their employees. Internal marketing increases workplace loyalty, trust and satisfaction, and this satisfaction contributes to better service delivery and higher external customer satisfaction. In the contemporary business environment characterized by intense competition and the difficulty of differentiating services, the return on investments made in personnel through internal marketing and employee satisfaction has been identified as a key factor in achieving success (Özdemir, 2014: 56). In addition, internal marketing, as a strategy to increase internal communication and customer awareness, requires the determination of internal motivations and the satisfaction of internal customers in order for the company to achieve its goals. This requires the evaluation of the validity of the assumed causal relationships between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction, the adequacy of the 'toolbox' methods used by marketing, and the legitimacy of the marketer's role as a change agent in internal markets (Ballantyne, 1997: 346). This is because customers perceive technology as a necessary support system, while they see employees as a key resource in terms of perceived service quality. Because all employees, including communication and support personnel and even managers, are critical marketing resources, regardless of the company's technology infrastructure. Therefore, it is accepted that professional marketers are not the only determining factor. Because it is clear that other categories of employees who are

not related to marketing or sales are also important in the context of marketing. For example, departments where other employees are employed, such as production, management, finance, etc., whose primary functions are not related to marketing or sales, also play a very important role. It is accepted that this marketing function is more important for long-term success than traditional marketing resources such as advertising and professional sales staff (Gronroos, 1985: 42). In fact, in the internal marketing approach within the TQM perspective, all employees and departments are approached as internal customers; employees and departments are considered as internal suppliers within the company. Lings (2004: 407) states that the basic proposition of this approach is that improving the quality of transactions made with internal customers can also positively affect the quality of transactions made with external customers; he supports this view with studies such as Schneider et al. (1994), Marshall et al. (1998), Brooks et al. (1999) and Frost and Kumar (2000).

At the starting point of the internal marketing literature, it is seen that approaches that are addressed within the scope of service marketing focus on employees in the presentation process in contact with external customers. This situation is compatible with the TQM perspective, but at the same time TQM focuses on internal processes and is more comprehensive. Lings (2004:407) states that this approach to the internal market sees all employees and departments as internal customers and internal suppliers of other employees and departments in the company, by giving examples from Barrett (1994), Bhote (1991) and Lukas and Maignan (1996) studies. In the TQM literature, internal marketing is defined as the marketing of goods and services within the company in order to achieve the goals of an organization and increase customer satisfaction (Quester and Kelly, 1999 cited in Ay and Kartal, 2003:16). Although the concept of internal marketing is based on the premise that employees are customers in their own right, the concept of 'employee customer/internal customer' is used in different ways in TQM and service marketing approaches. The reason for this is that the service marketing approach attaches great importance to the relationship between the company and the employee in the use of marketing techniques in the internal market as the most appropriate method to motivate employees. In service marketing, the focus is on employees who are in contact with external customers. In contrast, the TQM approach gives more priority to the development of relationships among employees. Within the TQM paradigm, the concept of the internal customer gains great importance by acting as a catalyst for employees to perceive each other as both customers and suppliers. This paradigm ensures that employees perform according to measurable standards that are internal and external. It usually shows that they make demands on each other, not on the organization as a whole (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1993: 221, 222). Because internal transactions constitute a very large part of the commercial transactions that deliver goods and services to the end consumer along the industrial supply chain (Harrell and Fors, 1992: 300).

In addition, the scope of demands that can be made between suppliers and customers is limited to the provision of "products" that meet the needs of their "customers". In order to ensure consistent quality of the final product, these needs must be met at every stage of the production process. However, the scope of internal marketing is not limited to ensuring that employees have customer awareness in their relationships with each other. Internal marketing plays an important role in motivating employees, including those who are not in direct contact with customers, to exhibit behaviors aimed at providing better service to the end customer by producing strategies in the relationship between the business and the employee (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1993: 221, 222).

Internal customer satisfaction provided with this motivation is effective on belonging, lateness and absenteeism. It has been shown that employee satisfaction can affect the turnover rate as well as the decision of individuals to terminate their employment (Schermerhorn et al. 2002: 163). Therefore, the concept is of great importance in the context of organizational effectiveness. Because it creates a significant impact on the relationship between the employee and the business by reflecting individual feelings towards the job, thus affecting the performance of both employees and the business as a whole. Encouraging internal customer satisfaction is effective in encouraging business members to exhibit behaviors that will motivate them to perform effectively and work efficiently. It is known that a highly satisfied employee can perform better than a dissatisfied individual in certain situations, and individuals who experience a high level of satisfaction are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes (Daryanto, 2014: 698; Hong, 1999: 1). It has been revealed that individuals feel satisfied and exhibit positive attitudes when conditions they perceive as satisfactory are provided. Work life, which constitutes an important part of human existence, is accepted as the most important factor affecting the general life satisfaction of individuals (Gün, 2016: 256). Because individuals spend a

significant part of their daily lives in work environments and many people do not do their jobs only to earn money. They have more important values, beliefs and goals related to their jobs than money. Increasing people's enthusiasm is to win them over, they usually spend more time with their work colleagues than their families and often meet with their colleagues in their social lives. Therefore, work life is an important factor affecting private life. Providing satisfaction in the workplace ensures that the employee is happy both at work and in their private life. Therefore, work plays an important role not only economically but also psychologically (Tor and Esengün, 2011: 55). Tang, Siu and Cheung (2014: 146) revealed that CEOs and human resources managers should create a positive and caring environment in the workplace, develop a harmonious team spirit so that employees feel more institutional support, and provide more job resources such as family-friendly policies, management support and job autonomy. In this case, it can be said that internal marketing should be seen as a prerequisite for effective external marketing. In order to achieve this, organizations should give sufficient importance to internal marketing. It has been proven that the internal marketing process has a significant impact on the service performance of the internal market, thus creating a high level of customer satisfaction in the external market and ensuring that customers are satisfied with their experiences (Özdemir, 2014: 63).

The benefits of internal marketing on internal customer satisfaction can be listed as follows (Telli, Işıkay and Demir, 2022: 89, 90):

- A decrease in turnover is observed in businesses that provide internal customer satisfaction.
- Competent personnel are retained in businesses with internal customer loyalty.
- When turnover decreases, the time and financial resources spent on training new personnel decrease.
- Faulty goods and services decrease, costs decrease.
- The service quality of personnel dedicated to the business increases.
- Employees who experience a sense of belonging tend to provide higher levels of customer satisfaction.
- Employees experience personal development satisfaction.
- Employees' satisfaction with working conditions increases.
- Clarity of authority, duties and responsibilities is also experienced.
- Employees are satisfied with remuneration.
- Management satisfaction also contributes.
- The establishment of positive relationships between employees also contributes.
- There is an increase in workforce competence.
- There is an improvement in the quality and effectiveness of communication between employees.
- Employees' contributions are used to create value. - Facilitates career development of employees.

As a result, two dimensions stand out within the scope of internal marketing. The first dimension is that every department and every individual within an organization is both a supplier and a customer. The second dimension is related to the organization's personnel and requires them to cooperate in a way that is compatible with the company's strategy and goals. This is considered to be particularly important in service-oriented businesses where there is a direct relationship between the production and consumption of the service. Therefore, the business deals with both quality management and customer service and ensures the coordination of human resources and process improvement strategies (Collins and Payne, 1991: 261). Considering that this coordination is also related to the expectations and perception levels between the employee and the business, it is seen that internal customer satisfaction is another important dimension of internal marketing. Moreover, this dimension related to employee satisfaction is likely to be affected by TQM activities. Because the activities carried out within the context of the TQM system play an important role in the development of safer and more satisfying working environments for employees. TQM encourages a participatory culture, increases respect in interpersonal communication, empowers employees to contribute to organizational development and creates a scientific work environment (Bayazıt, 1998:98). In fact, this

situation is supported by the study of B. Deniz (2024), which shows that the harmony between the individual and the organization creates a positive and linear effect on workplace satisfaction together with organizational identification. Thus, internal marketing, in essence, accepts that all employees are customers of managers who want to achieve the goals of the company. If the goals of the company are solid in terms of external marketing, individual functional areas contribute by responding to their own internal target audiences, each of which is directly or indirectly linked to the final customer and the competitive market (Harrell and Fors, 1992: 300). It is seen that the satisfaction level resulting from the response to the expectations of the internal target audience not falling below the perception levels is directly related to internal customer satisfaction.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodology of the research is explained in detail and information is provided about the purpose of the research, its problematic, importance, limitations, hypotheses, universe and sample, measurement tools used and data analysis.

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Ethics Committee conducted an examination of the research in its meeting held on 08/01/2022. The conduct of this research with the order number 692 and decision number 02 was unanimously approved from an ethical point of view.

#### 3.1. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to determine the effect of TQM practices on internal customer satisfaction in order to increase target market share and provide competitive advantage in marketing.

#### 3.2. Research Problem

It is not uncommon for businesses to view quality activities as tedious or as an additional source of expense. It is even possible for employees to view these activities as an additional workload. In such cases, it is expected that two perspectives on quality management systems will emerge, and the following questions must be addressed. Do Total Quality Management Practices reduce employee satisfaction? Are TQM practices perceived as a workload?

#### 3.3. Importance of the Research

It is imperative that businesses recognize the important role of employees in ensuring customer satisfaction and delivering quality outputs. The efficiency of production processes encourages employee satisfaction and thus contributes to the overall success of the business. Achieving competitive advantage in the market can be a result of this. In achieving this competitive advantage, it is anticipated that quality circles can be an important indicator in the relationship between quality practices and employee satisfaction, especially in terms of teamwork, problem-solving focus and continuous improvement. However, it is important to note that Total Quality Practices can also have undesirable consequences such as increased workload and documentation requirements, which can negatively affect employee satisfaction by distracting from core activities.

#### 3.4. Limitation of the Research

- Only workers working in businesses within Polatlı Organized Industrial Zone were included in the study.
- The findings and results of the study are limited to the characteristics measured by the scales.
- The study does not include statistical analysis and findings regarding demographic variables.

#### 3.5. Assumptions of the Research

The following assumptions were derived from the literature reviewed in the research and the dominant views within the theoretical framework.

V1 (Assumption 1) → Internal marketing positively affects internal customer satisfaction

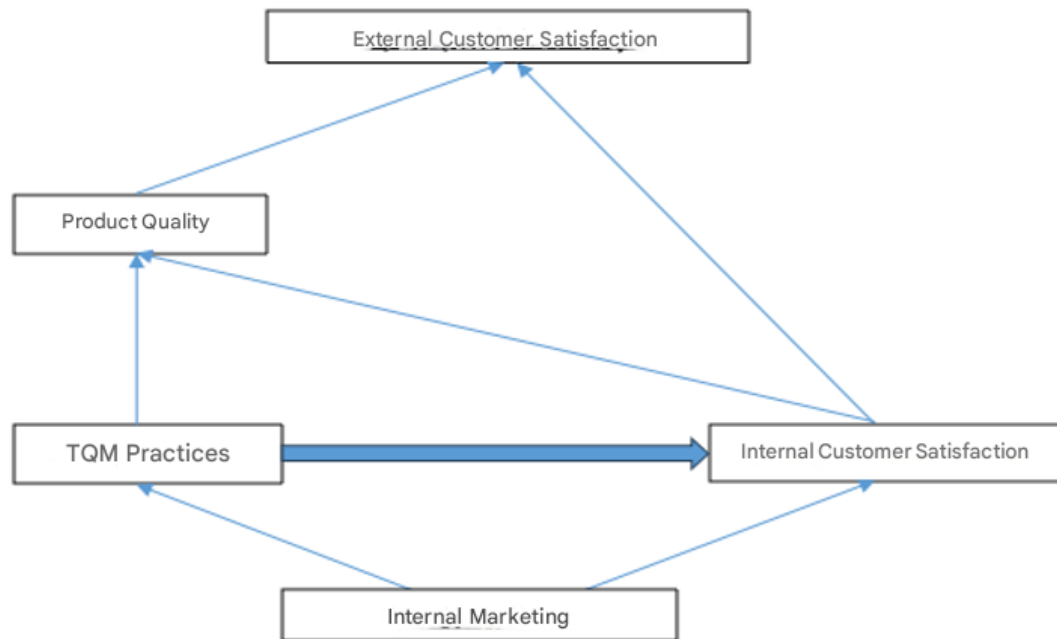
V2 (Assumption 2) → TQM practices positively affect internal marketing.

V3 (Assumption 3) → Internal customer satisfaction positively affects the quality of the product produced

V4 (Assumption 4) → Product quality positively affects external customer satisfaction

V5 (Assumption 5) → TQM practices positively affect product quality

### 3.6. Model of the Research



**Figure 1.** Model of the Research

### 3.7. Research Hypothesis

H1: Total quality management practices have a positive effect on internal customer satisfaction.

### 3.8. Research Universe and Sample

According to the Economic and Social Report of Polatlı Chamber of Commerce (2024: 54), the number of workers working in the facilities that started production in Polatlı Organized Industrial Zone was determined as 1,651. Accordingly, the universe of the research consists of 1,651 workers working in Polatlı Organized Industrial Zone.

The data for this study was collected between 9 December 2022 and 1 May 2023 using an online survey method from workers employed at production facilities in the Polatlı Organized Industrial Zone.

In sampling studies where the universe size is known, the following formula suggested by Sümbüloğlu and Sümbüloğlu (1998:264-265) is used to determine the sample size:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot t^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{d^2 \cdot (N - 1) + t^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$

Here;

n = Sample size,

N= Universe size (1,651),

p = Probability of the event occurring (0.5),

q= Probability of the event not occurring (0.5),

t= Value found from the t table according to the determined confidence level (1.96 for 95% confidence level),

d = Deviation value (0.05 margin of error).

As a result, for a universe of 1,651 people, the required minimum sample size is calculated as approximately 312 people with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

In this case, the sample size of 319 people is sufficient because it is larger than the required minimum of 312 people.

### 3.9. Scales Used in the Study

The following scales were used in the study to measure Total Quality Management and Internal Customer Satisfaction.

#### 3.9.1. Total Quality Management Scale

In this study, the Total Quality Management (TQM) scale developed by Zeitz, Gerald, Johannesson, Russell and J. Ritchie Edgar in 1997 was used to evaluate quality practices.

This scale was adapted to Turkish by Eker (2012) and analyzed in detail. The internal reliability value of the scale was determined as 0.83 in the study. Only the TQM Factors (seven factors and 32 variables) of the scale were used in line with the purpose of the study. In this context, the adaptation made by Eker (2012) was taken as basis.

#### 3.9.2. Internal Customer Satisfaction Scale

The Minnesota Job Satisfaction Scale developed by Weiss et al. (1967) was used to measure internal customer satisfaction. The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Akkemiş (2010). The scale consists of 20 questions to be evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'not satisfied at all' to 5 = 'very satisfied'. The sub-dimensions of the scale are internal satisfaction, external satisfaction and general satisfaction. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the quality practices scale was found to be 0.96, and the Cronbach's Alpha value of the internal customer satisfaction scale was found to be 0.95, and according to these values, the reliability levels of the scales were determined to be high.

### 3.10. Statistical Analysis

The survey method, which is one of the quantitative research methods, was used in the research. Within the scope of statistical analysis, descriptive statistics were used, and correlation and regression analyses were performed to determine relationships. For this purpose, SPSS 22.0 statistical package program was used and the findings were evaluated at a 95% confidence interval and a 5% significance level.

## 4. FINDINGS

Research findings are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics (n=319)

Demographic Information		n	%
Gender	Man	230	72,1
	Woman	89	27,9
Age	18-25	33	10,3
	26-35	88	27,6
	36-45	65	20,4
	46-55	111	34,8
	56 and above	22	6,9
Educational Status	Primary Education	44	13,8
	High School	77	24,1
	Associate Degree	88	27,6
	Undergraduate	77	24,1
	Postgraduate	33	10,3
Working Period in Institution	0-5	176	55,2
	6-10	44	13,8
	11-15	11	3,4
	16-20	33	10,3
	20 and above	55	17,2

When the demographic characteristics of the 319 participants are examined, it is seen that 72.1% of the participants are male and 27.9% are female. This distribution is an indicator of the numerical superiority of male employees in the institution where the research was conducted.

When the age distribution is examined, it is seen that the largest group consists of participants between the ages of 46-55 (34.8%), followed by the age group of 26-35 (27.6%). This shows that a significant portion of the organization's employees are in the middle age group, indicating a skilled and experienced workforce. The observation that other age demographics are represented at lower rates indicates that the young workforce is integrated into the organization to a limited extent.

Regarding educational status, the majority of the participants have high school (24.1%), associate's degree (27.6%) and bachelor's degree (24.1%). The proportion of the population with a postgraduate qualification is 10.3%. This distribution shows that the majority of individuals employed within the organization have a secondary education as well as an associate/bachelor's/bachelor's degree, and there is a significant variation in educational attainment. This diversity provides a valuable basis for interpreting quality practices and measuring internal customer satisfaction levels.

When evaluated in terms of tenure in the organization, it is seen that 55.2% of the participants have worked between 0-5 years. This finding shows that a significant portion of the employees within the organization are newcomers. In contrast, this rate is 17.2% among those with 20 years or more of seniority. This situation reveals that the organization has both experienced and newly employed employees, and it is necessary to evaluate how these different levels of experience are reflected in quality practices and satisfaction perceptions.

The participant profile is characterized by a high degree of diversity in terms of age, gender, educational status, and length of service. This factor is very important as it serves to increase the validity of the research and facilitates the interpretation of the findings in relation to various demographic groups.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics

Variables	n	Average	S.S.	Skewness Coefficient	Compression Ratio
Quality Practices	319	3,57	0,72	-0,31	-0,18
Internal Customer Satisfaction	319	3,60	0,75	-0,22	-0,21

It was determined that the evaluations of the employees participating in the research regarding quality practices ( $3.57 \pm 0.72$ ) were positive and their internal customer satisfaction was high ( $3.60 \pm 0.75$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 3.** Correlation Analysis

		Internal Customer Satisfaction
Quality Practices	r	0,66
	p	0,00
	n	319

According to the correlation analysis results in Table 3, there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between quality applications and internal customer satisfaction ( $r=0.66$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

**Table 4.** Effect of Quality Practices on Internal Customer Satisfaction

Independent Variable	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	1,12	7,01	0,00
Quality Practices	0,69	15,81	0,00
$R^2=0,441$		$F=249,88$	$p=0,00$

Dependent Variable: Internal Customer Satisfaction

According to the regression analysis results, it was determined that quality practices positively affected internal customer satisfaction ( $\beta=0.69$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). It was determined that 44.1% of the change in internal customer satisfaction was explained by quality practices ( $R^2=0.441$ ). This result revealed that quality practices were a determinant of internal customer satisfaction (Table 4).



## 5. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the quality of a product directly affects external customer satisfaction. The dominant perspective in the current literature is that the successful presentation of enriched products characterized by quality to external customers depends on employee satisfaction. This study investigates the relationship between quality practices and internal customer satisfaction from an internal marketing perspective. The findings reveal that quality practices and internal customer satisfaction processes should be carried out both theoretically and practically under the roof of internal marketing, with the awareness of its organic connections.

The definition of quality that we previously presented in Saygın (2017:37) as a result of its integration with the literature and its expansion: It is the measure of ability and performance that emerges with the power of being error-free in accordance with the planned functionalities, together with the degree to which the goods or services reach material and spiritual satisfaction in the effort to meet the demands and needs of customers, it is the power to achieve work. It is the level of satisfaction of the customer in return for the price he pays. As can be seen, the perception of external customers regarding the extent to which their physiological, psychological and sociological needs are met is directly related to the principles of quality management as well as the marketing field that deals with customer satisfaction. In fact, when external customer satisfaction is adapted to the context of internal customers, it is seen that it is closely related to the extent to which the physiological, psychological, sociological and technical needs of employees are met in the context of their professions and workplaces. In this context, it can be stated that internal customer satisfaction is an important indicator of the institution's internal marketing activities and corporate quality. The findings in the research, which are consistent with similar studies in the literature, show that quality practices have a significant and positive effect on internal customer satisfaction.

The research findings have shown that there is a significant and positive relationship between quality practices and internal customer satisfaction. It has been determined that the perception of quality practices ( $X=3.57$ ) and internal customer satisfaction ( $X=3.60$ ) levels are high. This finding shows that the importance attributed to quality within institutions is also reflected in employee satisfaction.

Although the Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy seems to prioritize external customers in terms of final product and service quality, its basis lies in employee satisfaction and active participation in business processes. Therefore, the degree of internal customer satisfaction depends on the material and moral opportunities offered by the employer in return for the employees' labor, institutional prestige and effective management practices. In this context, the factors that increase internal customer satisfaction are not limited to financial factors. In this context, the factors that increase customer satisfaction in a business are not limited to financial factors. The efficiency of production processes and the existence of reward mechanisms are also among the other important factors. The concept of institutional justice perception covers a multifaceted structure that includes elements such as organizational trust levels, the manifestation of leadership styles in the workplace, and the reputation of the institution. For example, S. Deniz's (2023) study shows that workplace happiness is affected by ethical leadership and employee voice, thus emphasizing the importance of these factors in the context of institutional morale.

At this point, the concept of internal marketing gains importance. The concept of internal marketing can be defined as a management approach that positions employees as internal customers and designs business processes to meet their needs and expectations. In order to achieve success in the field of internal customer satisfaction, businesses need to adopt an approach that is oriented towards the needs of their employees. This requires the integration of marketing principles into job design, motivation processes and organizational commitment. In this direction, the impact of TQM practices on internal customer satisfaction is inevitable. The basic principles of TQM include management practices designed to increase employee motivation, encourage their participation in business processes and strengthen their sense of organizational belonging. Correlation analysis findings showed that there was a moderate and positive relationship between quality practices and internal customer satisfaction ( $r = 0.66$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding provides further support for the view that the implementation of quality practices is a critical element in ensuring internal customer satisfaction.

As a result, it can be said that quality practices are effective in increasing not only external customer satisfaction but also internal customer satisfaction.

The findings obtained from the regression analysis show that the implementation of quality practices is associated with a significant and positive effect on internal customer satisfaction ( $\beta=0.69$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The explanatory ratio of the model ( $R^2=0.441$ ) reveals that 44.1% of the change in internal customer satisfaction is explained by quality practices. This ratio is remarkable in that it shows that the implementation of quality practices is an important predictor of internal customer satisfaction. As a result, it can be said that internal customer satisfaction should be considered as an important factor not only in terms of individual employee satisfaction levels but also in terms of organizational efficiency and sustainable competitive advantage. The successful implementation of TQM and internal marketing practices will enable employees to show higher performance both individually and organizationally and will positively contribute to the overall quality management processes of the enterprise. As a result, it is clear that the implementation of quality management practices in organizations serves a dual purpose. First, it has been shown that such practices can increase operational efficiency. Second, it has been shown that they increase employee satisfaction. This study has revealed that employee participation in decision-making processes, continuous improvement approach and organization's efforts towards service quality have a direct impact on employee satisfaction. In this context, quality practices can be defined as a tool that should be used in internal marketing, increasing employees' internal motivation and sense of belonging can be defined as a factor that contributes to increasing satisfaction. Therefore, it can be stated that managers should give more importance to quality practices, continuous improvement activities and practices that prioritize employee participation and that doing this from an internal marketing perspective will make them more effective. It is clear that increasing internal customer satisfaction will have a positive impact on external customer satisfaction in the long term.

As a result, businesses should consider quality not only as a technical process but also as a human resources strategy. The results show that quality management practices in organizations serve not only to improve processes but also to increase employee satisfaction. In particular, the views that employee participation in decision-making processes, continuous improvement approach and organizational efforts towards service quality have a direct impact on employee satisfaction have been supported. In this context, strengthening the intrinsic motivation and sense of belonging of employees who actively participate in quality circles can also be considered as elements that increase this satisfaction. In this context, managers are advised to give more importance to quality circles, continuous improvement activities and practices that prioritize employee participation. Increasing internal customer satisfaction will also contribute positively to external customer satisfaction in the long term. Therefore, businesses should consider quality not only as a technical process but also as a human resources strategy. In light of the research findings, the following suggestions can be developed for managers: It is important to consider quality practices within the organization not only as a management requirement but also as a tool to increase employee satisfaction. Structures that encourage employee participation in quality processes should be established and feedback mechanisms should be strengthened. In this way, both service quality and employee satisfaction can be improved sustainably. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of the relationship between quality practices and internal customer satisfaction and shows that quality-oriented approaches have a strategic value in ensuring the satisfaction of human resources, especially in healthcare enterprises.

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