The Mediating Role of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the Effect of Organizational Culture on Organizational Intimacy

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mediating role of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the relationship between organizational culture and organizational intimacy. The research adopts a descriptive–correlational and applied design. The study population consisted of employees from two private hospitals in Tehran, from which a random sample of 325 participants was selected. Data were gathered using three standardized instruments: Hook et al.'s (1998) 12-item TQM scale, Schein's (1980) 12-item organizational culture questionnaire, and Vakhro–Thompson's (1983) 17-item organizational intimacy scale. Reliability and validity of the instruments were confirmed. To test the hypotheses, Partial Least Squares (PLS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were applied using Smart PLS and SPSS. The results demonstrate that organizational culture significantly influences organizational intimacy through the mediating role of TQM. Moreover, organizational culture exerts significant direct effects on both TQM and organizational intimacy, while TQM itself significantly enhances organizational intimacy.

Introduction

Intimacy is regarded as a cornerstone of any healthy relationship, yet it is inherently difficult to achieve (Beikzadeh, 2022). Individuals with a stronger need for intimacy tend to form deeper interpersonal bonds and engage in more frequent interactions (Syguera et al., 2020). Intimacy reflects the sharing of inner desires, empathy, and profound mutual understanding (Ghorishian et al., 2023). Within organizations, intimacy plays a pivotal role in addressing challenges and preventing potential problems. Indeed, organizational intimacy fosters effective leadership, motivates employees, and ultimately contributes to a progressive and resilient organization (Moghtaderzadeh Maleki Moghadam & Valizadeh Zenouz, 2016). Once organizations recognized its importance, many—often guided by expert recommendations—began actively promoting and reinforcing intimacy in the workplace (Salari & Nastiezaie, 2020). Intimate employees communicate more openly, resolve conflicts independently, and strengthen cohesion. Consequently, organizations employ various strategies to cultivate intimacy or reinforce its manifestations (Kim & Park, 2023). However, poorly designed efforts, such as uncritical imitation of foreign organizational cultures, can produce adverse outcomes, including voluntary turnover (Wamburi et al., 2024). Such turnover remains a pervasive challenge, imposing considerable costs on organizations by weakening emotional bonds and diminishing empathy among staff (Bellis et al., 2023).

Hospitals constitute one of the most frequent sources of public dissatisfaction with healthcare systems worldwide, and Iran is no exception. A comparative study across 17 countries—including Belgium, France, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Finland, and Iran— evaluated healthcare along six dimensions: (1) patients' right to choose, (2) respect and dignity, (3) confidentiality, (4) communication, (5) prompt responsiveness, and (6) social support. Overall, Iran ranked below 13–14 of these countries, though it performed relatively well in areas such as patients' choice and confidentiality, surpassing Portugal, Greece, Finland, the Netherlands, and Italy. Conversely, it ranked last in prompt responsiveness and social support. A corresponding national survey reported patients' satisfaction with inpatient services as 31% satisfactory, 38% highly satisfactory, 21% somewhat satisfactory, 5% unsatisfactory, and 5% completely unsatisfactory (Akbari, 2020).

Furthermore, six out of every ten nurses indicated that they had changed or left their workplace, position, or even profession. High turnover among healthcare professionals has resulted in staff shortages, disrupted patient care, increased absenteeism, and additional turnover. Burnout is particularly costly for hospitals, especially when experienced physicians and nurses are lost (Idiasys, 2024). Turnover imposes both direct and indirect costs, including recruitment and selection, training and integration, productivity losses due to vacancies, depletion of human capital, and disruptions to organizational processes (Bomsta & Kerr, 2023; Khani et al., 2018). Identifying activities that strengthen organizational intimacy is therefore critical.

In today's competitive environment, organizations must undergo continuous transformation to ensure survival and accomplish their goals. Such transformation requires a fundamental reassessment of organizational mindsets, beginning with the evaluation of existing organizational culture, which underpins all activities. Total Quality Management (TQM), a strategic approach for enhancing organizational effectiveness and performance, is one such mechanism. TQM provides a framework for understanding and improving organizational processes, and its success depends on the commitment of individuals across all hierarchical levels (Valmohammadi, 2011). Shared values and collective beliefs shape organizational culture, which in turn exerts a profound influence on organizational success (Monorian et al., 2008).

Today, senior managers increasingly recognize TQM as a catalyst for transformation and productivity, employing it as a tool to achieve developmental objectives. Through TQM, organizations can not only monitor the outcomes of improvement initiatives over time but also benchmark their performance against peers and industry leaders.

Building on these insights, the present study explores the interrelationships among organizational culture, TQM, and organizational intimacy, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of TQM in the relationship between organizational culture and organizational intimacy.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture can be conceptualized as the overall climate or working environment that is directly perceived by all members of an organization. It psychologically influences employee behavior and performance, thereby shaping the achievement of organizational objectives. A supportive culture enhances morale and effectiveness, whereas a weak or unfavorable culture undermines organizational success (Ahmadi Nabi, 2021).

Organizational culture arises from the values, norms, and routines—both explicit and implicit—that are practiced within the organization. It may also be cultivated through recurring organizational activities. As a critical factor, organizational culture helps firms achieve planned objectives, provides members with a sense of identity, preserves the organization's core character, and grants it competitive distinctiveness.

Adherence to organizational culture requires employees to align their behavior with collectively accepted norms, which indirectly increases their competence in fulfilling their roles. Employees who internalize and embody organizational values contribute to the development of a strong and sustainable culture (Jarihi et al., 2022).

Denison et al. (2000) proposed a model identifying four major dimensions of organizational culture: **involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission.**

1. **Involvement**
   This dimension is assessed through empowerment, team orientation, and capability development. Effective organizations empower individuals, design work systems around teams, and invest in developing human resources at all levels. Such practices foster commitment, as members perceive themselves as integral parts of the organization. Employees at every level actively participate in decision-making, and their choices directly shape their work while aligning with organizational goals.
2. **Consistency**
   Measured through core values, agreement, and coordination/integration, this dimension reflects the stability and coherence of effective organizations. In such organizations, employee behavior is rooted in fundamental values, leaders and subordinates are adept at building consensus, and activities are well-integrated. Organizations characterized by consistency exhibit strong and distinctive cultures that significantly influence employee behavior.
3. **Adaptability**
   This dimension encompasses change creation, customer orientation, and organizational learning. While highly cohesive organizations often resist change, their internal integration

and external adaptability can serve as sources of competitive advantage. Adaptive organizations are customer-driven, risk-taking, and capable of learning from mistakes. They possess the capacity to initiate change and continuously enhance their ability to deliver value to customers.

4. **Mission**

   Mission is assessed through strategic direction, goals and objectives, and vision. Arguably the most critical dimension of organizational culture, mission provides clarity regarding organizational purpose and direction. Successful organizations articulate strategic objectives and clearly define their vision. Conversely, organizations that frequently alter their mission face challenges, as such changes necessitate parallel adjustments in strategy, structure, culture, and behavior. In such contexts, strong leadership is essential to define the organizational vision and to cultivate a culture that supports it.

Total Quality Management (TQM)

Total Quality Management (TQM) is widely recognized as a comprehensive approach capable of driving organizational transformation. As Sallis (2001, trans. Hadighi, p. 41) notes, TQM is a philosophy of continuous improvement that equips organizations with essential tools and techniques to meet both current and future needs, demands, and expectations. Since the adoption of TQM represents a form of organizational change (Swanson, 2000; Pakar, 1995), the organizational environment must be adequately prepared to accept such change. The success of TQM as an agent of transformation is closely tied to the cultural context, requiring fundamental shifts in values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions (Powell, 1995; Kujala & Lillrank, 2004; Fenner, 2005).

Accordingly, the primary pathway to implementing TQM lies in reshaping organizational culture, which in turn alters behavioral patterns within the organization and among its employees. TQM must be deeply embedded in and supported by culture, as a strong culture creates robust linkages among internal customers, external customers, and suppliers (Rajai Pour et al., 2009).

TQM emphasizes effective design, the selection of appropriate technologies and production processes, quality-oriented training, greater employee participation, attention to customer needs, and systematic performance measurement. It provides a holistic framework for enhancing competitiveness, efficiency, and organizational flexibility. At its core, TQM serves as a method for planning, organizing, and integrating all organizational activities, relying on the active involvement of individuals at every hierarchical level.

The key principles of TQM in pursuit of quality include:

1. **Customer focus:** Customers ultimately determine the quality of products and services. Their feedback provides critical insights into needs and expectations.
2. **Employee involvement:** All employees should actively participate in organizational processes and systems, receiving appropriate training relevant to their expertise.
3. **Process orientation:** Processes must be continually analyzed to identify weaknesses and opportunities for improvement.
4. **Integrated business systems:** All TQM processes should be embedded within a unified business framework.
5. **Strategic and systematic approach:** A well-defined, quality-oriented strategic plan is essential for sustainability.
6. **Continuous improvement:** Ongoing quality enhancement enables organizations to adapt to dynamic markets and maintain competitive advantage.
7. **Data-driven decision-making:** Reliable data must be systematically collected, documented, and analyzed to ensure accurate decisions and anticipate trends.

8. **Effective communication:** Transparent information sharing across teams is vital for improving processes and strengthening collaboration (TechTarget, 2025).

Ultimately, TQM constitutes a comprehensive system that mobilizes the intellectual and physical capacities of employees at all organizational levels. By fostering participation, enhancing alignment with customer expectations, and institutionalizing continuous improvement, TQM enables organizations to achieve competitiveness, efficiency, and long-term sustainability (Yazdkhasti & Rajai Pour, 2009, p. 59)

Organizational Intimacy

The manifestation of intimacy in the workplace can be examined across three levels: individual, group, and organizational (Shariati et al., 2017).

- **Individual level:** Intimacy provides employees with a sense of meaning that transcends the immediate purpose of their work. It fosters motivation and a higher sense of purpose, encouraging individuals to engage in tasks with greater determination and enthusiasm.
- **Group level:** Intimacy cultivates unity and solidarity among employees, thereby strengthening trust-based communication and fostering collaborative, participatory interactions.
- **Organizational level:** Intimacy is reflected in the values embodied in the organization's mission and core objectives. These values serve as sources of work ethic, organizational commitment, and a sense of belonging. When visibly upheld by senior management, they enrich employees' professional lives.

In general, intimacy can be defined as the sharing of inner desires with others and the mutual experience of empathy and deep understanding. Developing intimate relationships involves observable positive behaviors—not merely subjective experiences—such that both parties simultaneously share and experience common emotions.

In organizational settings, work intimacy refers to the quality of the manager–employee relationship, often regarded as a mechanism for enhancing performance. Intimate relationships also function as a communicative mode within the workplace. Thus, intimacy at work can be understood as a relational process in which employees share professional concerns and challenges with their colleagues, fostering deeper understanding and sensitivity toward workplace issues. As such, organizational intimacy represents a flexible and evolving process that develops over time (Bashir, 2013).

Literature Review

Valmohammadi et al. (2013), in a study entitled *The Impact of Organizational Culture on Total Quality Management*, showed that organizational culture has a positive effect on the implementation of TQM in pharmaceutical companies in Tehran Province.

Similarly, Ahmadi-Nabi et al. (2024), in a study titled *The Effect of Organizational Culture on Organizational Performance through the Mediating Role of Total Quality Management*, concluded that organizational culture significantly influences organizational performance through the mediating role of TQM.

In another study, *The Mediating Role of Total Quality Management in the Relationship between*

Organizational Culture and Job Motivation (Case Study: Teachers of Firoozabad City), Momenfar et al. (2021) found that TQM plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between organizational culture and teachers' job motivation.

Yazdkhasti et al. (2009), in their research on *The Relationship between Types of Organizational Culture and the Level of TQM Adoption in State Universities of Iran*, reported that group culture was significantly and positively related only to the leadership and human resource management components of TQM, whereas rational and hierarchical cultures had significant positive relationships with all TQM components.

Finally, Jaryahi (2022), in a study entitled *The Effect of Organizational Culture Characteristics on the Implementation of Total Quality Management with Emphasis on the Mediating Role of Business Ethics in Shirin Asal Company*, showed that organizational culture has significant effects on both business ethics and TQM. The findings indicated that successful TQM implementation is shaped by organizational culture as well as business ethics.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The present study aims to investigate the mediating role of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the relationship between organizational culture and organizational intimacy.

Research Hypotheses

Main Hypothesis

- Organizational culture positively and significantly influences organizational intimacy through the mediating role of Total Quality Management.

Sub-Hypotheses

1. Organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on organizational intimacy.
2. Organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on Total Quality Management.
3. Total Quality Management has a positive and significant effect on organizational intimacy.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study
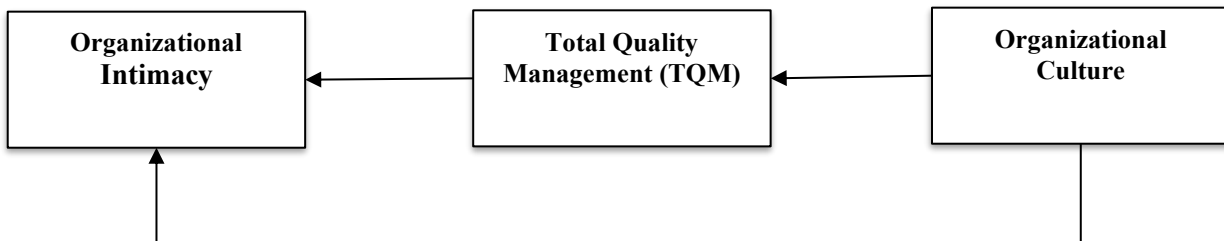
Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive–correlational research design and was applied in terms of purpose. The statistical population consisted of all employees of two private hospitals in Tehran. Using the sample size determination formula (50 < N < 150), a total sample of 325 participants was obtained.

The sampling technique was simple random sampling, ensuring that each member of the population had an equal probability of selection.

For data collection, the following standardized instruments were employed:

- The Total Quality Management (TQM) questionnaire developed by Hawk et al. (1998), consisting of 12 items;
- The Organizational Culture questionnaire developed by Edgar Schein (1980), consisting of 12 items;
- The Organizational Intimacy questionnaire developed by Waqr and Thompson (1983), consisting of 17 items.

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability and validity of the instruments were examined and confirmed.

To test the research hypotheses and analyze the relationships among the variables, the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were applied using SmartPLS and SPSS software.
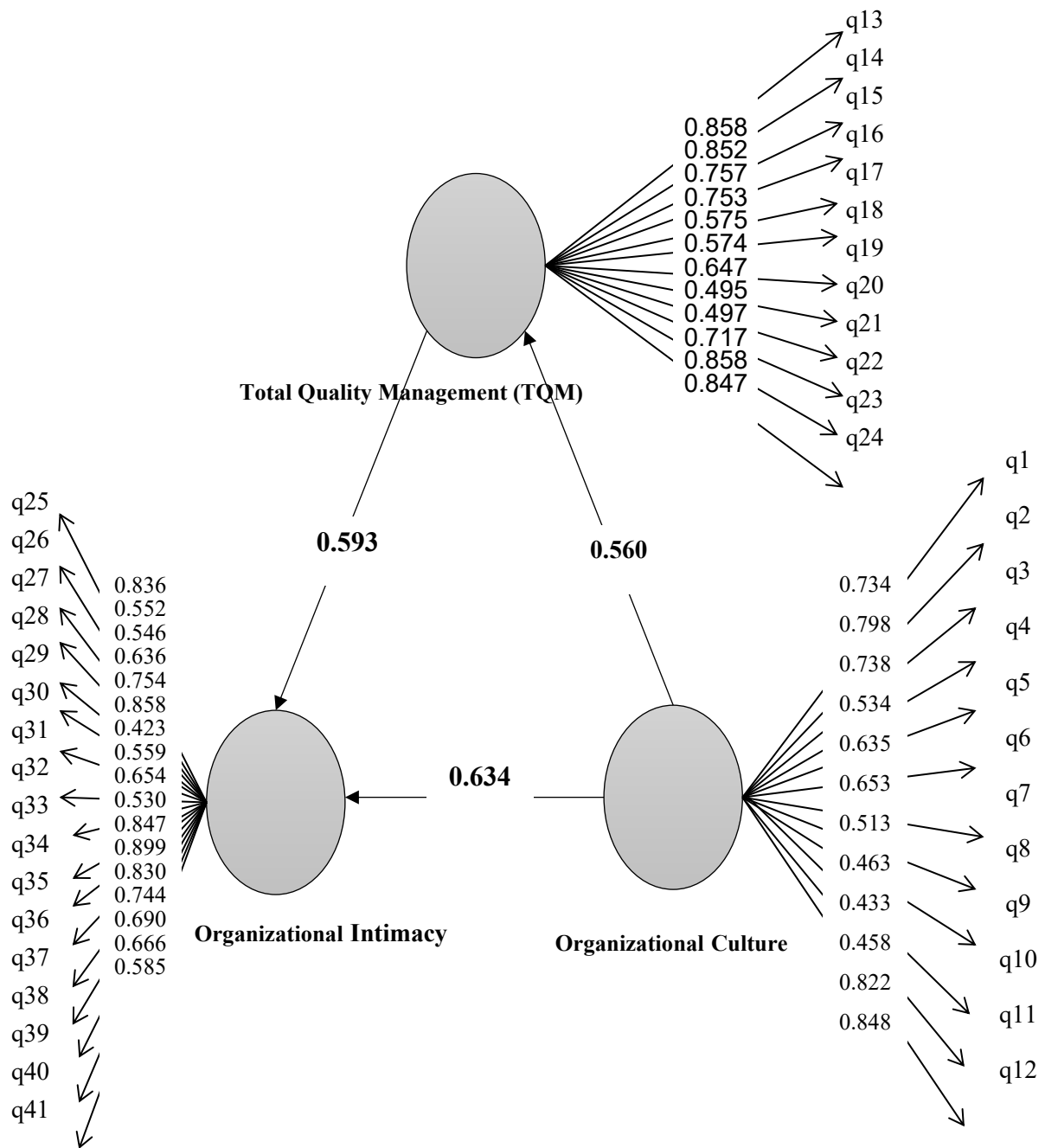
Findings

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model in the Standardized Coefficient Estimation Mode
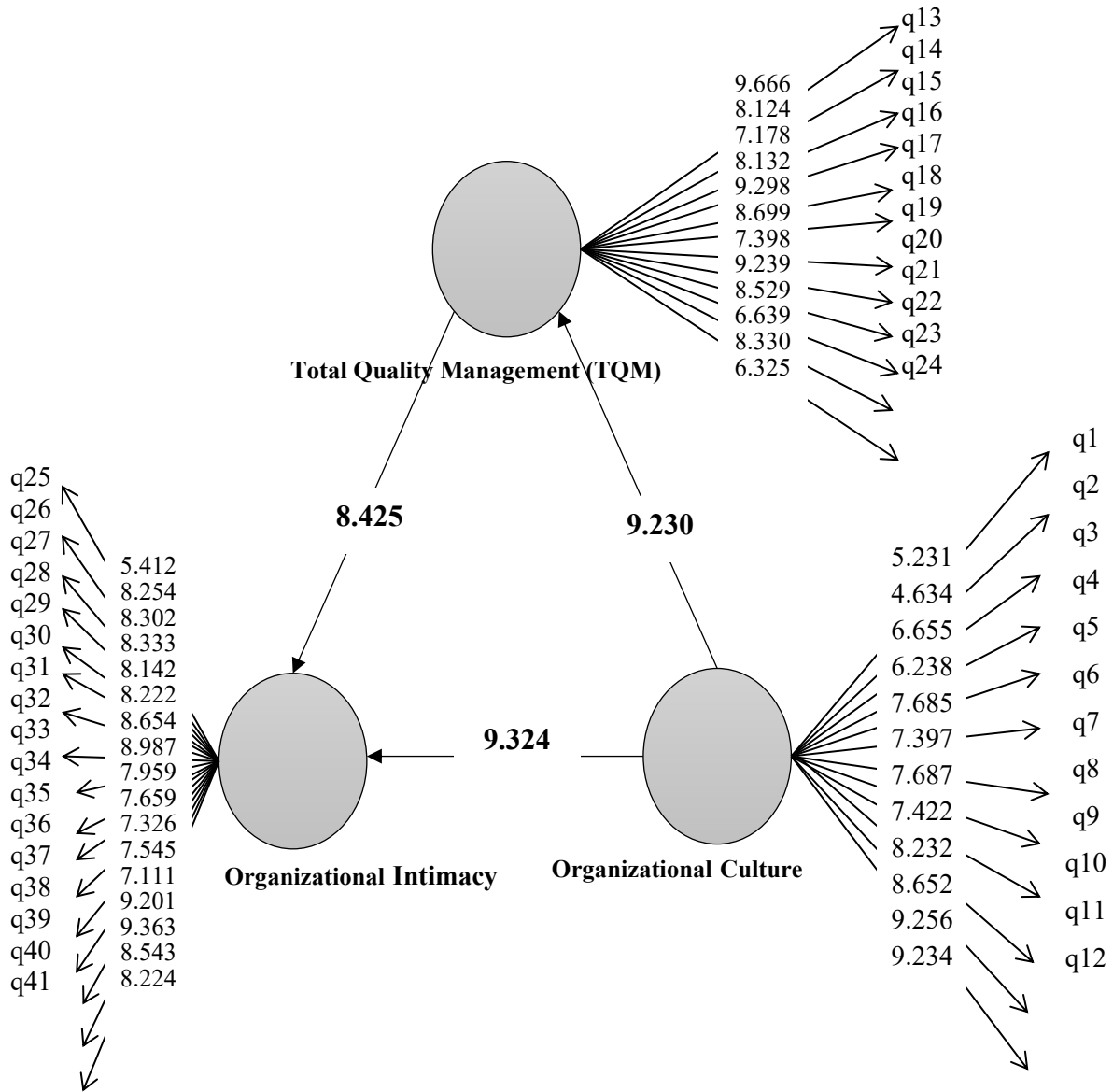
Figure 3. Structural Equation Model in the Absolute Significance (t-value) Estimation Mode

(Figure 3) illustrates the research model in the absolute significance mode of path coefficients (*t-value*). This model essentially tests all structural equations using the *t-statistic*. According to this model, a path coefficient or factor loading is considered significant at the 95% confidence level if the *t-value* exceeds ±1.96.

Analysis of Sub-Hypotheses

Sub-Hypothesis 1:
Organizational culture has a significant effect on organizational intimacy.

Analysis of Sub-Hypotheses

Sub-Hypothesis   **1**

Organizational culture has a significant effect on organizational intimacy.

Table 1. Results of Estimating Sub-Hypothesis 1

Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value
Organizational Culture → Organizational Intimacy	0.63	9.324

Since the t-value is 9.324, which exceeds the critical threshold of ±1.96 (p < 0.05), the claim that *"organizational culture has a significant effect on organizational intimacy"* is supported at the 95% confidence level. Furthermore, the positive beta coefficient (β = 0.63) confirms the significant positive influence of organizational culture on organizational intimacy.

Sub-Hypothesis   **2**

Organizational culture has a significant effect on Total Quality Management (TQM).

Table 2. Results of Estimating Sub-Hypothesis 2

Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value
Organizational Culture → TQM	0.560	9.230

Given that the t-value is 9.230, which is greater than ±1.96 (p < 0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed at the 95% confidence level. The positive beta coefficient (β = 0.560) indicates that organizational culture exerts a significant positive effect on TQM.

Sub-Hypothesis   **3**

Total Quality Management has a significant effect on organizational intimacy.

Table 3. Results of Estimating Sub-Hypothesis 3

Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value
TQM → Organizational Intimacy	0.593	8.425

With a t-value of 8.425, which exceeds ±1.96 (p < 0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed at the 95% confidence level. The positive beta coefficient (β = 0.593) demonstrates that TQM has a significant positive effect on organizational intimacy.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the relationship between organizational culture and organizational intimacy. To test the relationships and hypotheses, Partial Least Squares (PLS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were applied using Smart PLS and SPSS software.

The findings revealed that organizational culture positively and significantly affects organizational intimacy through the mediating role of TQM. Moreover, organizational culture exerts a positive and significant influence on both organizational intimacy and TQM, while TQM itself has a positive

and significant effect on organizational intimacy. The results further indicated that organizational culture significantly impacts the intimacy of employees in private hospitals, and this effect is strengthened in the presence of the mediating variable, TQM.

These findings are consistent with prior studies, including Valmohammadi (2013), which demonstrated a positive relationship between organizational culture and TQM; Ahmadi-Nabi (2024); and Jaryahi (2022), both of which confirmed the significant positive impact of organizational culture on TQM.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- To improve hospital services and increase patient satisfaction, the principles of Total Quality Management should be implemented in hospitals.
- TQM practices should be utilized to foster stronger organizational intimacy between hospital managers and employees.
- Monthly dialogue sessions should be held between managers, physicians, and nurses to openly discuss problems and challenges.
- To cultivate a strong and sustainable organizational culture, all hospital staff should be actively involved in the management and administration of hospital affairs.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies are recommended to investigate the impact of organizational culture on organizational resilience through the mediating role of Total Quality Management (TQM).

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