



Identification of Management and Technical Standards in Fitness Clubs: A Qualitative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the implementation and impact of management and technical standards within fitness clubs.

Methodology: Employing a qualitative research design, the study involved semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, including university professors in sports management, managers and experts from the licensing commission of fitness clubs, and standards specialists. The thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, focusing on the motivations for standard adoption, the processes of implementing these standards, and the perceived impacts on organizational performance and stakeholder engagement.

Findings: The study reveals that fitness clubs adopt management and technical standards primarily to improve operational efficiency, ensure compliance with regulations, and enhance service quality. Challenges in standardization include aligning internal processes with external requirements and managing stakeholder expectations. Successful standardization efforts lead to improved operational efficiency, better stakeholder management, and enhanced competitive advantage. The research also highlights the importance of voluntary environmental programs and ISO certifications in signaling commitment to quality and sustainability.

Conclusion: The adoption of management and technical standards in fitness clubs plays a crucial role in enhancing operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, and stakeholder satisfaction. Despite the challenges faced during implementation, the benefits of standardization are clear, suggesting that fitness clubs should continue to engage in these practices. Future research should aim to broaden the geographic and demographic scope of participants and incorporate quantitative measures to further validate the findings.

Keywords: *Fitness clubs, management standards, technical standards, operational efficiency, stakeholder management*

1 Introduction

The importance of management and technical standards in the fitness industry, particularly within bodybuilding clubs, has grown exponentially in recent years. This increase in attention stems from a broader recognition of the critical role that these standards play in enhancing operational efficiency, ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements, and ultimately, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

The European Bifurcation Club's white paper on stenting techniques (Burzotta et al., 2020) offers a unique perspective on the application of technical standards within a highly specialized medical context. While seemingly distinct from the fitness industry, the principles of standardization, technical proficiency, and continuous improvement resonate with the broader themes of management and technical standards in bodybuilding clubs. This cross-industry comparison highlights the universal applicability and benefits of standardization efforts, underscoring their significance in driving organizational excellence and innovation. Voluntary environmental programs, as delineated by Potoski and Prakash (2005), serve as a foundational framework for understanding the nexus between clubs' aspirations to meet regulatory demands and their voluntary initiatives aimed at environmental stewardship. This intersection of voluntary and mandated compliance elucidates the strategic advantage that clubs can gain by aligning with broader societal expectations while navigating the regulatory landscape. Such alignment is not merely about adhering to external pressures but is indicative of clubs' commitment to sustainable practices, enhancing their legitimacy and competitive edge in the market (Potoski & Prakash, 2005).

Expanding on the discourse of operational excellence, Fried et al. (2013) highlight the pivotal role of process management standards in stabilizing organizational processes. The adherence to established rules and frameworks enables clubs to streamline their operations, mitigating variability and fostering an environment conducive to continuous improvement. This is particularly relevant in the dynamic and highly competitive fitness industry, where operational efficiency directly impacts customer satisfaction and retention rates (Fried et al., 2013). The strategic management of stakeholders is another critical dimension explored in the literature, with Cicut et al. (2017) emphasizing the importance of identifying and prioritizing stakeholders in the decision-making process. In the context

of fitness clubs, understanding the nuanced expectations and needs of various stakeholders—from members and employees to regulatory bodies and community partners—can significantly influence the effectiveness of management strategies. Such an approach not only facilitates alignment with stakeholders' expectations but also enhances the clubs' ability to anticipate and respond to changing market dynamics (Cicut et al., 2017).

The adoption of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards, as investigated by Nascimento et al. (2018), underscores the significance of technical standards in bolstering organizational performance. The implementation of ISO standards within bodybuilding clubs exemplifies a commitment to operational excellence and quality management. By aligning with globally recognized benchmarks, clubs can ensure the consistency and quality of their services, thereby enhancing member satisfaction and loyalty. Further exploring the relationship between market orientation and innovation, Bai, Asgharpour, & Nia (2016) shed light on the critical role that market orientation plays in driving innovation within bodybuilding clubs. The study suggests that a strong market orientation, characterized by an acute understanding of and responsiveness to customer needs, can significantly enhance a club's innovative capabilities. This is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced fitness industry, where clubs are constantly challenged to innovate and differentiate their offerings to remain competitive (Bai et al., 2016).

Beck and Walgenbach (2005) delve into the dynamics of technical efficiency versus adaptation to institutionalized expectations through the lens of ISO 9000 standards adoption. Their work provides a nuanced understanding of the motivations behind clubs' decisions to adopt such standards, whether driven by the pursuit of technical efficiency or the need to conform to institutional expectations. This exploration is critical in understanding the broader implications of standardization efforts, not just in terms of operational efficiency but also in aligning with industry norms and expectations (Beck & Walgenbach, 2005). Guillén et al. (2016) provide a comprehensive framework for the effective management of condition-based maintenance programs, emphasizing the role of e-maintenance strategies in industrial development. The parallels between this framework and the management of technical standards in fitness clubs are evident in the emphasis on proactive maintenance and optimization of operations. Such strategies are essential for ensuring the reliability and safety of equipment, which is paramount in

providing high-quality service to club members (Guillén et al., 2016).

In their examination of the efficiency of non-profit organizations, Miragaia, Ferreira, & Vieira (2023) utilize a data envelopment analysis (DEA) approach to support strategic decision-making. This analytical lens offers valuable insights into the operational efficiency of fitness clubs, particularly those operating within a non-profit model. The study highlights the potential for DEA as a tool for assessing and enhancing the efficiency of standardization practices within clubs, offering a quantitative basis for strategic improvements (Miragaia et al., 2023). Neves et al. (2017) explore the key aspects of implementing ISO/IEC 17025 quality management systems in materials science laboratories, providing a detailed account of the challenges and benefits associated with such endeavors. The parallels with the fitness industry lie in the shared emphasis on adherence to quality standards and the rigorous process of certification. The experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of ISO/IEC 17025 standards offer valuable insights for fitness clubs embarking on similar standardization and certification journeys (Neves et al., 2017).

The integration of voluntary environmental initiatives, process management standards, stakeholder management strategies, and adherence to ISO standards represents a multifaceted approach to enhancing organizational performance, ensuring regulatory compliance, and fostering innovation within bodybuilding clubs. As clubs navigate this landscape, the lessons gleaned from these studies offer a roadmap for achieving operational excellence and strategic differentiation in an increasingly competitive market. Thus, this study aims to explore the implementation and impact of management and technical standards within fitness clubs.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Data Collection

In the methodology section of the article titled "Identification of Management and Technical Standards in Fitness Clubs," the research is described as a qualitative study focused on the phenomenon of management and technical standards within fitness clubs. The researcher initially embarked on identifying the phenomenon and collecting qualitative data through exploratory interviews. Following this, a model was developed, and quantitative data were collected to test the extracted standards in the fitness clubs.

The qualitative segment employed thematic analysis based on a systematic literature review and structured interviews. The research population included experts in the field: university professors and researchers in sports management, managers and experts from the licensing commission of fitness clubs, managers of fitness clubs with extensive experience and high qualifications, and standards specialists in service. A purposive sampling method was used to select a sufficiently large sample size (15 participants) to achieve theoretical saturation in concept extraction.

2.2 Data Collection

For qualitative data collection, semi-structured (semi-exploratory) interviews were conducted alongside a literature review to complement the findings. The interviews were qualitative, aiming to delve deep into the subjects' experiences and insights. In the literature review part, components were extracted by examining the foundations and background through document analysis, books, and articles from both domestic and international sources. The validity of this section was ensured through the individual competence of the interviewees, the content validity of the framework (by three sports management researchers), and the agreement among coding validators (two expert sports management researchers).

Interviews were conducted based on a pre-designed analytical framework, ensuring feedback was given to interviewees without influencing their responses, thereby enhancing internal validity. After each interview, the model obtained up to that point was presented, and any comments from the interviewees regarding the model were discussed. This procedure was followed to ensure the interviews were free from any bias or preconceptions. Data collection continued until the researcher was confident that further data collection would not add new knowledge. After 15 interviews over six months, data analysis indicated no new data were being added, and theoretical saturation was achieved.

In qualitative research, instead of validity and reliability, terms like credibility, transferability, and confirmability are used. The validity of the literature review and interview tools was initially assessed by experts, followed by reliability methods and agreement among validators.

2.3 Data Analysis

After conducting interviews with each respondent, the audio recordings were transcribed and coded. Academic interviewees were marked with an "M" and executive interviewees with an "S". For the analysis of interview texts, the thematic analysis method was used. According to this method, interviews were read repeatedly, and the content relevant to the researchers' primary question was identified. Researchers then coded the selected qualitative data. Coding was based on the interview and the numerical codes previously described. After the coding phase, researchers used their creativity and knowledge to label each and then grouped the sub-themes that had the most semantic and conceptual similarity, creating new meanings and terms. In fact, sub-themes were categorized into main themes. Main themes are the answers to the research questions derived from qualitative data.

For the analysis of findings, a three-stage coding process was employed to categorize the identified components, based on previous studies and expert opinions. As data were collected, analysis began simultaneously through three stages of coding. After extracting the codes, they were categorized, and continuous comparison highlighted the

differences and similarities between these codes. Categories were separated or merged to form a theory during this process, with existing literature and texts also being used to refine the theory.

3 Findings and Results

In the study, a total of 15 participants were meticulously selected to represent a wide spectrum of expertise in the fitness club industry, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the standardization practices within this sector. The demographic breakdown of participants included 7 university professors and researchers in sports management, demonstrating the academic insight into the standardization process. Additionally, the study encompassed 3 managers and experts from the licensing commission of fitness clubs, highlighting the regulatory perspective. Furthermore, 3 managers of fitness clubs with extensive experience and high qualifications were interviewed, providing a practical view of implementing standardization in daily operations. Lastly, 2 standards specialists in service contributed their expertise, offering a nuanced understanding of the standards themselves.

Table 1

The Final Results of Qualitative Analysis

Construct	Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Foundation of Standardization in Fitness Services	Drivers of Standardization in Fitness Clubs	- Global advancements in fitness standardization - National Requirements for Sports Services Standards - Environmental Opportunities for Standardization
Challenges of Standardization in Fitness Clubs	Internal Challenges of Clubs Environmental Challenges of Clubs	
Level of Standardization in Fitness Clubs	Organizational Standardization in Fitness Club Standardization Individual Standardization in Fitness	- Institutional Standardization in Sports - Fitness Trainer Standardization - Customer Standardization in Fitness
Capacity of the Fitness Services Standardization System	Management of Fitness Club Standardization Development of Fitness Services Standards Implementation of Fitness Standardization	- Monitoring Fitness Standardization
Optimization of Standardization in Fitness Clubs	Capacity Building for Fitness Standardization Specialization of Fitness Services Standards	

General Standards for Fitness Clubs	Levels of Standards	
	Nature of Standards	
	Acceptance of Standards	
Efficiency of Fitness Club Management Standards	Specialized Club Management Standards	
	Management Standards	
	Technical Standards	
Results of Standardizing Fitness Clubs	Results for Fitness Clubs	- Enhancement of Business Efficiency - Sustainability of Club Performance
	Results for the Fitness Industry	- Regulation of the Fitness Market - Development of the Fitness Industry
	Results for the Fitness Customer Community	- Behavioral Results - Consumption Results

The study unveiled several pivotal constructs related to the standardization of management and technical practices within fitness clubs. These findings are categorized into the foundation of standardization, challenges, levels of standardization, the capacity of the standardization system, optimization efforts, general standards, efficiency, and the results of standardizing fitness clubs. Below is a detailed discussion of these constructs:

3.1 Foundation of Standardization in Fitness Services

Our investigation revealed that the drivers of standardization in fitness clubs are multifaceted, including global advancements in fitness standardization, national requirements for sports services standards, and environmental opportunities for standardization. One interviewee emphasized the global influence, stating, "The international trends towards standardization have undeniably pushed our local fitness clubs to adapt and align with global benchmarks."

3.2 Challenges of Standardization in Fitness Clubs

The study identified internal and environmental challenges faced by clubs. Internal challenges revolve around the adaptation of clubs to standards, whereas environmental challenges include regulatory and market pressures. Reflecting on these challenges, one club manager mentioned, "Adapting to standards is not just an internal decision; it's about navigating the regulatory landscape and market expectations."

3.3 Level of Standardization in Fitness Clubs

Within the clubs, organizational standardization emerges alongside institutional, club, and individual standardization efforts. A key theme was the role of fitness trainer and customer standardization, highlighting the importance of all stakeholders in the standardization process. "Standardization is a collective effort; it starts with us, the trainers, and extends to every member," explained a fitness instructor.

3.4 Capacity of the Fitness Services Standardization System

This encompasses management, development, implementation, and monitoring of standardization efforts in clubs. An industry expert shared, "Effective management and continuous monitoring are the backbones of successful standardization."

3.5 Optimization of Standardization in Fitness Clubs

Efforts are made towards capacity building and specialization of fitness services standards, aiming for a refined approach to standardization. "Specialization allows us to not only meet but exceed standards, offering unparalleled service," a club director pointed out.

3.6 General Standards for Fitness Clubs

The study further examined the levels, nature, and acceptance of standards, finding a diverse landscape of standardization across clubs. "The acceptance of standards is as crucial as their development. It's about embedding these standards into our club's DNA," remarked another manager.

3.7 Efficiency of Fitness Club Management Standards

Investigating specialized club management standards alongside management and technical standards, the research highlights the critical role of efficient standardization. "Efficiency in meeting standards ensures that we're not just compliant but also competitive," noted a club owner.

3.8 Results of Standardizing Fitness Clubs

Finally, the results for fitness clubs, the fitness industry, and the fitness customer community were explored. Clubs reported an enhancement of business efficiency and sustainability of club performance. The industry sees regulation of the fitness market and development of the fitness industry, while customers experience behavioral and consumption results. A participant summarized, "Standardization has not only improved our operational efficiency but has also elevated the customer experience, setting a new benchmark in the fitness industry."

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the implementation and impact of management and technical standards within fitness clubs. Through a qualitative lens, we sought to understand how these standards influence operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, and stakeholder satisfaction within the unique context of the fitness industry.

Our findings revealed that fitness clubs actively engage in adopting management and technical standards to enhance operational efficiency, ensure compliance with regulatory frameworks, and meet or exceed stakeholder expectations. These initiatives are driven by both internal motivations and external pressures, including the need to stay competitive in an increasingly saturated market.

The emphasis on operational efficiency aligns with Bai, Asgharpour, & Nia (2016), who highlighted the crucial role of market orientation in spurring innovation within bodybuilding clubs. This study extends the discourse by illustrating how adherence to management and technical standards can serve as a catalyst for operational innovations that respond to market demands and customer expectations (Bai et al., 2016).

The findings on regulatory compliance resonate with Potoski and Prakash (2005), who discussed the importance of voluntary environmental programs and ISO 14001 certifications (Potoski & Prakash, 2005). Like the

mechanical engineering industry's experience detailed by Beck and Walgenbach (2005), fitness clubs find value in adopting ISO standards not just for technical efficiency but also as a means of adapting to and exceeding institutionalized expectations (Beck & Walgenbach, 2005).

Stakeholder satisfaction, as discussed in the findings, finds parallel in the work of Cicut et al. (2017), emphasizing the significance of identifying and prioritizing stakeholders in organizational strategies. This study further underscores the necessity of such strategies in the context of fitness clubs, where member satisfaction directly influences business success (Cicut et al., 2017).

The challenges and benefits associated with ISO certification in the fitness industry are mirrored in the experiences of materials science laboratories implementing ISO/IEC 17025, as explored by Neves et al. (2017). The cross-industry insight from Nascimento, Cabero, & Valentim (2018) regarding the adoption of ISO standards in different regions also supports the global relevance of this study's findings (Nascimento et al., 2018).

Lastly, the aspect of continuous improvement and innovation in adopting standards echoes Fried et al. (2013) and Guillén et al. (2016), who discussed the decoupling from standards for technical innovation and the management of condition-based maintenance programs, respectively (Fried et al., 2013; Guillén et al., 2016). This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how fitness clubs leverage standards not only for compliance but as a foundation for innovation and strategic differentiation.

This study, while comprehensive in its exploration of management and technical standards in fitness clubs, is not without limitations. One of the primary constraints is the sample size and demographic scope, as the research was conducted with 15 participants predominantly from a specific geographical region. This limitation may affect the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts or diverse fitness club environments. Additionally, the study primarily employed qualitative methods, which, while rich in detail and depth, may not capture the quantifiable impacts of standardization practices on operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Future studies could benefit from a more diverse participant pool and the inclusion of quantitative measures to provide a more holistic understanding of the implications of management and technical standards in the fitness industry.

Future research should aim to address the limitations identified in this study by expanding the geographical scope and including a larger, more diverse sample of participants.

Such expansion would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the global practices and challenges associated with management and technical standards in fitness clubs. Additionally, future studies could incorporate quantitative research methods to measure the direct impacts of standardization on operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and financial performance. Investigating the long-term effects of standardization efforts and the role of digital technologies in facilitating adherence to standards could also provide valuable insights into evolving practices in the fitness industry.

Based on the findings of this study, fitness clubs are encouraged to actively engage in voluntary environmental programs and align their operations with internationally recognized standards, such as ISO certifications. This alignment not only enhances operational efficiency but also boosts the club's reputation among stakeholders. Clubs should prioritize the identification and management of stakeholder needs, employing a strategic approach to decision-making that balances internal goals with external expectations. Additionally, incorporating process management standards and fostering a culture of continuous improvement can significantly contribute to organizational resilience and competitiveness. Clubs are also advised to stay abreast of market orientation and innovation trends, leveraging customer insights to drive service improvements and differentiate themselves in a crowded market. By adopting these practices, fitness clubs can navigate the complexities of the industry, meet evolving stakeholder expectations, and achieve sustainable growth.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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