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THE IMPACT OF AI ON QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES -- A CASE STUDY OF SHANGHAI SQ AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

Total Quality Management (TQM), as a profound management philosophy, accentuates the active participation of all organizational members, striving to augment the quality of products and services via ceaseless process refinement. In China, the footprint of TQM application has expanded from the manufacturing realm to diverse sectors, prominently including agriculture. With the remarkable breakthroughs and extensive applications of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G, big data, and satellite remote sensing, bolstered by Chinese government policies, TQM has found new impetus in the development of precision agriculture, smart agriculture, and green agriculture within Chinese agricultural enterprises. This, in turn, has unfurled novel challenges and opportunities for the application and evolution of TQM in agricultural settings. This paper zeroes in on the behavioral and awareness dimensions within the five-dimensional quality management framework — namely, characteristic quality, tool quality, system quality, behavioral quality, and awareness quality — grounded in TQM theory.

By deploying a questionnaire survey and conducting interviews with employees and management of Shanghai SQ Agricultural Technology Company, this study probes into the impact of AI technology on the behavioral and awareness quality of employees in agricultural enterprises and dissects the principal issues and strategic pathways that AI technology encounters in the application of quality management in agricultural enterprises.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Total Quality Management (TQM), Five-Dimensional Quality Management Framework, Agricultural Enterprises

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1. INTRODUCTION

China, as the global behemoth in agricultural production and consumption, has witnessed an escalating focus on quality management within its agricultural enterprises to vouchsafe the quality and continuous amelioration of agricultural products. However, in the wake of the meteoric development and pervasive application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, compounded by the burgeoning consumer demand for wholesome, safe, and top-notch agricultural products, the Total Quality Management (TQM) paradigm in agricultural enterprises is confronting new trials and prospects.

The Five-Dimensional Quality Management Framework, serving as a comprehensive quality governance system, encompasses characteristic quality, tool quality, system quality, behavioral quality, and awareness quality. The infiltration of AI technology in agricultural enterprises initially reverberates in the technical echelons, precipitating enhancements in characteristic quality, tool quality, and system quality. Through precision agriculture, astute monitoring, and data analytics, a more profound comprehension and fulfillment of customer requisites and anticipations become feasible. Investments in intelligent devices, technologies, and software resources can supercharge efficiency, curtail errors and waste rates, and consequently, fortify the overall product quality. Refinements in systems, processes, and standards tailored to the utilization of intelligent paraphernalia and resources can standardize operational workflows, mitigate risks, and catalyze coordination and cooperation among departments, augmenting the market competitiveness of agricultural products. The pragmatic application of AI in agricultural enterprises and its conspicuous effects have steered theoretical research on the impact of AI on TQM to preponderantly center on the domains of influence and technical nuances, with comparatively scant exploration into behavioral and awareness quality.

Liu, H., Liu, R., GU, X., Yang, M. (2023) posited that the Quality 4.0 theory research broadens the vista of quality management to the internal surveillance of all activities in the product value chain, underpinned by four theoretical frameworks: digital quality management, predictive quality management, intelligent quality management, and mass customization.

Hu, Z. et al. (2024) and Xiao, A., Qin, Y., Xu, Z. & Škare, M. (2023) analyzed that the application of TQM has proliferated from industry and manufacturing to sectors catering to social and population needs, especially in medical and educational industries; they demonstrated the salutary impact of TQM on financial performance, sustainability, and green development.

Pandey, P., Agrawal, N., Saharan, T., Raut, R. (2021) pointed out that leadership development, recruitment processes, and training development are the linchpins in implementing TQM. Vihari, N., Yadav, M., and Panda, T. (2022), in their study on the positive impact of soft TQM practices on job role performance, also unearthed that employee innovative work behavior partially mediates the relationship, and a proactive atmosphere moderates it.

Sonandi, A., Ladzani, W., Nealer, E. (2021) spotlighted the role of TQM in propelling process innovation strategies in agricultural enterprises. AlQershi, N., Saufi, R., et al. (2023) delved into the nexus between TQM and green innovation, sustainable development, and their corollary roles. Elbasi, E., et al. (2023) scrutinized the employment of AI technologies such as expert systems, natural language processing, speech recognition, and machine vision, which not only transmuted the quantum of work in the agricultural sector but also safeguarded the quality, productivity, and sustainability of work therein. Chen, Y., et al. (2020) anatomized that the application of AI in the agricultural domain mainly enfolds image recognition and perception, skills and labor, maximizing output, and chatbots.

This paper commandeers the case of Shanghai SQ Agricultural Technology Company to deliberate and explore the behavioral quality of enterprise employees and the awareness quality of the organization under the aegis of AI technology application.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Below are the relevant discussions on the broader implications of AI in agriculture that may be useful for understanding its impact on quality management in agricultural enterprises.

2.1. AI in Agriculture

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into agriculture is seen as a pivotal solution to address challenges such as rapid population growth and increasing food demand. Traditional farming methods often lead to negative environmental impacts, but AI offers a transformative shift towards sustainable practices. This includes optimizing production and quality through advanced technologies like image sensing for yield mapping and decision support systems for farmers (Vasudevan, 2022).

2.2. Benefits and Challenges

The deployment of AI in agriculture presents both advantages and challenges. While AI can enhance productivity and quality management, issues such as accessibility, data privacy, and potential job displacement must be considered. The emergence of robot farmers and AI-driven innovations is reshaping farming practices, indicating a significant shift in how agricultural enterprises manage quality (Jahanara, 2024).

2.3. Case Studies and Applications

Although specific case studies like that of Shanghai SQ Agricultural Technology Company were not detailed in the search results, the general trends indicate that AI tools can significantly improve quality management processes in agricultural enterprises by providing real-time data analysis and predictive insights, which are crucial for effective decision-making (Jahanara, 2024).

Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into agriculture is a pivotal solution to address the pressing challenges posed by rapid population growth and escalating food demand. Traditional farming methods, unable to cope with this surge, often resort to harmful pesticides, deteriorating soil health. However, the advent of AI promises a transformative shift toward sustainable agricultural practices.

In the context of the United States, AI's historical trajectory within the agricultural sector showcases a remarkable evolution from rudimentary applications to sophisticated systems focused on optimizing production and quality. The future of American agriculture lies in AI-driven innovations, spanning various facets such as image sensing for yield mapping, labor management, yield optimization, and decision support for farmers.

Despite its numerous advantages, the deployment of AI in agriculture does not come without challenges. This paper delved into both the benefits and drawbacks of AI adoption in the agricultural domain, examining its impact on the agro-industry and the environment. It scrutinized the emergence of robot farmers and AI's role in reshaping farming practices while acknowledging the inherent problems associated with AI implementation, including accessibility, data privacy, and potential job displacement. Moreover, the study explored how AI tools can catalyze the development of agribusiness, offering insights into overcoming existing challenges through innovative solutions. By comprehensively understanding the opportunities and obstacles entailed in AI integration, stakeholders can navigate the agricultural landscape adeptly, fostering a more sustainable and resilient food system for future generations.

In summary, the broader context of AI's impact on quality management in agriculture highlights its potential to revolutionize practices and address critical challenges in the sector.

3. EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY

3.1. Background

Shanghai SQ Agricultural Technology Company stands as a comprehensive agricultural entity, amalgamating digital facility horticulture and soil-less cultivation technology research and development, production operation management, and technical services in facility agriculture industrialization bases. Since 2017, the company has been grafting Total Quality Management (TQM) onto its agricultural operations, with its application burrowing deeper over time. Initially, the company interlaced Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology solely in the product production pipeline, spanning data analysis, pest and disease control, water and fertilizer management, and harvesting, proffering support for TQM through intelligent analysis. The incursion of AI technology in the production process has exerted a salutary influence on propelling TQM.

Based on the Five-Dimensional Quality Management Framework, the dividends in terms of characteristic quality, tool quality, and system quality have been relatively conspicuous. Nevertheless, fissures have emerged in behavioral quality and awareness quality.

The quandaries chiefly coalesce around two fronts: Firstly, on the behavioral quality front, employees lack uniform execution benchmarks during the implementation of TQM. Moreover, disparities in employee capabilities prevail, accompanied by a sense of alienation towards the employment of AI technology in the production process. Concurrently, employees evince a low sense of responsibility, with scant attention accorded to quality outcomes. Secondly, in the realm of awareness quality, a pervasive issue of low quality awareness pervades among employees, bereft of a preventive quality mindset. Additionally, a feeble sense of identification with the company's quality culture exists, with employees failing to wholeheartedly embrace the company's quality culture. Lastly, employees tend to be insular and lack proactivity in relation to the company's quality culture and quality processes.

3.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DATA ANALYSIS

3.2.1. Research Hypothesis

Considering that Company SQ has already achieved notable outcomes in three dimensions of the five management quality frameworks, namely character quality, system quality, and tool quality, but has not pay much attention to behavioral quality and consciousness quality due to a lack of relevant data and research, this study aims to address this gap by focusing on the enhancement of employees' behavioral and consciousness quality. Specifically, the hypothesis of this study assumes that the application of AI technology can positively influence and improve these two quality aspects among Company SQ's employees.

3.2.2. Research Methodology

This paper harnesses a case study methodology, leveraging questionnaires and interviews to quantitatively assay employee behavior and awareness quality, encapsulating behavioral data, personalized training, incentive mechanisms, quality culture communication, feedback timeliness, and participation in quality management. It also broaches the extant problems and strategic blueprints for the application of AI in quality management within enterprises.

3.2.3. Survey Design

The survey has been tailored to explore the effects of AI on the behavioral and consciousness quality of employees at Company SQ. It encompasses seven categories of questions, comprising a total of 19 items, all rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The intended respondents for this survey are middle level managers and grassroots employees within the company. Utilizing a sampling method, a random selection of 30 individuals was made. A total of 30 questionnaires were distributed, and all 30 were successfully collected and deemed valid.

3.2.4. Research Analysis

Sample Description : The study's sample comprised 30 respondents, predominantly male (73.3%, or 22 individuals) with females accounting for 26.7% (8 individuals). Most respondents were aged 30 to 49 years (66.7% of the sample). Regarding education, the majority held associate (50%) or bachelor's degrees (26.7%), indicating an overall high educational level. The mean scores for the items fell between 3.5 and 5 on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis : In this study, a one-sample t-test was employed for data analysis to compare the sample mean of employees' satisfaction with AI applications against a theoretical neutral value of 3 (on a 1-to-5 scale). The aim of this comparison was to ascertain whether employees significantly perceived the impact of AI on their behavioral and consciousness quality.

The statistical analysis results (Table-1) reveal that the sample mean of employees' recognition of AI applications surpassed 3.5, based on a sample size of 30. The one-sample t-test produced a t-value of 3.79, with a corresponding p-value of 0.000351641, which is highly significant compared to the 0.05 threshold. This outcome indicates that the impact of AI on employees' behavioral and consciousness quality is statistically notable and positively perceived by the employees.

Table-1 presents the survey data analysis regarding the impact of AI on employee behavioral and awareness quality at Shanghai SQ Agricultural Technology Company.

TABLE-1: SAMPLE MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION, AND T-TEST RESULTS (SAMPLE SIZE = 30)

CATEGORY	ITEM	MEAN	STD. DEV.	ASSUMED-MEAN	T-VALUE	P-VALUE	SIG.
QUALITY CULTURE DISSEMINATION	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AI IN ENHANCING ORGANIZATIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT CULTURE	3.83	0.791	3	5.77	0.000001512	Y
	AI SUGGESTIONS FOR QUALITY MANAGEMENT CULTURE IMPROVEMENT	3.93	0.74	3	6.91	0.000000068	Y
	EMPLOYEE UNDERSTANDING OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT CULTURE THROUGH AI TECHNOLOGY	3.63	0.718	3	4.83	0.000020416	Y
REAL-TIME FEEDBACK AND IMPROVEMENT	AI IN IDENTIFYING WEAK LINKS IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT	3.9	0.923	3	5.34	0.000004912	Y
	REAL-TIME FEEDBACK AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT	3.8	0.805	3	5.44	0.000003714	Y
	PRACTICALITY OF AI-DRIVEN QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SUGGESTIONS	3.77	0.626	3	6.71	0.000000117	Y
PARTICIPATION IN QUALITY AWARENESS	THE EXTENT TO WHICH AI PLATFORMS ENHANCE EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT	3.67	0.661	3	5.53	0.000002951	Y
	THE POSITIVE ROLE OF AI IN ENHANCING EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT	4	0.83	3	6.6	0.000000158	Y
	AI TOOLS INTEGRATING QUALITY MANAGEMENT INTO DAILY WORK	3.7	0.702	3	5.46	0.000003535	Y
BEHAVIORAL DATA ANALYSIS AND IMPROVEMENT	AI MONITORING AND ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR DATA TO IDENTIFY EXECUTION DEVIATIONS IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT	4	0.743	3	7.37	0.00000002	Y
	ENHANCED UNDERSTANDING OF WORK PROCESSES AND POTENTIAL QUALITY RISKS THROUGH AI ANALYSIS	3.43	0.626	3	3.79	0.000351641	Y
	DATA-DRIVEN SUPPORT FROM AI TO IMPROVE WORK BEHAVIOR AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY	3.87	0.937	3	5.07	0.000010571	Y
PERSONALIZED TRAINING AND GUIDANCE	AI LEARNING SYSTEMS PROVIDE HIGHLY RELEVANT TRAINING CONTENT FOR EMPLOYEE WORK NEEDS	3.97	0.928	3	5.71	0.000001788	Y
	AI FACILITATES DYNAMIC ADJUSTMENT OF TRAINING CONTENT TO ENHANCE EMPLOYEE QUALITY AWARENESS AND SKILLS	3.77	0.774	3	5.43	0.00000388	Y
	PERSONALIZED TRAINING FROM AI HELPS MAINTAIN BEHAVIORAL CONSISTENCY IN WORK, COMPLYING WITH QUALITY MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS	3.73	0.785	3	5.12	0.000009155	Y
INCENTIVE MECHANISM OPTIMIZATION	AI-DRIVEN INCENTIVE MEASURES ENHANCE EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT	3.97	0.964	3	5.49	0.000003247	Y
	PERSONALIZED INCENTIVE MEASURES STRENGTHEN EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITY IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT	3.7	0.75	3	5.11	0.000009238	Y
	THE POSITIVE ROLE OF AI IN OPTIMIZING INCENTIVE MECHANISMS FOR EMPLOYEES	4	0.871	3	6.29	0.000000362	Y
CONTRIBUTION TO TQM – C.I.	AI'S CONTRIBUTION TO ENHANCING ORGANIZATIONAL TQM IMPROVEMENT	3.8	0.805	3	5.44	0.000003714	Y

3.3. Key Findings

This study, through the statistical dissection of survey questionnaires and interview outcomes, alights on the following cardinal findings:

Positive Alterations in Employee Behavior and Attitude: The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can prodigiously enhance employees' attitudes and behavioral modalities at work. Surveys divulge that employees' scores on the role of AI in fortifying their identification with quality management eclipse the overall average. AI technology, by furnishing real-time feedback and decision support, buttresses employees' sense of responsibility, teamwork, and commitment to continuous improvement. This transformation harbors the potential to sculpt a positive work culture and kindle work motivation.

Augmentation of Organizational Quality Awareness: The introduction of AI can markedly hoist the entire organization's cognizance of the importance of quality. Surveys evince that AI plays a propitious role in intensifying the overall quality management awareness among organizational members, with scores also vaulting over the overall average. Under the aegis of enhanced awareness quality concepts, organizational members are more predisposed to actively partake in quality enhancement activities.

Cultivation of Professional Skills and Corporate Culture: Training and development blueprints formulated through AI technology can efficaciously foster employees' professional skills and personal attributes. Surveys intimate that employees' recognition of AI's role in the development of professional skills and corporate culture also outstrips the overall average. The application of AI catalyzes the formation of a positive corporate culture, which plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee job satisfaction and loyalty.

4. RESULTS & ANALYSIS

The results of the questionnaire survey among employees were corroborated through interviews with the company's senior leadership. Data from surveys and interviews denote that the AI platform, on average, scored above 3.5 in aspects such as quality culture communication, implementation results feedback and improvement, participatory quality awareness, behavioral data and improvement, personalized training and guidance, and optimization of incentive mechanisms. Among these, the optimization of incentive mechanisms was most rapturously received, with an average score of 3.889. Trailing closely were real-time feedback and improvement, and personalized training and guidance, with an average score of 3.822. The nadir score was for behavioral data analysis and improvement, at 3.767. Additionally, based on the organization and compilation of interviews and questionnaire information from SQ Company, the recognition of the contribution of the AI platform to the continuous improvement of TQM was appraised at 3.8, which dovetails logically with the results presented in Figure 1.

The survey data concerning the impact of AI on employee behavioral and awareness quality at Shanghai SQ Agricultural Technology Company is illustrated in the figure below.

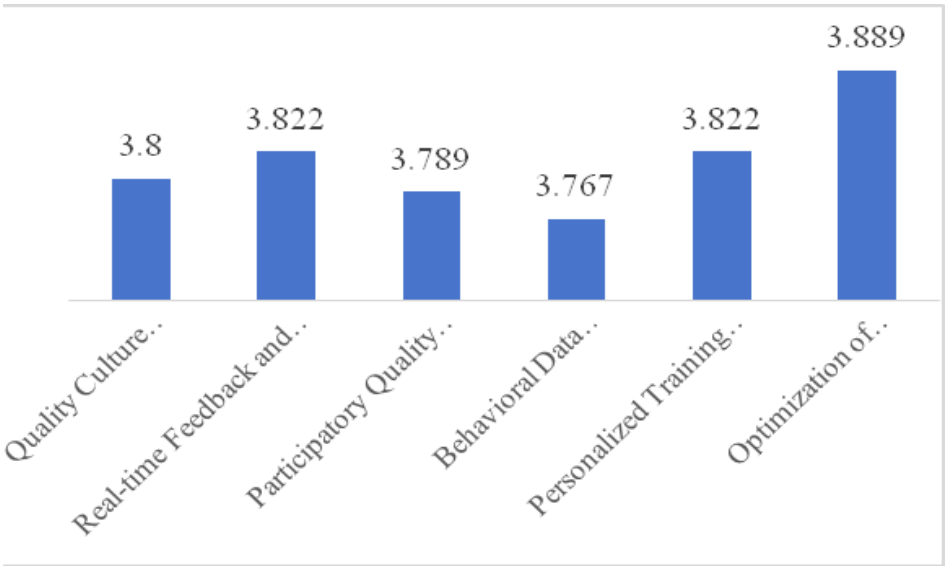

Figure-1: Survey on AI's Impact on Employee Behavioral and Consciousness Quality Recognition

5. CONCLUSIONS & LIMITATION

This study attests that the application of AI technology in agricultural enterprises can galvanize the elevation of employee behavioral and awareness quality, and exert a favorable influence on the continuous refinement of TQM.

There are certain fetters to this study. First, the case analysis prosecuted in this study might not be germane to other agricultural enterprises, as the case enterprise is still in the throes of transitioning from the technical aspect of AI application to the cultivation of employee behavioral and organizational awareness quality. Consequently, this study lacks empirical data on the efficacy of enhancing employee behavioral and awareness quality. Additionally, the issues of data security and personal privacy engendered by the use of AI may precipitate application risks for enterprises, along with other latent negative impacts, all of which beckon further research in the future.

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The author declares NO conflict of interest. There are no other third parties in the design of the study, in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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Ethical approval is not applicable to the current study, as the data collected are unanimous and the analysis is based on the summary statistical data only.

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