

Article

Stakeholder Relationship Management in the Romanian IT Sector: A Pilot Assessment Using Stakeholder-Oriented Dimensions of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Excellence Model [†]

Cristina-Elena Ungureanu ^{1,*}, Bogdan Fleacă ², Răzvan Mihai Dobrescu ³ and Elena Fleacă ²

¹ Doctoral School of Entrepreneurship, Business Engineering and Management, National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, 060042 Bucharest, Romania

² Department of Entrepreneurship and Management, Faculty of Entrepreneurship, Business Engineering and Management, National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, 060042 Bucharest, Romania; bogdan.fleaca@upb.ro (B.F.); elena.fleaca@upb.ro (E.F.)

³ Department of Economics, Faculty of Entrepreneurship, Business Engineering and Management, National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, 060042 Bucharest, Romania; razvan.dobrescu@upb.ro

* Correspondence: cungureanu0307@stud.faima.upb.ro

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Abstract

At present, the organisational landscape, which aims to provide value through its product and service offerings, must have the necessary infrastructure to deliver at the expected service levels. This requires the appropriate adaptation of existing frameworks, methods, and models to their business models, thereby generating consistent deliverables across time and industries. This is also applicable to Romanian Information Technology (IT) organisations, which face increasing pressure to deliver within the expected quality, time, and budget parameters. This study aims to assess the quality of stakeholder relationship management (SRM) as a higher-order organisational capability in Romanian IT organisations through a stakeholder-oriented subset of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) excellence framework and to explore its contribution to organisational quality, business continuity, and organisational resilience. A pilot study was conducted, using a sample of 52 Romanian IT professionals, to examine the applicability of four stakeholder-oriented MBNQA dimensions—Leadership and Governance, Workforce, Customers and Markets, and Community Engagement—as components of SRM quality. The findings provide preliminary evidence that these dimensions represent relevant elements for assessing SRM quality within the Romanian IT sector. Among them, the Workforce dimension exhibited the strongest association with SRM quality, highlighting the potential importance of employee engagement, Workforce development, and organisational learning in stakeholder-oriented excellence. The results also support the conceptualisation of SRM quality as a multidimensional construct that emerges from the interaction of complementary organisational subsystems. Although limited by its exploratory nature, sample size, and geographical focus, this study provides an initial foundation for applying the stakeholder-oriented subset of the MBNQA framework to stakeholder relationship management in the Romanian IT sector. Future research should validate the proposed model using larger, more diverse samples and examine its applicability across organisational, industrial, and geographical contexts.



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1. Introduction

In the current organisational landscape, excellence models have evolved to provide value to organisations beyond their predefined function as assessment tools. These frameworks serve as complex roadmaps for navigating the sophisticated landscapes of organisational systems. Against these varieties of frameworks, the MBNQA excellence framework stands out for its comprehensive scope of multidimensional quality constructs required to achieve organisational performance [1,2]. Despite this, as researchers in the field have highlighted, the application of such models is often hindered or challenged when within delimited geographic areas or specialised industries. In such areas, local operations tend to have nuances and may differ from the excellence model's original origins [3–5].

Reflecting on the modern realities of a landscape driven by volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) factors following the effects of COVID-19, the IT sector has emerged as a significant domain for societal resilience and innovation [6–10]. For organisations operating in this sector, the transition from mastering technical proficiency to achieving desired organisational excellence seems to require the adoption and adaptation of robust frameworks relevant to their specific ecosystem. The quality of a diverse group of stakeholders can be perceived as a central piece of this transition process, acting as a bridge between technical output and sustainable value creation [11–16].

From an academic perspective, frameworks such as the MBNQA have shown promising results in professional sectors, such as manufacturing, the service industry, education, healthcare, non-profit, government, and small business, providing an overarching perspective on the model's performance. Still, its applicability to the cultural and operational nuances of the IT sector based in Romania has yet to be documented [3,17–19]. This gap is especially relevant as the IT sector is of strategic importance in the Romanian market and is projected to provide a significant contribution to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the upcoming years [20]. Additionally, research indicates that with an increase in the digital products and services being offered, there is an increased need to ensure the continuity of essential operations and the ability to recover, in a timely manner, from disruptions. As such, evaluating SRM through the MBNQA stakeholder dimensions provides a practical route to assess both organisational quality and the relational capacities that may enable business continuity and organisational resilience in Romanian IT organisations [21,22].

In this context, this study also seeks to fill in the existing academic gap in applying excellence models of the Romanian IT sector. To evaluate the current state of the research, a systematic database search was performed in April 2025 across academic repositories, such as Web of Science, MDPI, Scopus, and IEEE Xplore. The search utilised combinations of keywords, such as “Malcolm Baldrige”, “IT services”, “Romania”, and “software development”. Specifically, the results returned the following:

- Twenty-five results in the IEEE Xplore collection with the keyword “Malcolm Baldrige”.
- Twenty-one results in the Web of Science collection with the keywords “Malcolm Baldrige” and “IT services”.
- Five results in the Web of Science collection with the keywords “Malcolm Baldrige” and “Romania”.
- Six results in the Web of Science collection with the keywords “Malcolm Baldrige” and “software development”.

- Eight results in the Scopus collection with the keywords “MBNQA” and “Romania”.
- Eight results in the Scopus collection with the keywords “MBNQA”, “IT services”, and “Romania”.
- Zero results in the MDPI collection with the keywords “Malcolm Baldrige” and “Romania”.
- Zero results in the MDPI collection with the keywords “MBNQA” and “Romania”.

The results reveal a considerable gap in the intersection of this specific geographic region, industry, and model application, which may correlate with the strategic segment’s slight stagnation, compared to the strong growth experienced in recent years [23]. Consequently, further empirical research is needed to understand the critical enablers of sustained performance in specific cultural and operational contexts such as the Romanian IT sector.

This study continues with Section 2, which establishes the theoretical foundation of the model for assessing SRM quality, considering the stakeholder-oriented subset of the MBNQA excellence model, followed by research methodology in Section 3. In Section 4, the results are presented, followed by analytical findings in Section 5, and the limitations and further research directions in Section 6, and we conclude with the final remarks of this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Conceptualisation of SRM Quality as a Higher-Order Latent Construct

2.1.1. The MBNQA Excellence Framework and Current Developments

This study utilises the MBNQA model as a foundation for assessing the quality of SRM in the Romanian IT sector. The MBNQA excellence framework conceptualises organisational excellence as an integrated management system comprising six interrelated categories: leadership, strategic planning, customer orientation, measurement, analysis and knowledge management, Workforce management, and process management [1,2]. Within this system, leadership establishes vision, governance mechanisms, values, and organisational culture, while strategy translates these principles into objectives and action plans that support adaptation and long-term sustainability. Customer orientation emphasises understanding stakeholder needs and creating value through effective engagement, whereas knowledge management supports organisational learning and evidence-based decision making. Workforce and operations focus on developing organisational capabilities and ensuring the effective design and continuous improvement of processes. From a systems perspective, organisational performance emerges from the dynamic relationships among these subsystems rather than from the optimisation of individual elements.

Recent developments have expanded traditional quality and performance perspectives towards broader sustainability- and transformation-oriented approaches. Contemporary excellence frameworks increasingly emphasise sustainable value creation and alignment with environmental, social, and governance objectives. The EFQM 2020 Model, for example, explicitly integrates sustainable value creation and societal contribution as fundamental principles of organisational excellence [24].

Another important evolution concerns the shift from customer-centric approaches to stakeholder ecosystem perspectives. Organisations are increasingly viewed as embedded within interconnected networks of employees, customers, suppliers, communities, regulators, and society. Consequently, excellence is associated with the ability to create value across multiple stakeholder groups rather than focusing exclusively on customers and shareholders [25]. This perspective reinforces systems-thinking principles based on interdependence and long-term sustainability. Digital transformation and Quality 4.0 constitute additional developments in excellence research. The integration of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and Industry 4.0 capabilities has expanded the scope

of quality management beyond operational efficiency. Recent studies have highlighted the complementarities between excellence models and digital transformation, suggesting that organisational excellence increasingly depends on the ability to combine quality management practices with digital capabilities [26].

Furthermore, modern excellence frameworks place growing emphasis on organisational agility, resilience, innovation, and Workforce well-being. Recent versions of the MBNQA model recognise innovation, risk management, Workforce engagement, diversity, and organisational resilience as critical enablers of sustained performance in dynamic environments [27]. Similarly, the EFQM 2020 Model explicitly identifies innovation and transformation as key organisational capabilities that support continuous renewal and long-term competitiveness [28].

Although contemporary excellence frameworks increasingly incorporate sustainability, stakeholder ecosystems, digital transformation, resilience, innovation, and Workforce well-being, these dimensions are often examined separately. Consequently, further research that adopts a systems perspective is required to understand how excellence frameworks can be operationalised in specific organisational contexts. In particular, empirical evidence regarding the applicability of the MBNQA framework to the cultural and operational characteristics of Romanian IT organisations remains limited, thereby motivating the present study.

2.1.2. Selection of MBNQA Dimensions for Assessing SRM Quality

To understand the SRM system in place in modern organisations, it is worth noting that the SRM concept has evolved from a combination of academic and organisational practice theories, ranging from “stockholder” interests to “stakeholder theory” in less than a century. An early definition comes from the Stanford Research Institute as early as 1963, when the idea of stakeholders was used strictly to refer to groups that are mandatory for an organisation’s existence. Around 1984, R. Edward Freeman expanded the concept to include any group or individual that can affect or be affected by an organisation’s objectives. This moment can be pinpointed as the one that marked the move from monetary-driven objectives towards what is now known as value generation for all interested parties. Today, SRM is viewed as a strategic process for identifying, managing, and balancing stakeholder interests and influences. Recent studies further position SRM as an integral component of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability Management Systems (SMS), reflecting the growing need for governance structures capable of addressing emerging challenges such as digitalisation, circular economy practices, and the adoption of artificial intelligence [29–36].

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, this study uses two primary SRM frameworks to systematise organisational behaviours. The selected models are the Project Management Institute’s (PMI) approach to SRM as detailed in the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) guide and Lynda Bourne’s Stakeholder Relationship Management Maturity Model (SRMMM) [12,37]. These frameworks have been selected for their strong focus on SRM engagement practices and their ability to act as links between theory and practical application within modern organisational structures.

For example, a direct comparison of these frameworks reveals a consistent lifecycle approach that matches both internal and external MBNQA-considered factors:

- Internal identification and alignment of stakeholders: in both cases, these processes have their roots in the identification of the appropriate stakeholders and prioritisation based on the triangle of interest, influence, and power;
- Understanding of the environment: mapping of the internal flows, connections, and external factors of the organisation allows for an understanding of the stakeholder community;

- Strategic alignment: involves carrying out the defined strategies agreed in previous steps to encourage positive relationships through effective communication channels;
- Continuous monitoring: which both models agree upon and concludes with iterations aimed at ensuring that stakeholder processes remain applicable to internal and external factors.

By connecting these practical frameworks with broader organisational factors, it can be noted, first, that both models link project success to stakeholder involvement. Additionally, these frameworks highlight a dynamic relationship between a project's lifecycle and stakeholder involvement.

Moreover, the selection of the PMBOK and Bourne's SRMMM is grounded in their strong focus on stakeholder dynamics and organisational maturity from a project and process perspective. Unlike ISO 21500 [38] or PRINCE2, which treat stakeholder engagement primarily as a procedural or control-oriented requirement, PMBOK and SRMMM conceptualise stakeholder relationship management as a continuous, lifecycle-based process that requires active monitoring, communication, and iterative improvement. In addition, these frameworks align more closely with the multidimensional structure of the MBNQA model, as they emphasise interpersonal competencies, communication, and adaptive feedback mechanisms rather than static compliance. Consequently, PMBOK and SRMMM provide a more suitable conceptual fit for integrating stakeholder relationship management with MBNQA dimensions such as leadership, Workforce, and customer orientation [35,39].

Given the current stage of development of the Romanian IT sector, the MBNQA framework provides a valuable tool for assessing the transition from basic stakeholder management practices toward organisational excellence. Specifically, it enables the evaluation of whether stakeholder relationship management (SRM) is performed as a fragmented administrative activity or as a mature, systematic process embedded within organisational practices [12,40].

To adapt the MBNQA framework to the Romanian IT context, a systems perspective was adopted to examine the proximity of each MBNQA dimension to SRM processes. Consistent with PMBOK and SRMMM, SRM is conceptualised as a continuous lifecycle involving stakeholder identification, engagement, communication, relationship development, and monitoring. Drawing on systems theory, which emphasises the analysis of organisational subsystems according to their functional relevance and interaction intensity [41], this study focuses on Leadership and Governance, Workforce, Customers and Markets, and Community Engagement, as these dimensions represent the MBNQA components most directly involved in stakeholder-facing activities.

This selection is theoretically consistent with the stakeholder management literature and project-based stakeholder frameworks. The Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) guide and Bourne's Stakeholder Relationship Management Maturity Model (SRMMM) conceptualise stakeholder management as a dynamic and iterative process involving stakeholder identification, prioritisation, engagement, communication, and continuous monitoring [12,37]. Similarly, stakeholder theory emphasises that organisations depend on the ability to manage relationships with multiple stakeholder groups to achieve long-term success [42]. These frameworks collectively highlight that SRM is fundamentally relational and enacted through direct interactions between organisational actors and stakeholder groups. Consequently, Leadership and Governance and Workforce were selected as the principal internal drivers of SRM quality, while Customers and Markets and Community Engagement were selected as the primary external interfaces through which organisations create and maintain stakeholder relationships.

In contrast, Strategic Planning, Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management, and Operations Focus were excluded because they function primarily as supporting or

enabling subsystems rather than direct SRM interfaces. From a systems perspective, these dimensions serve as second-order support mechanisms that indirectly influence SRM through leadership, Workforce, and customer-facing subsystems [24]. In this regard, Table 1 presents the justification for the selected MBNQA categories for this study, considering their proximity to SRM processes (identification, engagement, communication, monitoring) and their systems role.

Table 1. Justification for selecting MBNQA dimensions for SRM quality.

MBNQA Dimension	Role Within the Organisational System	Relationship with SRM Processes	Inclusion in Study (As Variable)	Justification
Leadership and Governance	Internal stakeholder-facing subsystem	Direct	Included (V1)	Leadership establishes stakeholder engagement priorities, governance mechanisms, communication norms, trust, ethical behaviour, and relationship-building practices.
Workforce	Internal stakeholder-facing subsystem	Direct	Included (V2)	Employees are the primary actors responsible for stakeholder interaction, communication, collaboration, and relationship maintenance.
Customers and Markets	External stakeholder-facing subsystem	Direct	Included (V3)	Represents the principal stakeholder group involved in value co-creation, feedback, satisfaction, and the development of long-term relationships.
Community Engagement	External stakeholder-facing subsystem	Direct	Included (V4)	Reflects organisational legitimacy, societal relationships, social responsibility, and engagement with the broader stakeholder ecosystem.
Strategic Planning	Strategic coordination subsystem	Indirect	Excluded	Defines organisational direction and resource allocation, but does not directly manage stakeholder interactions
Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management	Information and learning subsystem	Indirect	Excluded	Provides data, analytical capability, and organisational learning that inform decision-making but remains indirectly linked to SRM processes.
Operations Focus (Process Management)	Operational execution subsystem	Indirect	Excluded	Supports service and product delivery that affects stakeholder perceptions but does not directly address SRM processes.

2.2. Research Objectives and Hypothesis Development

The integration of the MBNQA, PMBOK, and SRMMM frameworks provides a comprehensive perspective for examining the multidimensional nature of stakeholder relationship management (SRM) quality.

The primary objective of this study is to assess SRM quality through a stakeholder-oriented subset of the MBNQA excellence framework. Unlike traditional approaches that view stakeholder satisfaction as the main indicator of relationship effectiveness, SRM quality is conceptualised as a higher-order latent organisational capability that reflects an organisation's ability to systematically identify, prioritise, engage, communicate with, and continuously monitor stakeholders to create value and sustain long-term relationships.

To operationalise this construct, this study focuses on the MBNQA dimensions that are most closely aligned with stakeholder relationship management activities. This selection is theoretically justified by the strong functional links between these dimensions and the core processes of stakeholder engagement and relationship management, as presented in Table 1. Moreover, focusing on the stakeholder-oriented dimensions of the MBNQA framework reduces model complexity and is particularly well-suited to the exploratory nature of this pilot study (N = 52). This approach enables a more focused assessment of how stakeholder-oriented excellence practices contribute to organisational quality, business continuity, and organisational resilience in Romanian IT organisations.

Based on the literature explored so far, the factors can be organised into two main research objectives:

O1: To evaluate Romanian employees' perceptions of how internal MBNQA criteria (Leadership and Governance, Workforce) influence the quality of SRM activities.

O2: To evaluate Romanian employees' perceptions of how external MBNQA criteria (Customer and Markets, Community Engagement) influence the quality of SRM activities.

For further reference, the MBNQA criteria will be collectively referred to as follows:

- V1 for Leadership and Governance.
- V2 for Workforce.
- V3 for Customers and Markets.
- V4 for Community Engagement.

As presented in Figure 1, SRM quality is conceptualised as a higher-order latent organisational capability operationalised through Leadership and Governance, Workforce, Customers and Markets, and Community Engagement, and linked to organisational quality, business continuity, and resilience outcomes.

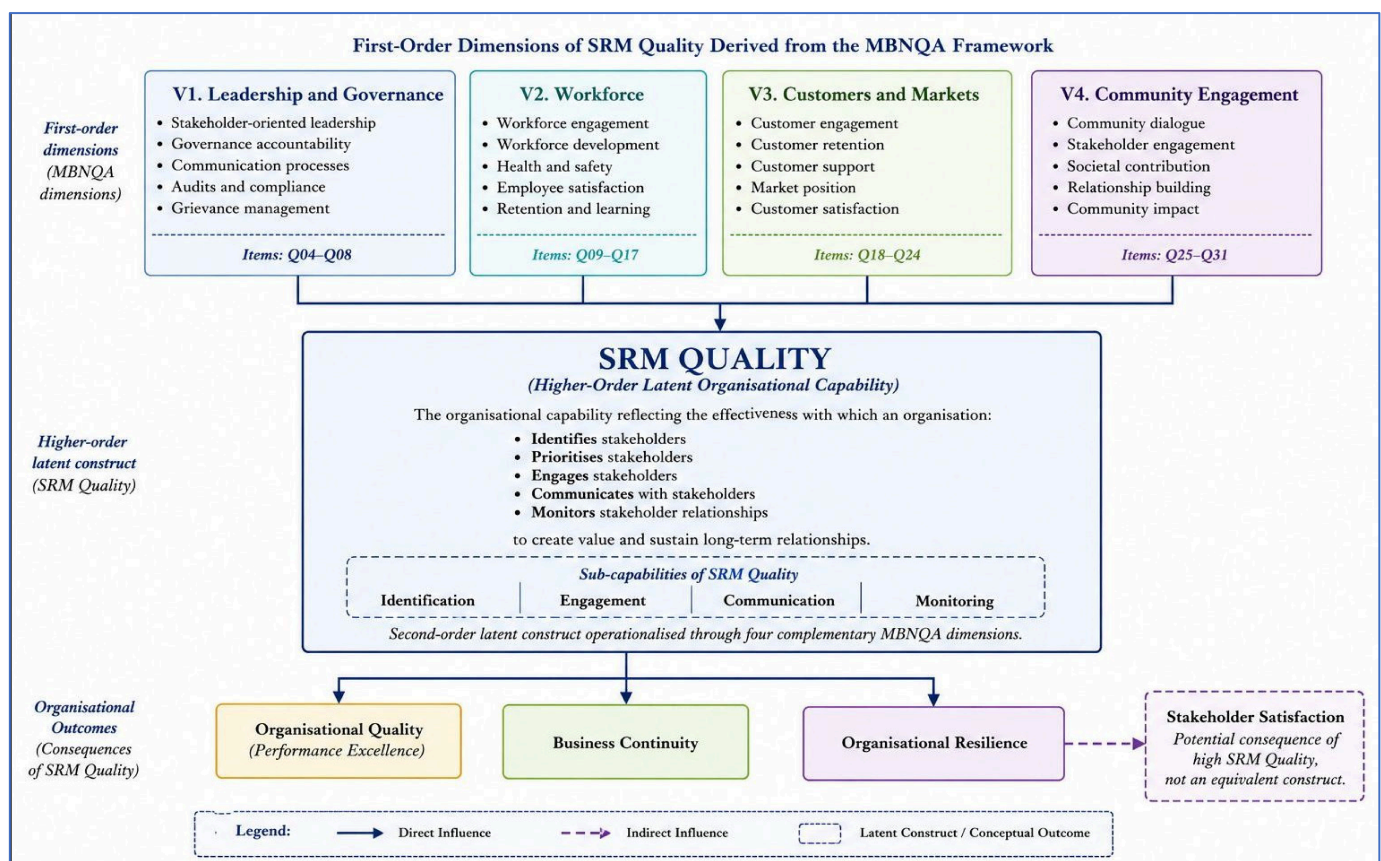


Figure 1. Hierarchical conceptual framework to assess SRM quality on MBNQA dimensions.

In the pursuit of organisational excellence, the role of organisational Leadership and Governance serves as a fundamental pillar for achieving high-quality SRM. Within the MBNQA framework, leadership is viewed as the way in which the organisation's leaders guide the organisation in setting the overall vision and maintaining a high level of performance excellence. In the context of Romanian organisations, perceptions of organisational structures are considered fundamental elements in establishing the accountability and transparency needed to build trust both within and beyond the organisations. An element of strong leadership can ensure that SRM is more than a peripheral activity. By leveraging effective Leadership and Governance skills in organisational management, a solid strategic direction can be ensured, thereby fostering a culture in which stakeholder needs are prioritised [37,43].

The reviewed literature suggests that when leadership demonstrates and maintains its commitment to governance and corporate social responsibility, this directly affects perceptions of maturity and the quality of stakeholder interactions. In the context of Romanian organisations, the same perception is directly correlated with how organisations manage their stakeholder relationships [12,43,44].

Therefore, the first research hypothesis can be defined as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *There is a strong positive relationship between Romanian employees' perception of the Leadership and Governance and the quality of SRM activities.*

The second selected dimension of the MBNQA framework, the Workforce, emphasises the creation of a high-performance environment, where employees are constantly engaged and developed to utilise their full potential, in alignment with the organisation's strategic objectives. The literature related to the Romanian market indicates that the IT sector has undergone shifts in recruitment and retention strategies in recent years. These shifts indicate that the internal perception of how an organisation addresses Workforce concerns has a high impact on its operational excellence, adhering to service levels, organisational resilience, and business continuity. In this context, the literature indicates that by investing in Workforce capabilities and directly engaging to support systematic process-related topics, a high level of quality can be achieved in interactions with both internal and external stakeholders. As such, exploring investments in Workforce concerns involves not only process optimisation to achieve performance but also readiness to respond to unforeseen socio-technical disruptions [21,22,45].

Based on the theoretical findings, the second research hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *There is a significant positive relationship between Romanian employees' perception of the Workforce and the quality of SRM activities.*

The third selected dimension of the MBNQA framework, the Customer and Markets, concerns how an organisation determines the requirements and expectations of its external target audience to ensure the long-term engagement and brand loyalty for its products and services. In the context of Romanian organisations, the ability to segment markets and understand the shifting needs of the national consumer base is a basic step in maintaining a competitive edge. When employees perceive that their organisation is actively listening to its target audience and adapting its offering to the demand, it reinforces the perception of its systematic approach [19,46,47].

Based on the theoretical findings, the third research hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *There is a significant positive relationship between Romanian employees' perception of the Customer and Markets and the quality of SRM activities.*

The fourth selected dimension of the MBNQA framework, Community Engagement, is defined as an external component which refers to the organisation's role in contributing to the well-being of its social and environmental ecosystem. In the Romanian organisational landscape, the literature on this topic shows that this dimension is increasingly viewed as an integral part of a circular and sustainable economy, in which success is tied to community well-being. As such, effective SRM involves moving beyond internal operations to address the expectations of the general public and the environment. The literature shows that when Romanian employees perceive their organisations to be actively involved in the development of their local community and environmental issues, this strengthens the perceived quality and ethical standing of the organisation's broader stakeholder interactions. As such, a solid commitment to Community Engagement is expected to be correlated with an enhanced and effective approach when it comes to managing stakeholder relationships [48–51].

Therefore, the fourth research hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *There is a significant positive relationship between Romanian employees' perception of Community Engagement and the quality of SRM activities.*

Having established the theoretical connection between the MBNQA dimensions and the SRM quality, this study proceeds with an empirical assessment of the frameworks within a Romanian IT organisation. This combination of industry and geographical location has been selected as the target population for its status as a high-growth, knowledge-intensive combination that serves as a primary driver for national sustainable development and innovation objectives [52–56].

3. Materials and Methods

The research hypotheses operationalised four primary constructs: Leadership and Governance (V1), Workforce (V2), Customers and Markets (V3), and Community Engagement (V4). They derive from the MBNQA excellence framework. These multidimensional selections represent both internal and external organisational factors that influence the maturity and quality of stakeholder interactions. In the context of project-oriented organisations, both internal drivers, such as leadership and Workforce development, are perceived as essential for building trust towards achieving operational excellence. Simultaneously, external stakeholders such as customers and community members can reflect the growing demands and pressure on attention to CSR activities. Taken together, these variables capture the relevant internal and external dimensions that influence SRM quality in Romanian IT organisations, while also ensuring contextual and analytical alignment with the study sample.

To ensure that a rigorous evaluation of the proposed relationships described in the literature section could be made, the theoretical constructs were operationalised into a structured measurement instrument. The overall process involved mapping each research objective and hypothesis to specific questions within the MBNQA variable groups. Next, each variable item was translated into a functional survey item. The table contains the operational description of each variable, the corresponding survey question number, and the corresponding measurement scale to capture respondent perception, with 1 being the lowest and 5 corresponding to the highest level of agreement. A Likert scale was used to measure the variables. A matrix table representation of the study operationalisation can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Study research structure.

Research Objective	Hypotheses	Variable Group Description	Operational Description	Survey Question
O1.	Demographic data		Current position within your organisation's hierarchy	Q01
			Seniority in the IT&C sector	Q02
			Age range	Q03
	H1	V1	Effectiveness of Leadership and Governance processes (succession, communication)	Q04
			Effectiveness of leadership engagement and communication with the Workforce	Q05
			Effectiveness of leadership engagement and communication with key stakeholders	Q06
			Demonstration of Leadership and Governance accountability in audits and	Q07
			Effectiveness of addressing grievances and complaints	Q08
			Effectiveness of key processes for Workforce engagement	Q09
			Effectiveness of key processes for Workforce development	Q10
			Effectiveness of key processes for health and safety	Q11
	H2	V2	Organisational results concerning absenteeism, retention, and turnover	Q12
			The extent to which the organisation measures employee satisfaction	Q13
			Effectiveness of developing organisational Workforce and leadership	Q14
			Incidence rate of health and safety events	Q15
			Organisational results on additional workplace health and safety indicators	Q16
			Effectiveness of processes for customer listening	Q17
			Effectiveness of processes for customer engagement	Q18
			Effectiveness of processes for customer retention	Q19
	H3	V3	Effectiveness of processes for customer support	Q20
			Organisational performance in market positioning	Q21
			Organisational results for customer loyalty	Q22
			Effectiveness of managing customer complaints across segments	Q23
			Overall customer satisfaction with products, services, and experience	Q24
O2.	H4	V4	Effectiveness of key processes for Community Engagement	Q25
			Effectiveness of processes for listening and engaging with communities	Q26
			Effectiveness of key processes for supporting key communities	Q27
			Effectiveness of engaging and building relationships with key communities	Q28
			Frequency, diversity, and impact of Community Engagement activities	Q29
			Sufficiency of the duration of Community Engagement is meant to achieve meaningful outcomes	Q30
			Significance and impact of social contributions made by the organisation	Q31

While there are a few studies that address the MBNQA model in Romanian industries, the design of this research is based on the gap identified in the specialised literature that combines excellence models with stakeholder theory within the IT sector [19,39,57,58].

To conduct the quantitative research, the survey method was used to develop the content based on the information available on the online version of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) website in 2024 for the MBNQA model [59–62]. The survey structure is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Survey questions.

Question ID	Question Content
Q04	Leadership and Governance processes and systems, including succession planning and two-way communication, are effective.
Q05	Senior leaders from my organisation effectively engage and communicate with the Workforce.
Q06	Leadership of the organisation is demonstrated through effective engagement and communication with key customers and stakeholder segments.
Q07	The organisation's Leadership and Governance accountability is demonstrated through effective internal and external audits, assessments, certifications, and accreditations.
Q08	My organisation effectively addresses grievances and complaints, including those related to safety, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and ethics.
Q09	The organisation's key processes for Workforce engagement are effective.
Q10	The organisation's key processes for Workforce development and job skills training are effective.
Q11	The organisation's key processes for ensuring workplace health and safety are effective.
Q12	The organisation demonstrates positive results in terms of turnover, retention, and absenteeism.
Q13	The organisation measures employees' satisfaction and dissatisfaction.
Q14	The organisation effectively develops its Workforce and leadership, including through job skills training.
Q15	The organisation has a low incidence of significant safety-related incidents, including Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reportable incidents.
Q16	The organisation demonstrates positive results on additional indicators of workplace health and safety, such as safety audits and near-miss tracking.
Q17	The organisation's processes for listening to customers are effective.
Q18	The organisation's key processes for customer engagement are effective.
Q19	The organisation's key processes for customer retention are effective.
Q20	The organisation's key processes for customer support processes are effective.
Q21	The organisation maintains a strong market position in terms of market size and market share across business units or product/service lines.
Q22	The organisation's customers are loyal, as evidenced by the likelihood of recommending the organisation's products and/or service offering.
Q23	The organisation effectively manages customer complaints across customer segments.
Q24	The organisation's customers are satisfied with the products and services they received, and with the overall experience.
Q25	The organisation's key processes for Community Engagement are effective.
Q26	The organisation's processes for listening to and engaging with communities are effective.
Q27	The organisation's processes for supporting key communities are effective.
Q28	The organisation effectively engages and builds relationships with key communities.
Q29	The organisation's Community Engagement activities are frequent, diverse, and impactful.
Q30	The organisation's Community Engagement is sufficiently long to achieve meaningful outcomes.
Q31	The organisation makes significant and impactful societal contributions.

To test this study's relevance, the Romanian IT sector has been selected as the specific industry in which to pilot the survey. The demographic dimensions considered for this study are the following:

- Survey was created and distributed in two formats: (1) digital format through Google Forms and (2) in printed format, for responders who preferred responding on paper;
- Survey was sent out to people who work in industrial engineering organisations, specifically IT departments and their derivatives;
- Out of 52 requested surveys, 52 answers were received, and surveys were distributed and answers collected between December 2024 and February 2025;
- Out of the responders, 62% of respondents hold individual contributor roles and 38% hold a form of leadership role within IT departments.

The responses were collected and analysed using PSPP v1.6.2 and Python v3.13 [63,64], an open-source tool for data analysis capabilities comparable to those of other data management software on the market.

4. Results

Although the empirical analysis is based on a pilot sample of 52 respondents, the purpose of this stage was exploratory, aiming to test the feasibility and internal coherence of the proposed SRM quality measurement model rather than to provide definitive population-level generalisation. Consistent with pilot study methodological guidelines, sample sizes between 30 and 100 respondents are generally considered acceptable for preliminary survey validation, scale development, and exploratory model testing. Moreover, previous research suggests that approximately 30 representative participants constitute a reasonable minimum sample size for pilot studies aimed at assessing the clarity, reliability, and feasibility of newly developed measurement instruments [65]. Accordingly, the statistical procedures were interpreted as preliminary evidence supporting the conceptual model and as a basis for future validation using larger samples.

After validating the data, the demographic analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel. In contrast, the statistical analysis was performed automatically using PSPP v1.6.2 and Python v3.13, thereby ensuring data integrity and minimising manual errors. The sample included 32 individual contributors, 12 lower-level managers (team or scope managers), and 8 middle-level managers (managers of managers or individuals with significant decision-making responsibilities). Results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Respondent profiles (roles).

Respondent Profile	Response Count	Response in %
Individual contributor/non-managerial employee	32	62%
Lower-level manager	12	23%
Middle-level manager	8	15%

Another key demographic is respondent seniority (Table 5): most have 10 or more years of experience in IT departments; 16 have 5–10 years; and the remainder are juniors with 3–5 years of experience.

The third demographic element recorded was the respondents' age range, as presented in Table 6.

Table 5. Respondent profiles (seniority roles).

Seniority in the Industry	Response Count	Response in %
≥10 years	33	63%
5–10 years	16	31%
3–5 years	3	6%

Table 6. Respondent profiles (respondents' ages).

Age Range of Responders	Response Count	Response in %
≥50	2	3%
40–49	19	37%
30–39	25	48%
26–29	6	12%

The consistency of the stakeholder-oriented subset of the MBNQA framework was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha (α). As shown in Table 7, all the group variables met the acceptable reliability threshold, with the group variable Community Engagement (V4) showing the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.94$), closely followed by Customers and Markets (V3) ($\alpha = 0.90$). Additionally, the descriptive statistics reveal that the group variable Customers and Markets (V3) also ranked the highest mean score, with $M = 4.06$, thus suggesting a strong focus on this dimension within the evaluated environment.

Table 7. Reliability and description statistics based on PSPP and Python results.

Variable	N	Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Variance	Skewness	Min	Max	Mean
Leadership and Governance (V1)	52	5	0.67	0.45	−0.22	2.6	5	3.97
Workforce (V2)	52	9	0.86	0.41	−0.02	2.78	5	3.99
Customers and Markets (V3)	52	7	0.90	0.51	−0.89	2.14	5	4.06
Community Engagement (V4)	52	7	0.94	0.58	0.44	2.57	5	3.68

Further analysis performed on the MBNQA dimensions, including Standard Error Mean (SEM) and Standard Deviation (SD) from Table 8, illustrates the dispersion and the precision of the collected data.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of MBNQA dimension ($N = 52$) based on PSPP and Python results.

Variable	Standard Error Mean (SEM)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Leadership and Governance (V1)	0.09	0.67
Workforce (V2)	0.09	0.64
Customers and Markets (V3)	0.10	0.72
Community Engagement (V4)	0.11	0.76

Measurement Model Validation

To further assess the robustness of the measurement model, additional validity and diagnostic analyses were performed, and the results are presented in Table 9. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was evaluated using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity. The KMO value was 0.811, indicating good sampling adequacy, while Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant, $\chi^2(6) = 130.31$, $p < 0.001$. These results confirm that the correlation matrix is appropriate for factor analysis [66].

Table 9. Measurement model validation and diagnostic statistics.

Indicator	Result
KMO	0.811
Bartlett’s Test $\chi^2(6)$	130.31
Bartlett p -value	<0.001
Variance explained by the first higher-order factor	77.38%
Composite Reliability (CR)	0.932
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.774
Harman’s Single-Factor Variance	46.34%
Maximum VIF	3.969

A higher-order factor analysis was subsequently conducted using the four MBNQA dimensions as first-order indicators of SRM quality. The first factor explained 77.38% of the total variance. Strong factor loadings were obtained for Leadership and Governance (0.871), Workforce (0.928), Customers and Markets (0.831), and Community Engagement (0.887), supporting the conceptualisation of SRM quality as a higher-order latent organisational capability. Furthermore, Composite Reliability (CR = 0.932) exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, while Average Variance Extracted (AVE = 0.774) exceeded the threshold of 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity [67].

Given that all variables were collected through a single self-reported questionnaire, common method bias was assessed using Harman’s single-factor test [68]. The first unrotated factor explained 46.34% of the total variance, remaining below the recommended threshold of 50%. Consequently, common method variance is unlikely to represent a dominant source of measurement bias in the present study. Multicollinearity diagnostics were also performed to assess the degree of association among the first-order dimensions. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 2.192 to 3.969, remaining below the commonly accepted threshold of 5.0. These findings indicate that severe multicollinearity is not present and that the dimensions remain sufficiently distinct despite their theoretical interconnectedness [66].

To determine the association between the stakeholder-oriented subset of the MBNQA elements and the operationalised SRM activities, the standardised regression and Pearson correlation analyses were performed. The results of the regression analysis indicate that all four group variables are statistically significant predictors ($p < 0.001$), with the Workforce (V2) group displaying the highest standardised coefficient (0.321) and a high t -statistic result ($t = 14.86$). This suggests that this variable has the greatest impact on the analysed model. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Standardised regression based on PSPP and Python results.

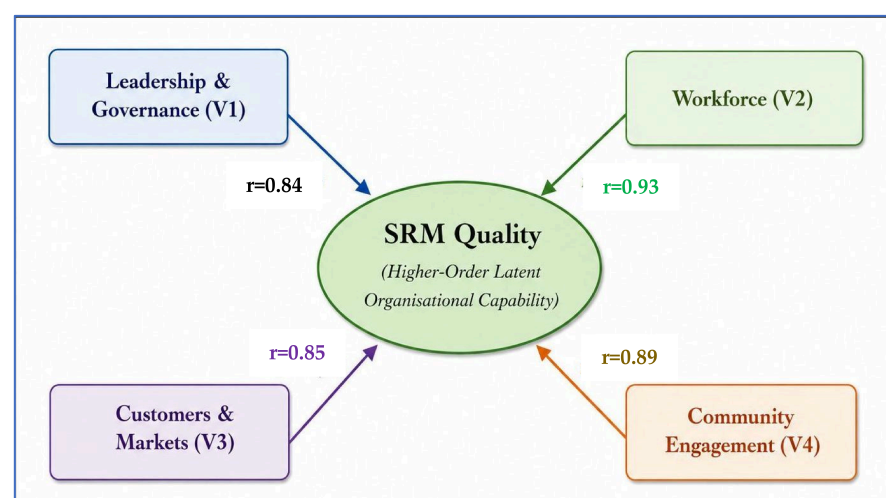
Variable	Standardised	<i>t</i> -Statistic	Sig. (<i>p</i>)
Leadership and Governance (V1)	0.179	10.12	<0.001
Workforce (V2)	0.321	14.86	<0.001
Customers and Markets (V3)	0.250	17.31	<0.001
Community Engagement (V4)	0.250	16.59	<0.001

The hypothesis testing confirmed that all defined primary hypotheses (H1 to H4) are supported. The strongest positive correlation was observed between the Workforce (V2) group and the “SRM quality” concept, with $r = 0.93$, closely followed by the Customers and Markets (V3) group, with $r = 0.89$. The data can be found in Table 11.

Table 11. Hypothesis testing—correlation analysis based on PSPP and Python results.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Pearson I	β -Weight	<i>p</i> -Value	Result
H1	V1 → SRM quality	0.84	0.196	<0.001	Hypothesis supported
H2	V2 → SRM quality	0.93	0.34	<0.001	Hypothesis supported
H3	V3 → SRM quality	0.85	0.30	<0.001	Hypothesis supported
H4	V4 → SRM quality	0.89	0.31	<0.001	Hypothesis supported

The strong positive associations reported in Table 11 should be interpreted within the context of the hierarchical measurement model adopted in this study. Since SRM quality is understood as a higher-order latent organisational capability, Leadership and Governance (V1), Workforce (V2), Customers and Markets (V3), and Community Engagement (V4) represent complementary first-order dimensions that contribute to the formation of the construct. Therefore, the high coefficients observed, particularly the relationship between Workforce (V2) and SRM quality ($r = 0.93$), should not be interpreted as evidence of construct redundancy but rather as indicators of the strong contribution of each dimension to the higher-order construct, as presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Hypothesis testing validation of SRM quality based on the MBNQA framework.

This interpretation is supported by the factor analysis results, which demonstrate that the four dimensions collectively explain a substantial proportion of variance in SRM quality. At the same time, the multicollinearity diagnostics confirm that the dimensions remain

empirically distinguishable. Similar patterns have been reported in multidimensional organisational excellence models, where strong interrelationships among dimensions are theoretically expected due to the systemic nature of organisational performance [66].

The correlation between group variables from Table 12 further validates the cohesion among the MBNQA criteria, with the strongest relationship being between the Leadership and Governance (V1) variable and the Workforce (V2) variable, yielding 0.792.

Table 12. Correlation between group variables based on PSPP and Python results.

Variable	V1	V2	V3	V4
Leadership and Governance (V1)	-			
Workforce (V2)	0.792 _a	-		
Customers and Markets (V3)	0.568 _a	0.707 _a	-	
Community Engagement (V4)	0.697 _a	0.751 _a	0.666 _a	-

Footnote: “a” Pearson correlation is significant at 0.05 level; Sig. (2-tailed); N = 52.

The correlation analysis presented in Table 12 provides additional support for the systemic logic of the stakeholder-oriented subset of the MBNQA framework. The moderate-to-strong correlations observed among the dimensions suggest that Leadership and Governance, Workforce, Customers and Markets, and Community Engagement function as mutually reinforcing organisational subsystems rather than isolated managerial practices. Importantly, none of the observed correlations exceed the threshold typically associated with severe construct redundancy or multicollinearity, supporting the empirical distinctiveness of the dimensions while confirming their theoretical interconnectedness [69].

The One-Way ANOVA results presented in Table 13 were examined to determine the demographic factors influencing respondents’ perception. The results indicate no statistically significant differences in role classifications ($p = 0.74$), seniority ($p = 0.89$), or age range ($p = 0.18$). Accordingly, the data suggest a high level of consensus on the overall topic across the demographic segments considered.

Table 13. One-Way ANOVA results from PSPP and Python results.

Factor	Segment	Mean (μ)	SD (σ)	N	F-Statistic	p-Value
Role classification	Individual contributor / non-managerial employee	3.92	0.58	32	0.31	0.74
	Lower-level manager	3.85	0.76	12		
	Middle-level manager	4.07	0.56	8		
Seniority	3–5 years	3.79	0.62	3	0.12	0.89
	5–10 years	3.9	0.8	16		
	≥10 years	3.95	0.53	33		
Age range	26–29	4.39	0.77	6	1.70	0.18
	30–39	3.86	0.72	25		
	40–49	3.83	0.34	19		
	≥50	4.29	0	2		

The results of this study can be interpreted in various ranges of positive correlations, as shown below:

Moderate positive correlations:

R = 0.568 between Leadership and Governance (V1) and Customers and Markets (V3).

R = 0.666 between Customers and Markets (V3) and Community Engagement (V4).

R = 0.697 between Leadership and Governance (V1) and Community Engagement (V4).

Strong positive correlations:

$R = 0.707$ between Customers and Markets (V3) and Workforce (V2).

$R = 0.751$ between Community Engagement (V4) and Workforce (V2).

$R = 0.792$ between Leadership and Governance (V1) and Workforce (V2).

The results of the pilot survey appear to indicate a range of positive correlations among the key variable groups. In turn, this would highlight the influence of specific MBNQA dimensions over SRM activities.

Positive moderate correlations were observed between Leadership and Governance (V1) and Customers and Markets (V3), while the strongest positive correlation was observed between Leadership and Governance (V1) and Workforce (V2). This pair could indicate that Workforce (V2) and Leadership and Governance (V1) are considerably influential in shaping the quality of SRM activities within the IT departments of Romanian organisations.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide preliminary empirical support for the proposed model of SRM quality as a higher-order organisational capability defined by four stakeholder-oriented, complementary dimensions derived from the MBNQA excellence framework: Leadership and Governance, Workforce, Customers and Markets, and Community Engagement. Rather than viewing stakeholder relationship management as a collection of isolated activities, the results support a systems-based perspective in which stakeholder-oriented excellence emerges from the interaction of multiple organisational subsystems. This interpretation is consistent with the MBNQA philosophy, which emphasises organisational performance as the outcome of interconnected managerial practices rather than independent functional activities [4].

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends existing research on business excellence frameworks by demonstrating their relevance for assessing stakeholder relationship management capabilities in a knowledge-intensive environment. Previous studies have shown that the applicability of the excellence framework in healthcare [58], mining [34], and agriculture [19] is also influenced by contextual and cultural factors [3]. The present findings suggest that the MBNQA framework remains relevant within the Romanian IT sector, despite its specific organisational and cultural characteristics. The significant relationships observed among the four dimensions support the proposition that stakeholder relationship management should be analysed as an integrated capability rather than as a set of discrete stakeholder-oriented practices.

The additional measurement model validation further reinforces this interpretation. The factor analysis results, together with satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and multicollinearity diagnostics, provide preliminary evidence that the four MBNQA dimensions contribute to a coherent higher-order SRM quality construct. Consequently, the strong correlations observed between the dimensions and SRM quality should not be interpreted as construct redundancy but as an indication of the systemic and mutually reinforcing nature of stakeholder relationship management processes and activities.

The findings should also be interpreted within the broader international literature on business excellence frameworks and stakeholder-oriented management practices. Although studies explicitly integrating MBNQA and SRM remain scarce, the application of excellence models in knowledge-intensive and technology-driven sectors has been investigated in several national contexts. For instance, research conducted in the United States, where the Baldrige framework originated, has consistently demonstrated that organisational excellence is strongly associated with leadership effectiveness, Workforce engagement, customer focus, and process integration [70]. Similarly, studies conducted in Europe using the EFQM model [71] and across regions of the globe and other emerging economies have shown that

excellence frameworks provide valuable mechanisms for aligning organisational capabilities, stakeholder expectations, and long-term performance outcomes [72]. Comparative analyses further suggest that the effectiveness of excellence models is influenced by institutional, cultural and sectoral contexts [3,4], thereby justifying further investigation within the Romanian IT sector.

From this perspective, this study helps reduce the existing geographical gap in the literature by providing evidence from the Romanian IT sector. This context has received limited attention in studies of organisational excellence and stakeholder management. While the strong contribution of the Workforce dimension appears consistent with findings from international studies highlighting the importance of human capital and organisational learning in knowledge-intensive environments, the significant role of Community Engagement outlines the increasing importance of broader stakeholder integration within emerging European digital ecosystems. These results are also consistent with research suggesting that sustainable value creation increasingly depends on organisations' ability to integrate multiple stakeholder groups into their business models and decision-making processes [35].

Among the analysed dimensions, Workforce exhibited the strongest association with SRM quality. This finding has important theoretical implications, suggesting that Workforce-related capabilities, including employee engagement, Workforce development, organisational learning, and communication effectiveness, which strongly influence the maturity of stakeholder relationship management. These findings support previous research arguing the importance of operational excellence systems and human capital development as drivers of organisational performance and stakeholder value creation [45]. In the context of knowledge-intensive industries such as IT, stakeholder relationships are often developed and maintained through direct interactions between employees and stakeholder groups. Therefore, Workforce capabilities appear to represent a critical mechanism through which organisations transform stakeholder-oriented strategies into effective organisational practices.

The significance of Leadership and Governance further supports stakeholder management theory and project governance approaches. PMBOK highlights stakeholder identification, engagement, communication, and monitoring as essential processes that require strategic Leadership and Governance support [37]. The results suggest that leadership structures, accountability mechanisms, communication systems, and governance processes create the conditions necessary for sustaining high-quality stakeholder relationships. This finding is also consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of innovation systems and institutional capabilities in supporting organisational performance and stakeholder value generation [43].

The significant contribution of Customers and Markets confirms the central role of customer-oriented processes in SRM activities. However, the results also indicate that SRM quality extends beyond customer management alone. Community Engagement emerged as a significant dimension, suggesting that Romanian IT professionals increasingly perceive stakeholder quality through a broader sustainability and societal value perspective. This finding aligns with recent research highlighting the growing importance of stakeholder integration in sustainable business models and value delivery systems [35]. It also reflects evidence from Romanian organisations showing that organisational performance increasingly depends on social responsibility, ethical behaviour, and stakeholder-centred approaches [48,49]. Another noteworthy finding is the absence of statistically significant differences across age groups, organisational roles, and seniority levels. This result suggests a relatively consistent perception of stakeholder management quality throughout the surveyed organisations. Such alignment may indicate that stakeholder-oriented quality

practices are becoming embedded within the professional culture of the Romanian IT landscape. Similar observations have been reported in exploratory studies examining the adoption of new digital-based competencies and organisational practices in technology-intensive environments [73]. From a theoretical perspective, this finding provides preliminary support for the applicability of the proposed SRM quality framework across different organisational levels.

The study also contributes to the integrating of quality management and stakeholder management research streams. While stakeholder management maturity models focus on the progression of stakeholder-related capabilities [12], and PMBOK emphasises stakeholder engagement throughout project lifecycles [37], the MBNQA framework offers a broader perspective on organisational excellence. The proposed SRM quality construct, therefore, provides a conceptual bridge linking stakeholder management practices with business continuity, organisational quality and resilience. This integration is consistent with previous studies demonstrating the value of combining quality management and knowledge-based approaches in complex organisational systems [39].

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organisations should adopt a holistic approach to stakeholder relationship management rather than treating it as a function-specific activity. The strong contribution of Workforce highlights the importance of investing in employee development, stakeholder communication competencies, continuous learning, and engagement mechanisms. Furthermore, the significant relationships among Leadership and Governance, Customers and Markets, and Community Engagement indicate that stakeholder relationship management should be integrated across organisational processes and embedded within the overall management system.

Finally, the findings may provide useful directions for future research on the relationship among stakeholder relationship management capabilities, organisational resilience, and business continuity. Recent studies suggest that resilience can be influenced by an organisation's ability to maintain effective stakeholder relationships under conditions of uncertainty and disruption [21,22]. The proposed SRM quality framework offers an initial basis for further examining how stakeholder-oriented excellence may contribute to organisational sustainability and adaptive capacity over time.

Building on these results, several original contributions emerge:

- Suitability for SRM: The adapted MBNQA framework is suitable as an initial approach for driving quality into SRM activities within specialised sectors such as IT.
- Role of experience: The study confirms that effective SRM requires a certain level of professional experience, as reflected in the seasoned survey population.
- Process refinement: The obtained insights can help guide organisations to refine internal processes or explore additional performance-oriented frameworks to enhance SRM practices.
- Measurable improvements: By focusing on key dimensions of the Workforce (V2) dimension, organisations can achieve measurable improvements in their SRM endeavours, therefore leveraging the observed correlations to prioritise interventions for maximum impact.

To replicate these results, organisations can be encouraged to adopt a broader range of excellence frameworks, supported by the ongoing updates of established methodologies such as the PMBOK [37]. Research using both historical MBNQA data [57,58] and recent studies highlights the dynamic nature of SRM. It requires a continuously updated stakeholder database that is regularly reviewed to reflect market changes.

Based on the methodology described in this study, future research could repeat this survey among populations with purely theoretical experience to compare results, as studies

indicate that soft skills and risk management responses will remain central elements in education and organisational excellence [6,73].

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the research was designed as a pilot exploratory investigation involving a relatively limited sample of Romanian IT professionals ($N = 52$). Although the sample size is consistent with recommendations for preliminary instrument testing and exploratory theory development, caution is warranted when generalising the findings beyond the text investigated. The results should be regarded as preliminary evidence supporting the proposed conceptual framework rather than as definitive conclusions applicable to all organisational settings.

Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported questionnaire data collected at a single point in time. While common method bias is a potential concern in survey-based research, Harman's single-factor test indicated that no single factor accounted for the majority of the variance, suggesting that common method variance is unlikely to represent a dominant source of measurement bias [68]. Nevertheless, future studies could strengthen methodological robustness by combining perceptual measures with objective organisational indicators and multiple stakeholder perspectives.

Third, although the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and acceptable multicollinearity diagnostics, the assessment of SRM quality as a higher-order latent organisational capability should be further validated with larger, more heterogeneous samples. Future research might employ advanced validation techniques, including Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), to confirm the construct's hierarchical structure and assess its stability across different organisational and industrial contexts [69].

Finally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture the dynamic nature of SRM quality as an evolving organisational capability. Future research could benefit from larger multi-sector and cross-country samples, longitudinal designs, and the examination of additional organisational outcomes related to SRM quality. Such studies may contribute to a deeper understanding of stakeholder relationship management as a capability that supports organisational quality, business continuity, and resilience.

7. Conclusions

This study contributes to the stakeholder relationship management literature by proposing and empirically examining a conceptualisation of SRM quality as a higher-order organisational capability framed through four complementary stakeholder-oriented dimensions derived from the MBNQA excellence framework: Leadership and Governance, Workforce, Customers and Markets, and Community Engagement. Based on a pilot sample of 52 Romanian IT professionals, the findings provide preliminary empirical support for the proposed framework and suggest that stakeholder relationship management may be understood as an integrated capability that emerges from the interaction of multiple organisational subsystems rather than as a collection of isolated stakeholder-oriented practices. The additional measurement model validation supports the internal consistency and coherence of the proposed construct. At the same time, the strong relationships among the four stakeholder-oriented dimensions are consistent with the systems perspective underpinning the MBNQA framework.

From a practical perspective, the results indicate that organisations seeking to strengthen stakeholder relationship management may benefit from simultaneously developing leadership systems, Workforce capabilities, customer-oriented processes, and

Community Engagement practices, rather than by focusing on individual organisational functions in isolation. Within the investigated sample, the Workforce dimension exhibited the strongest association with SRM quality, highlighting the potential importance of employee development, stakeholder communication competencies, and organisational learning. Furthermore, the absence of statistically significant differences across age groups, seniority levels, and professional roles suggests a relatively consistent perception among respondents regarding the importance of quality-oriented stakeholder management practices. While these findings should not be generalised beyond the investigated context, they provide preliminary evidence that the proposed framework may offer a useful basis for assessing and improving SRM practices within Romanian IT organisations. Future research employing larger, more diverse samples is required to validate the model further and examine its applicability across different organisations and industrial sectors.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

Acronym	Acronym meaning
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
IT	Information Technology
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MBNQA	Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award
NIST	National institute of Standards and Technology
PMBOK	Project Management Body of Knowledge
PMI	Project Management Institute
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
SD	Standard Deviation
SEM	Standard Error Mean
SMS	Sustainability management system
SRM	Stakeholder Relationship Management
SRMMM	Stakeholder Relationship Management Maturity Model
VUCA	Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity

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