

Factors Affecting the Quality of Vietnamese Civil Servants

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ABSTRACT

Civil servants of each country are defined as those who perform public duties and serve the people, so the quality of civil servants is a decisive factor in the quality, efficiency and prestige of state agencies. The laws of countries often stipulate in great detail the standards for the quality of civil servants, which often include the main factors, namely Civil Service Ethics, Professional Qualifications, and Practical Working Capacity. In this study, the author refers to the above three standards as factors affecting the quality of civil servants. Based on the established scales including Civil Service Ethics, Professional Qualifications, Practical Working Capacity and Civil Service Quality, the author conducted a survey of 270 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including: Thai Nguyen Province (North), Nghe An Province (Central), Ben Tre Province (South). The survey aims to assess the practical quality of local civil servants at the commune level in Vietnam. The research results showed that local leaders underestimate the practical working capacity of civil servants. From there, the author discussed some research contents and policy adjustment implications to improve the quality of local civil servants in Vietnam.

Keywords: Civil servants; Commune-level civil servants; Civil servant quality; Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, local government consists of three levels: 63 provincial governments, 705 district governments, and 10,599 commune governments (GSO, 2023). In the local government system, the commune level is the lowest level of government; commune-level civil servants are staffed with 6 positions: Commander of the Commune Military Command; Office - Statistics; Land - Construction - Urban and Environment (for wards and towns)/or Land - Agriculture - Construction - Urban and Environment (for communes); Finance - Accounting; Justice - Civil Status; Culture - Society (VG, 2023).

In general, local civil servants are trained and fostered to meet the standards of their titles and civil servant ranks; the quality of civil servants is gradually improved. However, due to differences in terrain, culture, economy and society between regions, the level of qualifications and practical working capacity of commune-level civil servants across the country also has certain differences; in many localities, the quality of local civil servants is still not commensurate with their qualifications; it has not

really met the requirements of tasks in the trend of administrative reform and international integration (MOHA, 2023).

The above practice is a limitation that needs to be overcome and is posing a challenge to local leaders in managing and developing the civil service. This raises the issue of continuing to conduct empirical studies on the quality of civil servants at the commune level to provide information for the development and improvement of policies for civil servants. This is also the reason that attracts the author's attention when researching the quality of civil servants.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Vietnam, the term "quality" is interpreted to mean the value and features of things; human value is expressed in their qualities and abilities: Quality is what creates the quality and value of a person, an object, or an event (Phe, H., 2011). And therefore, the quality of civil servants is also understood to mean the quality and ability of civil servants to meet the requirements of performing public duties. In research and management practice, the quality of civil servants is often mentioned in two aspects, including civil service ethics and professional qualifications. And thus, the quality of civil servants is explained in terms of both civil service ethics, professional qualifications and ability - practical working ability, meeting the requirements of performing public duties. According to Son, N.V. (2023), the quality of civil servants is the value of civil servants and this value is affirmed when they demonstrate their moral qualities, qualifications and capacity in public service activities, meeting the requirements of the assigned work in public service activities. Vietnamese law also stipulates that the assessment of the quality of civil servants includes aspects of public service ethics, professional qualifications and practical working capacity (VG, 2020).

The above research viewpoints and research contents on the quality of civil servants all refer to the value of individual civil servants associated with the requirements of public service activities. That value is generalized to include public service ethics, professional qualifications and practical working capacity. The author supports the above research viewpoints and contents and emphasizes that the value of civil servants is affirmed when they demonstrate public service ethics, professional qualifications and practical working capacity to meet the requirements of public service activities, meet the requirements of the job position, serve the state and serve the people. From here, the scale "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ) is built with the interpretation including the following contents: Civil servants with good moral qualities, good professional qualifications, good working capacity, meeting the political standards of civil service personnel (CSQ1); Civil servants with good moral qualities, good professional qualifications, good working capacity, meeting the requirements of the job position and assigned tasks (CSQ2); Civil servants with good moral qualities, good professional qualifications, good working capacity, ensuring the progress and quality of assigned work, serving and creating satisfaction for the people (CSQ3).

In terms of content, public ethics, professional qualifications and practical working capacity are three components of the quality of civil servants; if one of these three components is missing, an individual civil servant will not be evaluated according to comprehensive quality standards. Khanh, C.X. (2010) and Tam, N.T. (2011) affirmed that ethics, qualifications and capacity are the basis for evaluating civil servants according to legal regulations, are factors that make up the quality of civil servants, and determine the quality of civil servants. Therefore, in terms of contrast, public ethics, professional qualifications and practical working capacity are factors that have an impact on the quality of civil servants. The author inherits the above studies and builds the scales of "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) when referring to the factors affecting the "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ), which are explained below.

- Firstly, public ethics of civil servants is identified as the core political standard that every civil servant must have and regularly practice to meet the requirements of serving the state and serving the people. According to Thai, P.H. (2016), public ethics is the most basic standard; civil servants must have good political ideology, good working style, good sense of discipline, good service spirit - serving the state, serving the people. Ha, T.T. (2023) affirmed that public ethics of civil servants is demonstrated in loyalty to the country, strict compliance with the law and regulations of the agency, compliance with the assignment and readiness to accept assigned tasks, dedicatedly serving the state and serving the people. Inheriting the above viewpoints and research content, the author built the "Public Ethics" (PE) scale including the following contents: Civil servants have good political ideology, are loyal to the country, comply with the law and regulations of the agency (PE1); Civil servants have good working style, good sense of discipline, honesty, modesty, standard behavior (PE2); Civil servants have standard attitude and behavior, respect colleagues, respect and serve the people attentively (PE3).

- Second, the professional qualifications of civil servants are the main criteria for civil servants to successfully complete assigned tasks with the knowledge and skills that have been created and nurtured. According to Cuong, T.V. et al. (2018), these are the knowledge and skills that each individual is trained and nurtured before being recruited as a civil servant. Can, N.T. (2020) further affirmed that such knowledge and skills must meet the standards of civil servant ranks and meet the requirements of the job positions for which civil servants are recruited. The author agrees with the above studies, but emphasizes that such knowledge and skills will continue to be trained and nurtured so that civil servants meet the requirements of performing public duties, so that civil servants always meet the standards prescribed by law on professional knowledge, skills, and state management knowledge according to the standards of their ranks and job positions. With that meaning, the author builds the "Professional Qualification" (PQ) scale, including: Civil servants with knowledge, professional skills, and expertise that meet the standards of civil servant ranks according to the law (PQ1); Civil servants with knowledge, skills/have been trained in knowledge, skills that meet the standards of state management qualifications prescribed for civil servants according to the appointed ranks (PQ2); Civil servants with knowledge, skills, expertise/have been trained in knowledge, skills, and expertise that meet the requirements of the job position they hold (PQ3).

- Third, the practical working capacity of civil servants is the main factor in creating working results and products of civil servants in public service activities. According to Thang, N.T. et al. (2023), it is the ability to work well based on the foundation of qualities, knowledge, and skills that have been trained and fostered; thanks to that, civil servants can realize ideas, plans, and work programs into specific products in the process of advising and implementing tasks and public services. Hoa, N.T.T et al. (2023) share the same view with Thang, N.T. et al. (2023), emphasizing the ability of civil servants to perform assigned tasks proficiently and reliably: Civil servants demonstrate the ability to advise, the ability to organize and implement work, the ability to inspect and evaluate work. On that basis, the author builds a scale of "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) of civil servants, including a number of contents: Civil servants have the capacity to advise to meet the requirements of policy planning and professional and technical advice related to the job position (WC1); Civil servants have the capacity to perform professional duties, deploy tasks scientifically, comply with the law and ensure progress and quality of work (WC2); Civil servants have the capacity to inspect, evaluate and proactively grasp the situation, analyze, evaluate and summarize work in a timely manner to complete tasks well (WC3).

From the above overview, the author has built a theoretical framework on factors affecting the quality of civil servants. The research model is determined to include 3 independent scales/variables: "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) and 01 scale/dependent variable "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ). The above scales include 12 observed variables, designed by the author into 12 questions in the survey form and measured by a 5-level Likert scale: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - No opinion; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree [Table 1, Figure 1].

Table 1. Theoretical framework

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	Public ethics	PE					
1	Civil servants have good political ideology, are loyal to the country, comply with the law and regulations of the agency	PE1					
2	Civil servants have good working style, good sense of discipline, honesty, modesty, standard behavior	PE2					
3	Civil servants have standard attitude and behavior, respect colleagues, respect and serve the people attentively	PE3					
II	Professional qualification	PQ					
1	Civil servants with knowledge, professional skills, and expertise that meet the standards of civil servant ranks according to the law	PQ1					
2	Civil servants with knowledge, skills/have been trained in knowledge, skills that meet the standards of state	PQ2					

	management qualifications prescribed for civil servants according to the appointed ranks						
3	Civil servants with knowledge, skills, expertise/have been trained in knowledge, skills, and expertise that meet the requirements of the job position they hold	PQ3					
III	Practical working capacity	WC					
1	Civil servants have the capacity to advise to meet the requirements of policy planning and professional and technical advice related to the job position	WC1					
2	Civil servants have the capacity to perform professional duties, deploy tasks scientifically, comply with the law and ensure progress and quality of work	WC2					
3	Civil servants have the capacity to inspect, evaluate and proactively grasp the situation, analyze, evaluate and summarize work in a timely manner to complete tasks well	WC3					
IV	Civil servant quality	CSQ					
1	Civil servants with good moral qualities, good professional qualifications, good working capacity, meeting the political standards of civil service personnel	CSQ1					
2	Civil servants with good moral qualities, good professional qualifications, good working capacity, meeting the requirements of the job position and assigned tasks	CSQ2					
3	Civil servants with good moral qualities, good professional qualifications, good working capacity, ensuring the progress and quality of assigned work, serving and creating satisfaction for the people	CSQ3					

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

Research model

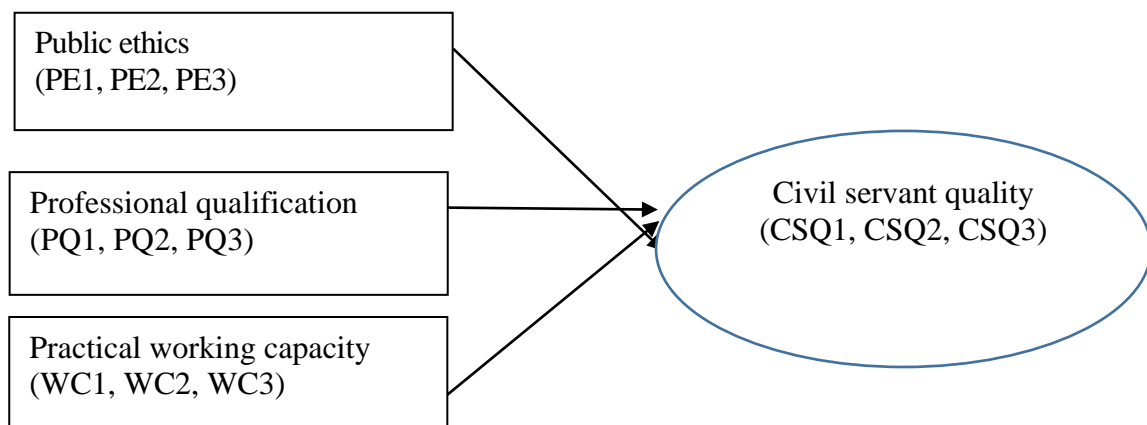


Figure 1. Research model

The theoretical research model was built to demonstrate the impact of the factors "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) on "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ). The author conducted an empirical study in 3 localities of Vietnam with the hypothesis that: *Public ethics (H1), Professional qualification (H2) and Practical working capacity (H3) have a positive impact, affirming the civil servant quality.*

3. RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, qualitative research methods are used through collecting and analyzing secondary data to build a theoretical framework on factors affecting the quality of civil servants. In addition, the author uses quantitative research methods through direct surveys of opinions of 270 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including: Thai Nguyen province (North), Nghe An province (Central), Ben Tre province (South). The survey is conducted in two steps: Preliminary survey and official survey.

a) Preliminary survey

With 12 observed variables of the 4-scale research model, the minimum sample size required in quantitative research is $N = 12 \times 5 = 60$ (Hair, J.F. et al., 2009). First, the author conducted a preliminary survey in Thai Nguyen province with a sample size of $N = 90$ leaders of commune-level government agencies ($N > 60$). The results of the preliminary survey in Thai Nguyen province showed that the scales and observed variables are reliable enough to be used in official surveys on a larger scale.

b) Official survey

The author conducted an official survey with 270 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 localities representing 3 regions of Vietnam as mentioned above: $N > 60$, ensuring reliability when conducting survey research. The survey was conducted selectively: Survey respondents were leaders of commune-level government agencies for 3 years or more; the author conducted preliminary interviews to capture information about the standards of the surveyed people and distributed survey forms based on their consent to answer. The survey results collected 270/270 valid forms, achieving a response rate of 100%.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The author conducts statistics and tests Cronbach' Alpha to identify the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model. According to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), the scale ensures reliability when it reaches Cronbach'alpha value > 0.6 ; observed variables are reliable when it reaches Corrected Item-Total Correlation value > 0.3 . The statistical and testing results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Statistical results and testing results of the scale

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Public ethics (PE)	PE1	270	2	5	4.31	.572	.776	PE1 = .622
	PE2	270	2	5	4.28	.604		PE2 = .618
	PE3	270	2	5	4.13	.635		PE3 = .576
2. Professional qualification (PQ)	PQ1	270	2	5	4.25	.565	.712	PQ1 = .589
	PQ2	270	2	5	4.22	.588		PQ2 = .606
	PQ3	270	2	5	4.09	.602		PQ3 = .559
3. Practical working capacity (WC)	WC1	270	1	5	4.01	.592	.682	WC1 = .394
	WC2	270	1	5	3.94	.611		WC2 = .417
	WC3	270	1	5	3.96	.625		WC3 = .399
4. Civil servant quality (CSQ)	CSQ1	270	2	5	4.12	.534	.702	CSQ1 = .583
	CSQ2	270	2	5	4.07	.591		CSQ2 = .414
	CSQ3	270	1	5	4.05	.588		CSQ3 = .405
Valid N (listwise)		270						

Source: Author's survey results

Data in Table 2 shows that observations on the scales of "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) and "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ) are all rated at an average level of Mean > 3.94 , statistically significant according to the determined Likert scale (1-5). Commune-level government leaders all affirmed the quality of local civil servants, expressed in the

aspects of good moral qualities, good professional qualifications, good working capacity, meeting the political standards of civil servants; meeting the requirements of job positions and assigned tasks; ensuring progress and quality of assigned work, serving and creating satisfaction for the people.

Among the above scales, the observed variables of the scale "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) were assessed at the lowest level with Mean (WC1) = 4.01, Mean (WC2) = 3.94, Mean (WC3) = 3.96, showing that local leaders assessed that civil servants have certain limitations in practical advisory capacity, capacity to perform professional tasks and capacity to inspect and evaluate work, that: Practical working capacity is not commensurate with professional qualifications; has not yet maximized the knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered to achieve the best results in performing tasks.

All 4 scales and 12 observed variables in the model have standard test values: Cronbach's alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3. These scales continue to be used to conduct exploratory factor analysis to test the theoretical model of the study. Exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation is performed to preliminarily assess the unidimensionality, convergent value, and discriminant value of the scales to have more basis for drawing research conclusions about the suitability of the initial theoretical model. The results of exploratory factor analysis are shown in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.815
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2495.755
	df	123
	Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.644	38.703	38.703	4.644	38.703	38.703	3.335	27.794	27.794
2	3.047	25.392	64.095	3.047	25.392	64.095	2.345	19.546	47.339
3	1.237	10.308	74.403	1.237	10.308	74.403	2.275	18.957	66.296
4	1.113	9.277	83.680	1.113	9.277	83.680	2.086	17.383	83.680
5	.542	4.518	88.198						
6	.351	2.926	91.124						
7	.287	2.391	93.515						
8	.269	2.242	95.757						
9	.261	2.172	97.928						
10	.130	1.084	99.013						
11	.098	.817	99.830						
12	.020	.170	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

Source: Author's survey results

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix^a					
Scales	Observed variables	Component			
		1	2	3	4
Public ethics (PE)	PE1	.834			
	PE2	.811			
	PE3	.758			
Professional qualification (PQ)	PQ1		.844		
	PQ2		.795		
	PQ3		.826		
Practical working capacity (WC)	WC1			.786	
	WC2			.779	
	WC3			.792	
Civil servant quality (CSQ)	CSQ1				.812
	CSQ2				.806
	CSQ3				.798
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.					

Source: Author's survey results

In quantitative research, according to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), exploratory factor analysis was performed in accordance with the data set through the values: $0.5 \leq \text{KMO} \leq 1$; Bartlett's test has an observed significance level $\text{Sig.} < 0.05$; Eigenvalue ≥ 1 ; Total Variance Explained $\geq 50\%$; Factor Loading ≥ 0.5 . The data in Table 3 and Table 4 show that:

+ $\text{KMO} = 0.815 > 0.5$, confirming that exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for the data set; Bartlett's test has an observed significance level of $\text{Sig.} = 0.000 < 0.05$, showing that the observed variables have a linear correlation with the representative factor. Total Variance Explained with Cumulative % = $83.680\% > 50\%$ (Table 3), showing that 83.680% of the variation of the representative factors is explained by the observed variables; the observed variables all have Factor Loading > 0.5 (Table 4), showing that the observed variables have good statistical significance. The theoretical research model initially proposed is consistent with the survey research practice.

+ The observed variables were extracted into 04 factors corresponding to the 04 initial factors with Eigenvalues > 1 (Table 3), continuing to confirm the suitability of the initial research model. And the initial research model was kept intact, including: 03 independent variables "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualifications" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) and 01 dependent variable "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ) with 12 observed variables with good statistical significance, it is possible to perform multivariate linear regression analysis to examine the relationship of the variables in the model. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 5, which is the basis for the author to draw research conclusions.

Table 5. Multivariate regression results

Coefficients ^a							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.116	.512		14.108	.000	
	Public ethics (PE)	.397	.264	.392	8.141	.000	1.875
	Professional qualification (PQ)	.302	.206	.279	6.587	.000	1.823
	Practical working capacity (WC)	.208	.185	.139	4.955	.000	1.792

a. Dependent Variable: Civil servant quality (CSQ)
R Square: 0.776; Durbin-Watson: 2.008

Source: Author's survey results

The data in Table 5 shows that:

+ R Square = 0.776, confirming that the scales "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) explain 77.6% of the variation in the scale "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ); $1 < VIF < 2$, showing that the regression model does not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.008 ($1 < d < 3$), showing that the regression model does not have autocorrelation, confirming that the scales "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) are independent and have an impact on the scale "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ), confirming the suitability of the theoretical research model with the survey data set.

+ The regression coefficients of the three independent variables "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualifications" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) are all statistically significant Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) and have positive values: $B(PE) = 0.397$, $B(PQ) = 0.302$ and $B(WC) = 0.208$, confirming the positive relationship between the three independent variables "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualifications" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC) and one dependent variable "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ); hypotheses H1, H2, H3 are accepted; the initial research model continues to be confirmed to be appropriate.

Based on the generalized regression model of Hair, J.F. et al. (2009): $Y = B_0 + B_1 \cdot X_1 + B_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + B_i \cdot X_i$, the author determined the multivariate regression model of this study as follows:

$$CSQ = 1.116 + 0.397 \cdot PE + 0.302 \cdot PQ + 0.208 \cdot WC$$

Based on the regression coefficient (B), it can be seen that the correlation level of the independent variables and the dependent variables in decreasing order is: "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualifications" (PQ), "Practical Working Capacity" (WC). That contributes to further affirming the empirical research results in Vietnam, that: Vietnamese commune-level local civil servants have good political ideology, are loyal to the country, comply with the law and regulations of the agency; have good working style, good sense of discipline, honesty, modesty, standard behavior; have standard attitudes and behaviors, respect colleagues, respect and serve the people attentively; have knowledge, professional skills, and expertise that meet the standards of civil servant ranks, meet the standards of state management qualifications, and meet the requirements of the job position. However, civil servants have certain limitations in practical advisory capacity, capacity to perform professional tasks, and capacity to inspect and evaluate work; Practical working capacity is not commensurate with professional level; has not yet maximized the knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered to achieve the best results in performing tasks.

5. CONCLUSION

The above empirical research results have shown that local leaders underestimate the practical working capacity of commune-level civil servants. Civil servants have certain limitations in practical advisory capacity, professional task performance capacity and work inspection and evaluation capacity; practical working capacity is not commensurate with professional qualifications; have not yet maximized the knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered to achieve the best results in performing tasks.

Assessing this issue, according to current legal regulations, the assessment of civil servant quality in Vietnam is mainly in the form of internal assessment; the implementation process includes the following contents: Civil servants self-assessment; the agency approves and recognizes the results of civil servant assessment for each department (VG, 2020). According to the explanation of many researchers, the internal assessment method is implemented smoothly, but will lack multi-dimensional assessment information (Thang, N.T. et al., 2023). Therefore, the author recommends that local leaders need to innovate the assessment of civil servant capacity; focus on assessment according to the competency framework of each job position: Develop assessment content, the process of assessing the quality of civil servants according to the competency framework of each job position of civil servants.

The implementation of the above assessment content and methods will help agencies and localities easily quantify the criteria for assessing the quality of civil servants according to job characteristics, according to the standards of titles and positions of civil servants. Agencies and

localities have a consensus in the assessment method and content of the quality of civil servants; overcome the limitations of civil servant assessment according to current legal regulations with the main form being internal assessment.

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