

## SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS AND STUDENT SATISFACTION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AMONG SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN MANILA, PHILIPPINES

ADRIAN JASPER CRUZ<sup>1</sup>, AMBROSIO “BUTCH” DE LA CRUZ<sup>2</sup>

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4595-9838>

adrianjaspercruz09@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, od\_09consultant@yahoo.com<sup>2</sup>

Centro Escolar University Graduate School, Manila, Philippines<sup>1-2</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Many private schools are greatly affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result, many HEIs decided to shut down their school operations such as College of Holy Spirit Manila, Colegio de San Lorenzo, and Kalayaan College. Low student retention is the main reason for its permanent closure and based on the previous study, student satisfaction in service quality can increase customer loyalty for continuous patronage. The study assesses student satisfaction in the SQD using the Modified SERVQUAL Model among the selected HEIs in Manila, Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main objective of the study is to provide updated data information regarding student satisfaction to help both participating and non-participating schools continuously improve the service quality for students. The 366 survey respondents and 12 interview participants are 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate students from the selected private HEIs in Manila, Philippines. The research design is descriptive research and used the mixed method technique to assess student satisfaction in the service quality dimensions for both academic and non-academic services. The homogeneous purposive sampling technique is used to select and recruit participants with shared characteristics such as the same year levels which are the 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate students who have more knowledge, experience, and exposure to the services of the university for both academic and non-academic services. Kruskal Wallis test and Mann Whitney are used for statistical data analysis and hypothesis testing. In the quantitative part of the study, the empathy dimension is the lowest SQD among selected HEIs in Manila. Therefore, it is recommended for university administrators to establish a TQM service culture with an emphasis on genuine connection. In the thematic analysis, the reliability dimension with academic teaching ineffectiveness got the highest frequency among negative sub-themes. Therefore, it is recommended for academic heads to reconduct a faculty development program with an emphasis on advanced teaching effectiveness.

*Keywords: Service Quality Dimensions, Student Satisfaction, Higher Education Institutions, Mixed Methods, Philippines*

### INTRODUCTION

The service quality of HEI plays an important role in student satisfaction and loyalty. “In 2020, all countries face a pandemic due to COVID-19 infection. This virus has affected all spheres of social life, not excluding the field of education, and has required radical changes (Boer

et al., 2021). In March 2020, when Covid-19 reached the Philippines which caused some Filipinos to be infected, President Duterte suspended the classes at all levels. It is the beginning of confusion regarding the decisions of HEIs on how they will continue the classes during lockdown. CHED reported on March 17, 2020, that some students want to go back to traditional face-to-face classes due to internet connection and

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gadget problems. Other students focus on the adaptability of flexible distance online learning systems. Living in these pandemic times is so hard for all the students. The DOH reported on September 10, 2020, that people got depression during this pandemic, especially students. Many students need support from private organizations and government institutions to continue their studies during this pandemic. The support system for public HEIs from CHED is free higher education. Many undergraduate students in the Philippines are fortunate to receive financial assistance from the government. They can receive free education, tertiary education subsidies, and other benefits when admitted and enrolled in SUCs and LUCs. The government supports public schools through various funding programs and other benefits during this pandemic. To date, how about the private HEI during these pandemic times? According to the COCOPEA report, on August 23, 2021, there were only 118,000 enrollees in private basic education schools out of 2 million students in the AY2020-2021. Moreover, based on this data, the retention rate in private schools is continuously decreasing. The COCOPEA Managing Director, Mr. Joseph Noel Estrada, said last August 23, 2021, that the shift to distance learning had resulted in a drop- in enrollment and the shutdown of some private schools. Regarding this matter, how can private HEI mitigate the impact of the pandemic? A statement from the College of Holy Spirit Manila reported last November 22, 2020, "*Be it known that the CHSM will voluntarily cease operations at the end of the academic year 2021-22.*" The low enrollment turnout worsened by the pandemic is the reason for the closure. The ultimate clients of HEIs are the students, and it is imperative to know and assess their student satisfaction level regarding service quality. There is a study in Indonesia with respondents of 100 private HEI students that concluded that "*service quality has a significant effect on student loyalty and student satisfaction has a significant effect on student loyalty*" (Cahyono et al., 2020). During these pandemic times, student loyalty to the university is essential for the business of private HEI. Many studies conducted about service quality in diverse sectors of the service industry, such as hotels,

restaurants, tourism, and banks, but only a few are about service quality in schools. (Cayanan, 2017).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted to 1) assess the student satisfaction in the SQD of the selected HEIs in Manila during the pandemic; 2) Identify which selected HEIs in Manila provide the highest quality of service based on student satisfaction rate during the pandemic; 3) provide updated data information to help to participate and non-participating HEIs continuously improve their service quality to students.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive research and used the explanatory sequential mixed methods technique to assess student satisfaction in the SQD for both academic and non-academic services. The 366 survey respondents and 12 interview participants are 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate students from the selected private HEIs in Manila, Philippines which are Centro Escolar University, Lyceum of the Philippines University, and Philippine Women's University. The survey questionnaire was distributed through e-mail and in-person, and the direct interview was done online. The researcher conducted an online direct interview with the 2 highest scorers and 2 lowest scorers in the survey of each participating HEI to collect additional data that supported the survey results. Purposive sampling is used in choosing HEIs. Homogeneous purposive sampling is used to select and recruit participants with a shared characteristic or set of characteristics such as the same year levels which are the 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate students who have more knowledge, experience, and exposure in the services of the university for both academic and non-academic services. Slovin's formula is used for determining the sample size with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. Descriptive statistics such as percentage distribution and frequency are used to answer the statement of the problem in determining the respondent's profile such as age, gender, year level, and name of HEI.



Inferential statistics is used to test the hypothesis of the study such as a non-parametric test. Hypothesis testing is used to compare the differences between the 3 groups. The Kruskal Wallis test and Mann Whitney determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the 3 HEIs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Profile of Respondents*

	Category	Frequency	%
<b>Age</b>	19 years old & below	14	3.83
	20 years old	89	24.32
	21 years old	154	42.08
	22 years old & above	109	29.78
<b>Gender</b>	Male	95	25.96
	Female	271	74.04
<b>Year Level</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	263	71.86
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	103	28.14
<b>School</b>	Centro Escolar University	205	56.01
	Lyceum of the Philippines University	146	39.89
	Philippine Women's University	15	4.10

Table 1 shows 154 or 42.08 percent of respondents from selected HEIs in Manila are 21 years old and 109 or 29.78 percent of respondents are 22 years old & above. There were 89 or 24.32 percent of respondents who were 20 years old and 14 or 3.83 percent of respondents are 19 years old & below. The majority of respondents from 3 selected HEIs in Manila are female respondents which are 271 undergraduate students (74.04%) and 95 or 25.96 percent of respondents are male, and also the majority of respondents are 3<sup>rd</sup>-year undergraduate students which are 263 or 71.86 percent and there was 103 or 28.14 percent of respondents which are 4<sup>th</sup>-year undergraduate students of selected HEIs in Manila. The majority of the respondents of the study are from CEU which is 205 undergraduate students (53.01%). The 146 or 39.89 percent are from LPU and the 15 or 4.10 percent are PWU. The total number of respondents is 366 undergraduate students.

### 2. Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction of Survey Respondents

**Table 2**  
*Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction: A Quantitative Analysis*

Service Quality Dimensions	Mean	S.D.	V.I.
Reliability	3.31	.462	Satisfied
Assurance	3.37	.467	Satisfied
Tangibles	3.33	.484	Satisfied
Empathy	3.28	.496	Satisfied
Responsiveness	3.29	.510	Satisfied
Speed	3.30	.491	Satisfied
Convenience	3.31	.479	Satisfied
<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.31</b>		<b>Satisfied</b>

Table 2 shows the overall mean for reliability is 3.31 and it is interpreted as satisfied. Reliability is a better assessment in the private institutions than in the public institutions (Soares et al., 2017) and reliability is the second to the highest in terms of satisfaction rate in SQD in private HEI (Chui et al., 2016). The overall mean for assurance is 3.37 and it is interpreted as satisfied. The Assurance has the highest score among the private HEIs in the Philippines (Cayanan, 2017). The overall mean for tangible is 3.33 and it is interpreted as satisfied. Tangibles is the highest SQD in the HEIs of Serbia (Krsmanovic et al., 2014) while in Thailand, it is the lowest SQD (Yousapronpaiboon, 2014). The overall mean for empathy is 3.28 and it is interpreted as satisfied. In Poland, empathy has the most negligible impact according to the perception of students (Grudowski et al., 2021). In Malaysia, empathy has the lowest satisfaction score in Universiti Teknologi MARA (Chui et al., 2016) and in another study conducted in 32 private HEIs in the Philippines, empathy has the lowest score (Cayanan, 2017). The overall mean for responsiveness is 3.29, speed is 3.30, and convenience is 3.31.

### 3. Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction of Direct Interview Participants

Table 3 shows that one of the positive subthemes is “*professor’s helpfulness*” in which 3 out of 6 highest scorers claimed that in the academic services of selected HEIs in Manila, the



professors were very helpful when it comes to academic concerns such as adjusting the deadlines for submission.

**Table 3**  
*Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis*

Themes	Subthemes	Participants	
<b>Positive Subthemes</b>	Empathy	Professor's Helpfulness	P3, P5, P10
	Convenience	Process Simplicity in Non-Academic Services	P1, P6
	Speed	Timely Document Processing	P5, P10
	Tangibles	Updated Curriculum	P2
<b>Negative Subthemes</b>	Reliability	Academic Teaching Ineffectiveness	P3, P4, P7, P8, P12
	Responsiveness	Unresponsive Academic & Non-Academic Services Employees	P1, P4, P11, P12
	Convenience	Difficulty in Scholarship Processing	P2, P11, P12
	Empathy	Uncompassionate Non-Academic Services Employees	P7, P12
	Assurance	Lack of Manpower	P2, P4
	Speed	Slow Service in Payment Transactions	P7, P8

They also indicated that their professors were continuously inspiring and motivating them to continue their studies even during a pandemic. Another positive subtheme is “*process simplicity in non-academic services*” in which 2 out of 6 highest scorers claimed that the non-academic services are very convenient and the amount of effort to ask for assistance is simpler and less hassle. Another positive subtheme is “*timely document processing*” in which 2 out of 6 highest scorers stated that the document processing in their respective HEI is fast. Another positive subtheme is “*updated curriculum*” in which 1 out of 6 highest scorers claimed that their university is always updating the curriculum that can help students to become more successful in the future. One of the negative subthemes is “*academic teaching ineffectiveness*” which 5 out of 6 lowest scorer participants claimed that there is ineffectiveness in the academic teaching of faculty members. The lowest scorers are not very satisfied with the academic services of their universities in terms of their professor’s way of teaching. They indicated that their professors are just reading the learning resources and not explaining the contents and context of the lessons. Some participants experienced professors were having chit-chats or casual talk instead of teaching lessons. “*Unresponsive academic & non-academic services employees*” is another negative subtheme in which 4 out of 6 lowest scorers experienced the unresponsiveness of employees from their school. Some participants experienced the unresponsiveness of employees when they sent

requests, and some students stated that people who were in higher positions never responded just like their other professors. Another student expressed their concern about no follow-ups. Another negative subtheme is “*difficulty in scholarship processing*” in which 3 out of 6 lowest scorers experienced difficulty in processing their grants due to the amount of work needed to process it. “*Uncompassionate non-academic services employees*” is another negative subtheme which 2 out of 6 lowest scorer participants experienced uncompassionate non-academic services employees and expressed his disappointment in the Registrar’s Office because of the behavior of the employees which he called “*rudest*” employees”. Another negative subtheme is “*lack of manpower*” which 2 out of 6 lowest scorers expressed their concerns about the lack of manpower in the university. The last negative subtheme is “*Slow Service in Payment Transactions*” in which 2 out of 6 lowest scorers claimed that their university has a slow service when it comes to payment transactions due to longer waiting time to process the transaction.

**4. Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction According to Respondent’s Age**

**Table 4**  
*Comparison of Respondents’ Assessment on the SQD that Influence their Satisfaction when they are Grouped According to their Age*

SQD	Age	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis	p-value	Sig
<b>Reliability</b>	19 years old & below	192.21	.129	P = 0.988 > 0.05	NS
	20 years old	184.72			
	21 years old	182.51			
	22 years old & above	182.78			
<b>Assurance</b>	19 years old & below	179.50	1.991	P = 0.574 > 0.05	NS
	20 years old	176.19			
	21 years old	192.52			
	22 years old & above	177.24			
<b>Tangibles</b>	19 years old & below	175.07	.415	P = 0.937 > 0.05	NS
	20 years old	181.20			
	21 years old	187.40			
	22 years old & above	180.95			
<b>Empathy</b>	19 years old & below	198.57	.350	P = 0.950 > 0.05	NS
	20 years old	182.61			
	21 years old	181.86			
	22 years old & above	184.61			
<b>Responsiveness</b>	19 years old & below	188.89	.634	P = 0.888 > 0.05	NS
	20 years old	184.31			
	21 years old	187.07			
	22 years old & above	177.10			
<b>Speed</b>	19 years old & below	183.89	.951	P = 0.813 > 0.05	NS
	20 years old	179.00			
	21 years old	187.94			
	22 years old & above	183.41			
<b>Convenience</b>	19 years old & below	162.18	.634	P = 0.889 > 0.05	NS
	20 years old	185.15			
	21 years old	184.69			
	22 years old & above	183.21			
<b>Average</b>	19 years old & below	183.79	.327	P = 0.955 > 0.05	NS
	20 years old	178.66			
	21 years old	186.66			
	22 years old & above	182.95			

Table 4 shows that when the SQD are grouped according to age, it is striking to see that there are no significant differences among age groups, as a result, there are no significant



differences among age groups when it comes to the overall SQD. The results are similar to the findings of Ham et. al., (2003), who stated that “age has no significant relationship with service quality”. Also, the observation of results is in line with the findings of Carey et al., (2002) who reported that “age factor is not related to the perception of satisfaction”.

### 5. Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction According to Respondent’s Gender

**Table 5**  
*Comparison of Respondents’ Assessment of the SQD that Influence their Satisfaction when they are Grouped According to their Gender*

SQD	Gender	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann Whitney	p-value	Sig
Reliability	Male	188.19	17878.00	12427.00	P = 0.611 > 0.05	NS
	Female	181.86	49283.00			
Assurance	Male	195.58	18580.50	11724.50	P = 0.191 > 0.05	NS
	Female	179.26	48580.50			
Tangibles	Male	188.17	17876.00	12429.00	P = 0.612 > 0.05	NS
	Female	181.86	49285.00			
Empathy	Male	192.59	18296.50	12008.50	P = 0.323 > 0.05	NS
	Female	180.31	48864.50			
Responsiveness	Male	186.36	17704.00	12601.00	P = 0.756 > 0.05	NS
	Female	182.50	49457.00			
Speed	Male	189.42	17995.00	12310.00	P = 0.518 > 0.05	NS
	Female	181.42	49166.00			
Convenience	Male	189.53	18005.50	12299.50	P = 0.510 > 0.05	NS
	Female	181.39	49155.50			
Average	Male	189.38	17991.00	12314.00	P = 0.529 > 0.05	NS
	Female	181.44	49170.00			

Table 5 shows that when the SQDs are grouped according to gender, it is striking to see that there are no significant differences between males and females when it comes to student satisfaction in all SQDs in 3 selected HEIs in Manila, as a result, there are no significant differences between male and female when it comes to the overall SQD. Gender doesn’t have a major impact on the service quality dimension (Khattab, 2019).

### 6. Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction According to Respondent’s Year Level

Table 6 shows that when SQDs are grouped according to year level, it is striking to see that there are no significant differences between 3<sup>rd</sup>-year and 4<sup>th</sup>-year undergraduate students when it comes to student satisfaction in all SQDs in the 3 selected HEIs in Manila, as a result, there are no significant differences between 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup>-year undergraduate students in overall SQD. In a

study by Ada et al., (2017), the satisfaction score of 3<sup>rd</sup> year were higher than those of 4<sup>th</sup> year.

**Table 6**  
*Comparison of Respondents’ Assessment of the SQD that Influence their Satisfaction when they are Grouped According to their Year Level*

SQD	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann Whitney	p-value	Sig
Reliability	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	184.75	48588.00	13217.00	P = 0.716 > 0.05	NS
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	180.32	18573.00			
Assurance	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	182.06	47891.50	13165.50	P = 0.674 > 0.05	NS
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	187.18	19279.50			
Tangibles	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	182.46	47986.00	13270.00	P = 0.760 > 0.05	NS
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	186.17	19175.00			
Empathy	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	182.89	48099.00	13383.00	P = 0.857 > 0.05	NS
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	185.07	19062.00			
Responsiveness	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	184.60	48549.50	13255.50	P = 0.747 > 0.05	NS
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	180.69	18611.50			
Speed	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	182.65	48037.00	13321.00	P = 0.802 > 0.05	NS
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	185.67	19124.00			
Convenience	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	185.54	48796.50	13008.500	P = 0.548 > 0.05	NS
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	178.30	18364.50			
Average	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	183.38	48229.50	13513.50	P = 0.973 > 0.05	NS
	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	183.80	18931.50			

### 7. Service Quality Dimensions and Student Satisfaction According to Respondent’s School

**Table 7**  
*Comparison of Respondents’ Assessment of the SQD that Influence their Satisfaction when they are Grouped According to their School*

SQD	HEI	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis	p-value	Sig	Remarks (Post Hoc)
Reliability	CEU	191.17	7.193	P = 0.027 < 0.05	S	A VS B B VS C
	LPU	168.02				
	PWU	229.33				
Assurance	CEU	192.46	14.805	P = 0.001 < 0.05	S	A VS B B VS C
	LPU	163.18				
	PWU	258.87				
Tangibles	CEU	190.17	8.293	P = 0.016 < 0.05	S	A VS B B VS C
	LPU	168.35				
	PWU	239.87				
Empathy	CEU	190.83	7.244	P = 0.027 < 0.05	S	A VS B B VS C
	LPU	168.32				
	PWU	231.10				
Responsiveness	CEU	195.69	12.396	P = 0.002 < 0.05	S	A VS B B VS C
	LPU	161.52				
	PWU	230.90				
Speed	CEU	201.94	23.366	P = 0.000 < 0.05	S	A VS B B VS C
	LPU	152.32				
	PWU	234.93				
Convenience	CEU	197.37	16.496	P = 0.000 < 0.05	S	A VS B B VS C
	LPU	158.34				
	PWU	238.80				
Average	CEU	194.90	12.929	P = 0.002 < 0.05	S	A VS B B VS C
	LPU	161.67				
	PWU	240.17				

Table 7 shows that the PWU has the highest mean rank among selected HEIs in the satisfaction scores for reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, responsiveness, speed, and convenience dimensions. In the case of LPU, the mean rank of their student satisfaction score in 7 SQDs is the lowest while CEU is the middle among the 3 selected HEIs in Manila. As a result, PWU has the highest mean rank and LPU has the lowest mean rank in the overall student satisfaction score in SQD. It is striking to see that there are significant differences among participating HEIs in Manila when it comes to student satisfaction in reliability,



assurance, tangibles, empathy, responsiveness, speed, and convenience.

## CONCLUSIONS

Empathy got the lowest student satisfaction score (3.28) and responsiveness got second to the lowest (3.29) while the assurance got the highest satisfaction score (3.37) and tangibles dimension got the second to the highest (3.33). For the thematic analysis from the lowest scorers, “academic teaching ineffectiveness” got the highest frequency among negative sub-themes from the highest scorers, and “professor’s helpfulness” got the highest frequency among positive sub-themes. For empathy, the employees’ emotional connection to students still fails to meet the “very satisfactory” score even during the pandemic when students need empathic services from HEI personnel and staff. Based on the previous foreign and local studies and the current findings, empathy is still the lowest SQD in the field of HEIs. Also, the results of the survey reveal that responsiveness still needs attention especially when it comes to university online chat support and employees’ follow-up on the request of the students. For assurance, the participating HEIs show that they are handling the information & data privacy very well and the physical safety protocols such as social distancing, wearing of face masks, and other COVID-19-related policies are strictly and properly implemented. For reliability, the majority of qualitative participants raised a concern regarding the professor’s way of teaching. Therefore, HEIs need to review and re-evaluate the quality of academic teaching of the faculty members. For assurance, some of the qualitative participants experienced a lack of manpower in the university that affected the efficiency of the school operations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the empathy, the researcher strongly recommends that University Administrators establish and implement a TQM Service Culture in their respective HEI with emphasis on the genuine connection between non-academic employees and students. For

addressing the responsiveness dimension, the researcher strongly recommends that Academic and Non-academic Supervisors create and enforce a system policy that focuses on addressing employee responsiveness issues such as “do not avoid, ignore, or snob the student emails and concerns” and “always provide a follow up for those students seeking inputs or assistance”. To address the reliability, the researcher strongly recommends that College Deans and Program Heads reconduct a Faculty Development Program with an emphasis on teaching effectiveness for the faculty members. To address the assurance, the researcher strongly recommends to the VP for HR or HR Director of private HEIs to create a succession plan to solve the lack of manpower raised by the students.

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## AUTHORS' PROFILE

**Adrian Jasper C. Cruz**, is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Management at De La Salle Araneta University, Philippines. He finished a Master of Business Administration major in Total Quality Management at Centro Escolar University Graduate School. A graduate with a Bachelor's degree from Our Lady of Fatima University. Faculty Member at San Mateo Municipal College handling courses such as Organizational Development & Change, Strategic Human Resource Management, Marketing Psychology, Strategic Marketing Management, Essentials of Management, and Industry Readiness in the undergraduate program of Business Administration and Psychology. Former Certified Trainer and Shift Supervisor at Starbucks. Bona Fide Member of the Philippine Council of Deans and Educators in Business (PCDEB), Philippine Society for Quality, Inc. (PSQ), Philippine Association of Researchers for Tourism and Hospitality (PARTH) and Philippine Leadership Society (PLS)

**Ambrosio "Butch" M. De La Cruz, Ph.D.**, Professorial Lecturer 4 at the Graduate School of Centro Escolar University teaching in the Post-Doctoral Program in Quality Management, PHD in Business Management and I/O Psychology, and MBA major in TQM. Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. degree holders from the University of the Philippines-Diliman and De La Salle University and CEU Professional Development. Postdoctoral Studies in PHRM-OD from UST and UMUC and USD (California). Former Collegiate Tenured Professor, University of Maryland, University College at College Park Baltimore, University of San Diego, Troy State University Graduate School. Former VP of HRM & Training Center, The ITT Sheraton Corporation. President & CEO, AHRMDCO International. U.S. Licensed Psychologist and Psychotherapist and PRC Licensed Psychologist. Executive Coach and Training Facilitator in various multinational





companies. Malcolm Baldrige Awardee representing Sheraton H.K. Hotel and Towers & Pre-opening Director of The Sheraton Towers Southgate in Melbourne Australia. Quality Team Leader of Atkins Kroll, Inc., TQM Adviser of the U.S. Army in Hawaii with a rating of 98%, Training Facilitator of the State Wide Quality Improvement (OSQI) Training Center at Sacramento, California, Ad Hoc Committee of the Canadian Quality Institute, Who's Who International Awardee in Business Management of America and Teaching Excellence Nominee & Awardee of the University of Maryland for 3 consecutive years.

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