

ASHRAE Research Project Report

1587-RP

Control Loop Performance Assessment

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ASHRAE RP-1587 Control Loop Performance Assessment

Final Report

Prepared for
Project Monitoring Subcommittee
ASHRAE Technical Committee TC 1.4
Control Theory and Application

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Executive Summary

This is the final report for the control loop performance assessment project sponsored by ASHRAE. In this project, two single control quality factors (CQFs) in the context of building heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) controls were developed and tested. These CQFs need to be objective, quantitative metric with simple-to-interpret criteria; additionally, they need to use only typically available data from HVAC control systems, such as the control loop output.

An extensive review of control loop performance assessment in various industries reveals that few studies are available to assess HVAC control loop performance. We systematically reviewed 35 indices and their associated methods of evaluating control loop performance, including their drawbacks and merits. Fourteen of these indices were selected to assess their performance on an air handler unit (AHU) heating coil outlet air temperature control loop using simulated data from a dynamic Modelica model. Based on the review and preliminary simulation results, two CQFs — the normalized Harris Index and Exponential Weighted Moving Averages (EWMA) — were recommended for further investigation. The first CQF (i.e., CQF-Harris) is based on the normalized Harris Index, together with a reversal index that detects control response trend reversal behaviors. The second CQF (i.e., CQF-EWMA) is the EWMA-based index along with the reversal index.

A CQF scale was developed to categorize HVAC control loop performance: excellent (A), good (B), fair (C), bad (D), and fail (F). For CQF-Harris, the scale is based on the ratio of control output variance to the minimum variance. For CQF-EWMA, the scale is based on the dimensionless error ratio between control output and the set point. The scale ranges are also given for the two CQFs. The proposed CQFs were implemented on simulated HVAC control loops through offline testing. A total of 16 simulated control loops (two sets) were assessed based on data from Modelica models. The first set of models is for the AHU heating/cooling coils. The

second set of models is for the dynamic VAV system with room models. This offline testing shows that the proposed CQFs can assess control loop performance with correct scales. Sensitivity analyses were conducted for CQF-Harris with respect to unmeasured disturbance (i.e., white noise) variance, moving window length, and sampling frequency. The results show that CQF-Harris is sensitive to unmeasured disturbance variance and to the length of the moving window, although it is less sensitive to the sampling frequency. The sensitivity analysis was also conducted for the CQF-EWMA with respect to the sampling frequency and unmeasured disturbance variance, and the results show that it is not sensitive to these two parameters.

The proposed CQFs were also tested using data from real control loops. A total of 213 real control loops were tested in six data sets. These loops covered VAV room air temperature control, AHU supply air temperature control, AHU static pressure control, water loop differential pressure control, and VAV airflow control, etc. The first four sets are from an office building in Chicago, Illinois. The fifth set is from the Iowa Energy Center's Energy Resource Station. The sixth set is from a classroom and laboratory building on campus at the University of Alabama. The test results show that the both CQFs are effective in assessing control loop performance. The assessments using these two indices are aligned with each other for the majority of the test cases.

Furthermore, sensitivity analyses for the real VAV control loops were conducted with respect to sampling frequency and length of the moving window. From the results, it is recommended that a moving window length of 80 or 100 minutes (i.e., 20 samples with a sampling frequency of four or five minutes) be used for VAV control loops. A weighted CQF for an evaluation of the averaged control loop performance over a given assessment time period is also proposed for the two CQFs with applications for real control loops.

Real-time field-testing with actual HVAC system and local VAV controllers were conducted at the Iowa Energy Center's Energy Resource Station. Both single maximum and dual maximum control logics were tested. Both proposed CQFs were able to be successfully programmed and downloaded to four real DDC (direct digital control) local controllers. The real-time CQFs values

are consistent with those from offline Matlab computations. However, the effort in implementing CQF-Harris index was quite involved, and required significant computational resources for the controllers. It is recommended to adopt the CQF-Harris index for DDC controllers with a higher CPU power and larger memory, for example, higher than 2MB. It should be programmed by controller manufactures as a standard “calculation block”. Implementing the CQF-EWMA index on these DDC controllers was easy and straightforward, and can be implemented in most of modern DDC controllers by engineers who are familiar with DDC programming.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	II
Acknowledgements	V
List of Figures	VIII
List of Tables	XI
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
Chapter 2 Review of Control Loop Performance Assessment	5
2.1 Challenges for Current HVAC Control Loop Performance Assessment.....	5
2.2 Reviews of CPA Methods.....	9
2.3 Threshold of CPA Indices.....	29
2.4 Preliminary Test for Selected CPA Indices Reviewed	33
2.5 Tuning methods for Closed-loop Controls	39
2.6 Diagnosis Methods for HVAC Control Loops	41
Chapter 3 Development of Control Quality Factor (CQF)	44
3.1 Guidelines of Developing CQF	44
3.2 Proposed CQF.....	44
Chapter 4 Development of CQF Assessment Scales	61
4.1 Assessment Scales for CQF-Harris.....	61
4.2 Assessment Scales for CQF-EWMA	62
Chapter 5 CQF Offline Testing for Simulated HVAC Control Loops	64
5.1 Simulated HVAC Control Loops.....	64
5.2 Offline CQF Testing for Control Loops from Modelica Heating/Cooling Coil Models	65
5.3 Offline CQF Testing for Control Loops from a Modelica VAV System Model.....	76
5.4 Sensitivity Analysis for the CQFs.....	80
Chapter 6 CQF Offline Testing for Real HVAC Control Loops	87
6.1 Real Control Loops List.....	87
6.2 Real Control Loop Assessment Offline Case Study	93
6.3 Real Control Loop Offline Assessment for Different Vendors	95
6.4 Sensitivity Analysis for a Real VAV Control Loop	98
Chapter 7 Weighted CQFs for Real Control Loops.....	101
7.1 Weighted CQF	101
7.2 Weighted CQF Case Study	102

Chapter 8 Online Field Testing for CQFs.....	105
8.1 Hardware-in-the-loop (HIL) Testing	105
8.2 Online Testing at Iowa Energy Center.....	121
Chapter 9 Conclusions	147
Nomenclature	149
References	154
Appendix.....	159
I. ARMA Model for HVAC Control Loop Output.....	159
II. Maximum Likelihood Estimation.....	162
III. Recursive Least Square	166
IV. CQF Code (Matlab).....	169
V. Offline Test Cases for Simulated HVAC Control Loops	176
VI. Offline Test Cases for Real HVAC Control Loops.....	177
VII. Offline Test Cases for Real HVAC Control Loops (IEC2014)	212
VIII. Offline Test Cases for Real HVAC Control Loops (Vendors).....	215
VIII. Online Test Cases for Real HVAC Control Loops (IEC2015)	216

List of Figures

Figure 1 A Typical Procedure for Control Loop Performance Monitoring.....	3
Figure 2 Closed Loop Diagram (O'Neill and Williams 2013).....	10
Figure 3 Dynamic Response of a Closed Loop (Brogan 1974).....	13
Figure 4 Closed Loop Diagram for Harris Index (Qin 1998).....	20
Figure 5 Diagram of Modelica Heating Coil Model.....	35
Figure 6 Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control.....	36
Figure 7 CPA Indices for Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature.....	37
Figure 8 Numerical Behavior for a Normalized Harris Index	47
Figure 9 Procedures of MLE Algorithm (Statlect 2015)	49
Figure 10 Procedures of RLS Algorithm (Hu 2013)	50
Figure 11 Simulated Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature.....	50
Figure 12 Harris Index Comparison Using MLE and RLS Methods	51
Figure 13 Real Data of VAV Box Controlled Room Air Temperature.....	52
Figure 14 Control Loop Performance Comparison Analysis for RLS/MLE.....	53
Figure 15 Numerical Behavior of the EWMA of Error Ratio (G).....	57
Figure 16 Illustrations for Reversal Behaviors	60
Figure 17 An Illustration for CQF-Harris Assessment Scales.....	62
Figure 18 An illustration of CQF-EWMA Assessment Scales.....	63
Figure 19 Simulated Data for Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Case-1	65
Figure 20 Simulated Data for Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Case-2	66
Figure 21 Simulated Data for Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Case-3	67
Figure 22 Simulated Data for Cooling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Case-1	67
Figure 23 Simulated Data for Cooling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Case-2	68
Figure 24 Simulated Data for Cooling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Case-3	69
Figure 25 CQF-Harris for Simulated Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-1	70
Figure 26 CQF-EWMA for Simulated Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case -1	70
Figure 27 CQF-EWMA for Simulated Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-2	71
Figure 28 CQF-Harris for Simulated Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-2	71
Figure 29 CQF-EWMA for Simulated Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-3	72
Figure 30 CQF-Harris for Simulated Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-3	72
Figure 31 CQF-EWMA for Simulated Coiling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-1	73
Figure 32 CQF-Harris for Simulated Coiling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-1	74
Figure 33 CQF-EWMA for Simulated Coiling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case -2	74
Figure 34 CQF-Harris for Simulated Coiling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-2	75

Figure 35 CQF-EWMA for Simulated Coiling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-3	75
Figure 36 CQF-Harris for Simulated Coiling Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop Case-3	76
Figure 37 Diagram for Modelica Models of a VAV System.....	77
Figure 38 VAV Room Air Temperature Control in the Cooling Mode	78
Figure 39 Performance Assessments for a VAV Room Air Temperature Control in Cooling Mode	79
Figure 40 Assessment Scale Comparisons for CQF-Harris and CQF-EWMA	80
Figure 41 Procedure for Sensitivity Analysis	81
Figure 42 Heating Coil outlet Air Temperature.....	81
Figure 43 CQF Assessment for Heating Coil Outlet Air Temperature Control Loop.....	82
Figure 44 Sensitivity Analysis for Evaluation Window Length for CQF-Harris	83
Figure 45 Sensitivity Analysis for Unmeasured Disturbance Variance for CQF-Harris..	84
Figure 46 Sensitivity Analysis for Unmeasured Disturbance for CQF-EWMA	85
Figure 47 Sensitivity Analysis for Sampling Frequency	86
Figure 48 Inter Room Air Temperature	93
Figure 49 CQF-Harris for Inter Room Air Temperature Control Loop.....	94
Figure 50 CQF-EWMA for Inter Room Air Temperature Control Loop.....	94
Figure 51 Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box of Vendor-1	95
Figure 52 CQF-Harris for Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box of Vendor-1	95
Figure 53 CQF-EWMA for Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box of Vendor-1	96
Figure 54 Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box of Vendor-2.....	96
Figure 55 CQF-Harris for Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box of Vendor-2	97
Figure 56 CQF-EWMA for Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box of Vendor-2	97
Figure 57 Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box.....	98
Figure 58 Sensitivity Analysis: CQF-Harris for Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box – Sampling Frequency	98
Figure 59 Sensitivity Analysis: CQF-Harris for Room Air Temperature Control for a VAV Box – Moving Window.....	99
Figure 60 Heat Exchanger Supply Water Temperature Control Loop	102
Figure 61 Weighted CQF-Harris for Heat Exchanger Supply Water Temperature Control Loop	102
Figure 62 Weighted CQF-EWMA for Heat Exchanger Supply Water Temperature Control Loop.....	103
Figure 63 Hot Water Loop Differential Pressure Control	103
Figure 64 Weighted CQF-Harris for Hot Water Loop Differential Pressure Control Loop	104
Figure 65 Weighted CQF-EWMA for Hot Water Loop Differential Pressure Control Loop	104
Figure 66 HIL System Diagram.....	106
Figure 67 Actual HIL Setup in the Lab	106
Figure 68 A BEMS Interface for a VAV Box	107
Figure 69 Dymola Model of a VAV Box with Reheat Coil	109

Figure 70 Modelica Model of an RC Network Room	111
Figure 71 Simulink Model with Modelica Block	112
Figure 72 Screen Shot of Dymola/Simulink Model Running on Central processor Control Desk	112
Figure 73 CQF-Harris for Different P0 Values	114
Figure 74 CQF-Harris for Different P0 Values (Zoomed In)	114
Figure 75 CQF-Harris for Different Input Reductions	115
Figure 76 CQF-Harris for Different Input Reduction (Zoomed In)	115
Figure 77 Recording for Sample Data for CQF-Harris	116
Figure 78 CQF-Harris and CQF-EWMA for Single Maximum Logic VAV Box	118
Figure 79 CQF-Harris Comparison between Matlab and HIL for Single Maximum Logic VAV Box	118
Figure 80 CQF-EWMA Comparison between Matlab and HIL for Single Maximum Logic VAV Box	119
Figure 81 CQF-Harris and CQF-EWMA for Dual Maximum Logic VAV Box.....	119
Figure 82 CQF-Harris Comparison between Matlab and HIL for Dual Maximum Logic VAV Box	120
Figure 83 CQF-EWMA Comparison between Matlab and HIL for Dual Maximum Logic VAV Box	120
Figure 84 Energy Resource Station - South-East View	121
Figure 85 Energy Resource Station Floor Plan.....	122
Figure 86 Test Room HVAC Plan.....	123
Figure 87 DDC Program – Harris Index Moving Window and For-Loop Calculation..	130
Figure 88 DDC Program – A Portion of the Harris Index Moving Window Custom Block	131
Figure 89 DDC Program – A Portion of the Phi_ARMA Custom Block.....	132
Figure 90 DDC program - Reversal Index and CQFs.....	133
Figure 91 CQF Inputs and CQF-Harris (Flow Percentage East B)	137
Figure 92 CQF Inputs and CQF-EWMA (Flow Percentage East B).....	137
Figure 93 CQF-Harris Comparison (Flow Percentage East B)	138
Figure 94 CQF-EWMA Comparison (Flow Percentage East B).....	138
Figure 95 CQF Inputs and CQF-Harris (Room Cooling South B)	140
Figure 96 CQF Inputs and CQF-EWMA (Room Cooling South B)	140
Figure 97 CQF-Harris Comparison (Room Cooling South B)	141
Figure 98 CQF-EWMA Comparison (Room Cooling South B)	141
Figure 99 CQF Inputs and CQF-Harris (Room Heating West B)	142
Figure 100 CQF Inputs and CQF-EWMA (Room Heating West B).....	143
Figure 101 CQF-Harris Comparison (Room Heating West B)	143
Figure 102 CQF-EWMA Comparison (Room Heating West B).....	144
Figure 103 CQF Inputs and CQF-Harris (VAV DAT Inter B).....	145
Figure 104 CQF Inputs and CQF-EWMA (VAV DAT Inter B)	145
Figure 105 CQF-Harris Comparison (VAV DAT Inter B).....	146
Figure 106 CQF-EWMA comparison (VAV DAT Inter B).....	146

List of Tables

Table 1 Summary of CPA Indices Reviewed	10
Table 2 Error Band for VarBand (Li and O'Neill 2015).....	28
Table 3 Summary of Requirements/Benefits of Control Benchmarking Methods (Jelali 2006)	29
Table 4 Harris Index Bounded Values (Ko and Edgar 2004b).....	30
Table 5 ISE Maximum Values (Zhou and Liu 1998b)	31
Table 6 Lower Bound of IAE Values (Ooi and Weyer 2011)	31
Table 7 ITAE Optimal Values (Zhao et al. 2012)	32
Table 8 First Normalized and Bounded EWMA Index (Salsbury and Alcalá 2015)	33
Table 9 Bounded Hurst Index (Hu et al. 2001).....	33
Table 10 Summary of 14 Selected CPA Indices.....	34
Table 11 PI Controller Settings.....	36
Table 12 Diagnosis Index (Salsbury 1999b).....	42
Table 13 CQF Definition	45
Table 14 Memory Usage for RLS and MLE Methods	54
Table 15 Predefined Unmeasured Disturbance (White Noise) Variance	55
Table 16 EWMA of Error Ratio (G) Scales.....	57
Table 17 CQF-Harris Scales	61
Table 18 CQF-EWMA Scales	63
Table 19 Simulated Heating/Cooling Coils Control Loops	64
Table 20 Simulated VAV Box Control Loops.....	64
Table 21 PI Controller Settings for VAV Box Control Loops	77
Table 22 Real Control Loops in Summer (Subsystem A)	87
Table 23 Real Control Loops in Summer (Subsystem B).....	88
Table 24 Real Control Loops in Winter (Subsystem A).....	90
Table 25 Real Control Loops in Winter (Subsystem B).....	91
Table 26 Iowa Control Loops @ 01.30.2014.....	92
Table 27 Building 1 (Vendor-2 Control Loops)	92
Table 28 Building 2 (Vendor-1 Control Loops)	93
Table 29 Iowa Control Loops @1023-1027.2015	93
Table 30 Weighted CQF Scores	101
Table 31 ERS VAV Box Design Specification	124
Table 32 Stages of Baseboard Heat	124
Table 33 Occupancy Simulators Control Modes	125
Table 34 CQF Test Design	128

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems are used to control environmental variables such as temperature and humidity in the built environment. Although some intelligent controllers (e.g. fuzzy logic controllers (Yen and Langari 1998) and pattern recognition adaptive controllers (Seem 1998)), have been developed over the past two decades, the most commonly used controller in HVAC applications remains the Proportional-Integral (PI) type (Seem 1998; Zhao et al. 2013b). Indeed, 95% of industrial controllers are of the Proportional-Integral-Derivative (PID) type even though most loops are actually PI-controlled (Aström 1995). The PI/PID controller has proven simple to implement and sufficient for most HVAC applications.

However, numerous studies show that, while effective in regulating the built environment, HVAC systems that poorly implement these controllers often use energy inefficiently (Barwig et al. 2002). Poorly performing control loops are a common issue across various industries and result in wasted energy, reduced occupant comfort, and excessive and unnecessary wear of actuators. In a 2000 Honeywell report (Edgar 2007), the author listed performance assessment numbers for installed controllers based on surveys. Of the 64% of controllers that utilized closed-loop feedback, 25% were rated as having excellent performance, 23% as acceptable, 34% as fair, and 16% as poor. Based on the data available, performance for HVAC control loops is even worse. Often, reduced performance in HVAC control loops is a result of manufacturer/field engineer/facility managers focusing on customers' desired indoor environment rather than on HVAC control loop performance. The focus on customers' desired environment contributes to wasted energy due to poor control loop performance in HVAC applications.

Cost and performance are always the biggest concerns in the HVAC industry. For engineers installing and commissioning a system, time spent tuning control loops can significantly add to

the overall expense. Controllers are conventionally shipped with default tuning parameters that are determined through manufacturers' lab tests. Without retuning, those default parameters could result in poor control performance since the actual HVAC systems will, in practice, almost certainly have nonlinear and varying dynamics different from those at the manufacturers' test facilities (Federspiel and Seem 1996). Loads for a given HVAC system will often vary with time due to seasonal or job-schedule loads (summer vs. winter and weekday vs. weekend, for example). To better optimize performance, tuning parameters in the controller should be adjusted to accommodate such major process parameter variations. At this time, the tuning procedure commonly used in the HVAC industry is highly labor-intensive and subject to human error as stated in ASHRAE Guideline 11 (ASHRAE 2009). As an alternative, auto-tuning (Aström 1995) is emerging to automate the tuning of control loops in HVAC applications (Dexter et al. 1990; Dexter and Haves 1989; Zhao et al. 2012). Unfortunately, the HVAC industry does not have standard and quantifiable methodologies to test and verify the state of tuning and the performance of systems operating under closed-loop control. Current methods include proprietary schemes and labor-intensive manual methods.

Control loop performance assessment (CPA or CLPA) is an important step to guarantee the efficiency of automation systems. It is also a key step for deciding if the fault detection and diagnosis is necessary and if there is a need for subsequent tunings of control loops. A diagram of a typical procedure for control loop performance monitoring is shown in Figure 1.

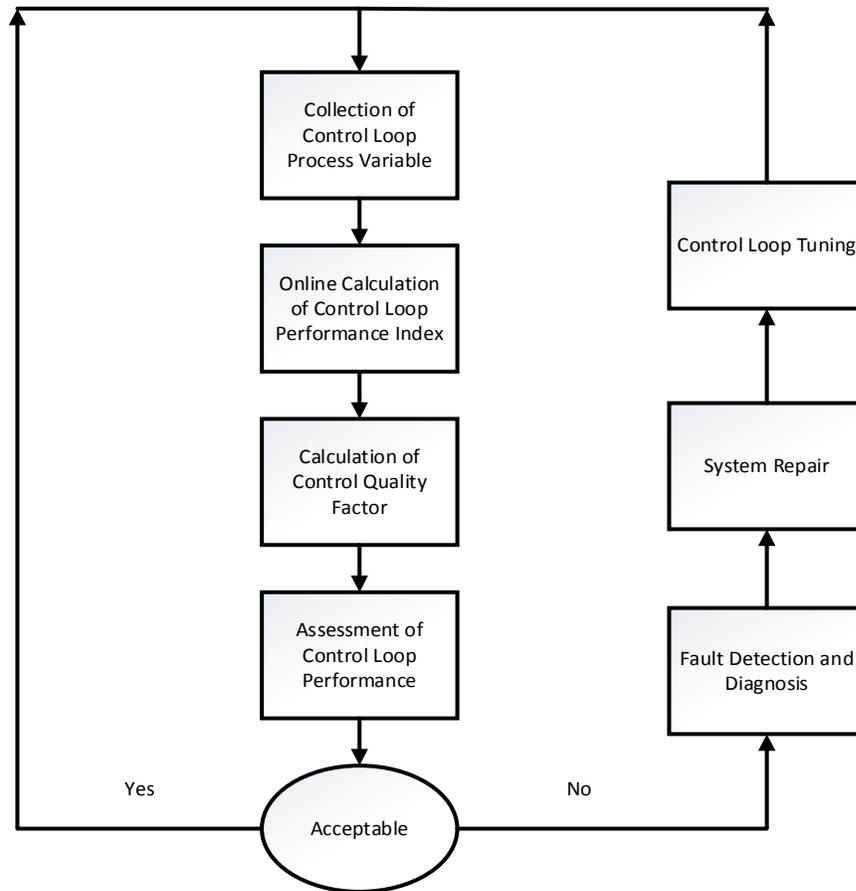


Figure 1 A Typical Procedure for Control Loop Performance Monitoring

The CPA has been an active topic for researchers and practitioners over the last three decades, especially in the process control industry. In the late 1980s, Harris (1989) introduced the Harris Index based on Minimum Variance Control (MVC) theory. Since then, this index has been widely used in the process control industry. Several commercially available packages (e.g. Honeywell's Loop Scout (Jämsä-Jounela et al. 2003)) were using the Harris Index for control loop performance assessment, mainly in the process control loops. New CPA indices have emerged in the process control industry over the last decade, especially in the refinery and oil industries. However, the complicated algorithms behind those CPA indices require significant computational resources, which may not be appropriate for applications in the HVAC closed loop performance assessment. HVAC control loop assessment usually requires a simple, fast evaluation algorithm due to the limited on-board memory of most HVAC controllers.

In addition, current CPA indices from the process control industry do not give definite assessment scales or criteria such as excellent, good, fair, bad and failed. Some CPA indices only have the lower bound such as an Integral of Absolute Error index (Hägglund (1995)). In general, most of these existing CPA indices need a human-in-the-loop to decide if the control loop performance is acceptable or not.

In summary, there is a need for a comprehensive and systematic review of the state-of-the-art for control loop performance assessment to facilitate the development of an objective and quantitative index with simple-to-interpret criteria, namely, a Control Quality Factor (CQF) for HVAC applications. The focus of this CQF is assessment of normal loop operation after recovering from a disturbance. There is also a need in the field to develop assessment scales for the CQF regarding HVAC control loops.

The structure of this report is organized as follows:

- Review of Control Loop Performance Assessment
- Development of CQF
- Development of CQF Assessment Scales
- CQF Offline Testing for Simulated HVAC Control Loops
- CQF Offline Testing for Real HVAC Control Loops
- Weighted CQFs for Real HVAC Control Loops
- Online Field Testing for CQFs
- Conclusions

This is just a sample of the
Final Report.

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