

Research on the Practice of Civil Servant Quality in Vietnam

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Abstract. Civil servants are human resources who use state power to perform public duties, serving the state and the people. Therefore, the quality of civil servants is a decisive factor in the quality, effectiveness of public service performance and the prestige of state agencies. Vietnamese law stipulates the assessment of the quality of civil servants, including the main contents, including Political qualities, Professional qualifications, and Working capacity. This study assesses the quality of local civil servants in Vietnam, so the author analyzes the Political qualities, Professional qualifications, and Working capacity of civil servants as both constituent contents and factors affecting the quality of civil servants. Based on the theoretical framework of the research, the author surveyed the opinions of 510 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including: Lai Chau province (North), Ha Tinh province (Central), Tra Vinh province (South). The research results show that local leaders underestimate the working capacity of civil servants in the practice of public service. From the conclusion of this research, the author suggests policy adjustments to improve the quality of local civil servants in Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, local civil servants are staffed in a 3-level local government system, including: 63 provincial-level governments, 705 district-level governments, and 10599 commune-level governments (GSO, 2024). At the provincial and district levels, civil servants are staffed in many specialized agencies to perform state management tasks according to fields/groups of fields. At the 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).

According to the assessment of the Ministry of Home Affairs (a government agency responsible for managing civil servants nationwide), commune-level civil servants are trained and fostered, basically meeting the title standards and the quality of civil servants is gradually improving (MOHA, 2024). However, Vietnam is reforming the local government apparatus in the direction of eliminating district-level localities; organizing a 2-level locality model, including provincial and communal levels (CPV, 2025); it is expected to reduce 50% of provincial-level localities, reduce 60%-70% of communal-level localities and implement in 2025 (TP New, 2025); at the same time, the reform of the local government apparatus is in the trend of developing digital government and digital society to better serve the people..

With the reform of streamlining the local government apparatus and the development trend of digital government and digital society mentioned above, many new tasks have been added for commune-level civil servants, posing new requirements on the quality of commune-level civil servants. This is the reason that attracts the author's attention and choice when researching the quality of civil servants in the scope of local commune-level civil servants.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lexicographer Phe, H. (2011) explains the term "quality" as what creates the quality and value of a person or an object. This content implies the value and features of an object; it implies the value of a person expressed in their quality and capacity. And according to the provisions of Vietnamese law on assessing the quality of civil servants, that value is the political quality, professional qualifications, and working capacity of civil servants demonstrated by civil servants in the process of performing public duties (VG, 2020).

On that basis, it can be understood that the quality of civil servants is the value of civil servants and this value is reflected in the political qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity of civil servants to meet the requirements of performing public duties: Meeting the political standards of civil service personnel (loyalty, service); meeting the standards of civil servant titles (appropriate professional qualifications, trained in state management knowledge); meeting the requirements of job positions (advisory capacity, work implementation capacity, work progress and quality). The scale "Civil servant quality" (CSQ) is built in this study with the interpretation of the implied contents: Civil servants with good political and ethical qualities, meeting the political standards of civil service personnel (CSQ1); Civil servants with qualifications, knowledge, expertise and understanding of the field of work and public service activities, meeting the standards of civil service titles (CSQ2); Civil servants with good working capacity, demonstrating the ability to advise and implement work to ensure progress and quality of assigned work, meeting the requirements of the job position (CSQ3).

In terms of theoretical and practical research, according to Hoi, D.X. (2023) and Son, N.V. (2023), the quality of civil servants is the value of civil servants, expressed in terms of moral qualities, qualifications, and capacity to perform public duties, meeting the requirements of public service activities. Similarly, Ha, T.T. et al. (2023) and Anh, M. et al. (2024) affirmed three contents of assessing the quality of civil servants, including moral qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity. The approach of Son, N.V. (2023), Hoi, D.X. (2023), Ha, T.T. et al. (2023) and Anh, M. et al. (2024) is consistent with and based on the practical provisions of Vietnamese law on assessing the quality of civil servants. This is a regulation on assessing the quality of civil servants

based on the criteria of political qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity of civil servants to meet the requirements of performing public duties (VG, 2020). The above researchers explain the political qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity of civil servants as follows:

- Firstly, political quality is the political standard that civil servants must have; at the same time, civil servants must regularly practice political quality to always be loyal to the country, steadfast in their goals, ready to work and serve the people, creating satisfaction for the people. The scale of "Political qualities" (PO) is explained according to the following contents: Civil servants are loyal to the country, strictly abide by the law and have a spirit of setting an example and solidarity in the collective (PO1); Civil servants are ready to undertake work, ready to work and take political responsibility for assigned tasks (PO2); Civil servants are dedicated to serving the state, serving the people, and responding to the people's legitimate requests (PO3).
- Second, professional qualifications are the basic and necessary knowledge and skills standards that each individual is trained and fostered before being recruited as a civil servant; as a basis for civil servants to perform professional tasks effectively. Such knowledge and skills must meet the standards of civil servant titles, meet the requirements of the job positions for which civil servants are recruited; and at the same time, continue to be updated and supplemented in practice so that civil servants meet the requirements of performing public duties. The scale of "Professional qualification" (PR) is interpreted according to the following contents: Civil servants with specialized knowledge and skills that are trained and fostered to meet the standards of recruited civil servants (PR1); Civil servants who are trained and fostered in state management knowledge and skills that meet the standards of recruited civil servants (PR2); Civil servants who have knowledge and skills that meet the requirements of recruited job positions and are trained and updated annually during their public service activities (PR3).
- Third, working capacity is the ability to work well based on the foundation of knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered, including consulting capacity, work implementation capacity, work inspection and evaluation capacity. Civil servants with good working capacity will successfully realize ideas, plans, and work programs; this is the main content to evaluate the results of performing assigned tasks for civil servants. The scale of "Working capacity" (WO) is interpreted according to the following contents: Civil servants have the ability to research and advise to transform management ideas into policies, work plans and programs (WO1); Civil servants have the ability to implement scientific work and ensure the progress and quality of assigned professional tasks (WO2); Civil servants have the ability to control work well - proactively grasp information and analyze and evaluate work to always complete assigned tasks (WO3).

Through the overview study, the author has built a theoretical framework on civil servant quality with a 4-scale model, including: 3 independent scales/variables: "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO) and 01 dependent scale/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).

The research model is built in the direction of evaluating the influence of "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO) on "Civil servant quality" (CSQ). The author conducts empirical research in 3 localities of Vietnam with the hypothesis that: *Political qualities (H1), Professional qualifications (H2) and Working capacity (H3) directly affect, affirming the Quality of civil servants.*

Table 1: Theoretical framework.

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	Political qualities	PO					
1	Civil servants are loyal to the country, strictly abide by the law and have a spirit of setting an example and solidarity in the collective	PO1					
2	Civil servants are ready to undertake work, ready to work and take political responsibility for assigned tasks	PO2					
3	Civil servants are dedicated to serving the state, serving the people, and responding to the people's legitimate requests	PO3					
II	Professional qualification	PR					
1	Civil servants with specialized knowledge and skills that are trained and fostered to meet the standards of recruited civil servants	PR1					
2	Civil servants who are trained and fostered in state management knowledge and skills that meet the standards of recruited civil servants	PR2					
3	Civil servants who have knowledge and skills that meet the requirements of recruited job positions and are trained and updated annually during their public service activities	PR3					
III	Working capacity	WO					
1	Civil servants have the ability to research and advise to transform management ideas into policies, work plans and programs	WO1					
2	Civil servants have the ability to implement scientific work and ensure the progress and quality of assigned professional tasks	WO2					
3	Civil servants have the ability to control work well - proactively grasp information and analyze and evaluate work to always complete assigned tasks	WO3					
IV	Civil servant quality	CSQ					
1	Civil servants with good political and ethical qualities, meeting the political standards of civil service personnel	CSQ1					
2	Civil servants with qualifications, knowledge, expertise and understanding of the field of work and public service activities, meeting the standards of civil service titles	CSQ2					
3	Civil servants with good working capacity, demonstrating the ability to advise and implement work to ensure progress and quality of assigned work, meeting the requirements of the job position	CSQ3					

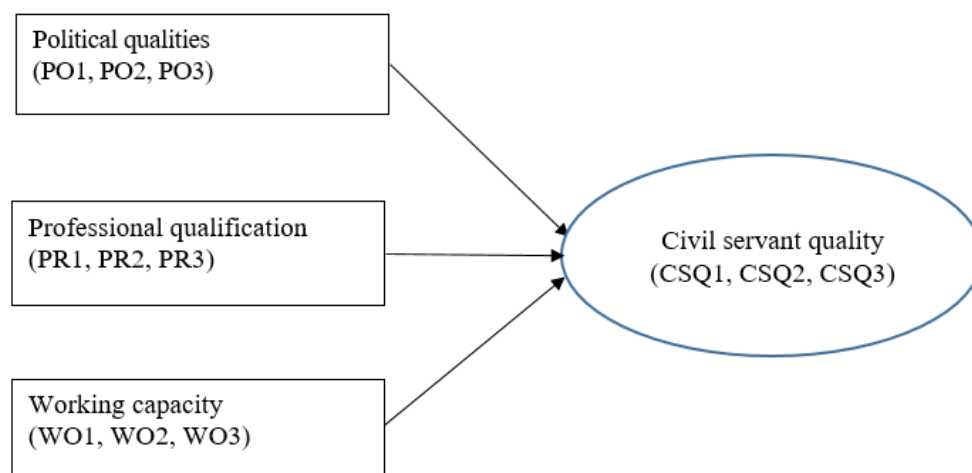


Figure 1: Research model.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the author uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method is used through the collection and analysis of secondary data to build a theoretical research model. The quantitative method is conducted through a survey of 510 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including: Lai Chau province (North), Ha Tinh province (Central), Tra Vinh province (South). The survey is conducted in two steps: Preliminary survey and official survey.

- Preliminary survey: The research model includes 4 scales, 12 observed variables and according to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), the minimum sample size required in quantitative research for this research model is $N = 12 \times 5 = 60$. The author conducted a preliminary survey in Lai Chau province with a sample size of $N = 170$ leaders of commune-level government agencies ($N > 60$). The results of the preliminary survey in Lai Chau province showed that the scales and observed variables are reliable enough to be used in official surveys on a wider scale.
- Official survey: The author conducted an official survey with a sample size of $N = 510$ 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, targeting leaders of commune-level government agencies who have held positions for 3 years or more. The author conducted preliminary interviews to capture information about the standards of the respondents and distributed survey forms based on their consent to answer. The survey results collected 510/510 valid forms, achieving a response rate of 100%.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the author conducts statistics and tests the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model. In quantitative research, the scale ensures reliability when it reaches Cronbach's alpha value > 0.6 ; observed variables are reliable when it reaches Corrected Item-Total Correlation value > 0.3 (Hair, J.F. et al., 2009). 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. Political qualities (PO)	PO1	510	1	5	4.27	0.553	0.728	PO1 = 0.601
	PO2	510	1	5	4.18	0.611		PO2 = 0.589
	PO3	510	1	5	4.21	0.542		PO3 = 0.573
2. Professional qualification (PR)	PR1	510	1	5	4.24	0.566	0.702	PR1 = 0.594
	PR2	510	1	5	4.17	0.609		PR2 = 0.602
	PR3	510	1	5	4.19	0.597		PR3 = 0.557
3. Working capacity (WO)	WO1	510	1	5	4.02	0.645	0.663	WO1 = 0.389
	WO2	510	1	5	4.01	0.659		WO2 = 0.406
	WO3	510	1	5	3.99	0.676		WO3 = 0.395
4. Civil servant quality (CSQ)	CSQ1	510	1	5	4.13	0.624	0.694	CSQ1 = 0.531
	CSQ2	510	1	5	4.11	0.618		CSQ2 = 0.446
	CSQ3	510	1	5	4.08	0.589		CSQ3 = 0.425
Valid N (listwise)		510						

Data in Table 2 shows that observations on the scales "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO) and "Civil servant quality" (CSQ) are all rated at an average level of Mean ≥ 3.99 , statistically significant according to the determined Likert scale (1-5). Commune-level government leaders all affirmed the quality of local civil servants through good political qualities and ethics, meeting the political standards of civil service personnel; qualifications, knowledge, expertise and understanding of the field of work, public service activities, meeting the standards of civil servant titles; good working capacity, demonstrating the ability to advise and implement work to ensure progress and quality of assigned work, meeting the requirements of the job position.

Among the above scales, the observed variables of the "Working capacity" (WO) scale were assessed at the lowest level with Mean (WO1) = 4.02, Mean (WO2) = 4.01, Mean (WO3) = 3.99, showing that local leaders assessed many civil servants as having certain limitations in their ability to research and advise to transform management ideas into policies, work plans and programs; limitations in the ability to implement work to ensure progress and quality of assigned professional tasks; limitations in the ability to

control work, not proactively grasping information and analyzing and evaluating work to always complete assigned tasks.

The survey data in Table 2 also contributes to reflecting the current capacity of Vietnamese local civil servants, in which the limitations are clearly shown in the capacity to advise and control work. This issue is also assessed and evaluated similarly by many experts and managers. Hoi, D.X. (2023) assessed that although many commune-level civil servants in Vietnam have met the standards of professional qualifications, their professional practice capacity has not met the requirements of local governance innovation; work results have not met the expected goals of quality of public service performance. Anh, M. et al. (2024) affirmed that Vietnamese local civil servants have good moral qualities; professional qualifications meet the standards of civil servant ranks and meet the requirements of job positions; have the capacity to work, complete assigned tasks and create satisfaction for the people; however, the practical working capacity of civil servants is not commensurate with their professional qualifications; have not yet maximized the knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered to achieve the best results in performing tasks.

Data in Table 2 shows that all 4 scales and 12 observed variables in the research model have standard test values: Cronbach's alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3. These scales and observed variables continue to be used to conduct exploratory factor analysis to test the theoretical research model. 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.		0.726
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	1628.595
	df	66
	Sig.	0.000

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	3.677	30.642	30.642	3.677	30.642	30.642	2.715	22.625	22.625
2	2.729	22.738	53.380	2.729	22.738	53.380	2.208	18.398	41.024
3	1.249	10.412	63.793	1.249	10.412	63.793	2.018	16.820	57.843
4	1.111	9.261	73.054	1.111	9.261	73.054	1.825	15.210	73.054
5	0.879	7.328	80.382						
6	0.696	5.800	86.182						
7	0.491	4.093	90.275						
8	0.427	3.561	93.836						
9	0.249	2.077	95.913						
10	0.231	1.928	97.841						
11	0.174	1.450	99.291						
12	0.085	0.709	100.000						

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

Table 4: Rotated component matrix.

Rotated component matrix^a					
Scales	Observed variables	Component 1	2	3	4
1. Political qualities (PO)	PO1	0.818			
	PO2	0.812			
	PO3	0.783			
2. Professional qualification (PR)	PR1		0.814		
	PR2		0.798		
	PR3		0.806		
3. Working capacity (WO)	WO1			0.787	
	WO2			0.791	
	WO3			0.793	
4. Civil servant quality (CSQ)	CSQ1				0.802
	CSQ2				0.805
	CSQ3				0.795

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

Rotation method: Varimax with kaiser normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

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 Sig. < 0.05; Eigenvalue ≥ 1 ; Total Variance Explained $\geq 50\%$; Factor Loading ≥ 0.5 . The data in Table 3 and Table 4 show that:

+ KMO coefficient = $0.726 > 0.5$, confirming that exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for the data set; Bartlett's test has an observed significance level of Sig. = $0.000 < 0.05$, showing that the observed variables have a linear correlation with the representative factor. Total Variance Explained with Cumulative % = $73.054\% > 50\%$ (Table 3), showing that 73.054% 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 "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO) and 01 dependent variable "Civil servant quality" (CSQ) with 12 observed variables with good statistical significance, which can perform multivariate linear regression analysis to examine the relationship of 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		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	Sig.	VIF
Model		B	Std. error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	1.109	0.526			12.833	0.000	
	Political qualities (PO)	0.376	0.271	0.396		10.401	0.000	1.815
	Professional qualification (PR)	0.311	0.223	0.287		8.827	0.000	1.834
	Working capacity (WO)	0.237	0.198	0.177		5.995	0.000	1.789

a. Dependent variable: Civil servant quality (CSQ)
R Square: 0.736; Durbin-Watson: 2.107

The data in Table 5 shows that:

+ R Square = 0.736, confirming that the scales "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO) explain 73.6% of the variation in the scale "Civil servant quality" (CSQ); VIF = 1.815, VIF = 1.834, VIF = 1.789 ($1 < VIF < 2$), showing that the regression model does not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.107 ($1 < d < 3$), showing that the regression model does not have autocorrelation, confirming that the scales "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO) 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 "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO) are all statistically significant Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) and have positive values: B(PO) = 0.376, B(PR) = 0.311 and B(WO) = 0.237, confirming the positive relationship between the three independent variables "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO) and 01 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): $Y = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + \dots + B_iX_i$, the author determined the multivariate regression model of this study as follows: $CSQ = 1.109 + 0.376*PO + 0.311*PR + 0.237*WO$

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: "Political qualities" (PO), "Professional qualification" (PR), "Working capacity" (WO). That contributes to further affirming the empirical research results on the quality of local civil servants in Vietnam, that civil servants have good political qualities and ethics, meeting the political standards of civil service personnel; have qualifications, knowledge, expertise and understanding of the field of work, public service activities, meeting the standards of civil servant titles; have good working capacity, demonstrating the ability to advise and implement work to ensure the progress and quality of assigned work, meeting the requirements of the job position.

However, many civil servants have certain limitations in their ability to research and advise on transforming management ideas into policies, work plans and programs; limitations in their ability to implement work to ensure progress and quality of assigned professional tasks; limitations in their ability to control work, not proactively grasp information and analyze and evaluate work to always complete assigned tasks. This reality is raising the issue of needing to research and innovate in civil servant management. Accordingly, local leaders need to focus on assessing the quality of civil servants according to the competency framework of each job position. The issue that needs to be implemented is to develop assessment content and a process for assessing the quality of civil servants according to the competency framework of each job position. That will help localities quantify the criteria for assessing the quality of civil servants according to job characteristics, according to the standards of titles and job positions of civil servants; thereby, localities have consistency in the assessment method and content of assessing the quality of civil servants.

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