

Assessing The Quality of Local Civil Servants in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Civil servants are human resources performing public duties, serving the interests of the state and the people. Therefore, the quality of civil servants is a decisive issue for the results and effectiveness of public service activities. Current Vietnamese law stipulates the content of civil servant quality assessment, including Ethics, Qualifications, and Capacity. The author inherits the content of these legal provisions to build a research model for assessing the quality of civil servants in Vietnam, including: 03 independent scales "Ethics", "Quality", "Capacity" and 01 dependent scale "Quality of civil servant". The model is designed to assess the impact of the contents/factors of Ethics, Qualifications, and Capacity on the quality of civil servants. Based on the theoretical framework of the research, the author surveyed the opinions of 480 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including: Dien Bien Province (North), Nghe An Province (Central), Binh Phuoc Province (South). The research results show that local leaders have low ratings on the "Capacity" scale, indicating that local civil servants at the commune level are still limited in their practical working capacity in public service activities. From there, the author discusses the content of policies to improve the quality of local civil servants in Vietnam today.

Keywords: Quality of civil servant; Ethics; Qualifications; Capacity; Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Localities in Vietnam are defined by law with 3 levels in order from top to bottom, including: Provincial level (63 provincial-level units), district level (705 district-level units) and commune level (10599 commune-level units) [GSO, 2024]. The human resources performing public duties of local governments are classified into cadres (those elected to hold leadership positions according to law) and civil servants (those recruited and appointed to hold management positions and professional titles according to law) [VNA, 2008].

In this study, the author limits the scope of research on human resources performing public duties of local governments in Vietnam to include only civil servants. In fact, provincial and district-level civil servants are staffed in affiliated specialized agencies. Commune-level civil servants are staffed according to 6 positions, including: 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, the quality of commune-level civil servants has improved over the years; civil servants have moral qualities, qualifications, and basic capacities that meet the standards of job titles and positions [MOHA, 2024]. However, in 2025, Vietnam is reforming the state apparatus, eliminating district-level localities and reducing the number of provincial and commune-level localities [CPV, 2025a]; reducing from 63 provincial-level units to 34 units; reducing the number of commune-level units by 60%-70% [CPV, 2025b].

The reform of the state apparatus and the trend of developing digital government and digital society are currently posing requirements on the quality of commune-level civil servants. Because, when the district level is abolished, many new tasks are added for commune-level civil servants. This issue is attracting the attention of many managers and researchers and is also the reason for the author's choice when conducting this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term “quality” is interpreted in a common sense, which is what creates value and implies human value expressed in their qualities and abilities. According to Hai, T.N. (2018), the quality of civil servants is a set of factors reflecting the individual quality of each civil servant. More specifically, the quality of civil servants is considered with factors such as qualities, ethics, qualifications, professional capacity, sense of organization and discipline, etc. Similarly, Ha, L.C. (2021) affirmed that the quality of each civil servant is first of all expressed in political qualities, ideology, ethics, lifestyle, professional training, cultural knowledge and communication; expressed in experience and capacity for leadership, management, organization, apparatus operation and practical organizational capacity; at the same time, expressed in the effectiveness of their leadership, management activities, and prestige before the collective and the people.

The studies of Hai, T.N. (2018) and Ha, L.C. (2021) are similar to the current legal regulations of Vietnam on assessing the quality of civil servants, including the following contents: Political qualities, professional qualifications, working capacity of civil servants, demonstrated by civil servants in the process of performing public duties [VG, 2020]. On that basis, the author builds the "Quality of civil servant" (QCS) Scale, implying the following contents: Civil servants with good ethics, meeting the standards for the recruited job title and position and the political standards of civil service personnel (QCS1); Civil servants with qualifications and social understanding, meeting the standards for the recruited job title and position and professional qualifications according to the law (QCS2); Civil servants with good capacity, meeting the standards for the recruited job title and position and working capacity standards according to the law on assessing the quality of civil servants (QCS3).

In terms of theoretical research, the ethical elements, qualifications, and capacities of civil servants are explained in detail by many studies. Hai, T.N. (2018) and Ha, L.C. (2021), although interpreting the content according to specific approaches and contexts, both emphasize three contents when discussing the quality of civil servants, which are ethics (political qualities, ideology, lifestyle, prestige before the collective and the people, etc.), qualifications (level of professional training, cultural knowledge and communication, etc.) and capacity (experience, leadership, management, organization, apparatus operation, and practical organizational capacity, etc.). Son, N.V. (2023) and Anh, M. et al. (2024) affirm that the quality of civil servants is the value expressed in ethical qualities, professional qualifications, and practical working capacity that meets the requirements of public service activities. The above studies explain the ethics, qualifications and capacity of civil servants in detail below.

- Firstly, ethics is the political standard that civil servants must have. Accordingly, civil servants must regularly cultivate and practice ethics to always be loyal and steadfast in their goals; have good political and ideological qualities and lifestyles; be ready to work and serve, and affirm their prestige before the collective and the people. The scale "Ethics" (ET) is explained to imply the following contents: Civil servants are loyal to the country and people; steadfast in the goal of serving the country and people (ET1); Civil servants have good political and ideological qualities and lifestyle; are exemplary in abiding by the law and uniting in the collective for the common good (ET2); Civil servants are ready to work and take responsibility for assigned tasks; devotedly serve the people, respond to legitimate requests and ensure the rights and interests of the people (ET3).

- Second, the level is the standard of knowledge, professional skills, and social understanding of civil servants, meeting the title standards and job position requirements of civil servants; serving as the basis for civil servants to perform public duties effectively and efficiently. However, society is constantly moving, posing the requirement of self-study, self-training, updating, and supplementing in the practice of public service activities so that civil servants always complete their assigned tasks well. The scale "Qualifications" (QL) is explained to imply the following contents: Civil servants have knowledge, professional skills and social understanding that meet the standards of the civil servant position they are recruited and appointed for (QL1); Civil servants have knowledge, professional skills and social understanding that meet the requirements of the job position they are recruited and appointed for (QL2); Civil servants proactively study, practice, update and supplement their knowledge, professional skills and social understanding to always complete their assigned tasks well (QL3).

- Third, capacity is a professional standard to evaluate the performance of civil servants in the practice of public service. When civil servants have good capacity, demonstrated in their ability to advise, implement work, and control

work; they will easily realize ideas, plans, and work programs to turn them into products and become the content of evaluating the performance of public service. The scale "Capacity" (CP) is explained to imply the following contents: Civil servants have good consulting ability (problem identification, research, information synthesis), easily realize ideas, plans, work programs into products, achieve assigned work goals (CP1); Civil servants have good work implementation ability (determine content, implementation methods and arrange scientific resources), easily realize ideas, plans, work programs into products, achieve assigned work goals (CP2); Civil servants have good work control ability (proactively grasp information and analyze, evaluate work), easily realize ideas, plans, work programs into products, achieve assigned work goals (CP3).

Thus, the ethics, qualifications and capacity of civil servants are both components of the quality of civil servants and have a direct and decisive influence on the quality of civil servants. When civil servants have good ethics, qualifications and capacity, the work is carried out smoothly and achieves results and efficiency. With that meaning, the hypothesis put forward in this study is: *Ethics (H1), Qualification (H2), Capacity (H3) are the constituent content and are the factors that directly influence and affirm the quality of civil servants.*

With the above overview, the author has built a theoretical framework including a model of 4 scales, designed to assess the impact of ethics, qualifications, and capacity on the quality of civil servants. The scales include: 3 independent scales/variables "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP) and 01 dependent scale/variable "Quality of civil servant" (QCS). The four scales include 12 observed variables, designed by the author into 12 questions in the survey 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	Ethics	ET					
1	Civil servants are loyal to the country and people; steadfast in the goal of serving the country and people	ET1					
2	Civil servants have good political and ideological qualities and lifestyle; are exemplary in abiding by the law and uniting in the collective for the common good	ET2					
3	Civil servants are ready to work and take responsibility for assigned tasks; devotedly serve the people, respond to legitimate requests and ensure the rights and interests of the people	ET3					
II	Qualifications	QL					
4	Civil servants have knowledge, professional skills and social understanding that meet the standards of the civil servant position they are recruited and appointed for	QL1					
5	Civil servants have knowledge, professional skills and social understanding that meet the requirements of the job position they are recruited and appointed for	QL2					
6	Civil servants proactively study, practice, update and supplement their knowledge, professional skills and social understanding to always complete their assigned tasks well	QL3					
III	Capacity	CP					
7	Civil servants have good consulting ability (problem identification, research, information synthesis), easily realize ideas, plans, work programs into products, achieve assigned work goals	CP1					

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
8	Civil servants have good work implementation ability (determine content, implementation methods and arrange scientific resources), easily realize ideas, plans, work programs into products, achieve assigned work goals	CP2					
9	Civil servants have good work control ability (proactively grasp information and analyze, evaluate work), easily realize ideas, plans, work programs into products, achieve assigned work goals	CP3					
IV	Quality of civil servant	QCS					
10	Civil servants with good ethics, meeting the standards for the recruited job title and position and the political standards of civil service personnel	QCS1					
11	Civil servants with qualifications and social understanding, meeting the standards for the recruited job title and position and professional qualifications according to the law	QCS2					
12	Civil servants with good capacity, meeting the standards for the recruited job title and position and working capacity standards according to the law on assessing the quality of civil servants	QCS3					

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

Research model

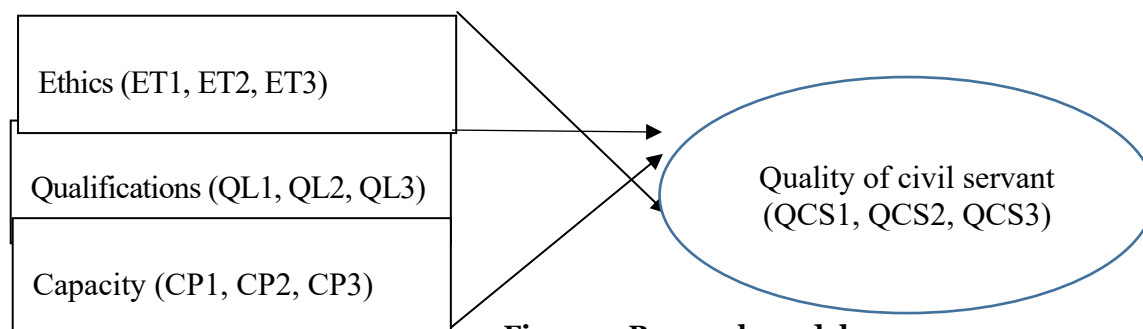


Figure 1. Research model

3. Research methods

- Qualitative method: The author uses this method through collecting and analyzing secondary data to build a theoretical research model.

- Quantitative method: The author used this method by surveying the opinions of 480 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including: Dien Bien Province (North), Nghe An Province (Central), Binh Phuoc Province (South). The survey was conducted in two steps: Preliminary survey and official survey.

+ Preliminary survey: With the research model of 4 scales, 12 observed variables and according to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), the minimum sample size needed to conduct quantitative research of this model is $N = 12 \times 5 = 60$. The author conducted a preliminary survey in Dien Bien province with a sample size of $N = 160$ leaders of commune-level government agencies ($N > 60$). The results of the preliminary survey in Dien Bien 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 $N = 480$ 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 author conducted preliminary interviews to capture information and distributed survey forms based on the consent of the survey respondents. The survey results collected 480/480 valid forms, achieving a response rate of 100%.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the collected survey data, statistics and reliability testing of the scales and observed variables in the research model were conducted. In quantitative research, according to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), the scale ensures reliability when reaching Cronbach's alpha value > 0.6 ; observed variables are reliable when reaching 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's Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1 Ethics (ET)	ET1	480	1	5	4.25	.554	.712	ET1 = .611
	ET2	480	1	5	4.19	.613		ET2 = .593
	ET3	480	1	5	4.22	.539		ET3 = .577
2. Qualifications (QL)	QL1	480	1	5	4.21	.569	.703	QL1 = .596
	QL2	480	1	5	4.18	.614		QL2 = .610
	QL3	480	1	5	4.15	.599		QL3 = .564
3. Capacity (CP)	CP1	480	1	5	4.03	.646	.672	CP1 = .388
	CP2	480	1	5	4.02	.661		CP2 = .410
	CP3	480	1	5	3.98	.673		CP3 = .399
4. Quality of civil servant (QCS)	QCS1	480	1	5	4.12	.619	.689	QCS1 = .533
	QCS2	480	1	5	4.13	.616		QCS2 = .449
	QCS3	480	1	5	4.09	.595		QCS3 = .431
Valid N (listwise)		480						

Source: Author's survey results

Data in Table 2 shows that observations on the scales "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP), "Quality of civil servant" (QCS) are all rated at an average level of Mean ≥ 3.98 , statistically significant according to the determined Likert scale (1-5). Commune-level government leaders all affirmed the quality of local civil servants, that civil servants have good ethics, meet the standards of titles, job positions and political standards of civil servants; have qualifications, social understanding, good capacity, meet the standards of titles, job positions and professional qualifications, work capacity standards according to the law.

In general, commune-level civil servants are assessed for quality in terms of ethics, qualifications and capacity. However, there are still certain differences in the observed values of the scales "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP). Accordingly, the observed variables of the scale "Capacity" (CP) are assessed at the lowest level with Mean (CP1) = 4.03, Mean (CP2) = 4.02, Mean (CP3) = 3.98, showing that local leaders assess many civil servants as having certain limitations in their advisory capacity, work implementation capacity and work control capacity. Accordingly, many civil

servants are limited in their ability to identify problems, research, synthesize information to perform advisory work; limited in their ability to determine content, implementation methods and scientifically arrange resources when implementing work; Limited ability to proactively grasp information and analyze and evaluate work, thereby not controlling work well.

The survey results with statistical data, summarized in Table 2, contribute to reflecting the practical working capacity of Vietnamese commune-level local civil servants, showing certain limitations in advisory capacity, work implementation capacity and work control capacity. This content is also mentioned by a number of studies, that although civil servants meet the standards of professional qualifications and good political qualities, their practical working capacity does not meet the requirements of serving the people, especially the requirements of working capacity in the context of developing digital society and digital government [Anh, M. et al., 2024]. From that practical basis, this study concludes that Vietnamese commune-level local civil servants have good ethics; have professional qualifications, social understanding that meet the standards of titles and job position requirements; however, there are still limitations in practical working capacity. In other words, the practical working capacity of local civil servants at the commune level is not commensurate with their professional qualifications and training, and needs to be improved to achieve results and effective task performance in practical public service activities.

Survey data in Table 2 shows that all 4 scales and 12 observed variables have standard test values (Cronbach's alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3). Therefore, these scales and observed variables continue to be used to conduct exploratory factor analysis to test the theoretical model of the study. The author conducts exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation 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.		.727
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1631.364
	df	66
	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	3.686	30.714	30.714	3.686	30.714	30.714	2.729	22.738	22.738
2	2.699	22.490	53.204	2.699	22.490	53.204	2.160	17.999	40.738
3	1.246	10.387	63.591	1.246	10.387	63.591	1.965	16.372	57.110
4	1.125	9.371	72.962	1.125	9.371	72.962	1.902	15.853	72.962
5	.876	7.300	80.263						
6	.695	5.788	86.051						
7	.500	4.166	90.217						
8	.428	3.564	93.780						
9	.250	2.080	95.860						
10	.238	1.987	97.847						
11	.173	1.444	99.292						
12	.085	.708	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
1. Ethics (ET)	ET1	.811			
	ET2	.808			
	ET3	.793			
2. Qualifications (QL)	QL1		.810		
	QL2		.799		
	QL3		.803		
3. Capacity (CP)	CP1			.789	
	CP2			.794	
	CP3			.792	
4. Quality of civil servant (QCS)	QCS1				.801
	QCS2				.806
	QCS3				.797
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 Sig. < 0.05 ; Eigenvalue ≥ 1 ; Total Variance Explained $\geq 50\%$; Factor Loading ≥ 0.5 . Data in Table 3 and Table 4 show:

+ KMO coefficient = $0.727 > 0.5$, 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 % = $72.962\% > 50\%$ (Table 3), showing that 72.962% 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 "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP) and 01 dependent variable "Quality of civil servant" (QCS) 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						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.124	.533		11.843	.000
	Ethics (ET)	.371	.284	.393	9.818	.000

Qualifications (QL)	.298	.242	.278	8.174	.000	1.802
Capacity (CP)	.241	.196	.182	6.859	.000	1.794
a. Dependent Variable: Quality of civil servant (QCS)						
R Square: 0.725; Durbin-Watson: 2.102						

Source: Author's survey results

The data in Table 5 shows:

+ R Square = 0.725, confirming that the scales "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP) explain 72.5% of the variation in the scale "Quality of civil servant" (QCS); VIF = 1.785, VIF = 1.802, VIF = 1.794 ($1 < \text{VIF} < 2$), showing that the regression model does not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.102 ($1 < d < 3$), showing that the regression model does not have autocorrelation, confirming that the scales "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP) are independent and have the same impact on the scale "Quality of civil servant" (QCS), confirming the suitability of the theoretical research model with the survey data set.

+ The regression coefficients of the three independent variables "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP) are all statistically significant Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) and have positive values: B(ET) = 0.371, B(QL) = 0.298 and B(CP) = 0.241, confirming the positive relationship between the three independent variables "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP) and one dependent variable "Quality of civil servant" (QCS); 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): $Y = B_0 + B_1 \cdot X_1 + B_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + B_i \cdot X_i + e$, the author determined the multivariate regression model of this study as follows: $\text{QCS} = 1.109 + 0.376 \cdot \text{ET} + 0.311 \cdot \text{QL} + 0.237 \cdot \text{CP}$

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: "Ethics" (ET), "Qualifications" (QL), "Capacity" (CP). This study contributes to further confirming the empirical results on the quality of local civil servants at the commune level in Vietnam, that civil servants have good ethics, meet the standards of titles, job positions and political standards of civil servants; have qualifications, social understanding, good capacity, meet the standards of titles, job positions and professional qualifications, working capacity standards according to the law. However, many civil servants are limited in their ability to identify problems, research, synthesize information to perform advisory work; limited in their ability to determine content, implementation methods and arrange scientific resources when implementing work; Limited ability to proactively grasp information and analyze and evaluate work, thereby not controlling work well.

Based on that practical basis, this study concludes that Vietnamese commune-level local civil servants have good ethics; have professional qualifications, and social understanding that meet the standards of their positions and job requirements; however, there are still limitations in practical working capacity - practical working capacity is not commensurate with the professional qualifications trained and fostered, and needs to be improved to achieve results and effective task performance in public service activities. This reality is raising the issue of needing to research and innovate in the management of civil servants at the local level, that local leaders need to focus on objectively assessing the practical working capacity of civil servants in public service activities; need to assess the quality of civil servants according to the competency framework for each job position. This issue needs to be carried out by localities in a uniform direction: Quantifying criteria for assessing the quality of civil servants according to job characteristics, according to title standards and job positions; Unify the assessment method and content of civil servant quality assessment to build a team of local civil servants that meets the requirements of serving the people in the context of developing digital society and digital government.

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