

A Study On Capacity And Work Performance Of Vietnamese Civil Servants

Nguyen Van Son^{1*}, Ngo Sy Trung², Dang Thanh Tuan³,
Tran Ba Loi⁴

¹National Academy of Public Administration Campus in the
Central Region, Vietnam;

*Corresponding author, Email: sonvn@napa.vn

²National Academy of Public Administration, Hanoi city, Vietnam;
Email: ngosytrung01@yahoo.com;

³National Academy of Public Administration Campus in Ho
Chi Minh city, Vietnam;
Email: tuanquynhon1985@gmail.com

⁴Industrial Park Union Binh Phuoc Province;
Email: tranbaloibp@gmail.com;

Abstract

Local civil servants in Vietnam are staffed to work in three provincial, district, and commune tiers of government agencies, in which the provincial one is responsible for overseeing all civil servants in the whole locality. Vietnamese law establishes criteria for judging civil servants' capacities and competency based on how well they fulfill their tasks. However, the capabilities defined by the statutory criteria for civil servant titles and their actual capacities in the working process varies. When evaluating civil servants, it is crucial to consider these two factors as they have an impact on their actual performance. The authors of this study focus on examining and assessing how "competence under title standards" and "practical capacity" affect the "work performance" of Vietnam's local civil servants. To represent the three regions of Vietnam, we surveyed 300 leaders of government agencies in the provinces of Thai Binh (Northern), Quang Ngai (Central), and Đong Thap (Southern). The research findings have demonstrated that local leaders tend to underestimate the Practical capacities of civil servants, confirming that it has not yet met the requirements of public service performance in the context of social development management innovation. From these research findings, we have recommended policy changes for regional civil servants to promote their credentials to provide better public service.

Keywords: Local government; civil servants; Capacity; Work performance.

The Vietnamese local government's system of administrative agencies is made up of the following specialized agencies and categories of civil servants who carry out the state management function by the following industries and fields, or groups of industries and fields: Departments of the provincial government; Divisions of district government; and posts for civil servants in the commune-level administration. As of 2023, Vietnam has 63 province governments, 705 district governments, and 10,599 commune governments (GSO, 2023).

The competency requirements for civil servants and the criteria for evaluating their performance in their assigned tasks are outlined in Vietnamese legislation (VNA, 2008; VG, 2020). Based on these criteria, agencies and localities in charge of managing civil servants shall assess and categorize their work performance into four levels, namely, Excellent Accomplishment of Tasks, Good accomplishment of the Tasks, Accomplishment of the Tasks, and Non-accomplishment of Tasks. The general assessment is that local civil servants in Vietnam completed their yearly assignments; their quality has improved, and they are increasingly meeting the requirements of administrative reform; however, the capacity under title standards and in practice is still not equal, and even between urban, rural, and mountainous areas (VG, 2021; MOHA, 2022).

The above reality is widespread and evident in many localities leading to the fact that civil servants' work performance still falls short of what is needed for duties involving local development administration in the context of administrative reform. It is a management issue that is posing a challenge to local authorities. It is necessary to conduct research and surveys on the local civil servants' capabilities and work performance to address this problem. It is another reason why we are carrying out this research, which aims to evaluate the effects of "practical capacity" and "competence under title standards" on the "work performance" of local Vietnamese civil servants and recommend policies that are appropriate for real situations. We constructed a theoretical framework to conduct research and surveys of 300 leaders of government agencies in three provinces that represent three regions of Vietnam: Thai Binh (northern), Quang Ngai (central), and Dong Thap (southern).

2. Literature review

2.1. Competence of civil servants

The term "civil servants' competence" mentioned by many researchers refers to their caliber, working ability, and dedication to the civil service. According to Trung, N.S. et al (2022), it is the capability to perform the tasks assigned, mostly expressed by their work performance. This content is also emphasized in some other studies, which means the ability to complete tasks involves both "the ability to work independently" and "the ability to work collaboratively" (Thu, T.T. et al., 2013; Toan, P.D., 2018).

In the legal aspect, the legal documents by many countries often specify the competency requirements for different civil servant titles. These criteria are also explicitly stated in Vietnamese law, which serves as a basis for agencies and localities to manage, use and evaluate civil servants annually (VNA, 2008; VG, 2020). In actual management, agencies and localities base their evaluations of civil servants' work performance on their capacity in reality and the competency criteria associated with their titles. Hung, L.D. (2023) discussed this issue and showed that it is the element that most significantly affects the work performance of local civil servants at the commune level. In this study, along with the provisions of Vietnamese law, we selectively inherit and adopt the findings of previous studies to generate research content on the capacity of civil servants, including Competence according to their title standards and practical capabilities.

a) Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles (CST)

Competence according to the requirements of civil servant titles is determined by common standards of qualifications, awareness, and ability to perform tasks under their titles.

- CST1. Good professional, political, and legal awareness: Civil servants must be knowledgeable about the law and their professional disciplines, adhere to Party's guidelines and State policies and laws, and uphold agency-wide discipline and administrative rules.

- CST2. Strong ability to operate independently: Civil servants must always actively plan and organize work in their professional sectors; they must also be energetic, creative, daring to think, daring to do, and flexible in performing tasks. They must also follow a scientific, democratic, and fair working approach.

- CST3. Strong coordination skills: civil servants must be able to communicate, share information, and coordinate; they must also build and develop partnerships inside and outside the public service for mutual goals to achieve common professional success in their professions.

- CST4. Effective communication skills: While carrying out their assigned duties, public servants must act professionally, use appropriate language, and show respect for colleagues, businesses, and other individuals.

- CST5. Capacity to self-study, create, and adapt well to change: Civil servants regularly study and practice to supplement and refresh their knowledge and professional abilities, as well as to initiate initiatives at work; To be proactive and inventive in handling risks, they must be aware of the shifting trends in the professional and civil service sectors.

The content of state-issued policies shall be served as the foundation for the administration and evaluation of civil servants' competence according to civil servant title criteria. As a result, it is a

factor that influences how well they perform at work and is used as a metric by authorities to assess their level of quality.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Civil servants actively study and practice to maintain "competence according to civil servant title standards," which will improve their work performance and help to ensure the quality of their work and civil servants as required.

b) Practical capacities of civil servants (PCS)

The roles, tasks, and professional activities that civil servants engage in while carrying out their duties as the basis for determining their practical capacity. It includes organizing the implementation of policies, reviewing and evaluating how to perform tasks within the purview of local state administration, and consulting on policy-making.

- PCS1. Good advisory capacity. That is the thinking capacity needed to approach solving scientific problems; it is also the one needed to analyze, assess, critique, and realize ideas in order to satisfy the demands of a professional consulting job. For the purpose of consulting work in their respective sectors, civil servants must actively learn, augment their knowledge, skills, and competence, as well as conduct research and suggest new ideas and projects.

- PCS2. Strong task-performance skills. That is the capacity to recognize and assess timely, scientific work; to create a workable plan for the efficient execution of duties in a professional setting. To efficiently carry out assigned duties, this competence calls for civil servants' planning abilities, initiative, and inventiveness in responding to hazards in professional operations.

- PCS3. Digital capability to carry out duties in a digital setting. To improve the frequency and efficiency of receiving and handling dossiers and requests from businesses and individuals in their professional fields, civil servants must be able to apply information technology to solve their assignments, have digital skills, and are eligible for working in a digital environment.

- PCS4. Capability for testing and evaluating. It is the capacity to take proactive management of their workloads; the capacity to synthesize, learn from experience in a timely way, and appropriately change plans in order to consistently complete the tasks given to them in a professional setting. In order to perform their official duties effectively, civil officials must have the ability to examine and evaluate their work scientifically, actively understand the situation, and quickly identify and fix any faults or unreasonable issues.

The factor that most immediately reflects a civil servant's work performance is their practical capacity, which aids them in carrying out their responsibilities and functions in public service operations. Therefore, many nations have adopted practical competency standards

to assess work output and determine civil servant compensation, which has become a factor that significantly affects, primarily, their performance.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Civil servants actively pursue learning and practice to foster "practical capacity," which will improve their performance on the job and help to ensure the quality of civil servants in particular and the effectiveness of government agencies in general.

2.2. Work performance of civil servants (WPC)

One of the factors used to judge a civil servant's quality is their performance on the job. The criteria for evaluating the civil servant's work performance under Vietnamese law include guaranteeing progress in performing tasks, ensuring the standard of task execution, and fostering public satisfaction (VG, 2020). When creating criteria for evaluating civil servants, some other research (Tuyen, H.T.M., et al., 2022; Trung, N.S. et al, 2021) also made reference to the subject matter above.

- WPC1. Evaluating the allocated tasks' progress. The progress of the accomplishment of prescribed assignments is the responsibility of civil servants. These are regular jobs by the obligations and duties related to the employment position; there are also planned and unforeseen jobs.

- WPC2. Ensuring the quality of the task assigned. When carrying out their assignments, civil servants are in charge of making sure the job they do is of a high caliber. Every public service goal should try to achieve, and that is what each public servant and agency should do.

- WPC3. Create satisfaction for both people and businesses. It is a request that is in line with the government agency's political mission to serve the public. In light of this, civil servants must respect businesses and people, treat them fairly, and defend their legal rights and interests.

We developed a theoretical framework for study on the capability and effectiveness of local civil servants using the literature review mentioned above. The three scales that make up the theoretical framework are the "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" scale, the "Practical capacities of civil servants" scale (two independent variables), and the "Work performance of the civil servants" scale (1 dependent variable). The above scales include 11 observed variables, all of which are specified and used in this study as the theoretical foundation for empirical research. We designed the survey according to these 12 observed variables and measured by the 5-level Likert measure: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - No comments; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Research theoretical framework

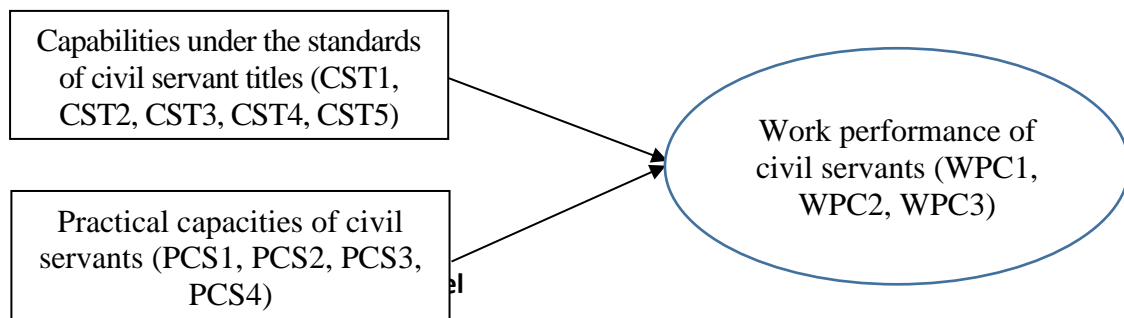
No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels
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			1	2	3	4	5
I	Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles	CST					
1	Good professional, political, and legal awareness	CST1					
2	Strong ability to operate independently	CST2					
3	Strong coordination skills	CST3					
4	Effective communication skills	CST4					
5	Capacity to self-study, create, and adapt well to change	CST5					
II	Practical capacities of civil servants	PCS					
1	Good advisory capacity	PCS1					
2	Strong task-performance skills	PCS2					
3	Digital capability to carry out duties in a digital setting	PCS3					
4	Capability for testing and evaluating	PCS4					
III	Work performance of civil servants	WPC					
1	Evaluating the allocated tasks' progress	WPC1					
2	Ensuring the quality of the task assigned	WPC2					
3	Create satisfaction for both people and businesses	WPC3					

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

After building the theoretical framework, we developed a research model with three factors, including two independent variables (Capability under the standards of civil servant titles; Practical capacities of civil servants) and one dependent variable (Work performance of Civil Servants). The built-in research hypotheses H1 and H2 demonstrate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Figure 1).

Research model



3. Research Methods

a) Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods were used in the literature review. We gathered and examined pertinent studies and synthesized state-produced legal documents to create a research theoretical framework and model that includes the following scales: Capability under the standard of civil

servant titles; Civil servants' actual capacity; Civil servants' work performance (Table 1, Figure 1).

b) Quantitative methods

Correlation and regression analyses are used in this study to test the research hypothesis and produce reliable research findings. When using the 3-scale model and the 12 observed variables from this investigation, the minimal sample size to be used is $N = 12 * 5 = 60$ (Hai, D.H. et al., 2018). We performed a survey of 300 ($N > 50$) agency leaders in the local government systems of three provinces that represent the northern, central, and southern halves of Vietnam: Thai Binh, Quang Ngai, and Đông Thap. The survey's findings are: 287/300 respondents agreed to respond, and 287/287 of those answer sheets were valid, resulting in a 100% valid response rate. According to the study sample's characteristics, the majority of survey respondents (219/287, or 76.3%) had more than three years of experience leading an agency within the local government system (Table 2).

Table 2. The study sample's descriptive statistics

Case Processing Summary						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender * Age * Time	287	100.0%	0	0.0%	287	100.0%

Gender * Age * Time Crosstabulation						
Count						
Time	Gender		Age			Total
			< 30	30-40	>40	
< 3 years	Gender	Male	24	21		45
		Female	17	6		23
	Total		41	27		68
3-5 years	Gender	Male		97		97
		Female		45		45
	Total			142		142
> 5 years	Gender	Male			37	37
		Female			40	40
	Total				77	77
Total	Gender	Male	24	118	37	179
		Female	17	51	40	108

Total	41	169	77	287
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Source: Author's survey results

We tested the scale with statistics, performed correlation and regression analyses on the data we acquired, and tested the research hypothesis.

4. Research findings

To determine the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model, we did a statistical analysis and tested Cronbach's Alpha. According to Hai, D.H. et al. (2018), the scale was reliable when it reached Cronbach's alpha > 0.6; The observed variable is reliable when it achieves the Corrected Item-Total Correlation value > 0.3. Table 3 below presents the statistical and test results.

Table 3. Statistical and scale testing results

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach ' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles (CST)	CST1	287	1	5	4.06	.477	.840	CST = .637
	CST2	287	1	5	4.28	.506		CST = .697
	CST3	287	1	5	4.15	.548		CST = .694
	CST4	287	1	5	4.11	.517		CST = .717
	CST5	287	1	5	3.99	.609		CST = .510
2. Practical capacities of civil servants (PCS)	PCS1	287	2	5	4.07	.548	.681	PCS1 = .492
	PCS2	287	2	5	4.09	.489		PCS2 = .637
	PCS3	287	1	5	3.52	.738		PCS3 = .314
	PCS4	287	2	5	4.04	.511		PCS4 = .509
3. Work performance of civil servants (WPC)	WPC1	287	2	5	4.06	.606	.752	WPC1 = .660
	WPC2	287	2	5	4.16	.497		WPC2 = .549
	WPC3	287	1	5	3.93	.647		WPC3 = .556
Valid N (listwise)		287						

Source: Author's survey results

Data from Table 3 demonstrate:

+ According to the identified 5-level Likert measure, the scales "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST), "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS), and "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC) are all rated at Mean > 3.5, which is of statistical significance. Only the observed variable "Digital capacity to perform work in the digital environment" (PCS3) was assessed at the lowest level, with Mean = 3.52, demonstrating the civil servants' practical application of digital competence and information technology. They can only

accomplish a few inadequate professional tasks when working in a digital environment.

+ Cronbach's alpha > 0.6 and Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3 are the model's standardized test scores for the three scales and the 12 observed variables. To examine the relationship between the independent variables "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST) and "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS) and the dependent variable "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC), correlation and regression analyses are still performed using these scales.

Table 4. Results of the scales' correlation tests

Correlations

		PCS	CST	WPC
PCS	Pearson Correlation	1	.732**	.630**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	287	287	287
CST	Pearson Correlation	.732**	1	.688**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	287	287	287
WPC	Pearson Correlation	.630**	.688**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	287	287	287

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author's survey results

Table 5. The outcomes of multivariable regression

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.560	.209		2.675	.008	
	Practical capacities of civil servants (PCS)	.317	.071	.274	4.477	.000	1.654
	Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles (CST)	.557	.070	.487	7.974	.000	1.654

a. Dependent Variable: Work performance of civil servants (WPC)

R Square = .504

Durbin-Watson = 2.008

Source: Author's survey results

The scales in Table 4's correlation analysis results demonstrate that:

+ The scales' correlation coefficients reach the value $0 < r < 1$, indicating a positive correlation between the independent variables "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST) and "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS) and the dependent variable "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC).

+ The r values > 0.5 also demonstrate a close correlation between "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST), "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS) and "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC), with the "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS) ($r = .630$) being rated lower than "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST) ($r = .688$).

The regression analysis data in Table 5 indicate that:

+ R Square = .504, confirming that the scales "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST), and "Practical capacities of civil servants" (TH) explain 50.4% of the variation of the scale "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC).

+ The regression model's $VIF = 1.654$ ($1 < VIF < 2$) value demonstrating that the model does not have multicollinearity, confirms the independence of the scales "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST) and "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS), as well as their influence on the scale "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC).

+ Durbin-Watson = 2008 ($1 < d < 3$), demonstrating the absence of autocorrelation in the regression model. The scales "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST) and "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS) are correlated with the scale "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC), as evidenced by the regression coefficients of two independent variables "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST) and "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS), which are both statistically significant (Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05)).

+ The unstandardized regression coefficients have positive values, B (PCS) = 0.317, and B (CST) = 0.557, indicating that the independent variables "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST), "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS), and the dependent variable "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC) have a positive relationship.

Using the generic regression model proposed by Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), which reads: $Y = B_0 + B_1 \cdot X_1 + B_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + B_i \cdot X_i$, we arrived at the following multivariable regression model:

$$WPC = 0.560 + 0.317 \cdot PCS + 0.557 \cdot CST$$

+ The standardized regression coefficients: B (PCS) = 0.317, and B (CST) = 0.557, support the correlation between the independent and dependent variables, titled "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS) and "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST), in ascending order.

5. Conclusion

The two independent variables "Capabilities under the standards of civil servant titles" (CST), "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS), and 01 dependent variable "Work performance of civil servants" (WPC) can be seen to have a positive relationship based on the correlation coefficient ($0 < r < 1$) and the standardized regression coefficient ($\text{Beta} > 0$); Hypotheses H1, H2 are accepted.

The results of correlation and regression analysis demonstrated that leaders rate the "Practical capacities of civil servants" (PCS) at a low level, with "Digital capacity to perform tasks in the digital environment" (PCS3) rated at the lowest level with Mean = 3.52 (Table 3), demonstrating the ability to use information technology and digital competence in carrying out civil servants' professional responsibilities when working in a digital world is constrained and inadequate.

From the findings of this study, we propose the following as the contents of policies on retraining civil servants: (1) develop and implement a program to build digital literacy among all civil servants and to deploy synchronization; (2) Encourage active study among civil servants to augment and update their understanding of the digital transition and to increase their ability to function practically in the digital environment. This policy content will assist localities in more accurately assessing the quality of civil servants, assist civil servants in acquiring new knowledge and skills in line with the development trend of digital technology in social management, and ensure the operational efficiency of government agencies while meeting the demands of administrative reform, digital transformation, and serving businesses and the general public.

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