

VIETNAMESE LOCAL CIVIL SERVANTS' PUBLIC SERVICE ETHICS AND CULTURE

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Abstract - Vietnamese local civil servants, which are mainly commune-level civil ones, are identified with the roles and responsibilities of implementing the nation's policies while providing services to a population diversity in ethnicity, culture, and religion. The local population's characteristics are the determining factors, creating the commune-level civil servants' civil service culture, ethics and affecting the outcomes of their work performance. This paper focuses on the analysis of the effects of civil service culture and ethics on the performance outcomes of commune-level civil servants. After developing a theoretical framework for the study, the author polled 360 respondents who had at least three transactions with their local commune government in the last five years. The survey's goal is to gather public opinions on civil service culture and ethics, and work performance results of commune-level civil servants in the locality. Vietnam's five provinces under study are Nam Định and Thai Binh (in the North), Quang Tri (in the Central), and Đồng Nai, Tây Ninh (in the South). According to research findings, people undervalue the civil service culture of commune-level civil servants, which has an impact on their ability to perform tasks. Accordingly, the author suggests that local features should be taken into account in the field of governance in order to improve the quality of Vietnam's commune-level civil servants.

Keywords: Local civil servants; Commune-level civil servants; Civil service culture; civil service ethics; Work performance results.

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INTRODUCTION

There are two categories of public servants in Vietnam: the central level and the local level. GSO figures from 2023 show that there are 63 provincial administrative units with 58 provinces and 5 centrally-run cities; the district-level administrative units, with 705 districts, urban districts, towns, provincial cities, and cities under the central government, are below the provincial administrative units; the commune-level administrative units are below the district-level administrative units with 10.599 communes, wards, and townships [2].

In the locality, commune-level civil servants are human resources to perform tasks at the lowest government level at the three-tier local government apparatus (province, district, and commune). Commune-level civil servants are those living in such residential areas and often interact directly with people and address the requirements of people who are of many different ethnicity, culture, and religion. This characteristic has contributed to the distinctive features of the commune level, i.e., in addition to the general principles stipulated by law, the management operations by the commune government include aspects related to the demographics and regional differences in local culture. It



also forms a unique feature in the civil service culture and ethics of commune-level civil servants when compared to the ones at district and provincial levels, which have an impact on their work performance outcomes. While receiving the designation of Accomplishment of Tasks every year, that result is not commensurate with the State's investment in commune-level public servant policies. In many localities, commune-level civil servants exhibit weaknesses in civil service culture and morality as the policies have been implemented in a timely manner or in a manner that satisfies the needs of serving the people [14]. This is posing challenges for local managers in improving the quality and effectiveness of civil servants and government agencies.

Given the mentioned fact, it is imperative to research and assess the civil service culture and ethics of commune-level civil servants. This study aimed to gather empirical data for the State's management and policy-making of commune-level civil servants. To evaluate the civil service culture and ethics of commune-level civil servants in the localities where they live, the author undertakes theoretical research and polls 360 people in 5 provinces representing three regions of Vietnam. The survey results give the author objective data from which to draw research conclusions and policy recommendations that are appropriate for the Vietnamese context in the present and future.

1. Literature Review

Civil service culture (SC)

The ethical norms and values of civil servants in the performance of public service operations are frequently referred to as civil service culture. While discussing the civil service culture of civil servants, some researchers emphasize values, a crucial component of culture. This approach stems from the cultural perspective and affirms that the civil service culture is the set of values that underpins all of the organization's operations [5]. Another way to examine civil service culture is the organization's values, norms, beliefs, and conventions. The behaviors of an organization's members are governed by such values and beliefs that are shared internally and become an organization's tradition [1]. Although the above-mentioned researchers have different perspectives when addressing civil service culture, they all stress the values of the civil service. In order to serve the interests of the state, the people, and society, these values foster trust and cohesion among civil servants.

In management activities, countries all over the world are keen on developing a culture of civil service based on promoting traditional values from the nation's history to serve the people. In Vietnam, building a civil service culture is identified as a prime objective of Vietnam's state administrative reform process toward professionalism, modernization, and serving the people [14]. The fundamental elements of the civil service culture are specifically exemplified in the direction, guidance, and leadership of the Prime Minister, including (1) Compliance with administrative disciplines; (2) Cooperation and responsibility at work; (2) Dedication to serving the people [7]. It is a direct legal basis for each agency and civil servant to develop a civil service culture to ensure administrative discipline, efficiency in public service activities, and serving the people.

- SC1. Compliance with administrative disciplines: Civil servants adhere to work regulations, which include only abiding by the law when handling affairs (such as professional tasks or people's requests); not handling their tasks emotionally; and not allowing other factors to influence how they solve problems.

- SC2. Cooperation and responsibility at work: civil servants have a duty to respect and cooperate with colleagues, act appropriately around superiors, subordinates, and peers, and have a spirit of coordination when performing tasks to complete them on schedule and to a high standard. They must jointly share accountability for the assigned tasks' progress and quality.

- SC3. Dedication to serving the people: Public servants should respect the people, be willing to serve, and do so devotedly to protect the rights and interests of the people, using work performance outcomes and people's satisfaction as metrics to gauge their working capacity and work effectiveness.

There are similarities between managers' and researchers' perceptions of civil service culture. Managerial decisions (legal requirements) regarding civil service culture are frequently based on data from study findings. In this paper, the author uses the provisions of the law as a basis for the analysis and assessment of civil servants' civil service culture with the goals of analyzing and evaluating reality and demonstrating the impact of civil service culture on the work performance outcomes of Vietnamese commune-level civil servants. These provisions are Compliance with administrative disciplines; Cooperation and responsibility at work; and Dedication to serving the people.

Public service ethics (SE)

Public service ethics are approached in many aspects, including politics, law, and culture. According to the researcher K.Kernaghan (1994), in terms of culture, ethical norms are a part of the civil service culture. In the legal aspect, “public service ethics is the attitude, behavior, conduct, performance of duties and obligations of civil servants when performing official duties” [8]; Alternatively, “public service ethics is a system of principles and rules of conduct in public service activities to regulate the behavior, attitude, conduct, and responsibilities of public servants while performing their official duties” [4]. In terms of politics, L.S.Tung (2021) affirms that “the civil service ethics of civil servants represent the democracy that public servants perform when serving the people” [11]. On the other hand, the study by H.V.Thoi (2016) underlined that “public service ethics is the synthesis of two groups of social ethics and personal ethics of civil servants in performing official duties; it is constituted by the perceptions of politics, responsibilities, and attitudes of civil servants toward carrying out official duties” [9].

In state management operations, the issue of public service ethics is often defined by countries as norms for assessing the quality of civil servants. In Vietnam, the law stipulates that public service ethics are the criterion for rating civil servants, including the following components: (1) Good political awareness, (2) Good professional sense (Professionalism), and (3) Good sense of discipline [12], [13].

- SE1. Good political awareness: Civil servants should be loyal to the fatherland and the nation's political goals. They shall place the interests of the nation, the people, and the collective above their own while being unwavering political stances and devotedly serving the people.

- SE2. Good professional sense (Professionalism): Civil servants are answerable for their assigned tasks, accomplishing them on schedule and to a high standard. They maintain a proper attitude and respect for colleagues and people while solving their affairs. They uphold democracy and true values when carrying out their official duties.

- SE3. Good sense of discipline: Civil servants adhere strictly to the Party's guidelines and lines, the State's policies and laws, and the regulations of the working agency. Also, they shall strictly and precisely abide by the agency's assignment and the work reporting regime.

All the above researchers' and managers' points of view emphasized civil servants' attitudes, behaviors, conduct, and obligations. The author of this paper analyzes and assesses the public service ethics of commune-level civil servants based on the issues mentioned above and the provisions of Vietnamese law, namely Good political awareness; Good professional sense (professionalism); and Good sense of discipline.

Work performance results of civil servants (WPR)

One of the criteria for assessing the actual quality of civil servants is their work performance outcomes. This is a matter regulated by national legislation and mentioned in numerous academic studies [10]. In Vietnam, the term “work performance results” is precisely defined in Vietnamese law to mean three things (1) Guaranteeing task execution progress, (2) Assuring task execution effectiveness, and (3) Making people satisfied [12], [13].

- WPR1. Guaranteeing task execution progress. Civil servants perform tasks according to their job positions. Each task assigned has a due date. It is a deadline for task performance outcomes. Therefore, they are responsible for adhering to the schedule. Otherwise, they will need to provide explanations for why it was not followed and accept full responsibility for any losses.

- WPR2: Assuring task execution effectiveness. Any task given to civil servants must achieve effectiveness objectives. It is a prerequisite for content, as it helps demonstrate how capable civil servants are in real-task situations. As a result, they are accountable for ensuring the effectiveness of the tasks they have been given to perform.

- WPR3. Making people satisfied: Civil servants should devotedly serve the populace. One of the criteria used to evaluate civil servants' performance is how contented the public is. Hence, when resolving people's requests, civil servants must respect them, treat them fairly, and defend their legal rights and interests.

From the literature review on civil service culture, ethics, and work performance outcomes of civil servants, the author develops a research theoretical framework and model with two independent variables (civil service culture and ethics) and one dependent variable (work performance outcomes of civil servants), totaling nine observable variables. A research model examined the effects of civil service culture and ethics on the work performance outcomes of commune-level civil servants. The

following observed variables were used in the survey's design and measured by the 5-level Likert scale (1) - Strongly disagree, (2) - Disagree, (3) - No comments, (4) - Agree, and (5) - Strongly agree (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. A theoretical framework for research on civil service culture, ethics, and work performance results of commune-level civil servants

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	Civil service culture	SC					
1	Compliance with administrative disciplines	SC1					
2	Cooperation and responsibility at work	SC2					
3	Dedication to serving the people	SC3					
II	Public service ethics	SE					
1	Good political awareness	SE1					
2	Good professional sense	SE2					
3	Good sense of discipline	SE3					
III	Work performance results	WPR					
1	Guaranteeing task execution progress	WPR1					
2	Assuring task execution effectiveness	WPR2					
3	Making people satisfied	WPR3					

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

Research model

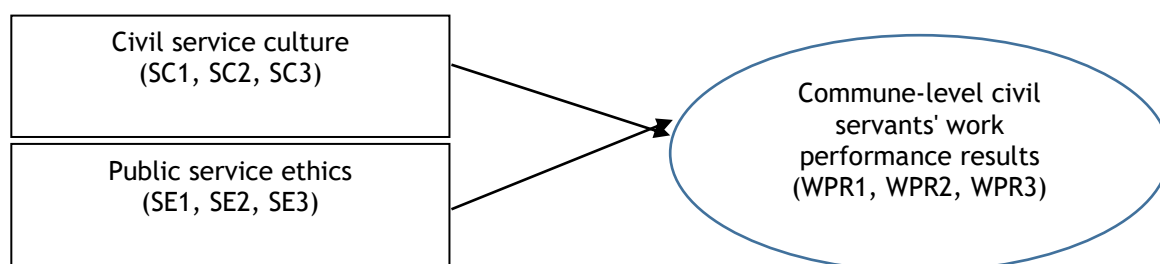


Figure 1. Research model

Research hypothesis

H1: Civil service culture have a correlation/impact on commune-level civil servants' work performance results.

H2: Public service ethics have a correlation/impact on commune-level civil servants' work performance results.

2. Research methods

In this paper, the author primarily employs two qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative method

Secondary data are gathered from publications and analyzed as part of the qualitative method. The author then synthesized and refined pertaining research contents before constructing a theoretical framework with three scales: (1) Civil service culture of commune-level civil servants, (2) Public service ethics of commune-level civil servants, and (3) Work performance outcomes of commune-level civil servants (Table 1, Figure 1).

Quantitative method

The qualitative method is carried out through the collection and analysis of primary data in the form of a survey, which consists of two stages, namely a Preliminary survey, and an Official survey.

- Preliminary survey

In order to analyze the scales' unidirectionality, convergent value, and discriminant value in this study, the author used exploratory factor analysis. According to J.F.Hair et al. (2009), the minimum sample size required for exploratory factor analysis for the 3-scale and 9-observed variable model in this study is $N = 9 \times 5 = 45$ [3]. Using a sample size of $N = 360 > 45$, the author conducted a poll of people's opinions to ensure the validity of the data collection. With a sample size of $N = 70$ participants, the author created a survey, finished it, and performed a preliminary one in Nam Dinh province. Its findings demonstrate the dependability of all three scales and the nine variables observed, allowing for their use in the official survey's larger sample size.

- Official survey

The author conducted an official survey in five provinces representing three regions of Vietnam: Nam Dinh and Thai Binh (in the North), Quang Tri (in the Central), Dong Nai and Tay Ninh (in the South). The respondents had at least three dealings with their local commune authority in the last five years. After the author's initial interview with them, the poll was conducted with their permission. The survey's findings show that 360/360 participants agreed to respond, and 360/360 of those response forms were valid, yielding a 100% response rate. According to the study sample's characteristics, the majority of survey respondents (256/360 people, accounting for 71%) had more than five interactions with local government agencies in the last three years (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the study sample

Case Processing Summary						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender * Age * Frequency	360	100.0%	0	0.0%	360	100.0%

Gender * Age * Frequency Crosstabulation						
Count						
Frequency			Age			Total
			< 30	30-40	>40	
3-5 times	Gende	Male	41	29		70
		Female	20	14		34
	Total		61	43		104
6-10 times	Gende	Male		123		123
		Female		53		53
	Total			176		176
> 10 times	Gende	Male			37	37
		Female			43	43
	Total				80	80
Total	Gende	Male	41	152	37	230
		Female	20	67	43	130
	Total		61	219	80	360

Source: Author's survey results

Using the data collected from the survey, the author investigated the validity of the scales, observed variables, exploratory factor analysis, and regression analysis to test research hypotheses and came to research conclusions.

3. Research findings

To determine whether the observed scales and variables in the research model are reliable, the author conducts Cronbach's Alpha test. The requirements for their dependability are Cronbach's alpha > 0.6 and Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3 [3]. The test findings demonstrate the reliability of all three scales and nine observed variables (Table 3).

**Table 3. Scale test results**

STT	Scales	Observed variables	Reliability coefficients (Cronbach' Alpha)	The correlation coefficient of the smallest total variable
1	Civil service culture (SC)	SC1, SC2, SC3	.607	SC3 = .5.12
2	Public service ethics (SE)	SE1, SE2, SE3	.719	SE1 = .554
3	Commune-level civil servants' work performance results (WPR)	WPR1, WPR2, WPR3	.646	WPR1 = .367

Source: Author's survey results

All three scales and the nine observed variables in the research model were still employed to conduct exploratory factor analysis after the test value had attained the standard. The author conducted exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation to determine the scales' unidirectionality, convergence, and discriminant value. The findings are in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4. Total Variance Explained

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.803
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	2070.152
Approx. Chi-Square	
df	36
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	3.764	41.821	41.821	3.764	41.821	41.821	3.764	41.821	41.821
2	1.609	17.873	59.694	1.609	17.873	59.694	1.609	17.873	59.694
3	1.324	14.716	74.411	1.324	14.716	74.411	1.324	14.716	74.411
4	.877	9.742	84.153						
5	.555	6.168	90.321						
6	.343	3.811	94.131						
7	.281	3.121	97.253						
8	.173	1.923	99.175						
9	.074	.825	100.000						
10	.877	9.742	84.153						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Source: Author's survey results

Table 5. Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix ^a				
Scales	Observed variables	1	2	3
Civil service culture (SC)	SC1	.721		
	SC2	.723		
	SC3	.677		
Public service ethics (SE)	SE1		.741	
	SE2		.708	
	SE3		.784	
Commune-level civil servants' work performance results (WPR)	WPR1			.759
	WPR2			.621
	WPR3			.679

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

Source: Author's survey results

In quantitative research, exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the following values for the data set: $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$; Bartlett's test has an observed significance level of $\text{Sig.} < 0.05$; Eigenvalue ≥ 1 ; Total Variance Explained $\geq 50\%$; Factor Loading ≥ 0.5 [3].

Tables 4 and 5's data demonstrate that $KMO = 0.803 > 0.5$, indicating that exploratory factor analysis worked well with the given data set. The significance level for Bartlett's test is $\text{Sig.} = 0.000 < 0.05$, revealing that the observed variables have a linear correlation with the representative factors. Total Variance Explained and Cumulative % = $74.411\% > 50\%$ confirm 74.411% variation of such representative factors explained by observed variables with Factor Loading > 0.5 . It demonstrates that the observed variables gained a good statistical significance and were extracted into three elements corresponding to the initial three factors with Eigenvalues > 1 , exemplifying that the initial research model is maintained, including 01 dependent variable (WPR) and 02 independent variables (SC, SE) with a total of 9 observed variables gaining good statistical significance and can perform Multivariate linear regression analysis to examine the relationship of independent variables (SC, SE) and the dependent variable (WPR).

Table 6. Multivariable regression results

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.376	.112		12.329	.000	
	Civil service culture (SC)	.217	.032	.293	6.804	.000	1.856
	Public service ethics (SE)	.832	.037	.927	22.552	.000	1.856

a. Dependent Variable: Commune-level civil servants' work performance results (WPR)
Adjusted R Square: 0.741; Durbin-Watson: 2.015

Source: Author's survey results

The data presented in Table 6 reveals that the factors SC and SE account for 74.1% of the variation in the factor WPR in the research model, with an adjusted R Square value of 0.741. The data set fits the multivariate regression model created. The regression model's lack of multicollinearity is confirmed by the coefficient of variance exaggeration of the factors ($VIF = 1.856 < 2$). Durbin-Watson = 2.015 ($1 < d < 3$) proves no autocorrelation in the regression model. The regression coefficients of the two independent variables (SC, SE) are of statistical significance ($\text{Sig.} < 0.05$), demonstrating that they relate to the WPR. The research model's factors have a positive link based on the positive values of the unnormalized regression coefficients (B), and hypotheses H1 and H2 are acceptable.

Based on the generalized regression model by J.F.Hair et al. (2009): $Y = B_0 + B_1 \cdot X_1 + B_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + B_i \cdot X_i$ [3], the author determined the multivariate regression model for this study as follows:

$$WPR = 1.376 + 0.217 \cdot SC + 0.832 \cdot SE$$

Based on the standardized regression coefficient (Beta), it can be seen that the correlation level of the independent variables and the dependent variable in ascending order is Civil service culture (SC) and Civil service ethic (SE).

CONCLUSION

With the above analyzed and verified data, the research conclusion confirms that people underestimate commune-level civil servants' civil service culture (SC). It is a factor that significantly affects their Work performance results (WPR). From there, the author proposes several issues related to the reform of governance for local leaders to improve the quality of commune-level civil servants in Vietnam, namely (1) Implementing annual policies of retraining civil service culture for commune-level civil servants with content suitable to local cultural characteristics, (2) conducting an assessment of civil servants' civil service culture in a specific and scientific way, including internal assessment (done within the agency) and external assessment (collecting the people's opinions).

The retraining combined with the assessment of commune-level civil servants' civil service culture well implemented is of practical significance, which is: (1) To encourage commune-level civil servants to frequently update and complement to enhance the knowledge of civil service culture; to inculcate in them a culture of respect and collaboration with colleagues, serving the people, and adhering to working regulations; (2) helping local government agencies regularly check and evaluate civil servants'

spirits of cooperation, coordination, and service to have sufficient and multi-dimensional information about them in the process of performing their official duties.

Commune-level civil servants' well-executed civil service culture and ethics will be a crucial precondition to ensure the effective operations of local government agencies. When commune-level civil servants are regularly provided with knowledge and professional skills in culture and public service ethics, people will feel respected, served wholeheartedly, and more inclined to trust the local government. From there, local government agencies may effectively mobilize the people's engagement and material resources to promote community development.

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