

QUALIFICATIONS AND PRACTICAL CAPABILITIES OF LOCAL VIETNAMESE CIVIL SERVANTS

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Abstract - The constitution of Vietnam divides local government into three levels: province, district, and commune. The commune-level government is the lowest level of government; it is the agency responsible for directly implementing State policies and laws to the populace and defending their legal rights and interests. Hence, the work performance results of commune-level civil servants play an important role in validating the effectiveness of management activities and the prestige of government agencies. From a legal and practical standpoint, the work results of commune-level civil servants are reflected in the progress and quality of assigned tasks and affected by a variety of other factors, including subjective ones (their qualifications, capacities, and attitudes at work) and objective ones (working environment, facilities, technology, so on). This study refers to two subjective factors affecting their work performance results, namely professional qualifications and practical credentials. Its research objectives identified by the author are to evaluate and demonstrate the extent to which such factors affect the work performance results of commune-level civil servants. The author conducted a survey of 350 commune-level government agency leaders in five provinces representing the three regions of Vietnam, namely, Ninh Binh, Thanh Hoa (Northern), Nghe An (Central), and Tay Ninh, Ben Tre (Southern). According to the research findings, local authorities undervalue commune-level civil servants' practical credentials. Thereby, the author offers some policy recommendations for them to improve their qualifications and practical credentials for civil services.

Keywords: Local government; Commune-level civil servants; Professional qualifications; Practical credentials; Work performance results.

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INTRODUCTION

There are 63 provincial governments, 705 district governments, and 10.599 commune governments in Vietnam [2], [15]. Each level of government is composed of an elected body (known as the People's Council) and an executive body (known as the People's Committee), both of which are set up under legal principles and structure [11]. The staff employed in the commune-level government includes seven civil servants defined as the Chief police officer, Military chief commander, Administrative-statistics clerk, Land-construction-urban area - agriculture and environment officer, Financial controller-accountant, Justice-civil status officer and Culture- social affairs officer [6], [12].



The commune-level civil servants' annual work performance results are classified into four categories: Excellent Accomplishment of Tasks; Good Accomplishment of Tasks; Accomplishment of Tasks; Non-Accomplishment of Tasks [13]. According to the statistics from the Vietnam Ministry of Home Affairs, the vast majority of commune-level civil servants are annually categorized as Good Accomplishment of Tasks and Accomplishment of Tasks. They are standardized in terms of qualifications and professional skills, and local socio-economic development tasks are ensured to be well accomplished. Nonetheless, their qualifications, skills, and job experience are still unevenly distributed throughout urban, rural, and mountainous areas; in many regions, they have not met the actual requirements [7]. Due to this, their work performance results are still insufficient to meet local development governance requirements in the context of reform and serving the people [14].

The abovementioned fact places a limit on qualified human resources and presents difficulties for local authorities. In order to assist in solving this issue, it is vital to conduct research and surveys on the qualifications, capabilities, and working performance results of commune-level civil servants. In light of this, the objectives of this study were to provide management with scientific data for policies-making and developing commune-level civil servants. The author conducted theoretical research, surveyed, and gathered the opinions of 350 commune-level government agency leaders with at least three years of managerial experience from 5 provinces representing three regions of Vietnam: Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa (Northern), Nghe An (Central), Tay Ninh and Ben Tre (Southern). Its findings provided objective data for the author to formulate research conclusions and policy recommendations suitable to Vietnam's contexts.

1. Literature Review

Qualifications and professional skills of civil servants (QPS)

In general terms, civil servants' qualifications and professional skills are the knowledge, credentials, and skills they received through training before being recruited as civil servants. At the same time, they continue to get training to meet the agency's mission requirements at every stage of development. It is a demonstrated and easily discernible criterion based on their diplomas and certificates and is an essential requirement for them to successfully perform their assigned tasks. Numerous researchers in the field of human resource management affirm that credentials and professional skills are the fundamental and essential criteria for evaluating the capability or quality of human resources in every organization [1], [3].

Vietnamese law stipulates criteria on civil servants' qualifications and professional skills, standards for their ranks (such as employees, officers, specialists, principal specialists, and senior specialists), and requirements for job positions; Additionally, they need also meet the basic requirements for foreign language proficiency, informatics skills, and state management expertise [10]. While evaluating the quality of civil servants, many researchers also take these standards into consideration [9]. Considering the provisions of current Vietnamese legislation and the indicated earlier research findings, the author outlines the requirements for qualifications and professional skills of commune-level civil servants, including:

- QPS1. Meeting the standards on qualifications and professional skills. Commune-level civil servants' qualifications and professional skills meet the requirements set forth by the civil servant ranks prescribed for each rank (specialists, principal specialists, and senior specialists), as evidenced by diplomas granted by reputable educational institutions.
- QPS2. Meeting the standards on foreign language proficiencies and informatics skills. Commune-level civil servants' foreign languages proficiencies and informatics skills meet the requirements set forth by the job positions, as evidenced by diplomas and certificates granted by competent agencies.
- QPS3. Meeting the standards on state management knowledge. Commune-level civil servants' state management knowledge satisfies the requirements outlined by the civil servant ranks mandated for each rank (specialists, principal specialists, and senior specialists), as evidenced by diplomas and certificates granted by competent agencies.

- QPS4. Acquiring specialized knowledge and skills to meet the requirements of the job positions. Commune-level civil servants' specialized knowledge and skills satisfy the job position requirements reflected in the annual training, which is quite diverse in content according to all areas of expertise in state management activities associated with the job position requirements they undertake.

In addition to assuring standards on the form (diplomas, certificates), the professional qualifications and skills shall also be expressed under the content (work performance). So, to effectively complete their assigned tasks, commune-level civil servants must make the most of their newly acquired knowledge and skills. The quality of civil servants is only then accurately reflected by their professional training and capabilities.

Civil servants' practical capabilities (CPC)

Numerous works in the field of research discuss the practical competencies required of civil servants, such as the ability to effectively and efficiently carry out the assigned tasks [9] or the capacity to perform the tasks well due to possessing ethical qualities and professional qualifications [1]. In the field of management, the competency standards for civil servants per job position are clearly stated in Vietnam's Law on Cadres and Civil Servants [10]. According to these approaches, civil servants' capabilities can be understood as the ability to perform assigned tasks under their qualities, qualifications and skills to meet job position requirements.

In terms of legal perspective, commune-level civil servants shall conduct such functions and tasks as advising on policy and legal planning, managing the implementation of laws and policies, inspecting and assessing how duties that fall under local state management are carried out [10], [11]. Every year, governmental agencies examine the civil servants' credentials in relation to the demands of the job position. The following specific contents indicated are advising capability, capability to organize and perform tasks, capability to evaluate and assess.

- CPC1. Good advising capacity. It is the capacity to advise on policy-making and professional operations in professional fields associated with employment positions in the agency. It requires civil servants to possess competences necessary for consulting, including the capacity to research, synthesize, and draft documents. This capacity is essential for all work to be transformed from an idea into a specific professional product to advise the competent authorities in making implementation decisions.

- CPC2. Good organizational capacity to perform tasks. It is the ability to organize the implementation of professional assignments to ensure the progress and quality of the assigned tasks. It requires civil servants to recognize and analyze the situations of performing professional functions in a scientific and timely manner and to develop a plan to execute the tasks reasonably and feasibly.

- CPC3. The capacity to check and assess accurately: This is the capacity for proactive work control. It requires civil servants to actively grasp situations, identify them and swiftly fix faults or irrational and unsuitable issues to advise, develop and adjust policies and plans to achieve high results while carrying out their official duties.

Work performance results of civil servants (WPR)

The outcomes of their work performance are among the criteria used to assess a civil servant's quality. It is often regulated by national legislation and cited in numerous research [8]. Vietnamese law also clearly states that work performance outcomes, which are expressed in three ways: ensuring the progress of the assigned work; ensuring the quality of the assigned work performance; and making people satisfied, are among the contents of the annual civil servant evaluation [13].

- WPR1. Ensuring assigned tasks must be completed on schedule. Each task assigned in public service operations has a due date for completion. The commune-level civil servants are in charge of ensuring the progress of task execution under the established plan or any specifically allocated tasks.

- WPR2. Ensuring the quality of the assigned work performance. In public service operations, each task assigned achieves a product quality goal. Commune-level civil servants are responsible for ensuring the quality of task execution under the established plan or any specifically allocated tasks.

- WPR3. Make people satisfied. Commune-level civil servants have the responsibility to wholeheartedly serve the people, respect the people, treat the people fairly, and defend the people's legitimate rights and interests. Consequently, the standard for assessing civil servants is whether they satisfy the public while dealing with their demands.

The author's theoretical framework for research on the qualifications, professional skills, and practical capacity, and work performance results of commune-level civil servants was developed by the mentioned-above literature review. Three scales included in the theoretical framework are the scale of commune-level civil servants' work performance results (one dependent variable), the scale of civil servants' qualifications, profession, and the scale of civil servants' practical capacity (02 independent variables). The mentioned scales contain ten observable variables that have been defined to assist in the study of the factors like commune-level civil servants' qualifications, professional skills, practical abilities, and working performance outcomes. They were observed and used in the survey's design based on a 5-level Likert scale: 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 | | | | |
|-----|--|------------|---------------|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I | Qualifications and professional skills of civil servants | QPS | | | | | |
| 1 | Meeting the standards on qualifications and professional skills | QPS1 | | | | | |
| 2 | Meeting the standards on foreign language proficiencies and informatics skills | QPS2 | | | | | |
| 3 | Meeting the standards on state management knowledge | QPS3 | | | | | |
| 4 | Acquiring specialized knowledge and skills to meet the requirements of the job positions | QPS4 | | | | | |
| II | Civil servants' practical capabilities | CPC | | | | | |
| 1 | Good advising capacity | CPC1 | | | | | |
| 2 | Good organizational capacity to perform tasks | CPC2 | | | | | |
| 3 | The capacity to check and assess accurately | CPC3 | | | | | |
| III | Work performance results of civil servants | WPR | | | | | |
| 1 | Ensuring assigned tasks must be completed on schedule | WPR1 | | | | | |
| 2 | Ensuring the quality of the assigned work performance | WPR2 | | | | | |
| 3 | Make people satisfied | WPR3 | | | | | |

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

Research model

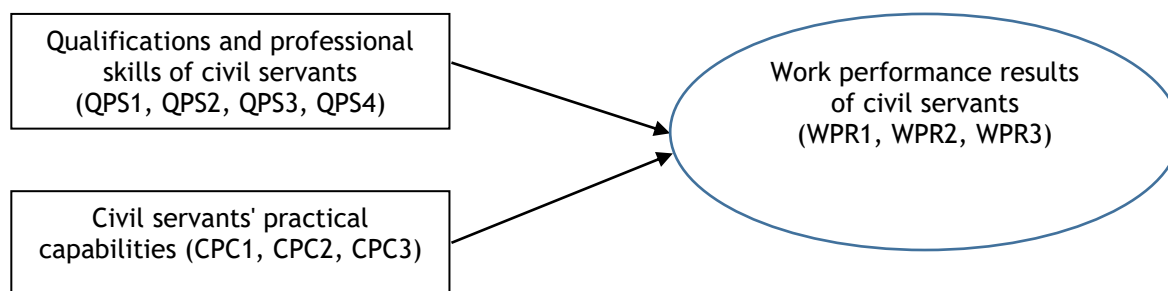


Figure 1. Research model

Research hypothesis

H1: Qualifications and professional skills have a correlation/impact on commune-level civil servants' work performance results.

H2: Civil servants' practical capabilities have a correlation/impact on commune-level civil servants' work performance results.

2. Research methods

Qualitative method

Qualitative methods are employed to analyze related studies and synthesize state legal documents to develop theoretical frameworks and models for the research. The major research contents are distilled by the author after gathering and analyzing publications into the scales: Qualifications and professional skills of commune-level civil servants, Practical ability of commune-level civil servants, and Work performance results of commune-level civil servants (Table 1, Figure 1).

Quantitative method

To verify the study's hypothesis, this study performed exploratory factor analysis and regression analysis. The 3-scale and 10-variable model of this study's exploratory factor analysis requires a minimum sample size of $N = 10 \times 5 = 50$ [4]. The author carried out the formal survey with a sample size $N = 300 > 50$ to assure the reliability of the data. The poll was conducted in five provinces representing Vietnam's three geographic regions: Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa (in the North), Nghe An (in the Central), Tay Ninh and Ben Tre (in the South). The respondents have at least three years of experience as leaders of commune-level governmental bodies. 350 out of 350 respondents agreed to respond, and 350 out of 350 answer sheets were valid, yielding a 100% valid response rate. According to the study sample's characteristics, the majority of participants (245/350, or 70%) had worked as a leader of a commune-level government agency for more than five years (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the study sample

| Gender * Age * Time Crosstabulation | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|------|-------|-----|-------|
| Count | | | | | | |
| Time | | | Age | | | Total |
| | | | < 35 | 36-45 | >45 | |
| 3-5 years | Gender | Male | 32 | 29 | | 61 |
| | | Female | 24 | 20 | | 44 |
| | Total | | 56 | 49 | | 105 |
| 6-10 years | Gender | Male | | 119 | | 119 |
| | | Female | | 45 | | 45 |
| | Total | | | 164 | | 164 |
| > 10 years | Gender | Male | | | 41 | 41 |
| | | Female | | | 40 | 40 |
| | Total | | | | 81 | 81 |
| Total | Gender | Male | 32 | 148 | 41 | 221 |
| | | Female | 24 | 65 | 40 | 129 |
| | Total | | 56 | 213 | 81 | 350 |

Source: Author's survey results

The author tested the scales, exploratory factor analysis, and regression analysis on the data collected to validate the study hypothesis.

3. Research results

The author tests the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model. According to D.H.Hai et al., the scale ensures reliability when reaching the Cronbach alpha value > 0.6; All observed variables have reliability when getting the Corrected Item-Total Correlation value > 0.3 [4]. The test results show that all three scales and ten observed variables are reliable for further analysis (Table 3).

Table 3. Scale test results

| STT | Scales | Observed variables | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Reliability coefficients (Cronbach' Alpha) |
|-----|--|--------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Qualifications and professional skills of civil servants (QPS) | TĐ1 | .336 | .724 |
| | | TĐ2 | .576 | |
| | | TĐ3 | .515 | |
| | | TĐ4 | .661 | |
| 2 | Civil servants' practical capabilities (CPC) | NL1 | .416 | .717 |
| | | NL2 | .522 | |
| | | NL3 | .466 | |
| 3 | Work performance results of civil servants (WPR) | KQ1 | .521 | .676 |
| | | KQ2 | .581 | |
| | | KQ3 | .525 | |

Source: Author's survey results

Next, the author tests exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation to preliminary evaluate the scales' unidirectionality, convergence value, and discriminant value (Table 4, Table 5).

Table 4. Total Variance Explained

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 | 5.177 | 51.771 | 51.771 | 5.177 | 51.771 | 51.771 | 4.200 | 42.004 | 42.004 |
| 2 | 1.432 | 14.323 | 66.094 | 1.432 | 14.323 | 66.094 | 2.192 | 21.915 | 63.919 |
| 3 | 1.031 | 10.311 | 76.405 | 1.031 | 10.311 | 76.405 | 1.249 | 12.486 | 76.405 |
| 4 | .877 | 8.774 | 85.179 | | | | | | |
| 5 | .445 | 4.449 | 89.629 | | | | | | |
| 6 | .387 | 3.875 | 93.504 | | | | | | |
| 7 | .300 | 3.002 | 96.506 | | | | | | |
| 8 | .253 | 2.529 | 99.035 | | | | | | |
| 9 | .058 | .577 | 99.612 | | | | | | |
| 10 | .039 | .388 | 100.000 | | | | | | |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: KMO = .821
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 2942.721; df = 45; Sig. = .000

Source: Author's survey results

Table 5. Rotated Component Matrix

| Rotated Component Matrix ^a | | | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------|------|------|
| Scales | Observed variables | Component | | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Qualifications and professional skills of civil servants (QPS) | TĐ1 | .886 | | |
| | TĐ2 | .821 | | |
| | TĐ3 | .815 | | |
| | TĐ4 | .754 | | |
| Civil servants' practical capabilities (CPC) | NL1 | | .843 | |
| | NL2 | | .838 | |
| | NL3 | | .852 | |
| Work performance results of civil servants (WPR) | KQ1 | | | .807 |
| | KQ2 | | | .827 |
| | KQ3 | | | .818 |
| Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations. | | | | |

Source: Author's survey results

According to J.F.Hair et al., exploratory factor analysis was performed using the following values in line with the data set: $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$; The Bartlett's test has a significance level observed Sig. < 0.05; Eigenvalue ≥ 1 ; Total Variance Explained $\geq 50\%$; and Factor Loading ≥ 0.5 [5]. The results of Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate that Exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for the data set, as indicated by the coefficient $KMO = 0.821 > 0.5$; observed variables are linearly correlated with the representative factor, as demonstrated by Bartlett's Test with observed significance level Sig. = $0.000 < 0.05$; observed variables account for 76.405% of the variation of the representative factors, expressed through Total Variance Explained with Cumulative % = $76.405\% > 50\%$; The observed variables have good statistical significance, with Factor Loading > 0.5 . One dependent variable (WPR), two independent variables (QPS, CPC), and a total of 10 observed variables with good statistical significance were extracted into three factors that matched the three initial factors. This indicates that the original research model was maintained. It is possible to perform a multivariable linear regression analysis to consider the relationship between the independent variables (QPS, CPC) and the dependent one (WPR).

Table 6. Multivariable regression results

| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | VIF |
|--|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|-------|
| Model | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.231 | .110 | | 11.193 | .000 | |
| | Civil servants' practical capabilities (CPC) | .021 | .031 | .022 | .667 | .005 | 1.382 |
| | Qualifications and professional skills of civil servants (QPS) | .689 | .026 | .869 | 26.777 | .000 | 1.382 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Work performance results of civil servants (WPR) Adjusted R Square = .734; Durbin-Watson = 2.115 | | | | | | | |

Source: Author's survey results

According to the data in Table 6, the factors QPS, CPC explain 76.6% of the variation of the WPR factor in the research model (Adjusted R Square = 0.766). The multivariate regression model has been designed in line with the data set. Multicollinearity does not exist in the regression model (VIF = 1.382

< 2). There is no autocorrelation in the regression model (Durbin-Watson = 2.135 ($1 < d < 3$)). The components QPS and CPC are all correlated with the WPR, as shown by the statistically significant regression coefficients of the two independent variables (Sig. < 0.05). The study model's factors have a positive link based on the positive values of the unnormalized regression coefficients (B), supporting hypotheses H1 and H2.

Using the general regression model by J.F.Hair et al.: $Y = B_0 + B_1 \cdot X_1 + B_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + B_i \cdot X_i$ [5], the author came up with the following multivariate regression model for this study as follows:

$$WPR = 1.231 + 0.21 \cdot CPC + 0.689 \cdot QPS$$

The standardized regression coefficient (Beta) in the regression analysis shows that the correlation of the independent and dependent variables in increasing order is: Civil servants' practical capabilities (CPC) and Qualifications and professional skills of civil servants (QPS).

CONCLUSION

The findings of the regression analysis showed that commune-level civil servants' practical capacity is assessed at a low level by the leaders. Therefore, they need to actively study and practice to improve their practical working capacity. In addition, local leaders also need to take necessary steps to conduct a more thorough evaluation of their operational capacity. This enables the locality to have quality human resources to perform public duties and provide better services to the populace.

According to the competency framework for each job title and position, Vietnam's legal regulations on evaluating the quality of civil servants do not currently have any requirements that must be met [13]. It is the reasons why many local governmental agencies haven't concentrated on developing capability frameworks for evaluating civil servants. Therefore, the author advises, as a result of the study's findings, a capacity framework should be built, and commune-level civil servants should be evaluated in line with the capability framework for each job position.

This policy's content will be beneficial for the following reasons: (1) to make it easier to quantify the criteria for evaluating civil servant quality in line with the characteristics and standards of each job title; (2) to help localities more accurately evaluate civil servant quality following the characteristics and standards of civil servants in each branch or field; (3) to promote consensus in the process of developing the capacity framework and evaluating the quality of civil servants under the capability framework of each job position in the commune-level government agencies.

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