

ASSESSING VIETNAMESE CIVIL SERVANTS' PUBLIC DUTY RESPONSIBILITIES

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Abstract

Civil servants are responsible to perform public duties, implement policies and laws to accomplish the state's political goals and serve the people, ensuring the people's legitimate rights and interests. Therefore, the state management effectiveness depends heavily on the public service responsibilities of civil servants (abbreviated as civil servants' responsibilities), especially civil servants at the commune level - those who regularly contact and resolve people's requests. In this study, the theoretical background of civil servants' responsibilities is analyzed, including 3 scales: Public service responsibilities (01 dependent variable); civil servants' consciousness at work; civil servants' working attitude (02 independent variables). A survey of 240 managers of commune-level authorities in 3 localities representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Nam Dinh province (Northern region), Quang Nam province (Central region) and Ben Tre province (Northern region) was conducted to identify the reality of public service responsibilities of commune-level civil servants in Vietnam. The findings confirm: comparing two elements of civil servants evaluated by local managers, civil servant's working attitude is appraised lower than civil servants' consciousness at work. This reveals that there are still commune-level civil servants who fail to show sufficient working attitudes and create satisfaction for the people while handling their dossiers. The findings suggest a number of policies that need to be researched and adjusted to improve Vietnamese local civil servants' qualities so that the requirements of serving the people could be met.

Key words: Commune-level civil servants; Public service responsibilities; Consciousness at work; Working attitude; Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Vietnam's local civil servants are assigned to three-level authority agencies: provincial level (63 district-level authorities), district level (705 district-level authorities), and commune level (10.599 commune-level authorities) [GSO, 2023]. In the local authority system, the commune level is the most basic, considered as the grassroots one to regular contact and resolve citizens' requests.

The commune-level civil servants on the payroll are categorized into 6 job titles in accordance with 6 sectors the civil servants take in charge of: Commander of the commune military command; Clerical – statistics civil servants; Cadastre - construction - urban and environment civil servants (for towns); Cadastre - agriculture - construction - urban and environment civil servants (for communes); Finance and accounting civil servants; Judicial - civil status public servants; Social and cultural civil servants [VG, 2023].

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs of Vietnam, local civil servants in general and commune-level civil servants in particular are basically standardized in terms of required professional qualifications and sufficient working competences. However, there are civil servants who fail to fulfill their public service responsibilities and create satisfaction to the people [MOHA, 2022]. This situation is considered as a limitation in public duty performance, showing weak points in management at local authorities, especially at commune-level authorities. Therefore, to this reality, the conduct of this study is practically significant.

2. Literature review

a) Civil servants' responsibilities (CSR)

The term "public service responsibility" is understood as civil servants' consciousness at work, working competences, and working attitude to accomplish assigned tasks (working progress, working quality, satisfaction of civil servants and the people) [Lan, N., 2006]. Civil servants' responsibilities, also stipulated in Vietnamese law, is "dedicated to serving the people" [VNA, 2008], being expressed in different aspects but emphasized on 3 main criteria for evaluating civil servants' qualities [VG, 2020] as follows: Civil servants are responsible to perform tasks and keep the progress of assigned tasks (CSR1); Civil servants are responsible to perform assigned tasks and ensure their quality (CSR2); Civil servants are responsible to perform their duties and create satisfaction from people when resolving their requests (CSR3).

For further details, it can be seen that: firstly, civil servants are responsible to keep the progress of assigned tasks because each assigned task has its completion deadline determined in the job description of each job position; secondly, civil servants are responsible to ensure the performance quality of assigned tasks because each assigned task requires outputs according to evaluation criteria for the public duty performance; thirdly, civil servants are responsible to perform their duties and create satisfaction from the people when resolving their requests because the rule of law state, including Vietnam, is constitutionally established to serve the people.

Civil servants' responsibilities are formed from the civil servants' consciousness at work and their working attitude, which are also two legal matters that demonstrate the public service ethics of civil servants as prescribed by Vietnamese law [VNA, 2008; VG, 2020].

Civil servants' responsibilities have been approached and analysed in different studies towards combining political, legal, and social ethical factors and addressing: consciousness at work and working attitude to serve the people are ethical qualities have to be strictly implemented by civil servants to realise the state's political goals [Tung, L.S., 2021; Dao, D.N., 2022]. Inherited from the aforementioned viewpoints, the theoretical framework of this study on civil servants' responsibilities are developed, which identifies two main issues: civil servants' consciousness at work; civil servants' working attitude.

b) Civil servants' consciousness at work (CW)

Civil servants' consciousness at work is seen as civil servants' awareness of their duties to be willing to work and contribute to the public service. According to Tung, L.S. (2021), civil servants show their consciousness at work through their compliance with laws and agency regulations in their working performance process. Sharing this view, Trung, N.S. et al (2022) further emphasizes civil servants' willingness to accept duties and the spirit of cooperation to best perform and complete their assigned tasks.

Approaches from the previous studies are consistent with the characteristics of civil service activities and civil servant evaluation standards in Vietnam as well as other countries, which helps to develop the measurement scale of civil servants' consciousness at work, including: civil servants consciously comply with state laws and agency regulations in performing professional tasks (in terms of time, process, administrative procedures, etc. during the working performance) (CW1); Civil servants are willing to accept tasks and strive to complete assigned tasks (CW2); Civil servants have a sense of cooperation and sharedness in the working performance process and strive to complete their assigned tasks (CW3).

With a sense of compliance with laws and agency regulations in performing professional duties, civil servants are required both to ensure discipline in the public duty performance and not to infringe upon the people's legitimate rights and interests. Moreover, the willingness to accept tasks, the spirit of cooperation and sharedness in the working performance process will help civil servants to easily integrate, understand and show more concerns about citizens' needs when they come to ask for help from civil servants. Accordingly, civil servants will be able to easily gather a lot of feedback and aspirations of citizens. In this case, civil servants' public responsibilities are affirmed from their own consciousness at work.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). That civil servants raise their consciousness at work is a factor to affirm their responsibilities.

c) Civil servants' working attitude (WA)

Civil servants' working attitude refers to the standard of ethical qualities that every civil servant must have. According to Trung, N.S. et al (2022), that civil servants serve the people is individuals' obligation required by their job position, which has great political impacts on maintaining the social order. Dao, D. N. (2022) further explains that when the people receive high – quality public service from state agencies, this means they get respects, have their opinions heard, and fair treatment from the government. In this case, civil servants are the ones that indirectly realize the political goals of the state and the social development governance of the locality.

The aforementioned opinions and explanations are all significant and consistent with the civil service culture prescribed by law and emphasized by different researchers [Dung, N.V. et al, 2023]. On that basis, a scale to measure civil servants' working attitude is set up, including: Civil servants have the obligation to respect the people while resolving their requests (WA1); Civil servants have the obligation to listen to the people's opinions while resolving their requests (WA2); Civil servants have the obligation to treat all people fairly while resolving their requests (WA3).

To well serve the people, civil servants must show respects to them at first. Accordingly, civil servants must show courtesy and politeness in communicating with the people, carefully guide them, listen to and collect their feedbacks on the state policies and gradually become a bridge directly connecting them and the authorities. Besides, that civil servants treat all citizens fairly while resolving their requests is not only an obligation, but also the conflict prevention between the people and state agencies. Thus, it is civil servants' working attitude to the people that can affirm their responsibilities.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). That civil servants' working attitude is well performed is a factor to affirm civil servants' responsibilities.

Reviews from the related researches allow the theoretical framework on public service responsibilities of civil servants to be developed in this study. The research model includes 3 scales: Scale "civil servants' consciousness at work", scale "civil servants' working attitude" (02 independent variables) and scale "civil servants' responsibilities" (01 dependent variable). In this study, these above scales include 9 observed variables, designed into 9 questions in the survey questionnaire and measured with 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	Civil servants’ consciousness at work	CW					
1	Civil servants consciously comply with state laws and agency regulations in performing professional tasks (in terms of time, process, administrative procedures, etc. during the working performance)	CW1					
2	Civil servants are willing to accept tasks and strive to complete assigned tasks	CW2					
3	Civil servants have a sense of cooperation and sharedness in the working performance process and strive to complete their assigned tasks	CW3					
II	Civil servants’ working attitude	WA					
1	Civil servants have the obligation to respect the people while resolving their requests	WA1					
2	Civil servants have the obligation to listen to the people’s opinions while resolving their requests	WA2					
3	Civil servants have the obligation to treat all people fairly while resolving their requests	WA3					
III	Civil servants’ responsibilities	CSR					
1	Civil servants are responsible to perform tasks and keep the progress of assigned tasks	CSR1					
2	Civil servants are responsible to perform assigned tasks and ensure their quality	CSR2					
3	Civil servants are responsible to perform their duties and create satisfaction from people when resolving their requests	CSR3					

Source: Compiled by the authors from the literature review

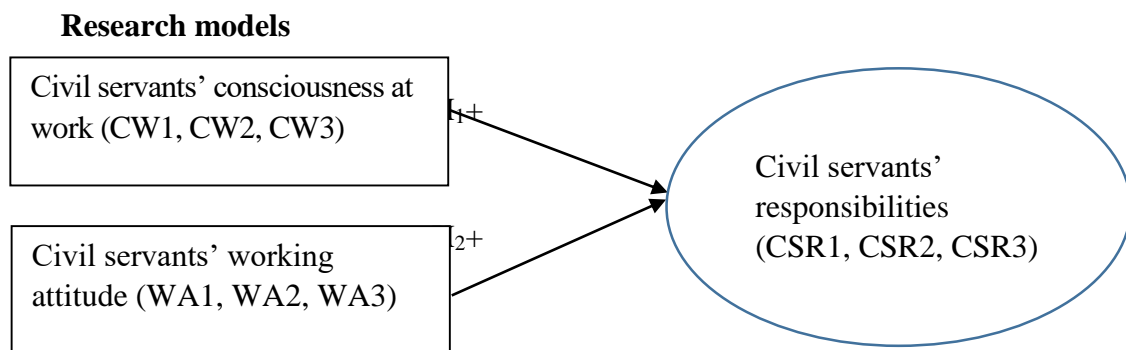


Figure 1. Research model

3. Methodology

In this study, a combination of secondary data and primary data analysis methods in qualitative and quantitative researches is deployed. Secondary data analysis method is carried out through collecting and studying published documents. The primary data analysis method is conducted in the form of a survey. The survey includes two phases: preliminary survey and official survey.

a) preliminary survey

The research model includes 3 scales and 9 observed variables, so the minimum sample size needed when testing and analysing correlation in this study is $N = 9 \times 5 = 45$ [Hai, D.H., 2019]. In this study, a survey of commune-level managers' opinions with a sample size of $N = 240 > 45$ is conducted, ensuring high reliability.

After completing the design of the survey questionnaire, a preliminary survey was conducted in Nam Dinh province with a sample size of $N = 80$ managers of 40 commune-level authorities in the province. Preliminary survey results in Nam Dinh province show that all 9 observed variables of the 3 scales are reliable enough to be used in the official survey on a wider scope.

b) Official survey

The official survey was conducted in 2023 in 3 localities representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Nam Dinh province (North), Quang Nam province (Central), Ben Tre province (South). The survey subjects were determined to be managers of commune-level authorities.

The author conducted preliminary interviews to gather information about the standards of the surveyed subjects and questionnaires, based on the subjects' agreement to take part in the survey. There were 240 managers agreed to answer the questionnaires and the survey resulted in 240/240 valid votes, reaching a 100% response rate. Characteristics of the research sample show that the majority (81.7%) of survey respondents are managers with 5 years of experience or more. (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the study sample
Sex * Time in management position Crosstabulation

			Time in management position			Total
			Less than 5 years	5-10 years	Over 10 years	
Sex	Male	Count	30	81	34	145
		% Sex	20.7%	55.9%	23.4%	100.0%
	Female	Count	14	43	38	95
		% Sex	14.7%	45.3%	40.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	44	124	72	240
		% Sex	18.3%	51.7%	30.0%	100.0%

Source: Authors' survey results

With the collected data, the scale testing and correlation analysis were conducted to test the research hypothesis.

4. Findings

Table 3 shows that all 3 scales and 9 observed variables in the research model are reliable, meeting the standard conditions: Cronbach'alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3 [Hai, D.H., 2019].

Table 3. Statistical results and scale testing results

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Civil servants' consciousness at work (CW)	CW1	240	2	5	3.91	.609	.718	CW1 = .451
	CW2	240	2	5	4.04	.611		CW2 = .460
	CW3	240	2	5	4.19	.643		CW3 = .461
2. Civil servants' working attitude (WA)	WA1	240	1	5	3.78	.646	.635	WA1 = .388
	WA2	240	1	5	3.82	.721		WA2 = .359
	WA3	240	1	5	3.68	.734		WA3 = .367
3. Civil servants' responsibilities (CSR)	CSR1	240	2	5	3.91	.608	.725	CSR1 = .578
	CSR2	240	2	5	3.86	.598		CSR2 = .621
	CSR3	240	1	5	3.81	.615		CSR3 = .633
Valid N (listwise)		240						

Source: Authors' survey results

Table 3 shows the observed variables of the scales "Civil servants' consciousness at work" (CW), "Civil servants' working attitude" (WA), "Civil servants' responsibilities" (CSR) are all rated at an average level of Mean > 3.6, which is statistically significant according to the defined Likert scale (1-5). However, the observed variables of the scale "Civil servants' working attitude" (PV) are rated at the lowest level with Mean (WA1) = 3.78, Mean (WA2) = 3.82, Mean (WA3) = 3.68, which shows that there are commune-level civil servants not yet having raised the spirit of serving the people and created satisfaction for the people while resolving their requests.

The test result creates the reliability to continue performing correlation analysis to find out the relationship of the scales in the research model: 02 independent variables "Civil servants' consciousness at work" (CW), "Civil servants' working attitude" (WA) and the dependent variable "Civil servants' responsibilities" (CSR) [Table 4].

Table 4. Results correlation analysis of the scales

Correlations				
		CW	WA	CSR
CW	Pearson Correlation	1	.683**	.761**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	240	240	240
WA	Pearson Correlation	.683**	1	.678**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	240	240	240
CSR	Pearson Correlation	.761**	.678**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	240	240	240
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Authors' survey results

Table 4 reveals:

+ The correlation coefficient of the scales reached the value $0 < r < 1$, proving that there is a positive relationship between the two independent variables "Civil servants' consciousness at work" (CW), "Civil servants' working attitude" (WA) and the dependent variable "Civil servants' responsibilities" (CSR); hypotheses H1 and H2 are accepted; the initially determined research model is confirmed to be consistent with the theoretical framework and survey data set.

+ Based on the r values [$r(\text{CW}) = .761$ and $r(\text{WA}) = .678$], it can be confirmed that the correlation level of the independent and dependent variables in an increasing order is: "Civil servants' working attitudes" (WA), "Civil servants' consciousness at work" (CW). This is the basis to draw a research conclusion, that is, there are still commune-level civil servants who have not themselves raised the spirit of serving the people and created satisfaction for the people while handling their dossiers.

5. Conclusion

The analysis and testing results help to affirm that Vietnamese commune-level civil servants have shown their responsibilities in the process of performing assigned tasks, reflected in their consciousness at work and working attitude. However, civil servants' working attitude is evaluated at a lower level than civil servants' consciousness at work local managers. This shows that there are still commune-level civil servants who have not yet promoted the high spirit of serving the people and succeeded in creating satisfaction for the people while handling their dossiers. This affects the efficiency and reputation of local authorities, requiring more attention and researches addressed on improving civil servants' responsibilities in the process of performing public duties and serving the people.

The findings suggest a number of policies that need to be researched and adjusted to improve Vietnamese local civil servants' qualities so that the requirements of serving the people could be met, which are:

- Firstly, regularly propagate and disseminate laws on civil servants' responsibilities with the spirit of serving the people to realize the state's political goals. This is an annual training activity prescribed by law [VG, 2017] to foster civil servants' ethical qualities.

- Secondly, regularly conduct surveys to collect the people's opinions on civil servants' working attitude. This activity helps to gather an objective evaluation, truly reflecting civil servants' responsibilities through the process of contacting and resolving the people's requests.

In fact, the evaluation of civil servants is carried out annually as required in laws, mainly in the form of internal evaluation: Civil servants in each department make the self-assessments which are synthesized and approved by the state agency [VG, 2020]. If only focusing on internal assessment, managers in local authorities can't get comprehensive information to draw reasonable conclusions on civil servants' responsibilities. Therefore, it is very necessary to have the people's active participation in evaluating the public service responsibilities of civil servants through their consciousness at work as well as working attitude.

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