

# FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF VIETNAMESE CIVIL SERVANTS

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## **Abstract**

The quality of civil servants is the top concern in public service activities because it is a decisive issue for the performance of state agencies. Reality in public service activities shows that the level of quality of civil servants of central and local agencies is often uneven. That is because many factors affect the quality of civil servants, creating a difference in quality between civil servants of agencies and localities. In this study, the author focuses on analyzing two basic factors that have a direct impact on the quality of civil servants, including. The proactive learning and practice of civil servants (subjective factor) and the working environment of civil servants (objective factor). The author built a theoretical framework and conducted a survey of 450 leaders of commune-level government agencies in 5 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Vinh Phuc and Phu Tho provinces (Northern region), Quang Tri province (Central region), Dong Nai and Tay Ninh province (Southern region). Survey results show that local leaders evaluate the quality of commune-level civil servants to meet the requirements of task performance; The factor “Proactive learning and practice of civil servants” is evaluated at a lower level when considered in terms of impact on the quality of civil servants. From the results of this research, the author discusses appropriate solutions and provides information for managers to implement measures to improve the quality of commune-level civil servants in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Quality of civil servants; Proactive learning and practice of civil servants; Working environment of civil servants; Vietnamese civil servants.

## **1. Introduction**

Vietnam’s local government is designed with 3 levels: Provincial level (63 provincial government agencies), district level (705 district government agencies), and commune level (10.599 commune-level government agencies) [GSO, 2022]. In this government system, the commune level is the lowest, regularly and directly receiving and resolving requests from people in the area.

Civil servants in each commune-level government agency are recruited to professional positions according to the law, including Police Chief, Military Commander, Office - Statistics, Cadastre - Construction - Urban - Agriculture Industry - environment, Finance - Accounting, Justice - civil status, Culture - society (VG, 2011; MOHA, 2019).

There are differences in the quality of commune-level civil servants between localities with different economic and social levels (mountainous areas, islands, rural areas, and urban areas). However, the proactiveness in civil servants' learning and practice and the working environment of commune-level civil servants are two contents that have an impact on the quality of civil servants confirmed by many researchers and managers.

According to general assessment, the quality of Vietnam's commune-level civil servants is guaranteed towards standardization of professional qualifications. However, in many localities, working conditions are not guaranteed well; Due to difficult economic and social conditions, the study and training of commune-level civil servants have not received much attention; Many civil servants have not promoted proactiveness in civil servants' learning and practice to update and supplement knowledge and improve their ability to perform assigned professional tasks (VG, 2021). This is a limited issue that needs to be researched and adjusted to ensure the quality of commune-level civil servants meets the requirements of serving the people in the context of digital government and digital society. Therefore, the author's conduct of this research is meaningful and necessary in the current context.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Quality of civil servants (QC)**

Civil servants are the subjects of public service activities that is people who are recruited to work regularly in state agencies and receive salaries from the state budget (Phuong, N.M., 2020). In Vietnam, civil servants not only work in state agencies but also political organizations, socio-political organizations, and several other organizations according to law (VNA, 2008; VNA, 2013). Characteristics and quality standards of civil servants vary depending on the political, economic, and social conditions of each country (Khanh, C.X. et al., 2010). This is an issue that needs attention when researching the quality of civil servants.

From a linguistic perspective, the term "quality" is defined as what creates the quality and value of a person, thing, or event (Phe, H., 2011). This approach helps researchers have a basis to build a definition of civil servant quality, that is Value is expressed through qualities and capabilities (knowledge, skills) that meet the standards for job titles and positions prescribed by law for civil servants. This definition clearly shows the professional standards of civil servants prescribed by Vietnamese law (political qualities; professional qualifications; working capacity); At the same time, the measure to evaluate it is the results of performing assigned tasks (VNA, 2008; VG, 2020).

With the research approach according to the above definition and based on current legal regulations, the author builds the content quality of civil servants according to three main contents for this research, including: Civil servants with dignity. good quality, meeting political standards and public service ethics (QC1); Civil servants have professional qualifications and knowledge that meet the standards of job titles and positions in public service activities (QC2); Civil servants have working capacity and work results that meet practical work requirements associated with job titles and positions in public service activities (QC3).

## **2.2. Factors affecting the quality of civil servants**

Researching factors affecting the quality of civil servants, many researchers point out and analyze quite clearly in two aspects: subjective and objective, including Personal factors (gender, age, proactive learning and training of civil servants), organizational factors (recruitment, use, evaluation, training and fostering of civil servants; working environment: facilities, techniques, technology, professional living conditions, fair competition...), social factors... (Khanh, CX et al., 2010; Trung, NS, 2022) . In this study, the author focuses on analyzing two basic factors that have a direct impact on the quality of civil servants, including: Proactiveness in civil servants' learning and practice; the working environment of civil servants. The choice to study these factors is shown in both subjective (personal factors) and objective (organizational factors) aspects.

### **a) Proactive learning and practice of civil servants (PC)**

Society is constantly moving, specialized knowledge will change in the direction of expansion, requiring civil servants to always update and supplement trained specialized knowledge, in addition, it is also necessary to update, and accumulate other social knowledge to supplement professional work (Trung, NS, 2022). Besides, social changes inevitably lead to changes and adjustments in the State's policy content in specialized fields. This is a learning requirement for civil servants to always keep up with new policies to organize and implement professional tasks. Therefore, civil servants proactively studying to improve their professional qualifications, accumulating more knowledge and skills, and proactively practicing professional practice skills are factors that have a direct impact on public quality position.

In terms of research, the proactive learning and practice of civil servants is confirmed with several main contents: Civil servants proactively update documents and policies related to professional activities (PC1); Civil servants proactively seek and participate in training and fostering programs related to updating and supplementing professional knowledge (PC2); Civil servants proactively and actively practice professional practice skills to always be proficient in organizing and performing assigned tasks (PC3).

Through the process of proactive learning and practice of civil servants both expand their specialized knowledge and develop in-depth knowledge in the field of professional activities, contributing to improving the quality and efficiency of implementation equipment. That is both a basic requirement and a high requirement for civil servants to become quality human resources to respond to changes in society and public service activities. All of these activities are carried out in a planned manner and will bring many good results, not only improving professional capacity but also affirming the reputation of civil servants.

*Hypothesis 1 (H1): Proactive learning and practice of civil servants has a direct impact on the quality of civil servants, helping civil servants become quality human resources responsive to social and economic changes in public service activities.*

### **b) Working environment of civil servants (WE)**

The working environment of civil servants is the place where they carry out their professional activities. These factors have a direct impact on the quality of civil servants (capacity to perform tasks, results of performing tasks) because they are the regular, daily operating conditions of civil servants.

According to Hai, T.N. (2008), the working environment of civil servants includes facilities, techniques, technology, and professional living conditions. With the same viewpoint as above, Trung, N.S. (2022) also emphasized fair competition when researching the working environment of civil servants. Also according to the above researchers, a good working environment is shown through the following aspects: The agency's facilities, techniques, and technology meet the professional performance requirements of civil servants (WE1); Civil servants regularly receive professional activities in appropriate forms (WE2); Civil servants can compete fairly during their work (WE3).

When the facilities, techniques, and technology serving the agency's professional activities are well met, it will create a good environment for civil servants to practice their profession stably and improve their professional skills. From there, the progress and quality of task implementation are guaranteed, contributing to building a team of civil servants operating professionally and effectively. Next, regular professional activities (contact, exchange of knowledge, expertise, skills, working skills... with colleagues) in work agencies will help civil servants There is updating and supplementing professional knowledge, sharing of experience, and professional practice skills. In reality, in the activities of agencies, the contact and exchange of knowledge, expertise, skills, and working skills of civil servants is often carried out through the following forms: Workshops and scientific discussions; practical learning programs; and competitions to improve professional skills.

Along with those factors, fair competition in the working environment (fairness in employment, rewards, learning, and development opportunities...) will help civil servants work with a spirit of self-discipline, Enthusiastic, maximize their internal strength and creativity, contribute to improving the quality and efficiency of performing professional tasks and contribute and serve the agency well. On the contrary, without fair competition, they will be indifferent to their work, work reactively, and not be able to develop their creativity, affecting their work performance and career growth.

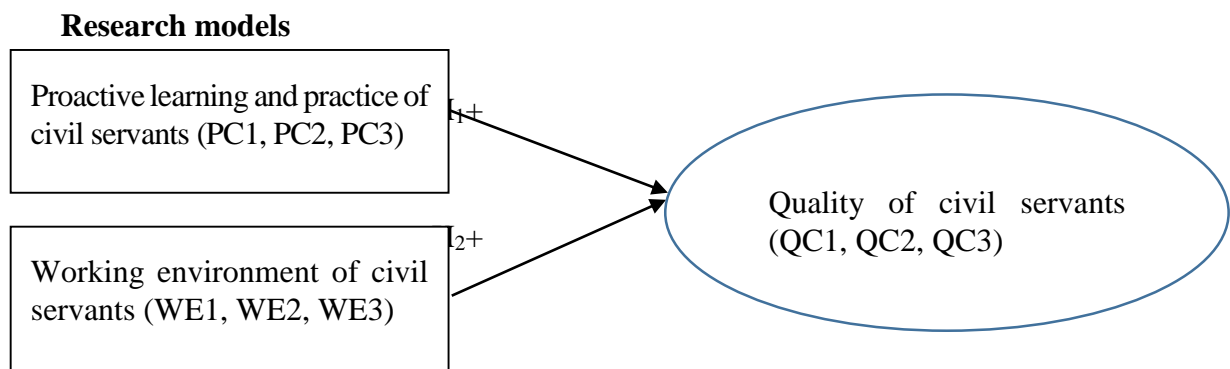
*Hypothesis 2 (H2): The working environment has a direct impact on the quality of civil servants, helping civil servants have conditions to work, study, and train to become quality human resources responsive to changes in society and public service activities.*

From the mentioned above research content, the authors build a research theoretical framework on factors affecting the quality of civil servants. The research model consists of 3 scales: "Proactive learning and practice of civil servants" (PC), "Working environment of civil servants" (WE) (two independent variables); and "Quality of civil servants" (QC) (01 dependent variable)". The above scales include 9 observed variables, designed by the authors into 9 questions in the survey questionnaire, and are measured by the 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
<b>I</b>	<b>Proactive learning and practice of civil servants</b>	<b>PC</b>					
1	Civil servants proactively update documents and policies related to professional activities.	PC1					
2	Civil servants proactively seek and participate in training and fostering programs related to updating and supplementing professional knowledge.	PC2					
3	Civil servants proactively and actively practice professional practice skills to always be proficient in organizing and performing assigned tasks.	PC3					
<b>II</b>	<b>Working environment of civil servants</b>	<b>WE</b>					
1	The agency’s facilities, techniques, and technology meet the professional performance requirements of civil servants.	WE1					
2	Civil servants regularly receive professional activities in appropriate forms.	WE2					
3	Civil servants can compete fairly during their work.	WE3					
<b>III</b>	<b>Quality of civil servants</b>	<b>QC</b>					
1	Civil servants with dignity. good quality, meeting political standards and public service ethics.	QC1					
2	Civil servants have professional qualifications and knowledge that meet the standards of job titles and positions in public service activities.	QC2					
3	Civil servants have working capacity and work results that meet practical work requirements associated with job titles and positions in public service activities.	QC3					

Source: Compiled by the authors from the literature review



**Figure 1.** Research model

### 3. Research methods

In this study, the authors used qualitative and quantitative methods to approach and deploy the research content on factors affecting the quality of civil servants. The research sample for this study was conducted in 5 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Vinh Phuc and Phu Tho provinces (Northern region), Quang Tri province (Central region), Dong Nai and Tay Ninh province (Southern region).

- Qualitative approach: The authors gather and analyze secondary data and then form preliminary conclusions regarding the theoretical and practical research on factors affecting the quality of civil servants. Next, the authors conduct in-depth interviews, gather viewpoints on the original research topic to complete the research theoretical framework, and draw reasonable research conclusions.

- Quantitative approach: We directly surveyed 450 leaders of commune-level government agencies in 5 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam to gather and evaluate primary data under the developed theoretical framework. We used the survey results to perform a correlation analysis to examine the link between the scales and the proposed research hypothesis. The minimum sample size for the 3-scale and 9-observed model of this study, according to Hai, D.H. (2019), is  $N = 9 \times 5 = 45$

We carried out a survey leaders of commune-level government agencies in 5 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam with a sample size of  $N = 450 > 45$  to guarantee the reliability of the data collection. The survey's findings show that 450 out of 450 leaders of commune-level government agencies, and 450 out of 450 answer sheets were acceptable, yielding a 100% valid response rate. With the data gathered from survey activities, we examined the scale's validity and observed variables and used correlation analysis, regression analysis to evaluate research hypotheses and draw logical conclusions.

### 4. Research results

After developing a theoretical framework for their study, the authors polled 450 leaders of commune-level government agencies. With the data collected from survey activities, the authors conducted Cronbach's Alpha test to identify the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the study model. According to Hai, D.H. (2019), Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.6$  and Corrected Item-Total Correlation  $> 0.3$  are the requirements for the reliabilities of the scales and the observed variables, respectively. The test results show that all 3 scales and 9 observed variables are reliable (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Statistical and scale testing results

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Proactive learning and practice of civil servants (PC)	PC1	450	1	5	3.69	.622	.615	PC1 = .427
	PC2	450	1	5	3.61	.631		PC2 = .416
	PC3	450	2	5	3.82	.664		PC3 = .383
2. Working environment of civil servants (WE)	WE1	450	2	5	4.02	.435	.708	WE1 = .593
	WE2	450	2	5	4.18	.432		WE2 = .577
	WE3	450	2	5	4.01	.428		WE3 = .562
3. Quality of civil servants (QC)	QC1	450	2	5	3.92	.539	.711	QC1 = .583
	QC2	450	2	5	4.03	.566		QC2 = .572
	QC3	450	2	5	4.13	.547		QC3 = .573
Valid N (listwise)		450						

*Source: Authors' survey results*

Table 2 data shows that observations on the scales “Proactive learning and practice of civil servants” (PC), “Working environment of civil servants” (WE), and “Quality of civil servants” (QC) were all evaluated at the average level Mean > 3.6, statistically significant according to the defined Likert scale (1-5); Civil servants are assessed to have quality that meet the requirements of performing assigned tasks. However, the observed variables of the scale “Proactive learning and practice of civil servants” (PC) are rated at the lowest level with Mean (PC1) = 3.69, Mean (PC2) = 3.61, Mean (PC3) = 3.82, shows that there are still many civil servants who have not proactively updated and supplemented knowledge and skills to develop their capacity. This is a factor that greatly affects the quality of Vietnamese local civil servants today.

All three scales and the nine observed variables in the research model have standard test values, as shown by the results in Table 2 (Cronbach'alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3). We used this test result as a foundation for dependability as we carried out correlation analysis, regression analysis to take the association of variables in the study model into consideration (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Correlation analysis results of the scales

<b>Correlations</b>				
		PC	WE	QC
PC	Pearson Correlation	1	.655**	.442**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	450	450	450
WE	Pearson Correlation	.655**	1	.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	450	450	450
QC	Pearson Correlation	.442**	.627**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	450	450	450

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

Source: Authors’ survey results

Table 3 data shows that correlation coefficients of the scales reach  $0 < r < 1$ , indicating that there is a positive relationship between the two independent variables “Proactive learning and practice of civil servants” (PC), “Working environment of civil servants” (WE) and 01 dependent variable “Quality of civil servants” (QC); hypotheses H1, H2 are accepted. Based on the values of r [ $r$  (PC) = .442 and  $r$  (WE) = .627], it can be confirmed that the correlation level between the independent variables and the dependent variable in ascending order, that is: “Proactive learning and practice of civil servants” (PC), “Working environment of civil servants” (WE).

**Table 4.** Multivariable regression results  
**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.608	.307		3.316	.000	
	Proactive learning and practice of civil servants (PC)	.411	.069	.466	3.985	.000	1.781
	Working environment of civil servants (WE)	.545	.057	.494	6.787	.000	1.781

a. Dependent Variable: Quality of civil servants (QC)  
R Square = .701; Durbin-Watson = 2.022

Source: Authors’ survey results

Data in Table 4 shows: R Square = .701, confirming that the scales “Proactive learning and practice of civil servants” (PC), “Working environment of civil servants” (WE) explain 70.1% of the variation bias of the scale “Quality of civil servants” (QC). VIF = 1.781 ( $1 < VIF < 2$ ), showing that the regression model does not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.022 ( $1 < d < 3$ ), showing that the regression model does not have autocorrelation.



The regression coefficients of the two unique variables “Proactive learning and practice of civil servants” (PC), “Working environment of civil servants” (WE) are both statistically significant with Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) and has a positive value: B (PC) = 0.411, B (WE) = 0.545, confirming the positive relationship between the two independent variables “Proactive learning and practice of civil servants” (PC), “Working environment of civil servants” (WE) and 01 dependent variables “Quality of civil servants” (QC); Hypotheses H1, H2 are accepted; The correlation level of the independent and dependent variables in ascending order is: “Proactive learning and training of civil servants” (PC), “Working environment of civil servants” (WE).

## 5. Conclusion

With the above analysis and testing results, the research conclusion is confirmed that: Local leaders underestimate the proactive learning and practice of civil servants. This shows that many civil servants have not proactively updated and supplemented their knowledge and skills to develop their capacity; which affects the quality of performance of duties by civil servants and the operational efficiency of government agencies. From the results of this research, the author discusses related content, which is: Implementing a multi-dimensional assessment policy on civil servant capacity and appropriate training policies, in the direction of encouraging civil servants to study and practice. Training to update and supplement knowledge, skills, and professions to meet the requirements of public service activities in the changing trend of society.

- *Implement a multi-dimensional evaluation policy on civil servants:* Innovate the evaluation of civil servants in the direction of combining internal evaluation (internal evaluation of the agency) and external evaluation (evaluation from the people); Focus on organizing to collect comments from the people on the professional capacity, work responsibilities and service attitude of civil servants. The evaluation of civil servants in Vietnam is carried out annually according to law with the main form being internal evaluation: Civil servants self-assess; The agency approves and recognizes civil servant assessment results for each department. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on organizing to collect opinions and evaluations from the people about civil servants; this should be done regularly, combined with internal assessment according to general provisions of law.

- *Implement appropriate civil servant training policies:* Each local government agency, as the entity managing and employing civil servants, needs to have training programs and plans and implement appropriate training policies to standardize the team of civil servants according to rank standards and job position requirements. In addition, it is necessary to implement policies to encourage civil servants to voluntarily train and promote the proactive learning and training of civil servants to update and supplement knowledge, skills, and operations to meet the requirements. Public service activities in the changing trend of society.

Society is always moving and developing in the direction of increasing information, professional knowledge, and skills and each civil servant is influenced by many factors (personal characteristics, professional job characteristics, social circumstances...), but they may not be able to recognize that change in time. That will hurt the quality and efficiency of civil servants' work. Therefore, each civil servant needs to determine that self-study and self-training are the key factors that determine their qualities, qualifications, and abilities to best meet the requirements of their assigned tasks. This perspective also demonstrates feasibility in the context of the contemporary information society, whereby self-learning and training of civil servants outside of the official form (through licensed training and retraining establishments), is also done in other forms in the direction of applying information technology and social networks in learning, searching, updating, and supplementing knowledge.

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