

# A STUDY ON DIGITAL CULTURE IN PUBLIC SERVICE ACTIVITIES

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## **Abstract**

Digital culture in public service activities is a new issue in Vietnam and many countries around the world. This is followed by the digital technology development, that is, digital technology has influenced on civil servants in terms of their working habits in the digital environment, thereby forming a digital culture in public service activities. Employing the main research method of analyzing and synthesizing documents, the study discusses and enriches theories of digital culture, specifically explains some basic factors affecting digital culture in public service activities. The study results hope to provide more information and scientific background supporting future researches relating to digital culture in public service activities.

**Key words:** Digital culture; digital government; digital civil servants; digital citizens.

## **1. Digital culture in public service activities**

According to Bray, J. (2022), digital culture describes how technologies and internet are shaping the way we interact - the way we behave, think and communicate in society. Digital culture is a product of technological innovation. Nowadays, digital culture is becoming popular to the operation of organizations in both private and public sectors, marking development and positive changes to improve work efficiency and creating a new value system through interaction habits in the digital technology environment among individuals in organizations and between civil servants and citizens. In each country, the implementation of public service culture is carried out on the basis of promoting traditional values of the national history, combined with changes in public duty performance towards better serving the citizens. With the aim of developing a professional, modern public service culture that better serves the people, Vietnam is building a digital culture in public service activities on the basis of inheriting values of the existing public service culture. This issue has also attracted various researchers in the field of culture, public administration and other related fields.

In terms of organizational culture approach, Edgar, H.S. (2004) affirms that public service culture is the values, beliefs and conventions in an organization. These values and beliefs which are shared internally, become the tradition and govern members' behavior of the organization. From an organizational management perspective, Huong, H.T.T. (2020) affirms that "public service culture is a system of values, behaviors, symbols, and standards formed during the process of building and developing public services, capable of being transmitted and having an impact on civil servants' psychology and behavior". In addition, Trung, N.S. et al. (2023) defines "civil service culture" as the values and ethical standards of civil servants in public service activities, regulated by law and implemented into specific policies within each public agency. In spite of different approaches towards public service culture, all these studies emphasize the "value" element referring to a set of values sustainably existing in public service activities.

These studies all show high stability as a superiority of the traditional civil service culture. However, society is constantly changing, then current public service activities are affected by new factors such as administrative reform, the 4th industrial revolution with the rapid development of technology. In this case, the stability of traditional public service culture has been inevitably affected to transform into a digital public service culture. The new element is a product of the digital technology development bringing great changes into the entire public service system including methods, processes and outcomes of public duty performance. However, the digital public service culture is still linked to the traditional public service culture. Therefore, the research point of view drawn out in this study is: building a public service culture needs to be done based on the principle of inheriting traditional values and the application of digital technology achievements to create a new value system for each public agency and civil servants, aiming to better serve the people.

Current management practices have shown the significance of digital culture in civil service activities. Many studies have confirmed that digital culture supports the digital transformation, changed the working methods and process of solving tasks in an organization, and civil servants' public duty performance results. (Guy, J.S., 2019; Trung, N.S., 2022). Specifically:

- Firstly, digital culture changes the personnel organization which is more streamlined and efficient. Thanks to digital technology applications, departments and civil servants in public agencies can response to received information more quickly and accurately, save time and related costs when handling assigned tasks, especially it is the task needs interconnection between different individuals and groups. Hence, the restructuring of the personnel towards downsizing and operating economically and effectively is inevitable.

- Secondly, digital culture changes the working method and process of solving tasks carried out by civil servants and public agencies in a more effective way. Similarly, digital technologies allow civil servants flexibly and actively complete their assigned tasks anytime, anywhere. Therefore, the traditional decentralization will gradually change towards flexibility, increasing the speed and efficiency in performing public service activities.

- Thirdly, digital culture promotes civil servants to innovate and be creative in public service activities. Rapid changes in digital technologies has put civil servants in a state of being willing to change and acquire new knowledge and skills. In this case, the digital working environment - digital culture becomes a motivating factor,

creating opportunities and challenges for civil servants to innovate in public duty performance process, experience new things and improve their capacities of acquiring new knowledge and skills.

Thus, civil servants' working habits and interactions in the digital environment are factors that form a digital culture in public service activities. These has changed the way of organizing working activities and working process as well as promoted civil servants to innovate in public service activities. The paper is in agreement with this point of view when discussing digital culture in public service activities.

## **2. Factors influencing on digital culture in public service activities**

Digital culture in public service activities is formed when civil servants interact and resolve public duties in the digital environment. With regard to social management, digital culture promotes the development of digital society, and plays one of the most important roles in the national digital transformation process; however, in a dialectical relationship, society becomes a factor that has a direct impact on forming a digital culture in each country (Ngoc, B., 2022). Relating to state management, Trung, N.S. (2022) affirms that digital transformation in state agencies will bring the existence of a digital culture into public service activities, thereby leading to a digital government, a digital economy and a digital society in which the main subjects are a digital government, digital civil servants, and digital citizens. Conversely, the development of the digital government, digital civil servants, and digital citizens is a condition directly affecting the development of the digital culture in public service activities. Therefore, in influencing factors to digital culture in public service activities discussed in this study include: digital government, digital civil servants, and digital citizens.

### **a) Digital government**

Developing a digital government refers to the fact that state agencies "transform and carry out all of their activities in the digital environment, not only improving their efficient operation, but also innovating operating models and changing their way of providing public services based on digital technologies and digital data, allowing citizens and businesses to participate in the service delivery process" (MIC, 2021). In other words, developing a digital government is transforming the operating model based on digital technologies and digital data to better serve businesses and citizens. For example, state agencies use online public services linked to the national database on population, land, and taxes so that citizens can register their land use rights online.

With its typical features, a digital government ensures its public duties to be safely performed in the digital environment with an operating model designed and run based on data and digital technologies so that the government is able to provide better public services, make decisions in time, and issue better policies. On that basis, the study identifies three elements of digital government development as the theoretical basis for this research, which are: public service activities carried out on digital technology platforms in a synchronous and convenient manner; public service activities are carried out on digital data platforms accurately with information security; The government's in - time decisions and better policies when digital technologies are applied into public service activities.

(1) Public service activities are carried out on digital technology platforms in a synchronous and convenient manner. In essence, digital technology is the following step in the development of information technology, allowing faster computation, more data processing, and larger capacity transmission at a cheaper cost. Digital technology is one of the main technology groups of the fourth industrial revolution. Four typical digital technologies promoting digital transformation are: Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Big Data, Cloud Computing. When public service activities are carried out synchronously on a digital technology platform, the working efficiency of civil servants and state agencies is guaranteed with the lowest time and cost. Public service activities professionally conducted by civil servants in the digital environment will form a digital culture including habits and professional operations in the digital environment.

(2) Public service activities are carried out on digital data platforms accurately with information security. Digital data is the data formed through digitizing documents using information technology applications. This means the process of modernizing and converting conventional systems to digital systems, such as converting from documents in paper to soft files on the computer. State agencies apply information technologies to digitize documents such as policy documents, direction documents, instructions relating to different management fields and being still in effect, thereby forming the agencies' digital data. When public service activities are carried out synchronously on digital data platforms, organizations and citizens can exploit the data by using digital platforms such as document access systems, etc. (free or paid for access service fee) to carry out legal transactions and requests conveniently, accurately as well as ensure information security. The result is a digital culture is formed - the habit of accessing information and the request to handle administrative procedures of organizations and citizens in the digital environment.

(3) The government makes in - time decisions and issues better policies when applying digital technologies in public service activities. Applying digital technologies and digital data in public service activities creates new values, changing both the arrangements and operations of state government agencies. This helps government agencies make decisions in time and issue better policies as well as allow organizations and citizens to participate in the process of building and promulgating policies, providing public services and forming a digital culture - organizations and citizens' habits and profession when they take part in government agencies' management activities in the digital environment.

Thus, the development of a digital government has changed state agencies towards efficiency improvement of public service activities, created interaction and an interactive culture in the digital environment (digital culture) of participants (civil servants, organizations, citizens) joining in public service activities. This has great influences on a digital culture in public service activities and needs to be studied.

#### b) Digital civil servants

The term "digital civil servants" is used to describe the civil servants who are equipped with necessary digital knowledge and skills; moreover, they regularly update this knowledge and skills to successfully complete assigned tasks in the digital environment. They are the people implementing digital transformation in state agencies to develop the digital government (Trung, N.S., 2022).

When civil servants own digital capabilities, they regularly work in the digital environment to perform their professional duties and a digital culture in public service activities will be formed. Then, these civil servants become the subjects to develop and follow the digital culture.

In practice, digital culture is unprecedented but a great development opportunity for all countries because technological breakthroughs were conceived many years, even decades ago but have only grown rapidly in recent years. Developing countries can take advantage of the opportunity to carry out their digital transform and form a digital culture faster because developed countries are often less enthusiastic about new things when they are in a stable state; however, underdeveloped and developing countries are often enthusiastic about new things to find breakthrough opportunities. Vietnam is also one of those developing countries with the opportunity to promote digital transformation and form a digital culture towards a digital government, digital economy, and digital society.

The development of digital culture has made state agencies to build a team of digital civil servants, change their working habits from the real environment to the digital environment to successfully complete assigned tasks on the digital environment, specifically: (1) civil servants perform well their advisory duties in the digital environment; (2) civil servants well organize and carry out assigned tasks in the digital environment; (3) civil servants submit qualified reports and meet demand of accountabilities for the results of public duty performance in the digital environment.

When civil servants have digital skills to meet the requirements of performing public service activities in the digital environment, a digital culture is developed and popularly recognized in public service activities. These civil servants are the subjects to follow the digital culture as well as greatly influence the development of the digital culture in public service activities.

#### c) Digital citizens

The term "digital citizen" refers to people who have basic digital knowledge and skills necessary to transact in the digital environment while participating in social activities and the policy planning process of the government. For example, citizens with mobile devices have formed habits of communicating online, buying and selling online, learning online, and seeing doctors online, etc.

The development of digital culture, in addition to setting requirements for the development of a digital government and digital civil servants, has also pose requirements for developing digital citizens. Accordingly, each person must equip themselves with basic and necessary digital knowledge and skills and constantly update and supplement them so as not to become outdated. Therefore, developing a digital culture is not the concern of state agencies, but also of every citizen, requiring the synchronous participation of the entire social system. After all, developing a digital culture is to serve citizens. Hence, each person should become a digital citizen, digital culture development will be successful. In other words, the participation of all members in society will ensure the success of digital culture development.

Developing digital citizens is a new issue for most countries today. Many studies have discussed basically on digital citizen development (MIC, 2021; Trung, N.S., 2022), including: (1) citizens are able to access digital information sources, that is information on identification and authentication of personal data,

information on privacy in the digital environment; (2) citizens are able to communicate in the digital environment to fulfill their daily needs, such as buying and selling goods and cultural exchanges; (3) citizens are able to interact in the digital environment when participating in economic and social activities and state management activities.

In terms of social management, the digital culture development also conveys significance of the people's revolution. When every citizen becomes digital citizens, they will discover suitable technologies and find out appropriate solutions towards positive interaction between state agencies and citizens. This supports state agencies to well perform public service activities and provide better public services with the participation of citizens in the digital environment. Therefore, developing digital citizens is one of the conditions influencing the development of a digital culture in public service activities.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, digital culture in public service activities refers to working habits and interactions in the digital environment of participants relating to public service activities (civil servants, organizations, citizens). This has impacts on changing the process of organizing and solving public duties and promoting innovation in public service activities. Developing a digital government, digital civil servants, and digital citizens is both a condition and a direct influencing factor to a digital culture in public service activities. Therefore, digital culture needs to be in consideration so that strategies and policies in accordance with the characteristics of public service activities in each country could be built up.

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