

How to Cite:

Trung, N. S., Hien, P. T. T., & Van, D. T. T. (2022). Commune-level civil servants' work capability in Vietnam. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 6(S1), 438-448.

<https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v6nS1.2061>

Commune-level Civil Servants' Work Capability in Vietnam

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Abstract---Commune-level civil servants are those who work at the lowest level of government in the Vietnamese administrative system. They directly deal with the people's requests and protect their legitimate rights and interests prescribed by the law. Civil servants and government agencies' performance depends much on their qualities and capabilities, including work capability, sense of responsibility for work, the attitude of serving the people. In this study, the author focuses on analyzing the commune-level civil servants' work capability under some contents like the ability to operate independently and the ability to operate jointly. He created a survey form and conducted a poll of 300 people on commune-level public employees' work capability at their residence based on the theoretical framework of criteria for commune-level civil servants' work capability. The survey area includes six provinces representing three regions of Vietnam such as Thai Binh, Nam Dinh (Northern); Nghe An, Quang Nam (Central); Binh Duong, and Ca Mau (Southern). The survey is performed carefully, with only those who have transacted with the commune government at least five times in the previous five years interviewed.

Keywords---commune-level civil servants, government, serving people, Vietnam, work capability.

Introduction

In Vietnam, the local government consists of 3 levels, including 63 provincial-level agencies, 705 district-level ones, and 10,604 commune-level ones (GSO, 2021).

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Manuscript submitted: 18 August 2021, Manuscript revised: 09 Nov 2021, Accepted for publication: 27 Dec 2021

The commune-level government is the one closest to the people under this system, and civil servants at the commune level are the ones who deal directly with their requests. Since the implementation of the Law on Cadres and Civil Servants in 2008 (VNA, 2008), with its specific standards and close to the job position, commune-level civil servants' quality has been improved in the direction of standardization in terms of qualifications, professional level and practical outcomes of assigned tasks implementation. However, according to the general assessment, commune-level civil servants' work capability has not yet to meet the requirements of local development management tasks (MOHA, 2020). This is a challenge for local managers in improving civil servant's and government agencies' quality and performance (Vu & Tran, 2021; Van Huong & Cuong, 2019; Zu, 2021).

It can be said that it is vital to promote research and practical survey on commune-level civil servants' work capability. With the goal of providing scientific information to serve the management and policy-making by the State, the author conducted a poll of selected 300 at their residence in six provinces representing three regions of Vietnam. The survey findings provide objective information for the author to draw research conclusions and provide policies recommendations suitable to Vietnam circumstances.

Literature reviews

The term 'capability' is mentioned by many researchers with the meaning of 'work capability, which is the physical, intellectual, and moral qualities of a person. (Trung et al., 2020). Many Vietnamese linguists explain with the same meaning 'Capability is a trait of an individual that demonstrates his level of proficiency. It means that he can competently and reliably perform one or more' (EPH, 2005) or 'Capability is the ability to well perform tasks thanks to ethical values and professional qualifications' (Lan, 2006). For state organizations, the work capability is specified into performance criteria according to job titles and position, and specific products (results) assigned to civil servants. Therefore, in this study, the author examines the work capability of civil servants, including that of commune-level civil servants, which is defined as the ability to perform the assigned tasks as evidenced by the performance outcomes. The ability to perform the operations approached by many researchers and managers is examined under two main contents, namely: the ability to work independently and the ability to work jointly (Dung, 2011; Thu & Ngan., 2013; Trung et al., 2021).

Ability to work independently (WI)

- WI1. Actively handling people's records according to their functions, tasks, and prescribed orders. This ability is often only performed well for tasks of a simple nature, associated with a specific stage, or purely professional ones. However, this is a necessary condition for each civil servant to achieve assigned tasks performance outcomes. It also means that this capability is content that demonstrates the knowledge and skills learned and accumulated, which is a necessary condition for each individual before being recruited to become a civil servant (Spiller & Urbiztondo, 1994; Moock et al., 2003).

- WI2. Solving tasks quickly and accurately. Civil servants with trained professional operations and scientific thinking can handle people's demands in the quickest time feasible while maintaining accuracy, resulting in their satisfaction and trust in government agencies.
- WI3. Complying with the law when dealing with tasks. Civil servants comply with the law when dealing with professional tasks and solving people's requests without being influenced by other factors. This capability, when implemented, will help establish order and stability in the performance of public duties. However, it should be noted that in many cases, rigid adherence to the law will not make people satisfied, especially when it comes to operations that need to be simplified to create favorable conditions for them without jeopardizing the agency's overall performance.
- WI4. Actively analyzing matters and advising policies. In addition to having good professional practice skills to implement the state's policies and laws, civil servants must also demonstrate their ability to analyze social matters, conduct good research, and synthesize information to be able to promptly advise and propose to leaders in making policy decisions to serve as tools for the management and administration of local affairs.

Ability to work collaboratively (WC)

- WC1: Working closely with every department and individual involved in completing mutual tasks in the most efficient manner possible. The operations management by government agencies involves a variety of complex duties that necessitate interconnection during the task-solving process. Therefore, in addition to having the ability to handle simple tasks independently, civil servants need to work jointly to complete complicated duties rapidly.
- WC2: Solving tasks flexibly within the prescribed framework. That means that it is necessary to have a manner of functioning that complies with basic regulations to ensure discipline in the performance of public services while also simplifying the steps of resolving people's requests without jeopardizing their interests or the entire process of operations by government agencies.
- WC3: Having a cooperative attitude at work. It refers to civil servants' integration, sharing, understanding, and concern for the people when they approach the government agencies with their requests, thereby capturing a lot of their feedback and aspirations.
- WC4: Having a good sense of coordination when dealing with situations. In performing their duties, many critical issues that arise in practice are addressed to the authorities by the people. There are even some that are unprecedented, requiring civil servants to come up with innovative solutions in such a way to satisfy the people and do not violate the rules that affect the general operation of the agency. These are the ones that require them to pay attention by learning how to handle similar circumstances in theory and reality (Pratama et al., 2015; Chokprajakchat & Sumretphol, 2017).

As previously stated, commune-level civil servants' work capability is a crucial component that has a significant impact on their working results (WR), as many researchers have noted. These factors include: Performing duties expertise on

schedule, ensuring quality (WR1), Responding to people's requests quickly and promptly (WR2), Establishing people's satisfaction and trust (WR3). Thereby, the author has developed a theoretical framework (Table 1) based on a 3-factor model (Figure 1).

Table 1
Research theoretical framework

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	Ability to work independently	WI					
1	Actively handling people's records according to their functions, tasks, and prescribed orders	WI1					
2	Solving tasks quickly and accurately	WI2					
3	Complying with the law when dealing with tasks	WI3					
4	Actively analyzing matters and advising policies	WI4					
II	Ability to work collaboratively	WC					
1	Working closely with every department and individual involved in completing mutual tasks in the most efficient manner possible	WC1					
2	Solving tasks flexibly within the prescribed framework	WC2					
3	Having a cooperative attitude at work	WC3					
4	Having a good sense of coordination when dealing with situations	WC4					
III	Commune-level civil servants' working results	WR					
1	Performing duties expertise on schedule, ensuring quality	WR1					
2	Responding to people's requests quickly and promptly	WR2					
3	Establishing people's satisfaction and trust	WR3					

Source: The authors' synthesized results from the literature review

Through the research overview on commune-level civil servants' work capability, the scales determined according to the research model include: 02 independent variables and 01 dependent variables with a total of 11 observed variables. The author designed a survey consisting of 11 questions and 11 observed variables with a 5-level Likert measure: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - No comments; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree (Table 1). Research models and research hypotheses are built below.

Research model

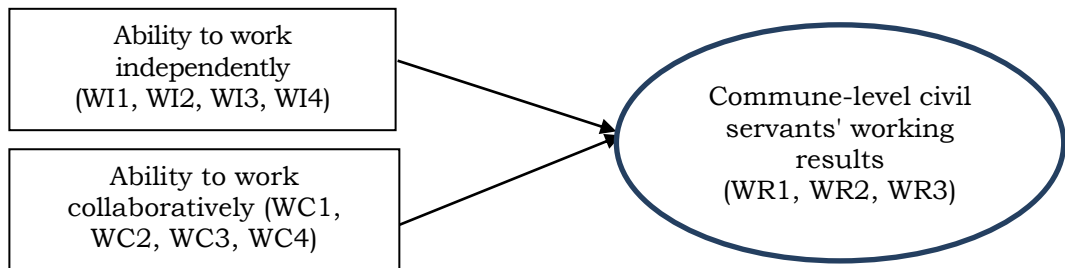


Figure 1. Research model

Research hypothesis

H1: Ability to work independently correlates with the Commune-level civil servants' working results.

H2: Ability to work collaboratively correlates with the Commune-level civil servants' working results.

Research method

The author uses a qualitative method (collection, analysis of secondary data - published documents) combined with quantitative methods (collection and analysis of primary data in the form of investigation and surveys). The investigation and survey are carried out in two steps: Preliminary investigation and official investigation.

Preliminary survey

The minimum sample size required for factor analysis for the 3-scale and 11-variable model of this study is $N = 11 \times 5 = 55$ (Hair et al., 2009). The author surveyed with sample size $N = 300 > 55$ to ensure the reliability of data collection. The survey questionnaire was designed and completed, the author conducted a preliminary survey in Thai Binh province with sample size $N = 150$ people. Preliminary survey results show that the observed variables are reliable so that they can be used in the official survey on a broader scale.

Official survey

The author conducted an official survey in six provinces representing three regions of Vietnam: Thai Binh, Nam Dinh (Northern), Nghe An, Quang Nam (Central), Binh Duong, and Ca Mau (Southern). The poll is performed carefully for only those who have transacted with the commune government at least five times in the previous five years interviewed (Dalal & Sharma, 2016; Arnawa et al., 2019). The survey was carried out with the respondents' consent after the author's preliminary interview. According to the survey data, 300/300 people agreed to respond, with 286/300 valid answer sheets, resulting in a 95% valid response rate. The majority (242/286 people, 84.6%) of survey respondents had

more than 5 transactions with local government agencies in the previous 5 years, according to the study sample's characteristics (Table 2).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of the study sample

Frequency				Age			Total
				< 30	30-40	>40	
3-5 times	Gender Male	Count		24 _a	20 _a		44
		% Gender		54.5%	45.5%		100.0%
		Female	Count	17 _a	6 _a		23
			% Gender	73.9%	26.1%		100.0%
	Total	Count		41	26		67
		% Gender		61.2%	38.8%		100.0%
		Female	Count		97		97
			% Gender		100.0%		100.0%
6-10 times	Gender Male	Count			45		45
		% Gender			100.0%		100.0%
		Female	Count		142		142
			% Gender		100.0%		100.0%
	Total	Count			142		142
		% Gender			100.0%		100.0%
	Gender Male	Count				37	37
		% Gender				100.0%	100.0%
> 10 times	Gender Female	Count				40	40
		% Gender				100.0%	100.0%
		Total	Count			77	77
			% Gender			100.0%	100.0%
	Total	Count				77	77
		% Gender				100.0%	100.0%
Total	Gender Male	Count		24 _{a, b}	117 _b	37 _a	178
		% Gender		13.5%	65.7%	20.8%	100.0%
		Female	Count	17 _{a, b}	51 _b	40 _a	108
			% Gender	15.7%	47.2%	37.0%	100.0%
	Total	Count		41	168	77	286
		% Gender		14.3%	58.7%	26.9%	100.0%

Source: Author's survey results

With the collected data, the author conducts scale testing, exploratory factor analysis, and regression analysis to test the research hypothesis.

Research results

The author conducts scale testing to identify the reliability of the observed variables in the model. The test results show that all 11 observed variables have reliability when meeting the standard conditions: Cronbach's alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3 (Hai & Ngoc, 2018), (Table 3).

Table 3
The results of scale testing

STT	Scales	Observed variables	Reliability coefficients (Cronbach' Alpha)	The correlation coefficient of the smallest total variable
1	Ability to work independently (WI)	WI1, WI2, WI3, WI4	.7.17	WI2 = .359
2	Ability to work collaboratively (WC)	WC1, WC2, WC3, WC4	.873	WC1=.486
3	Commune-level civil servants' working results (WR)	WR1, WR2, WR3	.707	WR3=.396

Source: Author's survey results

With verification values that meet the standard, 11 observed variables in the model continue to be used to perform exploratory factor analysis. The author conducts exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation to preliminary evaluate the unidimensionality, convergence value, discriminant value of the scales. The results of the analysis are shown in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Total variance explained

Table 4
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	5.643	51.297	51.297	5.643	51.297	51.297	4.354	39.586	39.586
2	1.897	17.248	68.545	1.897	17.248	68.545	2.404	21.850	61.436
3	1.035	9.408	77.952	1.035	9.408	77.952	1.817	16.516	77.952
4	.885	8.050	86.002						
.....						
11	.026	.234	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: KMO = .837

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 3243.332; Sig = .000

Source: Author's survey results

Rotated component matrix

Table 5
Rotated component matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
WI1	.903		
WI3	.829		
WI2	.808		
WI4	.679		

WC2	.911	
WC3	.875	
WC4	.861	
WC1	.659	
WR1		.900
WR2		.863
WR3		.654
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.		

Source: Author's survey results

In quantitative research, exploratory factor analysis is performed in accordance with the data set through the following values: $0.5 \leq \text{KMO} \leq 1$; Bartlett's test has the Sig level of significance. < 0.05 ; Eigenvalue ≥ 1 ; Total Variance Explained $\geq 50\%$; Factor Loading ≥ 0.5 (Hair, J.F. et al., 2009). The data in Table 4 and Table 5 show that: KMO value = $0.837 > 0.5$ confirms that exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for the data set; Bartlett test has the Sig level of significance. = $0.000 < 0.05$ shows that the observed variables have a linear correlation with the representative factor; Total Variance Explained with Cumulative % = $77.952\% > 50\%$ shows that 77.952% variation of representative factors is explained by observed variables; All observed variables have Factor Loading > 0.5 show that the observed variables have good statistical significance; The observed variables extracted into 03 factors corresponding to 03 initial factors with Eigenvalues > 1 , show that the original research model was kept unchanged, including: 01 dependent variable (WR), 02 independent variables (WI, WC) with a total of 11 observed variables with good statistical significance, multivariable linear regression analysis can be performed to consider the relationship of independent variables (WI, WC) with the dependent variable (WR).

Coefficients

Table 6
Multivariable regression results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1 (Constant)	1.165	.113		10.320	.000	1.000
Ability to work independently (WI)	.915	.032	1.016	28.183	.000	1.000
Ability to work collaboratively (WC)	.238	.033	.257	7.118	.014	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Commune-level civil servants' working results (WR)
Adjusted R Square: 0.773
Durbin-Watson: 2.160

Source: Author's survey results

The data in Table 6 show that:

- Adjusted R Square = 0.773 confirms that the factors WI, WC explain 77.3% of variation of the WR factor in the research model. The built multivariate regression model is suitable for the data set.
- The Variance Inflation Factors ($VIF = 1,000 < 2$) shows that the regression model does not have multicollinearity.
- Durbin-Watson = 2.160 ($1 < d < 3$) shows that the regression model does not have autocorrelation. The regression coefficients of 2 independent variables (WI, WC) are statistically significant ($Sig. < 0.05$) showing that the factors WI, WC are all correlated with WR.
- The unnormalized regression coefficients have positive values, so the factors in the research model have a positive relationship, the hypotheses H1, H2 are accepted.

On the basis of the general regression model $Y = B_0 + B_1 \cdot X_1 + B_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + B_i \cdot X_i$ (Hair et al., 2009), the multivariate regression model of this study can be identified as following:

$$WR = 1.165 + 0.915 \cdot WI + 0.238 \cdot WC$$

Based on the normalized regression coefficient, it can be seen that the correlation of the independent variables and the dependent variables in order are: Ability to work independently (WI) and Ability to work collaboratively (WC) (Allen et al., 2001; Xiao & Xie, 2021; Trung, 2021).

Conclusion

Based on the above research findings, it can be concluded that commune-level civil servants' ability to collaborate is rated lower than their ability to operate independently. It also means that commune-level civil servants need to enhance their coordination to function more effectively. From this conclusion, the author suggests some management innovations for local leaders, including (1) Regularly fostering and practicing civil servants' work and coordination skills, spirit, and service attitude; (2) Constantly monitoring and evaluating their collaboration and coordination capability, combining internal and external assessments (the people's opinions) to have complete and multi-dimensional information about them while performing their tasks (Zainudin et al., 2021; Dalal & Chahal, 2016).

In the state management operations, if the facilities and technology are advanced, the policies are coherent, but civil servants' working capability is limited, then their outcomes cannot achieve high efficiency. People will feel appreciated, served with zeal, and have more faith in the local governments if civil servants are constantly fostered and developed in their abilities to work independently and jointly. Government agencies can then beneficially mobilize resources to serve the locality development (Phuong, 2017; Ciobanu & Androniceanu, 2015).

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