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## A Study on Quality of Civil Servants in Vietnam

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### Abstract

*In each country, civil servants are those who perform public duties, serve the state and serve the people, so the quality of civil servants is always a matter of concern and is often evaluated in terms of public ethics, professional qualifications and working capacity. The author mentions these three criteria in his research with the meaning of both constituting content and influencing the quality of civil servants. With the theoretical research model built, the author conducted a survey of 330 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Lang Son province (North), Binh Dinh province (Central), Tra Vinh province (South) to assess the practical quality of local civil servants at the commune level. The research results show that local leaders underestimate the practical working capacity of civil servants, from which the author has the basis to draw research conclusions and discuss policy issues to improve the quality of local civil servants in Vietnam.*

**Keywords:** Civil Servant, Civil Servant Quality, Vietnam

### Introduction

Vietnam is operating a three-level local model, including provincial level (63 provincial localities), district level (705 district localities) and commune level (10599 commune-level localities) (GSO, 2024). In that system, the commune level is the lowest level of government and has 6 civil servant positions, including: Commander of the Commune Military Command; Office - Statistics; Land - Construction - Urban and Environment (for wards and towns) / or Land - Agriculture - Construction - Urban and Environment (for communes); Finance - Accounting; Justice - Civil Status; Culture - Society (VG, 2023).

In 2025, Vietnam is implementing a revolution in streamlining the state apparatus: Establishing a two-level local model, including provincial and communal levels (eliminating district-level localities) and merging provincial and communal administrative units (CPV, 2025) and planning to reduce about 50% of provincial administrative units and 60%-70% of communal administrative units (TT New, 2025). This raises many issues regarding the quality of local civil servants, especially communal civil servants when they take on many new tasks from the district level. Although communal civil servants are given attention through training and fostering policies to meet the standards of civil servant titles and ranks; the quality of civil servants is gradually improved, however, there are still certain differences between urban, rural and mountainous areas; Commune-level civil servants in many localities have not yet met the requirements of their tasks in the trend of administrative reform, building e-government and digital government (MOHA, 2024).

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And in the context of streamlining the local government apparatus today, the issue of the quality of commune-level civil servants is posing many challenges for local leaders; there is a need for empirical studies on the quality of commune-level civil servants to provide information for policy development and improvement, which has attracted the author's attention when researching the quality of civil servants.

## **Literature Review**

The term “quality” is often used to explain the value of a person expressed in their qualities and abilities. According to linguist Phe, H. (2011), quality is what creates the quality and value of a person, an object, or an event. Understood according to this concept, the quality of civil servants represents the qualities and abilities of civil servants that meet the standards of civil service ranks and meet the requirements of job positions in public service activities.

In terms of theoretical research, the qualities of civil servants are interpreted by many researchers with two contents, including civil service ethics and professional qualifications; the capacity of civil servants is interpreted as the ability to work practically to meet the requirements of the job that civil servants are assigned to undertake according to the job position in public service activities (Hai, T.N., 2018; Khanh, P.T.L., 2023). In terms of state management, current Vietnamese law also stipulates the assessment of the quality of civil servants according to the criteria of civil service ethics, professional qualifications and practical working capacity (VG, 2020). Thus, the quality of civil servants is approached to include both civil service ethics, professional qualifications and working capacity to meet the requirements of the job position in public service activities.

The author agrees with the research approach and the content of the legal provisions of Vietnam mentioned above. Accordingly, the quality of civil servants is defined as the value of civil servants expressed through their moral qualities, professional qualifications and working capacity to meet the standards of civil servant titles and meet the requirements of job positions in public service activities. The scale "Civil servant quality" (CSQ) is built with detailed explanations, including the following contents: Civil servants with good ethics - loyalty and awareness of serving the state and the people, meeting the standards of civil servant titles (CSQ1); Civil servants with professional qualifications meeting the standards of civil servant ranks and job positions (CSQ2); Civil servants with working capacity meeting the requirements of job positions to perform well the assigned tasks - ensuring progress and quality of assigned work (CSQ3).

In theory and practice, public ethics, professional qualifications and working capacity are both components of the quality of civil servants and factors that decisively influence the quality of civil servants. Therefore, the author builds a theoretical model of factors affecting the quality of civil servants in this study, including the following scales/independent variables: "Public ethics" (PE), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC).

- Firstly, public ethics is the political standard of each civil servant prescribed by law in accordance with the characteristics of the political and social regime of each country. According to Phuc, T.V. (2018), civil servants regularly practice public ethics to meet the requirements of serving the state and serving the people: Must have good political ideology, good working style, good sense of discipline, good service spirit - serving the state, serving the people. Hiep, N.T. (2021) affirms that public ethics is the most basic standard of civil servants, demonstrated in loyalty to the country, dedication to serving the state and serving the people; strictly complying

with the law and regulations of the agency, complying with the assignment of tasks by superiors and being ready to accept assigned tasks. On that basis, the author builds the "Public Ethics" (PE) scale including the following contents: Civil servants have good moral qualities, are loyal to the country, and are dedicated to serving the state and the people (PE1); Civil servants strictly comply with the laws and regulations of the agency, comply with the assignment of tasks by superiors, and are ready to accept assigned tasks (PE2); Civil servants regularly practice public service ethics to meet the requirements of serving the state and serving the people (PE3).

- Second, professional qualifications are the necessary knowledge standards of the recruitment process, which are the knowledge and skills that have been created and nurtured for individuals to register for recruitment to become civil servants. According to Minh, P.T.T. (2022), professional qualifications are the necessary knowledge and skills - necessary conditions for civil servants to complete assigned tasks. Son, N.V. (2023) affirms that professional qualifications are the knowledge and skills that each individual is trained and nurtured before being recruited as a civil servant, but must meet the standards of the civil service rank, meet the requirements of the job position for which the civil servant is recruited. In addition to the above contents, the author believes that civil servants are always proactive in self-training so that the knowledge and skills that have been trained and nurtured are always updated and supplemented to meet the standards of the civil service rank and their job position. The "Professional Qualification" (PQ) scale is built to include the main contents: Trained and fostered civil servants have knowledge and skills meeting the standards of the civil service rank they hold (PQ1); Trained and fostered civil servants have knowledge and skills meeting the requirements of the job position they hold (PQ1); Civil servants proactively self-train to update and supplement their knowledge and skills meeting the standards of the civil service rank and job position they hold (PQ3).

- Third, working capacity is the core factor for civil servants to create results and work efficiency in public service activities. According to Loan, T. (2017), the working capacity of civil servants is the ability to work to meet job requirements based on the knowledge and skills that civil servants have been trained and fostered. Van, N.T.T. (2022) shares the same view with Loan, T. (2017) and affirms that: Civil servants with good working capacity will easily realize ideas, plans, and work programs into consulting products and implement them effectively in practice. The above researchers also emphasize the role and significance of the practical working capacity of civil servants, which is that civil servants perform assigned tasks proficiently and reliably through their consulting ability, ability to organize and implement work, and ability to control work. The author inherits the above research results and builds a scale to measure "Working Capacity" (WC) of civil servants, including the content: Civil servants are capable of advising and realizing ideas into policy products for consulting in professional work (WC1); Civil servants are capable of organizing and implementing professional tasks, implementing scientific and feasible measures to achieve work results ensuring progress and quality (WC2); Civil servants are capable of controlling work, proactively reviewing, analyzing, and evaluating work to complete assigned tasks well (WC3).

From the above overview, the author has built a theoretical model to study the factors affecting the quality of civil servants, including 3 scales/independent variables: "Public ethics" (PE), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) and 01 scale/dependent variable "Civil servants quality" (CSQ). The research model shows the impact of the factors "Public ethics" (PE), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) on "Civil servants quality" (CSQ). The author conducted empirical research in 3 localities of Vietnam with the

hypothesis that: *Public ethics (H1), Professional qualifications (H2) and Working capacity (H3) have a positive impact, affirming the civil servants quality.* The scales in the research model include 12 observed variables, designed by the author into 12 corresponding questions in the survey form and measured by a 5-level Likert scale: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - No opinion; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree (Table 1, Figure 1).

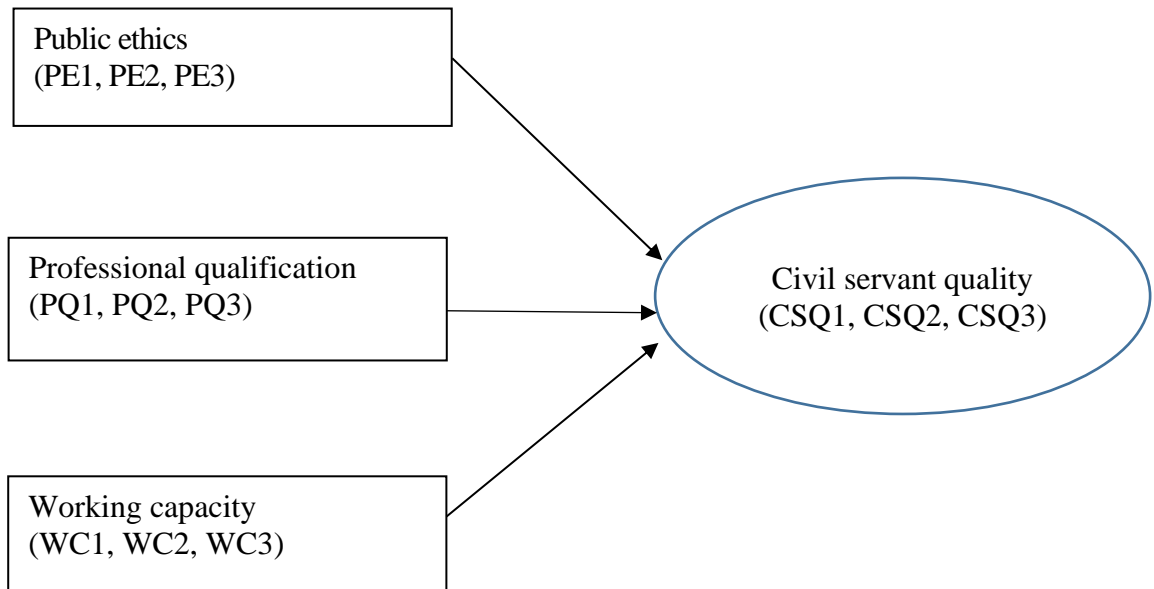
**Table 1.** Theoretical framework

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
<b>I</b>	<b>Public ethics</b>	<b>PE</b>					
1	Civil servants have good moral qualities, are loyal to the country, and are dedicated to serving the state and the people.	PE1					
2	Civil servants strictly comply with the laws and regulations of the agency, comply with the assignment of tasks by superiors, and are ready to accept assigned tasks.	PE2					
3	Civil servants regularly practice public service ethics to meet the requirements of serving the state and serving the people.	PE3					
<b>II</b>	<b>Professional qualification</b>	<b>PQ</b>					
4	Trained and fostered civil servants have knowledge and skills meeting the standards of the civil service rank they hold.	PQ1					
5	Trained and fostered civil servants have knowledge and skills meeting the requirements of the job position they hold.	PQ2					
6	Civil servants proactively self-train to update and supplement their knowledge and skills meeting the standards of the civil service rank and job position they hold.	PQ3					
<b>III</b>	<b>Working capacity</b>	<b>WC</b>					
7	Civil servants are capable of advising and realizing ideas into policy products for consulting in professional work.	WC1					
8	Civil servants are capable of organizing and implementing professional tasks, implementing scientific and feasible measures to achieve work results ensuring progress and quality.	WC2					
9	Civil servants are capable of controlling work, proactively reviewing, analyzing, and evaluating work to complete assigned tasks well.	WC3					
<b>IV</b>	<b>Civil servant quality</b>	<b>CSQ</b>					
10	Civil servants with good ethics - loyalty and awareness of serving the state and the people, meeting the standards of civil servant titles.	CSQ1					

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
11	Civil servants with professional qualifications meeting the standards of civil servant ranks and job positions.	CSQ2					
12	Civil servants with working capacity meeting the requirements of job positions to perform well the assigned tasks - ensuring progress and quality of assigned work.	CSQ3					

*Source: Compiled by the author through the review*

### Research Model



**Figure 1. Research model**

### Research Methods

**Qualitative method:** The author uses qualitative method through collecting and analyzing secondary data to summarize research and build a theoretical research model on factors affecting the quality of civil servants.

**Quantitative method:** The author uses quantitative research methods through surveying the opinions of 330 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Lang Son province (North), Binh Dinh province (Central), Tra Vinh province (South) to assess the quality of local civil servants at the commune level. The survey is conducted in two steps: Preliminary survey and official survey.

- Preliminary survey: The research model consists of 4 scales with a total of 12 observed variables. According to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), the minimum sample size required for this study

is  $N = 12 \times 5 = 60$ . The author conducted a preliminary survey in Lang Son province with a sample size of  $N = 110$  leaders of commune-level government agencies ( $N > 60$ ). The results of the preliminary survey in Lang Son province showed that the scales and observed variables are reliable enough to be used in an official survey on a larger scale.

- Official survey: The author conducted an official survey with a sample size of  $N = 330$  leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Lang Son province (North), Binh Dinh province (Central), Tra Vinh province (South):  $N > 60$ , ensuring reliability when conducting survey research. With a selective survey (survey respondents are leaders of commune-level government agencies for 3 years or more; with the consent of respondents before conducting the survey), the author collected 330/330 valid ballots, achieving a response rate of 100%.

## Research Results and Discussion

First, the author conducts statistics and tests the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model. In quantitative research, the scale ensures reliability when it reaches Cronbach's alpha value  $> 0.6$ ; observed variables are reliable when it reaches Corrected Item-Total Correlation value  $> 0.3$  (Hair, J.F. et al., 2009). The statistical and testing results are shown in Table 2 below.

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

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Public ethics (PE)	PE1	270	2	5	4.28	.543	.768	PE1 = .592
	PE2	270	2	5	4.29	.594		PE2 = .605
	PE3	270	1	5	4.16	.605		PE3 = .578
2. Professional qualification (PQ)	PQ1	270	2	5	4.35	.576	.745	PQ1 = .597
	PQ2	270	2	5	4.22	.581		PQ2 = .611
	PQ3	270	1	5	4.12	.613		PQ3 = .588
3. Working capacity (WC)	WC1	270	1	5	3.99	.628	.659	WC1 = .441
	WC2	270	1	5	3.93	.610		WC2 = .419
	WC3	270	1	5	3.97	.631		WC3 = .454
4. Civil servant quality (CSQ)	CSQ1	270	2	5	4.11	.548	.713	CSQ1 = .598
	CSQ2	270	2	5	4.05	.589		CSQ2 = .546
	CSQ3	270	2	5	4.09	.592		CSQ3 = .563
Valid N (listwise)		270						

*Source: Author's survey results*

Data in Table 2 shows that observations on the scales of "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Working Capacity" (WC) and "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ) are all rated at an average level of Mean  $\geq 3.93$ , statistically significant according to the determined Likert scale (1-5). Commune-level government leaders all affirmed the quality of local civil servants: Civil servants have good moral qualities demonstrated in their loyalty to the country and their sense of serving the state and the people; have professional qualifications that meet the standards

of civil servant ranks and job positions; have working capacity that meets the requirements of job positions to perform assigned tasks to ensure progress and quality.

Among the above scales, the observed variables of the "Working Capacity" (NL) scale were assessed at the lowest level with Mean (WC1) = 3.99, Mean (WC2) = 3.93, Mean (WC3) = 3.97, showing that local leaders assessed that civil servants have certain limitations in practical working capacity: Many civil servants are limited in their ability to realize ideas into policy products for consulting in professional work; many civil servants are limited in their ability to organize and implement professional tasks, limited in their ability to deploy scientific and feasible measures to achieve work results that ensure progress and quality; many civil servants are limited in their ability to control work, lacking the initiative to review, analyze, and evaluate work to complete assigned tasks well.

The test results in Table 2 show that all 4 scales and 12 observed variables in the research model have standard test values. From there, these scales and observed variables continue to be used for the next analysis. The author conducts exploratory factor analysis to preliminarily assess the unidimensionality, convergent value, and discriminant value of the scales to have more basis for drawing research conclusions about the suitability of the initial theoretical model. The results of exploratory factor analysis are shown in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

**Table 3.** Total Variance Explained

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.785
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2156.843
	df	123
	Sig.	.000

**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	7.520	41.777	41.777	7.520	41.777	41.777	4.629	25.719	25.719
2	4.735	26.307	68.084	4.735	26.307	68.084	4.402	24.456	50.174
3	1.855	10.306	78.390	1.855	10.306	78.390	4.034	22.409	72.583
4	1.079	5.996	84.386	1.079	5.996	84.386	2.125	11.803	84.386
5	.426	3.552	91.949						
6	.313	2.612	94.561						
7	.281	2.338	96.899						
8	.209	1.739	98.638						
9	.061	.505	99.143						
10	.052	.434	99.577						

11	.045	.371	99.948					
12	.006	.052	100.000					
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.								

*Source: Author's survey results*

**Table 4.** Rotated Component Matrix

<b>Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>					
Scales	Observed variables	Component			
		1	2	3	4
Public ethics (PE)	PE1	.814			
	PE2	.831			
	PE3	.789			
Professional qualification (PQ)	PQ1		.821		
	PQ2		.798		
	PQ3		.806		
Working capacity (WC)	WC1			.787	
	WC2			.793	



	WC3			.782	
Civil servant quality (CSQ)	CSQ1				.828
	CSQ2				.817
	CSQ3				.845
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.					
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.					

*Source: Author's survey results*

In quantitative research, according to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), exploratory factor analysis was performed in accordance with the data set through the values:  $0.5 \leq \text{KMO} \leq 1$ ; Bartlett's test has an observed significance level  $\text{Sig.} < 0.05$ ; Eigenvalue  $\geq 1$ ; Total Variance Explained  $\geq 50\%$ ; Factor Loading  $\geq 0.5$ . The data in Table 3 and Table 4 show that:

+ KMO coefficient =  $0.785 > 0.5$ , confirming that exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for the data set; Bartlett's test has an observed significance level of  $\text{Sig.} = 0.000 < 0.05$ , showing that the observed variables have a linear correlation with the representative factor. Total Variance Explained with Cumulative % =  $84.386\% > 50\%$  (Table 3), showing that 84.386% of the variation of the representative factors is explained by the observed variables; the observed variables all have Factor Loading  $> 0.5$  (Table 4), showing that the observed variables have good statistical significance. The theoretical research model initially proposed is consistent with the survey research practice.

+ The observed variables were extracted into 04 factors corresponding to the 04 initial factors with Eigenvalues  $> 1$  (Table 3), continuing to confirm the suitability of the initial research model. And the initial research model was kept intact, including: 03 independent variables "Public ethics" (PE), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) and 01 dependent variable "Civil servant quality" (CSQ) with 12 observed variables with good statistical significance, it is possible to perform multivariate linear regression analysis to examine the relationship of the variables in the model. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 5, which is the basis for the author to draw research conclusions.

**Table 5.** Multivariate regression results

<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.068	.524		13.983	.000	
	Public ethics (PE)	.375	.259	.402	9.446	.000	1.824
	Professional qualifications (PQ)	.322	.215	.292	7.817	.000	1.835
	Working capacity (WC)	.219	.196	.148	5.908	.000	1.789
a. Dependent Variable: Civil servant quality (CSQ)							
R Square: 0.734; Durbin-Watson: 2.102							

*Source: Author's survey results*

The data in Table 5 shows that:

+ R Square = 0.734, confirming that the scales "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Working Capacity" (WC) explain 73.4% of the variation in the scale "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ);  $1 < VIF < 2$ , showing that the regression model does not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.102 ( $1 < d < 3$ ), showing that the regression model does not have autocorrelation, confirming that the scales "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Working Capacity" (WC) are independent and have an impact on the scale "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ), confirming the suitability of the theoretical research model with the survey data set.

+ The regression coefficients of the three independent variables "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Working Capacity" (WC) are all statistically significant Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) and have positive values:  $B(PE) = 0.375$ ,  $B(PQ) = 0.322$  and  $B(WC) = 0.219$ , confirming the positive relationship between the three independent variables "Public Ethics" (PE), "Professional Qualification" (PQ), "Working Capacity" (WC) and 01 dependent variable "Civil Servant Quality" (CSQ); hypotheses H1, H2, H3 are accepted; the initial research model continues to be confirmed to be appropriate.

Based on the generalized regression model of Hair, J.F. et al. (2009):  $Y = B_0 + B_1 * X_1 + B_2 * X_2 + \dots + B_i * X_i$ , the author determined the multivariate regression model of this study as follows:

$$CSQ = 1.1068 + 0.375 * PE + 0.322 * PQ + 0.219 * WC$$

Based on the regression coefficient (B), it can be seen that the correlation level of the independent variables and the dependent variable in decreasing order is: "Public ethics" (PE), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC). That contributes to further affirming the results of empirical research in Vietnam, that: Civil servants with good moral qualities are shown in their loyalty to the country and their sense of serving the state and the people; have professional qualifications that meet the standards of civil service ranks and job positions; have working capacity that meets the requirements of job positions to perform assigned tasks to ensure progress and quality; have professional qualifications that meet the standards of civil service ranks and job position requirements in public service activities. However, many civil servants are limited in their ability to realize ideas into policy products for consulting in professional work; Many civil servants are limited in their ability to organize and carry out professional tasks, limited in their ability to deploy scientific and feasible measures to

achieve work results that ensure progress and quality; many civil servants are limited in their ability to control work, lack initiative in reviewing, analyzing, and evaluating work to complete assigned tasks well. This also shows that the practical working capacity of many civil servants is not commensurate with their professional qualifications; they have not yet maximized the knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered to achieve the best performance results according to the requirements of the job position in public service activities.

Commenting on the current state of civil servant quality mentioned above, it can be seen that there are also problems arising from current legal regulations. Specifically, according to the provisions of Vietnamese law, the assessment of civil servant quality is mainly in the form of internal assessment, conducted in the following order: Civil servants self-assess; the agency approves and recognizes the results of civil servant assessment according to each department unit (VG, 2020). Many researchers believe that the internal assessment method is convenient for each civil servant management agency, but there will be a lack of multi-dimensional assessment information on the practice of civil servant quality. In terms of research and practical observation, the author also recognizes this, therefore, the author implies the need to study and innovate the civil servant assessment policy in the direction of focusing on assessing civil servants according to the competency framework of each job position. Accordingly, agencies and localities need to study, develop and perfect the competency framework of each job position in public service activities; Develop assessment content and process for assessing the quality of civil servants according to the competency framework for each civil servant's job position.

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