Research on the Quality of Local Civil Servants in Vietnam

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Abstract

Civil servants are those who use state power to perform public duties according to their professional fields and job positions. The quality of civil servants is reflected in the work results of civil servants serving the state and the people. Vietnamese law also stipulates the evaluation of civil servants based on the work results of the civil servants assigned to them; and to achieve such work results, individual civil servants must have good moral qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity to meet the requirements of public service activities. In this study, the author identifies the factors of moral qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity as the forming conditions that have an impact on work results - the quality of civil servants. The author builds a theoretical framework consisting of these 4 scales and conducts a survey of 300 leaders of commune-level government agencies to collect information to assess the quality of commune-level civil servants in Vietnam today. The survey was conducted in 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Hai Duong province (North), Ha Tinh province (Central), Soc Trang province (South). The research results show that local leaders underestimate the practical working capacity of commune-level civil servants. From the conclusion of this research, the author discusses some policy contents to improve the quality of local civil servants in Vietnam.

Keywords: *Local Civil Servants, Commune-Level Civil Servants, Civil Servant Quality, Vietnam.*

Introduction

Vietnam's localities are divided into provincial, district and commune levels: 63 provincial localities, 705 district localities, 10599 commune localities [GSO, 2023]. Local authorities at each level are established including People's Councils (established by voters) and People's Committees (established by People's Councils, exercising executive power to manage and operate economic and social activities) [VNA, 2015].

Local civil servants in Vietnam are assigned to the government apparatus. Provincial and district-level civil servants are assigned to specialized agencies under the government. The commune-level government is the lowest level of government and does not organize specialized agencies under the government, but organizes an apparatus with 6 civil servant positions of the People's Committee at the commune level, 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].

Due to differences in terrain, culture, economy, and society between regions, the level of qualifications and capacity of commune-level civil servants across the country also has certain differences. The annual assessment of civil servant quality is carried out based on work results with 4 levels of civil servant classification: Excellent completion of tasks; Good completion of tasks; Completed tasks; Unfulfilled tasks [VG, 2020]. However, in many localities, the suitability/compatibility between professional qualifications and actual capacity to perform tasks of civil servants still has a large difference. This is an issue that local leaders are concerned about and is also an issue that the author is concerned about in this study when assessing the quality of civil servants.

Literature Review

In Vietnam, the term "quality" is commonly understood as what creates the value of an object. According to Phe, H. (2011), quality is what creates the quality and value of a person, an object, or an event. The definition of Phe, H. (2011) is widely applied in research, production, management, and is the basis for

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explaining many research subjects such as human resource quality, product quality, and service quality. Vietnamese managers also have clear regulations on the term "quality", that it is the entirety of the characteristics of an entity that give that entity the ability to satisfy the stated and intended needs [MOSTE, 1999]. This regulation can be applied in many activities, but is perhaps more suitable for state management activities, strictly applied by agencies and organizations when participating in the state management process according to decentralized sectors and fields.

The above viewpoints and definitions of quality all refer to the value of people and the value of things expressed through inherent characteristics and attributes when placed in specific conditions. The author supports the viewpoints and research content above when discussing the quality of local civil servants. Accordingly, the value of local civil servants is affirmed when they demonstrate their qualities and abilities to meet the requirements of public service activities, meet the requirements of the job position they undertake, serve the state and serve the people in the best way. With that meaning, the author builds the "Quality of civil servants" (QCS) scale for this study with an interpretation including the contents showing the promotion of the values that civil servants have done to serve the state and serve the people: Civil servants have qualities, qualifications, and abilities to meet the requirements of public service activities (QCS1); Civil servants have qualities, qualifications, and abilities to meet the requirements of the job position (QCS2); Civil servants have the qualities, qualifications and capacity to meet the requirements of serving the state and the people - ensuring the progress and quality of assigned work, serving and creating satisfaction for the people (QCS3).

Discussing the conditions that form and influence the work results - the quality of civil servants, many researchers mentioned the factors of moral qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity. According to Khanh, C.X. (2010), moral qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity are the foundation for civil servants to perform their duties and achieve the results of assigned tasks. Tam, N.T. (2011) also agrees with Khanh, C.X. (2010) and affirms that moral qualities, professional qualifications, and working capacity are the basis for evaluating civil servants according to legal regulations, but are also factors that make up the quality of civil servants. The author inherits the above studies and builds the scales of "Ethical qualities" (EQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) when referring to the factors affecting the "Quality of civil servants" (QCS), which are explained in detail below.

Firstly, discussing the ethical qualities of civil servants, Thai, P.H. (2016) affirmed that ethical qualities are the most basic standards for all civil servants, including good political ideology, good lifestyle, good working style, good sense of discipline. HUHA (2020) emphasized the ethical qualities of civil servants with strict compliance with the law, solidarity, honesty, and proper behavior. On that basis, the "Ethical qualities" (EQ) scale is generalized in this study, including the following content aspects: Civil servants have good political ideology, strictly comply with the law and regulations and rules of the working agency (EQ1); Civil servants have good lifestyle and style, honesty, modesty, and standard behavior (EQ2); Civil servants have good sense of discipline, respect for colleagues, respect for people, and dedication to serving the people (EQ3).

Second, discussing the professional qualifications of civil servants, Hai, N.H. (2014) affirmed that these are the knowledge and skills that each individual is trained and fostered before being recruited as a civil servant, meeting the standards of civil servant ranks, meeting the requirements of the recruited job positions as prescribed by law. Son, N.V. (2023) shares this view but emphasizes that such knowledge and skills continue to be trained and fostered so that civil servants can meet the requirements of the tasks of state agencies at each stage of development - meeting the standards prescribed by law on professional knowledge, skills, and state management knowledge associated with the performance of tasks in public service activities. On that basis, the author builds a scale of "Professional Qualification" (PQ) with the contents of knowledge and skills that civil servants acquire through training and fostering, including: Civil servants with professional qualifications meeting the standards of civil servant ranks prescribed by law (PQ1); Civil servants with state management knowledge/trained in state management knowledge meeting the standards of civil servant ranks prescribed by law (PQ2); Civil servants with knowledge and skills/trained in knowledge and skills meeting the requirements of job positions prescribed by law (PQ3).

Third, discussing the working capacity of civil servants, Anh, K.Q. (2022) affirmed that it is the ability to work well thanks to moral qualities and professional qualifications; civil servants transform the knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered to realize ideas, plans, and work programs into specific products in the process of advising and implementing tasks and public services. Similarly, Hung, L.D. et al. (2023) emphasized that the working capacity of civil servants is the ability to perform assigned work proficiently and reliably (advising ability, implementing work ability, checking and evaluating work ability); that product contains the values of civil servants in both the aspects of moral qualities and knowledge and skills that civil servants have acquired through training and fostering. With that meaning, the author builds the scale of "Working capacity" (WC) of civil servants in this study, including some main contents: Civil servants with good advisory capacity - capacity to advise on policy planning, advise on professional activities in the specialized field associated with the job position in the agency (WC1); Civil servants with good task performance capacity - capacity to perform professional tasks to ensure progress and quality of assigned tasks (WC2); Civil servants with good inspection and evaluation capacity - proactively grasp the situation, promote advantages, promptly overcome errors or unreasonable problems; proactively analyze, evaluate, and summarize the implementation of assigned tasks (WC3).

From the above overview, the author has built a theoretical framework on the Quality of Civil Servants and the influence of Ethical Qualities, Professional Qualifications, and Working Capacity on the Quality of Civil Servants. The research model is determined to include 3 independent scales/variables: "Ethical Qualities" (EQ), "Professional Qualifications" (PQ), "Working Capacity" (WC) and 01 scale/dependent variable "Quality of Civil Servants" (QCS). The above scales include 12 observed variables, designed by the author into 12 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 for Research on Quality of Civil Servants

No	Scales	Code	5-level Likert scale				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	**Ethical qualities**	**EQ**					
1	Civil servants have good political ideology, strictly comply with the law and regulations and rules of the working agency	EQ1					
2	Civil servants have good lifestyle and style, honesty, modesty, and standard behavior	EQ2					
3	Civil servants have good sense of discipline, respect for colleagues, respect for people, and dedication to serving the people	EQ3					
II	**Professional qualifications**	**PQ**					
1	Civil servants with professional qualifications meeting the standards of civil servant ranks prescribed by law	PQ1					
2	Civil servants with state management knowledge/trained in state management knowledge meeting the standards of civil servant ranks prescribed by law	PQ2					
3	Civil servants with knowledge and skills/trained in knowledge and skills meeting the requirements of job positions prescribed by law	PQ3					
III	**Working capacity**	**WC**					
1	: Civil servants with good advisory capacity - capacity to advise on policy planning, advise on professional activities in the specialized field associated with the job position in the agency	WC1					
2	Civil servants with good task performance capacity - capacity to perform professional tasks to ensure progress and quality of assigned tasks	WC2					
3	Civil servants with good inspection and evaluation capacity - proactively grasp the situation, promote advantages, promptly	WC3					

	overcome errors or unreasonable problems; proactively analyze, evaluate, and summarize the implementation of assigned tasks						
IV	**Quality of civil servants**	**QCS**					
1	Civil servants have qualities, qualifications, and abilities to meet the requirements of public service activities	QCS1					
2	Civil servants have qualities, qualifications, and abilities to meet the requirements of the job position	QCS2					
3	Civil servants have the qualities, qualifications and capacity to meet the requirements of serving the state and the people - ensuring the progress and quality of assigned work, serving and creating satisfaction for the people	QCS3					

Source: Synthesized through literature review
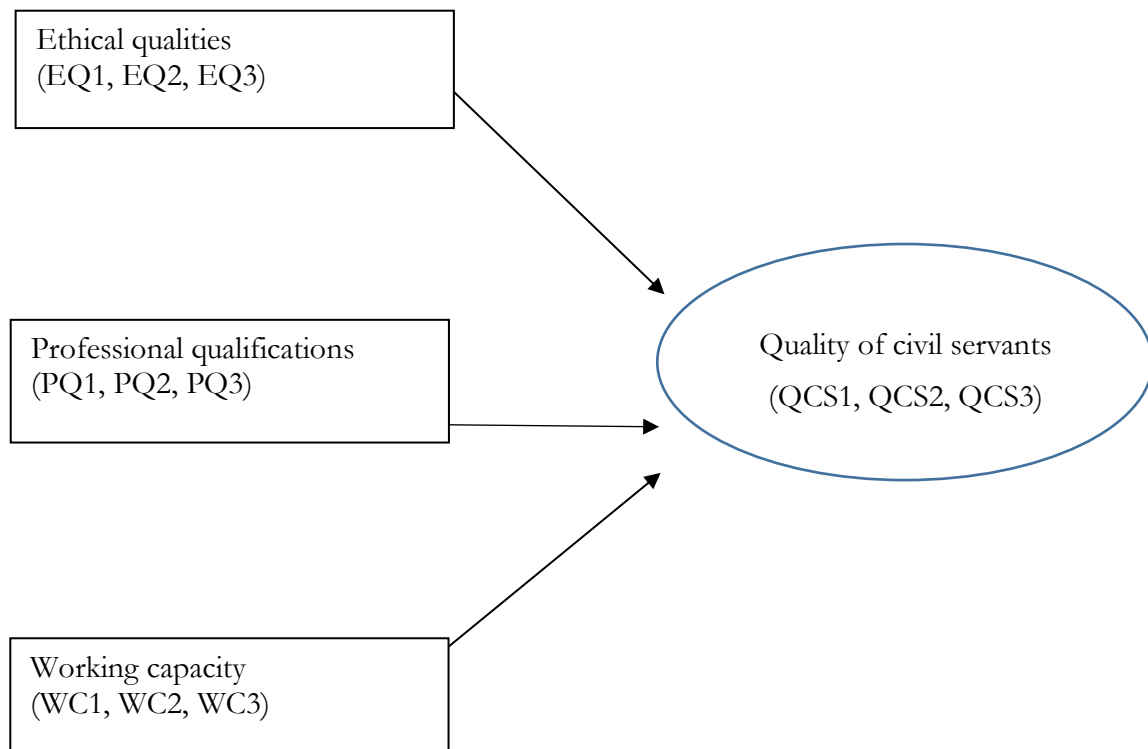
Research Model

Figure 1. Research Model

The theoretical research model was built to demonstrate the impact of the factors "Ethical qualities" (EQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) on "Civil servant quality" (QCS). The author conducted an experimental study in 3 localities of Vietnam with the hypothesis that: *Ethical qualities (H1), Professional qualifications (H2) and Working capacity (H3) have a positive impact, affirming the Quality of Civil servants.*

Research Methods

In this study, the author uses qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative research methods are implemented through collecting and analyzing secondary data to build a theoretical framework. Quantitative research methods are implemented through collecting and analyzing primary data using survey forms. The survey is conducted in two steps: Preliminary survey and official survey.

Preliminary survey: The theoretical framework for the study was built with 4 scales and 12 observed variables. According to Hai, D.H. (2019), the minimum sample size required for factor analysis and regression analysis for the 4-scale, 12 observed variables model is N = 12*5 = 60. First, the author conducted a preliminary survey with a sample size of N = 100 leaders of commune-level government agencies in Hai Duong province (N > 60). The results of the preliminary survey in Hai Duong province showed that the scales and observed variables were reliable enough to be used in an official survey on a larger scale.

Official survey: From the results of the preliminary survey that achieved reliability, the author conducted an official survey in 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Hai Duong province (North), Ha Tinh province (Central), Soc Trang province (South). The survey sample size was N = 300 leaders of commune-level government agencies (N > 60), ensuring reliability when conducting survey research. The survey was conducted selectively; respondents were leaders of commune-level government agencies for at least 3 years. The author conducted preliminary interviews to capture information about the standards of the respondents and distributed survey forms based on their consent to answer. The survey results collected 300/300 valid forms, achieving a response rate of 100%.

Research Results

From the collected survey results, the author tested the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model. The test results showed that all 4 scales and 12 observed variables were reliable when meeting the standard conditions: Cronbach'alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3 [Hai, D.H., 2019], shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Statistical Results and Testing Results of the Scales

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Ethical qualities (EQ)	EQ1 EQ2 EQ3	300 300 300	3 2 2	5 5 5	4.23 4.18 4.11	.622 .619 .643	.702	EQ1 = .527 EQ2 = .498 EQ3 = .510
2. Professional qualifications (PQ)	PQ1 PQ2 PQ3	300 300 300	2 2 2	5 5 5	4.14 4.12 3.98	.626 .620 .595	.682	PQ1 = .485 PQ2 = .516 PQ3 = .502
3. Working capacity (WC)	WC1 WC2 WC3	300 300 300	1 1 1	5 5 5	3.91 3.96 3.99	.593 .608 .615	.664	WC1 = .369 WC2 = .401 WC3 = .389
4. Quality of civil servants (QCS)	QCS1 QCS2 QCS3	300 300 300	3 2 1	5 5 5	4.02 3.97 3.95	.598 .611 .587	.658	QCS1 = .518 QCS2 = .446 QCS3 = .388
Valid N (listwise)		300						

Source: Authors' survey results

Data in Table 2 shows that observations on the scales of "Ethical qualities" (MQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) and "Quality civil servants" (QCS) are all rated at an average level of Mean > 3.95, statistically significant according to the determined Likert scale (1-5). Commune-level government leaders all affirmed the quality of local civil servants, expressed in the aspect of good moral qualities; professional qualifications meeting the standards of civil servant ranks and meeting the requirements of job positions; having the ability to work, complete assigned tasks and create satisfaction for the people. Among the above scales, the observed variables of the "Working Capacity" (WC) scale were assessed at the lowest level with Mean (WC1) = 3.91, Mean (WC2) = 3.96, Mean (WC3) = 3.99, showing

that local leaders assessed that civil servants' practical working capacity was not commensurate with their professional qualifications; they had not yet fully developed the knowledge and skills that had been trained and fostered to achieve the best results in performing their tasks.

Based on the reliable scales and observed variables, the author conducted an exploratory factor analysis to verify the theoretical model of the study. The exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation was performed to preliminarily assess the unidimensionality, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scales to provide more basis for drawing research conclusions about the suitability of the initial theoretical model. The results of the exploratory factor analysis are shown in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.822
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2169.694
	df	116
	Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained									
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.525	36.252	36.252	6.525	36.252	36.252	6.525	36.252	36.252
2	2.840	15.776	52.028	2.840	15.776	52.028	2.840	15.776	52.028
3	1.717	9.541	61.569	1.717	9.541	61.569	1.717	9.541	61.569
4	1.414	7.858	69.427	1.414	7.858	69.427	1.414	7.858	69.427
…..	…..	…..	…..						
12	.059	.329	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

Source: Authors' survey results

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrixa					
Scales	Observed variables	Component			
		1	2	3	4
Ethical qualities (EQ)	EQ1	.741			
	EQ2	.648			
	EQ3	.695			
Professional qualifications (PQ)	PQ1		.801		
	PQ2		.725		
	PQ3		.622		
Working capacity (WC)	WC1			.763	
	WC2			.774	
	WC3			.697	
Quality of civil servants (QCS)	QCS1				.732
	QCS2				.746
	QCS3				.638

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.	

Source: Authors' survey results

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

KMO coefficient $= 0.822 > 0.5$, confirming that exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for the data set; Bartlett's test has an observed significance level Sig. $= 0.000 < 0.05$, showing that the observed variables have a linear correlation with the representative factor. Total Variance Explained with Cumulative % = 69.427% > 50% (Table 3), showing that 69.427% 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 "Ethical qualities" (EQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) and 01 dependent variable "Quality civil servant" (QCS) 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

Coefficients[a]							
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.102	.431		13.360	.000	
	Ethical qualities (EQ)	.433	.155	.412	7.472	.000	1.780
	Professional qualifications (PQ)	.219	.109	.239	5.154	.000	1.831
	Working capacity (WC)	.188	.091	.108	2.665	.000	1.659
a. Dependent Variable: Quality of civil servants (QCS) R Square: 0.701; Durbin-Watson: 2.105							

Source: Authors' survey results

The data in Table 5 shows that:

R Square = 0.701, confirming that the scales "Ethical qualities" (EQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) explain 70.1% of the variation in the scale "Quality civil servant" (QCS); 1 < VIF < 2, showing that the regression model does not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.105 (1 < d <3), showing that the regression model does not have autocorrelation, confirming that the scales "Ethical qualities" (EQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) are independent and have an impact on the scale "Quality of civil servants" (QCS), confirming the suitability of the theoretical research model with the survey data set.

The regression coefficients of the three independent variables "Ethical qualities" (EQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) are all statistically significant Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) and have positive values: B(EQ) = 0.433, B(PQ) = 0.219 and B(WC) = 0.188, confirming the positive

relationship between the three independent variables "Ethical qualities" (EQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC) and 01 dependent variable "Quality of civil servants" (QCS); hypotheses H1, H2, H3 are accepted; the initial research model continues to be confirmed to be appropriate.

Based on the generalized regression model of Hai, D.H. (2019): $Y = B_o + B_1*X_1 + B_2*X_2 + … + B_i*X_i$, the author determined the multivariate regression model of this study as follows:

$$QCS = 1.102 + 0.433*EQ + 0.219*PQ + 0.188*WC$$

Based on the regression coefficient (B), it can be seen that the correlation level of the independent variables and the dependent variables in decreasing order is: "Ethical qualities" (EQ), "Professional qualifications" (PQ), "Working capacity" (WC). That contributes to further affirming the results of empirical research in Vietnam, that: Local civil servants have good moral qualities; professional qualifications meet the standards of civil servant ranks and job position requirements; have the ability to work, complete assigned tasks and create satisfaction for the people. However, the practical working capacity of civil servants is not commensurate with their professional qualifications; have not yet maximized the knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered to achieve the best results in performing tasks.

Conclusion

With the theoretical research framework built and practical research implemented, the author achieved the proposed research objectives. The results of this research have shown that the practical working capacity of civil servants is not commensurate with their professional qualifications; the knowledge and skills that have been trained and fostered have not been fully utilized to achieve the best performance results. The results of this research are also similar to the general assessment of the Vietnamese civil servant management agency: The quality of local civil servants has been improved in the direction of standardizing professional qualifications; however, the working capacity of civil servants has not really met the requirements of the tasks in the trend of promoting reform and international integration [MOHA, 2023].

The above practice is raising a management issue, which is the need to implement assessment measures according to the competency framework to achieve results and effectiveness in classifying the quality of civil servants. From here, the author discusses the content that needs to be studied and adjusted in the civil servant management policy, which is: Building assessment content according to the competency framework and implementing assessment according to the competency framework for each job position of civil servants. Firstly, in terms of practice, the assessment of civil servant quality in Vietnam is being carried out mainly in the form of internal assessment: Civil servants self-assess; the agency approves and recognizes the results of civil servant assessment according to each department unit [VG, 2020]; this assessment method is carried out conveniently internally, but it is also a limitation due to the lack of multi-dimensional assessment information. Secondly, current legal regulations do not set mandatory requirements for assessment according to the competency framework for each job title and position; Therefore, most local government agencies have not paid attention to and focused on building a competency framework and implementing the assessment of civil servants according to the competency framework. Therefore, building assessment content according to the competency framework and implementing assessment according to the competency framework for each job position of civil servants is very necessary, meaningful and feasible.

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