

# Competency-based training for Vietnamese civil servants

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**Abstract:** *To better serve the people, Vietnam urgently needs administrative reform and implementation of national digital transformation goals to build a digital civil service, an e-government, and a digital government. Through this process, training for civil servants is also essential so that they have not only appropriate knowledge and skills for administrative reform but also digital technology to meet the new requirements of the civil service. This study focuses on the theory of competency-based training for civil servants to meet the requirements of administrative reform and digital transformation in Vietnam. The research objectives have been achieved mainly by qualitative methods, such as collecting and analysing secondary documents, so that issues on state policies can be discussed, and then innovations to promote the effectiveness of civil servant training in Vietnam can be suggested.*

**Keywords:** *Training for civil servants; competency-based training; administrative reform; digital transformation; Vietnam.*

## 1. Introduction

As prescribed by law, Vietnamese civil servants are on the payroll of agencies both within the central political system (i.e., those of the Party, those of the State, ministries, and central organizations) and at the local level according to law. Local civil servants work at the provincial level (in 63 provincial administrative units), district level (in 705 district administrative units), and commune level (in 10,599 commune-level administrative units) (GSO, 2023).

In Vietnam, training for civil servants is regularly implemented, with the government playing a key

role in guiding these efforts through its policies (Government, 2017). State agencies and localities then develop annual training plans based on the characteristics of their respective in-charge industry or field and their own human resource development strategy. The training programs are implemented with different contents, of which knowledge and skills in specialized fields, administration and state management are considered key elements to be provided for civil servants. These empowers trainees with qualities and capacity that sufficiently meet the requirements of

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-serving the people and developing the country.

In the period 2021-2030, Vietnam is accelerating the administrative reform process (Government, 2021) and implementing the goal of national digital transformation and e-government building (Prime Minister, 2020; Prime Minister, 2021). Civil servant training at this stage poses new requirements to ensure civil servants have sufficient knowledge and skills on administrative reform and digital skills. Hence, this study on competency-based training for civil servants is significant in developing efficient training policies.

## **2. Theory of competency-based training for civil servants**

Civil servant training is a key factor in the overall management and development of human resources in the public sector. It is a shared political task of State agencies and localities to train civil servants with necessary qualities and capabilities to perform their public duty, particularly in the context of administrative reform and national digital transformation.

Of the two current public service systems existing in different countries, one is based on career, and the other is based on job positions. Long (2023) and Toan & Chau (2023) explain in quite detail that the career-based system is characterized by lifelong recruitment, with a long-term career and promotion according to a hierarchical system, mainly based on qualifications, seniority, work experience, and work achievements. In contrast, the job-based system features recruitment for specific positions and jobs and is associated with flexible recruitment, rotation, and appointment management. The civil service of many countries combines the advantages of these two systems to help it run smoothly with stability and continuity, attracting and

recruiting competent candidates for management positions, professional job positions, and those of special requirements. In either the job-based or career-based models, or a combination of both, emphasis is placed on recruiting talented people, training, and improving civil servants' work competency to develop high-quality human resources for fulfilling public duties.

As seen both theoretically and practically from civil servant management in different countries with advanced administrative systems, civil servant training focuses on organizing learning activities with the aim of providing or supplementing updated knowledge and skills to strengthen civil servants' work competency for their better public duty performance. This requires a synchronous combination, consistent with innovations in organizational apparatus, public service, assessment and management activities, utilization and compensation of civil servants associated with building civil servant structure, job positions, and competency frameworks. In addition, it is required that the contents and training programs for civil servants be unified and synchronous, based on knowledge from training programs and related knowledge and skills retraining programs implemented by educational and training institutions.

In terms of meaning, the term "competency" refers to the capacity to perform professional activities in a specific field, profession, agency or job position. This means civil servants can well combine their working skills, knowledge, attitudes and other necessary qualities to complete their tasks, ensuring the working quality both as required by their organizations and in line with their personal desires. In practice, civil servant training is often carried out in the direction of

competency improvement; focusing on improving skills and professional expertise, updating and supplementing the basic knowledge and skills that have been equipped earlier during the civil service training process. To carry out competency-based training, it is necessary to build a system of competency standards in competency frameworks for occupational groups, job position groups and competency levels. These standards serve as a guiding light, creating a foundation and setting training goals in learning and career development programs for civil servants, thereby reassuring them of their path and fostering a sense of guidance.

Competency-based training requires assessment of civil servants' competency before implementing a training program. The assessment based on the established civil servant competency standards will help State agencies and localities select appropriate contents and training programs for each target group in avoidance of duplication and time-wasting for civil servants and waste of agencies and localities' resources. In terms of research and management, analysing civil servants' competency will support the design and use of appropriate training content for each group of learners in the competency-based training program. In addition, capacity assessment also helps agencies develop flexible forms of training such as training through practical work and through job position rotation associated with workforce planning, compensation, recognition, and career development for civil servants.

Training for civil servants is generally carried out with two main goals:

(1) Training is aimed at improving the quality and efficiency of civil servants' duty performance (improving the quality of civil servants), often determined based on review and assessment to identify their limitations in

performing duties to equip and update necessary knowledge and skills for them;

(2) The other goal is to prepare civil servants for changes in their positions. This is also determined through a review and assessment, which identifies the new knowledge and skills required in the evolving civil service environment. Training then equips civil servants with these necessary tools, ensuring that they are prepared for their job positions.

It is a collective responsibility of State agencies and localities to analyse and clarify the training needs of civil servants. This is crucial to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfil their public duties and meet the requirements of their job positions.

### **3. Administrative reform, digital transformation and requirements for competency-based training for civil servants in Vietnam**

Vietnam's administrative reform and digital transformation in the period 2021-2030 is aimed to build a modern and constructive government, a digital government, and a team of civil servants with sufficient qualities and competencies to meet the requirements of serving the people and developing the country (Prime Minister, 2020; Prime Minister, 2021; Government, 2021). Hence, apart from improving civil servants' competencies for professional activities and job positions, State agencies and localities must equip civil servants with sufficient knowledge and skills in application of information technology and new digital technology that meet the requirements of the e-government and the digital government development processes, achieving the objectives of administrative reform. Accordingly, agencies and localities need objective and comprehensive evaluation of human resources to inform strategies for

training and developing a generation of digital civil servants capable of applying digital technology and forming a digital culture in public service activities.

In the current context of digital transformation, the work environment in public service activities is constantly changing in terms of technology. The development of digital technology requires civil servants to be flexible and proactive in mastering the skills to respond to changes in modern technology. This has a significant impact on the administrative system, organizational structure, job organization methods, and the work style and habits of civil servants (Ministry of Information and Communications, 2021). In addition, State agencies and civil servants need to take initiatives in identifying the effects of digital trends on their job positions, their work field, and their limitations in knowledge and skills. This proactive approach will help agencies and civil servants always be ahead in digital knowledge and skills, meeting job requirements and adapting to the digital work environment. It will also prevent them from falling behind or inadequately meeting the requirements and responsibilities of serving the people in the era of digital society, e-government, and digital government.

From a comprehensive management perspective, it's essential for State agencies and localities to have training strategies and flexible training methods for current civil servants to improve their working competency, meet the requirements of administrative reform and digital transformation, and build the e-government and digital government. State agencies and localities should design training programs to complement each other in equipping, updating, and supplementing civil servants with appropriate knowledge and skills,

supporting them to adapt to administrative reform and digital transformation. Competency-based training should focus on new work attitudes, updated knowledge, and new skills, encouraging behavioural change, transitioning from thinking to action, and altering how civil servants perform their duties in a digital environment (Toan & Chau, 2023).

Here are some key issues to consider when implementing competency-based training for civil servants.

*Firstly*, regular reviews and comprehensive assessments are crucial in identifying civil servants' training needs of. These assessments delve into the knowledge, skills, working attitudes, and performance process of civil servants, including their efficiency in handling specific working situations and producing work results. Equally important is the consistent management of leaders in State agencies and localities, which ensures that training programs are aligned with practical needs and supports evaluation, promotion, and remuneration of civil servants based on their competency and performance results.

From an overall perspective, there is a need for State agencies and localities to carry out strategic analysis and evaluation, focusing on professional fields and job positions in need of further training, such as providing new knowledge and skills, retraining to update and supplement knowledge and skills; in-depth training to develop professional competencies for the different field; training to meet requirements of building the e-government and the digital government. At the same time, agencies and local authorities must conduct surveys and training need assessments to categorize the target groups for training. This will help address gaps in competencies and meet the development needs of individual civil servants and the objectives of the agencies or

localities. When civil servants identify competency gaps or new skills that need to be acquired, they perceive learning as a personal necessity, making competency-based training genuinely effective.

*Secondly*, it is crucial to establish training programs with relevant content to meet the new demands of administrative reform, e-government development, and digital government development. These programs, designed on the basis of competency, should be tailored to the diverse needs of civil servants at different competency levels. To initiate this, it is essential to finalize the job position system, job descriptions, and competency framework. These will serve as the foundation for competency-based training for civil servants, a system that is vital for State agencies and local authorities in determining civil servant numbers, assessing their quality, and identifying the need for capacity-building training. Furthermore, it will form the basis for developing training programs and content that significantly enhance the competencies of civil servants, tailored to each job position within the public sector.

Toan and Chau (2023) further address that competency frameworks for civil servants' competency-based training must be identified in line with the need to improve digital competencies suitable for different learners (leaders, managers, and professional experts). Though each job position (or job position group) can be built differently and has different requirements in terms of training majors, work experience, and professional skills, the critical factor in developing a digital government is that e-government is a team of civil servants with digital capabilities to flexibly and effectively handle their public duties. Therefore, it is necessary to build a team of experts in the field of digital transformation at State agencies and localities

to spread knowledge and skills to civil servants, ensuring that they keep up with technology trends, new models, and work processes, meeting the requirements of building a digital government and e-government. State agencies and localities need to collaborate with training institutions to clearly define both general and specific training goals for each different group of civil servants. This includes specialized training content for certain fields and specific job positions closely linked to administrative reform and digital transformation requirements.

*Thirdly*, it is essential to monitor and evaluate civil servants' competencies and job performance after their training. This is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the training, determine whether it leads to improved performance in the workplace, and evaluate its impact on the community, society, or specific fields of work. Agencies and local authorities should implement appropriate measures to monitor and assess the progress of civil servants following their training. This should be considered a key factor in the system-wide approach of civil servants, which is crucial in supporting their utilization, promotion, and development in a holistic manner.

Post-training evaluation of civil servants' competencies is also a management strategy to innovate learning methods and enhance new skills within the civil service. This involves coordinating with training institutions to adjust topics, content, and methods and provide suitable training courses. Monitoring and evaluation can utilize feedback from trainees (civil servants), direct supervisors, colleagues, or partners and assessments by experts in training and development (Toan & Chau, 2023).

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, to build, develop, and maintain a contingent of civil servants capable of meeting the requirements of the digital era with full knowledge, skills, digital competencies, and sharp thinking, civil servant training policies need to be placed within the comprehensive context of administrative reform, civil service reform, and digital transformation. State agencies and localities should determine civil servants' training needs through periodic reviews and comprehensive evaluations of their working competencies and job performance. Based on these assessments, they should develop training programs and appropriate training content suitable and adaptable to the practical requirements of administrative reform and the creation of electronic and digital governments. Additionally, it is essential to conduct post-training monitoring and evaluation of civil servants' competencies and job performance to summarize and adjust policies, thereby further enhancing the effectiveness of the training activities. This process also necessitates the improvement of the institutional framework for civil servant training, aiming to encourage learning to equip, update, and supplement digital knowledge and skills. Practical competency-based training will significantly contribute to building a civil service workforce with necessary qualities, competencies, and adaptability to meet the new demands of administrative reform and national digital transformation. It will also ensure the ability to serve the public and support the country's development.

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