UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

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Administrative Culture in Vietnamese Civil Servants' Job Performance:

The Grounded Theory of Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

by

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Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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**Administrative Culture in Vietnamese Civil Servants' Job Performance:
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This research explores the administrative culture of Vietnamese civil servants' job performance. It seeks to understand the perceptions and experiences of Vietnamese civil servants pertaining to job performance practices, and the surrounding working environment in which the administrative culture is embedded. The research was driven by the inadequacy of interpretive, theoretically-based studies into public administration in general, and the limited administrative culture in developing countries where public reforms have been implementing in particular.

Three research objectives drove this research: first, to gain a greater understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Vietnamese civil servants concerning job performance; second to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the environment influencing performance in practice; and third to generate a theory explaining the responsive interactions of civil servants' job performance with the surrounding work environment. The study applies an interpretive approach and constructivist grounded theory methodology, based on 66 interviews with civil servants from different administrative organizations, roles, ages and years of experience from the north, centre and south of Vietnam. The data was analysed in accordance with grounded theory principles, using open axial, selective coding.

This research found that Vietnamese civil servants were constrained by the paradoxical entanglement of social cultural context, hierarchical centralization, red tape, status of civil servants, and weak performance management practice. The interplay of such conditions placed civil servants into situations of "Iron cage" and "VUCA" (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity). The study also identified compromising paradoxical entanglement as a core phenomenon, provoking a responsive strategy adopted by civil servants to deal with the circumstances, namely via compliance, accommodation, collectivization, inertness and distortion.

The current study integrated the emergent substantive grounded theory with the relevant extant literature, for instance the logics of appropriateness and consequences of Neo-Institutional Theory, and other relevant substantive theories, such as public administration and cultural studies. It was not intended to test the logics of actions and cultural dimensions, or theories of public administration, but rather to adopt them as theoretical lenses to support the interpretation, extension and validation of the research findings.

This study contributes to the interpretive approach in the public sector, specifically administrative culture studies. Additionally, the current research may be beneficial for policy makers, managers and professionals in Vietnamese public administrative organizations.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Giang Vinh Hoang, declare that the thesis entitled *"Administrative Culture in Vietnamese CSs' Job Performance: The GT of Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement"* and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Parts of this work may have been presented at the conference, and seminar, and not yet published before submission.

Signed: GIANG VINH HOANG

Date:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Administrative Culture
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
CS	Civil Servant
IT	Institutional Theory
GT	Grounded Theory
NIT	Neo-Institutional Theory
NPM	New Public Management
PA	Public Administration
PAR	Public Administration Reform
VCS	Vietnamese Civil Service

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter first outlines the background of the thesis and justifies the rationale for the research. Following this, the aims and objectives are established, and the research questions are presented. The chapter also introduces the rationale of the research methodology option, and outlines the overall structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the Research

Recent decades have witnessed extensive public service reform in many countries all over the world (Hood, 2000a; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, 2011a). Among these reforms, the New Public Management (NPM) with its theory on performance management and the Good Governance have emerged as the most outstanding movements and have been viewed as a worldwide phenomenon (Hood, 1991; Williams and Young, 1994; O'Flynn, 2007; Wynen *et al.*, 2014). The ultimate objective of these reforms is to improve the quality of civil servant (CS) performance, with the purpose of better meeting the needs of citizens (Brewer and Selden, 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015). One of the principles of such reforms is to apply the private sector's methods, models, values and philosophy of management in the public sector, leading to greater efficiency in public organizations. In order to realize this principle, there must be considerable change in many areas, including the administrative culture (AC), targeted at shifting to a culture that is more customer-oriented and innovative within government bureaucracies (Ashworth *et al.*, 2010; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015) because culture is considered a key factor which affects results, efficiency, effectivity and performance (Denison, 1990; Schein, 2004; Pollitt, 2006; O'Donnell and Boyle, 2008; Hartmann and Khademian, 2010; Kozuch and Kozuch, 2012). However, it is important to note that management in the public sector is challenging because of its complexity, hybridity and unpredictability (Haynes, 2003; Klijn, 2008; Christensen and Lægreid, 2011; Haynes, 2015), and culture in the public sector has its own characteristics which differ from those in the private sector. Haynes (2015) argued that importing and applying the business ideas of the private sector to public service is of limited relevance. Such change may lead to conflict in the public

sector, and it should not be assumed that private sector practices can be readily transferred, as expected by many governments in their reform programmes (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011a; Lee, 2012; Rahman *et al.*, 2013).

In the process of administrative reforms and NPM application, many countries have been making effort to learn and integrate the preeminent characteristics and management principles of the private sector into the public sector and theories from abroad (Dingwall and Strangleman, 2005). Although the theories on public sector reform have had a great impact on reform agendas, they often concentrate on the ideological, doctrinal and instrumental aspects, and have sought to learn from best-practice abroad (Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Schedler and Proeller, 2007). These theories and public reform movements are mostly researched and implemented in developed countries or OECD countries, but very little has taken place outside the Anglo-Saxon contexts (Hood, 1996; Pollitt, 2003). Although there have been many attempts to introduce the theory of New Public Management, limitations, challenges and traps have existed in measuring performance and application in the public sector (Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; Hood and Peters, 2004; Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006). Many academic researchers have argued that the approach of "one-size-fits-all" or "public management for all seasons" solutions to developing countries, without considering the specific domestic circumstances, is a "naïve", over-simplistic or even a "disastrous" imitation (Lachman *et al.*, 1994; Mendonca and Kanungo, 1996; Newman and Nollen, 1996; Arellano-Gault, 2000; Caiden and Sundaram, 2004; Schedler and Proeller, 2007). Therefore, many scholars have argued that the specificity of cultural aspects in the public sector needs to be reviewed, explored and properly analysed (Dwivedi, 2001; Dwivedi, 2002; Pečarić, 2011; Im, 2014).

This research investigates the AC in Vietnamese CSs' job performance in the context of administration reform and from CS's perspective. Vietnam is an interesting case because the public administrative system of Vietnam is in the process of reforming, targeting changing from existing embedded traditional culture of bureaucracy to a culture which is more customer-oriented and innovative. Vietnam completed a Masters Programme on PAR during the period 2001-2010, and has been making great efforts to fulfil a second Programme (2011-2020). A number of important objectives have been

set in this Programme[1], in which improving the quality of CS performance is one of the key aims. Despite the radical transformations that have taken place in PA in Vietnam, the sector is still suffering from a number of challenges, including, most notably, those related to CS job performance and AC. In this context, Vietnam is a compelling research laboratory for studying the AC of CS performance in the context of a reforming country.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

It is the overall aim of this study to explore the nature of AC in CSs' job performance in the context of current administrative reforms in Vietnam. More specifically, the research was designed to investigate to provide an in-depth understanding of the Vietnamese CSs' values, beliefs, behaviours, as well as their working environment. To achieve this aim, the research is organized around the following specific objectives:

- To understand the administrative environment in which the AC of Vietnamese CSs' job performance is embedded;

- To understand AC through the perceptions and experiences of the Vietnamese CSs that pertain to their job performance practices;

- To develop a substantive grounded theory of the AC of CS's job performance in the Vietnamese administrative system.

Three main research questions were examined:

Q1. How do Vietnamese CSs experience and perceive job performance?

Q2. What are the factors that influence Vietnamese CSs' job performance?

Q3. How do Vietnamese CSs respond to the surrounding environment?

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[1] The main goal of the Public Administration Reform in the phase 2011-2020 is to "be successfully building a democratic, strong, clean, professionalized, modernized, effective and efficient public administrative system which operates in line with the principles of the socialist ruled-by law, under the leadership of the Party; the contingent of cadres, civil servants will have appropriate competences and ethical qualities able to respond to the requirements of the national building and development" .

1.3 Significance of the Research

Currently, understanding the concept and specificity of culture in the public sector has been receiving greater interest among both academic researchers and practitioners (for example, Peters, 1989; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Hood, 1998; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Christensen *et al.*, 2007; Schedler and Proeller, 2007; Christensen and Laegreid, 2008; Ashworth *et al.*, 2010; Kozuch and Kozuch, 2012), especially in countries in the process of public sector reforms. This study of exploring administrative culture in Vietnamese CSs' job performance in the context of public administration reform was of significance for various reasons in both theoretical and practical issues.

In terms of theoretical issues, there are several significant reasons for the need for more in-depth understanding of AC.

Firstly, there has been little exploration of AC in the process of public administration reform. In the late 1980s, some authors mentioned AC in their research on public management (Peters, 1989; Newman, 1994; Cini, 1995). The wave of NPM and demand for theory, as well as practical experience of the administrative reforms taking place in many countries have highlighted the importance of developing AC in the public sector, and have been increasingly recognized by researchers in PA (Ranson and Stewart, 1994; Claver *et al.*, 1999; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). Accordingly, AC has attracted more attention than previously (Jabbra and Dwivedi, 2004; Farazmand, 2009; Jamil *et al.*, 2013a; Norman-Major and Gooden, 2015; Verhoest, 2016). Nevertheless, research on AC has been relatively less than that on organizational culture or political culture (Jamil, 2002; Henderson, 2004). It is important to note that although AC is great concern of PA reforms (PAR), it is surprising that research investigating this topic in the public sector remains an incipient and promising topic which appeals to many academics, researchers and practitioners (Hajnal, 2005; Hartmann and Khademian, 2010; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2011; O'Toole Jr and Meier, 2015; Wright, 2015). Geva-May (2002) argued that the topic of culture in PA science had been neglected for a long time. This is partly because, as Kelman (2007) argued, mainstream researchers were largely disengaged from government study. The more important reason is that there has been a separation of public management research from the mainstream of organizational

studies. Scholars researching on PA have isolated themselves from the mainstream of organization studies, therefore, having less contribution to make on this topic (Kelman, 2007).

Secondly, the lack of attention given to the research on AC in emerging economies has motivated this study. While transitional countries are those that have been implementing PARs in the strongest way and need a theoretical and empirical knowledge system, most existing research on PA has been conducted in developed countries (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2011; Gulrajani and Moloney, 2012; O'Toole Jr and Meier, 2015; Wright, 2015). It is important to note that public sectors in developing countries might not be operated with similar logic and mechanisms. In addition, AC is a wide and complicated topic because the culture of each country has its own characteristics, and public administrative systems differ due to differences in political institutions and economies (Dwivedi and Gow, 1999; Enrique *et al.*, 1999; Christensen *et al.*, 2007; Im, 2014). As the literature reflects, although the cultural boundaries between countries are becoming blurred in the process of globalization (Fukuyama, 1995), scholars agree that there are differences of culture among countries. Due to such cultural differences, many scholars call for differences in management practices (Dorfman and Howell, 1988; Schneider and De Meyer, 1991; Newman and Nollen, 1996), and there is a need for more practical and context-based knowledge on public sector culture in general, and AC in particular (Jabbra and Dwivedi, 2004). Arguably, some researchers believe that they are unable to use the AC of one country to explain the AC of another because of differences in administrative norms and values (Christensen and Laegreid, 2008).

Thirdly, there are a number of significant reasons for paying attention to AC in CS job performance. The literature suggests that while great attention has been paid to the exploration of performance, most research has focused on organizational performance, and very little on the individual level performance (Talbot, 2005; Campbell, 2015; Koumenta, 2015). Moreover, most research has considered employee performance as a variable, and has focused on the measurement of performance, rather than identifying the nature and cultural aspects (Campbell, 1990; Campbell *et al.*, 1993). Although academics have recently paid much attention to performance management in public sector reforms, and widely recognized the importance of improving the awareness,

attitude and behaviour of workers in the public sector (Brewer and Selden, 2000; Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; Haynes, 2003, 2015), currently there have been a small number of theoretical and practical studies on the nature and cultural aspects of performance in the public sector (Brewer and Selden, 2000; Boyne, 2003; Kelman, 2007). According to Brewer and Selden (2000), although performance in the public sector is an important topic, few empirical studies have been conducted in this area, and none have been from the perspective of public employees.

Regarding practical issues, according to many academics, deep understanding of AC is crucial for public managers and policy makers. Hood (1998, p.223) believed that "Cultural theory helps us to understand why there is no generally agreed answer to the question 'who should manage whom and how' in government" and "cultural theory can contribute to the analysis of failure and collapse in public management". Through studies on AC, it is possible to understand the characteristics of public employees working for government agencies, as well as those of the administrations themselves. In addition, such studies can help enhance the performance of administrative systems (Lee, 2012). Other researchers have claimed that one of the reasons for the failure or restriction of public sector reforms in many countries is that culture in the public sector, or more precisely AC, is not sufficiently taken into consideration (Lee, 2012; Rahman *et al.*, 2013). Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011a) argued that AC is one of the main factors impacting the process of public management reforms. In a similar vein, Schedler and Proeller (2007) argued that in order to design public administration, each and every country has to profoundly understand their AC, which is crucial for successful administration reform. Practically, Park (2017, p.140) argued that "studies of a country's AC are essential in order to understand the practices of its administration and of its policy implementation, including the failure of administrative or policy reforms". Therefore, there is a need for research that generates a better understanding of this topic.

In addition, it is crucial for Vietnamese administrative organizations to have a better understanding of this, as it will enable them to realize administration reform and improve CS job performance in practice. Last but not least, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, although PARs have been embraced by Vietnam's civil service

since 2001, no attempt has been made by scholars or practitioners to empirically explore the nature of Vietnamese AC. In other words, AC is quite a new area in Vietnam, and no literature has been found exploring the effect of AC on CS job performance in the country. The lack of research on this topic in developing countries in general, and Vietnam in particular might be explained by several reasons, such as the lack of database, different culture and language barrier make access difficult. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by exploring the cultural nature and aspects of administrative CSs' job performance from their own perspectives and experience of working life. Many scholars researching the Vietnamese civil service (VCS) have been calling for relevant research to have a deeper understanding of AC in the context of reform in Vietnam (Bruynooghe *et al.*, 2008; Do and Truong, 2009). Therefore, in line with other studies focusing on organizational culture in the public sector, it is important to investigate the concept of AC, especially in the context of a country like Vietnam, which is implementing a programme of public administrative reform in the light of NPM doctrine.

1.4 Research Methodology

Relativist constructionism worldview and interpretive paradigm were chosen for this research, allowing for a deeper understanding of social phenomena within a particular context. The study investigated AC via the perspective of Vietnamese CSs, including shared values, beliefs, experiences and assumptions on job performance. According to Glaser (1998, p.115), one of the best methods to understand about elements of culture is "to understand the action in a substantive area from the point of view of the actors involved". The interpretive approach enabled the researcher to gain a full understanding of AC reflected in CS performance, and from their point of view.

The literature suggests that the topic of organizational culture in the public sector has been largely examined via quantitative research designs (Denison and Mishra, 1995; Hood, 1998; Ashworth *et al.*, 2010). Research on the topic of AC is mainly normative/prescriptive, considering culture as a dependent variable. The researchers performed their studies using quantitative methods by applying the cultural dimensions of a national culture framework suggested by Hofstede (1984); Hofstede and Hofstede

(2005), or the Competing Values Framework of Cameron and Quinn (1999). For example, studies of AC in Bangladesh conducted by Jamil (2002); Haque and Mohammad (2013), and in Nepal by Jamil and Dangal (2009). Some researchers have applied theories of other disciplines. For instance, in "The art of the state", Hood (1998) applied the cultural theory of anthropologist, Douglas (1982) to his research on public management. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), in "Public Management Reform", paid attention to the cross-national variation. Shields (2007) placed these studies into a "historical institutionalist approach, in which culture is a context variable having influence on the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals". While quantitative and qualitative methods have their own advantages and disadvantages, there are constant arguments that quantitative approaches to analysing culture are less successful in delving beneath the surface-level aspects of culture (Brewer and Selden, 2000). Because culture is an ambiguous, multi-dimensional concept, the values and assumptions of which are difficult to count and capture, quantitative studies are limited in their ability to generate a contextually rich understanding of these complicated issues. In addition, culture in the public sector calls for further studies using a heuristic process rather than formalized institutions (Schedler and Proeller, 2007). Furthermore, there is also the fact that research is viewed by researchers and practitioners in Vietnam as "solution-oriented work", so studies aimed at developing and testing theories are not as appropriate as they are in western countries (Napier *et al.*, 2004). The current research attempts to explore the nature of AC based on an abductive approach in order to create deeper understanding about a specific AC, and contributes to the diversity of studies on culture.

The GT method was applied in this exploratory research. After comparing and contrasting the three main versions of GT - Glaserian, Straussian and Charmaz approaches - the researcher opted for the constructivist GT suggested by Charmaz (2000), and utilized coding techniques suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Corbin and Strauss (2008). There were several reasons for this adoption. First, the constructivist GT school advocated by Charmaz (2000), Charmaz (2006), Charmaz and Charmaz (2014) allowed the researcher to use the structure of the Strauss and Corbin versions, while maintaining the additional flexibility of a constructivist approach.

Moreover, the version by Charmaz provided the researcher with flexible guidelines, rather than methodological rules, recipes and requirements (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz and Charmaz, 2014).

Subsequently, the researcher carried out in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to gain deep understanding of the phenomenon. Data collection for this research was divided into three phases: the first phase, namely, the pilot phase, conducted over two months (June to July 2016), with 10 interviews; the second phase, namely, the main phase, conducted over five months (August 2016 to December 2016), with 46 interviews; and the third phase, namely, theoretical sufficiency achievement, conducted over three months (July 2017 to September 2017), with 10 interviews. Analysis of the data involved three major types of coding, namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Corbin and Strauss (2008).

1.5 Research Findings and Contributions

The findings of this study were presented in the four chapters, chapter five, six, seven, and eight. In the chapter five, open coding, the initial findings of the current research were presented in form of description about twenty-three open categories, with their properties and dimensions. Subsequently, the descriptive findings were in more abstract presentation in the axial coding chapter, with ten main emerged categories. The main findings from this study were the emergent substantive theoretical framework around a central phenomenon named compromising paradoxical entanglement. The emergent theory presented the process used deliberately by CSs to overcome the complexity of the constant coexistence of interrelated contradictions that they were cyclically dealing with, causing tensions in their job performance. The central phenomenon was situated within its conditions, namely, social cultural context, hierarchical centralization, red tape, status of CSs and weak performance management practice. The responsive reactions of CSs to the conditions and tactics employed to carry out the process of compromising paradoxical entanglement were compliance, accommodation, collectivization, inertness and distortion. The findings from the current study found that combinations of conditions and responsive reactions of CSs

caused "VUCA" conditions and "Iron Cage" seriously. Furthermore, the finding of the emergent core phenomenon from the current study was refined, validated, and extended within the extant literature in the chapter eight, for instance, the logics of appropriateness and consequences of Neo-Institutional Theory, paradox theory, and other relevant substantive theories, such as public administration and cultural studies.

The current study makes several methodological, theoretical, and practical contributions. Firstly regarding methodological issues, this study also responded to the call for more interpretive research in PA, focusing on the real experiences of people in PA system (Raadschelders and Hoon Lee, 2011). Although previous studies relating to culture, organizational culture and administrative culture have been conducted through both qualitative and quantitative approach, there is little grounded theory research in culture and organizational culture, and even not any grounded research in administrative culture study in Vietnam. This study extended the application of GT in the research of PA and AC. In addition, the current study responded the call for more grounded theory research on the fields of management, especially human resource management (Egan, 2002; Mazzola *et al.*, 2011; Murphy *et al.*, 2017). Secondly, in terms of theoretical issues, the current research generally contributed to the AC in PA science by providing more new evidence and knowledge of developing countries about this topic. In addition, since there has been a lack of studies on behavioural aspects of employees' job performance in the public sector, the research explored the factors influencing CSs' job performance, and their responsive reactions to those conditions, which were condensed in a substantive grounded theory paradigm of compromising paradoxical entanglement. As for practical contributions, the substantive grounded theory proposed by the current study is useful for administrative researchers and practitioners. Having more understanding about AC in CSs' job performance can help managers, CSs, and policy makers have an appropriate explanation on phenomenon and adopt solutions to improve CSs' performance.

1.6 Structure of the Research

The thesis is structured over nine chapters in total. Chapter One introduces the thesis and presents the background and rationale for the study. It also details the research aim, objectives and questions. Finally, the structure of the research is outlined.

Chapter Two

The aim of this chapter is not to generate a theoretical framework or hypothesis, but more to introduce the reader to the relevant literature that was available prior to the study's commencement by providing a general picture on the background of the research, and highlighting the significance of performing this study. In this regard, following the introduction, the chapter starts with a discussion of definitional issues for the key concepts of the investigated phenomenon - "culture", "AC", and "employee job performance". In order to position the current research within the context of a changing situation, it also reviews the PA contexts from the traditional PA to the current movements of PAR all over world, and explains the reasons why AC is an issue of concern in the context of globalization and PAR. The next section in this chapter discusses the theoretical approaches to AC in the current study.

Chapter Three

This chapter presents the context in which the current study was conducted, providing a short background description about Vietnam, its history, society, culture, political system and other related issues. A description of the civil service system and CSs of Vietnam is also provided, along with the current reforms.

Chapter Four

This chapter discusses the research philosophy, methodology and methods. It begins with a discussion of research paradigm worldviews in social sciences, and the choice of research philosophy for the current study. The next section gives an explanation of the research methodology, in which the research approaches and strategies are clarified. It is important to note that GT strategy is utilized in the study. Therefore, this chapter also discusses the GT approaches and rationale for adopting constructivist GT and abductive

logic. The last section describes the specific methods utilized under the following headings: sources of data, sampling strategies, process of data collection and analysis, ethical issues, and research validity and reliability.

Chapter Five

This chapter reports the initial empirical findings of the current research. While the list of open codes is shown in the appendix, the 23 open categories are explained in detail in terms of their properties and dimensions.

Chapter Six

This chapter reports the second stage of the GT analysis, and discusses the axial coding process with the main categories emerging from this. Following the process of axial coding, nine main categories were identified, which show a higher level of abstraction and density in comparison with the open categories. The ten main categories are discussed in detail. As the main categories were generated from the combination of open categories, and the purpose of axial coding focuses on identifying the relationships among open categories, the discussion of the main categories in this chapter concentrates more on explaining these relationships, instead of being a discussion of each main category.

Chapter Seven

This chapter reports the final stage of the GT analysis, namely selective coding, and discusses the substantive theory that emerged from the research, which is central and connects the other main categories in order to explain what the research is all about. Identifying the core category is challenging, as it must satisfy several criteria, such as abstraction, centrality, frequency, logic, consistence, abstraction and explanatory power (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This chapter outlined the substantive GT paradigm, and the components of the paradigm was discussed in detail.

Chapter Eight

This chapter integrates the emergent theory within the extant literature that describes similar phenomena. The aim of this process is twofold: first it allows the researcher to extend the interpretation of the emergent theory, and second it is to justify, validate and refine knowledge in the field of research. The extant literature used in this chapter is material that rotates the emerged central phenomenon and other components of the substantive GT paradigm from this research. In this study, NIT, focusing on the logic of appropriateness and logic of consequences, culture theories, and relevant studies in administrative science were employed to explain the substantive GT.

Chapter Nine

This chapter is the final chapter of the thesis, summarising the key findings and highlighting the contributions of the study in the areas of research, theory and practice pertinent to AC. This chapter also summaries the reflection on the research. Recommendations for practice and further research are detailed, and the implications and limitations of the study's findings are identified prior to the final concluding comments.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

It is important to note that the literature review on GT method is different from other traditional research methodologies, as the researchers are advised not to "review all of the literature in the field beforehand, as is frequently done by analysts using other research approaches" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.49). The reason for the difference is that the purpose of GT study is to generate a theory derived from data through the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1999). The purpose of doing so is to avoid any contamination and influence on the process of data analysis and interpretation from prior studies in the field. Consequently, the objective of this chapter is not to create a theoretical framework for empirical analysis, or to review the extant literature in great depth, but to briefly discuss the concept of AC and job performance in previous literature generally, which supports the "theoretical sensitivity" for the researcher. This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the meaning of culture, and the concept of administrative culture. In order to have a deeper understanding of administrative culture, this concept is placed in relation to other relevant concepts. The concept of overall job performance is also discussed, introducing the approach to this concept in the current study. The chapter further discusses the context of public administration, introducing some of key concepts in this sector, describing the development of public administration, especially the AC in the context of reforming, explaining the significance of research on this topic. Finally, this chapter introduces the theoretical perspective, including the Neo-Institutional Theory, Logics of Action, and Paradox Theory, which were found relevant to the substantive grounded theory of the current research.

2.2 The Meaning of Culture

Culture was formed during the formation and development of human society. Originally, the term "culture" is derived from Latin cultura, which stems from the verb "colere" and means "tending" or "maintaining" (Srnka, 2004). However, it was not until the 19th century when the writer Matthew Arnold expressed a somewhat similar view,

describing culture as ''the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit'' (Arnold, 1873). At around the same time, a famous English anthropologist Tylor (1958, p.1) proposed a definition of culture as: "Culture, or civilization… is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, and any other capacities acquired by man as a member of society''.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many trends emerged researching culture via different theories and methods. The term, "culture" may be described as one of the most complicated of words, because it has multiple facets. There is little agreement as to how culture should be conceptualized, because it carries different meanings for different people (Sathe, 1983). According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1967), there are around 160 definitions of culture. The definition of culture by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1967, p.181) is one of the most widely cited: "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action". Another widely cited definition of culture was given by Triandis (1972, p.4): "Culture is defined as an individual's characteristic way of perceiving the man-made part of one's environment. It involves the perception of rules, norms, roles, and values, is influenced by various levels of culture such as language, gender, race, religion, place of residence, and occupation, and it influences interpersonal behaviour". To date, the number of definitions of culture has reached the hundreds, and continues to increase, but the meaning and boundaries of culture remain confused (Denison, 1996).

The number above reveals the diversity, complexity and unreachable consensus in the process of finding a general concept of culture. The difference between the definitions of culture outlined above derives from the different angles of study, such as philosophical, ethnological, sociological, psychological or semiotical angles. The main reason for this difference is simply that researchers have insisted too much on one aspect or the other. The difference between the epistemology and ontology of

researchers lies in the difference in the introduction of the concept. Smircich (1983) argued that culture is viewed and analysed from different angles and lenses, leading to the difference between definitions. Researchers pursue these themes for different purposes, and their work is based on different assumptions about the nature of culture. Therefore, according to Schedler and Proeller (2007), it is pivotal to be highly aware of the approach that is chosen in culture research, because the angle of approach has great influence on the understanding of the cultural concept. Since there are so many approaches to and classification of culture, the interpretation and analysis of such schools is impossible and unnecessary within this study. However, in general, there are three main avenues for definitions of culture, as below.

The first approach considers culture as a certain product of mind, and lists the constituents of culture as: values, traditions, lifestyles, norms, ideologies, social institutions, symbols, signs and information created and accumulated by a community, e.g. "Culture is the system of such publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time. This system of terms, forms, categories, and images interprets a people's own situation to themselves" (Pettigrew, 1979, p.574). Similarly Larsson and Lubatkin (2001, p.1576) identified culture as "the norms, values and beliefs that the members of a certain group share, that are created by its members shared history and expectations". According to Newman and Nollen (1996, p.754), culture can be defined as "the values, beliefs, and assumptions learned in early childhood that distinguish one group of people from another". This understanding is consistent with the culture definition by Hofstede (1993, p. 89) "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another". This type of definition is close to the Cognition School approach, where culture is seen as a system of knowledge, of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting. Culture is the shape of things that people have in mind, their model for perceiving, relating and interpreting. It consists of whatever it is one has to know, or to believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to the members of one's society. As a product of human beings, culture consists of the ways in which people organize their experience of the real world so as to give it structure as a

phenomenal world of forms, according to their perceptions and concepts (Allaire and Firsirotu, 1984).

The second approach considers culture as a transmission process of creative activities, technologies, processes, modes of existence, living and development, ways of adapting to the environment, modes of human behaviour, i.e. the historically created design for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behaviour of men (Kluckhohn and and Kelly, 1945). Boyd and Richerson (1988, p.2) defined culture as "transmission from one generation to the next, via teaching and imitation, of knowledge, values, and other factors that influence behaviour". This type of definition could be found in the approach of the ecological-adaptationist and historical-diffusionist school (Allaire and Firsirotu, 1984).

The third approach considers culture as the relations or structures between values, between a human being and his fellow creatures, between humankind and all beings. This type of definition can be seen in the symbolic and structural-functionalist school, e.g. "Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action. It is an ordered system of shared and public symbols and meanings which give shape, direction and particularity to human experience. Culture should not be looked for in people's heads but in the 'meaning' shared by interacting social actors. The analysis of culture therefore is not an experimental science in search of laws but an interpretative one in search of meaning" (Allaire and Firsirotu, 1984, p.221).

Culture can be defined and analysed on different levels, ranging from the national level, through the professional and organizational levels to the group level (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). According to Schein (2010), culture can be classified into four levels: 1) Macro cultures (nations, ethnic and religious groups, occupations that exist globally); 2) Organizational cultures (private, public, non-profit, government organizations); 3) Subcultures (occupational groups within organizations); and 4) Micro cultures (microsystems within or outside organisations). It is worth noting that the relationship across cultural levels is not necessarily hierarchical from the more general to the least

general (Karahanna *et al.*, 2005). These interrelations are shown diagrammatically in the following figure using overlapping and nested ellipses.
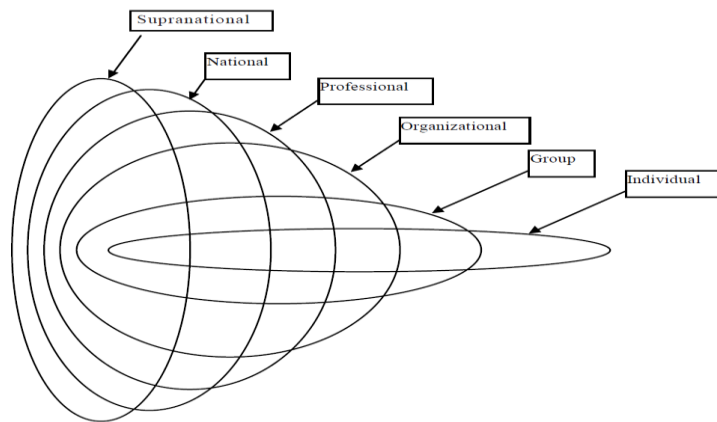
Figure 1: Interrelated Levels of Culture

Source: Karahanna *et al.* (2005, p.6)

This grounded study explores AC from a bottom-up perspective of CSs or individual level of culture. Karahanna *et al.* (2005) argued that an individual's culture is a product of several levels of culture, as each individual belongs to a specific context, such as national, professional or organizational culture. The meaning of administrative culture and its relationship with other levels of culture is discussed in the next section.

2.3 The Phenomenon of Administrative Culture

2.3.1 Definition of Administrative Culture

The term AC has been used in PA and management science since the 1980s, and has become an important variable in institutional analysis and explanation (Riggs, 1964). Riggs is also considered the first author to have discussed the role of AC within PA (Jamil *et al.*, 2013a). Similar to the complexity, abstraction and ambiguity of the concept of "culture", the term "administrative culture" is also difficult to define (Cini, 1995; Hajnal, 2005; Heusala, 2005), and is understood and explained in different ways (Peters and Savoie, 1995; Dwivedi and Gow, 1999; Henderson, 2004; Jamil *et al.*, 2013a). Most

researchers agree that AC draws its main inspiration from cultural theory, more specifically from theories of national and organizational culture (Jamil, 1994; Dwivedi and Gow, 1999; Jamil, 2002; Henderson, 2004; Jamil and Dangal, 2009; Jamil *et al.*, 2013b, 2013a).

In general terms, AC is understood as the culture of people working in an administrative system, or as public servants. According to Jamil *et al.* (2013a, p.897), AC "refers to the culture of PA in a country", and "some values and basic assumptions that are fundamental and influence the way a group of people think, feel, and act, and distinguish them from other group" (Jamil *et al.*, 2013b, p.900). Sharma (2002, p.65) remarked that "AC must necessarily be the culture of administrators, more specially the culture of those participants whose activities are restricted to the administrative environment, i.e. how an administrator acts or behaves vis-à-vis other administrative objects or 'actors' or individuals of the society in administrative capacity, is part of administrative culture". More specifically, it can be defined as a set of values, beliefs, tradition and practices shared among public employees (Sharma, 2002). Richardson and Baldwin (1976) defined AC as the combination of beliefs, attitudes, values and systems which affect the operation of government agencies. Rahman *et al.* (2013, p. 889) opined that "AC is all about the values/norms and practices that public servants pledge to follow and think should be done which also reflects on what actually is displayed as their actual behaviour", while Henderson (2004, p.236) defined it as "a set of commonly-held values, attitudes, and beliefs to which public servants (appointed, not elected 'public officials,' or 'bureaucrats') subscribe and are expected to follow, and which provides an 'ideal-type' of actual and official behaviour". According to Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011b, p.49), AC is "the expectations the staff of an organisation have about what is normal and acceptable in that organisation – 'the way we do things around here'. It therefore provides the context for ethical relations within the public sector. Such beliefs and attitudes manifest themselves in numerous ways, including symbols and rituals of the organisation". Schachter (2002, p.89) claimed that "AC can be defined as a dominant and coherent set of shared values conveyed by such symbolic means as stories, myths, legends, slogans, anecdotes and fairy tales. The culture of a given

organization depends on the legal, social, and economic frameworks within which it is embedded".

Based on the discussion above, for the current study, AC can be defined as the shared values, beliefs, norms and practices of CSs. According to Jamil *et al.* (2013a), because the term AC was borrowed from social and organizational culture theories, it is challenging for researchers to identify, distinguish and locate the level of AC in cultural studies. Therefore, in order to have a deeper understanding about administrative culture, this concept was considered in relation to other related types of culture, as presented in the following sub-sections.

2.3.2 Administrative Culture and Social Culture

Many researchers agree that AC is part of a social culture and contains the characteristics of specific types of social culture. Peters (1989), amongst other scholars, has argued that administrative culture is one of "large-scale organization" in society and that therefore, AC is not only affected by organizational culture, but also by societal culture. Haque and Mohammad (2013), Jamil *et al.* (2013b), and Jamil *et al.* (2013a) hold similar views, observing that AC is part of social culture, and "often not explicitly recognized in organizational analyses is the fact that this type of culture has consequences for the ways in which public policies are adopted and implemented, as well as for how public officials relate to themselves and to society in general" (Jamil *et al.*, 2013a, p.897). Broadly defined, AC is associated with the dominant values and norms in public organizations. These influence interpersonal relations both within and beyond the organization. According to Jamil (2002, p.94), "a study of AC has to incorporate not only the internal context of PA such as bureaucrats' attitudes towards work and their place of work, but also the external context, i.e. bureaucracy's relationship to politics and society in general". Similarly, Sharma (2002, p.65) argued that an administrator should discriminate between his culture as a social entity when mixing with others socially (social self) and his culture as an administrator (administrative self). Government organizations, when their members behave or take part in interactions inside or outside a social environment, have a "social character". An administrative organization, if established for a social purpose, is also "social", and this

social purpose is associated with the community. Pečarič (2011, p.386) observed that "AC is always a reflection of the overall situation in society, which in turn is poured into the specifics of an agency, which then lives its own life as administrative culture". According to Haque and Mohammad (2013), AC refers to the dominant norms and values that shape and influence bureaucrats' interpersonal relationships, attitudes and performance. AC is the product of not only people's perceptions about and orientation with their administrative system, but also the entire gamut of traditional, societal, historical and cultural values that influence, as well as govern the bureaucracy's own behaviour and professional norms, i.e., rationality, impersonality, technology and efficiency.

Dwivedi and Gow (1999) argued that there is no typical and common AC in the world, because it is part of the wider culture of society and its constituents, such as political, economic, social, religious, corporate, and civil society elements; and because different cultural contexts and administrative history have led to differences in administrative norms and values, as well as in AC between and within countries (Christensen *et al.*, 2007). For example, AC in South Korea is affected by Confucianism, which traditionally insists on hierarchy and authority in making decisions, but has also adopted the liberal values from Western capitalist societies. This gives South Korean AC characteristics of both traditional and liberal culture (Yun, 2006; Park, 2017). In the United States of America, AC moved from a Patrician notion of "administration by gentlemen" in colonial times to the merit system for government employment, modified in the last half-century by the introduction of values relating to equal employment opportunity and affirmative action. "Merit" may be considered the prominent value of AC in the USA for the last 120 years (Henderson, 2004). In Bangladesh, cultural dimensions such as a high level of uncertainty avoidance and relatively high collectivism have resulted in the pervasion of "corruption in AC in the form of mechanistic adherence to hierarchy, centralization, abuse of discretionary power, nurturing tadbir and sycophancy" (Haque and Mohammad, 2013). In Nepalese society, priority and privilege are given to Hindu men of the upper caste only. Such strictly hierarchical division of society is also reflected in its bureaucracy, which is "gender biased, religion biased and caste biased" as well as in its administrative culture, which is "guided more by particularism than

universalism, by ascription than achievement, by rule-orientation than result-orientation, and by more authoritarian than participatory values"(Jamil and Dangal, 2009).

2.3.3 Administrative Culture and Politics

Many other authors believed that AC is rooted in political culture (Peters, 1989; Cini, 1995; Dwivedi and Gow, 1999). Dwivedi and Gow (1999) argued that although AC is a part of the wider culture of society (political, economic, social, religious, corporate, and civil society culture), politics is the main influencing factor.

The relation between administration and politics has been studied under different perspectives by researchers and practitioners researching PA (Peters, 1989; Christensen *et al.*, 2007). According to Peters (1989), those who support the theory of "unifying administration and politics" do not acknowledge the distinction between administration and politics. In their opinion, administration depends on politics, while politics is the basis for the existence and development of administration. This approach stems from the famous essay entitled "The Study of Public Administration" of Thomas Woodrow Wilson (the 28th USA President), which is a premise for the formation of PA science separate from politics. Although not acknowledging the dependence of administration on politics, he emphasized that public administration, after all, must conform to political ideas and the national constitution. Wilson (1887, p.2019 - 210) argued that "The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics; it at most points stands apart even from the debatable ground of constitutional study. It is a part of political life only as the methods of the counting house are a part of the life of society; only as machinery is part of the manufactured product. But it is, at the same time, raised very far above the dull level of mere technical detail by the fact that through its greater principles it is directly connected with the lasting maxims of political wisdom, the permanent truths of political progress".

Therefore, the concept of PA has a close relationship with political systems. The analysis of PA should be based on the context of politics in general (Peters, 1989).

While studying administrative culture, researchers have agreed that AC is a part of, and closely related to political culture. Lam (1994) suggested that, in relation to AC and political culture, the question should be asked as to what extent CSs could accept different opinions and interests concerning political orientation. Sharing a similar viewpoint, Jamil *et al.* (2013a) argued that AC has influence on the approval and execution of public policies, as well as on the relationship with CSs, and the connection between CSs and society.

According to Christensen *et al.* (2007, p.49 -50), "AC is required to harmonize political loyalty with professional norms, meaning that a CS must be politically loyal to the political leadership but simultaneously make decisions based on a solid professional foundation". Likewise, Jamil *et al.* (2013b) suggest establishing a dialogue between political theories and organizational culture theories. In this regard, they add three more dimensions to the study of administrative culture: political responsiveness, which maps the politics-administration interface; social responsiveness, which focuses on the (civil) society-administration interface; and cohesiveness, which analyses internal sources of control and the exercise of authority and power within a bureaucracy. They emphasized that "the conceptualization of administrative culture, while concerned with values and norms within bureaucracy, is also concerned with political orientation and the responsiveness of public officials to society. In this regard, researchers who study professional neutrality ask whether bureaucratic actions are based on merit, skills, and the rule of law, or whether they are based on political loyalty, and to what extent public servants' lives and careers depend on responding to narrow political interests" (Jamil *et al.*, 2013b, p.901).

The political system and relationship between administration and politics varies between countries, leading to differences in administrative culture. For example, Putnam (1975) analysis of bureaucratic responsiveness in Britain, Germany and Italy highlights CSs' attitudes towards both politics and citizens, and how these in turn determine their tolerance for politics. His analysis identified two types of bureaucratic attitudes: classical and political. Whereas the classical bureaucrat is 'procedure-oriented' or 'rule-oriented', the political bureaucrat is 'problem-oriented' or 'programme-oriented'. Henderson (2004) found that in PA interpretations, the

administrative side of American Government reflects the ebb and flow of political trends and movements, along with the basic values of the broader political culture. Political scientists have sought to characterize administration and administrative personnel in the US context with themes such as growth and power, trade-offs between democracy and efficiency, proper oversight and control, policy development and implementation, and bureaucratic politics.

In explaining the concept of administrative culture, many researchers hold the middle ground. Henderson (2004) proposed that AC can be studied within the broader political science concern, with the entire polity and its features labelled under political culture. At its most basic, AC may be thought of as the general characteristics of public officials (i.e. shared values, attitudes, beliefs) - federal, state and local. AC is related to the broader political culture from which it derives, and can be further discussed in terms of sub-cultures. These will be identified as "sub-cultures" and are three in number: traditional, self-protective and entrepreneurial. In a similar vein, Yun (2009, p.899) suggests that "the meaning of AC is the political doctrine and ideology of nation, the mass opinion of political event and the mode of political style. Specifically, AC can be characterized by political symbols, political passions, and beliefs of officials, a sense of the value of officials, collective reason and thought, and a mode of the political behaviour of leaders. AC is, therefore, defined as the political thinking and idea of officials and political leaders, the consciousness and desire of the officials, the political style of administrative leaders, and the political behaviour pattern represented by public institutions".

2.4 The Concept of Job Performance

2.4.1 Defining Job Performance

The current study conducts an exploration of CSs' AC through their job performance. Therefore, it is important to clarify and be aware of the approach to the concept of job performance. So far, topics such as "performance management", "performance measurement", "performance appraised", "performance monitoring", "performance indicators" and "performance improvement" have received most attention from

academics, and the use of these terms is also extremely popular in practice. However, academics have not yet reached a consensus on the understanding of the term "performance", because performance is a multi-dimensional and dynamic concept (Bates and Holton, 1995).

Many academics have identified that performance consists of behaviours/actions/activities/processes (Murphy, 1989; Campbell, 1990; Campbell *et al.*, 1993; Motowildo *et al.*, 1997; Roe, 1999; Viswesvaran and Ones, 2000; Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; Griffin *et al.*, 2007). Perform means to carry out, accomplish or fulfil an action or task. Campbell (1990) believed that "performance is behaviour and should be distinguished from the outcomes because they can be contaminated by system factors". Motowildo *et al.* (1997, p.72) viewed performance as "the aggregated value to the organization of the discrete behavioural episodes that an individual performs over a standard interval of time". Likewise, according to Otley (1999), performance is a process which entails a number, or series of behaviours directed towards the achievement of some predetermined goal. The followers of this viewpoint state that in many cases, performance does not produce specific results which can be measured and assessed.

Other academics have stated that performance relates to an individual's work results (Bernadin *et al.*, 1995; Aguinis and O'Boyle, 2014). In many cases, the two concepts of "performance" and "result" are considered as one, and used interchangeably. "Performance is the outcome of work because they provide the strongest linkage to the strategic goals of the organisation, customer satisfaction, and economic development" (Bernadin *et al.*, 1995). Aguinis and O'Boyle (2014, p.316) observed performance based on results, "which does not consider the traits that workers possess or how they do the job and, instead, focuses on what they produce".

Many researchers who combine the two concepts above have pointed out that performance consists of both behaviour and results (March and Sutton, 1997; Viswesvaran and Ones, 2000; Motowidlo and Kell, 2013). Viswesvaran and Ones (2000, p.216) argued: "Job performance refers to scalable actions, behaviour and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about that are linked with and contribute to

organizational goals". As for Brumback (1988, p.387), "Performance means both behaviours and results. Behaviours emanate from the performer and transform performance from abstraction to action. Not just the instruments for results, behaviours are also outcomes in their own right - the product of mental and physical effort applied to task - and can be judged apart from results".

Performance is often analysed at two levels: organizational level and individual level. Organizational-level performance and individual-level performance have a close and inseparable relationship with one another, because the former depends on the latter, and an organization's results cannot be good if individuals' results are not good. This topic takes an interest in job performance at an individual level. Individual performance has recently received considerable attention from academics (Murphy, 1989; Campbell, 1990; Viswesvaran and Ones, 2000; Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; Griffin *et al.*, 2007).

The literature suggests that while researchers who expect to measure and manage the performance of an organization do so on the basis of results or the entire implementation process of the organization, others who approach performance at the individual level often focus on the behavioural level, because individual-level performance, being controlled by many factors of the organization, cannot be completely reflected. Moreover, researchers tend to consider job performance as a variable, and focus on how to manage and measure performance rather than identifying cultural nature of performance. According to Motowildo *et al.* (1997), results are not always the most accurate reflection of individual contributions to an organization. Results cannot show the true performance of individuals, because work results are dominated by many objective factors which individuals are unable to control, such as working conditions, different steps in the process, or numerous participants needed to make a final product, and so on. In addition, it is important to note that job performance cannot be limited to effectiveness/efficiency or productivity. Effectiveness is the assessment of the results of performance, while productivity is the ratio of effectiveness (Campbell *et al.*, 1993).

The concept of individual job performance were introduced by Murphy (1989) and Campbell *et al.* (1993), and further developed by many academics (for example, those

of Hunt, 1996; Borman and Motowidlo, 1997; Motowildo *et al.*, 1997; Pulakos *et al.*, 2000; Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; Bakker *et al.*, 2004; Griffin *et al.*, 2007). Borman and Motowidlo (1997) divided job performance into two groups: 1) task performance and 2) contextual performance. Viswesvaran and Ones (2000) and Rotundo and Sackett (2002) classified performance into three dimensions: 1) task performance; 2) organizational citizenship behaviours; 3) counterproductive behaviours. Although other academics have since analysed the different aspects of individual job performance, there has been almost no consensus on these classifications. Moreover, several authors, such as Pulakos *et al.* (2000) and Griffin *et al.* (2007) have added the dimension of adaptive performance.

This study concerned with individual job performance, focusing on the behaviour aspects of job performance through the perspectives of Vietnamese civil servants. It is important to note that, in practice, it is difficult to describe the aspects of actions in job performance if they are separated from results. For example, according to Armstrong (2006), performance is not only simply understood as outputs or achievement, but also a process of job implementation. Armstrong (2006, p.7) argued, "Performance is a matter not only of what people achieve but how they achieve it". The approach of the current research to the concept of job performance was in accordance with several academics who consider job performance as a process including inputs (competencies), processes (behaviours) and outcomes (results), or as a working process for the purpose of transforming inputs into outputs and outcomes (Brumback, 1988; Otley, 1999; Armstrong, 2006; Shields, 2007).

2.4.2 Job Performance in Public Sector

As mentioned above, the term "performance" has different meanings, depending on the nature of organizations and context in which it is used. Academics have recently paid much attention to the management of performance and organizational-level performance in the public sector, and acknowledged that in order to reform performance here, the first and most important thing is to change the awareness, attitude and behaviour of workers in the public sector (Brewer and Selden, 2000; Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; Haynes, 2003, 2015). However, to date there have been few

theoretical and practical studies on performance in the public sector (Brewer and Selden, 2000; Boyne, 2003), and very few focusing on micro-level or individual-level performance (Campbell, 2015; Koumenta, 2015). The lack of theories explaining the term performance in the public sector is easy to understand, because the doctrine of performance management was borrowed from the private sector. Following this logic, the concept of performance is also borrowed from the IT of the private sector (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Hood, 1995; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011b).

The concept of performance is abstract, ambiguous and difficult to define (Brewer and Selden, 2000; Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; Haynes, 2003). There are several reasons for this.   In the first place, public services are multifaceted, complicated, hybrid and unpredictable (Haynes, 2003; Klijn, 2008; Christensen and Lægreid, 2011; Haynes, 2015). Therefore, job performance in the public sector is also a more multi-faceted concept, involving not only the process of application of laws and other statutes, but also harmonization between management efficiency (output/input relation), effectiveness (outcome/output relation) and citizen relations (OECD, 2008). In general, job performance of individuals in the public sector "is not only a question of doing the right things and doing things in the right way. It also involves the way the individual behaves in a workplace context, and how he/she contributes to a well-functioning workplace and to a well-functioning organisation" (OECD, 2008, p.47).

 In addition, the public sector's missions, objectives and values are different from those of the private sector. According to Christensen *et al.* (2007), there are five fundamental differences between public and private organizations. These are: 1) differences in interests, as public organizations pay more attention to a broader set of norms and values; 2) greater requirement for accountability to citizens; 3) public organizations have to be stronger on openness, transparency, equal treatment, impartiality and predictability; 4) pubic organizations are multifunctional; 5) public organizations do not operate within a free and competitive market. According to Chaston (2011), the social values in government organizations are inclined to be more reflective than in private ones. The reason is that in the view of the public, who consider themselves co-owners of government organizations, these entities reflect society's values better than private enterprises. Consequently job performance in the public sector has its own

characteristics (Koumenta, 2015). If performance in the private sector is measured by such criteria as economy, efficiency and effectiveness, in the public sector, it may also be measured by other criteria, such as fairness, responsiveness and equity. Boyne (2002) reviewed theoretical arguments on the differences between private firms and public organizations, and identified four main areas of difference, including 1) Publicness and organizational environments (Complexity, Permeability, Instability, Absence of competitive pressure), 2) Publicness and organizational goals (Distinctive, multiple and vague goals), 3) Publicness and organizational structure (More bureaucracy, more red tape, lower managerial autonomy), 4) Publicness and managerial values (Less materialistic, serve the public, reinforced, lower organizational commitment).

2.5 Public Administration Context

The public sector has experienced a long period of change and development, both in practice and in theory (Aucoin, 1990; Larbi, 1999; Dwivedi, 2001; Caiden and Sundaram, 2004; Larbi, 2006; Caiden, 2017). This section reviews the flow of public administration renovation in order to provide an overview of public administrative context.

2.5.1 Bureaucracy and "Iron Cage"

The initial stage of traditional public administration was bureaucracy model, characterized by hierarchy, impartiality, high legality, continuity and standardization (Larbi, 1999; Drechsler, 2001; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015). The general idea is found in the studies of bureaucracy and bureaucratisation of Max Weber and others in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Howlett, 2004). This model was expected to bring safety to citizens, to set and enforce social criteria, and maintain the provisions of law. In the model of bureaucracy, rules and procedures are strictly applied to specific cases in order to limit individual bureaucrats' discretionary powers (Thompson, 2017). Therefore, the work environment of civil servants are in stability, rigidity, dependence and inertness situation, and expected to become machine-like obedient objects, which was expressed in the metaphorical term of "iron cage". The "iron cage" is a concept introduced by Weber (1947) to describe the situation of CSs who are trapped in a

bureaucratic system, in which obedience to strict rules, a clear hierarchy, and formalistic impersonality are typical characteristics (Weber, 1978).

More specifically, CSs in this model are bounded by red tape, which "usually implies excessive or meaningless paperwork, a high degree of formalisation and constraint, unnecessary rules, procedures and regulations, inefficiency, unjustifiable, and as a result from all this frustration a vexation" (Bozeman, 1993, p.274). More precisely, red tape is defined as "rules, regulations, and procedures that remain in force and entail a compliance burden, but do not advance the legitimate purposes the rules were intended to serve" (Bozeman, 2000, p.12). However, scholars have largely identified that policies, rules and laws are never specific enough to fit a particular case (Hill, 2003; Hoag, 2011). For instance, Hill (2003, p.267) argued that "policy often contains only shadowy guidance for practice, and implementers of policy often work under incomplete, inaccurate, or simply idiosyncratic understanding of what policy means for their everyday work of practice". It is interesting to note that formalization, red tape and centralization are the main characteristics of bureaucracy, shaping the contradictory behaviour of actors, causing paradoxes in their job performance. For instance, while formalization tends to increase bureaucratic behaviour, forcing CS to strictly abide by rules and regulations, red tape is a factor causing deviation in CS job performance. Bending rules and regulations that are considered to be red tape is a strategy which helps CSs to overcome the obstacle of bureaucracy (DeHart-Davis, 2007).

2.5.2 Public Administration Reforms and Culture Changes

Traditional PA and bureaucracy model were strongly criticized in the 1970s, due to slowness, red tape, inefficiency, paternalism toward citizens, waste of resources and excessive focus on process and procedures instead of results (UN, 2005). The following stage, or "New Public Management" model has been developed and applied in many countries in the world, especially in developed ones (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; O'Flynn, 2007), and has become one of the most striking reform trends in PA over past decades (Wynen and Verhoest, 2015). Continuing previous trends, NPM focused on result-oriented partnerships between the public and the private sector in order to provide services to citizens (Aucoin, 1990; Hood, 1991; Newman and Clarke, 1994;

Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). Its main principles were: (1) flexibility for managers to deal with ongoing changes in the national and global environment; (2) empowerment of citizens to promote more efficient, entrepreneurial and results–oriented management including "steering rather than rowing;" (3) new responsibility mechanisms that go beyond compliance mechanisms to search for innovations and results during the process; (4) introducing business principles into public affairs, including out-sourcing and contracting out; (5) promoting professional ethics in the public sphere; and (6) performance management and budgeting (UN, 2005). Although there have been many attempts to introduce the theory of NPM by encouraging governments to establish result-based management, limitations, challenges and traps have existed in measuring performance and application in the public sector (Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; Hood and Peters, 2004; Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006).

Along with the evolution of public sector models, culture change is therefore one of the first actors for attention (O'Donnell and Boyle, 2008; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015). AC needs to change from traditional AC to a more customer-focused, service focused, flexible culture (Newman, 1994; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015). In order to do this, entrepreneurial norms and techniques have been introduced into the public sector (Driscoll and Morris, 2001). Moynihan (2006) argued that traditional public AC should be rejected to make way for new culture, because it is too slow and rigid, and rarely focuses on results. However, whether the culture can be modulated and controlled in order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of performance in the public sector or not is an issue which many managers take into consideration, as well as being a controversial topic that needs more theoretical and empirical research (Ashworth, 2010; Hartmann and Khademian, 2010; Wynen *et al.*, 2014; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015). Public administrative reforms have produced more challenges and opportunities for scholars in terms of exploring the great issues in public administration, namely values, behaviour and culture (Wright, 2015; Dahl, 2018). Furthermore, although AC is great concern of PARs, it is surprising that research investigating this topic in the public sector, especially AC, still remains an incipient and promising topic which appeals to many academics, researchers and practitioners (Hajnal, 2005; Hartmann and Khademian, 2010; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2011; O'Toole Jr and Meier, 2015; Wright, 2015).

2.5.3 "VUCA" Conditions

Van Der Wal (2017) argued that public employees, especially public managers, in the 21st Century face various challenges of "VUCA" conditions. The term "VUCA" is an acronym (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) originating from the US military in the 1990s, and has recently found its way into the organization lexicon. He suggested that public employees must understand the nature of challenges, while responding to the barriers that led to them, noting that these difficulties may turn into immense opportunities, depending on "how public managers can prepare for and respond to a VUCA world" (Van Der Wal, 2017, p.5).

Firstly, in the matter of volatility, a situation of high dynamics and high speed of change (Lawrence, 2013), public employees have to deal with everyday situations such as disruptive events, scandals, crisis and disasters, and have plans and practices to deal with some of them. However, public employees have difficulty in forecasting their timing and occurrence, and because the increase of interconnectedness, even small events may cause other disruptive events and crises, resulting in volatility (Van Der Wal, 2017). Volatility is a real issue in the public sector and has become a key concern of administrators (Schillemans and van Twist, 2016). Also, Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010, p.255-256) noted that "public organizations have become more diverse workplaces, and equal employment and civil rights have become institutionalized within the organizations…the organizational context of much street-level work has changed markedly ever since".

Secondly, with reference to uncertainty, this is a situation of lack of predictability (Lawrence, 2013). The concept of uncertainty has been the concern of many administrative scholars (Lipsky, 1980; Vinzant *et al.*, 1998; Wagenaar, 2004; Lipsky, 2010). Situations of uncertainty are common in CS job performance due to information problems. Public employees' behaviour is limited by incomplete knowledge about future consequences; therefore, public employees' decisions are based on relatively simple heuristics and standard operating procedures (Simon, 2013). Van Der Wal (2017) similarly noted that sudden situations such as leadership transitions, and policy and programme changes are common and inevitable. However, in many cases, public

employees and managers lack crucial information about the short-term implications and cues on how to proceed; therefore, they fall into situations of uncertainty.

Thirdly, regarding complexity, this signifies the numerous and difficult-to-understand causes and mitigating factors involved in a problem (Sullivan, 2012). Most scholars in PA readily confirm that the public sector is now characterized by increased complexity of plural conflict values, stakeholders and organizations, as well as contradiction (Schillemans and van Twist, 2016). Dealing with a variety of stakeholders, each with their own worldviews, agenda, style, age, gender, orientation and background is one of the challenges of public employees and managers in their daily work. Christensen *et al.* (2007, p.150) highlighted that public employees cope with a variety of conflicting concerns from public service users, for instance, "economy, efficiency, being representative, responsiveness to voters, professional quality, performance, service quality, safety and security, due process, control, neutrality, equal treatment, impartiality, public transparency and openness, predictability and rights of participation". The increasingly collaborative and intergenerational nature of public employees' work is an example of the growing complexity (Van Der Wal, 2017).

Finally, ambiguity is a situation or an event which is unclear, and the nature of cause and effect relationships is doubtful in situations of ambiguity (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014). Van Der Wal (2017) argued that public employees and managers face increasing ambiguity when dealing with innovative implementation, untested new solutions and reforms for better satisfying service users. However, the outcomes of innovation and experiments are unclear or unknown to them; hence they are surrounded with ambiguity.

2.6 Theoretical Perspective

2.6.1 Neo-Institutional Theory

Cultural studies have been informed by different theoretical perspectives, and different theories have produced different interpretations of culture. The explanation of this GT study contributes to a certain extent to the field of NIT. Cultural and neo-institutional theories have close interplay. Many scholars have agreed that NIT involves the

incorporation and consideration of cultural aspects, which appear in all types of neo-institutionalism (Schedler and Proeller, 2007). Institutions have been conceived in the social sciences as a basic framework for human interaction in society or, in other words, "the rules of the game". These rules can be formal (constitutions, laws, statutes) and informal (beliefs, values, norms). These informal institutions are the key elements of culture in each society. IT has a long history, dating back to the late nineteenth century, and includes a wide range of views and positions (Scott, 2008). Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, institutionalism has developed and led to the emergence of NIT. While the old institutional theorists focus their studies on how formal structures affect social process and outcomes, new IT enlarges their perspectives in institutional approach, where informal components such as informal rules, conventions and culture are considered (Lowndes, 2010). IT is not a simple single theory, but is rather an umbrella theory that authors from different disciplines can apply to explain their research (Scott, 1987). IT is powerful in explaining organizational behaviour, and adopted in three main streams of studies: economics, political science and sociology (Scott, 2008). In general, "institution can be viewed as a relatively stable collection of practices and rules defining appropriate behaviour for specific groups of actors in specific situations" (March and Olsen, 1998, p.948). Cultural studies are "an attempt to explain differences in the behaviour of diverse groups of actors in situations that are objectively alike" (Schedler and Proeller, 2007, p.187). Therefore, institutional and cultural theories have the same object of research, which they approach in a similar manner and from a similar perspective (Pedersen and Dobbin, 2006; Kondra and Hurst, 2009). In the same vein, IT supports the cultural theory, expanding its findings relating to the sources of culture (Janićijević, 2015), and can be useful in order to advance a more comprehensive theoretical approach to cultural studies (Kondra and Hurst, 2009).

Given this relationship, and the experience from existing empirical AC literature, NIT was found relevant to support interpretation of administrative culture study. Howlett and Fraser (2002, p.471) contended that "neo-institutional accounts of social and political life have provided a new entry point to the analysis of administrative cultures and administrative reform. For neo-institutionalists, the institutional structure of an organization creates a distinct pattern of constraints and incentives for state and

societal actors that define and structure actors' interests and channel their behaviour. The interaction of these actors generates a particular administrative logic and process, or 'culture'". As for Howlett (2004), AC cannot exist free-floating, but rather operates within institutional context; therefore, the notion of AC can be situated within the confines of neo-institutional approach to the study of social and political life.

2.6.2 Logics of Action

The two logics were built and developed by neo-institutionalists, and found to be relevant and explainable for the issues of behaviours and values, which are the main concerns of the current study. The logic of expected consequences and logic of appropriateness have inspired many scholars in the field of PA (Goldmann, 2005). According to Schulz (2016), the two logics provide a fundamental power of explanation, and can help to understand and predict actors' behaviour. The current study applied the logic of appropriateness and logic of consequences to explain the causes of paradoxical entanglement, and the responsive reactions of CSs in their job performance (the detail of application for finding explanation were presented in the chapter 8).

The logic of appropriateness was identified and developed by constructivist institutionalists (March and Olsen, 2010). The essence of the logic of appropriateness theory is that individual behaviour within institutional contexts is structured, following rules, routines and standard operating procedures (Sending, 2002). The logic of appropriateness identifies individual action as "obligatory action", being rule and identity-based (Sending, 2002). This logic can be described as "rule-based or recognition-based action (March and Simon, 1958; March, 1994). Following this logic, each individual is a part of an institution, and plays a role within the institution. Rules and practices are the frameworks for actors to fit their actions to the situations by their appropriateness, in a conception of identity within the institution (March, 1989, p.38). Logic of appropriateness considers individuals' actions that involve a connection with situations, roles and rules. In the other words, behaviour in a specific situation should match the rules and roles or identity. Therefore, one might ask the following key questions: 1) What kind of action is this? 2) Who am I? 3) How appropriate are different actions for me in this situation?, and 4) What is the most appropriate action to take?

(March, 1989, .p23). This logic of action is found in traditional administration style, which CSs are bound by, and in most instances subscribe to as part of the public service ethos and values with which they identify and are identified with (Horton, 2006).

The logic of consequences has been developed by rational choice institutionalists. In this logic, actors comply with rule and norms if they perceive the costs (material and non-material) of non-compliance as being higher than those of compliance. Rational choice or public choice theories occupy a dominant position in PA nowadays as the movement of NPM. The theories mainly pay attention to behavioural outcomes explanation, such as "shirking" or "subverting" (Hondeghem and Vandenabeele, 2005). As a result of NPM, "public sector workers were expected to adopt the beliefs, values and ideals of the private sector, either through the direct pressures of the market or through a process of re-education" (Dingwall and Strangleman, 2005, p.497). Furthermore, the application of NPM leads to the alteration of many traditional PA values. Diefenbach (2009, p.895) argued that when NPM is implemented "it ignores, reduces, damages or even destroys many other values; the traditional public service ethos and its commitment to impartiality, social equality, integrity, equity and communitarian values, a care for the qualitative dimensions and the uniqueness of each individual and individual case, the socio-philosophical ideas of citizenship, representation, neutrality, welfare and social justice". Rational choice theory is based on the idea that the actions of individuals are driven by the rational pursuit of their interests (Barkin, 2009). Individuals are provided with alternatives, information and incentives by institutions to make their decisions. In rational choice institutional theory, individuals evaluate and behave in a rational way based on the information they have in respect to their preferences. From this point, the individuals will try to take advantage, and benefit according to their personal values and preferences. Therefore, individuals will calculate the consequences of certain actions to fulfil their own self-interest. For the rational choice institutionalists, institutions do not define individual preferences, but encourage the behaviour necessary to obtain benefits. The logic of consequences is commonly distinguished from the logic of appropriateness. This logic highlights the importance of personal values and preferences where alternatives are involved (March, 1989). The implementation of such actions consists of four components: 1) What are

my alternatives? 2) What are my values? 3) What are the consequences of my alternatives for my values? 4) Choose the alternative that has the best consequences (March, 1989, .p23).

According to Schwartz (2010), personal values are a significant driver of individual behaviour in line with the logic of consequences, and are important to acknowledge when discussing the implications of individual behaviour. Schwartz (2010) identified 10 groups of values, and argued that some of these values are complementary to each other, whereas others are in contradiction. For instance, benevolence and conformity are likely to interact to motivate pro-social behaviour (such as helping others), whereas security and power tend to discourage such behaviour.

However, paradoxes occur when individuals have to decide which logic should be followed, because paradoxes are embedded in the logic of each action. Actions might predominantly follow one or the other logic, and often a mixture of both. The two logics provide different explanations for the institutional phenomenon, but they can be considered complementary (Müller, 2004; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). In practice, the distinction between the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequences can make it difficult to choose one of them and apply, creating dilemmatic situations (March, 1989). Müller (2004) argued that, depending on conditions and contexts, individuals may shift their orientation and logic of action between rational choice institution (logic of consequences) and constructivist institution (logic of appropriateness). When acting in public situations, public employees not only primarily act rationally, according to careful consideration of self-interest or values, but also engage in matching these with the rules for actions (Christensen *et al.*, 2007).

2.6.3 Paradox Theory

 The use of concept "paradox" has been acknowledged as far back as 5,000 years ago (e.g. masculine and feminine in Hinduism, and Yin and Yang in Taoism). Poole and Van de Ven (1989) regarded paradox as a phenomenon or situation where two apparently contradictory factors or tensions appear to be true at the same time. Cameron and Quinn (1988, p.13) stated that "paradoxes are paradoxical - common and surprising,

confusing and understandable". Lewis (2000), and Smith and Lewis (2011) defined paradox as contradictory yet also interrelated elements, which exist simultaneously and persist over time. Audebrand (2017, p.374) denied paradox as "the dynamic interrelation, interplay or dialogue between interdependent, pervasive and persistent oppositional tendencies, forces or poles".

Over the past decade, the theory of paradox has been used in social science, especially in studying complex organizations (Audebrand, 2017). It has been identified and recognized, accepted, coped with in all walk of life (Handy, 1995), and also discussed in the extant literature, for example, paradoxical taxonomy (Cameron and Quinn, 1988; Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Lewis, 2000; Smith and Lewis, 2011). The paradoxical working environment has been studied by many researchers, for instance, studies of paradox tensions in human resources management (Aust *et al.*, 2015; Kozica and Brandl, 2015; Owens *et al.*, 2015; Zhang *et al.*, 2015) and paradox in the public sector (Whorton and Worthley, 1981; Kellough and Lu, 1993; Hood, 2000b; Fountain, 2001; Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; Hood and Peters, 2004), among others. However, the literature reviews shown that most of the research on paradoxes at organizational level. There is no research apply paradoxical lens to explain the tensions in civil servants' job performance.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has reviewed various aspects of administrative culture, and provided a discussion on the concept of job performance, and specifically several important concepts of public administration, such as "bureaucracy" "iron cage", "VUCA" condition, and the AC issues in the context of public sector reforms. In addition, this chapter introduced the relevant theoretical perspective to the current research, such as Neo-Institutional Theory, Logics of Action, and Paradox Theory. Conducting the literature review in general supported the theoretical sensitivity for the researcher. In addition, the literature reviewed showed that there is a need for further investigation on administrative culture. The movements of public sector reforms all over the world have been creating new theories and paradigms of public administrative styles, such as NPM, and Good Governance. More research is required on the topic of administrative

culture, because each type of public administrative paradigm has its own administrative culture style. Moreover, most of the studies on this topic were based on developed countries, while the study of administrative culture requires contextualised approaches, which bring an understanding of the phenomenon that is meaningful to participants in any given context. In addition, the literature suggests that while great attention has been paid to the exploration of performance, most research has been conducted in the private sector at an organizational level, focusing on performance measurement, rather than the cultural aspects of job performance. From these inferences, the current research was conducted to investigate the administrative culture in Vietnamese CSs' job performance, based on a cognitive research approach to understand participants' perspectives and experiences. The next chapter provides detailed description of the research site.

CHAPTER 3. VIETNAMESE CIVIL SERVICE AND CIVIL SERVANTS: AN OVERVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This study seeks to explore and understand the administrative culture in CS job performance in a developing country, Vietnam, from the perspectives of participants - CSs working in the system. This chapter presents an overview of the civil service and CSs in Vietnam. An understanding of the context is fundamentally important in helping to inform readers who are unfamiliar with Vietnam. The chapter begins with a short description of Vietnam, its history, society, culture, political system and other related issues. Next, it provides a description of the civil service and CSs of Vietnam, along with current administrative reforms.

3.2 Short Description of Vietnam

3.2.1 Geography and Population

The territory of Vietnam includes a land area of 331,699 square kilometres, and an immense sea area. Vietnam is shaped like the letter "S", stretching 1,650 kilometres from the northernmost to the southernmost tips[2]. The land border of Vietnam is 4,639 kilometres long, sharing a border with China (1,281 kilometres) in the North, and Laos (2,130 kilometres) and Cambodia (1,228 kilometres) in the West. Located in the East of the Indochinese Peninsula, near the centre of South-East Asia, with a coastline of 3,444 kilometres[3], Vietnam is endowed with ideal favourable conditions to develop its economy in general, and trade and tourism in particular. Mountains and tropical forests account for three-quarters of the total natural area, the lowlands being the most populated. The two "rice baskets" of the country are the Red River Delta in the North and the Mekong River Delta in the South *(the map is shown in Appendix 1)*.

According to the General Department of Population – Family Planning (Vietnam Ministry of Health), an estimate in 2016 put the population of Vietnam at 92 million. Regarding population, Vietnam ranks third in South-East Asia, eighth in Asia and

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[2] https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Việt_Nam

[3] https://vi.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Việt_Nam

fourteenth among 200 countries and territories in the world. By 2015, the annual average population growth rate was approximately 1%. The average population density is 280.6 inhabitants for every square kilometre of land; this figure makes the country the third most densely populated in the world[4].

The population is distributed unevenly, about 80% of the population living in the lowlands and coastal strips, with a high population density (2,206 inhabitants/km^2 in 2011). The Midlands and mountainous areas are thinly populated (97 inhabitants/km^2 in the Central Highlands, 119 inhabitants/km^2 in the North-West)[5]. Among 54 ethnic groups, Kinh people occupy 87% of the whole population and mainly inhabit the Red River delta, the central coastal delta, the Mekong delta and major cities. The rest includes ethnic minorities, over 8 million people in total, scattered in mountainous areas all over Vietnam's territory. The largest ethnic minorities are Tay, Thai, Muong, Hoa, Khmer, and Nung, with about one million inhabitants each, while the smallest are Brau, Roman and Odu with several people each[6].

3.2.2 History

Vietnam has undergone a history of over 4,000 years since the ancient Vietnamese founded their first kingdom under the name of "Van Lang" in 2879 BC. The history of Vietnam is always described as a long and continuous struggle for independence and freedom. The country was dominated by Chinese feudalists for more than 1,000 years (from 111 BC to AD 939). Vietnam was also a French colony for nearly 100 years, from 1859 to 1945.

During World War II, Vietnam was occupied by Japanese troops, then by French colonialists. The country declared its independence on September 2nd 1945, but straight after that, plunged into fighting against a French plot to turn Vietnam into their colony once again. The war lasted for more nine years, ending in 1954. The country was divided into two parts at the 17th parallel. The North, under the leadership of the

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[4] http://vov.vn/xa-hoi/dan-so-viet-nam-sap-cham-moc-92-trieu-nguoi-527386.vov
[5] https://gso.gov.vn/default.aspx?tabid=387&idmid=3&ItemID=12875
[6] http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/TheSocialistRepublicOfVietnam/AboutVietnam

Communist Party, became the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Meanwhile, the South remained under Western influence, particularly America.

The United States interference in Vietnam increased in the 1950s, and escalated into a full-scale war in March 1965, when the first American troops landed there. Although all the American troops withdrew from Vietnam in March 1973, according to the Paris Peace Agreement, the war continued until the South was completely liberated on April 30th 1975. The country was reunified and named "the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" in January 1976. The war legacy lasted until 1979, and today Vietnam is a country at peace.

3.2.3 Politics

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a socialist state ruled by law of the People, by the People and for the People. The political system was established upon the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and currently consists of the following: the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), political organizations, socio-political organizations, socio-professional organizations and mass associations.

The Party organizational system was established in line with the State administrative apparatus from central level to provincial, city, district and commune levels, as well as the agencies of fields such as public administration, education, political/social/professional organizations, military and police forces. Despite the parallel existence of these two systems, the CPV holds supreme power, leading operations of the State, the Vietnam Fatherland Front and other socio-political organizations, and making decisions on and supervising the implementation of political programmes, strategies and guidelines for national development and defence, directing personnel work and managing the contingent of cadres[7], introducing competent public employees for posts in State agencies and socio-political organizations.

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[7] Cadres are Vietnamese citizens who are elected, approved and appointed to hold posts or titles for a given term of office in agencies of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the State, socio-political organizations at the central level, in provinces and centrally run cities (below collectively referred to as provincial level), in districts, towns and provincial cities (below collectively referred to as district level), included in the payrolls and salaried from the state budget (Article 4, Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2008).

Over the last 88 years, the CPV has always held the core role for the Vietnamese nation and people. In times of war, the CPV has been in the vanguard of the struggle for national independence to liberate the country from domination by Western colonialists and American aggressors. In times of peace, the CPV has led the Vietnamese people to realize the cause of renovation, modernization and industrialization of the country.

3.2.4 Economy

Under the pressure of the economy falling deeper into economic crisis, the Party and Government of Vietnam decided to launch an economic renovation policy (named "Doi Moi") in 1986. Vietnam has so far recorded significant progress and achievements, widely acknowledged internally and externally (Nghiep and Quy, 2000; Thang and Popkin, 2004; Rowley *et al.*, 2007).

Overall, Vietnam has shifted from a state-subsidised, bureaucratic, centrally-planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy, from an economy maximising the state and collective sectors to a diverse, multilateral, open economy, from an economy prioritizing heavy industry to an economy emphasizing three strategic economic programmes: food and foodstuff, consumer goods and goods for export (Schermerhorn Jr, 2000; White *et al.*, 2001).

The Vietnamese economy is highly dependent on raw exports and foreign direct investment. It is the 6th largest economy in Southeast Asia among 11 Southeast Asian countries, the 48th largest in the world in terms of gross domestic product in 2013, and 128th in nominal GDP per capita. The total GDP in 2015 was $198.8 billion[8]. From only 11 countries having diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1954, Vietnam has currently established diplomatic relations with 185 countries, promoted economic, trade and investment relations with 224 markets in all continents, and established strategic and comprehensive partnerships with many powerful countries in the world[9].

In the process of implementing an open-door economic policy, Vietnam became a member country of the United Nations (1977), Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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[8] https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinh_tế_Việt_Nam
[9] http://tuoitre.vn/tin/chinh-tri-xa-hoi/20150827/viet-nam-da-co-quan-he-ngoai-giao-voi-hon-185-nuoc/959448.html

(1995), won admission to the ASEAN Free Trade Area (1995), Asia Europe Meeting (1996), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (1998), and World Trade Organization (2007) as the 150th member, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank Group, the Asian Development Bank, and the Economic Cooperation Forum Asia-Pacific, ASEAN. Vietnam has so far concluded 16 multilateral free trade agreements, typically with EU, ASEAN, South Korea, Japan and China[10].

3.2.5 Culture

The original culture of Vietnam derived from an agricultural civilization based on the cultivation of wet rice, and is one of the oldest in East Asia. During its history, Vietnam has experienced nearly a thousand years of Chinese domination, the influence of French colonialists in the 19th Century, a war of resistance against American invaders in the 20th Century and globalization in the 21st Century. Therefore, it can be said that Vietnamese culture consists of three overlapping layers: local culture, a culture mixed with Chinese, and a culture which interacts with the West. Vietnam has always made important cultural changes in line with historical periods. Some cultural identities have disappeared, but others have been added, enriching the modern Vietnamese culture[11].

The differences in topographic, climatic and population distribution have also formed cultural areas with typical characteristics in Vietnam. Along with this, the country consists of 54 ethnic groups living together in the territory, each ethnic group having its own cultural identity. Therefore, the Vietnamese culture is both diverse and unified. Beside the typical Viet-Muong culture, there are other cultural groups, such as Tay - Nung, Thai, Cham, Hoa - Ngai, Mon – Khmer and H'Mong - Dao, ethnic groups in the Central Highlands that still preserve the rich and comprehensive traditions of a purely agricultural society, closely attached to natural forests and mountains[12].

The long history and continual efforts to defend the nation against foreign invaders have also created patriotism and national pride among the Vietnamese people. In addition, some factors generally considered as characteristics of Vietnamese culture

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[10] http://www.trungtamwto.vn/tin-tuc/viet-nam-da-va-dang-tham-gia-16-fta
[11] https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Văn_hóa_Việt_Nam
[12] http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/TheSocialistRepublicOfVietnam/AboutVietnam/

comprise ancestor and leadership veneration, respect for sentimental and family values, and a thirst for knowledge.

Theoretically, the literature has shown that most of research on Vietnamese culture are mainly descriptive, focusing on Vietnamese custom, tradition, languages, cloths, cuisine, architecture. For instance, there are several studies conducted by Vuong (1986), Thêm (2001), Tran *et al.* (2008). However, the well-known study of national culture by Hofstede (2001), Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Schwartz (1999), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2011) did not include Vietnam.

3.3 The Contemporary Vietnamese Civil Service

In the first place, it is important to note that "civil service" is a broad concept, and yet there has so far been no uniform take on it (Hood, 1996; Evans, 2008). According to Longo (2001, p.6), the concept of civil service can be identified as "the system of articulation of public employment through which certain countries guarantee, with diverse approaches, systems, and instruments, certain basic elements for the existence of professional public administrations". In their studies on civil service, scholars have reviewed it from different aspects. In order to introduce the civil service of Vietnam, it is necessary to first consider the concepts and framework of civil service in general.

Firstly, the term "civil service" refers to a part of public employment. The use of this term is to distinguish between military and civil works (Longo, 2001). In practice, public service can be carried out under a variety of contractual and managerial arrangements, but many authors reserve the term "civil service" for career employees working under an explicit civil service law. Such law differs not only from private labour legislation, but also from a variety of contractual arrangements used for public services (Evans, 2008).

Secondly, the term "civil service" defines a specific type of activity used to perform State management duties, to enforce the law, and to put the law into practice. According to this definition, it can be seen that the difference between civil service activities and other normal activities is that civil service is based on the application of State-authorized power. This type of activity is carried out by a public legal entity,

guaranteed by State authority, and used to realize the management tasks assigned by the Government.

Thirdly, civil service activities are implemented by CSs; therefore, many scholars and practitioners argue that talking about civil service means talking about CSs who work under the law on civil service. Therefore, the concepts of civil service and CSs are interchangeable. According to the law on civil service and/or CSs of most countries, not all employees in the public sector are CSs (Longo, 2001) because there is difference between civil service and public service (Hood, 1996). CSs are an important part of civil service, and are defined as "a subset of persons employed to provide a public service" (Evans, 2008).

Fourthly, the term "civil service" refers to a special type of organization. "Civil service is the institution that is charged with transforming government and donor resources into poverty-reducing services. Civil service refers to the body of government officials who are employed in civil occupations that are neither political nor judicial" (Satish, 2004, p.2). This approach considers civil service from the angle of State organization.

In Vietnam, civil service is regarded as a specific type of activity used to perform state management duties, to enforce the law and put it into practice, and to effectively manage and use public assets and State budgets in order to serve the political tasks assigned by the Communist Party and the Government of Vietnam. Civil service activities, therefore, are defined as "the function of State management and organization to stabilize, develop society and citizen's life through State management agencies. In the broad sense, civil service implies the entire regular workforce in the central State apparatus and local government agencies. In the narrow sense, civil service refers to the whole of statutes on CSs" (Truyen, 1992, p.135). According to this definition, it can be seen that civil service activities are greatly different from other types of normal activities, because civil service activities are based on the use of powers authorized by the Government. This activity is conducted by a public legal entity, guaranteed by State power, and used to carry out management tasks assigned by the Government within the national political system, for social benefits. This concept is fairly similar to the common use of the term "civil service", which refers to the core

administrative arm of government, including civil servants working in government organizations such as ministries, departments and agencies. Therefore, the scope of VCS includes two main elements: 1) administrative arm; 2) CSs and their job performance. The two elements of VCS will be presented in the following paragraphs.

Regarding the Vietnamese administrative body, this includes Central government and local state administrative organizations, but excludes public service units (schools, universities, hospital, research institutes, television stations).

First, the Vietnamese central Government's components are ministries, and ministerial-level agencies. In 2016, the number of ministries and ministerial-level agencies in Vietnam amounted to 18 (Ministry of National Defence, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Construction, Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Information and Communications, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism), and four, respectively (Government Inspectorate, State Bank of Vietnam, Committee on Ethnic Minority Affair, Government Office). The ministries and ministerial-level agencies have their own provincial departments.

Second, the Vietnamese local state administrative organizations are known as People Committees, with three levels, including: 1) Provincial level (consisting of services, subcommittees, other organs administered by the People's Committees and the People's Committee offices); 2) District level (consisting of departments, sections, other organs administered by the People's Committees and the People's Committee offices); and 3) Communal level (sections and offices). The number of Vietnamese local state administrative organizations is shown in the following table (*Source: Ministry of Home Affairs of Vietnam*)[13].

[13] https://moha.gov.vn/danh-muc/linh-vuc-chinh-quyen-dia-phuong-dia-gioi-hanh-chinh-26074.html

No	Content			Number
I	Number of Administrative Territorial Units of Vietnam (up to 31/12/2017)			
1	Provincial Level			**63**
			Province	58
			City under Direct Central Rule	5
2	District Level			**713**
			Provincial City	68
			Town	51
			City District	49
			Rural District	546
3	Commune Level			**11.162**
			Commune	8.978
			Ward	1.587
			Townlet	602
II	The number of Island Commune (up to 31/12/2017)			
1	Commune Level			
			Commune	70
			District	12

Table 1: The Number of Vietnamese Local State Administrative Organizations

The Vietnamese Administrative arm is illustrated in the following figure:
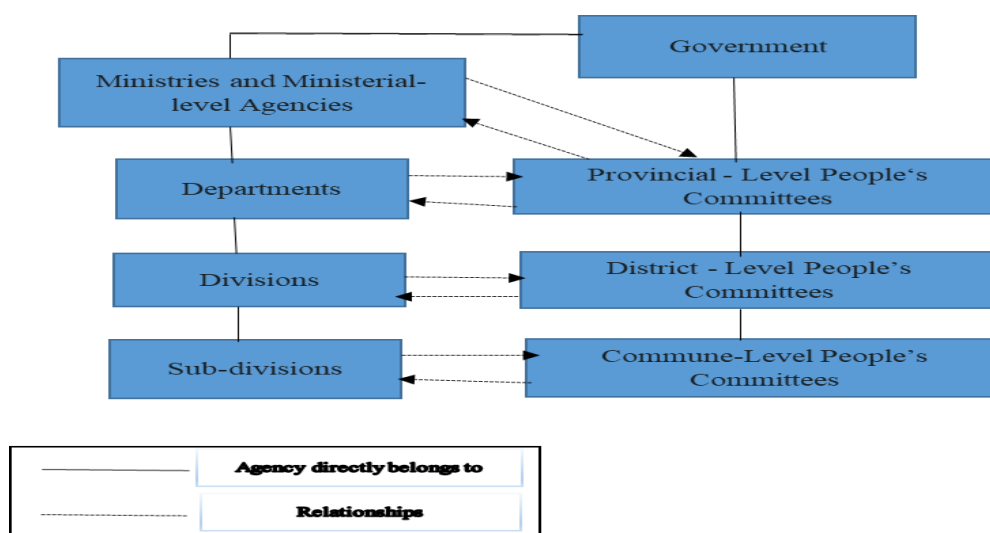
Figure 2: Vietnamese Administrative Body

Source: Developed by the author

Similar to the concept of civil service, the definition of CS is different between countries (Longo, 2001; Evans, 2008). In Vietnam, the scope and nature of CS has been varied, and changed through the process of establishment and development of the civil service. According to the Law on Cadres and CSs passed by the Vietnamese National Assembly on November 13, 2008, "CSs are Vietnamese citizens who are recruited and appointed to ranks, posts or titles in agencies of the CPV, the State, socio-political organizations at the central, provincial and district levels; in People's Army agencies and units, other than officers, professional military personnel and defense workers; in People's Police offices and units other than officers and professional non-commissioned officers, and in the leading and managerial apparatuses of public non-business units of the CPV, the State and socio-political organizations (below collectively referred to as public non-business units), included in the payrolls and salaried from the state budget; for CSs in the leading and managerial apparatuses of public non-business units, they are salaried from the salary funds of these units according to law" and "Commune-level CSs are Vietnamese citizens who are recruited to hold specialized titles in commune-level People's Committees, included in the payrolls and salaried from the state budget". The number of Vietnamese CSs is shown in the following table:

Item	Content	Total number (person)
1	The total number of commune-level cadres and CSs until December 31, 2014 (No statistical data from the following provinces: An Giang, Binh Duong, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Hai Duong, Ha Nam, Khanh Hoa, Kien Giang, Kon Tum, Lai Chau, and Yen Bai).	198,909
2	The total number of cadres and CSs district-level and higher levels (provincial and central level) until December 31, 2014 ((No statistical data from the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Construction, and Khanh Hoa, Kien Giang and Kon Tum provinces)	280,443
	Total	479,352

Table 2: The Number of Vietnamese Civil Servants, 2014

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs of Vietnam

3.4 Civil Servant Regimes and Civil Service Reforms in Vietnam

Broadly, there are two main types of civil service models: career-based and position-based systems (Bourgon, 2008; Bruynooghe *et al.*, 2008; Poon *et al.*, 2009; Acuña-Alfaro *et al.*, 2016). First, the career-based system is a CS regime organized on the basis of scale and speciality. Each scale has its own standards. It is necessary to pass a selection examination to be officially appointed to a certain scale, and pass a scale-raising examination to reach a higher scale. Each scale has a corresponding payroll. In the career-based system, training is associated with CS recruitment, and payment is based on seniority, merit and promotion. CSs are usually hired at the beginning of their career and are expected to remain in the civil service more or less throughout their working life. Initial entry is mostly based on academic credentials and/or a civil service entry examination. Once recruited, employees undertake a certain type of work, depending on the demand of organizations (Bourgon, 2008). This type of system has some limitations; for example, in cases where annual evaluation of CSs' working results is not good, it will not encourage them to work to their full capacity. Due to such characteristics, the career-based system does not respond timely to the dynamic market economy and globalization tendency today. Meanwhile, the position-based model builds a system of positions and identifies requirements and standards for each specific position. In the position-based system, selection of CSs relies on their competence relating to job positions or specific areas. The selection of candidates is by internal or external recruitment, and promotion is not guaranteed. A position-based system is generally more open, due to greater participation of candidates (Bourgon, 2008). However, to set up standards and requirements for tens of thousands of positions in the public service is not easy. In addition, each position has only one salary level, so that CSs who have worked for a long time at the same position will suffer limited remuneration and will not feel to give of their best.

The VCS generally inclines towards a career-based system (Bruynooghe *et al.*, 2008; Poon *et al.*, 2009). More specifically, to enter the civil service, CSs must undergo a selection examination and probation period. Only after successfully fulfilling the probation period, will CSs be eligible for scale-based promotion opportunities, as mentioned above. Scale-based career development is extremely important in order to

have opportunities for being appointed to managing and leading positions. CSs are classified into the following scales: Senior Expert (Group A); Principal Expert (Group B); Expert (Group C) and Below Expert (Group D). Scale-based promotion mainly relies on seniority and scale-raising examination results. Normally, it takes nine years to move from expert to principal expert, and six years from principal expert to senior expert (Poon *et al.*, 2009).

The policy of Vietnamese PAR was initiated in the late 1980s, and was associated with the start of "Doi Moi" (Economic Renovation) in 1986 with the development of a socialist-oriented market economy, and building rule-of-law of the people, by the people and for the people (Painter, 2003; Bruynooghe *et al.*, 2008; Poon *et al.*, 2009; Acuña-Alfaro *et al.*, 2016). In reality, along with public administrative reforms, CS management in Vietnam has gone through significant changes. From 1986 and earlier, the VCS was marked by a "mandarin" system, which followed the French civil service system model (Poon *et al.*, 2009; Acuña-Alfaro *et al.*, 2016). The CS regime of Vietnam was impacted by a centrally-planned mechanism, and CSs were managed according to a centralized and unified plan of the State. Recruitment was assigned to State administration agencies and CS management was undertaken by independent State agencies (Painter, 2003; Poon et al., 2009). During this period, Vietnam made a great effort to perfect its legal framework on CS management, the main landmark being the promulgation of the Ordinance on Cadres and CSs 1998. After the Ordinance on Cadres and Civil Servants 1998 took effect, the management of cadres and CSs in Vietnam gradually complied with the provisions of the Ordinance, from examination-based recruitment to execution of regime, policy, assessment, utilization, reward and disciplinary measures, all being in accordance with consistent provisions. After that, the first Masters Programme of PAR was conducted during the period 2001 to 2010. Over a period of ten years (1998-2008), along with the Ordinance on Cadres and Civil Servants 1998 and amendments, the Government of Vietnam promulgated many guiding documents, setting up an important system of institutions and legal bases to renew the mechanism of cadre and CS management. For instance, two important laws on CS and official management have been approved, which are the Law on Cadres and Civil servants 2008, and the Law on Officials 2010. The former is considered as the initiation

of a new policy-making cycle for CS management. This is a new revolutionary step in the process of reforming the CS regime and institutionalizing the Communist Party's guidelines on personnel in the context of building a socialist law-governed State of the people, by the people and for the people. The Law on Cadres and Civil servants 2008 stipulates job description and CS structure, creating a basis for position-based CS management, salary payment to CSs, and implementation of position-based policies and regimes for CSs. This facilitates a result-oriented public service performance management. Simultaneously, this is also the basis to enhance individual CS's responsibility and commitment to public service performance as well as each manager's responsibility for subordinate staff in controlling and implementing the objectives of the organization. Issues relating to human resource utilization, for instance training and fostering, which are renovated on the basis of leadership and management position criteria and standards of scale, should be in accordance with the requirements of assigned tasks.

Most recently, the Resolution No.30c/NQ-CP dated 8/11/2011 of the Government promulgating the Masters Programme of PAR for the period 2011-2020 has confirmed and stipulated more clearly the goals of PAR in Vietnam, specifically as follows:

- Develop and perfect the institutional system of socialist-oriented market economy to liberate the productive forces, mobilize and effectively use all resources for national development.
- Create a transparent, favourable, fair business environment to minimize the time spent and expenditure on enterprises across all economic sectors in compliance with administrative procedures.
 - Develop a system of State administrative agencies from central to grassroots in a thorough, transparent, powerful, modern, efficient and effective way.
- Ensure the practical execution of the people's democratic right, and the protection of human rights, associating human rights with the rights and interests of the people and the nation.
- Develop the contingent of cadres, CSs and officials with enough quality, capacity and qualifications to meet the requirements to serve the people and the country's development.

In addition, the project "Promoting the reform of public service, CS regimes" approved by the Prime Minister on 18/10/2012 also clearly defined the goal of "Developing a professional, responsible, active, transparent, effective public service". To achieve the above goals of PAR, during the last few years, Vietnam has focused on the main contents, as follows:

- Reform of institutions
- Reform of administrative procedures
- Development and improvement of quality of cadres, CSs and officials
- Reform of public finance
- Modernization of public administration.

The above analyses show that the VCS regime has made considerable changes, along with the evolution of public sector management models. The civil service of Vietnam has gradually shifted from a "closed" system to an "open" one that is strongly decentralized, strengthening the responsibility and accountability of CSs in their performance and expanding the participation of stakeholders in the process of CS management. The universal application of advanced management methods is a way for Vietnam to perfect its regime of public service and CSs. However, this is a difficult problem, because it affects the entire public service and public administration. Therefore, it needs time and careful consideration to decide how to apply it, and to what extent. In the future, there are sure to be more initiatives and experiments, as well as more successes and failures. The challenges of CS management in Vietnam in particular and PAR in general still lie ahead.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has given a general overview of the VCS regime and its recent reforms. The descriptions offered in the chapter provide the context for investigating the AC of CSs' job performance in practice. The methodology adopted for this study will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research paradigm, methodology and methods employed in this study. The chapter begins with a discussion about the philosophical assumptions in social sciences and the chosen research philosophy, presenting a consideration of different paradigms, and then detailing a rationale for the choice of relativist constructionism worldviews. Included in this is a reflection on the differences, commonalities and applications of qualitative and quantitative approaches, together with their epistemological and ontological bases. This is then followed by a discussion of possible methodologies for the study. A rationale for, and explanation of, the adoption of abductive research approach, qualitative strategy and constructivist grounded theory are provided. In the next section, consideration is given to the research methods used in the study. This section presents the concrete techniques and procedure of the thesis. A summary of this chapter is provided in the following table.

Table 3: Three Components of Research

Source: Adapted from Crotty (1998)

4.2 Research Philosophy

4.2.1 Research Paradigm Worldviews in Social Sciences

During any research process, researchers have their own "worldview" (Guba, 1990; Creswell, 2014) "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p.17) or "paradigm" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, 2013), "a set of generalizations, beliefs, and values of a community of specialists" (Kuhn, 1970). In this study, the researcher used the term 'worldview' as a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research. The two critical dimensions of research worldviews are ontology and epistemology, and usually arise together (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2014).

4.2.1.1 Ontological Position

Ontology is a branch of philosophy, dealing with the essence of reality in the social world and the nature of existence (Blaikie, 2007). Blaikie (1993, p.6) gave a "root definition" of ontology, which means "the claims or assumptions that a particular approach to social enquiry makes about the nature of social reality". Crotty (1998, p.10) defined ontology as "the study of being. It is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such". Ontological assumption is concerned with answering the question of whether research phenomena exist independently of the human mind, or as a product of the human mind, and dependent on human beings. In general, there are two main ontological positions, which are realism and idealism (Blaikie, 2007; Bryman, 2012).

The realism school can be divided into various sub-schools. According to Ritchie (2014), variants of realism include: 1) Naive realism (Madill *et al.*, 2000) – reality can be observed directly and accurately; 2) Cautious realism (Blaikie, 2007) - reality can be known approximately or imperfectly rather than accurately; 3) Critical or Transcendental realism (Bhaskar, 1978; Robson, 2002) - reality consists of different levels – the empirical domain that is made of up what we experience through our senses, the actual domain that exists regardless of whether or not it is observed, and the real domain that refers to underlying processes and mechanisms; 4) Subtle realism (Hammersley, 1993; Blaikie, 2007) – an external reality exists, but is only known

through the human mind and socially constructed meanings. However, in general, realism is based on the idea that there is an external reality that exists independently of people's beliefs about or understanding of it. In this theory, "both natural and social phenomena are assumed to have an existence that is independent of the activities of the human observer" (Blaikie, 2007, p.13). The philosophers of this school have an objective viewpoint of the world, which is the basis of the scientific method and inquiry (Crotty, 1998).

Idealism argues that reality is fundamentally mind-dependent: it is only knowable through the human mind and through social construct meanings, and no reality exists independently of these (Ritchie, 2014). In a similar vein, Blaikie (2007) argued that an idealist theory considers that the external world does not exist independently from our thought. Therefore, the philosophers of this school have a subjective viewpoint of the world. According to Ritchie (2014), collective idealism and relativism are sub-schools of idealism. While collective idealism considers that the social world is made up of representations constructed and shared by people in particular contexts, the relativism or radical idealism believes that there is no shared social reality, only a series of different (individual) constructions (Ritchie, 2014). More specifically, in the lens of relativists, there is no universal, objective truth, and there are a variety of interpretations of reality, locally, and historically specific (Guba, 1990). In a similar vein, Chalmers *et al.* (2009) argued that relativists believe that the phenomenon studied has multiple realities, and its' meaning can be explored and reconstructed through interactions between the researchers and the subjects of the research.

4.2.1.2 Epistemological Position

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge (Blaikie, 2007) which is the way human being understands and explains how they have the knowledge of what they know (Crotty, 1998). In other words, epistemology concerns three main issues: 1) the nature of truth and knowledge 2) the way in which knowledge is obtained, and 3) the role of the researcher, or the relationship between the researcher and researched, and how this influences the connection between "facts" and "values" (Ritchie, 2014). There are several types of epistemological approaches, the three, primarily contrasting ones

being: 1) Positivism and Post-positivism; 2) Constructivism and Interpretivism and 3) Pragmatism (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007).

Positivists and post-positivists believe that knowledge is objective and exists independently from the human experience. A central tenet of positivism and post-positivism is that the world exists externally, and the properties of this world should be measured through objective methods, instead of being implied subjectively. The positivist and post-positivism epistemology is linked to the objectivist ontology (realism). Therefore, knowledge is 'hard' 'real' and 'interpersonal'. These schools argue that humans can explain, share and predict what will happen in the social world through researching causal rules and the relationship between variables. Human knowledge is improved by the process of hypotheses testing, adding the right and eliminating the wrong (Ritchie, 2014). However, according to Blaikie (1993), Blaikie (2007), Denzin and Lincoln (2013), Ritchie (2014), positivism and post-positivism have several differences. The distinctions between the two research perspectives are summarised in the table below.

Criterion	Positivism	Post-positivism
Reality is …	Reality can be known accurately or totally (knowledge is foundational, correspondence theory of truth).	Reality can be known imperfectly and probabilistically, hypotheses can be rejected or provisional and fallibilistic, coherence theory of truth.
Science is …	Based on values of reason, truth and validity and focuses on facts and careful observation; Using quantitative methods, surveys and experiments, and statistical analysis.	Based on testing propositions: hypotheses about casual relationships are derived from scientific theories and then evaluated empirically against observations; Using both quantitative and qualitative practices.

Table 4: The Distinction between Positivism and Post-Positivism

Source: Summary from Blaikie (1993), Blaikie (2007), Denzin and Lincoln (2013), Ritchie (2014)

By contrast, interpretivists and constructivists argue that knowledge is subjective, and that understanding of the social world depends on human beliefs. According to Ritchie (2014, p.12), "Knowledge is produced by exploring and understanding the social world of the people being studied, focusing on their meanings and interpretations (social constructionist traditions emphasise the socially constructed nature of those meanings). Researchers also construct meanings and interpretations based on those of participants". The schools of interpretivism and constructivism are linked to the subjective ontology (idealism) (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bryman, 1988; Willis *et al.*, 2007; Holloway *et al.*, 2010). In addition, the nature of the social world should be researched based on the depth, but not the width of the phenomenon. Therefore, interpretive epistemology tries to gain understanding of the phenomenon in the context in which it is produced, and through different perceptions of the people or groups involved. People's perceptions are interpreted by their own circumstances and experiences; consequently, there is no universal reality, but rather many different perceptions. Likewise, the related school of constructionism emphasises that knowledge is actively 'constructed' by human beings, rather than being passively received by them (Crotty, 1998; Blaikie, 2007). Ritchie (2014, p.12) argued: "reality is affected by the research process, facts and values are not distinct, and objective value-free research is impossible. Some researchers may aim to be transparent about their assumptions and attempt to adopt a neutral position; others embrace subjectivity and become more personally engaged in the research". Both approaches reject the idea of 'value neutral' observations and universal laws, and both focus on understanding lived experience from the point of view of those who hold it (Ritchie, 2014). Although interpretivism and constructivism are relatively similar, they have several significant differences. First, constructivism argues that realities are not "out there" but are constructed by humans in relation to each other and under the impact of many social and cultural factors (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Crotty, 1998). Therefore, constructivism highlights that "knowledge is actively 'constructed' by human beings, rather than being passively received by them" (Ritchie, 2014, p.13). In addition, while interpretivists believe that the reality can be understood through researchers' interpretation, constructivists believe that reality is "socially constructed" and based on shared

experiences through interaction between and among researchers and participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Pragmatism, which is the critical realist perspective, integrates the objectivist quantitative and subjectivist research (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). This paradigm offers a perspective different from positivism/post-positivism and constructivism, and focuses on the research problem and the consequences of the research (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

4.2.2 Discussion for the Choice of Research Worldviews for the Current Study

This section discusses the research worldview for conducting AC research, and, subsequently, the worldview adopted for the current study.

In terms of the ontological position of AC - the nature of administrative culture and ontological assumption will decide the approach of culture research. In the context of culture in general, there are two main, completely opposite ontological approaches, objectivistic and subjectivistic (Janićijević, 2011). The objectivistic approach considers culture as a dependent variable. For example, in terms of organizational culture study, this approach argues that culture is what organization has, is one of the elements of organization, and has its purpose and function (Smircich, 1983; Jamil *et al.*, 2013b).

On the other hand, for the subjectivistic approach, organizational culture is what an organization is (Smircich, 1983; Jamil *et al.*, 2013b). More specifically, it is claimed that culture is not a distinct entity, separable from reality, but that it is the reality itself (Janićijević, 2011).

Regarding the epistemology assumption of AC – the nature of knowledge and the way AC can be created and captured, in the first place, for post-positivism, AC studies are frequently linked to the ontology of objectivism. The assumption is that culture, as a discrete entity, can be positively identified, described and measured by an objective categorical apparatus, independent from it (Janićijević, 2011). The basis for post-positivism research is that researchers approach a culture through predefined categories, which they study on the basis of results from previous research. They then

predefine the concepts, dimensions and variables to be studied within a culture, and afterwards develop a questionnaire which quantifies these dimensions and their relations.

On the other hand, based on subjectivistic ontological assumptions, culture cannot be positively identified and measured, but only interpreted. People keep the content of the culture in their minds, and it does not exist outside of them. Researchers cannot know what is in people's minds, but can only interpret the products of the culture – symbols, behavioural patterns. Culture is explored by understanding, and not by measurement. In order for this to be possible, it is necessary for researchers to be a part of the culture, to be subjective, rather than objective observers (Janićijević, 2011). Cultural studies in this approach are divided into three main groups: 1) Cognitive Perspective, which studies the beliefs or assumptions of organizational members (Schall, 1983). In this approach, researchers find out what organizational members think and what is to be shared among them. 2) Symbolic Perspective, which studies the language, non-language and other symbols of the organization (Smircich, 1983). 3) Structural Perspective, which explains how the symbols reflect the beliefs and assumptions of organizational members. The philosophical standpoint of this school is illustrated by Hall and Hall (1959, p.55): "When I talk about culture I am not just talking about something in the abstract that is imposed on man and is separate from him, but about man himself, about you and me in a highly personal way".

Lastly, constructionism research, based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of subjectivism, does not have predefined categories; rather they are established during the research itself, and based on input from the members of the organization or the members of the culture explored. Subjectivistic assumptions in ontology and epistemology and emic research imply that it is only possible to explore culture contextually, and that knowledge obtained from one culture cannot be used for the understanding of other cultures. One of the best methods is to learn how to interpret a culture in terms of its members' perceptions.

In the context of this study, the relativist constructionism worldview was adopted, which aims to provide an interpretive understanding of social phenomena within a

particular context. In addition, this research chose an interpretive research approach with several purposes. First, it enabled exploration of the AC through the perspective of CSs, including shred value, beliefs and assumptions in the VCS system. These elements could be investigated by using an interpretive approach which "tries to understand the action in a substantive area from the point of view of the actors involved" (Glaser, 1998, p.115). Also, the interpretive approach enabled the researcher to have a full understanding of AC reflected in CSs' performance, from their viewpoint.

4.3 Research Methodology

4.3.1 Research Approaches

In terms of the way phenomena are captured and theories are developed, there are three main approaches: deductive, inductive and abductive approach. This section will present a brief description of the three approaches.

The first one - the deductive approach, or theory testing process (a 'top-down' process) is where hypotheses are deduced from existing theories, to be empirically tested or validated (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Blaikie, 2007; Dubois and Gibbert, 2010; Bryman, 2012). Deductive research follows a conscious direction from general law to a specific case, and is suitable for testing existing theories, not creating new science (Kovács and Spens, 2005). Positivist researchers usually adopt a deductive research process, and begin the research with theoretical argumentation, which begs an explanation. The researcher has to find or formulate a possible explanation for the existence of regularity in the social phenomenon. The task is to test the theory by deducing one or more hypotheses from it, and then validate these arguments with empirical observations (Blaikie, 2007; Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010). The ontological position for deductive research is usually objective (realism). The aim of deductive research is to identify generalizable laws that are based on the hypotheses testing from a sample of population (Blaikie, 2007). However, this approach has been argued against by many authors. For example, developing a prior theory with literature is extremely different from coming to the field to verify or modify a unified, firmed-up theory of social research, which may not reflect the social reality of the context under investigation.

Purely deductive research process
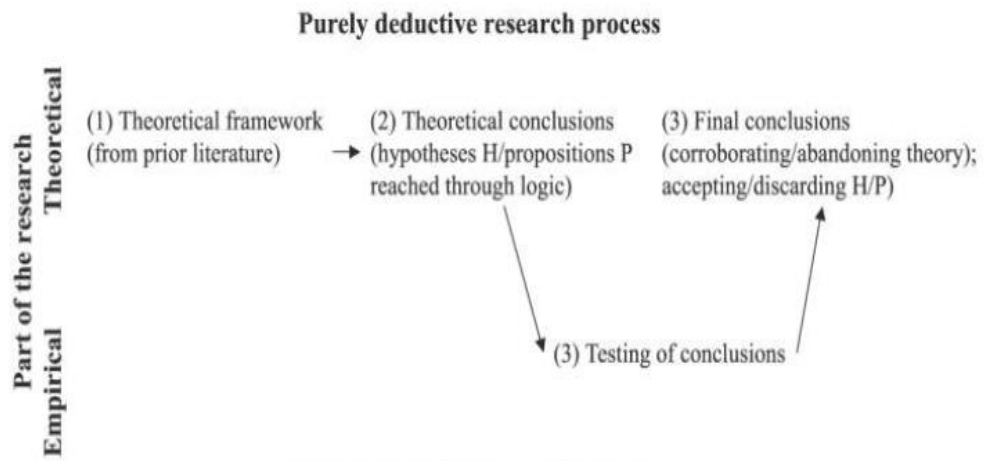
Figure 3: Purely Deductive Research Process

Source: Kovács and Spens (2005, p.137)

The second approach - the inductive approach or theory building process (a 'bottom–up' process) is where the research starts with data collection, followed by data analysis and then proceeds to derive generalisations (Blaikie, 2007). Induction, therefore, in contrast to deduction, moves from specific empirical facts or a collection of observations to develop or generate general law, rather than testing theory (Kovács and Spens, 2005). Observation of the empirical world leads to the formulation of concepts to explain the observation. Therefore, "the aim of inductive research is to describe the characteristics of people and social situations, and then to determine the nature of the patterns of the relationships, or networks of relationships, between these characteristics. Once generalizations about the characteristics and/or patterns have been established, some writers claim that they can be used to explain the occurrence of specific events by locating them within the establish pattern" (Blaikie, 2007, p.9). In contrast to the deductive research process, the inductive approach often starts with a subjective account of lived experiences (Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010). This approach requires researchers' understanding of the phenomenon and the context in which it exists. The research methods used for inductive approach, therefore, are usually qualitative to explain social phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Purely inductive research process

(0) Existing theoretical knowledge from prior research

(2) (Final) theoretical conclusions (framework)

(1) Real-life observations

Part of the research — Theoretical — Empirical
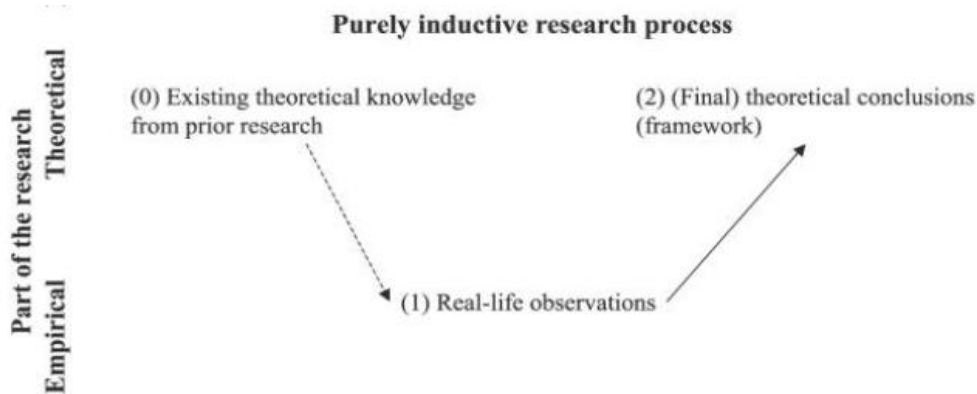
Figure 4: Purely Inductive Research Process

Source: Kovács and Spens (2005, p.137)

The third approach is abductive reasoning. Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p.180) defined that "abductive analysis is a qualitative data analysis approach aimed at generating creative and novel theoretical insights through a dialectic of cultivated theoretical sensitivity and methodological heuristics". Blaikie (2007), among others, argued that there is no such thing as 'pure' induction and or 'pure' deduction. For example, when so-called inductive researchers generate and interpret their data, they cannot approach this with a bank mind. Even if they are not testing a hypothesis, the kind of data they have employed will have been influenced by assumptions deductively derived from previous work in their field. Similarly, deductive researchers setting out to test a hypothesis will have drawn on a body of theory, which in turn has been inductively derived from prior observations (Ritchie, 2014). Blaikie (2007) goes on to introduce two further research approaches of enquiry – abduction, where theoretical frameworks evolve simultaneously and interactively with empirical observation. Constructivist research philosophers often adopt research logic based on abduction (Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010).

The starting point of the abductive approach is a combination of deduction and induction, which Dubois and Gadde (2002) call "theory matching", or "systematic combining". In this process, data is collected simultaneously with theory building, and

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there is consideration 'back and forth' between theory and empirical study (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). Researchers following the abductive approach attempt to find a new matching framework, or to extend the theory used prior to this observation (Inserm, 2000). The aim is to discover constructions of reality, ways of conceptualizing and giving meaning to the social world and tacit knowledge (Blaikie, 2007). "The main access a researcher has to these constructions is through the knowledge that social actors use in the production, reproduction and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation" (Blaikie, 2007, p.10). The primary aim of abduction is to develop understanding of a "new" phenomenon, while induction traditionally aims at generating findings from empirical data (Kovács and Spens, 2005).
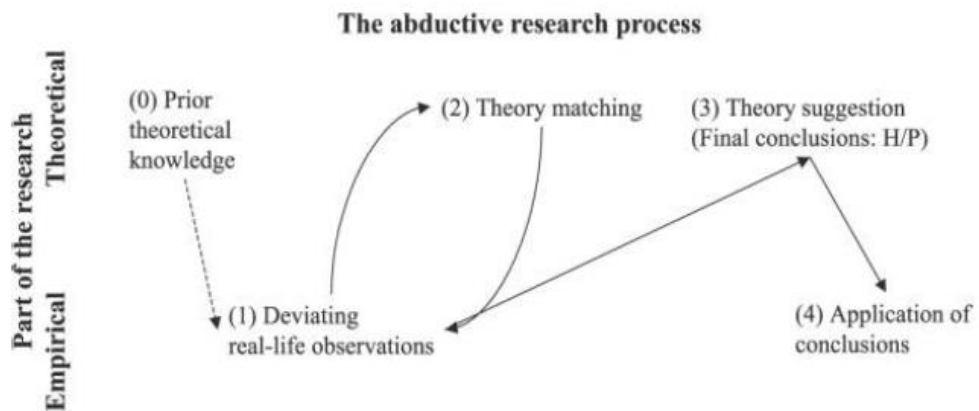
Figure 5: The Abductive Research Process

Source: Kovács and Spens (2005, p.139)

4.3.2 Research Strategies

4.3.2.1 Qualitative Strategy

Culture has been researched using the two main methodological approaches: objectivistic – quantitative, and subjectivistic – qualitative (Yauch and Steudel, 2003; Jung *et al.*, 2009; Bellot, 2011; Janićijević, 2011). The approach depends on the opposite ontological, epistemological assumptions, as well as the objectives of the study.

Qualitative research methods are adopted for this thesis. There are several reasons for this choice.

Firstly, according to Morgan and Smircich (1980), the appropriateness of using qualitative or quantitative techniques depends on the underlying assumptions of the researcher and the nature of the phenomena to be studied. The ontological and epistemological positions in this study are relativism and constructionism. The views and perceptions of CSs about their performance activities and AC are subjective, and these views are likely to be influenced by numerous factors, both personal and professional, as is the interpretation of these perceptions. A qualitative research approach makes explicit the interaction between the participant and the researcher, and is appropriate for the constructivist theoretical approach in this study.

Secondly, while this is an exploratory piece of research, culture is likely to remain a complex and contested concept. Although there has been an increasing amount of researcher, managers and policy makers trying to conceptualize it in a variety of ways, only limited cumulative knowledge is evident; therefore the argument around this topic has never been stopped, and the debate as to how the concept should be explored continues (Jung *et al.*, 2009). The objective of this study is to explore the factors affecting AC in Vietnam, and the attributes of AC in Vietnam in CSs' executive activities. Applying qualitative methods and taking a descriptive, non-numerical approach to collect and interpret information allows the researcher to investigate existing phenomena, understand the nature of social process and explain it. During the process of research, qualitative methods allow a systematic investigation of how individual participants make sense of the world, and how they interpret and experience events and social interaction. In this study, the studied phenomenon is administrative culture, which is explored based on the perspective of CSs in their daily executive activities.

Thirdly, the nature of the research problem is also important in choosing the approach to a study. One of the other objectives of this study is to develop an explanatory framework of administrative culture in Vietnamese CSs' job performance. Qualitative methods will enable this thesis to build a substantive theory. Creswell (1994, p.10) argues that "for the qualitative studies the research problem needs to be explored

because little information exists on the topic. The variables are largely unknown, and the researcher wants to focus on the context that may shape the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In many qualitative studies a theory base does not guide the study because those available are inadequate, incomplete, or simply missing". According to Ritchie (2014, p.31), "a major feature of qualitative methods is their facility to describe and display phenomena as experienced by the study population, in fine-tuned detail and in the study participants' own terms. It therefore offers the opportunity to 'unpack' issues, to see what they are about or what lies inside, and to explore how they are understood by those connected with them".

Fourthly, qualitative methods of research can bring several advantages, as outlined by the well-known researcher on culture, Hofstede *et al.* (1990), 1) A high degree of flexibility, since feedback information regarding the adequacy of certain questions is easily and quickly obtained, and therefore the questions can be easily adjusted and changed; 2) Extensiveness and diversity of the data gathered; 3) Scope and depth of exploration - it encompasses extremely different elements of a culture in all its layers; 4) The possibility of performing historical analysis, which is extremely important for exploration of a culture, 5) The picture of a culture is based on interpretations by members of the organization.

Fifth, one of the objectives of this study concerns the practical contribution to social policy, and more specifically is about improving the quality of CSs' job performance. In order to do that, it is critically important to fully understand the administrative culture in their job performance. There have been increasing calls for greater research using qualitative methods to understand more fully the nature of the problems that policies have to address. Therefore, there is a steady growth in commissions from governments and other public sector agencies for qualitative research (Ritchie, 2014).

Regarding qualitative research traditions, Creswell and Creswell (2013) identify five main types of qualitative research approaches: 1) Case Study; 2) Ethnography; 3) Phenomenology; 4) GT; 5) Narrative Research. After critical and careful comparison and consideration, GT was chosen for the current study. The overview and rationale for opting for this methodology is presented in the following sections.

4.3.2.2 Grounded Theory and Alternative Approaches

GT method was created by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss (1967), and has been developed and popularly applied in a range of disciplines. The purpose of this methodology is to construct theory from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). GT is typically an inductive methodology, generating and developing theory from obtained data, while the researcher has a minimum predisposition towards specific kinds of lines of research, or theoretical interests (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Jeong, 2009; Babbie, 2013; Creswell and Creswell, 2013). There are two main differences between GT and other forms of qualitative research: 1) the concepts created are generated from the data collection process; 2) research analysis and data collection is conducted simultaneously and continuously throughout the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

However, like other research methods, grounded theorists also face with several drawbacks. One of the key criticisms relating to the researcher who play the role as a research tool is the application of prior knowledge, including literature and prior knowledge of the researcher throughout the research process. Therefore, the researcher has to maintain the balance between objectivity and sensitivity, ensuring that the personal perspectives of the researcher do not have the influence on the participants' answers and the research outcomes. It is important for the researcher to be aware of subjectivity and properly reflect it on the data collection and analysis process. In addition, Charmaz (2000) contended that novice GT researcher may have high potential of methodological error by selecting purposeful instead of theoretical sampling. Moreover, due to the fast development, there are currently multiple approaches to GT, which resulted in confusion among scholars. The most popular versions are: 1) the original or classical version by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Glaser and Barney (1978); 2) the version by Strauss and Corbin (1990), Strauss and Corbin (1998), Corbin and Strauss (2008), Corbin and Strauss (2015); 3) constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006, 2013).

The first version – the Glaserian model, is an inductive approach that does not use any pre- understanding or theories. The defining components of GT practice include:

- "Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis;

- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deductive hypotheses;

- Using the constant comparison method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis;

- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis;

- Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationship between categories and identify gaps;

- Sampling aimed toward theory construction (theoretical sampling), not for population representativeness;

- Conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis" (Charmaz and Charmaz, 2014, p.8).

The classic GT has received criticism. One of the greatest is for delaying the literature review prior to and within the process of data collection and analysis in order for the researcher to generate a theory that fits with and is well-grounded in the empirical world (Thornberg, 2012). The reasons for the delay are: 1) to keep the researcher as free and open as possible to discover, and 2) to avoid contamination from existing concepts or theories which may distort the data or findings (Thornberg, 2012). Charmaz (2006) argued that Glaser's pure inductive approach is ambiguous, being free from extant theories and concepts. However, in reality, no one would claim to start a piece of research absolutely free from the influence of past experience and literature (Morse, 1994). Since the 1990s, a growing number of scholars have abandoned GT from the positivism and naïve realist concept of data and reliance on pure induction in the Glassian version (Charmaz, 2000; Clarke, 2003; Charmaz, 2006; Bryant, 2009; Charmaz and Charmaz, 2014).

The second version is the Straussian model, developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), establishing GT methodology together in 1967. However, Glaser and Strauss have slowly separated toward differing views on GT. While Strauss, together with Corbin, has paid more attention to verification in the process of generating theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998), Glaser has remained faithful to classic GT, and has focused on the emergence of data and theory via a systematic comparison of basic social process (Ong,

2012). The first two editions of Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Strauss and Corbin (1998) focus on applying additional technical procedures and providing guidance to novice researchers, rather than emphasizing emergent theoretical categories (Charmaz and Charmaz, 2014).

The third version is constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz and Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz (2000), both versions of GT by Glaser and Strauss and Corbin are strongly embedded in positivism and objectivist methods. The aim of objectivist GT is to explore what is believed to be 'there' in human actions and interactions. Constructivist grounded theorists view their research product as representing one of multiple realities about what may be happening regarding human actions and interactions. In this version, "the phenomena of study sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Constructivist GT has its roots in pragmatism and relativist epistemology. This school argues that neither data nor theories are discovered, but are constructed by the researcher in the process of interactions with participants in the research field (Charmaz, 2006). In other words, data are co-constructed by researcher and participants, and interpreted by the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Mills *et al.*, 2006).

The use of GT for this study was justified for the following reasons: First, the research interest has received little attention, or there is minimal knowledge of the phenomena (Goulding, 2002; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Murphy *et al.*, 2017). The topic of AC is a complex issue, which has received little attention, and as such, demands more in-depth research, especially in the context of public reforms implemented all over the world. Administrative culture is expected to change in order to meet the requirements of reforms. Therefore, it is necessary to have an investigation of the topic. Murphy *et al.* (2017, p.292) suggested that "grounded theory therefore excels at exploring new (i.e., "blue sky") research domains and at providing fresh perspectives on well-trod but ill-understood (i.e., "black box") research topics". More specifically, there is lack of an integrated theoretical framework explaining the administrative culture in Vietnamese CSs' job performance. Given this lack of literature, the abductive approach in GT might be appropriate (Murphy *et al.*, 2017).

Second, GT method enables researchers to generate theories that comprehensively explain behaviours and provide a perspective on behaviour from many different angles (Goulding, 2002; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). In this study, the meaning of CSs' performance is understood mainly as behaviours. Also, behaviour is one of the main aspects of culture that will be explored in this study.

Third, GT method enables researchers to generate theories that are applicable in practice (Goulding, 2002). "The procedure can be used to uncover the beliefs and meanings that underlie action, to examine rational as well as non-rational aspects of behaviour, and to demonstrate how logic and emotion combine to influence how persons respond to events or handle problems through action and interactions" (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 11).

Fourth, GT method allows the researcher to focus on the context in which individual behaviour takes place (Murphy *et al.*, 2017). The GT approach permits deeper engagement with social settings in which individuals operate, and therefore "might be useful for extending the understanding of how organizational policies, practices, and systems influence employees' experiences of their jobs" (Murphy *et al.*, 2017, p.292). This research is concerned with discovering the specific AC of Vietnam in data. More specifically, by developing theory, the researcher was able to explore and understand the problem experienced by a group of participants, and how they dealt with this problem.

Fifth, GT method provides researchers with a systematic method for collecting, analysing and interpreting the data (Creswell and Creswell, 2013). As a novice researcher, conducting a PhD research was a learning process, therefore, the researcher could utilize the specific guidance from GT method.

Sixth, GT method has been popularly used in social sciences, and received calls for its application in the domains of management and human resources, but has not generally been adopted by human resource scholars (Murphy *et al.*, 2017). In particular, a search of culture studies reveals a relatively small number of publications that employ a grounded theory approach, and there are no studies in the area of administrative

culture. Therefore, conducting this methodology presents a new area of research and offers the researcher the opportunity to create a methodological contribution.

4.3.2.3 Rationale for Adopting Constructivist GT and Abductive Approach

As suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), GT method should be used flexibly by individual researchers. Many grounded theorists modify the ideas and methods from Glaser, and Strauss and Corbin when conducting their research (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Up to now, GT methodology has been developed by many authors. Other examples of the development in GT methodology are Charmaz (2006) with constructivist GT, Clarke (2003) with re-grounding GT, Goldkuhl and Lind (2010) with multi-GT, and Thornberg (2012) with informed GT. A common link between these grounded theorists is that they apply GT using an abductive approach, instead of a purely inductive approach as the main means of inquiry. Murphy *et al.* (2017) argued that grounded theory method is the abductive interplay between inductive and deductive research approaches.

After comparing and contrasting the three main versions of GT - Glaserian, Straussian and Charmaz approaches, the researcher opted for the constructivist GT suggested by Charmaz (Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006, 2013) and utilized coding techniques by Strauss and Corbin (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015). An abductive approach was utilized as recommended by many recent grounded theorists, such as Charmaz (2000), Clarke (2003), Charmaz (2006), Goldkuhl and Lind (2010), Thornberg (2012), Murphy *et al.* (2017).This combination was chosen for several reasons, as follows:

First, the constructivist GT school of Charmaz (2000) allows researchers to utilize their own background, knowledge and the extant literature, combining with participants to build the grounded theory. This was reasonable for the researcher, having worked in the public sector for more than ten years.

Second, the abductive approach is an appropriate approach for the PhD research process, which allows researchers to have some prior general knowledge of existing literature on the research topic. This is also a requirement of the PhD process, for

example, conducting the research proposal, submitting for transfer. Conducting a general literature review is useful for novice researchers in theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Moreover, the logic of abduction has been adopted in the recent literature GT methods (Charmaz, 2006; Reichertz, 2010). According to Birks and Mills (2015), an abductive approach can be used at all stages of analysis, especially in the process of constant comparative analysis that leads to theoretical integration.

Third, constructivist GT also allows the researcher to use the structure of the Strauss and Corbin version, while maintaining the additional flexibility of a constructivist approach. Moreover, as for coding analysis procedure, this approach provides a more structured and detailed approach to methodology, and can help more in guiding the data analysis. According to Creswell and Creswell (2013), these versions are much more prescribed than the original conceptualization of GT. Therefore, the guidelines can help the researcher feel more secure when organising the huge amount of data. In addition, in the process of conducting this study, the techniques of constructing GT by Charmaz were followed, as not many techniques are shown in the version of Strauss and Corbin. Moreover, the version by Charmaz offers the researcher flexible guidelines, rather than methodological rules, recipes and requirements (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz and Charmaz, 2014). "GT methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. GT begins with inductive data, invokes integrative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you integrating and involved with your data and emerging analysis" (Charmaz and Charmaz, 2014, p.1).

4.4 Research Methods

4.4.1 Process of Data Collection and Analysis of the Current Study

Data Collection and Analysis Process for this research was divided into three phases: Pilot phase, Main phase, and the Phase of theoretical sufficiency achievement, as illustrated in the following diagram:
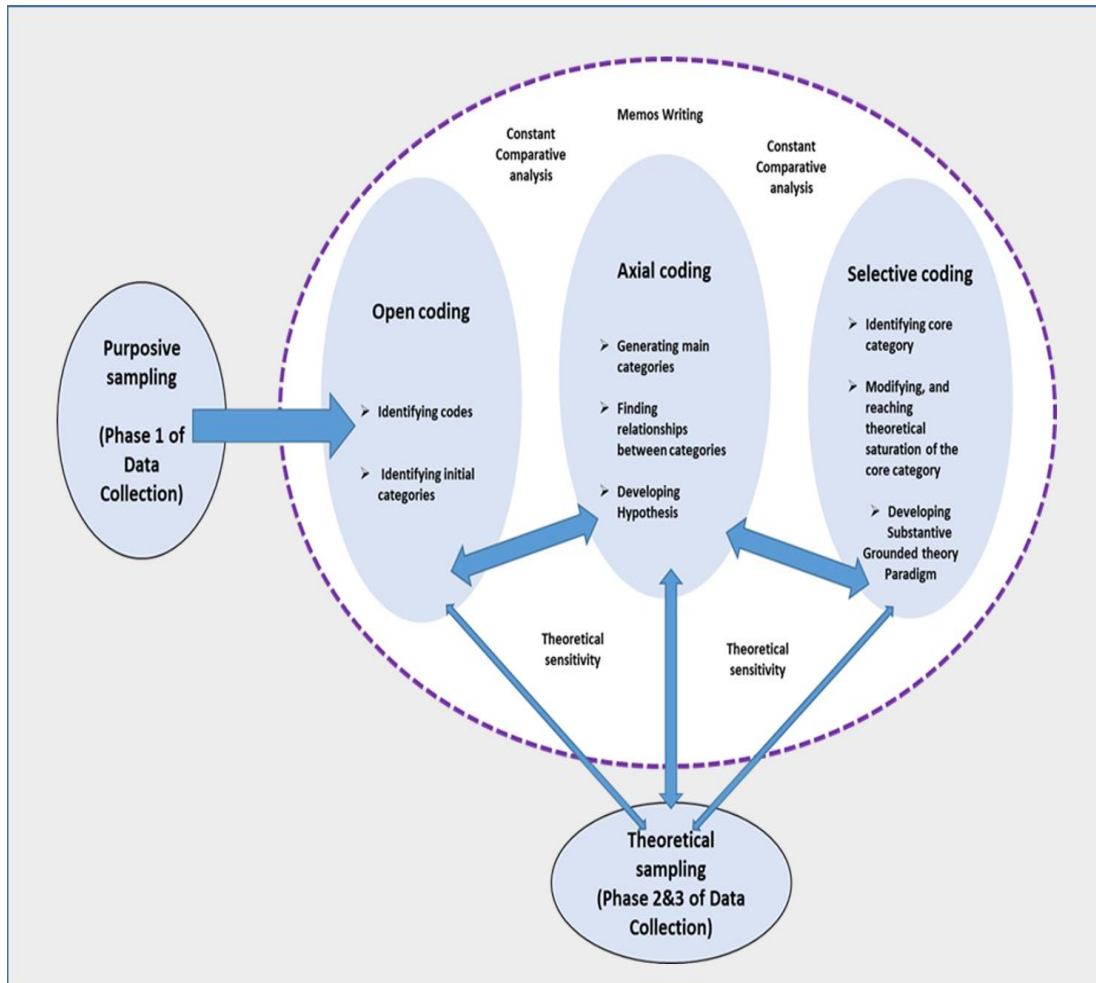
Figure 6: The Process of the Current Research

Source: Developed by the researcher, adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1998)

The first phase of data collection and analysis was conducted over two months, with 10 interviews from early June to the end of July 2016. In GT Method, Pilot interviews are not recommended because there is a simultaneous process of data collection and analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). However, in this research, initial interviews (pilot) were still conducted for several reasons. First, the initial interview phase enabled the researcher to become familiar with the condition and research field in which the study was conducted (CSs, the work of CSs and administrative system in Vietnam). Second, the initial interviews provided the researcher with a chance to identify, validate and clarify the applicability of the research methodology and design adopted. Moreover,

the initial interviews helped the researcher to narrow the focus of the research questions and select a more exact topic for the research. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested that by using the first few interviews as guides to the essence of the phenomena, the researcher can narrow the focus and therefore reduce the number of interviews needed. Third, the main purpose of the initial interview phase was to enhance the interview skills and choose appropriate analytical methods. In addition, it helped the researcher to design the interview questions and make sure they exposed ideas and meanings, which added value and enhanced the accuracy of questions for the next round of interviews. Specifically, this phase supported the researcher in generating themes and concepts in order to build a list of questions for semi-structured interviews in the second round of data collection (main data). Finally, as a novice researcher, the limitation of the research ability to fulfil an extensive project such as a PhD thesis was inevitable. The pilot interviews and analysis were necessary for the researcher to avoid any pitfalls. In addition, discussion between the researcher and the supervisor team on the outcomes of initial interviews and analyses was conducted in order for the researcher to keep on track.

The interviews was transcribed and the transcription analyzed by the author following the GT approach of Corbin and Strauss (2008). The process of data analysis also followed Corbin and Strauss (2008). Using the interview transcripts, the researcher conducted open coding, arranging themes and concepts into categories. The researcher then started to explore concepts and themes from the data, organising them into more conceptual units or categories in order to represent meaningful information. However, axial coding and selective coding did not take place during this phase, because the aim of this phase was to identify interesting themes and select the appropriate way for collecting data in the next phase.

In the second phase, the researcher conducted 46 interviews with CSs in the three main areas of Vietnam. These took part over four months, from early August to the end of November 2016. The theoretical sampling was applied at this stage. As mentioned in the section 4.4.2, theoretical sampling is a special type of purposeful sampling. Therefore, the samples in this phase were also chosen based on the purpose of the research and the general criteria. At this point, semi-structured interviews were

used as the primary means of data collection. Turning to the data analysis applied in this phase, according to Corbin and Strauss (2015, p.7-8), "data analysis in GT method is a constant comparison". The data analysis in this phase of the study involved three major types of coding, namely open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015).

The third phase was conducted over three months, from July 2017 to September 2017, with six interviewees who were retired senior managerial CSs, and four participants who had already participated in the first and second phases of the research. At this stage, the data collected in the two previous phases was analyzed carefully, and constant comparison was applied by moving back and forth with collected data. The theoretical sufficiency of emerged concepts, categories, and the relationships among main categories were largely achieved. The core category and initial emerged substantive theoretical model were proposed in the second phase. The purpose of this was to discuss, confirm, refute, modify and reach theoretical sufficiency of the core category, and develop substantive GT paradigm found in the initial findings in the first and second phases of data collection and analysis. However, it is worth noting that "though total saturation is probably never achieved, if a researcher determines that a category offers considerable depth and breadth of understanding about a phenomenon, and relationships to other categories have been made clear, then he or she can say sufficient sampling has occurred, at least for the purposes of this study" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.149).

The data was later analyzed at the axial coding stage by rebuilding it in a new way, finding relationships among the identified categories, and developing theoretical links between them (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The third stage in GT analysis is selective coding or integrating categories, "linking categories around the core categories and refining and trimming the theory" (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.295). During this stage, the researcher identified the core category and linked it systematically with all the other categories to generate emergent substantive GT (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). It can be seen that the processes of axial coding and selective coding are relatively similar. However, the degree of abstraction in selective coding is higher.

4.4.2 Sources of Data

In qualitative research, data are collected through multiple sources, and interviews and observations are the most popular means of data collection. In addition, many other types of data can be used, including videos, journals, diaries, internal documents and memos, memoirs, internet postings and historical records. For this research, the researcher used two main types of data - interviews and documentary sources.

4.4.2.1 Interviews

Interviews are one of the most popular sources of qualitative research, and "play the central role in the data collection" of grounded theory methods (Creswell, 2007, p.131). Interviewing is "a conversation, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee" (Kvale, 1996, p.174). The purpose of interviewing is to uncover and explore the meaning that underpin people's lives, behaviours, values, perspectives, routines (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). Interviewing is an important method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings (Cohen *et al.*, 2002). In comparison with the questionnaires, the interviews are more powerful in terms of generating data that allows researchers to understand individual's perspectives in greater depth (Kvale, 1996). However, like other any research tool, there are several drawbacks of interviewing method. One of the considerable challenges of this method that the researcher have to deal with is the subjectivity, validity, and reliability (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Patton (1990) argued that in qualitative research, the researcher plays the role as a research instrument, therefore, it is impossible for the researcher be totally objective in the interviews. The researcher's background, knowledge, personality, and mind-set might influence the process and outcome of interviews. Creswell (2007) remarked other limitations of interviews that the appearance of the researcher might bias the participants' responses, and that not all participants are able to be equally articulate and perceptive to response to the interviews.

There are three main types of interviews: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Bryman, 2012). Structured interviews, which are usually in the form of survey, and popularly used in quantitative research rather than qualitative research

(Arksey and Knight, 1999; Bryman, 2012). Unstructured interviews are normally in form of informal conversations, and the findings can generate in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon (Arksey and Knight, 1999). However, it is challenging for data collection and analysis as a great amount of time are requested, and therefore is not much suitable for project restricted in the short period (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Semi-structured interviews are between the structured and unstructured format, and perhaps the commonest and most diverse of the three formats (Arksey and Knight, 1999). First, it generates information in order to have an in-depth understanding in detail about a social phenomenon with a small number of cases (Patton and Patton, 2002). Second, it allows the researcher the flexibility in the way they conduct the interviews, and the participants have freedom to respond to questions (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Bryman, 2012). Semi-structured interview was considered suitable, and the main method of data collection. In addition, face-to-face interviews were conducted because mail surveys are often not effective, due to the unreliable mail system, and strong resistance from research subjects. Also, the Vietnamese do not like to be interviewed by strangers, especially without payment, and there would be lack of support for research that does not directly benefit the respondents in the short-term (Napier *et al.*, 2004).

Regarding interview process, prior to the interviews, the selected participants had been contacted and informed about the study. Subsequently, a consent letter was sent, detailing the purpose of the study, expectations of participants and issues of confidentiality. Then, a second conversation took place to verify that the consent forms had been signed, and to arrange a meeting time at the home of each participant. The participants were given a semi-structured interview guide a week prior to each interview, to allow them to reflect on the questions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed entirely and used for later coding. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, and the transcripts were not translated into English, except for the text included in the thesis as quotations.

At the early stage of the research, the pre-understanding of the researcher on the topic was quite limited. The interviews at this point were extremely explorative, with questions probing the general dimensions of the CSs' work performance. The

researcher attempted to explore particularly interesting themes relating to factors and characteristics of the daily executive activities of CSs. The data collected from the initial interviews enhanced the understanding of the researcher, and allowed a wider view of the subject from a different angle. Although having some ideas about the topic from the formulation of the problem and the literature review, the researcher set these ideas aside when going to interview in the pilot phase. This is important to avoid preconceptions and the imposition of existing concepts and theories. The researcher tried to be as non-directive as possible while interviewing the CSs. Therefore, the interview structure used in this phase was an intensive interview which "may range from a loosely guided exploration of topics to semi-structured focused questions" (Charmaz, 2006, p.26). More specifically, in the first five interviews, the researcher used unstructured interview for the purpose of generating themes and categories initially closest to reality, and avoiding preconceptions of the researcher. These interviews were conducted as conversations about the daily work of participants, for instance, their position, difficulties, challenges in their job, their feelings about the job, interesting situations they had experienced during their employment history, and so on. The participants themselves led the researcher in the conversations about daily work, which gave them the chance to talk and explain situations and new ideas. The researcher tried to understand and explore more deeply the job performance of participants during the conversation. The questions were based on six general themes, as follows:

- Background of participant;
- Tasks of CS;
- Task Cooperation within the organization;
- Task Cooperation with stakeholders;
- Difficulties and Challenges in work performance process;
- Performance Appraisal.

Each theme was followed by probes and follow-up questions to pursue interesting topics brought up in the interviews. According to Patton (1990), the interview protocol should start with questions that the participants find easy to answer, and then move on to more difficult and abstract, or sensitive topics. Thus, in the first stages of each interview, the researcher tried to establish an understanding of the interviewee's

background, then proceeded to ask information about their job performance, moving from general to specific questions *(An interview guide used for interviews 5- 10 is shown in Appendix 3).*

In the second and the third phase of interview process, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary means of data collection. The aims of this phase were to generate core categories and relationships between them and the initial framework. These questions were also followed by probes and follow-up questions to pursue themes brought up in the interviews *(see the list of questions in Appendix 4).* In the process of interviewing, the researcher tried to create an environment that encouraged participants to discuss their experiences in free-flowing, open-ended discussions, and enabled the researcher to gain access to their thoughts and ideas. After the questions on the list had been covered, the researcher asked additional questions in order to explore further concepts and clarify certain points. It took around 65 minutes for each interview. The longest one was 140 minutes and the shortest one was around 50 minutes. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the researcher attempted to explore particularly interesting themes in more detail, and did not feel it necessary to ask every question of every interviewee. In conversations, the researcher kept the participant in the frame by focusing on the research topic. However, as the aim of the research at this point was to keep the data collection process as open as possible to all emerging themes, the researcher attempted to be as open as possible to themes emerging from the interviews.

After each interview, the researcher made a transcription, with initial coding to generate codes and themes. After five initial interviews, the researcher conducted a summary analysis, comparing data and concepts to form a question guide for the next semi-structured interview. The interviewing skills of the researcher was greatly improved after each interview. For example, after several initial interviews, regarding the observance of regulation on working hours, the researcher felt surprised when most interviewees stated that they follow it seriously because there are a lot of complaints of citizens on this issue. Doubting the accuracy of such answer, the researcher supposed that he might make mistake due to asking direct questions such as "How many hours do you work per day? Do you respect the work schedule seriously?".

Subsequently, the researcher decided to use open and indirect questions so that the participants could easily share their stories, for instance, "How many children have you got?", "How could you arrange your daily schedule to take care of them, to pick them up to school". With such questions, the participants admitted that they had very low working efficiency due to their lack of concentration at work since they had to take time for caring their children. It meant that the participants did not strictly follow the regulation on working hours, and such open and indirect questions seem to be more effective than direct ones to explore the real essence. This strategy was also applied to the next interviews and created useful and rich data. One more example, through the process of data, collection, the researcher recognized that people who had a long time of working experience in the administrative organizations, especially those who are leaders, managers, normally responded a general answers. Through asking them indirect questions, for example "Could you please tell me a case that you have faced up during your performance? How did you deal with such situation?", "Could you describe a successful/unscheduled case that you have done so far? What were the lessons you learnt from that?". Therefore, to several issues which considered as the sensitivity relating to cultural political, power, the technique of asking indirect questions significantly supported the researcher in exploring the real stories from the participants.

4.4.2.2 Documents

In terms of documentary sources, the researcher reviewed and made analysis of various materials and government documents, such as Vietnamese Administrative Laws and regulations, Vietnamese Law on Cadres and CSs, Vietnam's General Statistics Office data research reports; and the Master of Administration Reforms mass-media material and publications *(the list of documents is shown in appendix 5)*. The aim was to understand the regulations and environment in which administrative organizations operate.

All written interviews and documents were transferred and managed using QSR's Nvivo 11 software.

4.4.3 Sampling Strategies

Purposive sampling and theoretical sampling were adopted for this research. First of all, purposive sampling is "intentional selection of information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the central questions of the research" (Patton and Patton, 2002, p. 134). According to Ritchie (2014, p.114) "In the purposive sampling, decisions about which criteria are used for selection are often made in the early design stages of the research. They will be informed by a range of factors including the principle aims of the study, existing knowledge or theories about the field of study, hypotheses that the researcher may want to explore or gaps in knowledge about the study population". The chosen participants should "provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.181). Also, the participants should be "people who represent a variety of positions in relation to the research topic, of a kind that might be expected to throw light on meaningful differences in experience" (King and Horrocks, 2010, p.29). Based on the definition of AC, that is, shared values, beliefs, norms and practices of CSs, one of the most appropriate methods to gain a deeper understanding of AC is through CSs' perspectives on their daily job experiences. In addition, according to Christensen *et al.* (2007, p.38), one of the methods to grasp the organizational culture in a public organization is "to interview members who have been in the organization a long time and who know the institutional characteristics well, for example, an experienced administrative leader, a director of an agency with many years in the job or 'the old mayor', all of whom are likely to have accrued a deep, insightful knowledge of their organization's informal norms and values across a wide spectrum". Therefore, in order to capture diverse perspectives and experiences from participants, participants were recruited in a variety of administrative organizations across various levels of administrative systems from many provinces in three main regions of Vietnam. Respondents were selected according to the following three criteria: Being CSs (managers and functional CSs); working in administrative organizations (vertical administrative organizations and horizontal administrative organizations); working in administrative organizations more than three years. The recruitment of participants from different age groups, with different levels of work experience, from various levels of public administrative

organizations in many provinces in Vietnam to maximise the possibility of obtaining extensive data on the process of job performance. This variation was helpful in making sense of the research setting by including people with diverse backgrounds and, therefore, with different viewpoints about the subject under study *(see the details of the participants in Appendix 2)*. Demographic information of respondents is summarized in the following table:

Criteria	Characteristics	Number of participants (62)	Percentage
Gender	Male	40	64.5%
	Female	22	35.5%
Age	26 – 35	39	62.9%
	36 - 45	16	25.8%
	Over 45	07	11.3%
Average years working in administrative organization	3 - 10 years	34	54.8%
	11 – 20 years	21	33.9%
	Over 20 years	07	11.3%
Educational Qualification	Undergraduate Degree	04	6.5%
	Bachelor Degree	19	30.6%
	Master Degree	39	62.9%
Position/Role	Functional Officer	33	53.2%
	Middle-Manager	22	35.5%
	Head/Leader	07	11.3%
Political Issue	Communist Party Member	56	90%
Type of Organization	Commune-level Administrative Organization	13	21.0%
	District-level Administrative Organization	22	35.5%
	Provincial-level Administrative Organization	23	37.1%
	Central-level Administrative Organization	04	6.4%
Area (Urban/Rural)	Urban	37	59.7%
	Rural	25	40.3%
Location	North of Vietnam	25	40.3%
	Central of Vietnam	23	37.1%
	South of Vietnam	14	22.6%

Table 5: Demographic Characteristic of Participants

Source: Developed by author from purposive and theoretical sampling

Second, it is important to note that grounded theory has unique sampling strategies in comparison with other qualitative research. Theoretical sampling means that "research is not sampling research participant (persons) but concepts" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.144). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.45), "theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges". Unlike conventional methods of sampling, researchers of GT do not go out and collect all the data before beginning the analysis. Analysis begins after the first data are collected. Data collection is followed by analysis. Analysis leads to concepts. Concepts generate questions. Questions lead to more data collection so that the researcher can learn more about those concepts. This circular process continues until the research reaches the point of saturation (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Theoretical sampling is useful to allow researchers to explore variations among concepts, and to identify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions in depth, especially discovering the phenomenon from different aspects, and from an open-minded position (Van De Vijver and Leung, 2000; Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

Patton (1990) argued that all kinds of sampling in qualitative research are purposeful sampling. However, "purposeful sampling is not always theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is purposeful selection of a sample according to the developing categories and emerging theory… theoretical sampling may therefore be seen as a variation within purposeful sampling"(Coyne, 1997, p. 629). This research utilized the sampling strategies suggested by Birks and Mills (2015) *(illustrated in the figure 6)*. Consequently, purposeful sampling was applied in the first phase of interviews (10 interviews), theoretical sampling in the second and third phase, and for data collection and analysis.
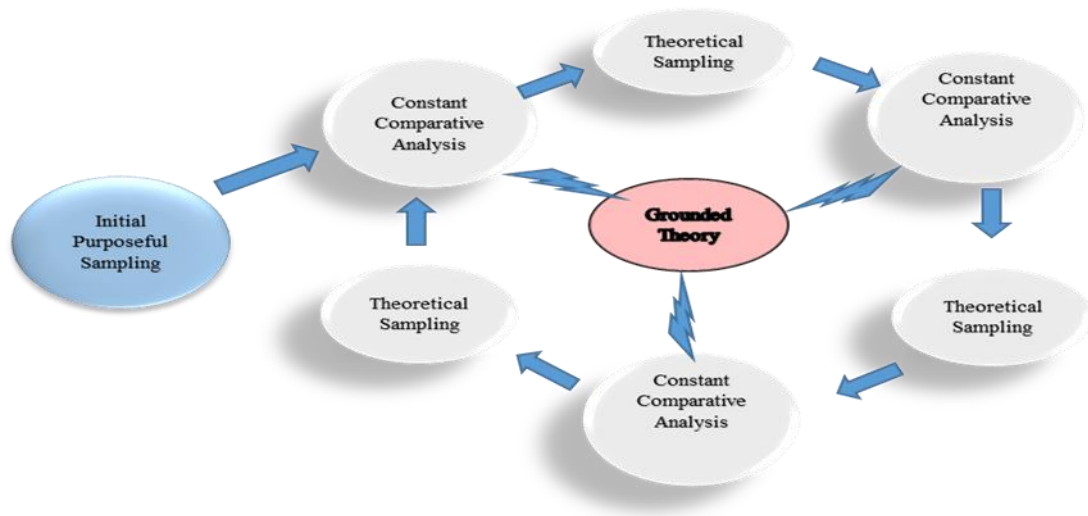
Figure 7: Sampling Strategy

Source: Birks and Mills (2015, p.69)

Theoretical sampling was applied to this study, which means that the data collection and analysis was conducted simultaneously, the questions for subsequent interviews were based on the previous interviews. For instance, the categories/themes developed in phase 1 were used for these interviews. Each theme was developed in order to build questions for interviews in the second phase. For example, in several first interviews, the researcher applied the grand tour questions, with the main question: "Could you describe your typical day at work?" The researcher witnessed that the respondents were confused when describing their typical working day. They found difficult to describe since their tasks are ambiguous. Subsequently, based on their response, the researcher coded and generated an open category, namely "job ambiguity", which was the guide for the next interviews, exploring more about the properties and dimensions of this category to understand why it happens, how it is, and how CSs deal with it until achieving the saturation on this category. In addition, theoretical sampling highlights the important of selecting the right participants in accordance with the emergent codes

and categories. For example, in the process of coding o the current study, the category of "power of leader" was an important emerged category, which has relationships with a variety of other emerged categories, such as, "subordinate", "passiveness", "misfeasance". These relationships among them needed to be saturated in terms of their properties and dimensions. However, in the two first phases of data collection, the participants were mostly functional CSs, and middle-range managerial CSs. It is important to note that managerial participants in these phases tended to be more skeptical and cautious in their answers; thus, the data obtained were general, and some questions were politely avoided. Understanding that the information from managers were considered important, subsequently, the recruitment of retired senior managerial CSs for the third phase of data collection was conducted.

Regarding the sample size, there is no fixed number of interviews at that point where theoretical saturation occurs (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967); (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), theoretical saturation is reached when:

- No new categories have emerged;
- The category is well developed regarding its properties and dimensions;
- The relationships among categories are well generated and validated.

4.4.4 Analysis Process of the Current Study

This section explains the process of data analysis using grounded theory methods that was applied to this research and follows the procedures suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

4.4.4.1 Open Coding

Open coding is the first step in the process of data analysis to create conceptual categories. The term's 'code' and 'concept' generally mean the same or similar things (Birks and Mills, 2015). Identifying open codes/open concepts means "breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for interpreted meaning of raw data" (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.239). According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), open coding must be

done at the beginning of analysis, with no preconceived codes, allowing the initial discovery of abstract conceptual categories and their properties, which can later be used to build theory.

In the open coding stage, after transcribing each interview, data were imported into the qualitative software package Nvivo 11, where analysis was started by carefully reading through all the data word-by-word, line-by-line or sentence-by-sentence from the interview transcripts and memos to understand and interpret the meaning behind the language. The open coding stage was divided into two main steps, namely open conceptualizing and open categorizing. The process of open coding is illustrated in the figure below.
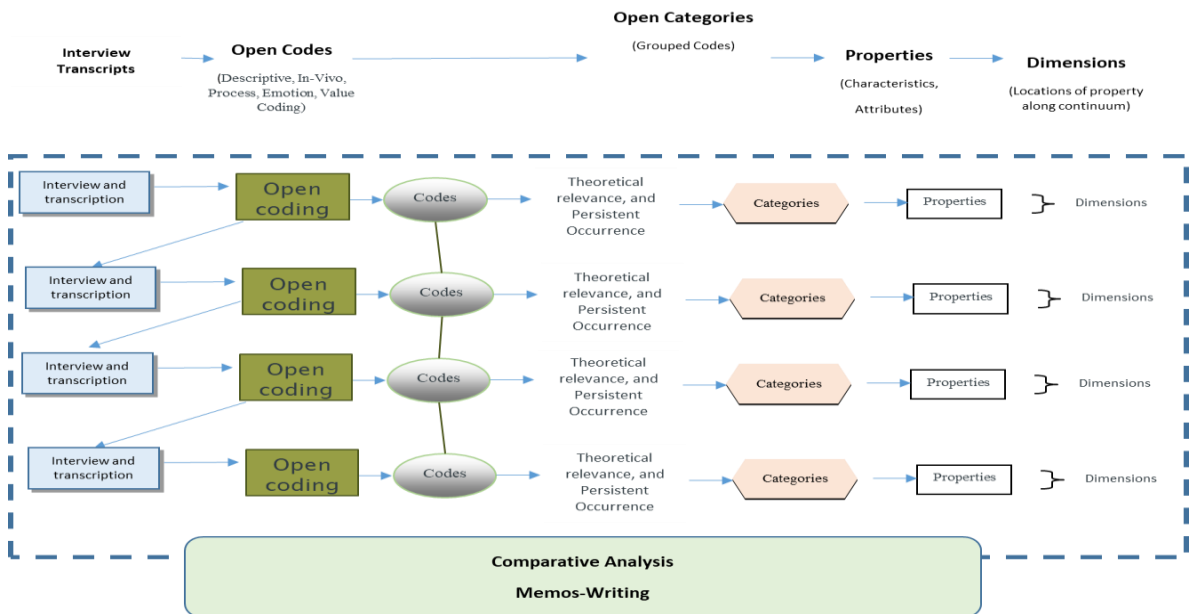
Figure 8: Open Coding Process

Source: Adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1990)

According to Saldaña (2013, p.3), "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data", and for Corbin and Strauss (2015, p.220) "concepts are words that stand for interpreted meaning of data", and a concept is described as an "abstract representation of an event, object, or action

or interaction that a researcher identifies as being significant in the data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.103).   During this step, the data was labelled with respective abstractions, and initial coding was started. Several coding techniques (methods) were used, such as descriptive, in-vivo, process, emotion and value coding, as suggested by Saldaña (2013). The table below provides a description of each type of chosen coding method.

Coding Methods	Intent
Descriptive coding	• Codes are summaries in a word or short phrase that denote the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data. • Codes are identifications of the topic, not abbreviations of the content. • Rationale for the study begins with general questions such as "What is going on here?" Therefore, this method is also appropriate for cultural studies.
In-vivo coding	• Codes are labels that came directly from the words of respondents themselves. • It has also been labelled "inductive coding" and it is one of the methods to employ during grounded theory's initial coding.
Process coding	• Codes are labelled using gerunds ("-ing" words) exclusively to denote action in the data. • It is useful to enhance and deepen participant perspectives.
Emotion coding	• Codes are labels of the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participants, or inferred by the researcher about the participant. • Rationale for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions.
Value coding	• Codes reflect a participant's values, attitudes and beliefs, representing their perspectives or worldview. • Rationale for exploring culture values, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions.

Table 6: Coding Methods of Open Concepts

Source: Adapted from Saldaña (2013)

Interview No.	Raw Data	Initial Codes
	Descriptive Coding	
46	*Sometimes I find many works simple but they finally become complicated. In many cases, the leader can make decisions by themselves but he wants to work following the collective, so it makes my suggestions delayed. For many times, I receive the leader's decision only near the date of conferences because he must ask for the collective's opinion.*	Jurisdiction of the Head Avoidance of responsibility Slow job performance process Urgent Deadline Collective Responsibility
25	**In-vivo Coding**	
	I think it should have experience to deal with citizens because they are from all walks of life. I'm an aged staff here. But for many newcomers who just graduated from the University, they are enthusiast and capable but lack experience, so they met many difficulties when dealing with the citizens.	Experience
	Process Coding	
2	*Everyone focuses on their own duties and avoids conflicts in the organization. It's a taboo. It's so important to maintain good relations with colleagues because we see and work with each other every day.*	Avoiding Conflicts Harmonizing relationships
	Emotion Coding	
9	*The employment of civil servant is a desire of many people, not only my family. My parents paid for my study in order that I could become a civil servant of the People's Committee of the district. In reality, many rich families couldn't do this*	Pride in Job
	Value Coding	
24	*To tell you the truth, I'm very dedicated to my work.*	Job Satisfaction

	If I can do something good for citizens, I feel so happy and find meals so delicious. I work not for salary only. After all, the target of administration reform is for the interest of the people	For the sake of citizens

Table 7: Illustration of Open Coding for Codes

Source: Author, from open coding

In the process of data collection and open coding, the researcher tried to be open-minded to any new data and ideas by constantly asking himself a list of questions when coding field notes, such as:

- What is going on here?
- What do the data mean behind these words? What do they really mean?
- What are civil servants really doing?
- What assumptions are the participants making?
- Is this code important to the research?
- Is this code conceptually interesting? Does it need to be explored more?
- To which category should this code indicate?
- What did I learn from these data?

Reading, coding data and critically asking questions constantly and concurrently throughout the process of data collection and analysis helped the researcher develop theoretical sensitivity and identify what needed to be explored in the coming interviews. In addition, the researcher applied constant comparative analysis, in which incidents are compared with incidents, codes with incidents, and codes with codes, to identify similarities and differences in order to facilitate the development of concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Furthermore, the researcher used memos, which contained "products of analysis or directions of the analysis" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.217) in the process of conducting and coding the interviews.

By the end of this process, the total number of initial concepts generated in open-coding (excluding codes that were renamed many times) was more than 200. As

analysis progressed, however, the concept system was continually trimmed down and refined for the researcher to understand more clearly the phenomenon. In the end, 198 open concepts with the most explanatory power were kept *(the list of open concepts is shown in Appendix 6).*

During this step, the codes which demonstrated similar themes were combined, and an open category label was generated. In order to be grouped in an open category, an open code needs to satisfy two criteria: 1) theoretical relevance, and 2) persistent occurrence. The open categories are then developed according to their properties and dimensions of the properties. Categories are "higher-level concepts under which analysts group lower-level concepts that then become its subcategories" (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.220). Properties are attributes or characteristics that define the categories. Dimensions are variations within the properties, which may be represented as positions along a continuum of alterative perspectives for each dimension (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The observed dimension was identified constructively from the constant comparison of participants' responses and the summary and theoretical sensitivity of the researcher. During this step, the researcher considered avoiding using concepts from the existing literature to name categories, instead interpreting from the nature of the data. Following the above steps made it possible to give the emerging concepts precision and specificity. In the process of coding, it is important to use memos to assist the analysis of the data. Details of the open categories are presented in Chapter Five.

4.4.4.2 Axial Coding

The second analysis stage of the current research applied the axial coding technique suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). As mentioned, the processes of open coding and axial coding were conducted at the same time, along with the process of data collection and analysis. This analysis stage was first introduced by Strauss (1987) as a component of the open coding process. Glaser and Barney (1978) called this stage theoretical coding. It was developed as a separate stage of analysis in the later versions proposed by (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). In some of the most recent books (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz and Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and

Strauss, 2015), this was not mentioned as an independent analysis stage. However, in the current research, the researcher still utilized the values of axial coding as a middle step before moving to the final stage of selective coding to develop a set of concepts at a higher level of complexity, and to bridge the gap from open coding to selective coding (Oktay, 2012).

In this research, the process of axial coding was conducted separately and simultaneously with the process of open coding, as illustrated in the following figure:
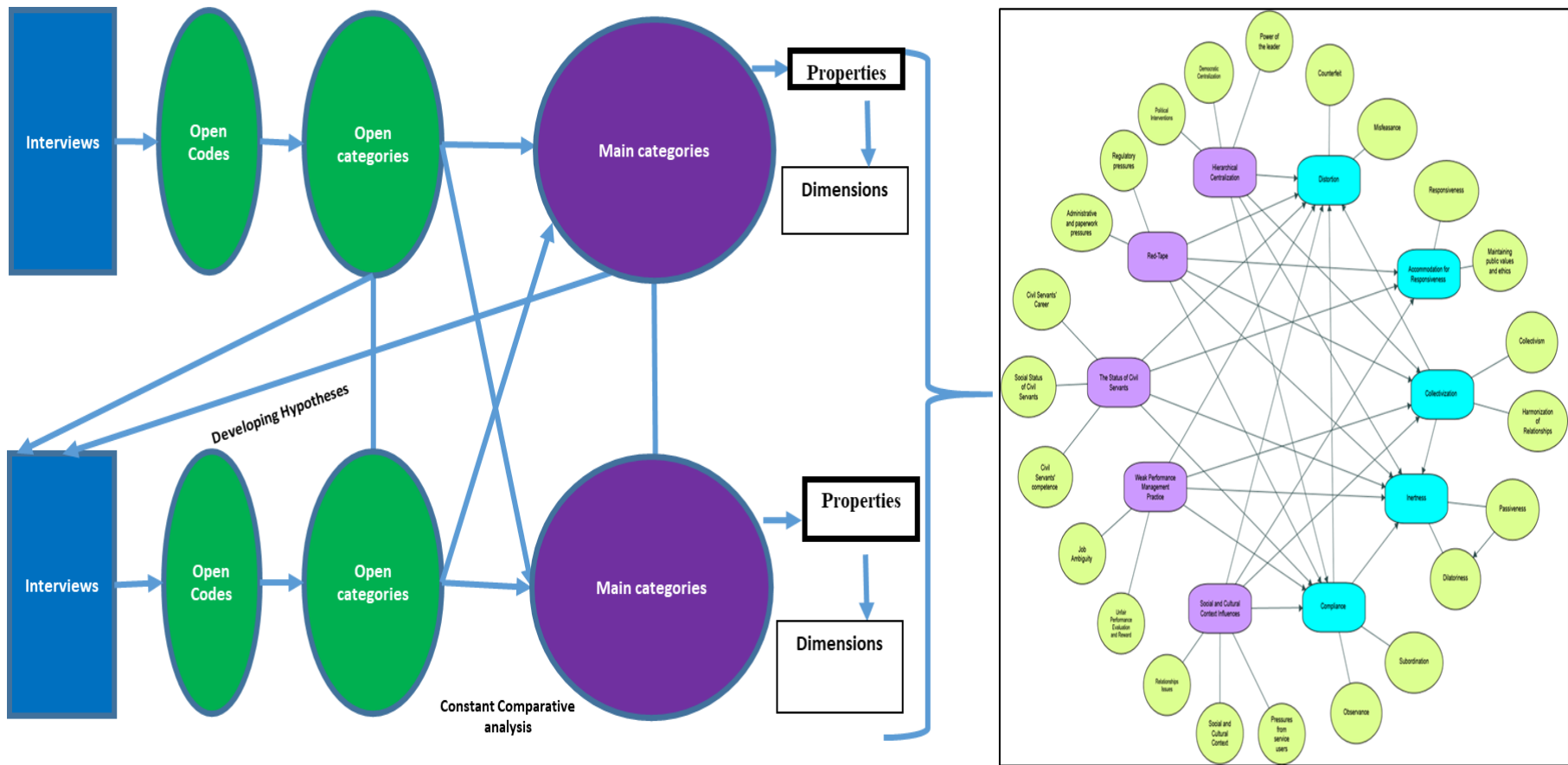
Figure 9: Axial Coding Process

Source: Developed by the author

As mentioned in the figure above, two main stages are conducted simultaneously and continuously in the process of axial coding: 1) connecting open categories to create main categories, 2) identifying theoretical relationships among main categories.

Firstly, while open coding aims to break up the data into meaningful concepts and categories, axial coding rearranges these together in a new way by making connections between and within the categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). To be more specific, after each interview had been conducted and transcribed, the researcher began open coding and axial coding simultaneously. The concepts identified early in the process of analysis of open coding were grouped together by axial coding if they shared a similar theme to develop higher level concepts and theoretical categories, which were called the main categories. Accordingly, the open categories, at this stage, become sub-categories of the main categories. In the end, 10 main categories were generated. This step is illustrated in the following figure:
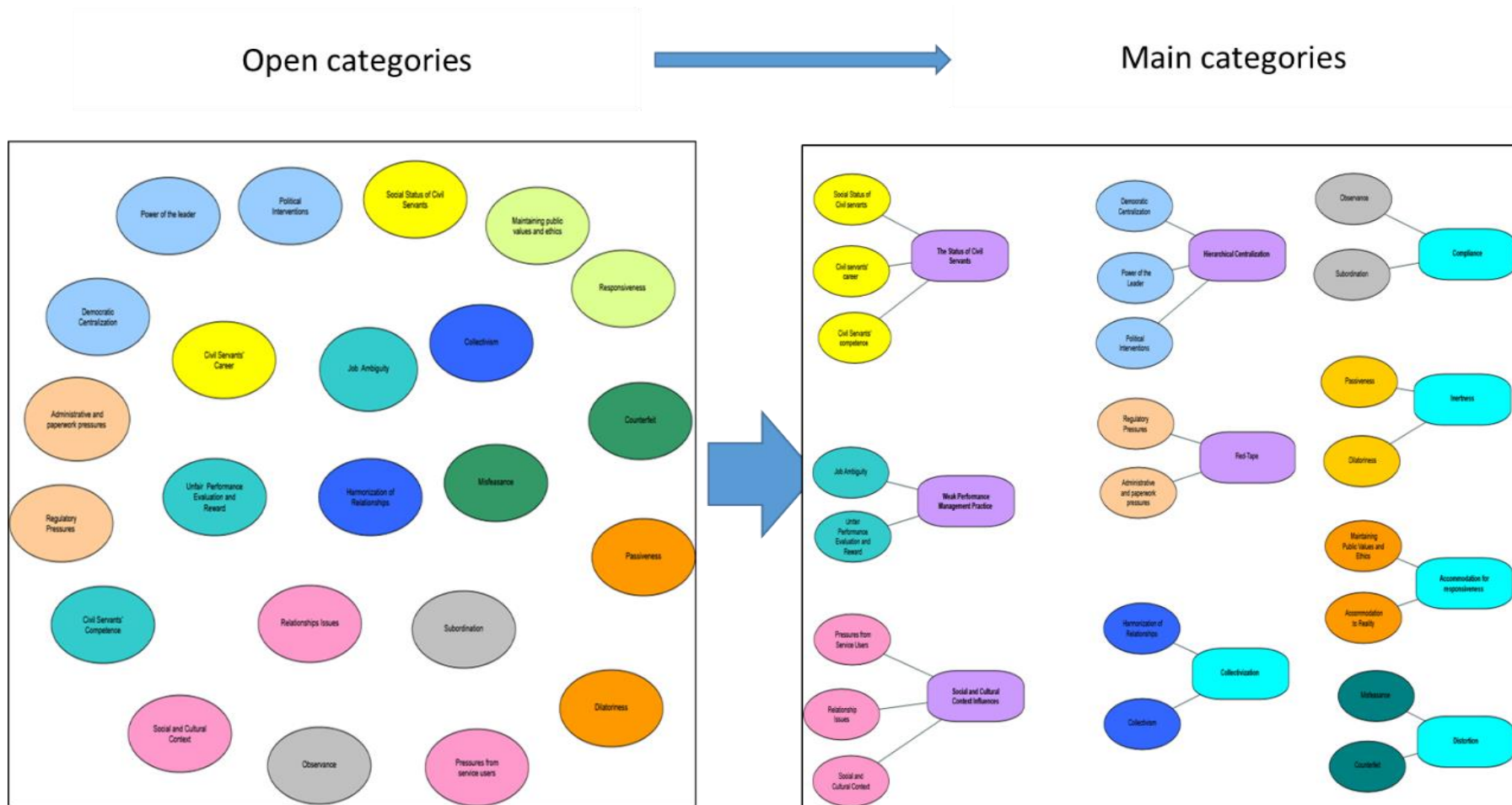
Figure 10: Connecting Open Categories to Create Main Categories

Source: Developed by the author

Secondly, the other main task of axial coding is to develop hypotheses (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) by exploring relations between and among categories. In order to do this, the researcher used the principles of constant comparison across data sets, categories and pre-existing categories, and categories and newly-refined categories suggested by Charmaz (2006). The researcher returned to the data many times, and categories were constantly compared and re-checked in order to ensure that the categories remained stable. This step gave the researcher an understanding of how phenomena might be related with each other. These hypotheses then supported the researcher in developing assumptions and guidance for the next round of data collection using theoretical sampling, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.108): "Posing questions in terms of the conceptual labels themselves, and how one category might be related to another. With such category relating questions in mind, we then return to our data and look for evidence, incidents, and events that support or refute our questions. At the same time that we are looking for evidence to verify our relationships, we are also looking for instances when they might not hold up". Subsequently, other open concepts continuing to emerge from new data were analysed by the next axial coding process. In this way, the analysis process moved from inductive logic of open coding to deductive logic. In other words, the researcher utilized abductive logic, moving back and forth between theory generation and theory testing (Oktay, 2012). However, axial categories still emerged from the source of data and were continuously verified against new data. Therefore, the axial categories were still firmly grounded in the findings (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Details of the main categories were presented in Chapter Six. The figure below shows the process of axial coding to identify the relationships among the 10 main categories.
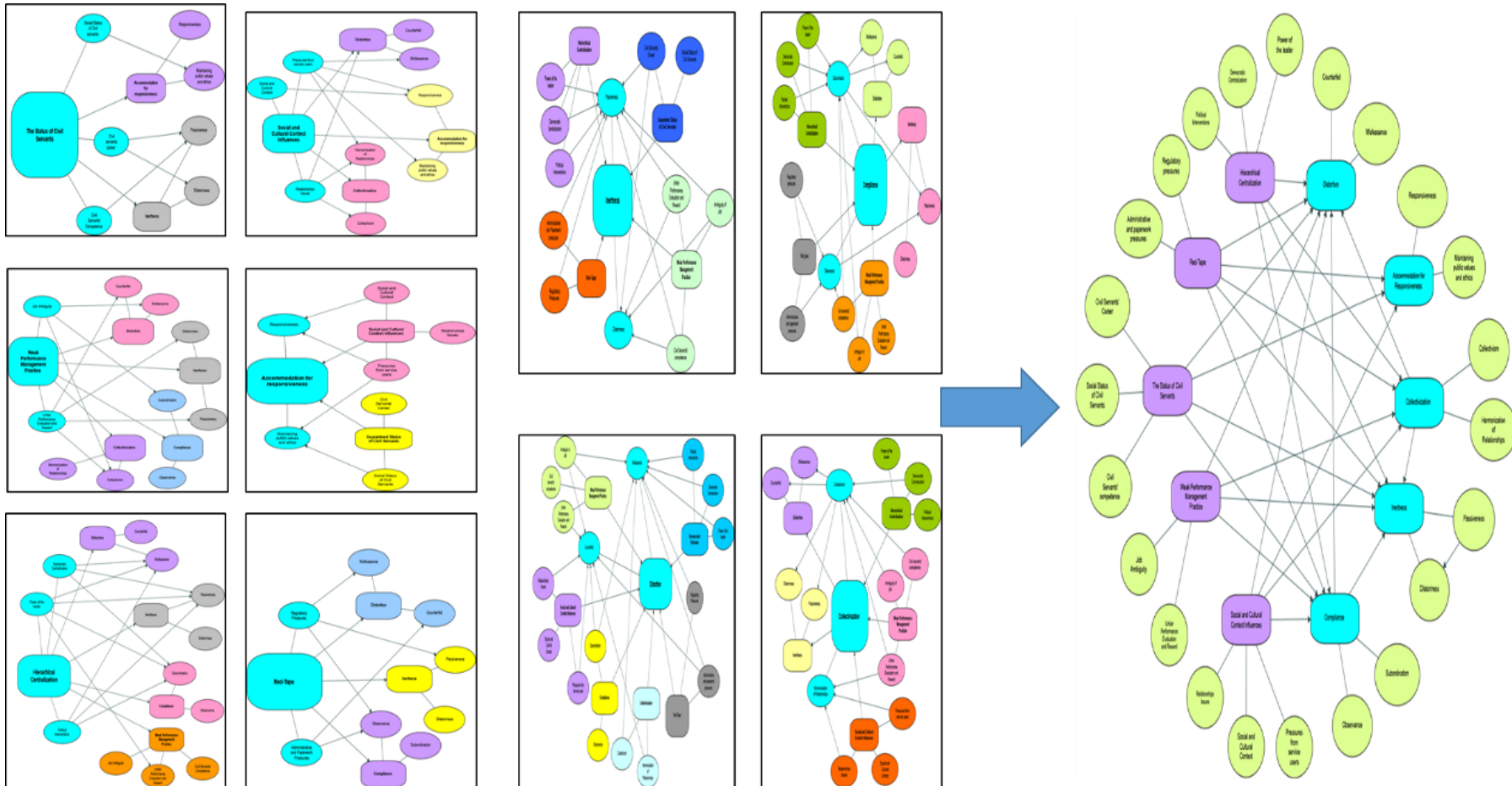
Figure 11: Process of Identifying Theoretical Relationship among Main Categories

Source: Developed by the author

4.4.4.3 Selective Coding

The third stage in GT analysis is selective coding or integrating categories which "link categories around a core category, and refine and trim the theory" (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.295). The purpose of this chapter is to build a substantive GT, which is generated from a specific empirical context and population, but lacks the explanatory power of formal theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The selective coding process in the current research was conducted in two main stages, suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990): 1) identifying a core category, which is the conceptualization of a descriptive story about the central phenomenon of the study 2) developing substantive GT paradigm. This process is illustrated in the figure below.
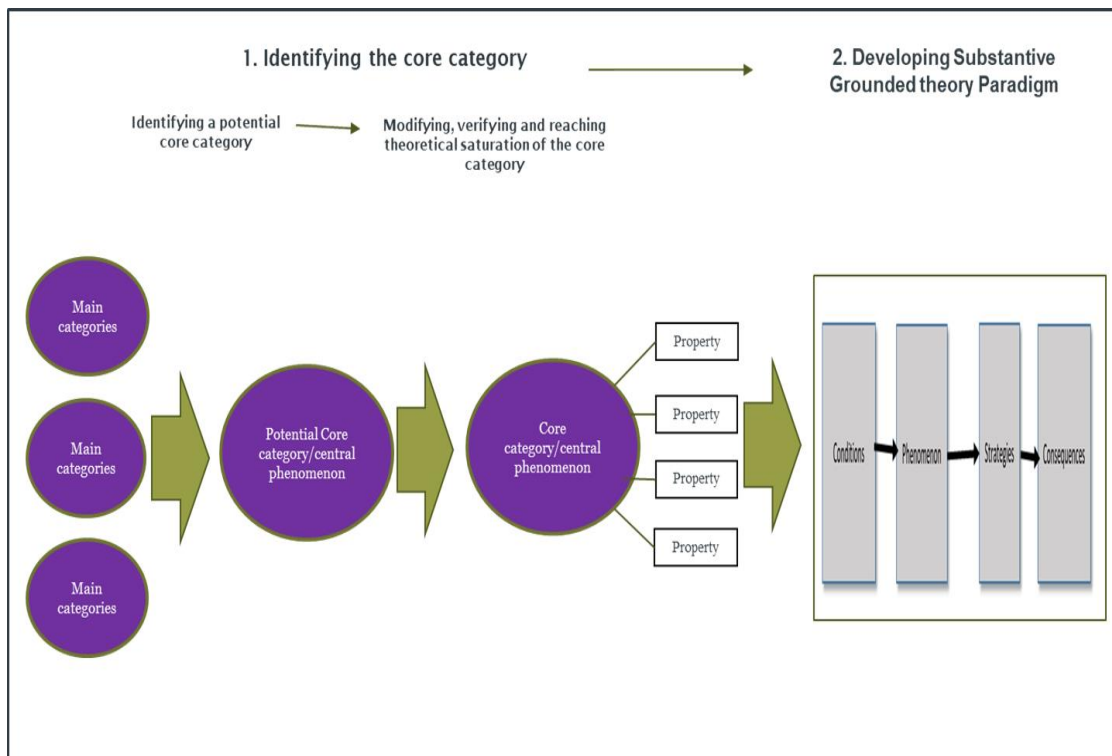
Figure 12: The Process of Selective Coding

Source: Adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1990)

The first step in selective coding is to identify a core category or main theme of the research, which is central and connects the other main categories in order to offer an explanation of what the research is all about, and structures a GT to explain the social process surrounding the phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The core category can be a process, condition, consequence or a theoretical code from existing open categories or main categories, when that category can represent the main phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). When there are no existing categories capturing the whole story, a researcher can develop a core category by choosing a category outside the existing categories. Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.104) suggested that "a central category may evolve out of the list of existing categories. In other words, a researcher may study the categories and determine that though each category tells part of the story, none capture it completely. Therefore, another more abstract term or phrase is needed, a conceptual idea under which all the other categories can be subsumed". According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), a core category must satisfy several criteria, such as 1) must have an abstraction and centrality that all other main categories run around, 2) must appear frequently in the data, 3) must be logical and consistent with the data, 4) should be sufficiently abstract so that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas, leading to the development of a more general theory, 5) should grow in depth and explanatory power.

The second stage of selective coding is integrating main categories around the identified core category. Selective coding is "the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to the other categories, validating those relationships…the core category is the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 116). This step was supported by paradigm model application to explain the central phenomenon suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990); Strauss and Corbin (1998). The paradigm model consists of three main components: condition, action or interactions, and consequences (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Condition answers the questions, 'why, where, how come, and when', which together form the structure, or set of circumstances or situations, in which phenomena are embedded (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.128). Regarding the action/interaction or strategies component, these are strategic or routine responses made by individuals or

groups to situations, problems, happenings, or events that arise under those conditions. Actions/interactions are represented by the questions, 'by whom' and 'how' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Consequences are the outcomes of actions/interactions or strategies. Consequences are represented by the question as to what happens as a result of those actions/interactions, or failure of persons or groups to respond to situations by actions/interactions, which constitutes an important finding in and of itself (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Details of the core phenomenon and the process to identify it was presented in Chapter Seven.

4.4.5 Ethical Issues

The researcher considers research ethics to be an important issue. First, ethical approval from the ethics committee of Southampton University was obtained before entering the research fields to collect data. The five main ethical forms were completed and submitted online via the link www.ergo.soton.ac.uk, including consent form of participants, debriefing form, ethics application form, participant information sheet and risk assessment form. In addition, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants and their data was guaranteed throughout the process of conducting the research. For instance, a declaration of confidentiality and anonymity was made before each interview. The hand-written consent forms were sent and verified before the interviews. The data was kept in a secure place. Moreover, the privacy of the participants was highly respected in terms of interview timing and location, in order to avoid disturbance to the work and personal life of participants.

4.4.6 Research Validity and Reliability

Reliability and validity are two factors that any qualitative researcher should pay attention to in the process of conducting research, from research design, data collection and analysis, to evaluating the quality of the study in order to ensure the trustworthiness, rigor and quality of qualitative research (Patton and Patton, 2002). According to Seale (1999), Seale (2000), and Golafshani (2003), validity and reliability are the core issues of the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Firstly, in order to achieve reliability, qualitative researchers should show "the audience of the research studies as much as possible of the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions" (Seale, 2000, p.159). To do so, the process of data collection and analysis and the research findings should be provided clearly to the audience.

More specifically, regarding data collection, Brower *et al.* (2000) suggest that the research audience should be provided with details of the data collection process - for instance, descriptions detailing where the researcher visited, what they observed, who they talked to, what they asked, and so on. In addition, researchers must spend time on the fieldwork, collecting numerous interviews, and making exhaustive field notes in order to have rich data. In the current study, the researcher spent around seven months on the first and second phases and three months on the third phase in the fieldwork of data collection, allowing enough time to explore the phenomena. Also, during the data collection, the researcher made an effort to develop trustful relationships between the researcher and participants in order to create a comfortable environment for the sharing of information. Moreover, in order to "give extraordinary voice to informants, who are treated as knowledgeable agents" (Gioia *et al.*, 2013, p.26), the interviews were conducted in conversational style, with open questions, encouraging the informants sharing their own stories and experiences. The theoretical sampling was applied in the data collection process, therefore, the interview protocol were asked flexibly and adjusted based on informant responses (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The process of data collection, sampling and questions used are presented in detail in the Chapter Four and the appendices of the study.

With regard to data analysis and reporting, (Geertz, 1993) suggested that the researcher should provide readers with "thick, and rich description". Therefore, in the open coding chapter of this study, quotations have been used extensively as part of the reported findings. Not only does this ensure the reliability of the findings but this also "provides particulars of everyday life that give the readers both sense of the routines of the natives and evidence of the author's concern with providing authentic accounts" (Brower *et al.*, 2000, p. 376). Also, deep analysis and rich descriptions bring out the special cultural features attributed to PA (Brower *et al.*, 2000).

Secondly, validity of qualitative research shows "how well participants' meanings have been captured and interpreted" (Ritchie, 2014, p. 358). Triangulation and member or respondent validation are mostly applied to ensure the validity of qualitative research.

To be more specific, triangulation is the use of different sources of information to confirm and improve the clarity and accuracy of a research finding (Ritchie, 2014). The current study rigorously follows the steps recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2015), and adopts multiple data sources, such as using different interviewees holding a variety of positions in administrative organizations from the three main areas of Vietnam, and multiple related documents. In addition, ''Backtrack'' to prior informants suggested by Gioia *et al.* (2013) and cross interview technique was applied in the data collection process. This means asking the same questions of different interviewees from the same administrative organizations, and sometimes from different administrative organizations. Moreover, the responses of previous participants were carefully checked against other participants. In terms of GT articulation, although Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that GT research should concentrate on generating theory rather than verifying it, the verification was still used in this study as the GT constructivist approach. Therefore, the initial findings of the research were discussed with some of the key participants during the third phase of data collection. This ensured that participants were involved at all the different stages, and the substantive theory emerging from the research reflects the perspectives and experiences of participants. Moreover, "additional consultations with the literature to refine articulation of emergent concepts and relationships" suggested by Gioia *et al.* (2013, p.26) was conducted in order to extend, validate, and refine the substantive grounded paradigm of the current study.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the research philosophy, identifying the ontology and epistemology of the research, which are relativism and constructionism, respectively. The worldview had a great impact on the choice of methodology. This chapter also presented theoretical approaches to culture and AC study. GT was found to be appropriate for conducting an empirical exploration of the dimensions of AC in CSs' job performance in Vietnam. In addition, an overview of the data collection and

analysis procedures was presented. A full, detailed analysis of open coding is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5. OPEN CODING

5.1 Introduction

The main section in this chapter presents detailed description and discussion of the emerged open categories, providing foundations, and guidance for data analysis from axial and selective coding, supporting the development of the main categories and the core category in the following chapters.

5.2 Discussion of Open Categories

The following sections provide a detailed description of each open category based on participants' beliefs and experience in relation to the administrative cultural dimensions of CS job performance in the administrative organizations of Vietnam. 23 open categories emerged, including:

1) Civil Servants' Career;
2) Social Status of Civil Servants;
3) Civil Servants' Competence;
4) Job Ambiguity;
5) Unfair Performance Evaluation and Reward;
6) Democratic Centralization;
7) Power of the Leader;
8) Political Interventions;
9) Regulatory pressures;
10) Administrative and Paperwork pressures;
11) Relationship Issues;
12) Pressure from Service Users;
13) Social and Cultural Context;
14) Desire for maintaining Public Values and Ethics;
15) Responsiveness;
16) Harmonization of Relationships;
17) Collectivism;
18) Passiveness;

19) Low Productivity;

20) Misfeasance;

21) Counterfeit;

22) Observance;

23) Subordination.

5.2.1 Civil Servants' Career

The category of "Civil Servants' Career" was highlighted according to two properties: security of career path, and stable job engagement, as shown in the following table.

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Civil Servants' Career	Security of Career Path	High-low Upward-downward Clear – unclear	➢ High ➢ Upward ➢ Clear
	Stable Job Engagement	High-low	➢ High

Table 8: The Open Category of Civil Servants' Career

In terms of security of career path, Vietnamese CSs' positions are guaranteed by a seniority scheme and clear, rigid career paths, mostly in an upward direction. Although salaries in the public sector are lower than in the private sector, the stability brings them a sense of security, because the employment of CSs tends to guarantee lifelong work. For example, one interviewee said:

"The stability and invisible values of public sector as well as the opportunity for promoting to higher positions in the future keep me here" (Interviewee 18).

Another CS revealed:

"I intend to engage to public service system until I retire. I also want to have a stable job and contribute to my homeland" (Interviewee 53).

With the lifelong tenure for CSs in Vietnam, once employees have started working for an organization, it is extremely difficult to dismiss them, even when the organizational structure changes and a number of divisions can be removed. In most cases, CSs of such divisions will be transferred to other sections, even if their specialization is not appropriate to the new position, which restricts their job performance, as illustrated by the following comments:

> "In the past, the People's Committee had an agricultural service centre including eight civil servants… At present, that centre is not existed anymore, but civil servants under it have been moved to another division. However, without appropriate qualifications, they cannot support the agency or fulfil their task, leading to low job performance. Actually, they still belong to the scheduled figures of regular staffs, so the Committee has to use them without any occasion of dismissing them" (Interviewee 7).

Regarding stable job engagement, and in answer to the question as to whether or not they intended to remain with the State administrative agencies for a long period, it is interesting to note that almost 100% of interviewees answered that they anticipated being CSs until retirement. One CS said: "My working environment is safe and peaceful, without competition. Therefore, I am going to work here until retirement, except for rearrangement of organization" (Interviewee 35). The main reason for this is that the environment of State administrative agencies, which is not adventurous and active, may suit their character. Another CS revealed: "My personality is not suitable with such requirements of private sector as work pressure, activeness, speed and high outcome" (Interviewee 9). Another CS shared the same opinion as follows:

> "If I'm offered an employment with high salary but instability and risk of dismissal at any time, I will refuse. As a woman, I don't dare take adventure. Beside employment, I have my family with my children. If I lose my job, I must take time to find another job" (Interviewee 18).

5.2.2 Social Status of Civil Servants

5.2.3 Civil Servants' Competence

This category depicted the competence status of CSs, and is highlighted by two properties: civil servants' competence compared with their job requirements, and competence development.

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Civil Servants' Competence	CSs' competence compared with job requirements	High – low	➢ Low
	CSs' competence development	Effective – Ineffective	➢ Ineffective

Table 9: The Open Category of Civil Servants' Competence

Most interviewees agreed that there was a large gap between job requirements and CSs' competence, as well as between CSs.

As a target of the administration reform programmes in Vietnam, the capacity of CSs should be improved in the context of ever higher requests of civil service system. However, in reality, the majority of interviewees said that they did not have qualifications appropriate to their current position, one of them revealing: *"Nearly 90% of employees in my organization do not have the suitable qualifications"* (Interviewee 29). For instance, many CSs who possessed a Bachelor's degree in engineering worked in the field of HR management in the Departments of Home Affairs, or who had graduated from pedagogical field worked as administrative staff. Furthermore, CSs, especially those working in rural areas, lacked appropriate work skills such as computer skills, communication, reading and understanding legal normative documents, planning, consulting, team-working and other types of expertise to perform their work efficiently. This status was particularly evident at commune level, where the number of CSs represented slightly over 40% of the total number of staff. As an example, one interviewee made the following comment:

"Bad performance partly results from the competence inappropriate to job requirements. In my commune, only one or two people are bachelors, the others under high school level" (Interviewee 33)*.*

Regarding CSs' competence development, at the time of interview, a lot of participants were following on-service training programmes or training courses. One of the reasons was that these programmes are both compulsory (some are training courses on state management and political theories) and essential conditions for CSs to have opportunities of promotion in State administrative organizations. Another reason is that their initial qualifications were not appropriate, so they had to take part in training courses conforming to their current position. CSs' training is not only their own responsibility, but also that of the organization. Actually, State administrative agencies are allocated a budget for training and fostering their CSs. In general, CSs are facilitated to participate in training courses in terms of time and finance, as the following participant revealed:

"I'm supported by the provincial-level People's Committee for my master's course. In fact, the People's Committee has the policy of financial support for the postgraduates of some fields which the province is in need of" (Interviewee 15).

The improvement in competence is granted by the State, and also comes under State management through obligatory training and on-demand training. One CS quoted his situation as an example:

"I was appointed to be the Deputy Chairman of commune-level People's Committee immediately after graduation, without working experience, and knowledge on public service as well as practical relationships. At the time of appointment, I was supported to take part in a training course of three months on basic commune-level administrative management and several necessary skills by the National Academy of Public Administration. After that, I was on a fact-finding tour of difficult communes within one month to gain

practical experience, then set to work immediately in a way of combining business with training" (Interviewee 22).

However, the policy of obligatory training is not necessarily effective and efficent, because many CSs take part in these free State compulsory training programmes to gain qualifications and certificates for promotion, but not for real or practical competence. In practice, currently, promotion of CSs is based on their qualifications rather than their actual capacity and job performance results; therefore, they try to collect as many qualifications as possible at any cost, rather than being trained practically to obtain knowledge and skills appropriate to job requirements. Also, many CSs who fail to meet job requirements still have their employment guranteed by the State, leading to poor performance and negative impacts on the performance of others as well as the whole system.

Most interviewees said that the training programmes for new or young CSs were not effective and remained limited. Despite the provision of probationary guidance for young CSs, most of them believed this provision to be theoretical and formalistic only, and that, in practice, they needed to study by themselves. In addition, state management is a huge subject, so that many junior CSs did not know how or where to start, as highlighted in this response:

> *"In fact, the input training at State administrative agencies is of very low quality. As a newcomer in the public sector, I was a fish out of water, without any guidance and support. At the beginning, a person was appointed to directly guide me. But finally, he nearly didn't help me much. I must learn everything by myself"* (Interviewee 39).

5.2.4 Job Ambiguity

Job ambiguity was highlighted according to two properties: Job description and Ambiguity of job assignment.

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Job Ambiguity	Job description	Clear – unclear	➤ Unclear
	Ambiguity of job assignment	High – low	➤ High
		Fair-Unfair	➤ Unfair

Table 10: The Open Category of Job Ambiguity

Regarding the first property, job description was not clear in general. Firstly, there is no standard job description for each position, although the Vietnamese Government has promulgated a number of documents related to the identification of positions of CSs[14]. Each State administrative agency has its own process of identifying and describing the job of CSs. The reason is that state management covers many fields, and the employment of CSs in State administrative agencies is extremely diverse in terms of activities, which also generates a lot of positions, ranks, functions, tasks and rights. At each position, CSs have to undertake many duties. In each duty, they have to perform a number of concrete works. As an example, one CS said:

> *"…Relevant legal normative documents are so many, and specialized requirements are ever-higher, so it should guarantee the accuracy of consultancy. The field of internal affairs includes too many works relating to government organization, emulation and rewards, religion, archives, other organizations and associations, so on."* (Interviewee 21).

Secondly, job description did not reflect completely all the tasks CSs had to do. In addition, many CSs did not know what their job description was, because their agency had not introduced it. Many CSs revealed that their tasks were based on general functions, which were unclear and did not conform with their positions. Beside their fixed tasks, they had to spend a lot of time performing unpredictable tasks, specifically unscheduled tasks, movement activities, tasks assigned by the Head, pluralism,

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[14] Decree No.36/2013/ND-CP dated April 24, 2013 of the Government on positions and structure of civil servant classification scale;

Circular No.05/2013/TT-BNV dated June 25, 2013 of the Ministry of Home Affairs on guiding the implementation of the Decree No.36/2013/ND-CP dated April 24, 2013 of the Government on positions and structure of civil servant classification scale;

Decision No. 414/TCCP-VC dated May 9, 1993 of the Personnel Committee of the Government on the promulgation of specialized criteria of administrative personnel classification scale.

unnamed tasks, helping colleagues, paperwork, communication and meetings, dealing with conflict, self-education and uniting members. However, these tasks are often not mentioned in the job description or just expressed in a general phrase as "performing other works under the assignment of leaders". According to many CSs, unscheduled or irregular tasks made up 40% to 50% of their work. A ministerial-level CS even shared: *"Normally we perform unpredictable tasks more than regular ones"* (Interviewee 8). Another CS said: *"There are too many unscheduled tasks, interrupting our regular tasks. This causes job distraction and makes slow progress of other tasks"* (Interviewee 4).

Regarding the second property, job assignment was also unclear. Firstly, the process of assigning tasks was overlapping and inconsistent. According to many CSs, they normally performed tasks assigned by their line managers (the Chief/Deputy Chief of Division), but sometimes directly, by the highest leader of the agency (the Head), especially in the field of consultation. As a result, they were always placed in a dilemma of how to respect the leader's will without displeasing the line managers. Secondly, job assignment was not equal, as revealed by the following CS:

> *"For the tasks shared between two people, CSs must actively combine with each other. Sometimes, the one lets the other do all, which causes injustice"* (Interviewee 39).

Thirdly, job assignment was mostly dependent on the leaders. According to a number of interviewees, the relation between the Chief of Division and the Head of Organization was extremely important in job assignment, i.e, some divisions being assigned more tasks, others having fewer tasks; some having important tasks, others unimportant ones. Similarly, at an individual level, it also depended on the leader's partiality and feeling. A lot of interviewees thought that if their leaders had no sense of justice, it would lead to a waste of human resources. For example, CSs with high capacity may be assigned simple tasks, or those having capacity appropriate to a position are charged with another position, leading to failure or inefficiency in completing tasks. As an example, one CS said:

"... For general tasks, the Chief of Division will assign to whom he finds suitable. Sometimes, tasks are assigned by sudden inspiration, in oral orders, not in written documents (...). If leaders have affection for somebody, they will assign this person more tasks, so obviously, he/she will obtain more achievements and get better evaluation than others" (Interviewee 48).

In general, unclear job descriptions and job assignments not only suggest a lack of professionalism among managers, but also create injustice for CSs, leading to ineffectiveness in job performance, as well as unfair performance evaluation and reward.

5.2.5 Unfair Performance Evaluation and Reward

The Performance Evaluation Policy has been stipulated in several documents[15]. In the Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2008, there are four articles specifying the evaluation of civil servants: Article 55 - Purpose of civil servant evaluation, Article 56 – Contents of civil servant evaluation, Article 57 - Civil servant evaluation responsibility, and Article 58 – Evaluation-based categorization of civil servants. In addition, civil servants who are leaders and Communist Party members should also be subject to the Regulations on evaluating cadres and civil servants promulgated with the Decision No.286-QD/TW dated February 08, 2010 of the Politburo. However, in practice, performance evaluation and rewards are not really fair, as expressed by the four aspects below: evaluation criteria, subjectivity-based evaluation, egalitarianism and seniority-based payment.

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Unfair Performance Evaluation and Reward	Evaluation Criteria	Clear – unclear Rigid – flexible	➢ Unclear ➢ Rigid
	Subjectivity-based Evaluation	High – low Fair – unfair	➢ High ➢ Unfair
	Egalitarianism	High – low Fair – unfair Motivated –	➢ High ➢ Unfair ➢ Demotivated

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[15] Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2008;
Decree No. 56/2015/ND-CP of the Government dated June 09, 2015 on evaluating and categorizing cadres, civil servants and officers;
Law on Emulation and Reward dated November 26, 2003;
Law on amending, supplementing some articles of the Law on Emulation and Reward dated June 14, 2005;

		Demotivated	
	Seniority- based Payment	Fair – unfair Motivated – Demotivated	➤ Unfair ➤ Demotivated

Table 11: The Open Category of Unfair Performance Evaluation and Reward

In the first place, according to many interviewees, on the one hand, evaluation criteria were general, applying to all types of CSs, which leads to the fact that the top evaluation usually belonged to leaders, who evidently obtained the highest achievements, and rarely to normal CSs. 55/62 interviewees said that the job performance of leaders at their agency had always been evaluated as excellent. On the other hand, evaluation criteria were unreasonable, and could not possibly reflect all the activities of CSs, as the following interviewees said:

"Most of evaluation criteria are abstract and dependent on the viewpoint of each person. But standpoint, thinking and work efficiency aren't quantified. Evaluation is almost general and unrealistic" (Interviewee 22).

and:

"Regarding evaluation of CSs, it's impossible to follow these rigid criteria because in one year, there are a huge amount of activities that can't bundle all into some concrete criteria (...) It's very difficult to evaluate based on a concrete activity, let alone CSs' activities during one year" (Interviewee 6).

In addition, evaluation criteria were rigid and inappropriate to the nature of State administrative management activities. First, because the outcomes are mainly expressed via the issue of decisions on State administrative management, it is difficult to quantify and qualify the effectiveness and efficiency. A department-level leader gave an example as follows:

"With such criteria on a good decision as legality, reasonableness, timeliness, feasibility, so on, at that time, the decision was considered good, and it was a basis to evaluate that CSs had completed their tasks at good level. However,

later, when there are certain changes in policy or context, the decision can be reviewed and judged unreasonable, causing many losses to the organization" (Interviewee 32).

Second, some duties of CSs, such as making plans or projects were long-term and time-consuming, therefore it was difficult to identify the outputs and when they would be completed. As an example, a CS working in the Department of Home Affairs said:

"As we make a plan of administration reform, we can't receive feedbacks immediately because it must take a few quarters or even one year. We just know whether this plan is right or not, whether it will make the situation better or worse only after one year of implementation" (Interviewee 39).

As to the second aspect, performance evaluation was affected by subjectivity. On the one hand, it was based on private relationships between colleagues, as the following CS remarked:

"The performance evaluation results heavily depend on the feeling and relationships, not on your outcomes (…) Actually, if you are good performers but do not get on well with others, you will not be recognized by colleagues" (Interviewee 35).

In many cases, afraid of displeasing others, CSs usually avoided giving frank comments, leading to inaccurate evaluation. As an example, an interviewee revealed:

"In case of disagreement, I will directly and secretly give opinions with my colleague first instead of criticizing him/ her at meetings. In fact, it's Vietnamese psychology, once they are criticised in public, they would be ashamed and have negative attitude towards us…" (Interviewee 39).

The third reason for unfair performance evaluation and reward was due to egalitarianism, which is highlighted by achievement distribution. Many interviewees said that in year-end evaluation, apart from leaders, CSs who achieved outstanding job performance should take turns in being rewarded. For instance, one CS said:

"In practice, ... if I received that certificate of merit this year, although I have an excellent performance in the next year, I should give it to another colleague… I feel disappointed and less motivated. Actually, no matter how hard you worked, you will not be recognized" (Interviewee 9).

The fourth reason relates to inappropriate payment of CSs. In fact, the payment was not based on their position, performance and contribution to their organizations, but on seniority. According to many interviewees, payment was low for those who demonstrated good performance, but too high for those who did not implement effectively. As a result, this salary scheme reduced the work motivation of CSs, as highlighted in the following response:

"... Even some people work double others but receive lower salary because CSs are paid according to seniority but not to workload. Those who perform many tasks should be rewarded at the end of year" (Interviewee 56).

5.2.6 Democratic Centralization

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Democratic Collective Centralization	Centralized Democracy Principle	High – low	➢ High
	Hierarchy	High – low	➢ High

Table 12: The Open Category of Democratic Centralization

Regarding leadership in State administrative agencies in Vietnam, there are two working modes: "centralized leadership" and "democratic leadership". On the one hand, "centralized leadership" is the mode in which the heads of organizations generally have complete power to self-decide and take personal responsibility for all issues within the jurisdiction of the organization they manage. This mode is applied in "horizontal administrative organizations" (Ministries, ministerial-level agencies) or in functional agencies under the People's Committee (departments, divisions and sub-divisions). Ministers, Directors of Departments, and Chiefs of Division are generally fully entitled to decide all issues involving the activities of organizations, and are wholly responsible

for their decisions. On the other hand, "democratic leadership" is the mode in which the majority makes decisions. This mode is applied in "vertical administrative organizations" (Government and People's Committees at all levels). The issues under their jurisdiction are discussed collectively and decided by the majority. The Government and the People's Committees at all levels operate on the basis of the combination between the democratic leadership and the heads' powers and personal responsibilities. This principle is to ensure centralized leadership based on democracy, and to ensure democracy under the centralized leadership. Centralism aims at ensuring law enforcement and management in a consistent and democratic manner, while democracy expands the rights of the administrated subjects to fully develop collective intelligence in administration activities and their capabilities in the course of law enforcement.

> *"The decentralization between the Central and local authorities is still inadequate. The Central still acts as one-man show"* (Interviewee 35).

The main reason for high centralization is the administrative principle of hierarchy. At the systematic level, the structure of State administrative agencies is also hierarchical, and less decentralized to the subordinates. As a result, subordinate State administrative agencies are often dependent on superior ones. To implement their tasks, subordinates have to ask for the guiding opinion of their superiors. For example, provincial-level People's Committees have to answer and report on their activities to the Government; district-level and commune-level People's Committees to their immediate superiors. This leads to dependence on superior organizations in terms of budget, planning, personnel and so on. For instance, one CS said:

> *"Due to centralized and hierarchical mechanism, one task has to be transferred through many levels. If it is stuck at any level, for example, the person in charge is going on business, everyone has to wait"* (Interviewee 35).

5.2.7 Power of the Leader

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Power of the leader	Formal power of the leader	High – low	➢ High
	Informal power of the leader	High – low	➢ High

Table 13: The Open Category of Power of the Leader

According to many interviewees, leaders of State administration agencies in Vietnam are extremely powerful, having both formal and informal powers.

On the one hand, leaders' powers are legitimately and formally defined by laws and regulations, in which leaders are entitled to make final managerial decisions involving the implementation of general tasks, the personnel management of the organization, and administrative decisions related to the provision of public services and public administration services to citizens, and take ultimate responsibility for such decisions. Therefore, the higher position CSs hold, the more powerful they are.

On the other hand, CSs holding leading and managing positions also have invisible powers, known as "soft powers", such as expert power, characteristic power, reference power, information power, rewarding power and connection power. The majority of CSs thought that the informal power of leaders was extremely important. For example, the way leaders motivate employees, assign duties, evaluate employees and lead the collective had great influence on the operation of agencies and subordinate CSs. The following interviewee said:

> *"If leaders are open-minded and able to see the advantages of employees, assign appropriate duties for employees to prove their talent and gradually reach important positions in the organization, the relation between employees and leaders will be definitely better. On contrary, if leaders are conservative and the way of management is unfair, it will have very great impact on employees' working efficiency"* (Interviewee 22).

In addition, line-managers should first be qualified and have specialized knowledge to manage and set an example for their subordinates. In cases where managers are not experts in the working field, they might not receive high respect from their subordinates. A participant gave an example:

> *"The former Chief of my division wasn't a good specialist, making a lot of difficulties and pressures on me. For example, he usually appointed me to join the leadership meetings while only he could get information from grassroots level. So at such meetings, I couldn't understand anything…"* (Interviewee 7).

Furthermore, many interviewees believed that leaders can create organizational culture, due to the great dependence on them. It is common nature for Vietnamese people to respect their leaders, and they usually follow the leader's orientation. This can produce organizational culture change in accordance with the style of the Head. For example, if the leader applies a style of arbitrary leading and the principle of complying with orders, it will reduce the motivation of workers. By contrast, if he follows a democratic style, it will create a comfortable working atmosphere, although in some cases might reduce productivity. As an example, a department-level leader said:

> *"The culture of organization is dependent on the Head. If they are enthusiast, visionary and talented, the cultural environment of organization will be good. If they are conservative and frequently shout at employees, the organizational culture will be not good"* (Interviewee 32).

5.2.8 Political Interventions

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Political Interventions	Communist Party's orientation and control	Strong-weak	➢ Strong
	Combination mechanism between Vietnamese Communist Party and authorities	Clear – unclear	➢ Clear

Table 14: The Open Category of Political Interventions

Political interventions are expressed by the orientation and control of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and the parallel mechanism between the Party and the authorities.

Firstly, in Vietnam, the Communist Party is the unique ruling party, covering all political, economic, cultural and social aspects, and all legislative, executive and judicial fields, as stipulated in Article 4 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1992[16]. In addition, the obligations of CSs towards the Party are also prescribed in the Law on Cadres and Civil servants 2008[17] . Vietnamese CSs in general, and the majority of interviewees who were members of the Vietnamese Communist Party (56/62 participants) in particular understood that the operation of State administrative agencies is to achieve the political target of applying the guidelines and policies of the Communist Party in practice. State administrative agencies, although independent of each other in terms of organizational structure, share the same purpose to wholeheartedly serve political duties. Therefore, it is understandable that the Party plays an important role in orientating and controlling the operation of State administrative agencies and the job performance of CSs. As a result, all CSs have to work under the Resolution of the Vietnamese Communist Party, consult with the Party when dealing with complicated and important issues, and be supervised by the Party in various ways and through different channels.   As an example, a chairman of a commune-level People's Committee said:

> *"It can't say that the Chairman is able to do everything at will. During the term of five years, our People's Committee should base on the Resolution of the Party as well as the norms and plans of superior State agencies to make the Plan of local socio-economic development, which consists of the annual duties also conformable to the Resolution of the Party"*   (Interviewee 6).

The Chairman of other commune-level People's Committees emphasized the power and supervision of the Party over his job performance as follows:

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[16] "The Communist Party of Vietnam, the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class and loyal representative of the interests of the working class, the working people and the whole nation, who adheres to Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought, is the force assuming leadership of the State and society".

[17] "To be loyal to the Communist Party of Vietnam and the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; to safeguard the national honor and interests" (Clause 1, Article 8) and "To strictly observe the Party's line and policies and the State's laws" (Clause 4, Article 8).

"The Party Committee Secretary is powerful, he holds in hand a very strong power and influence, which always stays the same as prescribed in the law" (Interviewee 33)

and:

"All the tasks we have not settled in a proper way will be reported to the Party through its satellites. Specifically, at grassroots level, the Secretary of the commune-level Communist Party Committee is always the Chairman of the commune-level People's Council. The People's Council includes sub-committees, who are "the spy" of the Party, and somehow reflect everything to the Party to guarantee its role of supervision" (Interviewee 15).

Secondly, in addition to political intervention, Party agencies also combine with State administrative agencies to perform general tasks to serve the people. For most leading and managing CSs, the Party had direct impact on their operation, because their duties were to manage and administer, and they had to take responsibility for all their decisions. For functional/ executive CSs, at first, the majority of them answered that they did not feel any impact of the Party on their job performance, because they mainly worked in accordance with laws and regulations, but were not dependent on Party agencies. However, in deeper conversations with interviewees, most of them changed their opinion, and said that the Party had been intervening in the implementation of tasks in many aspects. For example, Party organizations held training courses for outstanding party members with good qualities and capabilities to shoulder the tasks, and gave comments on the personnel arrangement of State administrative agencies. The following department-level CS said:

"We always have a Party cell meeting in every month. (…) Under the regulations, the Party leads the political duties of the agency, so it is obvious and reasonable to introduce the specialized contents in the Party meetings to assign tasks to Party members" (Interviewee 15).

and:

"(...) We also integrate Party and division meetings. I think it's good to introduce the Resolution of Party Cell at division meeting because it leads the activities of division" (Interviewee 34).

5.2.9 Regulatory Pressures

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Regulatory Pressures	Quality of regulations	Good – poor	➢ Poor
	Quantity of regulations	Sufficient - insufficient	➢ Insufficient

Table 15: The Open Category of Regulatory Pressures

According to many interviewees, one of the difficulties of CSs in the process of task implementation was that while they enforced the law, a lot of legal normative documents currently promulgated by the Government were a hindrance.

On the one hand, most CSs revealed that there were a lot of low quality legal normative documents, for instance, loose, incoherent, overlapping or unclear regulations. A department-level CS in charge of personnel said:

"Terms, words, phrases and sentences used in legal normative documents are not clear. For example, in the Circular No. 08 guiding the implementation of the Decree No.06 on managing civil servants in business-administrative units, I don't understand what the phrase "working under contract" means" (Interviewee 25).

A deputy Chief of Division also spoke as follows:

"The system of legal normative documents is not consistent. Two documents provide different regulations for the same matter, so we don't know which one we should refer to" (Interviewee 23).

On the other hand, the low quality of regulations also results in an increasing number of legal normative documents. After a period of applying unclear provisions, the Government must issue more decrees, which, in turn, are still loose, so the

Government must supplement them with more circulars to guide the implementation, making CSs confused in their job performance. The following CSs revealed:

"In general, there are so many legal documents. (…) I even don't know which document is the standard to follow" (Interviewee 26)

and:

"I always want to have the latest and most sufficient legal basis to deal with professional issues. But I don't know what is the standard to apply because there are too many legal documents such as decree, circular, instruction, guidance" (Interviewee 22).

In addition, in the process of implementation, competent State administrative agencies in each location have to issue their own obligatory regulations in the form of "decisions", which also increases the quantity of legal normative documents. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"In my province, laws, decrees and circulars have a very high legal status. In the process of transferring them from the Central to grassroots level, the provincial level shall issue one more document or decision; and district and division levels come after, each level issues one more (…)" (Interviewee 29).

5.2.10 Administrative and Paperwork Pressures

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Administrative and Paperwork Pressures	Administrative procedures and requirements	Complicated – simple Rigid- Flexible	➢ Complicated ➢ Rigid
	Paperwork	Much-Less	➢ Much

Table 16: The Open Category of Administrative and Paperwork Pressures

One of the pressures CSs had to suffer was administrative procedures and requirements, together with paperwork. According to the majority of interviewees, although State administrative agencies were implementing PAR towards reducing the number of administrative procedures which create difficulties for citizens and enterprises, in reality, many local authorities and even CSs themselves created more kinds of papers to ensure the coherence of procedures and cope with the inspection of superior agencies. Two interviewees commented:

"(…) I'm directly in charge of administration reform but I haven't yet identified what administrative procedures were already cut down. For example, in the field of land registry, although the PAR stipulated to reduce the time limit for granting land certificates to citizens from 45 to 30 days, it takes 3 months in reality" (Interviewee 4).

and:

"At the People's Committee where I work, to complete the procedures of granting land use right certificates to citizens, local CSs require them to submit the writing confirmation of those who live in adjacent areas (…). Actually, this kind of paper does not belong to administrative procedures and it is sometimes very difficult to get, for instance, in case of conflict or dispute with neighbours (…)" (Interviewee 9).

5.2.11 Relationship Issues

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Relationships Issues	Matrix of relationships	Complicated – simple Integrated – separated	➢ Complicated ➢ Integrated
	Family-style culture	Strong – weak	➢ Strong
	Pressures of relationships	High –low	➢ High

Table 17: The Open Category of Relationship Issues

Relationship issues consist of three main properties: matrix of relationships, family-style culture, and pressures of relationships.

Firstly, according to many interviewees, being a normal CS involves three main relationships: relation with managers, relation with colleagues, and relation with external organizations and individuals. However, these are not purely business relationships, but also for private purposes. Most interviewees said that they were strongly governed by private relations, and it was difficult to clearly distinguish between business and individual relationships during the process of performing duties, as underlined in the following view:

> *"From my point of view, the relationship in Vietnamese State agencies (…) also implies many kinds of relationships such as brotherhood, colleagueship, relative, friendship, and sometimes opponent, so on, which exist in parallel. Once it cannot discriminate such relations, it would have bad impact on work effectiveness and efficiency"* (Interviewee 39).

Secondly, the majority of interviewees said that the organizational culture at their agency contained many particularities of family-style culture, such as respect of feelings and relationships. Besides working time, CSs usually had other common activities to connect with each other. This type of culture has a lot of positive points, for example, the ambiance is always warm and harmonious; CSs support and share burdens and difficulties with each other. However, it also reveals several limitations, for instance, the attitude of "A soft answer turns away wrath" in evaluation (as mentioned above), the mutual protection in cases of mistakes, or the impossibility of dismissing a CS even though that person does not complete their tasks, because CSs in the same organization always consider each other as family members. One interviewee gave an example:

> *"Actually, in the process of completing tasks, CSs should not only base on the law but also have consideration for sentiment. Colleagues in the same division are almost like family members, we could not have the heart to let*

someone out even when that person is incapable to fulfil tasks" (Interviewee 18).

Thirdly, for many interviewees, one of their concerns was how to deal with internal and external relations of the organization. As to the question *"What is the most difficult problem you find during the process of taking duties?",* a lot of CSs answered that finding solutions which both satisfied relationships (normally personal relationships) and regulations was sometimes the greatest pressure. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> *"To tell you the truth, every agency runs into this problem, especially the area of land registry is more sensitive. There are many interlacing relationships very hard to deal with, which puts pressure on me"* (Interviewee 29).

In general, relationship issues held importance for CSs. Not only executive CSs but leaders are also controlled by the surrounding relations. It is evident that the higher position CSs hold, the more relations they have both in the State administrative system and in society. However, since the emotional factor was emphasized in the process of performing duties, in many cases, CSs were not able to act at their own discretion, and the indulgence for negativity, weakness and shortcomings was maintained and developed in their organizations, which had bad impacts on their job performance.

5.2.12 Pressures from Service Users

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Pressures from service users	Variety of service users	High – low	➢ High
	Requirements of service users	High – low	➢ High
	Confidence of service users in CSs	High – low	➢ Low

Table 18: The Open Category of Pressures from Service Users

According to many interviewees, to meet the target of public service and satisfy citizens' demands, they had been experiencing a lot of pressure and complicated situations in the process of their work.

Firstly, CSs have contact with many kinds of people with different levels of awareness and attitudes. Some people are good-tempered, but others are demanding. Citizens may behave inappropriately, become excited or abusive, disturbing the public order. A number of CSs said that citizens had a tendency to gather together into groups for the following reasons. First, they think that such a gathering can put pressure on the authorities to act in a faster, more beneficial way. Second, the gathering is, as mentioned by many CSs, like a citizens' fun day out. Third, citizens gather by the instigation of anti-government groups. No matter what the situations are, CSs always have to keep calm and respect service users.

Secondly, one of the pressures service users put on CSs is the ever-increasing requirement for progress and transparency. In fact, the interaction between CSs and service users is mainly related to the interests of the latter. Service users, only caring about results, but not procedures and regulations, always hope that their interests will be satisfied immediately, and try to force CSs to promptly settle their grievances using any method, such as taking advantage of their relationship with superior CSs or asking their acquaintances working in State administrative agencies for help. However, in order to successfully settle issues with service users, CSs are constrained by many kinds of relations, such as organizational hierarchy, statutory processes and procedures, and legal normative documents. Moreover, citizens have started to take more interest in transparency and accountability. Through multiple sources of information, they can trace the activities of CSs in particular and authorities in general. This means that CSs have to improve the quality of their job performance, as an example illustrated by a respondent:

> *"The requirements on transparency are ever-higher, which requires the higher quality of work. In the past, citizens might not take interest in how*

legal normative documents are issued, but now, it changes, citizens might get information not only via the portal but also through other sources" (Interviewee 21).

Thirdly, in some cases CSs may suffer from public doubt over their capability, honesty and uprightness. Since many issues involve other agencies, CSs themselves are unable to actively push for progress, making citizens believe wrongly that they are incapable, lazy or intentionally make difficulties in order to claim bribes. For instance, one interviewee revealed:

"Service users usually have the preconceived idea that every CS always wring money from them. They don't even see the provisions of law we show. They also don't trust the law documents we downloaded on the Internet because of no red seal" (Interviewee 29).

5.2.13 Local Social and Cultural Context

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Social and Cultural Context	Local culture and custom	Complicated – simple Different – similar	➢ Complicated ➢ Different
	Local geographic particularities	Different –similar	➢ Different
	Local economic particularities	Stable – changeable Different – similar	➢ Changeable ➢ Different

Table 19: The Open Category of Local Social and Cultural Context

In Vietnam, there are 54 ethnic groups. Among them, Kinh people occupy the majority of the population, while ethnic minorities are scattered all over the territory, of whom nearly 30% live in urban areas and 70% in rural areas. Each ethnic group has its own particularities of habits, customs and culture. The common language is Vietnamese, but ethnic minorities still utilize their own language. 24 ethnic groups, such as Thai, Mong, Tay, Nung, Khmer, Gia Rai, Ede, Hoa, Cham, have their own script. In the process of interviewing CSs from urban to rural, from plain to mountainous areas, in the North, Centre and South of Vietnam, the stories of interviewees showed that local geographic, economic, cultural and social particularities have great impact on CSs' performance. An

interviewee, originated in the North, born and growing up, studying in the South and experiencing in many regions of Vietnam, talked about the cultural difference between regions (comparing the North with the South) as follows:

"(…) For the cases like mine, where a young CS, with only 3-4 years of experience, is appointed to the Chairman of commune-level People's Committee at a totally new location, it's extremely difficult to come true in the North but may happen in the South" (Interviewee 6).

In addition, local geographic and economic particularities were one of the impacts on job performance. A CS working in a mountainous commune in a remote area talked about his challenges in the local difficult situation as follows:

"(…) At present, there remain six mountainous villages which have not yet been connected to the national electricity system because the distance between these locations and the centre of commune is 40km of forest road" (Interviewee 22).

Meanwhile, another CS working in the city used an example of the impact of local socio-economic growth on the amount of works:

"When there are many programmes and projects relating to citizens' interests, for example, the construction of industrial areas and roads involve compensation, ground clearance for the people, we will receive more petitions, complaints and denunciations" (Interviewee 10).

It can be seen that the interaction between CSs and citizens in urban areas is bi-directional. According to many CSs, the intellectual standards of people in urban areas have greatly increased, and they are more aware of their civil rights, so they require the authorities at all levels to be more professional. An interviewee, who used to work for both urban and rural authorities, said:

"(…) Service users at urban areas are mainly enterprises, employees, CSs, relatives of CSs, so on, meanwhile, at rural areas mostly agricultural workers. Therefore, when interacting with citizens, CSs at urban areas must be always

conscious of whom they are receiving, of course, their spirit and attitude
should be different" (Interviewee 6).

Meanwhile, people in rural or mountainous areas, especially ethnic minorities, show themselves to be more reserved when contacting the authorities. According to many CSs working in these areas, the reason is that ethnic minorities live in thinly populated areas, have almost no outside contact, use their own language and are of a timid nature. They consider themselves singular and are self-deprecating. Therefore, authorities and CSs should be more proactive in their approach and interaction with citizens, in order to narrow the gulf between citizens and CSs.

5.2.14 Desire of Maintaining Public and Personal Values and Ethics

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Desire of Maintaining Public and Personal Values and Ethics	Following public values	High – low	➢ Depend
	Work from the heart	High – low	➢ Depend
	Enthusiasm at work	High – low	➢ Depend

Table 20: The Open Category of Desire of Maintaining Public and Personal Values and Ethics

The majority of interviewees expressed their desire to maintain public and personal values and ethics. On the one hand, most CSs, from central to commune level, from urban to rural areas, were aware of and leaned towards the professionalism and citizen-serving style rather than traditional administrative culture. Their awareness resulted from the positive effectiveness and efficiency of administrative reform and training on CSs ethics. Others thought that it is owing to the requirement for ever-increasing professionalism and accountability that CSs have changed their manners and attitudes in serving citizens. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"Civil servants are now back to the criteria in which they serve the people. I
also must try the best to do good things for the people. Only if the cases are
too difficult to deal with, do I just give up" (Interviewee 10).

A commune-level leader in a mountainous province emphasized:

"I tell my subordinates that we should consider ourselves as sellers and citizens as customers instead of granting a favour" (Interviewee 14).

On the other hand, according to a number of CSs, to avoid making difficulties for people, they should be flexible in law application and administrative procedures for the sake of citizens, although to some extent, this might break the law. As a reward, they would receive the respect of citizens, together with personal satisfaction, which is a point the following interviewee was keen to highlight:

"(…) If I can do something good for citizens, I feel very happy and find meals very delicious. I work not for salary only. After all, the target of administration reform is for the interest of the people" (Interviewee 24).

Furthermore, a lot of CSs voluntarily worked overtime without remuneration or went personally to people's houses to deal with administrative procedures. This sprang primarily from the heart, together with a sense of personal responsibility and professional ethics, as the following interviewees said:

"Despite of hardly travelling in my commune, I find that most of people here need me, so I want to have more contribution" (Interviewee 22).

and:

"The most interesting thing for me is that I do something good and beneficial for citizens. If not, I feel indebted to them" (Interviewee 14).

5.2.15 Responsiveness

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Responsiveness	Listening to citizens	High – low	➢ Depend
	Adapting to reality	High – low	➢ Depend

Table 21: The Open Category of Responsiveness

Civil servants' responsiveness was expressed by listening to citizens and adapting to reality.

On the one hand, in order to get information from the community to make the most appropriate local plans, citizens can contribute their ideas and supervise the work of public administrative organizations via many channels, for instance, through their representative organs, which are people council at all levels, or via mass media, which is now extremely popular and easy to use. PAR has been more and more targeted at the development of an authority that is closer to the people, listens to the voice of people and satisfies the needs of people by making better decisions and policies. For example, CSs at grassroots level often go to citizens' houses to obtain their opinions, which may cover the majority of their working time. This was expressed as follows:

> *"To make the plans of local socio-economic development, we should directly go to citizens' house to know their opinion and expectation. For example, we should have a meeting with the people on building a road across their land or fields, or a house of culture in order to find out how the clearance and compensation is, how the contribution of citizens is (…)"* (Interviewee 6).

On the other hand, a lot of CSs said it that in reality, benefits should be given to citizens. In some cases, CSs had to take advantage of loopholes to facilitate citizens, although they knew that this violates the law. However, it was necessary to have the consensus of leaders or superior State agencies for taking advantage of loopholes. One CS said that in mountainous areas, where the quality of life and intellectual standards of the people was extremely backward, they should be flexible in dealing with premature marriage, close-to-blood line marriage, and birth registry:

> *"There are many junior high school students getting marriage. In reality, they are mature enough to get married, but based on birth registry certificate, they violate premature marriage. We can't prohibit them to marry because it's their demand. We can punish them but we don't want. (…) As a CS, we must serve citizens and meet all the things citizens need"* (Interviewee 22).

5.2.16 Harmonization of Relationships

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Harmonization of	Avoiding conflicts	High – low	High

Relationships		Positive – Negative	Depend
	Expanding network	Significant – insignificant	Significant

Table 22: The Open Category of Harmonization of Relationships

Firstly, concerning the relationships between CSs and their colleagues, superiors and subordinates, as well as internal and external relations, the avoidance of conflict was considered an extremely important factor to maintain a comfortable ambiance within the organization and to perform duties in a smooth way. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"To cooperate with relevant individuals and agencies, it requires harmonization but not rigidity or distinction between superior and subordinate. The rigidity will hurt the pride of subordinates, leading to the fact that they won't execute their task immediately (…)" (Interviewee 3).

Therefore, to avoid conflict, many CSs followed the method "A soft answer turns away wrath" or avoided making colleagues lose face. For example, in cases where their colleagues made mistakes, most of them thought that they should make comments privately, instead of criticizing them openly at meetings. If they continued making mistakes, it was better to keep silence, as the safest solution, which is a point that the following interviewee was keen to make:

"(…) It's very important to maintain good relations with colleagues because we see and work with each other every day. Moreover, we evaluate the achievements of each other at the end of year, so it'd better not displeasing colleagues" (Interviewee 2).

Moreover, it is interesting to note that relationships are a special type of soft power in CSs' job performance. To the question *"What do you feel interesting during the process of taking duties?",* a lot of CSs replied that it was the harmonious working atmosphere. One CS said:

"The internal relation in my division is very good, we share the burden of work with each other (…). I feel comfortable among my colleagues. This motivates and encourages me to engage with my current work" (Interviewee 46).

Secondly, for many CSs, working relations were considered an invisible property and an implicit power. That is the reason why they tried to establish and expand their network as much as possible. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"(…) The most interesting is that the subordinates of our district-level division include 31 commune-level sub-divisions of culture, so we have relations with all of them. By working with communes, I know many people, who are mainly leaders. If my acquaintances living in a certain commune have difficulty in civil status for example, I can call to the leader of that commune to ask for help" (Interviewee 19).

and:

"In general, once you have a position and many relations in Vietnam, you can ask for help via a phone call only. This is a precious thing that you cannot buy by money" (Interviewee 32).

5.2.17 Collectivism

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Collectivism	Collective decisions making	High – low	➢ High
	Cooperation	High – low	➢ High
	Blaming	High – low	➢ High
	Shifting responsibilities	High – low	➢ High

Table 23: The Open Category of Collectivism

The collective mechanism is a characteristic and principle of the Vietnamese public service system, expressed by four properties as above.

Firstly, the majority of interviewees said that planning and making decisions was based on the principle of collectivization. For example, the process of making a plan for the provincial-level People's Committee starts with drafting the plan, then having a meeting between the provincial-level People's Committee, the heads of the department and the leaders of the district people's committee for discussion, submitting the draft to the Standing Committee of the District Party for comments, and finally ending with the approval of the People's Council.

Secondly, according to many interviewees, not only could an agency/CS not deal with all the tasks, but most of the State administrative management activities also involved many agencies, levels and objects (organizations, non-business agencies, enterprises, citizens). Therefore, much cooperation is required in the process of performing tasks. A leader gave the following example:

> "(...) For example, when there is a murder, provincial-level, district-level and local polices should combine in scene examination and autopsy. Besides, the Fatherland Front and other organizations should also take part in burial service and other relating works " (Interviewee 6).

However, cooperation between agencies, divisions and individuals was, in many cases, a formality. In fact, in any team or project, only the key people spend time and take responsibility; others just have their name but no responsibility or active participation, as in the case of attendance checking. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> " (…) When issuing a certain document, we shall collaborate with at least one or two departments and request them to give comments on such document. Some of them read the whole document and make comments. Some just skimmed through for form's sake. Only at the time of promulgation, mistakes were detected. At that moment, I found such collaboration was just a formality, without any effect and a waste of money." (Interviewee 18).

Consequently, it is difficult to identify the responsibility and participation of involved parties. For example, for a collective duty, those who make less contribution also receive collective achievement, which makes those who work hard seriously

disappointed and demotivated. On the contrary, when mistakes happen, like *"everybody's business is nobody's business",* everyone thinks that it does not affect themselves. The following interviewee said:

> *"In many cases, they set up a team with many members, but only one or two*
> *people do the job. When rewarded, they also receive collective achievement.*
> *I do not like it, and I feel demotivated"* (Interviewee 25).

Moreover, when the collective duty is inefficient, behind schedule or criticized, superiors and subordinates will lay the blame on each other, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

> *"In Vietnam, the culture of resignation when making serious mistakes in civil*
> *service performance is still rare. Actually, when making mistakes, they blame*
> *on others and do not dare to stand up to take it"* (Interviewee 1).

In addition, according to a number of CSs, in the process of task assignment, some tried to shift the workload onto others, and did not have joint responsibility for performing tasks. In the case of mistakes, those entitled to make decisions were inclined to shift the responsibility onto those giving advice, making proposals or reports, as highlighted by the following interviewee:

> *"Executive CSs have the essential responsibility for duties meanwhile the*
> *other ones are only in charge of coordination. As a result, they'll be*
> *reprimanded for not taking their utmost responsibility. They're to blame for*
> *not coordinating with others in harmony"* (Interviewee 5).

5.2.18 Passiveness

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Passiveness	Initiative	Much – less	➢ Less
	Raising the voice	Much – less	➢ Less
	Inactiveness in working manner	High – Low	➢ Low

Table 24: The Open Category of Passiveness

Firstly, it can be noted that procedural bureaucracy and strict law observance made many CSs complain that they were not allowed or did not want to be creative in the process of implementing their tasks. In their opinion, they had a duty to enforce the law; meanwhile the law is always rigid. As one CS said:

"To be honest, it's also impossible if I want to create. It means that it's difficult and unacceptable to create or change law provisions" (Interviewee 46).

Furthermore, the interviews indicated that CSs are not eager, or can be lazy in making initiatives, even when this is just a formality to conform with law provisions in order to realize achievements. In practice, there is a lack of support and encouragement for innovation. For instance, many CSs said that it was difficult for an initiative to be accepted, and that while their new ideas might be agreed at a basic level, there was no guarantee of acceptance at the higher levels. The following interviewees revealed:

"I've got so many ideas but none of superiors are interested in it. It doesn't affect anyone! Although I have a proposal or an initiative, without budget, it can be developed on papers only but not in reality" (Interviewee 12).

and:

"Since I have been working here, I do not think about creativity. People perform their job base on their experience. Even leaders do not care of creativeness and innovation" (Interviewee 51).

Secondly, a lot of CSs were afraid of giving opinions, because they were not encouraged to do so, or else were lazy in their thinking. For example, at meetings, executive CSs just kept silent and only gave their opinions when asked by leaders. As one interviewee said:

"When I started to go to work, I often raised my voice. But time by time, I've

became silent" (Interviewee 46).

A number of young CSs in particular said that their voice was hardly heard in the organization. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"To whom and for what to give opinions? It's related to the interest and

prestige of superiors so the subordinates usually don't dare doing it"

(Interviewee 48).

As a result, the interest of CSs in job performance was extremely low. CSs often followed the direction of their superiors and their own experience. Only two interviewees answered that in the case of problems arising, they usually reported to their leaders, simultaneously proposing their own opinion, meanwhile others just stopped at "asking for the opinion of leaders". It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"I see myself is not active. I just do what the supervisors assigned for me.
Moreover, doing too many works takes a lot of time, so that I don't have
time for generating new and innovative ideas" (Interviewee 30).

Another district-level CS said:

"I mainly base on legal documents, which are extremely rigid. If I'm not sure

that it has a proper legal grounds, I will ask the leader's opinion"

(Interviewee 7).

5.2.19 Dilatoriness

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Dilatoriness	Using working time	Effective – ineffective	➢ Ineffective
	Tardiness	High – low	➢ High

Table 25: The Open Category of Dilatoriness

The dilatoriness in this context was defined as CSs' act of postponing or delaying especially habitually or intentionally, which is mainly expressed in their use of working time and tardiness at work.

According to many interviewees, although the working time of CSs was eight hours per day, only those directly working with citizens or being on duty to receive citizens should seriously exercise the regulations on working hours. Others, especially those with young babies, taking part in training courses to improve their standards, falling sick or being busy with family matters, might have more flexible working hours. One of the reasons why they elected to work in State administrative agencies was the working hours which are not restricted, as in private enterprises. As a result, they had more time for their family or for their own business. One CS commented:

> *"(…) For example, people stay at the agency in 7 hours, not in 8 hours as regulated. Within such 7 hours, the duration in which they really work is around 5 hours. Within such 5 hours, the real efficient time is 3 hours only"* (Interviewee 39).

In the process of the interviews, based on constant comparison the answers from participants, the researcher found that in terms of using working time, CSs could be divided into the following groups. The first group, referring to female CSs undergoing pregnancy or nursing little babies, had low working efficiency due to their health, or sometimes due to their lack of concentration at work. Several interviewees falling into this group said the situation should improve when their child was over 5 years old. In fact, there is no provision for this, but managers would generally consider and understand these cases. As one interviewee revealed:

"I work around six hours per day. I've got little babies, so luckily the leader understands my situation and allows me to go home early" (Interviewee 46).

The second and third groups, including ageing CSs who did not hold a high post, and women aged from 40 to 50, worked rather perfunctorily because they were due to reach retirement age and were not motivated to strive for promotion. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"While their children are grown-up, they are no longer busy with family matters. They don't hold a high post in the agency, so they come to office for two purposes: working and gossip. These people talk a lot because they are in need of sharing and chatting" (Interviewee 39).

The fourth group involved junior CSs who were freshmen with little experience of the job, not having yet been charged with many tasks. A lot of them were relatively idle and often spent their working time studying to improve their skills and doing private business. The fifth and sixth groups utilized their time most effectively. The fifth group, including CSs who were being prepared for management positions worked most efficiently and fully observed the regulations on working hours, since they had both the greatest motivation for promotion and a thorough understanding of their job, and were assigned many tasks as well as important duties. The sixth group comprised CSs holding leading and managerial posts. Beside the reasons analysed above (the role, position and responsibility of this group was extremely high), the reason why they were always busy was that they were planned for higher posts, and needed to express themselves, as well as work harder and more efficiently.

Although the process and progress of job performance is mostly provided in legal documents, the delay in task implementation was frequent for many subjective and objective reasons. According to many interviewees, CSs always have plausible reasons to explain their tardiness, and were obviously not responsible for this. A lot of CSs talked about the laid-back working style and the habit of using time at work to do private business, as per an example given by the following interviewee:

"(…) In many cases, they use such reasons as joining Communist Party Cell meetings, marriage or funeral ceremony, visiting sick people, so on, to go out of office and not receive citizens. It's unacceptable when all people go to marriage ceremony and no one is present at work (…)" (Interviewee 12).

5.2.20 Misfeasance

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Misfeasance	Public power	High – low	➢ High
	Interest issues	High – low	➢ High
	Favouritism	High – low	➢ High
	Corruption	High – low	➢ High

Table 26: The Open Category of Misfeasance

In this context, misfeasance implies the abuse of power to perform acts in an illegal way, which includes four properties: public power, interest issues, favouritism and corruption.

A common feature of public service is the "use of state power", which means that CSs are offered corresponding jurisdictions and resources to perform their tasks. There is a paradox that without power, it is impossible to implement the state management functions, while the use of public power may lead to the risk of abusing powers and resources for private profit, corruption, harassment and negativity, all of which are complicated, sophisticated and difficult to control. Several interviewees said that in reality many CSs are not fully and correctly aware of their powers. Furthermore, Vietnamese people's culture of complaisance and respect for sentiment and relations, together with the loose provision of law, renders CS job performance in many cases distorted, or more severely, it might lead to law violation and corruption. A CS from the Department of Construction said:

"I take an example on illegal construction of which there are different opinions on the settlement. Some people think it could apply administrative sanctions and let them continue, others believe it should comply with the law

provision. The reason is that there are a lot of interests related to the construction, which results in many negative issues" (Interviewee 42).

Civil servants' job performance may be distorted in comparison with provisions for many reasons, including the influence of interests (because the employment of CSs involves interests) and the control of internal and external relationships. In particular, the phenomenon of "giving gifts" to CSs was mentioned by many respondents. The most common areas for the giving and receiving of gifts were public service delivery, inspection and supervision over law enforcement. Those "giving gifts" may include the enterprises and service users who were in need of public services, or who were under inspection or examination. The purpose of "giving gifts" is to reduce the cost of filing for violations or simply to establish close relationships with CSs. One of the reasons leading to this phenomenon is that the small salary forced CSs to find other ways to earn extra money by harassing or accepting "gifts" from service users. Consequently, CSs may not concentrate on their job, and may even commit illegal acts. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> *"The salary is really not enough to satisfy the demand, many CSs still have to do other jobs, or worse, abuse his job position for harassment and extortion of citizens"* (Interviewee 11).

In addition, the impact of relations in some cases might distort the provision of law, and the principles and processes of public administration in order to serve the interests of relevant parties. Benefit-related fields were often areas where CSs engaged in corruption and favouritism, such as business licensing, construction licensing, recruiting and appointing CSs into management positions or making decisions with direct impacts on the interests of enterprises and citizens, as revealed in the following quotes:

> *"For CSs' recruitments at my location, most of recruited CSs are not good. Sometimes, the recruitment is just via a phone call from the superiors to ask us to arrange a position for his nephew although this position is not appropriate to his nephew's specialization"* (Interviewee 32).

Moreover, many service users take advantage of individual relationships to make a profit in public projects. As a result, CSs with public powers may abuse these to give priority to their relatives or lobby. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> *"There are a number of CSs trying many ways to ask money when service users need them. This is now a norm. But I don't want to take advantages of my position to make money in that way. However, in many cases, I have to get their money to do lobby for them in order that work goes smoothly"* (Interviewee 30).

5.2.21 Counterfeit

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Counterfeit	Unreliable reports	High – low	➢ High
	Formalism	High – low	➢ High

Table 27: The Open Category of Counterfeit

The counterfeit in this category refers to the dishonesty, which was mainly expressed by unreliable reports and formalism.

Firstly, the result of interviews greatly surprised the researcher when the majority of CSs acknowledged that a lot of their reports had a low reliability. An interviewee working at a Department of Home Affairs said:

> *"Personally, I think it can use 20-30% of report contents only"* (Interviewee 39).

Another CS added:

> *"Sometimes, figures don't match, and the accuracy is not very high. (…) If the reports are simple and fall into the specialization, its accuracy is high. Normally, unscheduled reports are not accurate"* (Interviewee 34).

Secondly, formalism in this context means the preference of appearance. A number of interviewees thought that formalism was a serious and chronic disease of the public

administration and CSs of Vietnam. This was revealed in several main points as evaluation, job performance, collaboration and creativity. For instance, CS evaluation is not inclined to the essence, but just a formality. Essentially, it does not create many positive changes or impacts on CSs and evaluation results seem not to be used much. Besides, a lot of programmes, plans, targets and missions have been introduced with flashy slogans, but in fact, they are only surface gloss, lending colour without substance. A CS said:

> " (…) There is a great difference between provincial, department and grassroots levels in completing a program. It's deliberately exaggerated by the superiors meanwhile in reality, the subordinates are unable to implement" (Interviewee 39).

5.2.22 Observance

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Observance	Observance of laws and regulations	High – low	➢ High
	Attachment to administrative principles and procedures	High – low	➢ High

Table 28: The Open Category of Observance

Civil servants' observance was expressed in two properties: observance of laws and regulations and attachment to administrative principles and procedures.

First, as stipulated in Article 2 of the Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2008, CSs must implement their tasks and powers in accordance with this Law and other relevant regulations. Cadres and civil servants engaged in public-duty activities must abide by their obligations and have a responsibility to properly perform their assigned tasks. Both State organizations and CSs, as well as all citizens must strictly observe the law.

Second, regarding the question on the application of flexibility and principle in their job performance, most CSs answered that they must strictly comply with regulations,

principles, administrative processes and procedures, and only apply flexibility in special cases. One CS said:

"I think it'd better obey the regulations. But sometimes it should be flexible for the cases requested by the leaders" (Interviewee 56)

Or a leader said:

"It should comply with principles. Principles are essential, but flexibility is just occasional. Moreover, the job performance is also supervised by some agencies such as police" (Interviewee 35).

In general, most CSs were aware that their task was to put laws and policies into practice. According to their opinions, justice, accuracy and consistency are required; and if superiors and subordinates do not have consensus on the application of flexibility and principle, it is extremely difficult to deal with its consequence and easily leads to law violation. As a district-level CS said:

"I mainly base on legal documents, which are extremely rigid. If I'm not sure that it has a proper legal grounds, I will ask the leader's opinion" (Interviewee 7).

5.2.23 Subordination

Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
Subordination	Complying with supervisors	High – low	➢ High
	Power-oriented attitude	High – low	➢ High

Table 29: The Open Category of Subordination

Subordination can be expressed using two properties: complying with supervisors and power-oriented attitude.

Regarding the first property, according to many CSs, one of the main principles in administrative organizations was to comply with orders and consult with superiors.

Therefore, the centralized power and impact of leaders is actually extremely great, which was reflected in the following statements:

"I can't self-decide to perform tasks because it is required to have the signature of leaders. In case where I make suggestions to leaders but they don't accept, I must answer citizens that the leaders don't agree" (Interviewee 4).

and:

"As usual, I ask the opinion of the Chairman of People's Committee before implementation. (…) In most of cases, I talk to my leader about my point of view, jurisdiction and responsibility for this matter so that he can understand. If he still keeps his opinion, I must follow him" (Interviewee 3).

Besides, the principle of obeying leaders in State administrative agencies, and the Vietnamese culture of venerating the Head made CSs too dependent on the Head. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"I should rely on the leader in the process of taking duties. Whatever I speak out as a Chief Officer, it is definitely based on the consultation of the Chairman and approved by him" (Interviewee 3).

Regarding the second property, power-oriented attitude was partly manifested by reserving achievements for leaders and managers. Actually, performance achievement is an important criterion for career promotion. However, there is a rigid regulation on the quota of achievement for each organization in order to avoid egalitarianism of recognition. Many CSs said that their agency set a fixed percentage of CSs who fell into the category of excellent task accomplishment. A CS said:

"In my agency, only 15% of regular CSs are entitled to excellent accomplishment of tasks. Many people think with such limited criterion, even when they try their best, they will never reach it" (Interviewee 46).

Such a limit has led to the consequence of achievements mainly belonging to leaders. One interviewee commented:

"Achievements mostly fall into leaders but not employees, because leaders are mainly responsible for all works. Therefore, the title of "excellent accomplishment" or "Model of Civil Servant" (Individuals who have obtained great achievements in production) are not nearly awarded to normal CSs" (Interviewee 5).

Another interviewee said:

"Normally, with such manner of worship, leaders must always obtain the greatest achievements. Leaders also consider that if they don't do well, the collective won't" (Interviewee 10).

5.3. Summary

This chapter consisted of discussion on open categories, along with their properties/dimensions. These categories relate to the data on the cultural aspects of Vietnamese CSs' job performance in practice. In total, 23 open categories were developed. A list of the open codes and categories, along with properties and dimensions is presented in Appendix 6. The relationships between the various categories are the focus of axial and selective coding, which will be fully discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

CHAPTER 6. AXIAL CODING

6.1 Introduction

In practice, the differences between open and axial coding are "artificial" because the two stages are done simultaneously, and therefore the distinction is drawn for explanatory purposes only (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This chapter provides a discussion of the 10 emergent main categories, which are show a higher level of abstraction and density as the various open categories were interwoven together. These main categories provide the material for the next stage of analysis, selective coding, where the core category is identified, and which is discussed in the next chapter.

6.2 Discussion of Axial Categories

Because the axial categories were mainly formed from open categories, the discussion of main categories in this chapter will focus on explaining the relationships between open categories, without entering into the comprehensive area of open categories, in order to avoid content already discussed in the previous chapter. The following table shows the main categories which emerged from the axial coding, each of them being discussed in the next section.

No	Open Categories	Axial Categories
1	CSs' Career	**The Status of CSs**
	Social Status of CSs	
	CSs' Competence	
2	Job Ambiguity	**Weak Performance Management Practices**
	Unfair Performance Evaluation and Reward	
3	Democratic Centralization	**Hierarchical Centralization**
	Power of the Leader	
	Political Interventions	
4	Regulatory Pressures	**Red tape**
	Administrative and Paperwork Pressures	

5	Relationships Issues	**Social and Cultural Context Influences**
	Pressures from Service Users	
	Social and Cultural Context	
6	Maintaining Public Values and Ethics	**Accommodation for Responsiveness**
	Responsiveness	
7	Harmonization of Relationships	**Collectivization**
	Collectivism	
8	Passiveness	**Inertness**
	Dilatoriness	
9	Misfeasance	**Distortion**
	Counterfeit	
10	Observance	**Compliance**
	Subordination	

Table 30: List of Main Categories

6.2.1 The Status of Civil Servants
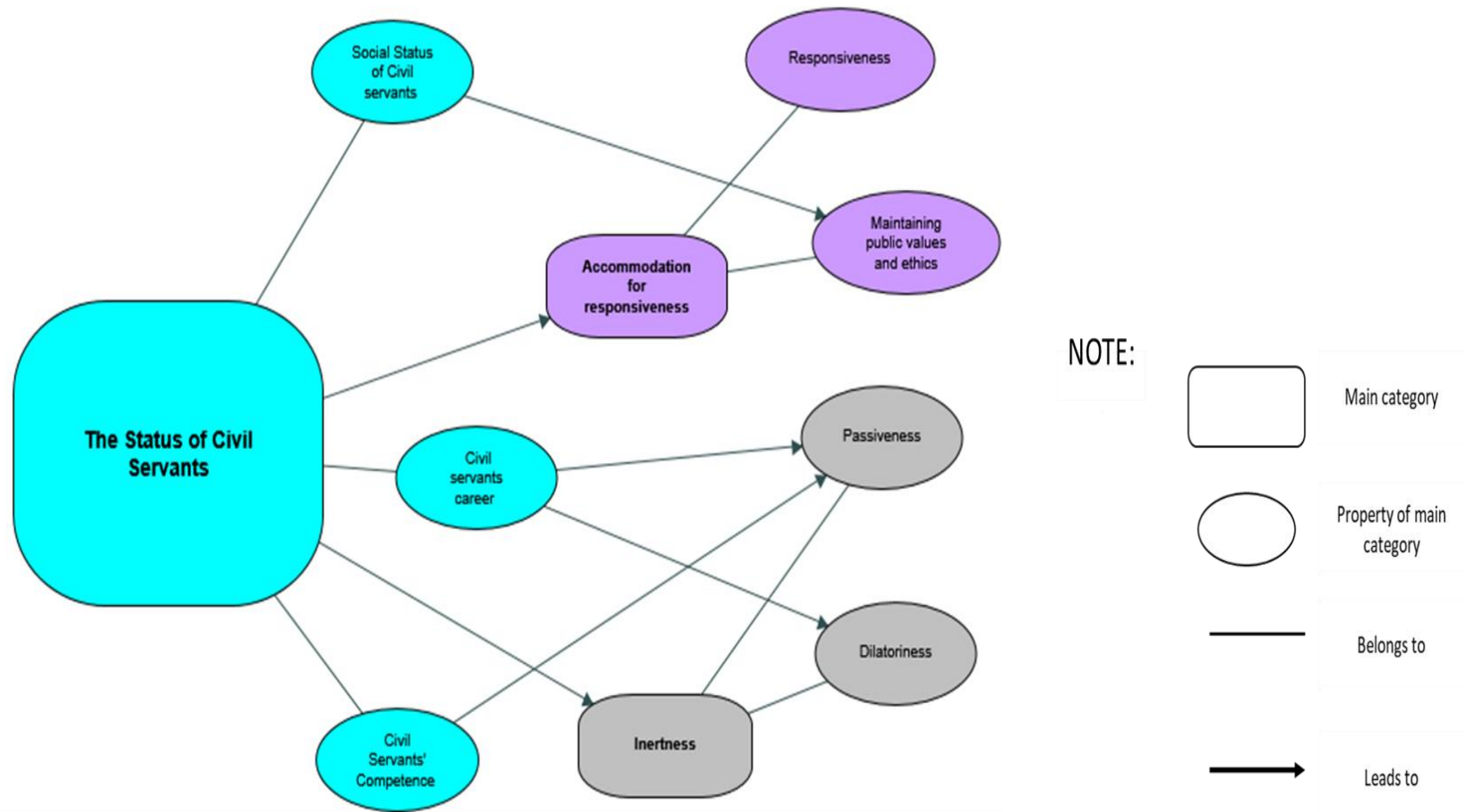
Figure 13: The Relationships of the Main Category of Status of Civil Servants and Other Main Categories

A combination of the three sub-categories, "stable CSs' career", "civil servants' competence", and "social status of CSs", forms this main category.

The main category of "civil servants' status", in this study, has a relationship with the other main categories "inertness", and "accommodation for responsiveness" (see the figure 13). First, because of their career stability, and having a job for life, clear and steady career paths, less competitive work environment, and flexible working times, CSs receive a regular salary, earn promotion by rank, and can never be dismissed, whether the quality of their work is good or bad. This can lead to dilatoriness and tardiness. In fact, despite the stability and guaranteed career, many CSs experience the monotony of boring work and a stagnant environment, which reduces their motivation, and creates passivity and inertia in their job performance. "Lifelong", "an old fox not easily snared", and State guarantee are elements which deter CSs from self-development. An interviewee talked about this situation:

> "Once entering the public sector, CSs will never be dismissed, except for stealing or imprisonment. (...) The salary is paid by the Government, so no one can reduce it. As you can see here, they go out to drink tea in the morning; when citizens come, no one is there, it makes the citizens angry" (Interviewee 12).

Furthermore, as the competence of CSs is relatively low, they are not normally active in giving opinions, and just follow the direction of leaders. In addition, many law provisions are misunderstood by CSs, resulting in inconsistent implementation of regulations.

Secondly, from the majority of CSs' perspectives, social status and social recognition are extremely meaningful. Most of them are proud of their careers, while at the same time aware of the importance of their profession, and the power they hold in the process of implementing public administrative services. In addition, they are conscious of public sector value, as well as the desire to dedicate themselves to society and to fulfil their social responsibility.

6.2.2 Weak Performance Management Practices
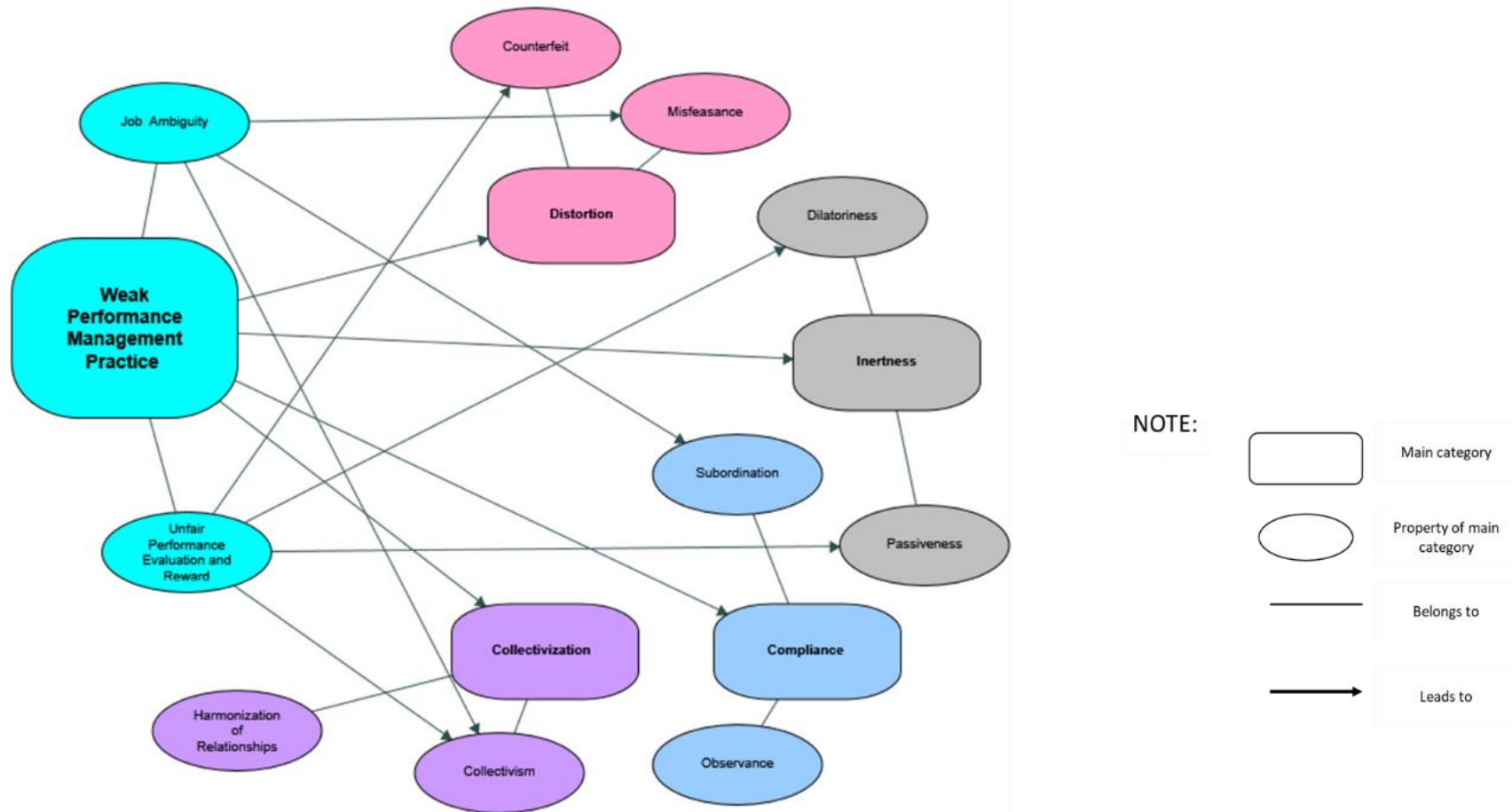
Figure 14: The Relationships of the Main Category of Weak Performance Management Practices and Other Main Categories

"Weak performance management practices", synthesised in "job ambiguity", and "unfair performance evaluation and reward", describes the situation of performance management practice in the public administrative organizations of Vietnam. The main category of "Weak performance management practices" has the relationship with other main categories, such as "distortion", "inertness", "compliance", and "collectivization" (see the figure 14).

One of the other main manifestations of weak performance management is the ambiguity of CSs' role and position, which is also one of the major causes of the abuse of public power in the context of unclear determination of duties, responsibilities and powers. It also makes it difficult to lay the blame for mistakes. In addition, regarding the delegation of public service performance power to CSs, many interviewees expressed their concern over the ambiguity between the powers and duties of CSs. In fact, due to the failure in grasping State regulations when concretizing the functions, tasks and rights of the agency, collective or individuals, the proper, full and real powers of individuals in accordance with the collective powers, especially those of the heads, cannot be clearly defined. This results in wrong empowerment, lack of power, excess of power, overlapping of powers, centralization or decentralization of powers, or sharing of powers between the collective and individuals, between subordinate and superior levels, and between agencies of the same level in implementing the same tasks and responsibilities. For some CSs, the perception of delegated powers was improper, leading to the abuse of power for private interests. The ambiguous task assignment creates difficulty in identifying to which agency or individual such tasks belong. Actually, these general tasks fall under the umbrella of common responsibility , and ultimately no one takes responsibility. In practice, it is not at all easy to identify jobs and positions for CSs, because their roles and positions remain ambiguous. According to many interviewees, job descriptions for CSs, if possible, would be as beneficial as the expectations of law and planning. However, they did not believe that any job description would become real, effective or efficient as expected. Many CSs said that job description was currently given in a formal manner. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"The model of job description in our agency is actually perfunctory. Theoretically, it is very good, but the practical implementation is not appropriate and effective because administrative tasks are very general, unable to be expressed in the diary. (...) A great number of workshops, preliminary and summary seminars were organized but there is no result" *(Interviewee 31).*

The evaluation and remuneration of CSs is the most obvious manifestation of management not being based on results. In fact, evaluation in many cases is dominated by other factors, as analyzed in the previous chapter. Remuneration is not currently based on job description and working results, but on seniority, which reduces the motivation of CSs and makes them feel discouraged, because of being treated unfairly. Subjective factors also dominate assessment, due to unclear assessment criteria. These restrictions, along with the averageism of the policy of remuneration for CSs, have diminished the motivation of CSs. They do not want to try their best, since they are not properly evaluated and paid for their efforts. One CS commented:

"(...) In my division, reward and commendation are mainly for leaders, not for normal officers meanwhile the latter has to do more works than the former. So it makes officers depressed" *(Interviewee 54).*

6.2.3 Hierarchical Centralization
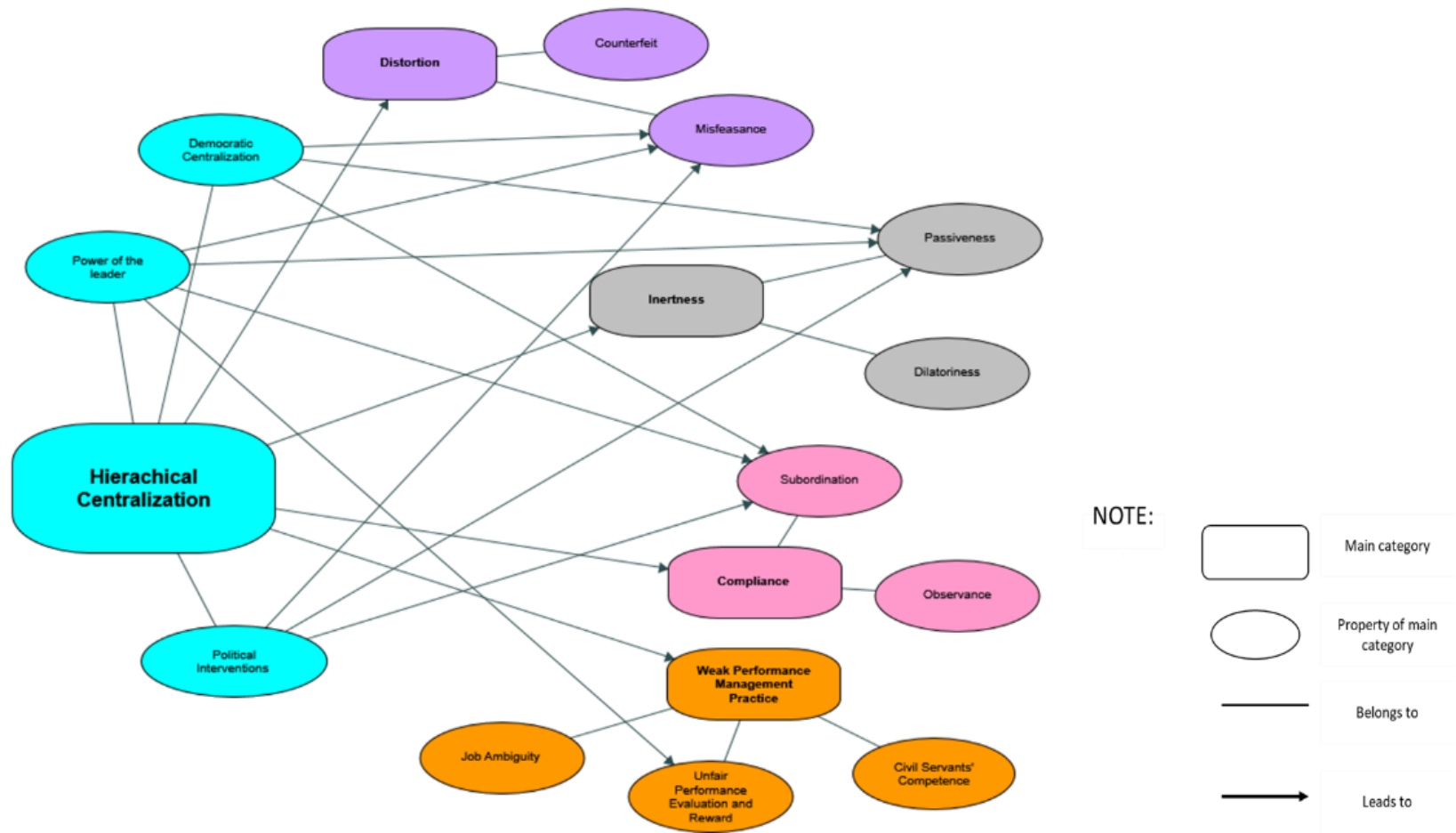
Figure 15: The Relationships of the Main Category of Hierarchical Centralization and other Main Categories

"Hierarchical centralization" is the main category which synthesizes the three related sub-categories of "Democratic centralization", "Political intervention" and "Power of the leader". This main category has the relationship with other main categories "distortion", "inertness", "compliance", and "weak performance management practice" (see the figure 15).

The centralization of power in the current research is understood both in terms of state power and political power. Centralization is a principle of Vietnamese public service, creating a large power gap between superiors and subordinates, and superior and subordinate agencies. Centralized power means that the higher the position CSs hold, the greater power and importance they get. The centralization of power, from a systemic angle, creates bureaucracy when the weak hierarchy generates a cumbersome system of work settlement, which causes administrative and paperwork pressures. Moreover, the higher and more absolute power each individual holds, the greater tendency towards corruption. Corruption of power is inevitable, and often manifests itself in the following forms: abuse of power, arbitrariness, irresponsibility and abuse of power (profiting from power). This is one of the fundamental reasons for the regulations and policies being distorted when implemented in reality.

In addition, centralization has caused CSs to be dependent on their supervisors and senior organizations, with little room for bottom-up participation. At the organizational level, the role and power of the head are centralized and great. At the systematic level, the structure of State administrative agencies is hierarchical and less decentralized to the subordinates. As a result, subordinate State administrative agencies are often dependent on superior ones in terms of budget, plan or personnel. To implement their tasks, subordinates have to ask for the guiding opinions of their superiors. One CS gave an example:

> "(...) We have to make reports on unexpected issues, specifically when the state policy changes. For example, we have to report the increase of minimum wage, which was not planned at the beginning of the year. We should observe the government regulations on calculations, records, so on." (Interviewee 5).

Furthermore, the dominance of political power is enormous, both direct and indirect, as analyzed in the previous chapter. The Communist Party's lead is comprehensive, especially in such important issues as major policies, State administrative personnel. In many cases, the Party's role makes the executive role of CSs more dependent and less active, even when some of them hold a position in Party agencies controlling the job performance of CSs. A chairman of a commune-level People's Committee said:

"(…) Theoretically, it is good if such leading and combination are positive and for general benefits. However, it is very complicated in reality. For example, when we suspend the unauthorized house construction, the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of the Party, who is the relative of that house owner, might make phone calls to request us to ignore that violation. This act is illegal. (…)" (Interviewee 6).

A district-level leading CS gave more explanations:

"(…) All the activities of the People's Committee must first be approved and commented by the district Standing Committee of the Party. The former shall take the initiative in making plans on the basis of local particularities or at the requests of the superiors, hold meetings between Chiefs of divisions and district leadership, and then submit the plans to the latter, who will give comments on the plans in monthly or extraordinary meetings" (Interviewee 3).

At the same time, in many cases, the centralization of administrative powers, as well as the power of the Party agencies makes the subordinates unable to develop a sense of initiative. The subordinates' activities are largely the execution of their superiors' orders, which is considered as a criterion for good job performance. This leads to passiveness, ineffectiveness and inefficiency among subordinate CSs and local State administrative agencies.

6.2.4 Red Tap
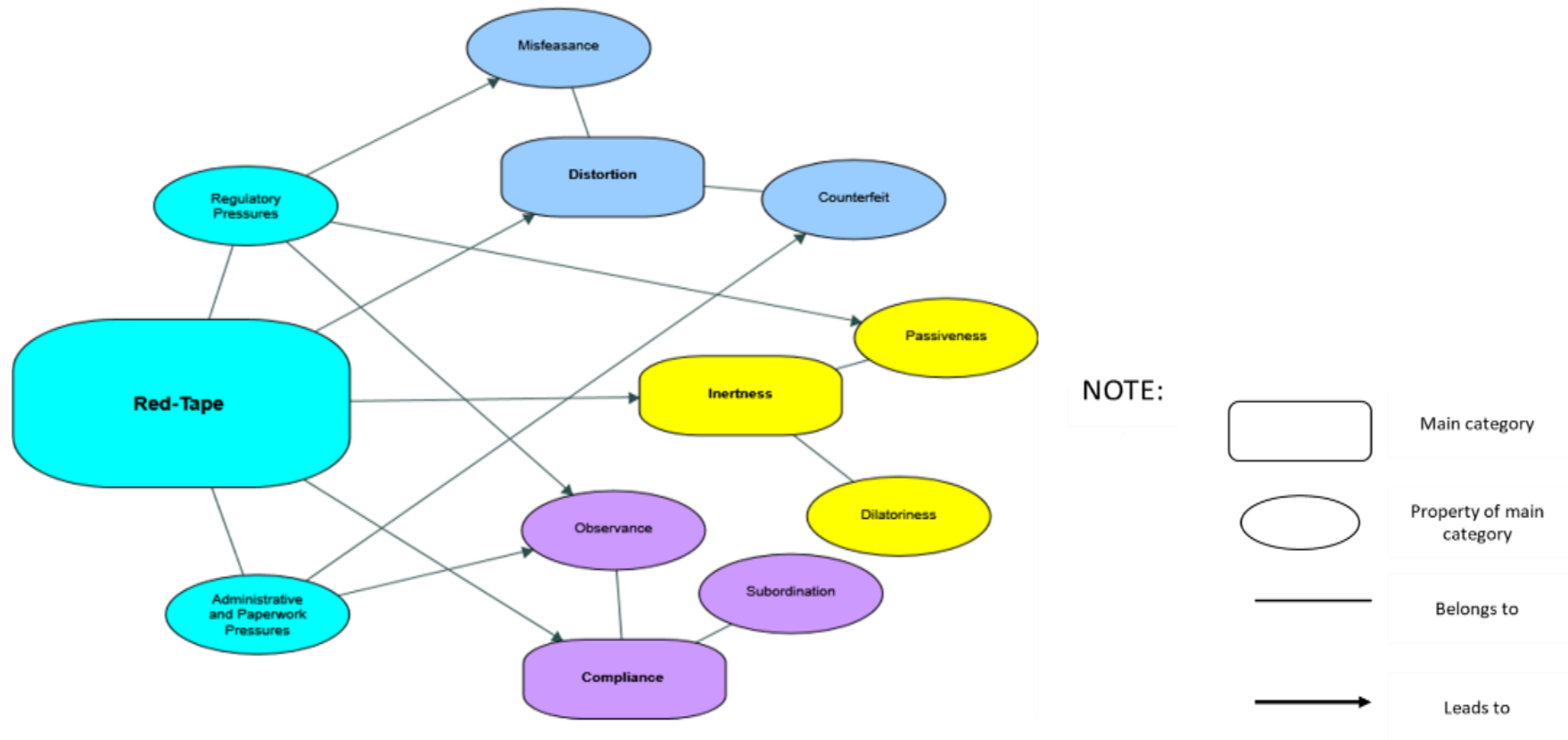
Figure 16: The Relationships of the Main Category of Red Tape and Other Main Categories

The main category of "Red tape" combines two sub-categories: "regulatory pressures" and "administrative and paperwork pressures". This main category has relationship with other main categories "distortion", "inertness", and "compliance" (see the figure 16).

The majority of CSs, including both leading, managerial and executive workers, said that one of the greatest difficulties and causes leading to tardiness in their work and reduction in motivation was the red tape, which is the phenomenon of excessive but weak regulations, rules, paperwork, permits, procedures and requirements. While compliance with laws and administrative procedures is an obligatory requirement for CSs' task performance, there are too many legal normative documents. This is because, after the promulgation of a law, many circulars and ordinances are issued to supplement such legal normative documents. Moreover, apart from the sheer number of legal documents, the quality is low, and often they even conflict with one another. This interferes with CSs' performance, for example the inconsistent understanding and application, causing arbitrary application, leads to complaints from citizens. In addition, the loopholes in law provisions can be exploited to serve improper interests.

In reality, the huge number of legal normative documents does not actually make Government provisions stricter. Conversely so, in many cases, it can make it difficult for CSs to carry out their work due to the following factors: overlapping and contradictory legal normative documents; spending much time searching and understanding laws and regulations. Moreover, people also have difficulty in understanding and grasping the regulations, even the most principled and simplest procedures, before they approach the State administrative agencies. A CS working in the judicial area said:

> "Legal documents are so numerous that I couldn't remember and systemize. For example, to settle the request of a citizen, I based on the regulations in 2013. But when the citizen asked me according to which regulations I did, I must take a lot of time to find out the regulations to show him because the archives system is not good at all. (…)" (Interviewee 4).

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The majority of CSs said that paperwork occupied a lot of their time, which is a characteristic of the traditional bureaucratic PA model. Many of them thought that there were too many reports, of which some were unnecessary (they did not even understand for what purpose they had to make reports to their superiors), some overlapping with the reports of other agencies. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> *"(…) I have to make so many reports that I can't complete timely. Even sometimes there are also reports about trade union, propaganda-instruction, public relations, and so on, that are not under my specialization. For the summary reports of ten or twenty years of implementation I didn't follow at the beginning, I must go back to the origin of these programs"* (Interviewee 21).

Another CS shared the same opinion as follows:

> *"(...) Every month I must summarize all the activities of the People's Committee for the leaders to participate in the regular joint-division meeting. In addition, there are periodic reports of three months, six months or one year, (...) and summary reports of five years of local task implementation. There are also some reports I find unimportant, I don't know for what purpose the leaders ask me to do"* (Interviewee 4).

6.2.5 Social and Cultural Context Influences
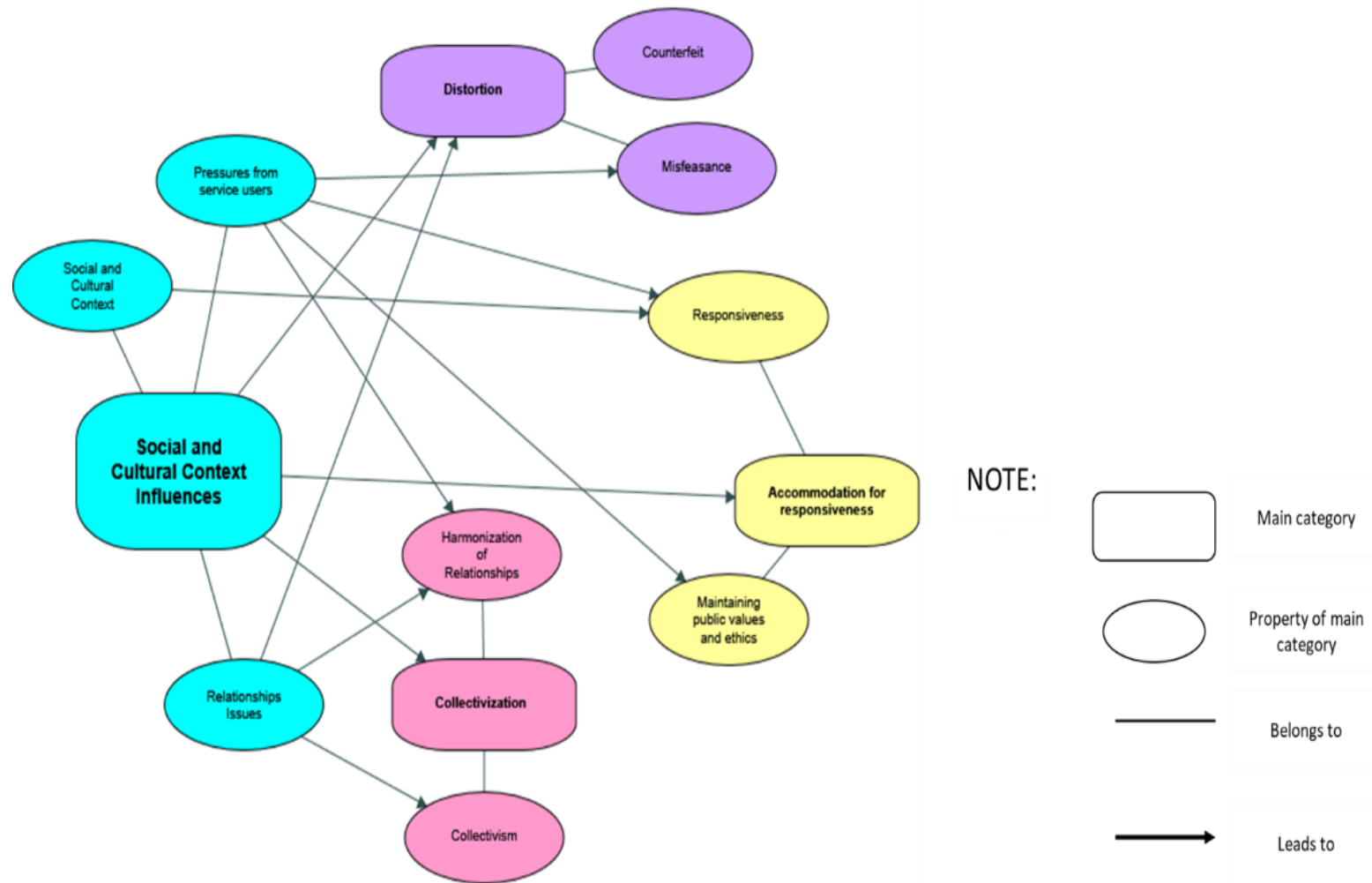
Figure 17: The Relationships of the Main Category of Social and Cultural Context Influences and Other Main Categories

"Social and cultural context", "Pressures from service users" and "Relationships issues" formed the components of this main category. This main category has the relationship with other main categories "distortion", "accommodation for responsiveness", and "collectivisation" (see the figure 17).

Most interviewees said that the surrounding social cultural environment, such as the level of economic development, infrastructure, cultural and social characteristics of each locality had a great effect on their job performance. This study conducted interviews with CSs in the three main regions of Vietnam, as well as making comparisons between CSs in urban and rural areas. The results show a great deal of social and cultural contextual influence on the thinking and actions of CSs. For example, urban public servants were more professional, and obeyed the rules and regulations more. CSs in the rural areas, on the other hand, had a greater attachment to the people, traditional customs, habits, and family relationships than the CSs in urban areas. In the process of interacting with CSs, citizens carry with them the cultural and psychological features and practices as well as the intellectual standards of each region, which had strong effects on this interaction. For instance, according to a lot of CSs working in rural and mountainous areas, the habits and customs of people are deeply rooted and are almost unchangeable. The people there usually act according to their own habits and customs rather than the law and State regulations. An interviewee commented:

> *"(…) Ethnic minorities behave, act, live and maintain relations based on their habits, customs and sentiment but not the law. If we force them to obey the law, sometimes it will be counterproductive"* (Interviewee 22).

The pressure of service users has had both positive and negative impacts. On the one hand, it makes CSs try their best to improve their capacity and quality of service to meet the ever-increasing demands of society. The people in general and administrative service users in particular are both customers and supervisors of CSs' job performance. Therefore, CSs have to ensure accommodation with reality and maintenance of public values and ethics. On the other hand, pressure of the people, in many cases, also distorts the job performance of CSs.

Relationships are one of the factors greatly impacting CSs' performance. There are relations within the organization, relations outside the organization, individual relations and work-related relations. Most CSs said that they often received requests for help to be given priority in the process of dealing with administrative procedures. A commune-level CS gave an example:

"(…) I have many common activities with citizens such as local movements, so I have many acquaintances, who know I work here and ask me for help. They are my relatives and friends, so definitely I must give priority to them by trying to speed up the procedures" (Interviewee 2).

Similarly, the following interviewee expressed the sentiments as outlined above:

"In my opinion, in the process of taking duties, it should not be too rigid but sometimes delicate, flexible and follow the principle "A soft answer turns away wrath". I will help my relatives, my friends if I can" (Interviewee 5).

6.2.6 Accommodation for Responsiveness
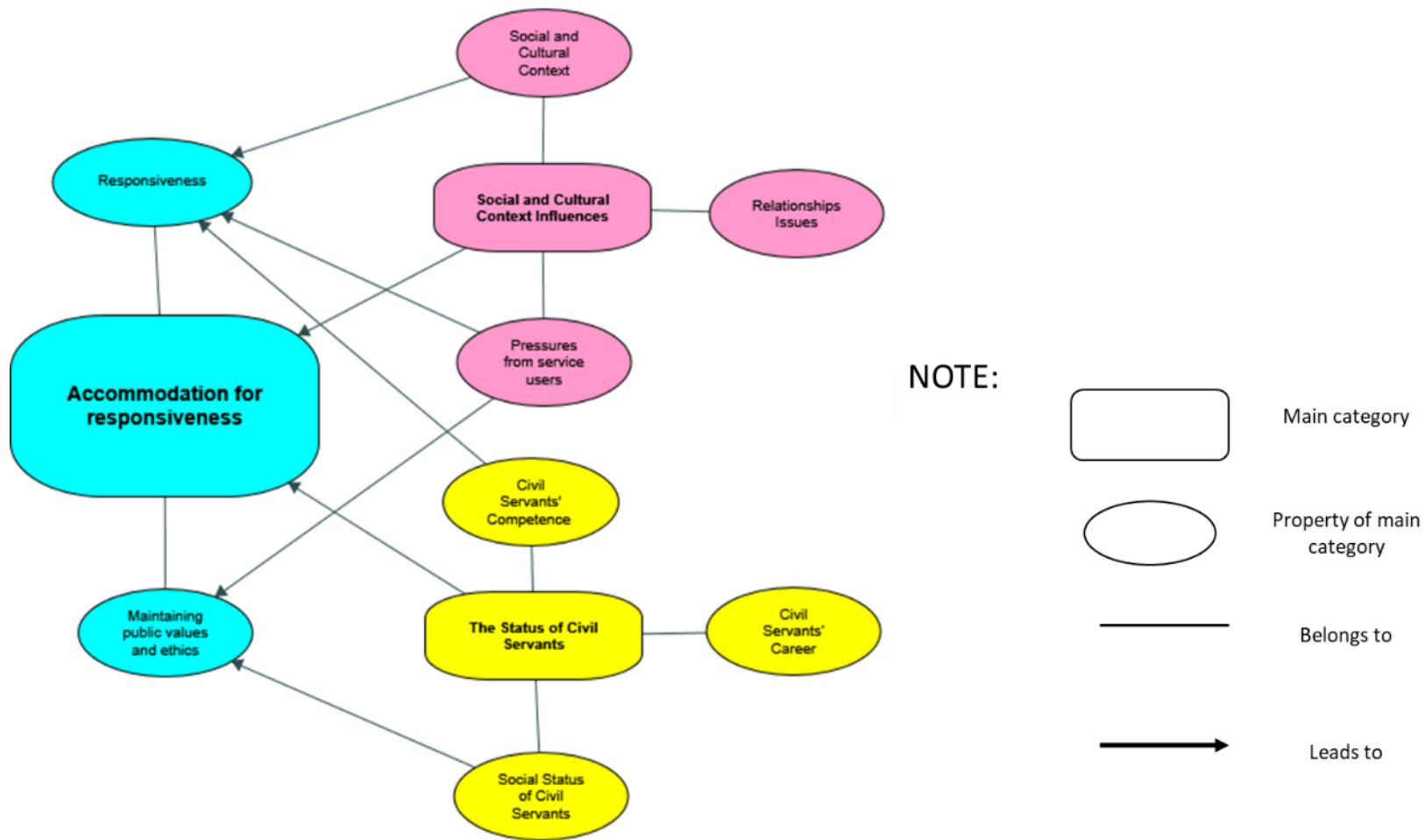
Figure 18: The Relationships of the Main Category of Accommodation for Responsiveness and Other Main Categories

This was a main category formed from two subcategories "Maintaining public values and ethics", and "Responsiveness". This main category has the relationship with other main categories "social and cultural context influence" and "the status of civil servants" (see the figure 18). The majority of CSs were aware of their mission in delivering public services for citizens in the realm of responsiveness. Responsiveness is the goal of public service activity. However, in many cases, CSs have to find ways to achieve that goal. The reason is that their activities are subject to many barriers, such as institutions, policies, conditions of facilities, social culture, organizational structure of the machine, as discussed in the previous chapter. In order to meet the needs of the people, they have to dodge the mechanisms and regulations in cases where law provisions are not appropriate to the reality. In many cases, CSs have to break the law, or violate regulations to benefit the people. However, flexible or rigid law application depends on each CS, and the balance between "reason" and "sentiment" is a difficult choice. Many CSs said that if they applied only the regulations of law, without considering the actual situation, it could not be fully in keeping with reason and sentiment. Meanwhile, the reality is always more diverse and complicated than what is provided in law or described in CSs' functions and tasks. Therefore, CSs usually have to cope with the unpredictable or unexpected, such as fire, natural calamities, or social upheavals like demonstrations, public order disturbance, traffic accidents, or changes in laws and policies. These are all reasons leading to the limitation of responsiveness.

Responsiveness is also shown in ensuring that values and public morality are guaranteed. Increasing social pressure and demands on the public service system in general and CSs in particular, raises the sense of responsibility among CSs. Most of interviewees expressed their desire to contribute more to the community, and wished to build a more responsive administrative system. Public servants interviewed in charge of directly working with citizens, insisted that they always wanted to bring the best value to the people, for the benefit and respect of the people, one of them saying:

"When working with people, we have to guide them in a very specific and understandable way, with a calm and nice attitude. The intellectual level and law understanding of people at present are higher than before thanks to

legal propaganda, mass media and the Internet. When receiving citizens, CSs

have to respect the regulations as well as the people " (Interviewee 3).

6.2.7 Collectivization
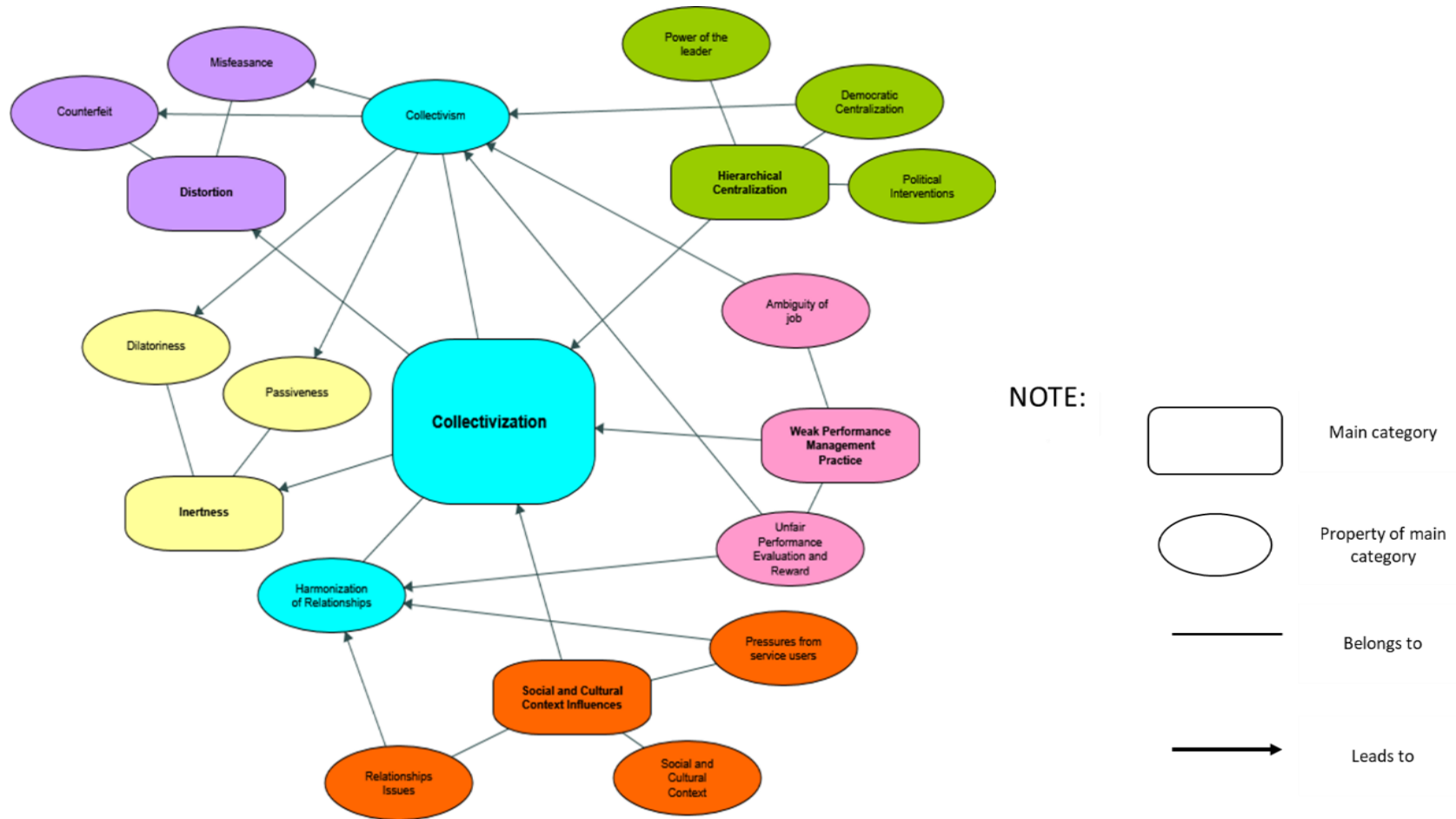
Figure 19: The Relationships of the Main Category of Collectivization and Other Main Categories

This was a main category formed from two sub-categories, which were "Harmonization of Relationships", and "Collectivism". This main category has the relationship with other main categories "hierarchical centralization", "weak performance management practice", "social and cultural context influences", "distortion", and "inertness" (see the figure 19).

In this study, collectivization is recognized as the nature of CSs' performance, which requires coordination among individuals, organizations and different levels in the State administration system. The "bureaucratic model" has a great impact on collectivization, creating a hierarchical network, in which each individual, organization and level is responsible for a part of the work. This leads to collective responsibility. Collectivization is also the reason for the interdependence of civil servants in their job performance. Regarding work progress and outcome, since each CS is just a link in the chain, they cannot control the work at other stages. For instance, the dependence of State administrative agencies in general and CSs in particular on State budget was also mentioned by a lot of interviewees. It was difficult for CSs to perform tasks without financial resources due to tardy disbursement or insufficient budget. Another example to support this point was that a number of CSs said their work progress was tardy because they were dependent on coordinating agencies. A Vice-Director of the Department of Transport said:

> "(…) Normally, it takes only one day to settle the issue. But without harmonious coordination, it may take time double or triple" (Interviewee 32).

Another CS said:

> "CSs usually blame each other when dealing with difficulties. For example, if I dare not do something, I will pass the buck to the district-level Department, the one in turns to the ministry. So it takes a lot of time for settlement" (Interviewee 52).

In addition, collectivization is a cultural characteristic of the job performance of CSs. It makes individuals mix with the collective and have a tendency to follow the crowd. In

addition, collectivization is a way for CSs to shirk their responsibility when mistakes occur by blaming the collective, or else the collective screens erring individuals. Many interviewees said that currently, a lot of violations had been occuring but had not been detected by the State. The reason is that many activities of State agencies, cadres and CSs are not well controlled, and they often cover up for one another or combine with each other to create a privileged area for their own benefits.

6.2.8 Inertness
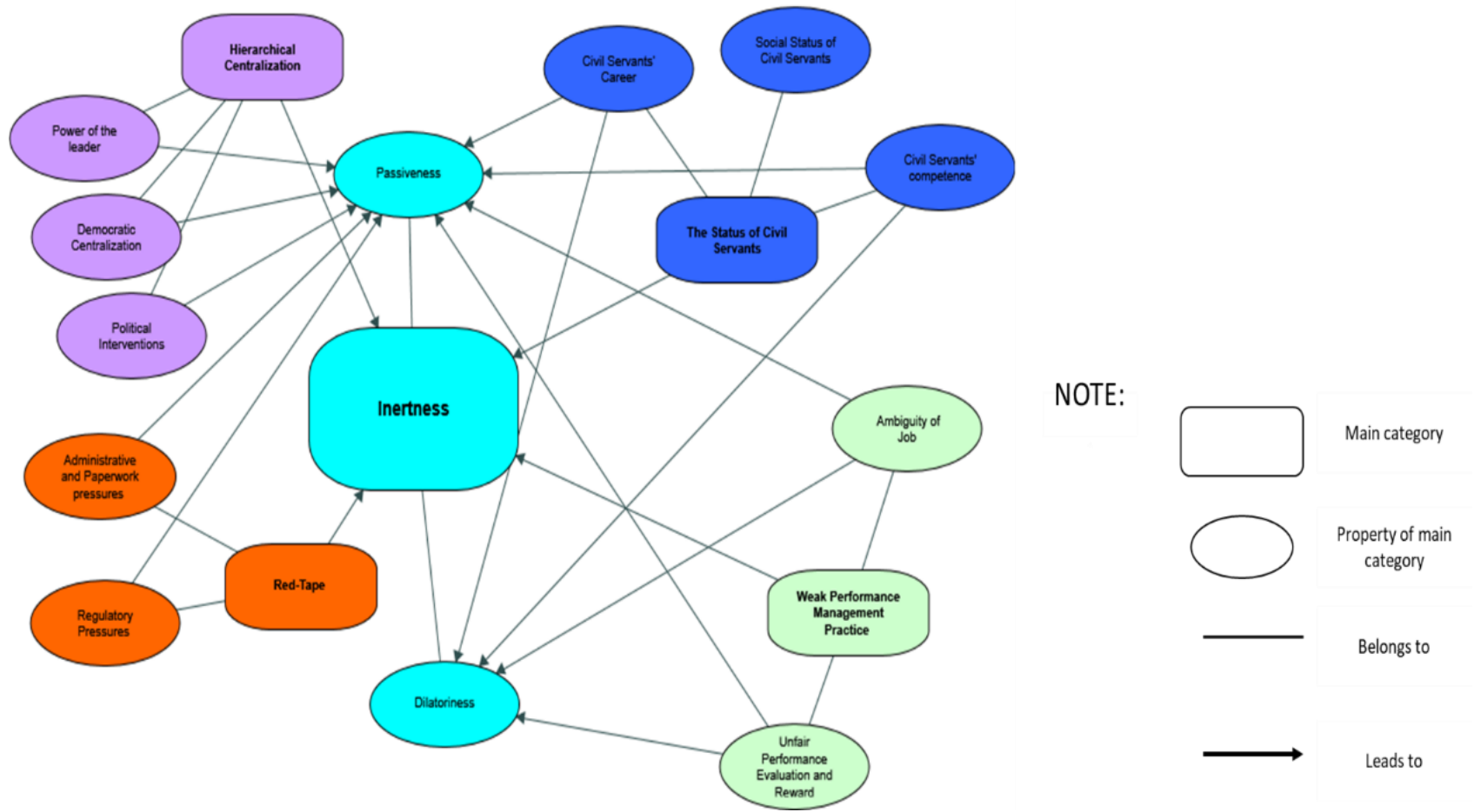
Figure 20: The Relationships of the Main Category of Inertness and Other Main Categories

Inertness, in this study, means the stagnation of CSs at work, which synthesized two subcategories, "passiveness", and "dilatoriness". This main category has the relationship with other main categories "hierarchical centralization", "the status of civil servants", "weak performance management practices", and "red tape" (see the figure 20). Through the interviews, the researcher found that the inertia of each CS in particular was multiform, and largely a symptom of stagnation in job performance, manifest is lack of enthusiasm, work for form's sake, low efficiency, and lack responsibility and creativity. In other words, they performed tasks below their true capacity. One CS commented:

> *"(…) Frequently, CSs do not pay 100% of their effort to complete their tasks, but only 50% only, or lower"* (Interviewee 50).

Some of the reasons for the inertia of CSs are summarized in the interviews, as being due to: 1) the nature of CSs (age, gender, professional qualification, character, professionalism, motivation profit); 2) the influence of performance management practices (position arrangement, planning/promotion/rotation/ dismissal, salary, allowances and benefits); 3) the constraints of the political system; 4) the bureaucratic obstacles, and 5) the dominance of family and society (marital status, economic capability, family tradition).

6.2.9 Distortion
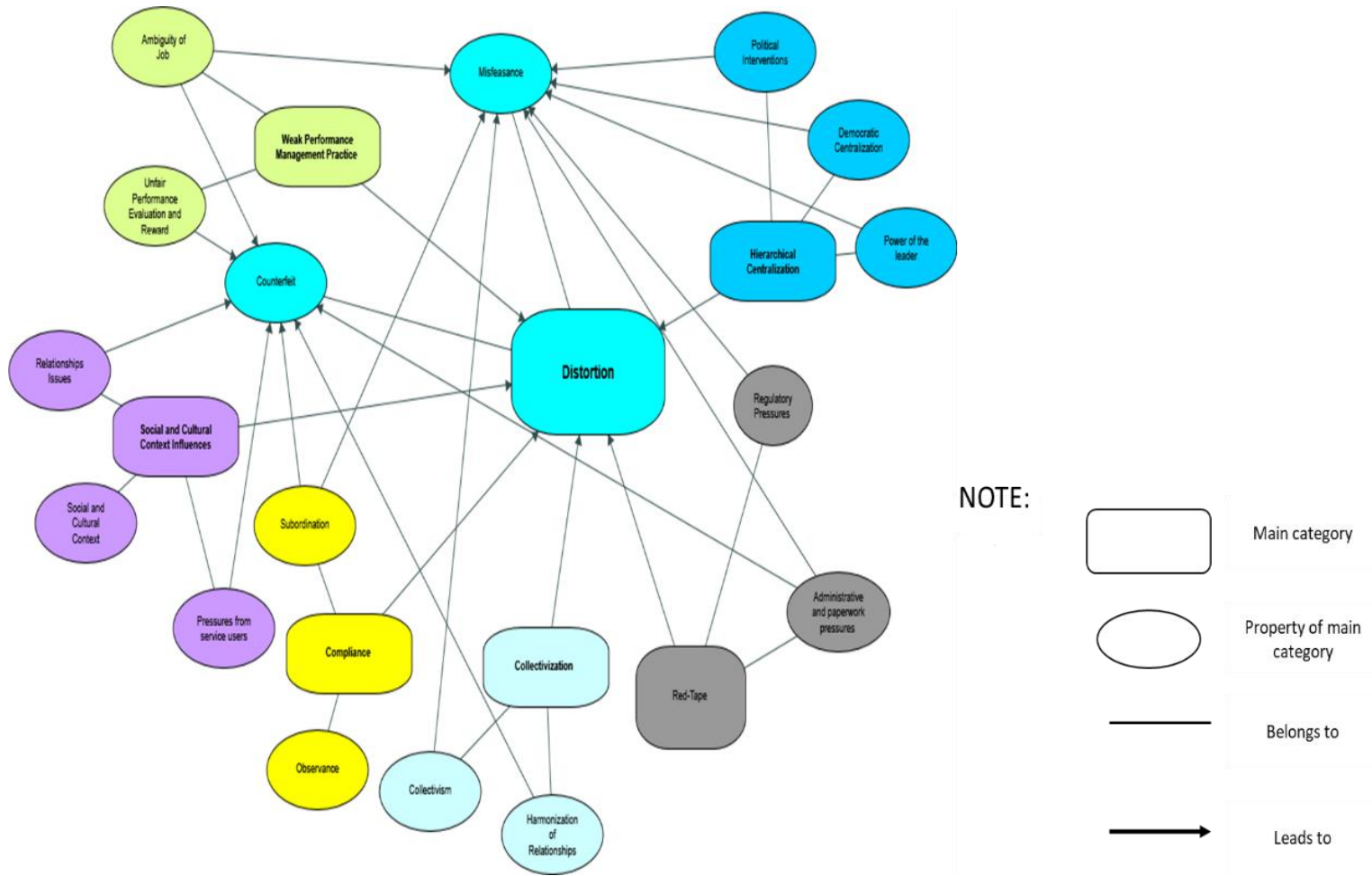
Figure 21: The Relationships of the Main Category of Distortion and Other Main Categories

Distortion, in this study, is understood as the change of principles, regulations and policies after they have been implemented in practice, and counterfeit in the performance of CSs. Distortion was a main category which synthesized two subcategories, "Misfeasance", and "Counterfeit". This main category has the relationship with other main categories, "weak performance management practices", "hierarchical centralization", "red tape", "collectivization", and "social and cultural context influences" (see the figure 21).

Regarding the distortion of principles, regulations and policies, in reality, the promulgation of policies and regulations is reasonable, but the implementation was not as good as the expectations and goals of managers and citizens and the requirements of such documents. Many CSs said that there was a wide gap between the theory and practice, which might make the results distorted. In many cases, CSs could not or did not want to comply with State regulations, and looked for loopholes or even broke the rules. There are many reasons for the distortion of performance results, such as the privilege of CSs, the culture of obedience, the weakness of the legal documentation system and the capacity of CSs. First, with regard to the abuse of power, in order to carry out their work, CSs are given certain powers, and the centralized power and ambiguity over their role can make them easy to control or corrupt. Moreover, the unconditional obedience of subordinates is a principle, and even in the culture of a public service system, provides the best condition for CSs to be corrupted by power. Meanwhile, the legal document system contains too many loopholes and inadequacies, the abuse of power and the distortion of principles and regulations to serve their individual goals becoming more and more popular and easy. The capacity of CSs, which is low and inappropriate to work requirements, and the ever-increasing expectations of society, also make many regulations become distorted, wrongly understood and implemented in practice.

According to many interviewees, the abuse of power was also for the purpose of prioritizing relationships. They took the example of the distortion of regulations in recruitment and promotion at their agencies. While a lot of respondents believed that competency and achievement were two main factors in the recruitment and promotion of personnel, more than half of the interviewees said that relationships with powerful

people, and friendship played an important role and facilitated them to be recruited and promoted. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"(...) For example, at the Department of Home Affairs, when there is a plan to appoint or promote someone, the decision thereon will be affected by many sides, not simply by the capacity and qualifications of that person" (Interviewee 38).

When respondents were asked whether they received gifts or money when they were doing work for the people, most of them displayed a sceptical attitude and avoided the question, saying that it happened in other positions, or other institutions, but that they themselves always put the rules, administrative principles and public service ethics first.

Another sensitive area mentioned by CSs when talking about the distortion of regulations was that of corruption in the bidding and procurement of goods and services by public authorities, where interaction between enterprises and the State hid many potential risks of corruption. According to many interviewees, there exists a collusion between enterprises and officials competent to carry out the bidding of package deals in the public sector.

As regards counterfeit in the public service culture, one of its manifestations was the exaggeration of accomplishments, resulting in many virtual achievements. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"… In many reports, we must raise the achievements in accordance with the superiors' expectation. For example, in the New Rural Development Program, the Government has allocated the State budget of 340 billion VND. During my term of office, I only disbursed 40 billion VND and accomplished some works. However, the superior sometimes suggested me to make report on more works (…)" (Interviewee 6).

and:

"(...) Provincial and department levels prefer monumental achievements that are actually colourful things, meanwhile the commune level is unable to realize it. "(Interviewee 38).

6.2.10 Compliance

NOTE:

▭	Main category
⬭	Property of main category
——	Belongs to
⟶	Leads to
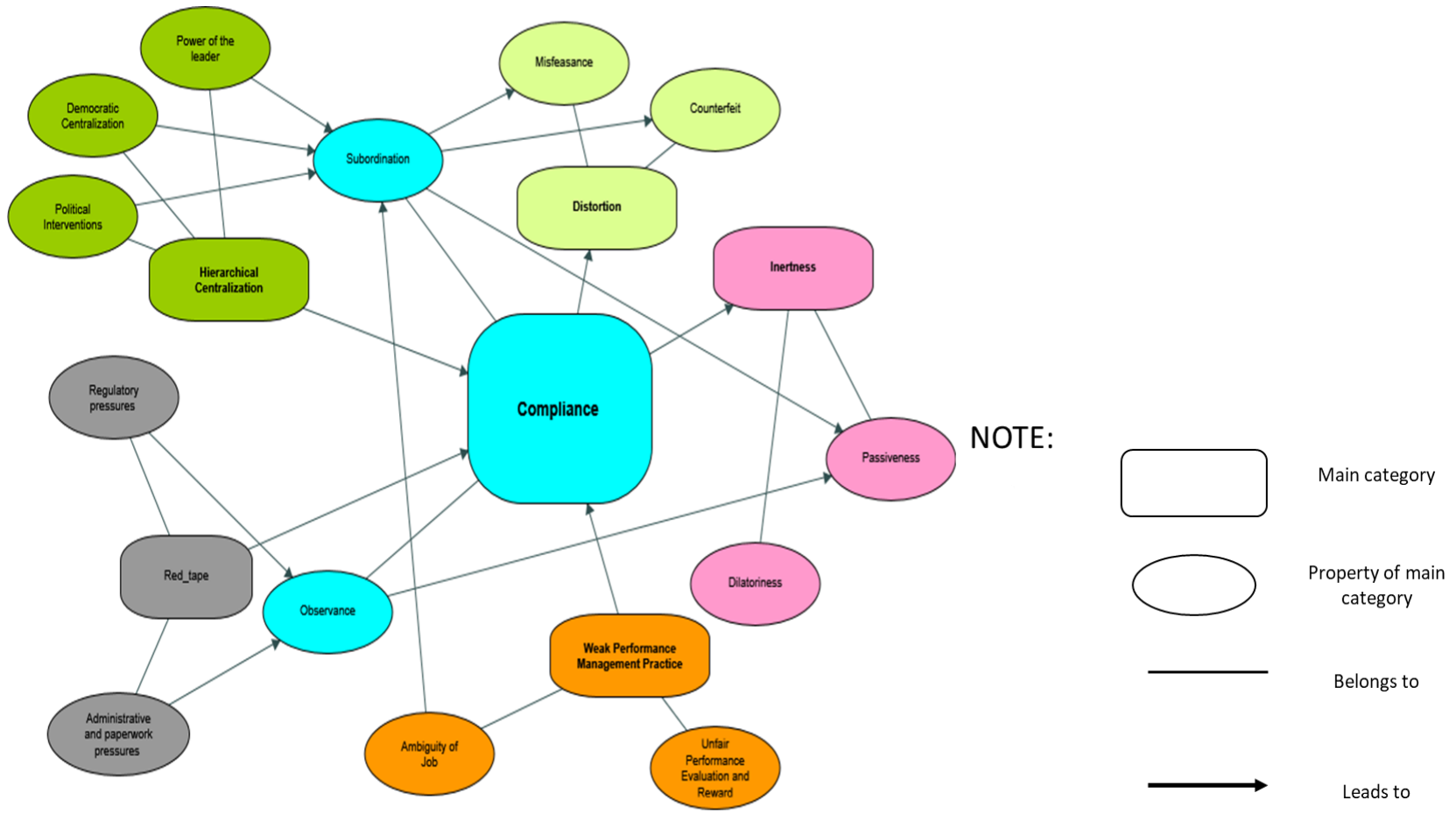
Figure 22: The Relationships of the Main Category of Compliance and Other Main Categories

This main category originally involved two subcategories, "Observance", and "Subordination". The category of "compliance" has the relationship with other main categories "distortion", "inertness", "weak performance management practices", "red tape", and "hierarchical centralization" (see the figure 22). According to most CSs, one of the main principles in administrative organizations was to comply with law and order. In most cases, it was necessary to consult with superiors. The principle of obeying leaders in State administrative agencies, and the Vietnamese culture of venerating the chief make CSs too dependent on the Head. A number of CSs said that they still complied with the guidance of managers, even when disagreeing with them on the manner of settlement. Moreover, they should avoid conflict with their managers, primarily because confrontation did not normally bring them any benefit, but only negative consequences. According to the majority of interviewees, the fact that CSs always complied with superior orders had become a norm of their working method. For the question on the application of flexibility and principle in their job performance, most CSs answered that they must strictly comply with regulations, principles, administrative processes and procedures, and only applied flexibility in special cases. One CS said:

"I think it'd better obey the regulations. But sometimes it should be flexible for the cases requested by the leaders" (Interviewee 56)

One leader added:

"It should comply with principles. Principles are essential, but flexibility is just occasional." (Interviewee 35).

are many causes leading to obedience, which is manifested by excessive dependance on the leader. First, the centralization of power puts the role and right of making decisions into the hands of the leader. Second, the capacity of CSs was low. Many CSs said that they must follow the assignment of leaders in order to avoid being blamed for mistakes. Leaders, owing to their seniority, usually had much experience of working practice and the chance to obtain access to many sources of management information, so they possessed both hard and soft powers to make their subordinates obey. Third,

the ambiguity of roles also made it difficult for CSs to work independently. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"In the process of implementing tasks, I have to rely on the leader. As a Chief Officer, all my speaking should base on the opinion of the Chairman" (Interviewee 3).

Sharing this opinion, another CS said:

"The final decision of evaluation depends on the leaders 'opinions. Therefore, the collective normally follow the decision of the leaders and try to have a good relationship with him or her" (Interviewee 35).

The relationship between leaders and functional CSs was similar to that of "General and soldiers" in the military. However, under the provisions of the Law on Cadres and CSs, junior CSs who believe that the employers are giving the wrong orders should have feedback to them, but must still execute their requirements, while at the same time reporting it at a higher level. Having limited autonomy in job performance and being extremely dependent on seniors resulted in extra pressure on junior CSs.

"(…) A certain order may not have any grounds, even the leaders don't take interest in procedures and principles, and they just only force us to reach the target they want. Therefore, I don't feel comfortable. (…)" (Interviewee 28)

and:

"Sometimes it is stressful and pressure when I want to follow my perception but the leader does not agree" (Interviewee 5).

Most CSs were aware that their task is to put laws and policies into practice. In their opinion, justice, accuracy and consistency are required; and if superiors and subordinates do not have consensus on the application of flexibility and principle, it will be extremely difficult to deal with the consequences and easily leads to law violation. A CS said:

"I mainly base on legal documents, which are extremely rigid. If I'm not sure that it has a proper legal grounds, I will ask the leader's opinion" (Interviewee 7).

6.3 Summary

This chapter has provided the discussion of the 10 main categories. Instead of giving a description of the content of each category, the chapter focused on a discussion of the relationships between categories. The core category among the 10 axial categories and the relationship between the main categories and the core category will be identified to formulate the substantive GT. This is presented in the following chapter on selective coding.

CHAPTER 7. THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF COMPROMISING PARADOXICAL ENTANGLEMENT

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses selective coding, the final analytical stage of grounded theory method, and the substantive theory emerging from this research. The chapter provides an explanation of the paradigm model, providing a detailed discussion of the emerging central phenomenon, the conditions and interactions of the central phenomenon.

7.2 Central Phenomenon/Core category - Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

Regarding the selective coding process to build substantive grounded theory in the current study, similarly conducted in the previous stages of open coding and axial coding, this stage was done simultaneously with the last two stages, and finally completed. In the process of axial coding, the main categories were created, and initial paradigm model was applied to understand the relationships and phenomena. However, during the axial coding stage, the core phenomenon was not identified. The researcher has always tried to select one main category which is able to answer the great question "What is this all about?" However, no category could really occupy the central role for all remaining categories to surround, and be strong enough to express a phenomenon which can answer "what is going on here?" The researcher decided to choose a new category to satisfy the criteria of a core category and answer the above question. In order to do so, the main categories with their properties and dimensions were laid down for systematic consideration, and analysis in terms of their properties and dimensions was conducted. The main categories and their particular properties are illustrated in the following figure.

Categories

Properties and Dimension

Sociocultural Context	Hierarchical Centralization	Red-Tape	Weak Performance Management Practice	Compliance	Collectivization	Inertness	Guaranteed Civil Servants' Status	Distortion	Struggling for Responsiveness
High Volatility	High Complexity	High Ambiguity	High Ambiguity	Low Autonomy	High Collectivism	High Passiveness	High Engagement	High Formalism	Public Values and Ethics
High Uncertainty	High Rigidity	High Formality/Standard	High Formalism	High demotivation	High Avoidance	High Stability	Low and Unequal competence	High Subjectivity	
High Complexity	High Dependence	High Rigidity	High Subjectivity	High Dependence	High Subjectivity	Low Motivation	High Social Status	High Corruption	Difficult Accommodation to reality
High Ambiguity	High Power Distance	High Pressure	Low fairness	High Passiveness	Low fairness	Low Initiative	High Safety	Low Responsibility	
High Subjectivity	High Pressure	High Dependence	High Dependence	Low Initiative	Low Responsibility	Low Productivity	High Stability	Low Transparency	
High Demand	High Process Control	High Pressure	High Collectivism	High Acceptance	Low Productivity				
High Pressure		High Process Control	Low motivation	High Rigidity					
		High Complexity	High Process Control						

Figure 23: Main Categories and their Properties and Dimensions

After comparing the main properties and their dimensions, reviewing and summarizing memos in the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher summarized 10 characteristics from the main categories and their properties, including: complexity, volatility, uncertainty, ambiguity, stability, rigidity, dependence, inertness, acceptance, and accommodation. These characteristics were grouped into two contradicted sets of situation "VUCA condition" and "Iron cage".

More specifically, the term "VUCA" is an acronym (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) originating from the US military in the 1990s, and has recently found its way into the organization lexicon. This term was borrowed as it properly expresses the nature of the above situations. Firstly, regarding complexity, which means "there are numerous and difficult-to-understand causes and mitigating factors involved in a problem"(Sullivan, 2012). It is obvious that CSs suffer from a variety of interconnected forces and factors in their executions, such as ambiguity and complexity of jobs, dealing with multiple relationships, regulations, demanding CSs, leaders, complex social context, political issues, administrative principles, hierarchical administrative structure. Secondly, volatility is a situation of high dynamics and high speed of change (Lawrence, 2013). In the current research, volatility can be seen in many aspects, such as the volatility of social context, laws and regulations, greater transparency requirements and consumer choice. Thirdly, ambiguity is a situation or an event which is unclear, the nature of cause and effect relationships remaining doubtful in ambiguous situations (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014). This situation can be clearly seen from a variety of aspects, such as ambiguity of role, collective responsibility, open and loose regulations. Finally, uncertainty is a situation of lack of predictability (Lawrence, 2013). This situation can be seen in the natural and social economic environment, as well as the dependence and lack of autonomy of CSs.

Apart from VUCA conditions, Vietnamese CSs also face stability, rigidity, dependence and inertness situation, which were expressed in the term of "iron cage". The "iron cage" is a concept introduced by Weber (1947) to describe the situation of CSs who are trapped in a bureaucratic system, in which obedience to strict rules, a clear hierarchy, and formalistic impersonality are typical characteristics (Weber, 1978). It was in this context that Vietnamese CSs were not only trapped by the surrounding working

environment, such as formalization, red tape, hierarchical centralization, but also by their own comfort zone and stable orientation.

It is important to note that these above factors are simultaneously causes, phenomena and results of the way CSs respond to phenomena. They exist and resonate together to create a central phenomenon, which is "compromising paradoxical entanglement". Obviously, this potential core category has been modified and renamed many times before taking such an official name. After being identified, the potential core category and properties were refined and verified in the third interview to reach the sufficiency level of properties, as well the as core category. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.143), theoretical saturation is "the point in category development at which no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge during analysis".

The category of "Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement" was identified as the core category, which emerged as the highest order category and presented the main idea of the research by which the phenomenon could be explained. It showed that the actions of CSs were surrounded by paradoxical entanglement, and the strategies they applied to respond to these situations enriched and complicated the paradoxical situations. In other words, they suffered from the paradoxical conditions created both by the working environment and by they themselves. Compromising paradoxical entanglement is a phenomenon in which individuals understand what is going on around them, and meets the criteria for being described as the central category.

Compromising paradoxical entanglement is the core term used in this study to describe the process used deliberately by CSs to overcome the complexity of the constant coexistence of interrelated contradictions that they are cyclically dealing with, causing tensions in their job performance. Compromising paradoxical entanglement consists of two concepts: "Compromising" and "Paradoxical Entanglement", each concept also contains its own sub-categories.

Regarding the first concept, the Collins English Dictionary (online)[18] provides the following definition of the term "compromising" as *"a situation in which people accept*

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[18] Extracted from https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/compromise, accessed on 23rd April 2019, at 10:25

something slightly different from what they really want, because of circumstances or because they are considering the wishes of other people or the expedient acceptance of standards that are lower than is desirable". The Macmillan English Dictionary[19] defines it as: *"compromise is a way of solving problems or ending an argument in which both people or group accept that they cannot have everything they want", and "compromise is a behaviour in a way that is not honest by doing things that do not agree with what you previously believed in or tried to achieve".* In this study context, this concept was built from four sub-concepts, which are acceptance, tolerance, accommodation and adaptation, and was expressed in different aspects. The first aspect of compromise is the acceptance of the working environment for the sake of stability. A number of CSs said they were not really satisfied with their job because of low salary, boring work, lack of motivation, rigid working environment, lack of creativity, and so forth. However, most of them added that they would not quit the public sector and State administrative system, but accepted such limitations in order to have a stable job. Secondly, came the tolerance of mistakes and misconduct in job performance. CSs mostly tended to ignore and cover up for their colleagues' mistakes and misconduct to save face for those people, because after all, such mistakes did not have any direct effect on them, but only on the collective. As a consequence, the results of job performance evaluation are mostly general formalities, and so gradually, errors, or even corruption in some places, come to exist as a norm in the public sector. Thirdly, was accommodation with the surrounding environment, which is based on consideration and renunciation of some individual expectations, so that CSs must renounce the observance of what they believed to be right, such as law and moral principles. In many cases, instead of rigidly applying the provisions of law, CSs must deal with each circumstance in a way that is harmonious with real situations, even if contrary to the law, to give benefit to the people. Fourthly, came adaptation with leaders. Executing actions upon the will and instigation of leaders, CSs frequently have a tendency to obey rather than to oppose. According to the CSs, in many cases, leaders make wrong decisions, which break the law provisions, but they find that observance of such decisions is the best behaviour, because the ultimate responsibility belongs to the leaders. In addition, another aspect is to avoid conflict and to ingratiate themselves with leaders. Moreover, most of the

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[19] Extracted from the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, Second Edition, 2007, p. 300.

CSs believed that leaders, with their higher capability, would make better decisions, so it was worth the compromise.

Regarding the second concept, the term, "paradoxical entanglement" consists of two components "paradoxical" and "entanglement". First, According to the Macmillan English Dictionary, "paradoxical" is defined as *"consisting of two parts that seem to mean the opposite of each other"*[20]. In the context of this study, paradox has been used as a general term to describe the tensions and contradictory conditions that CSs have to deal with constantly. Contradictions can be clearly recognized within each main category. Taking the category of job performance assignment as an example, most interviewees said that leaders and managers assigned tasks based on competency more than on position, and had a tendency to increasingly assign more tasks or important duties to good CSs. Meanwhile, CSs with limited capacity were assigned fewer tasks. This tendency at first sight seems to be reasonable. However, the consequence is that CSs with limited capacity would not encounter sufficient with challenges, so would have little opportunity to better themselves. Hence the tendency was to become increasingly irresponsible. On the contrary, good CSs would be overloaded with work, with no increase in salary, leading to a decrease in the quality of their work. Contradictions also exist among the main categories, for example, contradiction between complex conditions (high volatility, uncertainty, ambiguity) and simplification (high rigidity, stability, process control, formality/standard); contradiction between responsiveness requirements and accommodation; contradiction between public value, morality and distortion; and contradiction between stability and changeability. Because of contradiction and complexity, tensions in job performance are inevitable. These tensions have their roots in the socio-cultural context, bureaucratic system, performance management practices, dependence on seniors, the ambiguity between collective and the individual, and the high demand of service users. For example, a lot of CSs answered that finding solutions which both satisfy the relationships (normally individual relationships) but do not contradict regulations is sometimes the greatest pressure for them. In the hope of establishing, maintaining and developing relations simultaneously under the control of administrative provisions and principles, many CSs,

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[20] Extracted from the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, Second Edition, 2007, p. 1084

therefore, fall into a dilemma in terms of dealing with relationships vs. applying regulations, compliance vs. autonomy, collective vs. individual, and so forth.

Secondly, the concept of "entanglement" can be understood as follows: 1) *The action or fact of entangling or being entangled*; 2) *a complicated or compromising relationship or situation*; 3) *an extensive barrier* (Oxford Dictionary - online)[21]. The Macmillan English Dictionary defines it as: "*entanglement is the process of becoming entangled in something, or a complicated situation or relationship*"[22]. In the context of this research, entanglement means the locked and complicated situations which cause CSs to be unable to move or be moved. This situation is caused by "VUCA condition" and "Iron cage" as mentioned above.

7.3 The Substantive Grounded Theory Paradigm of the Current Research

This section discusses the second stage in selective coding to develop the substantive grounded theory paradigm emerging from this study. The relationships among the main categories were identified in the process of axial coding, but the core phenomenon has not yet been found, and therefore, a complete model has not yet been created. Following axial coding, selective coding developed a theoretical model for the whole picture and in relation to the core phenomenon. After the core phenomenon was identified, the initial paradigm model generated in axial coding process was developed, and the core category was related to other main categories. Table 32 summarises the integration of the main categories and core category into a paradigm model.

Main categories	Core category (phenomenon)	Paradigm model elements
The Status of Civil Servants		
Weak Performance Management Practices		
Hierarchical Centralization		**Conditions**
Red Tape		
Social and Cultural Context Influences		
	Compromising paradoxical entanglement	**Phenomenon**
Compliance		
Accommodation for responsiveness		
Collectivization		**Interactions**

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[21] Extracted from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/entanglement, accessed on 23rd April 2019, at 16:20
[22] Extracted from the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, Second Edition, 2007, p. 490

| Inertness | | |
| Distortion | | |

Table 31: Integration of the Main Categories into Paradigm Model

Source: Author, from Selective Coding

The substantive grounded theory was visualised by a paradigm model suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Strauss and Corbin (1998) as a diagrammatic summary in the following figure.
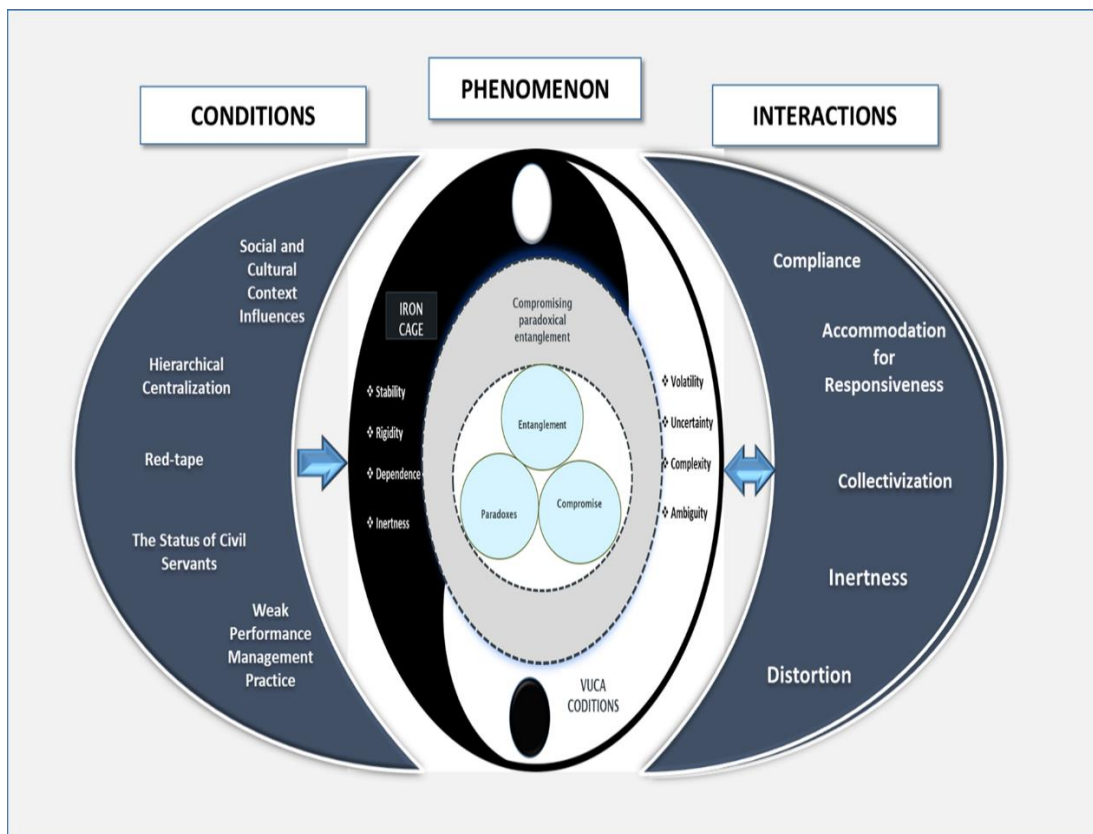
Figure 24: The Emerged Paradigm Model of Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

Source: Developed by Author

As the illustration in the above model, the paradigm contains three main parts. In the centre of the paradigm model is the core phenomenon, namely "compromising

paradoxical entanglement", which was presented in the previous section (Section 7.3). It can be seen from the paradigm that the behaviour of CSs is both a product of their surrounding environment, but at the same time, the acts and activities of their public enforcement recreates the environment. The paradigm also exposes the compromising paradoxical entanglement nature of cycles. The Yin and Yang of paradox in Taoism philosophy was borrowed to illustrate the paradigm, showing the two opposite elements of Yin (representing darkness, cold and secret) and Yang (representing brightness, the sun and heat). In the formal grounded paradigm, the conditions are generalized into two main contradictory categories, namely "Iron cage" and "VUCA conditions", reflecting the conflicting, complicated and entangled situations that CSs have to deal with in their working life. On the one side, the "Iron cage" is put in the area of Yin, as it depicts passive characteristics, such as stability, rigidity, dependence and inertia. On the other side, the "VUCA condition" is put in the area of Yang, as it illustrates active characteristics, such as volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. The findings expose the compromising paradoxical entanglement nature of cycles, which is likely to conform to Newton's third law of physics, that there is an equal and opposite reaction to every action.

The second part on the left side of the model is the conditions of the central phenomenon. Five conditions existed in this study, which caused the compromising paradoxical entanglement: social and cultural context influences, the guaranteed status of CSs, weak performance management practices, hierarchical centralization, and red-tape. In the current research, AC in CSs' job performance is a reflection of both surrounding conditions, which shape CSs' perceptions and reactions in response to those conditions. The third part on the right side of the model is the responsive reactions of the phenomenon. Five main responsive reactions were identified in this study: compliance, accommodation for responsiveness, collectivization, inertness and distortion.

The other main parts of the paradigm, conditions and interactions, are discussed in the following sub-sections.

7.3.1 Conditions of Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

7.3.1.1 The Status of Civil Servants

In the context of the study, it was shown that the relationship between CSs and public administrative service users is also paradoxical. It is rooted in the nature of the PA service, which is a specific type of service, monopolized by the state, while CSs are those performing this type of service. In that relationship, on the one hand, service users take initiative in buying services, but on the other hand, they have to solicit for such services, or depend on CSs and the State. However, CSs themselves also fell into this paradox. They play the role of public servants (passive), but at the same time also play the role of providing public administrative services (active). In addition, most CSs noticed paradoxes in their work and job position, in the stability vs. change orientation, and traditional AC vs. service-oriented AC.

Firstly, there were contradictions in the perspectives of CSs interviewed on stability and change in their career. On the one hand, this category shows stability as one of the most attractive areas of professions in the public sector, because it has created safety for CSs; on the other hand, paradoxically, it is the main cause of limitations and inertia in the job performance of CSs. In addition, nearly all interviewees answered that their salary could not guarantee their life, but also confirmed that they would not quit their job to get other work with a higher salary. Answering the question on job position and stability, the majority of CSs revealed that, from the start of working in the State agencies, they always wondered whether it was better staying to work for the public service with a stable job and low salary, or embarking on the adventure of developing their own plan to get a higher salary, but finally chose the safe working environment, instead of risking changing to another job. These CSs had gradually adapted to the paradox, which made them satisfied in some aspects, but unsatisfied in other aspects. Such safety made them happy with what they had, but afraid to change, or create new things.

Secondly, there is a contradiction between the missions of CSs in theory and in practice. Theoretically, CSs are representatives of the State in implementing public service.

Nevertheless, in practice, according to the feudal traditional culture which has long been rooted in the belief of Vietnamese people, working for the State means becoming a powerful official. The feudal conception on a ruling administration in which CSs grant favours, while citizens "beg" for public administrative services, still exists in the minds of both CSs and citizens. An interviewee said:

> *"Most of my colleagues think that working in the public service and being CSs mean becoming powerful officials, so they must gain loaves and fishes. This idea is ingrained in Vietnamese people's mind and also a part of Vietnamese culture"* (Interviewee 6).

In addition, according to many interviewees, the social status of CSs is also one of the reasons for the gap in communication between CSs and citizens. In practical PA in Vietnam, CSs are considered as representatives of public authorities, who hold the privilege of distributing public administrative services to citizens according to the "granting-begging" mechanism; meanwhile citizens, who are customers of the public administrative services, play a role weaker and more dependent on the suppliers, who are the public administrative agencies, as well as CSs. This creates an unequal relationship, contrary to other types of services in which the suppliers must make every effort to satisfy the customers. Consequently, service users have to lobby, bribe, or give gifts to CSs for better service. In addition, the distance between CSs and citizens also makes citizens, in many cases, afraid to approach the State administrative agencies to request public administrative services.

7.3.1.2 Weak Performance Management Practices

One of the main targets of the Masters Programme of PAR towards the civil service system in the period 2011–2020 is improving the quality of CSs and their job performance, and applying results-based performance management. Therefore, many strategies and plans have been carried out, for example, the Law on Cadres and CSs 2008 and Government Project for CSs training, identifying positions for CSs. The Law on Cadres and CSs 2008 stipulates the job description and CS structure, creating a basis for position-based CS management, salary payment to CSs, and implementation of

position-based policies and regimes for CSs. This facilitates result-oriented public service performance management. Simultaneously, this is also the basis to enhance each CS's responsibility and commitment in public service performance, as well as each manager's responsibility for subordinate staff in controlling and implementing the objectives of the organization. The introduction of the Law on Cadres and CSs creates a legal basis for the transfer of CS management from a career-based system to a position-based one.

Firstly, it was the paradox in CSs' competence. Although the key target of PAR in Vietnam is to improve the capacity of the CS contingent for a better service, many interviewees said that the lack of qualification of CSs has direct impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of job performance. Not many programmes have yet been completed, due to the unqualified implementers. A CS gave an example on the application of electronic communication systems as follows:

> *"The Department applies iDesk and OMS software. However, the Director is nearly incapable to use computer or iDesk, he can only send email. Therefore, the e-documents are kept at the Bureau of documents and archives. I feel it's very wasteful because the Department had to spend a billion VND for iDesk but it isn't efficient"* (Interviewee 36).

One of the reasons for the low quality of CSs is that their job is considered a simple job, and working in public service does not require a profound specialization, but only a general understanding. One interviewee said:

> *"There is a sad common belief that a well-qualified employee does not work in the public sector, which is only for those being not competitive enough to work in the private sector"* (Interviewee 50).

A provincial-level CS revealed:

> *"In reality, those who didn't take part in a specialized training still can perform tasks. Actually, CSs in State agencies are mainly in charge of State management, which essentially relates to law application and execution. So*

they have time to further improve their specialized knowledge" (Interviewee 35).

Moreover, the competence of CSs nationwide is not equal. Based on the constant comparison and cross check information among the participants, the researcher found that while CSs at central, provincial and district levels have been so far standardised in terms of qualifications, CSs' competence at commune level, especially in remote areas, is sadly inadequate. At the same time, the difference in competence between CSs can also be seen within an organization or a team, which is in contradiction with the consistent application of law provision and work settlement procedures. For example, a CS working in the Division of Home Affairs commented:

"The competence of CSs is unequal, leading to the fact that CSs cannot control their work. Some of them work well and in accordance to the provisions of law, but others don't, due to limited knowledge in laws and working skills (…)" (Interviewee 12).

Secondly, it was paradox in job assignment. Because the task of CSs is vague, it is hard to make quantitative and qualitative analysis, the application of job description into job assignment being relative only. Many CSs said that job assignment was actually unequal between CSs and between divisions under the same organization. Generally, job assignment was based more on competency than on position. Most interviewees said that leaders and managers had a tendency to increasingly assign important duties or more tasks to good CSs rather than to those with limited capacity. This tendency at first sight seems to be reasonable. However, its consequence is that CSs with limited capability will not face sufficient challenges, and so not have the opportunity to better themselves, making them become more and more irresponsible. On the contrary, good CSs will be overloaded with work, so that the quality of their work will have a tendency to decrease, due to keeping up with the volume. A CS, who was always evaluated as excellent in the accomplishment of tasks, said:

"Normally, the leaders should select those being more capable to undertake important tasks. But every coin has two sides. I have more tasks, so I'm

evaluated better but not paid more for this. In addition, more works more mistakes" (Interviewee 10).

In practice, however, the overall quality of CSs and their job performance is extremely low, and the management of public service performance for Vietnamese CSs still follows the traditional model, which only emphasizes the process of implementation, because most tasks are carried out in accordance with administrative procedures and law regulations. Many CSs said that the criterion for evaluating the quality of their job performance was to properly follow the process and administrative procedures; hence it is difficult to quantify the quality of results. Furthermore, the centralization of power also makes it difficult for results-based public service performance management to become a reality. The majority of CSs said that they were under pressures of time limit for task implementation; moreover many tasks were not in the plan, but depended on the will of the leaders and superior administrative authorities; therefore, they were subject to time pressure in many cases. In their opinion, the mastery of time and the planning of work was only relative, due to the mutual dependence between agencies, dependence on superior State agencies, and dependence on leaders' task assignment. Mostly they had to chase up unscheduled tasks and give priority to settling these tasks first instead of their regular tasks. One CS gave an example:

"Unscheduled tasks are so numerous! (...) For example, at 9:20 am in this morning, I received a request that I have to submit all the related documents for the leaders of the Ministry to have a meeting with the People's Committee of Tra Vinh Province, but the deadline for me is at 10:00 am" (Interviewee 1).

Thirdly, was lack of agreement on job assignment between those who assign and those who implement. A CS said:

" According to the regulations of organization, the Chief of Division is entitled to assign tasks, and employees must follow such assignment" (Interviewee 56).

Another CS shared a similar point:

"According to the regulations of agency, the head of division is in charge of task assignment, officers have to perform tasks" (Interviewee 54).

Fourtly, was paradox in evaluation. In practice, the evaluation on job performance is impacted by many factors, for example, the criteria of evaluation are unclear and unable to cover all the tasks of CSs; evaluation is based on feeling; evaluation is a form of levelling. Therefore, the evaluation is just a formality, which cannot classify the results of work implementation. Because of the collective mind, most CSs said that screening the errors of colleagues and following the collectivity was popular in annual evaluation. They mentioned the sentiment, the attitude of "A soft answer turns away wrath" and complaisance as a good way to avoid conflict with their colleagues. Many CSs, having low competence, bad performance and even making mistakes, are still evaluated as good performers because their evaluation results affect the collective and their leaders' achievements. Consequently, evaluation and payment cannot reflect the real work results of CSs. An interviewee revealed:

"Some people haven't done anything during the year but they still receive good evaluation at the end of year. The evaluation nearly doesn't stress on job but on person. Some people, although making repetitive mistakes in their job, are still regarded as good job performance. Or some people well completed tasks but they obtain the normal level only." (Interviewee 28).

Furthermore, the effect of evaluation is not high, because it is formalistic and just serves the purpose of summarization rather than orientation to and development of CSs. There is an absent link between job performance and evaluation and reward; therefore, many CSs said they did not have any expectation of the evaluation, because the result is rarely used for the purpose of work improvement, enhancement of work effectiveness or efficiency, promotion, and development of CSs' activities, such as training, fostering, planning, or remuneration. One interviewee said:

"Actually I don't have any expectation on evaluation since I do well for my job but not for the evaluation. The evaluation from specialized organizations doesn't also have great impact on me (...)" (Interviewee 21).

Fourthly, salary payment for CSs is paradoxical. Their tasks are complicated, but their salary is low. With the current salary level, it is hard for CSs to live in comfort and support their family. For instance, one CS said:

"After a period of time working in the state organization, I realize that the main reason for dissatisfaction and demotivation of CSs is low and unfair salary" (Interviewee 38).

It is true that all CSs working in State administrative agencies have their own tasks, but some of them do not work, and still receive a salary because their job and salary are always guaranteed by the State. As a consequence, their job performance is low, leading to the low budget for their position. Obviously, with such low remuneration, they always feel dissatisfied and are lazy in their work. However they still remain in the State administrative agencies for their safety and stability. Therefore, CSs fall into in a closed, vicious circle.

Going by the evidence presented so far, one can conclude that performance management practices in the public administrative organizations in Vietnam are still at the beginning of the innovative process, and are not a powerful tool to encourage and motivate CSs to achieve better performance. Most interviewees believed that performance management was a good reform orientation; however, they also had a sceptical attitude towards the success of this programme.

7.3.1.3 Hierarchical Centralization

Hierarchical Centralization is the main condition creating complexity, contradiction and tensions in CSs job performance. Firstly, a lot of interviewees said that it was difficult to maintain and achieve both centralization and democracy in making decisions. For example, one CS commented:

"It is difficult to achieve so-called centralized democracy in an organization. Because, after all, leaders decide everything" (Interviewee 38).

In the practice of administrative management, according to many CSs who were managers, the "monopoly" in this type of working mode should be accepted to

guarantee the personal responsibility of decision-makers, as well as the decisiveness, timeliness and consistency of management. However, when the leaders' power is too great, it is easy to fall into "centralized and arbitrary regime". At the same time, the provision of responsibility and authority is relatively loose and inadequate There are many loopholes for the repudiation of performing tasks and taking responsibility for the consequences. In Vietnam, two modes of State administrative management, working under the Head, and working according to the collectivity, exist in parallel, and the mechanisms of personal responsibility and collective responsibility correspond with these two modes, respectively. However, a lot of interviewees thought that it was often difficult to identify the mechanism of responsibility, and easy to overlap personal and collective responsibilities.

Secondly, the State machine is cumbersome and hierarchical. According to the majority of CSs, the challenges they had in the process of task implementation result from the cumbersome apparatus, overlap of functions and tasks, complex and unseasonable apparatus, plurality of intermediary levels, unreasonable staffing and hierarchy of the administrative system. That is the reason for the delay and interruption of task implementation of CSs, and explains why it is difficult to identify who will take responsibility for probable mistakes. In addition, it also causes difficulties for service users to determine which agencies are competent to deal with their requests. As a result, CSs must take a lot of time classifying such files and discussing with each other to identify the competence of settlement, as illustrated by the following example:

> *"Citizens often send a lot of petitions to many agencies. If there is an overlap of petitions, we must have a meeting in the week to determine which agency will answer citizens. In cases of consensus, we will transfer the files to specialized agency for settlement. If not, each agency resolves in its own way."* (Interviewee 10).

Thirdly, the centralization of power of leading CSs and superior agencies is too huge, causing the decision making of executive CSs to be low, making them passive and too reliant on their superiors. The overwhelming dependence of subordinate CSs on superiors and State administrative agencies is mentioned in different aspects. First,

there is dependence in terms of resources, such as finance, information sources and human resources. Actually, subordinate managing CSs need a budget to carry out their tasks and plans; they also get less information than their superiors, and sometimes lack the human resources to perform tasks smoothly. Second, in terms of timing, subordinates usually have to wait for their superiors' plans to make their own, which makes them dependent in terms of timing and schedule, as well as causing delay to work schedules, because of waiting for the approval of leaders and superiors. Simultaneously, according to many interviewees, the time limit for task implementation also made them stressed, because the work progress could be managed by themselves, but by their superiors. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> *"At the provincial level, it is now mandatory to hold a direct dialogue between citizens and the committee chairman before the decision is made. However, the chairman of the provincial People's Committee is very busy. It is difficult to arrange meetings. Therefore, the answer for citizens' complaints is almost overdue."* (Interviewee 10).

7.3.1.4 Red Tape

Legal normative documents are insufficient, constantly change and contain a lot of loopholes, or contradictions, which cause ambiguity, volatility, complexity and uncertainty in CSs' performance. Most CSs said there were too many legal normative documents and regulations, which were frequently changed, partly because of their low quality. The weaknesses relating to the quality of regulations, such as outdated regulations, legal provision inappropriate to real life, open or loose regulations and laws, complicated regulations, deficient regulatory frameworks, and overlapping or contradictory legal normative documents lead to incomprehension, misinterpretation or controversial ways of understanding the application. Besides, there are also loopholes for CSs to break the law and regulations to serve their own personal interests. CSs can apply these at their discretion, and there is no consensus on the application between agencies or localities. The rapid change of legal normative documents and policies requires CSs to constantly update. Many CSs said that the

updating of legal normative documents was an obligation of the job and took up a lot of their time. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> *"The Chief of Division and I, we have different opinions about dealing with the same problem of citizens. Not to take into account of pressure and diplomatic relations, the majority of disagreements result from inconsistent legal documents and unclear regulations. Meanwhile, the real life is multifaceted, and many issues have not been mentioned in the law yet. (...)"* (Interviewee 7).

Furthermore, the rigidity of standard, administrative procedures and formalities caused complexity, and was a reason for inertia in CSs' job performance. For example, one CS said:

> *"If there are not regulations related to the issues citizens require, I will consult the leaders, but in most of the cases, citizens have to wait until there is a regulation on that issue"* (Interviewee 2).

7.3.1.5 Social and Cultural Context Influences

In the process of interviewing CSs at different locations, from urban to rural areas, from plain to mountainous areas, in the North, Central and South of Vietnam, their stories showed that local geographic, economic, cultural and social particularities had a great impact on CSs' belief, perspective and behaviour. These circumstances create uncertainty. For example, according to a lot of CSs working in rural and mountainous areas, the habits and customs of people are deeply rooted and almost unchangeable. The people there usually act according to their own habits and customs, rather than the law and State regulations. In many cases, CSs there must behave in accordance with these habits and customs. Also, CSs usually have to cope with unpredictable occurrences such as fire, natural calamities, or social upheavals like demonstrations, public order disturbances, traffic accidents. On the other hand, many CSs working in the city talked about the impact of local socio-economic growth on the amount of work, and pressures that they had to suffer. The uncertainty of circumstances and requirements for responsiveness also caused pressure on CSs.

Another example of tension derived from demanding public service users. Typically, CSs had to have contact with many kinds of people with different awareness and psychology. In many cases, citizens acted inappropriately, were excited or disturbed the public order. A psychological characteristic of citizens reflected on by some CSs is that they have a tendency to gather together in a large group to put pressure on the authorities. CSs are often faced with this tension in their role as service delivers. The interaction between CSs and citizens is mainly related to the interests of citizens. Service users always hope that their interests will be satisfied immediately, and CSs are not allowed to get behindhand in their work. Citizens do not care about procedures and regulations, but only results. They try to force CSs to promptly settle their demands in many ways, such as taking advantage of their relationship with superiors or asking their acquaintances working in State administrative agencies for help. Nevertheless, in trying to settle citizens' demands, CSs are also constrained in many aspects, such as organizational hierarchy, statutory processes and procedures, and legal normative documents. Moreover, many works involve other agencies. CSs themselves are unable to be active in terms of progress, which may give citizens the mistaken impression that CSs are incapable, lazy or intentionally make difficulties to claim bribes.

Relationships represent another great social cultural issue that CSs have to consider in their job performance, not only executive CSs, but especially those in positions of leadership. CSs are controlled by both internal and external relationships. Internal relations include relations between colleagues, superiors and subordinates. External relations involve combinations with organizations, and individuals inside and outside the State administrative system. In many cases, it is difficult to clearly distinguish work relations from emotional relations. Particularly in a society where relations are always appreciated as intangible property, such complicated relations have an influence on CSs' performance. It can be seen that the number of relationships is in direct proportion to the position of CSs. This means that the higher position CSs hold, the more numerous the relations they have, both in the State administrative system and in society. However, in many cases, they cannot act at their discretion because of being controlled by surrounding relations. In the hope of establishing, maintaining and developing

relations simultaneously under the control of administrative provisions and principles, many CSs, therefore, fall into a dilemma, as the following responses implied:

"At my district, illegal construction (building house in agricultural land) is widespread. For me, there is no priority to anyone. However, some cases were accepted, some were rejected. The accepted cases were confirmed by my leaders or colleagues or bequeathed by history. So I feel very unconfident to talk to the citizens because I'm not able to explain why some were rejected meanwhile others were accepted. (…)" (Interviewee 26).

7.3.2 Responsive Reactions Undertaken to Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

The strategies CSs used in their job performance depend on many factors, and each concrete situation. In general, there are five main strategies, which are shown in the figure below.
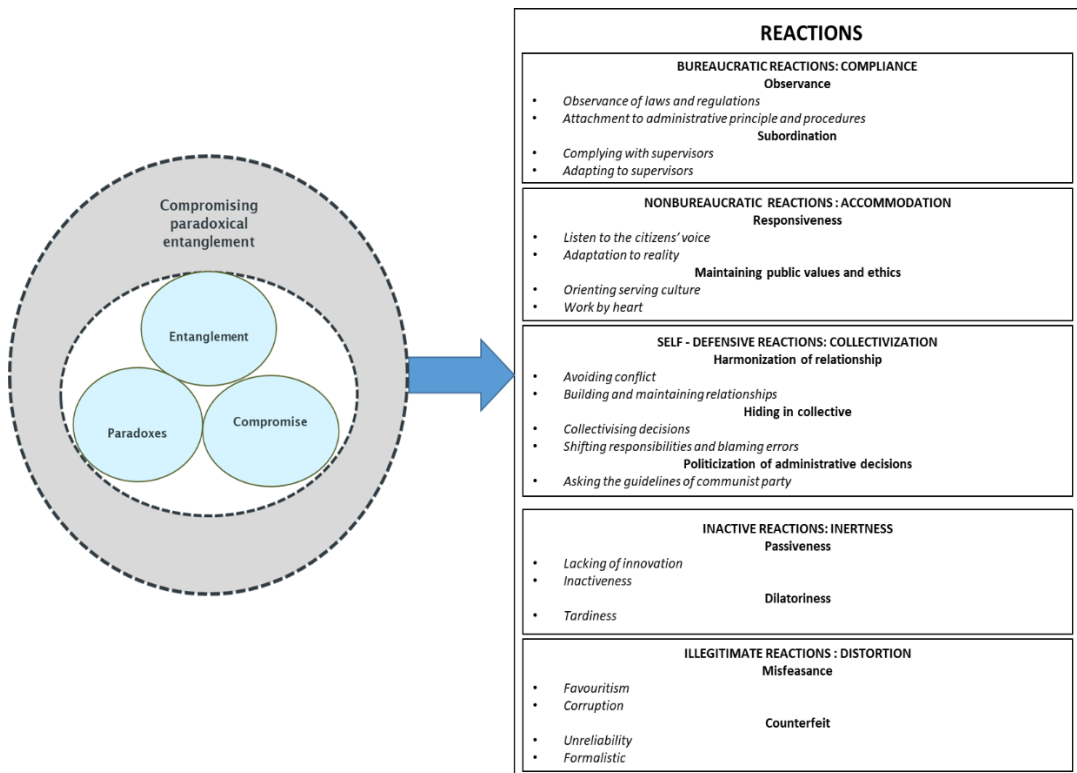
Figure 25: Responsive Reactions Undertaken to Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

Source: Developed by Author

7.3.2.1 Bureaucratic Reactions: Compliance

Compliance is a passive defensive strategy to respond to circumstances. There are two groups of responsive reactions in this category, including observance and subordination. Most CSs were inclined to observe law provisions and administrative principles. On the one hand, this helps to guarantee the consistency, fairness and accuracy of work implementation. On the other hand, it can also lead to inflexibility in the process of implementation. The strategy of compliance is concretized in the following sub-strategies.

First, most CSs said that law observance was more important than creativity. Therefore, they had a tendency to apply law regulations and administrative procedures in a correct, even rigid way. Consequently, their work implementation is extremely mechanical, takes time and even causes trouble for the people.

Second, the observance of the "compliance with orders" principle creates inequality in the State administrative relationship between leaders and staff. The former has the right to give concrete orders or enforce obligatory regulations on the latter and check the implementation thereof; meanwhile the latter has to carry out the former's regulations and orders. As a result, subordinate CSs become increasingly dependent on leaders, frequently asking their superiors' opinions when dealing with difficulties, and complying with superiors' orders unconditionally.

Third, CSs usually compromise with leaders. In reality, due to the centralization mechanism, the right to make administrative decisions belongs to leaders and managers. In many cases, for individual reasons, the promulgation of decisions is not conformable with sequence, procedure or even law provisions. However, most CSs felt they should not close their mind against leaders' unsatisfactory decisions.

In many cases, CSs said that they still complied with the guidance of managers even if they disagreed with them on the manner of settlement. Moreover, it was necessary for them to avoid conflict with their managers, primarily because confrontation did not

normally bring them any advantages, but rather tended to have negative consequences. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"(…) According to the Law on Cadres and CSs, the CSs who reckon that the employers give wrong orders should have feedback to them but still execute their requirements, at the same time report it to the higher level. Actually, it is too hard to make report simultaneously maintain the relationship. So we can neither oppose nor obey them" (Interviewee 29).

According to the majority of interviewees, law observance was the first priority and active principle. Paradoxically, there was no consistency between the direction of leaders and the provisions of law, which puts them in a difficult situation and creates tension. Most of them fell into conflict between the desire to abide by the law and compliance with their managers or leaders. One CS said:

"I think it's better to respect the regulation. But sometimes I must be flexible due to the direction of leaders. For example, in the case where the recruited person has no equivalent qualification, the leader told me that such person is the relative of the commune-level Vice Chairman who is his close friend. As an officer, I must obey his opinion." (Interviewee 54).

Fourth, according to most interviewees, they must adapt themselves to their leaders. Because each leader has his/her own working style, the implementation of CSs should change appropriately. Another CS said:

"For new leaders, we must try our best to adapt to their leading style and characteristics. In the past, I used to argue with the leader but I soon realised that its consequences brought terrible outcomes, so now I just follow orders" (Interviewee 10).

According to the majority of interviewees, the fact that CSs always comply with superior orders becomes a norm of their working method. When starting to work, CSs are often surprised at this norm, and then they feel stressful and less motivated in their work. However, most of them said that, after many years of experience, they had

become hardened and accustomed to it, and consider the execution as natural. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> *"As an employee, I must obey the leaders. I also feel sad if the leaders don't care about my opinion. But little by little, I get used to it"* (Interviewee 56).

and:

> *"At the beginning of working in the organization, I felt afraid when making a proposal, I didn't know whether what I did is appropriate to his idea or not. After a long time, I finally understand the idea of the leader as well as the working style of the division, and then the gap is also narrowed"* (Interviewee 46).

In addition, the honour afforded to leaders was popular. Most CSs thought that leaders have more capacity, more achievements and more responsibility than them. Therefore, in the year-end evaluation, leading CSs are usually at the top.

7.3.2.2 Non-bureaucratic Reactions: Accommodation

The strategies CSs used to undertake compromising paradoxical entanglement was mostly passive and less creative. However, Many CSs had more active, responsible and flexible perspectives and behaviour towards the difficulties and tensions in their job, enabling their performance to run more smoothly, being more efficient and responsive.

Firstly, thanks to effect of administrative reforms in Vietnam, many CSs were well aware of the service-oriented culture of the civil service, unlike the former traditional administration of governance. Many CSs said that they chose to work in the public sector primarily to contribute to society and serve the people. In job performance, they always emphasized service, responsibility and responsiveness in the process of performing their duties, that made them motivated to work, and to avoid violating the rules, regulations and codes of conduct in the public sector. A CS said:

> *"(…) Working with citizens, I always spend all dedication, responsibility, sentiment and understanding to give advice to them"* (Interviewee 9).

In addition, in the social context of Vietnam, CSs often emphasized the rationality and legality of their administrative decisions. But they also revealed that between the aspirations, perceptions and practices there was often a wide, even contradictory gap, causing many of the goals and slogans of the service-oriented culture to be impossible in practice.

Secondly, many CSs talked about their own and their agency's initiative in serving their service users, instead of passively waiting for people to come and work with them. At the same time, CSs and public administrations have also been applying many channels and forms to enable people to get more involved in public affairs. The voice of the people is more more likely to be listened to, helping public administration to generate and develop better action programmes and service delivery.

Thirdly is the adaptation to reality and being flexible. In resolving the difficulties and barriers in public affairs, many CSs said that, in many cases, they should be more flexible. However, the flexibility of functional executives is often too low. In order to be flexible, they often have to wait and ask for the leader's opinion. Turning to managerial executives, most of their ideas also suggest that, in order for a job to be smooth, they should not be too rigid in making decisions. However, they needed to consult the collective or party committee over complex issues. For example, a Chairman of a commune-level People's Committee talked about flexible solutions to cope with financial constraint:

> "For example, the annual budget for social-cultural activities is around 80 million dong. In every year, there are a lot of movement activities, spending a huge amount of money. Meanwhile, the budget can supply 1/3 of these activities only. I must invite donations from local people and enterprises to get more budgets for the remaining activities. This is not conformable to the law provisions, but if not doing so, there is no other way to organize such activities" (Interviewee 6).

Fourthly, dodging or modifying regulations/laws to respond to real situations when State regulations and laws are not appropriate to practice shows a gap between the

need for management and the reality of life. Many CSs talked about the requirement for flexibility in their execution. For instance, one CS shared a particular concern.

> *"How can I convince a girl to wait until 18 years old to get married when her friends have been got married since 13 years old? (…) If trying to look at human rights, the laws and regulations should open a way for ethnic minorities. Not encouraging ethnic minorities to marry soon, but it should not punish them because the law violation is just for the pursuit of happiness"* (Interviewee 14).

Fifth is the maintaining of public values and ethics. Many interviewees conceded that the fact "People need but authorities do not hurry" may occur in certain locations, concerning certain CSs. CSs hold public powers, and some of them are awake to the values of PA services toward people; therefore, they try to make "legal" and "illegal" delays. However, most CSs thought this occurred mainly in urban areas, where PA services, such as granting licenses and certificates, land use rights and house ownership certificates, are extremely meaningful for citizens. Meanwhile, in rural areas, especially in remote ones, the people are not even interested in such kinds of administrative services, and CSs have to come to their house to execute these procedures. For example, a CS in a mountainous area said:

> *"(…), in order to carry out citizens' procedures at the same time to meet local demands, CSs should be flexible and do from their heart. Citizens don't even have their own sandals, let alone something precious to give us"* (Interviewee 24).

7.3.2.3 Self- Defensive Reactions: Collectivization

CSs were aware of their role of being representatives of the State in working with the people. Their job performance has a great effect on people and society. Indeed, in cases of making mistakes in the process of implementation, the consequences would be so serious that CSs themselves could not take individual responsibility. Therefore, a group of defensive strategies, namely collectivization, is used by CSs to protect themselves and help them to avoid trouble at work. These strategies include several

sub-strategies: harmonisation of relationships, hiding in the collective and politicization of administrative decisions.

Firstly, in the area of building, maintaining, harmonizing relationships and avoiding conflict, as most CSs explained, civil service activities are complicated, so they need to maintain relationships with members of their organization and relevant agencies to facilitate their work implementation. The majority of CSs tried to avoid conflict and keep good relations with their colleagues, harmonize with the collective and heighten collectivism. Actually, most interviewees said that it was better to ignore weakness, mistakes or negative feedback to their colleagues in the evaluation of job performance in order to avoid displeasing them. Consequently, evaluation results did not reflect the truth, leading to the fact that weakness and shortcoming could not be settled thoroughly.

Secondly, CSs were inclined to take cover in collective by collectivizing administrative decisions, responsibilities and mistakes. As many interviewees revealed, their job relates to the legitimate rights and interests of public service users, which CSs are there to satisfy on behalf of the State. Most interviewees were aware of the importance of their work, the impact on service users, and the consequences of poor performance. An interviewee said:

> *"If we make a mistake in performance, the consequences will be tremendous, which may result in complaints. Consequently, we have to refund money and compensate for our mistake"* (Interviewee 52).

Therefore, CSs tended to avoid their responsibilities by collectivization. Moreover, it is difficult to distinguish collective and individual responsibilities in administrative decisions. For example, according to the provisions of law, the heads of State administrative agencies have individual responsibility for their administrative decisions, but in many cases, they rely on the collective to make such decisions, leading to slow progress of work and difficulty in attributing blame to personal responsibility. In addition, a number of CSs tried to avoid tasks and responsibilities by passing the buck to the collective, which often makes results ineffective, because no one is responsible

for these tasks. However, most CSs thought that the provision thereof was relatively loose. There are many loopholes for the repudiation of performing tasks and taking responsibility for consequences. In Vietnam, two modes of State administrative management, working under the Head and according to the collectivity, exist in parallel, corresponding with the mechanism of personal responsibility, and the mechanism of collective responsibility, respectively. However, a lot of interviewees thought that it was often difficult to identify the mechanism of responsibility, and it easy to overlap personal and collective responsibilities. In many cases, leaders avoid personal responsibility, or do not dare to make decisions by themselves, and decide according to the opinion of the collectivity. A number of CSs said that before making decisions within their competencies, many agencies found a "Council" to collect suggestions and proposals. Rarely did the decisions of the Head differ from the opinions of "Council" for the purpose of avoiding responsibility. Not only does this impact the progress of jobs, but also hardly makes individuals responsible for the consequences. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

> *"(…) For many times, I receive the leader's decision only near the date of conferences because he must ask for the collectivity's opinion. I think the leader should resolve if the cases are under his competencies. But in fact, he still works according to the collectivity"* (Interviewee 46).

Thirdly, administrative decisions are politicized. In reality, to implement their role of orientation, leading and management as prescribed in the Constitution and other legal normative documents, Party agencies also control their power by personnel arrangement. For example, the Chairman of commune-level, district-level and provincial-level People's Committees usually holds the post of Deputy-Secretary of the Communist Party Committee or equivalent level; the Director of Department, the post of Secretary of the Department Party Committee. As a result, the Heads of State administrative agencies are usually supervised and affected by the Party. A Chairman of a commune-level People's Committee revealed:

"First, the Party is the supreme leader. Second, on the side of the Party, I hold the post of Deputy-Secretary only, (…) I must comply with it" (Interviewee 33).

In addition, the observance of superiors' orders is also a way for CSs to alleviate their responsibility for mistakes. A CS said:

"We must determine that the Party directs the general. For the issues involving different opinions, we should respect all of them. (....) If we reach an appropriate agreement, the settlement will be easier " (Interviewee 35).

Regarding complicated duties, in order to avoid responsibility, CSs even worked in consultation with the Communist Party Committee of the organization. According to many of them, the Communist Party's leading opinion will guarantee the acceptability and consistency of administrative decisions, which is also a reason for CSs' avoidance of responsibility in their performance of tasks. An interviewee said:

"I will ask for the opinion of the Communist Party committee of the organization if the report is difficult or the leaders of the People's Committee don't agree. (…) In cases of something wrong, with the opinion of Communist Party Committee, neither I nor the leaders will be to blame for the consequence" (Interviewee 24).

7.3.2.4 Inactive Reactions: Inertness

Inertia derives from many causes, including conditional causes, such as social and cultural context, guaranteed status, bureaucratic obstacles, weak performance management practices, and the strategies that CSs adopt in response to the phenomenon.

Firstly, it is the passivity in CSs' perspective and behaviour. Most CSs said they preferred a more active working environment, while at the same time being passive and afraid or even suspicious of change. For example, many CSs also had doubts about the feasibility of the PARs, Government's Project for identifying positions as quotations:

"It will be easy if we have a job description. However, it is a great challenge to make a job description for CSs" (Interviewee 8).

and:

"I don't believe on the feasibility of the Government's Project for identifying job positions. It is so complicated, just on the paper, and difficult to become reality" (Interviewee 12).

Secondly, inertia is passivity in behaviour and work manner. The obedience of subordinates results in heightening compliance, rather than promoting creativity in the process of task implementation. The compliance with superiors' orders is regarded as a crucial criterion to evaluate CSs' job performance. As a result, most of their activities are controlled by the law and the will of their leaders. This creates a level of consistency, but also restricts the renovation of public service. It is partly illustrated in the following quote:

"In the first year, I felt very inert and shocked because I had too many works meanwhile the others did not do anything. But now I accepted such situation. I don't care about them anymore" (Interviewee 50).

A Chairman of a commune-level People's Committee said:

"Employees will be passive without the arrangement of leaders. For example, if citizens don't come, they hang out or do their own work. In these cases, citizens will obviously find that CSs don't have anything to do" (Interviewee 6).

Thirdly, it represents low productivity. In the process of interviewing leading and managing CSs on the work efficiency of their subordinates, as well as asking CSs about the efficiency and working style of others in their agency, a lot of interviewees said the work efficiency of CSs was generally low. For example, many CSs mentioned the phenomeon of cutting down on working time by getting to the office late, coming back home early, playing games or cards, drinking alcohol, making personal phone calls, chatting during working hours. This affects the efficiency of the general operation of

state agencies, affecting the style, prestige and image of public officials and employees, reducing efficiency and quality in handling work, and causing difficulties for citizens and enterprises in need of contact. The main causes of these shortcomings are that the heads of agencies, organizations and units of the State have not paid much attention to the management of working time, or observance of legal provisions on the use of time. One CS commented:

> *"I think CSs work inefficiently. For example, in the field of land management, where citizens often have requests of settlement, they have to travel many times, even be obsequious to CSs"* (Interviewee 40).

Many of them had a sluggish attitude towards task implementation. They considered State administrative agencies as a secure working place (because it is difficult to dismiss them) and made little contribution to the work or the agency. A leader revealed:

> *"Many CSs are not dedicated to work while there are so many tasks, they only wait for the date of receiving salary"* (Interviewee 33).

7.3.2.5 Illegitimate Reactions: Distortion

This category explains why policies, laws, regulations and principles cannot become effective and efficient in practice. Centralized power leads to abuse of power. The higher position CSs hold, the more power and public resources they get, specifically the right to make decisions and have access to information about such resources. In particular, CSs working in areas that are likely to lead to conflicts of interest, such as the provision of public services, recruitment and appointment, tendering, licensing and approval of projects, inspections and audits investigation, handling of violations, granting of land use right certificates, land acquisition and allocation, compensation and resettlement. In the process of carrying out the tasks and powers assigned to them, CSs face the fact that, in many cases, their personal interests may conflict with their obligations, tasks and powers assigned by the State. At this time, CSs have to make difficult choices between their own personal interests and interests of the agencies, the State or work. Although integrity requires public employees to always put the interests of the agency and the state above the interests of the individual, and to honestly carry

out the duties, powers and tasks assigned by the State, losing democratization, supervision mechanisms, and the unconditional compliance of subordinates easily leads to superiors' manipulation of power, which results in the distortion of regulations, laws and policies, and opportunities for corruption. In a contradiction reflected by many interviewees, the Law on Anti-Corruption has existed, but as mentioned, the rules are too general, merely formalities, and many are obsolete. When unlawfully discovered by law enforcement agencies, there are sufficient reasons for "internal handling", or "closing the door to solutions". As one CS revealed:

> *"You can read on newspapers many cases where CSs, due to low salary, have abused their powers to do negative things, even break the law for their benefit. For example, CSs in charge of land registry getting important information on land can act as estate agent"* (Interviewee 54).

The fact is that thinking that "government is bureaucratic corruption" is ingrained in the minds of the majority of people, and lubrication payment has become a normal part of transactional practice. As another CS said:

> *"Sometimes I feel sad to see that when service users come to us, they immediately think of negative issues, such as harassment, profiteering, corruption, or something like that. To tell you the truth, many CSs create difficulties to claim money from service users. Therefore, the public lose their respectability to CSs now"* (Interviewee 30).

In addition, despite their desire to observe State principles and provisions, most CSs are forced to infringe upon or distort the regulations due to personal relations or the direction of superiors. Many functional CSs said that they did not want to break the regulations, but, in many cases, under the pressures of their leader's power, they had to do so. One CS said:

> *"There are some cases we cannot take initiative but we must obey the will of superiors, even contrary to the principle"*(Interviewee 29).

And another commented:

"There is an annoyance and pressure when the leader asks me to do something that is contradicted to regulations. Actually, I do not dare report to the boss that it was wrong because that is his idea and his decision, and he must have the reasons to decide like that" (Interviewee 31).

Many interviewees revealed that they were accosted by other stakeholders, trying to merge their own private interests into the process of job performance. For instance, in order that cooperation is carried out smoothly, exchange of interests should be considered between involved parties. The socialist-oriented market economy mechanism of Vietnam still has many imprints of the economic mechanism during the subsidy period, often called the mechanism of subsidy. Therefore, all activities of the establishment (applicant) will have to wait for higher level, then even higher level approval (donor). This mechanism creates many holes in administrative procedures so that the "donor" has the excuse to "ask" to wait. Many leaders take advantage of their decision-making power to prioritise the organizations and individuals who share close relationships with them. It is partly illustrated in the following quotes:

"In the process of building a road, we had to work with many stakeholders, including the financial department who has the power of allocating budget. They suggested us to select their private company named X as contractor. In order to timely receive the budget, we had to modify our plans by changing the contractor according to their suggestion. (…) If we didn't satisfy them properly, our project might get stuck" (Interviewee 6).

and:

"As to the inspection of illegally building house, we frequently received many phone calls from some superiors to request us to deal with such illegal construction in a different way" (Interviewee 58).

Distortion also causes further paradoxes because it creates inconsistency in the way of dealing with work between CSs and State administrative agencies, resulting in complaints from service users. A CS took his own case as an example:

"(…) I always observe the regulations of legal normative documents but the others do not. So there occurs a lot of contradictions in the way of working, such as settling regimes for citizens" (Interviewee 54).

7.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the outcome of the final coding stage of GT research. The substantive GT was explained in the form of a paradigm, including the central phenomenon, the conditions creating the phenomenon, and the reactions to the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 8. THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY WITHIN THE EXTANT LITERATURE

8.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to link the substantive GT developed in the previous chapters with the extant literature. Although the main objective of this study was to develop a substantive theory of AC in CS job performance derived from data generated from the experiences of the participants, the integration of emergent substantive GT with the broad extant literature is still necessary. There were two main reasons for doing this. The first was to use some conceptualization in extant literature to reflect on and extend the interpretation of the emergent theory. The second was to justify and relate the substantive GT to the extant literature. Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) advised grounded theorists to bring the grounded findings into the general extant literature for extending, validating and refining the GT. Therefore, this chapter provides a discussion and comparison between the substantive GT and the relevant extant theoretical and empirical literature.

After the chapter introduction, the emerged core phenomenon within the extant literature is discussed in three primary domains: (1) the overview of compromising paradoxical entanglement, (2) the conditions of the phenomenon, and (3) the strategies of reactions towards the phenomenon. In this chapter, the extant literature of neo-institutional theories, the findings of other relevant substantive areas, for instance, relevant cultural studies, and public administrative science were used to support the findings of the current research.

8.2 An Overview of Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

The concept of compromising paradoxical entanglement, which was the core phenomenon emerging from this study, was defined as the behavioural efforts CSs employ to overcome the complexity of the constant coexistence of interrelated contradictions they faced on an everyday basis. Although it is a new concept, to some extent, this phenomenon has been implicitly introduced and discussed in the extant literature by scholars of institutional or public administrative areas, for instance, Lipsky (1980); (Oliver, 1991; Dewe *et al.*, 1993; Maynard-Moody *et al.*, 2003; Skinner *et al.*,

2003; Dias and Maynard-Moody, 2006; Lipsky, 2010; Loyens, 2015; Tummers *et al.*, 2015).

In order to understand how professionals deal with the paradoxical pressures from the surrounding working environment, scholars have explored this phenomenon from different perspectives. For example, the studies of Lipsky (1980) focused on street-level workers, "who interact directly with citizens in the course of their job, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work… typical street-level bureaucrats are teachers, police officers and other law enforcement personnel, social workers, judges, public lawyers and other court officials and many other public officials who grant access to government programs and provide services within them" (Lipsky, 1980, p.3). Lipsky (1980) identified dilemmas of street-level bureaucrats being trapped, and used the concept "coping" or "coping strategies" to discuss the street-level bureaucrats' reaction to the constant pressure from high workload, inadequate resources and conflicting demands. Inspired by Lipsky's work, many scholars have studied coping during public service delivery, for instance, Brodkin (1997), Dias and Maynard-Moody (2006), Kelly (1994), Oberfield (2009), Sandfort (2000), May and Wood (2003), Musil *et al.* (2004), Evans and Harris (2006); (Bischoff, 2018). These studies showed how coping strategies such as creaming, routinizing and rationing are used to achieve a manageable workload during public service delivery within the interaction between public employees and public service users (Vink *et al.*, 2015). Vink *et al.* (2015) regarded coping as a possible effect of experiencing stress during the public service delivery of public servants. Coping strategies to deal with the dilemmatic environment are defined as "the cognitive and behavioural efforts made [by frontline professionals, individually or within their social groups] to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them (during public service delivery)" (Vink *et al.*, 2015, .p116).

The findings of the current research contributed to the contemporary literature on PA by illustrating how compromising paradoxical entanglement is taking place in Vietnamese CSs' job performance. However, this study has gone beyond the literature of coping with dilemmas in public service delivery, by not viewing official's behaviour as an expression of dealing with psychological stress or limited resources, but looking at

how CSs deal with their surrounding environment more generally. The CSs' behaviours and values were considered in a broader context, not restricted to public service delivery, but in their job performance in general. Paradoxical entanglement arises when CSs face multiple, incompatible logics simultaneously. In this study, entanglement means locked, uncertain and complicated situations causing CSs to be unable to produce effective job performance. The substantive GT observed the phenomenon of compromising paradoxical entanglement, driven by not only the surrounding conditions, but also the responsive strategies of CSs themselves. The combination of these groups of causes creates the paradoxical entanglement that CSs face on an everyday basis. Subsequently, the next section explains the causes in accordance with the two main groups. The first group is concerned with the conditions, while the second relates to CSs' responsive strategies compromising paradoxical entanglement.

8.3 Conditions of Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

The findings of this study argue that paradoxical entanglement arises from the five main categories: social cultural context, hierarchical centralization, red tape, the status of CSs and weak performance management practice, which was viewed in the two contradicted key issues: "VUCA" conditions and "iron cage" in public administration context. In addition, these conditions are caused by the civil servants' responsive reactions (the details are discussed in the section 8.4). Paradoxical entanglement in the current study is a general term used to describe the condition of complexity of the coexistence of cyclical contradictions that civil servants was entangled in, causing them to be in the tensions and dilemmas in their job performance. These conditions are compared with the extant literature in the next sub-sections.

8.3.1 VUCA Conditions

The current research highlighted that Vietnamese CSs cope with a variety of challenges relating to the "VUCA" conditions (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) on a daily basis. For instance, CSs have to deal with multiple relationships, regulations, demanding service users, supervisors, complex social context, political issues, and hierarchical administrative structures. An interesting observation from the emergent

theory was the necessity for discretion in CSs' job performance, as Vietnamese CSs have been struggling to deal with deviation in their daily work. This argument is consistent with the findings of past studies by many researchers (Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody and Portillo, 2010; Hoag, 2011; Evans, 2015; Vedung, 2015). The main reasons are: 1) the ambiguity of job performance in the public sector, 2) scarcity of resources, and 43) increasing demand of service users (Lipsky, 2010; Hoag, 2011; Evans, 2015; Vedung, 2015).

Firstly, the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of life cause challenges to civil servants' job performance. According to Lipsky (1980), there is always a gap between the written rule and the job performance of public servants, which gives birth to a paradox. In similar vein, (March and Olsen, 2004) argued that actors may find the rules and situations they encounter to be ambiguous. In practice, it is rarely easy to make the right decision in rule application, and what should be done may be ambiguous. Moreover, public servants face paradoxes where, on the one hand, they must abide by the written rule, while on the other hand, the work they do requires improvisation and responsiveness to individual cases (Lipsky, 1980). They have to respond to citizens, with a limited amount of information or time to make a decision, even though the written rules do not always match the situation. The ambiguity and simplification of rules often makes political institutions appear to be bureaucratic, stupid, insensitive, dogmatic or rigid (March and Olsen, 2004).

Furthermore, there is a paradox between rules and public employees' or organizations' capabilities. In many cases, the public employees understand what to do, but are not able to do it, because prescriptive rules and capabilities are incompatible (March and Olsen, 2004). The main paradox that many public administrative scholars mentioned (Lipsky (1980); March and Olsen (2004); Lipsky (2010)) is a demand versus supply/responsiveness . Responsiveness refers to a client-centred approach that takes into account the individual needs, merits and claims of citizens applying for service (Hjörne *et al.*, 2010, 305). It is the conflict between social needs and CSs' responsiveness that is the problem. The nature of the work of CSs is to provide public services, mainly public administrative services, on behalf of the State. These types of public services are the rights and benefits of citizens and organizations. The issue is that

the needs of society and citizens are diverse, complicated, unlimited and ever-increasing, eliciting such elements as: fairness, responsiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, accountability and participation from public servants. Meanwhile, the current research found that the CSs' ability to satisfy social needs was limited by many groups of factors, such as: 1) those belonging to CSs themselves, including capacity and motivation; 2) those belonging to provided resources, including time, finance, information and human resources; 3) those belonging to organization, including coordination, leadership, hierarchy, complexity and cumbersomeness of the administrative apparatus; 4) those belonging to policy and legal systems; and 5) those belonging to environment, including change, uncertainty and complexity. "Actors are limited by the complexities of the demands upon them and by the distribution and regulation of resources, competencies, and organizing capacities; that is, by the institutionalized capability for acting appropriately" (March and Olsen, 2004, p.7). In similar vein, (Lipsky, 1980); Ellis *et al.* (1999); (Lipsky, 2010) drew attention to typical challenges faced by public employees during their daily work: overload and time limits for decision making, demanding quick responses and rapid solutions, inadequate resources, ambiguity of goals, uncertainty of methods and unpredictability of clients. Lipsky (2010) argued that the dilemmas appear since, on the one hand, the nature of public service employees requires flexibility in response to unique situations, and needs quick decision-making based on limited resources. On the other hand, they have to follow rigid policies, rules, regulations and procedures.

8.3.2 Iron Cage

While the "VUCA" conditions require a flexible responsive structure, Vietnamese CSs are trapped in "iron cage", which is characterized by rigidity, stability, inertness, and dependence of hierarchy, red tape, civil servants' status, and political interventions.

Firstly, Vietnamese CSs are trapped in a centralized hierarchical bureaucratic structure. Bureaucratic structures restricted the participation of CSs in decision-making, and it was also time-consuming because decisions had to flow down through the hierarchy from the top before they reached the people for whom the message was intended. That is also the reason why many CSs blamed for low productivity in job performance.

Moreover, hierarchical structure and centralization lead to a high degree of power distance and dependence of CSs on their supervisors. (DeHart-Davis, 2007) argued that centralization, meaning that rules and regulations are decided by a centralized leader or supervisor, is one of the main factors affecting rule deviation through personality. In other words, centralization may lead public employees to alienate from the rules, which makes them more likely to deviate from them. Moreover, strictly complying with supervisors without question leads to high power distance cultural orientation (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). In many cases, it is undesirable for a subordinate who receives conflicting commands from their supervisors (Simon, 2013), or commands that are contradicted to the legal documents (Bischoff, 2018). In summary, the acceptance of, and adherence to the principles of observance and subordination by CSs can lead to paradoxical entanglement in their responsive reactions to the working environment.

Secondly, it was in this context that Vietnamese CSs were also trapped by red tape. Adherence to laws is important, as it is a precondition of democracy, ensures effective implementation and protects people against the abuses of power (Alexander *et al.*, 2012). Rules and regulations are core components of PA theory and practice, as a safeguard against non-rational considerations, personal feelings and sympathies, and corruption (Pierre, 2003). In most cases, where rules and regulations are appropriate, abiding by the rules is important to maintain society and ensure service users' needs are achieved effectively (Henderson, 2013). However, when acting according to the logic of appropriateness, individuals will face many pressures, conflicts and dilemmas. The current study observed incidences of dilemmas when CSs were bounded by too many rules, regulations and procedures. Furthermore, in many cases, these regulations were illegitimate, illogical and ambiguous, causing conflict, confusion or tension in the process of CSs' job performance. This finding is consistent with much research, for example, Bozeman (1993); Bozeman (2000); and Tummers and Musheno (2015).

Thirdly, this research has evidenced that another barrier creating iron cage is the guaranteed status of CSs, which shapes several negative behavioural traits, such as lack of initiative, reluctance to speak up, hesitation over change, dilatoriness and indolence in CSs' working manner. In addition, a number of negative and undesirable attitudes of

CSs observed in this study are supported in the extant literature, for instance, intention to quit the civil service system (Brewer and Walker, 2010), demotivation and dissatisfaction (Moynihan and Pandey, 2007), or increasing feelings of insecurity, pessimism and mistrust (DeHart-Davis and Pandey, 2005; Brewer and Walker, 2010). However, in the context of the study, it is interesting and paradoxical to note that although a lot of CSs found tensions in their iron cage, they still planned to commit to the civil service system.

Finally, Vietnamese CSs were not only trapped by the surrounding working environment, such as formalization, red tape, hierarchical centralization, but also by their own comfort zone and stable orientation. In addition, civil servants do not only to the constraints of the bureaucratic environment, but also to political interventions. As analysed in the previous chapter, the leading role of the Vietnam Communist Party is comprehensive and covers all political, economic, cultural and social aspects, together with all legislative, executive and judicial fields, which allows more leeway in CS job performance in many cases. Administrative organizations and CSs are embedded in a complexity of institutional webs, in which multiple political principles may greatly impact on their decision-making process (Ferejohn, 1988). It is also worth noting from the current study that such political influences may be exerted via direct and indirect methods. One of the indirect methods to control the behaviour of CSs is the use of political appointment, as all position promotion in the civil service system must be approved by the Party. These effects have been largely discussed by scholars of PA and political science (Gallo and Lewis, 2011; Hollibaugh Jr *et al.*, 2014; Krause and O'Connell, 2016). The combination of both bureaucratic and political interventions causes dual constraints in CS job performance.

8.4 Strategies of Compromising Paradoxical Entanglement

This section discusses five groups of reactions outlined in the previous chapter, namely: compliance, collectivization, accommodation, inertness and distortion. These responses can be viewed as a spectrum of authorized/legitimate - unauthorized forms of reactions. The extant literature is used to compare and contrast issues under each phenomenon, with the overall objective of cross-referencing between the observations of this

research and those of the established literature. It is important to note that the logic of appropriateness and consequences from NIT are used to explain the CSs' behaviour and perspectives. However, due to the complexity of this phenomenon, and in order for it to be understood, it was necessary to use an interdisciplinary approach. The substantive theories from cultural and administrative studies were also referenced to have a deeper understanding about the phenomenon.

8.4.1 Bureaucratic Reactions: Compliance

In the context of the study, compliance is the dominant reaction of CSs in their job performance. This group of reactions show that CSs not only have the obligation of strictly following the laws, regulations and administrative procedures, but also complying with and adapting to their supervisors. This group of reactions is consistent with the logic of appropriateness, where CSs are presumed to follow rules and regulations. Also, the dominance of this type of reaction in Vietnamese CSs' job performance is consistent with hierarchy culture or the Weberian bureaucratic style of Vietnamese administrative culture. This type of AC highlights the importance of formalisation and structure, rule enforcement and the centralised power of supervisors (Weber, 1947). Obedience to strict rules, regulations, hierarchy and procedures are typical characteristics of bureaucratic organizations (Weber, 1978). "Bureaucrats are supposed to obey, and be the guardians of, constitutional principles, the law, and professional standards" (Olsen, 2006, p.3). More specifically, this kind of culture is characterized by hierarchy, in which information management and communication represent the means of gaining stability and control. Leaders are assigned with the task of encouraging rule enforcement, and CSs at all levels have the obligation to obey formal rules and procedures, and comply with supervisors as a control mechanism to ensure conformity. Claver *et al.* (1999, p.459) summarized the generic characteristics of this type of AC in the following features: 1) an authoritarian management style, and high degree of control, 2) one-way communication, usually top-down, 3) stability, initiative limitation, and order–obeying orientation, 4) repetitive and centralized decision-making, 5) reluctance towards innovation, 6) high degree of conformity, and 7) reluctance to change existing beliefs.

8.4.2 Unbureaucratic Reactions: Accommodation

The element of accommodation reaction in Vietnamese CSs' job performance is closely allied to the kind of culture that is more customer-oriented. The study found that Vietnamese CSs have been struggling to show responsiveness by listening to the voice of the people, discretion, and maintaining public values and ethics. It is also worth noting that these reactions are characteristics of a citizen-oriented culture (Claver *et al.*, 1999, p.459), which is defined by: 1) highlighting the role and value of citizens, 2) frequent contact with citizens, 3) thoroughly analysing problems that arise in public service, 4) prompt service being sought by all members and departments of public administration, and 5) the way citizens are treated is usually governed by previous rules.

The current research found that Vietnamese CSs suffered from the pressures of red tape, and that following the logic of appropriateness often created paradoxes and dilemmas. This is consistent with the findings by Maynard-Moody *et al.* (2003), which noted that in many cases, public employees have to choose which rules and procedures to apply in order to match regulations and procedures to the situation. Christensen *et al.* (2007.154) highlighted that the "tensions between control and autonomy is a persistent and fundamental dilemma in administrative reforms". Rule deviation is relatively common in the job of public employees when rules and regulations do not match with reality, or do not meet public values, personal values or ethics; therefore, public employees frequently apply their discretion to deviate from the rules (Maynard-Moody *et al.*, 2003; DeHart-Davis, 2007; Maynard-Moody and Portillo, 2010). Lipsky (1980); (Lipsky, 2010) argued that public service workers need autonomy or discretion in their job performance, because customers' situations are too complicated and unpredictable to be dealt with according to ready-made rules, procedures and policies applicable to all cases. Lipsky (2010) also suggested that public employees do not merely follow policy, but shape its results through their interpretation of rules and the resources allocated. Evans (2015) maintained that it is necessary for public employees to apply discretion in response to the unexpected, and to ensure that services are responsive to individual need. In contrast to the extant literature, where discretion is a tool for public employees to perform their job when responding to non-routine cases, and public employees are powerful actors with flexibility in how they interpret and

implement rules and regulations (Bourdieu, 2005; Lipsky, 2010; Evans, 2015), the practice observed by this study showed functional CSs to suffer from an extreme lack of discretion in their work. The power of discretion was reserved for higher positions in the organizations, and civil service system. Moreover, an interesting observation from this study is that while many Vietnamese CSs showed enthusiasm and emotional commitment in their job performance, these elements were viewed as conflicting with or threats to bureaucratic functioning, causing arbitrariness and inconsistency (Weber, 1978; Osborne, 1993; Portillo, 2012). However, a similarity can be seen in the work of past studies (Tummers and Musheno, 2015; Dubois, 2016), as many public employees used their own personal resources to help struggling clients. This reaction reflects and is evidence of the conflict between rules and values in the logic of appropriateness. Recently, along with the introduction of NPM in the public administration, aiming to increase performance and legitimacy, scholars have argued that the shift to more economic values has cause a less ethical public workforce (Hood, 1991; Maesschalck, 2004). At the same time, the NPM reforms require CSs to be more responsive to public service users' needs and demands (Vigoda, 2002). Therefore, the administrative reforms indicate how public employees might frequently have to cope with conflicting values in their work environment (Vink *et al.*, 2015).

When applying the logic of appropriateness in action, apart from obeying rules and regulations, CSs perform their job in accordance with public values, or standards of conduct that include honesty, integrity, efficiency, probity, dispassionateness, freedom from corruption and, above all, service to the public interest, as well as following the rule of law in CSs' job performance (Horton, 2006; Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007). Many scholars highlighted the significance of public values in shaping individual perceptions, giving identity to individual guiding behaviour, giving meaning to public service and maintaining society (Kluchhohn, 1951; Jørgensen and Vrangbæk, 2011). Conflicting values are popular in CSs' job performance (Vink *et al.*, 2015). Kettl (2011) argued that one of the fundamental challenges of governments in public service delivery is to balance inevitable contradictory and clashing values. Lipsky (2010) also argued that "how to treat all citizens alike in their claims on government, and how at the same time to be responsive to the individual case when appropriate" creates a

paradox in job performance. In practice, there is no single set of public values, but rather the existence of different sets of values, which may contradict each other. For example, "hierarchy" values are characterized by rule-following, due process, neutrality and loyalty to supervisors, while "market" values are oriented towards customer service, cost-effectiveness and demand (Jørgensen and Vrangbæk, 2011). It is interesting to note that both "rule-following" and "loyalty to supervisor" are primary values of the Weberian bureaucratic model, and yet there might be a conflict of values, even within the same category, for example, when CSs received illegal requests from supervisors (Krause and Meier, 2005; Bischoff, 2018). Stone (2002) similarly showed that various conflicting values exist in public service delivery. She elaborated on four equally public values: equity, efficiency, security and liberty, noting that the clashing of these values is inevitable, since various different goals may be pursued, while the condition of public resources is scarce. In addition, scholars have noted that the development of society might evoke conflicting values, for instance, in contemporary times, the involvement of citizens as 'reflexive, active agents' in the process of service delivery while simultaneously becoming more and more demanding in their role as clients. Public employees are dependent upon these reflexive actors in constituting and delivering public services, but also face conflicts when service users have ever higher levels of demand (Van der Wal *et al.*, 2006).

8.4.3 Self-defensive Reactions: Collectivization

In the current study, collectivization represents the strategy that CSs used as self-defence in order to minimize or avoid the negative aspects of paradoxical entanglement. As observed in this research, the majority of CSs have a collectivistic cultural orientation, reflected in the harmonization of relationships by several tactics such as avoiding conflict, building and maintaining relationships. It is worth noting that in a collectivist culture, as opposed to the individualistic culture, individuals strive to maintain harmony and social face, which is considered to be socially desirable behaviour (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). It has been suggested that it is difficult for the idea of peer feedback to take root in collectivistic culture, because individuals are unlikely to provide their fellow team members with genuine and honest feedback as a result of both in-group bias, and a desire to maintain group harmony

(Björkman and Lu, 1999). It was in this context that almost all managers and functional CSs declared that it was impossible for them to give negative feedback to their colleagues, and how they were motivated to save face and to tell their colleagues and managers what they wanted to hear, rather than the naked truth. Also, this research evidenced that harmonization of relationships is one of the factors leading to weak performance management practice, as analysed in the previous chapters. In addition, the importance of building and maintaining relationships in the collectivist cultural orientation observed in this study finds support in the extant literature relating the importance of the "guanxi" factor in Asian societies. Guanxi means literally "a relationship" between objects, forces, or persons. When it is used to refer to relationships between people not only can it be applied to husband-wife, kindship and friendship relations, it can also have the sense of "social connections", dyadic relationships, that are based implicitly (rather than explicitly) on mutual interest and benefit" (Yang, 1994, p.1). Wright *et al.* (2002) noted that "guanxi" exists at different levels, such as between organizations or individuals. Wright *et al.* (2002) also argued that this issue is paradoxical, as on the one hand, it encourages mutual relationships and corporation, while on the other hand, relationship-based behaviour leads to fraud, dishonesty, corruption and ethical dilemmas.

Another responsive strategy of CSs found in the current study was that of hiding in the collective and self-defending by collectivizing decisions, shifting responsibilities and blaming errors on the collective. CSs avoid disturbance by passing the problems on to other colleagues or agencies. It is also interesting to note from the current study that the politicization of administrative decisions is a tactic helping CSs to escape from paradoxical situations. As observed in this research, in many cases, when CSs need to bend or break the rules, regulations and procedures in order to response to service users' demands appropriately, they may apply the tactic of collective discretion. Rutz *et al.* (2017) argued that discretion was traditionally considered a feature of individual professional employees, but is currently applied collectively.

8.4.4 Inactive Reactions: Inertness

Another type of reaction resulting in paradoxical entanglement, noted in the substantive theory, is inertness, created from two categories: passiveness and dilatoriness. This type of reaction means that CSs allow paradoxical entanglement to happen without resisting, considering the phenomenon as a norm. This research evidenced that one of the reasons leading to inert reactions is high power distance cultural orientation. CSs tend to accept managerial decisions as unquestionable, which deters them from engaging in open dialogue and joint discussion with supervisors when agreeing goals and reviewing performance. Wilson (1989) argued that in public administration, CSs might pursue their own self-interest, and laziness is one of the main characteristics of CSs. The command and control cultural orientation in the civil service actually has the effect of making performance management useless. This type of reaction also has its roots in the guaranteed career of CSs, red tape and weak performance management (as analysed in the previous chapters). Low productivity and lack of innovation are the main characteristics of inactive reactions. It has long been acknowledging by scholars that the reality of the bureaucratic system is more complex, and that the "human factor" involved causes inefficiency and dysfunction (Merton, 1939). In addition, this type of reaction is relevant to the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance mentioned by behaviour Hofstede (2001), Hofstede and Hofstede (2005). In accordance with this type of culture, civil servants tend to be unwilling to accept changes, and reluctant to take personal innovation (Mendonca and Kanungo, 1996). Consequently, the vicious circles of inertness exist in civil servants job performance.

8.4.5 Illegitimate Reactions: Distortion

Theoretically, CSs are employed in order to represent the government in the display of public power and resources. In other words, they are the servants and guardians of legal and professional rules and constitutional order. They are expected to follow the logic of appropriateness, in which rules, regulations and public values should be followed properly and impartially with integrity, based on neutral competence. However, this research evidenced that, before CSs become CSs, they are human beings;

therefore, they are driven by self-interest as the logic of expected consequences. Maynard-Moody *et al.* (2003) noted in their research that public employees make decisions based on their beliefs and personal value system, while policy, rules and regulations are also in their calculations. Since the information on public policies, regulations and rules is, in many cases, ambiguous (Stone, 2002), public employees may make different decisions with the same information (Jones, 2001). Scholars have identified that public employees process and respond to information base on their individual characteristics, beliefs, values and experience (Jones, 2001; Wood and Vedlitz, 2007; Simon, 2013). For instance, in the same situation, public servants may either become more bureaucratic, strictly following the rules, or allow their less bureaucratic personality to come to the fore (DeHart-Davis, 2007). Consequently, this may contradict public values, for example, those of lawfulness and equality.

In addition, this research evidenced that counterfeit is a common problem in Vietnamese CSs' job performance. When CSs and administrative organization pursue logic of consequence, self-interest is highlighted, good results are rewarded while bad results are sanctioned. Therefore, the job performance outcome is exaggerated, unreliable reports are made. This issue has also been discussed in the extant literature (Christensen *et al.*, 2007). Their study referred to the problem of reporting in public organizations "there is a risk of gaming, of strategically over-reporting success and under-reporting failures in order to strengthen one's own organization"(Christensen *et al.*, 2007, p.156).

Misfeasance and counterfeit were responsive reactions observed in the current research, causing distortion. These reactions are paradoxical behaviour, which may be dysfunctional, and can threaten the social system, as rules are to be followed in order to maintain this system. They also contradict public values, or logic of appropriateness, such as trust, legitimacy, fairness, service quality and equality. For instance, rule-bending and rule-breaking, although having several advantages, as analysed in the previous section, also contain negative aspects, leading to corrupt behaviour, such as nepotism, favouritism, bribery, graft, patronage and other unfair means adopted by government employees. Olsen (2006) argued that when PA is not sufficiently bureaucratic, the public employees tend to be corrupt and unreliable, misuse their

position and power, and may become incompetent, inefficient, lazy, rigid and unresponsive, self-regarding and uncontrollable.

8.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed, compared and corroborated substantive GT with the relevant extant literature to provide a broader understanding, through the lens of NIT, of the logic of appropriateness and logic of consequences, and other findings in relevant areas such as studies of culture, public administrative. The differences and similarities of the themes emergent from this research compared with the extant literature were also discussed. The conclusions and recommendations of this research are provided in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

9.1 Introduction

This chapter marks the concluding part of the thesis. First, the chapter begins with a summary of the research and main findings. The summary is followed by a discussion of the key theoretical contributions of the research in the domains of public administration, AC studies, and especially the behaviours of CSs in the context of public administrative reforms. There is also discussion of the research's methodological contributions, focusing on the application of GT in AC study. Additionally, the chapter includes practical contributions of the current study that are likely to benefit policy makers, managers and professionals in public administrative organizations. Finally, the research limitations and several possible recommendations for future research are presented.

9.2 Summary of the Research and Findings

This study has explored AC through the perspectives of Vietnamese CSs on their everyday job performance. Therefore, the research was designed to understand the Vietnamese CSs' values, beliefs and behaviours, as well as the working environment in which their job performance is embedded. Overall, the current research has achieved its aims and objectives, which attempt to identify the nature of the key factors that influence CSs' job performance, CS's responsive reactions to these factors, and build a substantive grounded theory of CS performance in the Vietnamese administrative system.

The motivation for this study derived from the need to obtain in-depth understanding of administrative culture, which is crucial for public managers and policy makers, yet remains an incipient and promising topic (Hajnal, 2005; Hartmann and Khademian, 2010; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2011; O'Toole Jr and Meier, 2015; Wright, 2015). This topic is likely to be most important for those countries in the process of public administration reforms. Therefore, Vietnam, which is in a changing situation of public administrative reforms was considered an ideal case study for this research (Bruynooghe *et al.*, 2008; Do and Truong, 2009). The participants were recruited from a variety of administrative

organizations across various levels of administrative system from provinces across the three main regions of Vietnam. The research consisted of three phases of data collection. The first phase (pilot phase) was conducted over two months, with 10 interviews, from early June to late July 2016. The second phase consisted of 46 interviews with CSs in three main areas of Vietnam over a period of four months, from early August to late November 2016. The third phase consisted of 10 interviews (six senior CSs in the north of Vietnam, and four participants in the first and second phase of data collection), from July to mid-September 2017, and was conducted in order to supplement the perspectives of senior managers and re-check the sufficiency of the research sampling.

Following the constructivist GT was suggested by Charmaz (Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006, 2013), and coding techniques by Strauss and Corbin (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015), the data was carefully analysed in accordance with GT principles using open, axial, selective coding. The core category was identified in the final stage of data analysis, and the paradigm model suggested by (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998) was applied to explain the central phenomenon and relate all other categories to the core category in the form of conditions, phenomenon and responsive reactions. Key findings of the current study were presented in Chapters 5,6,7,8, which can be viewed as a spectrum of descriptive to theoretical forms. More specifically:

In the stage of open coding, 23 open categories emerged, describing the conditions, incidents and events regarding the actual undertaking of CSs' job performance in practice, including: CSs' Career, Social status of CSs, CSs' competence, Job Ambiguity, Unfair Performance Management, Democratic Centralization, Power of the Leader, Political Interventions, Regulatory Pressures, Administrative and Paperwork Pressures, Relationship Issues, Pressures from Service Users, Local Social and Cultural Context, Desire of Maintaining Public Values and Ethics, Responsiveness, Harmonization of Relationships, Collectivism, Passiveness, Dilatoriness, Misfeasance, Observance and Subordination.

Subsequently, abstraction of the data in the axial coding stage generated 10 main categories, including: the status of CSs, weak performance management practices,

hierarchical centralization, red tape, social and cultural context influences, accommodation for responsiveness, collectivization, inertness, distortion and compliance. At this stage, instead of providing a description of the categories, the focus was on the relationships between them. The output of the axial coding formed the basis of the substantive GT.

The study has achieved its objective of building a substantive theory of "compromising paradoxical entanglement", which emerged as the central phenomenon of this research. It describes the process used deliberately by CSs to overcome the complexity of the constant coexistence of interrelated contradictions that they were cyclically dealing with, causing tensions in their job performance. It identified the nature of the factors and how they interact to influence Vietnamese CSs' job performance in practice. More specifically, five groups of conditions leading to compromising paradoxical entanglement were identified, including: social cultural context, hierarchical centralization, red tape, status of CSs and weak performance management practice. These conditions not only influenced the CSs' behaviours, but also resulted in conflict, anxiety and entanglement. CSs responded to these challenges through the process of "compromising paradoxical entanglement". The research also described five sets of tactics employed to carry out this process, namely, compliance, accommodation, collectivization, inertness and distortion. This theory is dynamic in nature and accounts for the variations in experience, conditions and responses that participants utilised in an effort to limit the impact that the problem posed for them.

Although the main objective of this study focuses on thick explanation of the substantive GT, the emergent GT was still integrated within the extant literature in order to extend, validate and refine the substantive GT. The formulation of the substantive theory was related to the formal theories of NIT, with the specific support of logics of appropriateness and consequences. In addition, cultural studies and other relevant literature of public administrative science were used to support the finding interpretation of the current research.

9.3 Research Contributions

This research has contributed within three broad domains, which are theoretical from the emergent theory of compromising paradoxical entanglement, methodological from the adopted research strategy of constructivist GT, and practical regarding recommendations relevant to administration reforms, CS management and performance management in VCS system. These contributions are summarized below:

9.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

In the social sciences, there are many definitions of theory. A theory may be "a system of constructs and variables in which the constructs are related to each other by propositions and the variables are related to each other by hypotheses" (Bacharach, 1989, p.498). Charmaz (2006) classified definition of theory accordant with positivist and interpretive approaches. In the positivist definition, "a theory is a statement of relationships between abstract concepts that cover a wide range of empirical observations", while the interpretive definition of theory "emphasizes understanding of the studied phenomenon rather than explanation" (Charmaz, 2006, p.215-216). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss (1987), formal theory is a multi-area theory, whereas substantive theory is a one area theory. In other words, the difference between substantive and formal theories is the level of generality. While the former "evolves from the study of a phenomenon situated in one particular situational context", the latter "emerges from the study of a phenomenon examined under different types of situations"(Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.174).

The current research presents a unique analysis of investigation on the phenomenon of AC in Vietnamese CSs' job performance in the context of administration reforms, using qualitative method, specifically GT method, and generated a substantive grounded theory on compromising paradoxical entanglement. The research primarily generated a "substantial" theory, which "denotes a set of well-developed categories (themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some phenomenon" (Corbin and Strauss,

2008, p.55). In this respect, a number of theoretical contributions can thus be made to the field of PA literature and performance management in the public sector as follows:

The current research contributes significantly to the existing limited knowledge in the domain of PA studies, particularly regarding the area of the phenomenon of AC in developing countries in the context of administrative reforms (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2011; Gulrajani and Moloney, 2012; O'Toole Jr and Meier, 2015; Wright, 2015). Also, there has been a great number of research examining the cultural characteristics of public organizations within Western contexts, but a scarcity of research in this field in the public sector in a non-Western or developing country context, especially studies emanating from the United States and United Kingdom (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2011; O'Toole Jr and Meier, 2015; Wright, 2015). There has been a call for more contextual understandings of culture in the public sector (Dwivedi, 2001; Pečarič, 2011; Im, 2014). The current research is a response to these calls, and is one of the few to investigate this topic in a non-Western context, and especially in a developing country, Vietnam, which has been conducting administrative reforms, with the hybrid model of public administration. The insights shed by this research contribute towards an understanding of the ground meanings and contextual influences of AC in CSs' job performance in a transforming country.

Secondly, this research has contributed to the study of performance management in the public sector. It was clear from the literature review that there have been greatly few theoretical and practical studies on performance in the public sector (Brewer and Selden, 2000; Boyne, 2003), and especially few studies focusing on micro-level or individual-level performance (Campbell, 2015; Koumenta, 2015). As mentioned earlier in the literature on performance, there are three main understandings and approaches to this phenomenon. The first approach considers performance as individual work outcome, the second as behaviours or activities; the third argues performance as a process. This study is one of the few attempting to investigate CSs' job performance, focusing on their values, beliefs and behaviours. Olsen (2004) and Wise (2004) pointed to the need for more research and models that reflect the complexity of employee behaviour in the public sector. This research has bridged the gap in administrative behaviour at the individual level, which was mentioned by Karlsson and Olsson (2018)

that this is an interesting, potential research topic which has been largely neglected both within public organizations and among PA scholars. Specifically, this study contributes to the literature on performance management in the public sector by exploring the cultural aspects of CSs' job performance from their own perspectives, which there have been not any other research made this approach (Brewer and Selden, 2000).

Thirdly, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing an opportunity for understanding the AC in CSs' job performance through a substantive grounded paradigm of "compromising paradoxical entanglement". The current research paradigm addressed two main issues, explaining why paradoxical entanglement in CSs' job performance occurs, and the responsive reactions of CSs to the contexts, more specifically as follows:

Regarding the condition explaining why paradoxical entanglement occurs, the research findings highlight and support much recent literature concerning the complexity and paradoxes in the context of organizational life. For instance, the current research are in line with the extant literature on complexity of public services (Haynes, 2003; Klijn, 2008; Teisman and Klijn, 2008; Pečarić, 2011; Haynes, 2015), paradoxical tensions in human resources management (Aust *et al.*, 2015; Kozica and Brandl, 2015; Owens *et al.*, 2015; Zhang *et al.*, 2015), paradox in the public sector (Whorton and Worthley, 1981; Kellough and Lu, 1993; Hood, 2000b; Fountain, 2001; Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; Hood and Peters, 2004) and paradox in public policy making (Rivlin, 1984; Rappaport, 2002; Dupuis and Knoepfel, 2013). Moreover, the current research are in line with the contemporary scholars who have been concerned more with Eastern philosophical traditions in order to offer additional or even contradictory perspectives on the nature and implications of paradox (Li *et al.*, 2015; Huang, 2016; Li, 2016; Lee and Reade, 2018). In addition, as the literature reviews shown, most of these pieces of research have predominantly examined organizational-level approaches, but neglected the paradoxical tensions at the individual level. The current research was conducted, and provided understanding and explanation of paradoxes at the micro-level. The elements of paradoxical entanglement in the current research were condensed from the two main concepts "VUCA" conditions, and "Iron Cage". It is shown from the current

research that CSs not only predominately rely on their supervisors or colleagues in their job performance, but they are also influenced by implicit social dynamics, such as social relationships, social pressures and political issues. This means that CSs are influenced by the interplay between the internal and external pressures of environment. The current research findings also showed that CSs' behaviour not only depends on the logic of appropriateness, which is highlighted in the public role of CSs, requiring them to follow rules, regulations, and public values and ethics, but also on logic of consequences, encouraging them to follow their own interests and values. The finding from the current study also supported to the conclusion by Peters (2009, p.18): "The task of being a public administrator has never been an easy one. Even when the role was more clearly defined, the necessity of coping with the complexity surrounding most public programs presented a number of challenges to those public servants".

Regarding the responsive reactions dealing with the paradoxical entanglement, the current research responses to the suggestion by Karlsson and Olsson (2018, p.4): "CSs act in institutionally complex contexts in which they need to handle multiple rules, norms, and practices not necessarily compatible with another. There are thus different expectations and pressures on CSs and they have to handle contested issues - a highly interesting theme largely neglected both within public organizations and among PA scholars". The findings of the emergent theory contribute in adding more understanding of the ways CSs perform their job, and their strategies toward paradoxical tensions in their job. The issue of coping with work pressures has been addressed in the extant literature, some findings being parallel to the tactics observed from the emergent theory. For example, five types of strategies are proposed that organizations might use in response to pressures of the institutional environment: acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy and manipulate (Oliver, 1991). These responses have been analysed at organizational level, and used by organizations to cope with the pressures of isomorphism to achieve legitimacy. However, the strategies that individuals use to cope with pressures have not been much studied by institutionalists. In a systematic review of the literature, Tummers *et al.* (2015) developed a coherent classification of sets and ways of coping during public service delivery of street level bureaucrats. Three distinctive sets of coping were identified, including: moving towards

clients (rule-bending, rule-breaking, instrumental action, prioritizing among clients, use of personal resources), moving away from clients (routinizing, rationing), and moving against clients (rigid rule-following, aggression) (Tummers *et al.*, 2015). This study has gone further and demonstrated public employees' responses to their dilemmas, which many scholars have studied in public service delivery for instance, Brodkin (1997), Dias and Maynard-Moody (2006), Kelly (1994), Oberfield (2009) Sandfort (2000), May and Wood (2003), Musil *et al.* (2004), Evans and Harris (2006); (Bischoff, 2018). As argued previously, the current study not only observed CSs' behaviour in the interactions within their organization, or in public service delivery, but also investigated their interactions in the broader context of their overall job performance. These include both internal and external interactions to many related stakeholders such as politics, citizens, supervisors, and colleagues. Therefore, it serves to extend the knowledge provided by previous interpretive research on public management, specifically on the topic of behaviour in public administration.

One of the main contributions of the integration of substantive GT into extant literature is to fit AC in CSs' job performance into a larger framework, by integrating the emerged finding into the two logics of actions. It can also be seen from the paradigm that paradoxes may exist between the logic of appropriateness, which is typical logic of action in the traditional administration style, and logic of consequence, which is typical logic of NPM. It important to note that, in the context of this study, there was a dominance of the characteristics of traditional administration style. The finding from the current study supported to the findings by many other scholars in administrative science. For instance, Horton (2006, p.537) argued that "what appears to be the case is that in spite of all the changes much of the traditional PA cultures remain". Similarly, Vrangbaek (2009, p.529) stated that "Generally speaking it seems reassuring that traditional public sector values have survived in spite of the many changes and the focus on renewal and innovation in recent decades". Boyd (1995) observes that culture is extremely hard to change when it is deeply held. It is often a product developed in the long history of an organization. An organization's culture provides consistency and predictability for its members. It manifests what is important, valued and accepted. It

derives from a shared set of values and assumptions about a wide range of solutions to broad human issues.

Finally, in order to extend the interpretation and meaning of the emergent core phenomenon, the integration of emergent substantive GT into extant literature were conducted. In fact, comparing and contrasting the emerged substantive theory with formal theories can support the location of findings explored in the substantive theory within the existing body of knowledge, thus enhancing the notion of substantive theory (Charmaz, 2006). The current research enriched the relationship between NIT and public administrative study through the application of logics of action in administrative culture interpretation. Also, this research enriched theory of paradox in human resources management, which has been studied by many scholars (Aust *et al.*, 2015; Kozica and Brandl, 2015; Owens *et al.*, 2015; Zhang *et al.*, 2015), paradox and theory in the public sector (Whorton and Worthley, 1981; Kellough and Lu, 1993; Hood, 2000b; Fountain, 2001; Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; Hood and Peters, 2004), theory of dilemmas of the individual in public services (Lipsky, 1980; Oliver, 1991; Dewe *et al.*, 1993; Maynard-Moody *et al.*, 2003; Skinner *et al.*, 2003; Dias and Maynard-Moody, 2006; Lipsky, 2010; Loyens, 2015; Tummers *et al.*, 2015). Apart from integrating emerged substantive GT with the general formal theories, the discussion on other substantive areas also supplying materials for a formal GT development (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Glaser (2007, p.111) suggested: "formal GT emerges as natural if a researcher of a substantive GT continues his research into other studies in the same or other substantive areas". It is worth to note that although a formal theory can be directly generated from data, it is advantage to begin with a substantive GT (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Therefore, the emergent substantive theory of the current research can be a basis for further investigation in order to develop a more formal theory in the public administrative area.

9.3.2 Methodological Contributions

The current research has also provided a contribution in terms of the methodology, which was derived from the application of GT method. The findings of this research are mainly relevant to the proposed theory, which is the substantive theory compromising paradoxical entanglement. This theory is grounded on the empirical and real data that were collected from the field, by using open in-depth interviews from the perspectives of participants who had been undergoing the public administrative reforms, in order to generate data related to CSs' job performance culture. This section presents several methodological contributions of the current study.

It is interesting to note that despite prior calls for the use of grounded theory in the domains of management, and especially in human resources management, there is a relatively small number of publications that apply a grounded theory approach (Egan, 2002; Mazzola *et al.*, 2011; Murphy *et al.*, 2017). Also, there is little GT research to be found on culture and organizational culture, and none in the area of AC. A significant majority of studies using deductive approach adopted the national culture dimensions suggested by Hofstede (2001); Hofstede and Hofstede (2005); Schwartz (1999); Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2011), or competing values framework suggested by Cameron and Quinn (1999) to test, analyse or measure administrative culture. For instance, according to the literature review on AC conducted by Jamil *et al.* (2013a, p.898), "most researches on this issue analyse AC either as a dependent or interdependent variable". This means that, as a dependent variable, AC is considered as a consequence of the surrounding environment. By contrast, as an independent variable, AC is considered as a source of reason influencing the circumstances. This study responds to the call of more interpretive studies in PA (Raadschelders and Hoon Lee, 2011), and more importantly, the research approach of this study allowed the researcher the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and explanations of the salient problems relating to AC. This research also adds to the few behavioural administrative studies using GT to examine a phenomenon, as the first study of an examination and analysis of AC in Vietnam using the GT methodology. It has also responded to the need for more research "focusing on real people who do real work" in PA (Raadschelders and Hoon Lee, 2011, p.922). Therefore, this research extends the

applicability of GT by applying it to the research of PA in general and AC in particular. It shows how such an approach can help understand the social process of public administration, and might encourage future research in the field of PA to consider using GT.

9.3.3 Practical Contributions

Generally, this study adds to the body of knowledge, revealing a complicated multi-faced phenomenon, culture in general and AC in particular, by conducting research in an untouched context and collecting primary data in the civil service system in a developing country which has been implementing public sector reforms. The study attempts to provide a deeper knowledge of the AC in CSs' job performance. This is a significant issue for administrative systems which are in the process of reforming. The study contributes to increase value for PA practice. AC study can be beneficial for practitioners, such as policy makers, public managements and public professionals. Knowing more about AC and how it is influenced can furnish managers, CSs and policy makers with an appropriate explanation on the phenomenon and help them adopt solutions to improve CSs' performance (O'Donnell and Boyle, 2008). Schein (2004, p.11) argued that "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture; that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to understand and work with culture; and that it is an ultimate act of leadership to destroy culture when it is viewed as dysfunctional". Also, studies of AC help to understand the values and attitudes shared by CSs and their behaviour in practice. Therefore, understanding the nature of AC in CSs' job performance may enhance the ability of public managers to better encourage desirable employee behaviour, while discouraging those employee behaviors that impede performance (Jordan *et al.*, 2012). In addition, AC studies are significant in order to understand the practice of its administration and policy implementation, as well as the failure of administrative reforms (Park, 2017). Moreover, administrative studies support the understanding of working conditions in the public sector (Pečarić, 2011; Park, 2017). In summary, it is advised that public policy makers and managers learn to recognize and understand the complexity, contradictions, tensions and entangled conditions associated with CSs' job performance

in practice. Moreover, the acquisition of paradoxical entanglement management skills may be of necessity to public managers and leaders.

Hood and Peters (2004, p.279) concluded that "the identification of paradoxes associated with NPM offers an opportunity to improve administrative science and enhance understanding of administrative reform as a process".

9.4 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations, which are mainly related to the adopted research strategy and the practically of its implementation. The following section presents these limitations.

The study focuses on a particularly important case, the context of which is the VCS. Therefore, it hampers the possibility of generalization to other contexts. However, in interpretive research, the generation of the substantive theory is not a target, as Charmaz (2006, p.153) argued, "if you offer a fresh or deeper understanding of the studied phenomena, you can make an original contribution. Grounded theorists can contribute to a speciality field and simultaneously extend general theoretical interpretations that cut across fields".

Secondly, because this is a piece of qualitative research, the reliability of the research findings was inevitably affected by the researcher's thinking and bias in the process of data collection and analysis, and may have influenced the research findings. Also, this research focused on the exploration of AC through the perspective of CSs; therefore, the sources of data were limited to two types of data, namely interviews and documentation. In order to manage the potential limitations and achieve research reliability, the constant comparison method was applied, by moving back and forth between research questions, data, and emerging concept and categories. Multiple data sources were used by recruited CSs to obtain a variety of interviews from different positions in administrative organizations from the three main areas of Vietnam. The researcher had to travel to many provinces throughout Vietnam for data collection, ensuring a variety of local social and cultural contexts. Moreover, cross-interview technique was applied by asking the same questions to different interviewees. The

emerging concepts and categories, as well as the relationships between them were carefully checked against those of other participants.

9.5 Summary of the Reflection on the Research

This section discusses the reflections of the current study. Reflection (reflexivity) means "interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017, p.1). Therefore, the reflections in this section focus on the processes and issues that the current study is concern with, including the research motivation and the justification of the research problem, the research methodology decision, sampling strategies, data collection and analysis reflections.

Firstly, regarding the role of the researcher, Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007), argued that the researcher's background on personal training and experience has an influence on his/her own research. As a researcher and a lecturer in the National Academy of Public Administration of Vietnam (NAPA), I have worked closely with Vietnamese CSs, teaching and researching in PA sector whilst not being employed as a CS, I was in the meanwhile an outsider to the CSs' inner world. However, the knowledge background of the researcher in the PA sector could create a barrier to objectivity Strauss and Corbin (1998) I was aware of responsibility of maintaining objectivity and sensitivity throughout the research progress.

Secondly, regarding the reflection on the research motivation and the justification of the research problem, several important motivations encouraged me to conduct this research, including my experience, and the limitations that the researcher witnessed in the public administration reforms in Vietnam. Like several other developing countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh, Vietnam has attempted to apply NPM theory to the PAR programmes. However, the implementation of public reform was not simple in practice. To the best of my knowledge, I supposed that Vietnam is still lack of administration theory for these public administration reforms. The simple method of introducing lessons and theory from developing countries without carefully considering Vietnamese context might be a "disastrous" imitation. In practice, there is a variety of

complains on the quality of CSs' job performance, such as slowness, low productivity, bad attitude towards the citizens, corruption. CSs are considered as a reason of PAR failures and a weakness of administrative organizations. Conducting the current research is a great opportunity for me to listen to CSs' voice, more understand about their work environment, beliefs, perspectives, values, and norms about their job performance.

Thirdly, reflecting on the research methodology decision, as a novice researcher from a developing country where the social science is still immature and limited in comparison with developed countries, my understanding on research methodology and particularly grounded theory methodology at the beginning of the PhD process was considered zero. Therefore, I had to read and take part in a variety of research methodology short courses, including quantitative and qualitative methods, discuss with colleagues and supervisor team in order to be aware of different kinds of available research methods, and evaluate which methods are well-applicable to the current study. The current research aim is to explore the nature of AC in Vietnamese CSs' job performance, with the hope to provide an in-depth understanding of Vietnamese CSs' values, beliefs, behaviours as well as their work environment. Through the exploration, this research also aims to develop a substantive grounded theory of the AC of CS's job performance in Vietnamese administrative system. The researcher felt into qualitative research, and read more about the available qualitative research methods, such as case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and narrative research. After critical and careful comparison and consideration, GT was chosen for the current study (the reason for the choice of application was discussed in the section 4.3.2.2). However, due to the development of GT methodology over the past five decades, there has been a variety of GT approaches, with different philosophical standing. Therefore, the researcher faced with challenging decision on which version of grounded theory to use, the classic (Glaserian, Straussian), or constructivist grounded theory. After thoroughly reading, comparing these approaches, discussing with colleagues, supervisors, and more importantly carefully considering my previous knowledge background of the research area and my relationship with the potential participants, the constructivist grounded theory was chosen for the current study (the choice was discussed in detail in

the section 4.3.2.3). Another confusing challenge that the researcher faced with in GT application was literature reviews. While most of other research methods require the researcher to conduct extensive literature within the area of study before going to the research field for data collection, the grounded theorists suggested an opposite approach. The classic grounded theorists are extreme when advising the researcher not to conduct literature reviews at the beginning of the research as it may contaminate the researcher mind, and the ability of generating new grounded theory. The version of Straussian and constructivist GT does not forbid initial literature reviews. In order to be able to generate new grounded theory, the researcher applied two stages of literature reviews. The minor literature review in the first stage was done with the purpose of learning some general terminologies and research approaches relating to the current research. The later stage was done when the grounded theory of the current research had been emerged, with the purpose of reflecting, extending, and interpreting the research findings.

Fourthly, as for sampling reflexivity, the recruitment procedure was guided by a combination of purposive sampling and theoretical sampling. Being a lecturer of the NAPA is an advantage of the researcher to have access to many CSs in Vietnam because they take part in training courses in NAPA annually. I utilized this advantage to get access to participants through my personal relationships as well as the support from my colleagues in NAPA. Finally, data for the current research was collected through interviews with 62 CSs in the three main parts of Vietnam, including the north, centre and south of Vietnam. The participants were recruited from many administrative organizations, locations, and positions. Therefore, it was time consuming and costly to stay in and travel to the research field. However, conducting data collection for the current study was one of the most interesting, invaluable experiences in my life and my research career that I have had so far. I had a chance to have in-depth conversations to understand about their work environment, perspectives, values, experiences about their job performance in practice. It is interesting to note that, as I progressed my research, I wanted to expand the sample participants in order to have a variety of viewpoints, and gain information on particular themes emerging from the coding process.

Fifthly, regarding data collection and analysis, the interview process was both enjoyable and challenging. Before the interviews, I personally assumed that most of Vietnamese CSs are shy and sceptical to talk about themselves and share their personal perspectives. Surprisingly, many participants enjoyed the interviews and had preparation to share their in-sights, experiences, and time with the researcher. My background as a lecturer in public administration sector supported me to achieve the agreement of participants and encourage them to share their point of views, perspectives, and personal experiences. On the one hand, I considered it as my advantage; on the other hand, it was also a challenge for me to maintain the balance between objectivity and sensitivity throughout the process of interviews. In terms of data analysis, this was one of the most difficult parts of the current study, especially axial coding, and selective coding procedure. As suggestions by Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Charmaz (2006), data was analysed after each interview. The interview was transcribed by the researcher. It was extremely time-consuming as it took around six hours to transcribe one hour of interview. The researcher conducted 66 interviews, taking 72 hours of interviewing and around 430 hours of transcribing. However, it was worthy as it helped the researcher to be familiar with each interview and transcript, therefore supported the researcher in generating codes and categories, and improving the sensitivity to data. The data was managed and analysed with the support of NVivo Software 11. The data was analysed in accordance with grounded theory principles, using open axial, selective coding. It is important to note that the open categories, main categories, and core category were continuously modifies and refined throughout the process of data collection and analysis, and even during the process of writing up the final findings (the process of coding was detailed in the section 4.4.4).

9.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations for future research are proposed.

Firstly, the compromising paradoxical entanglement theory explains the AC in CSs' job performance in the context of Vietnam. Future research could investigate in greater depth specific areas, such as CS management, performance management and civil

service motivation in paradoxical entanglement conditions. For instance, one of the paradoxes that CSs face is the ambiguity of their role; therefore, it would be interesting to examine the roles of CSs in the context of paradoxical entanglement. Novel understanding is currently especially called for (Karlsson and Olsson, 2018), asking the question: "What types of roles are CSs playing in relation to different institutional rules and norms and various categories of actor (politicians, citizens, organizations), and how do they handle friction and conflict?" (Karlsson and Olsson, 2018). Also, this study has investigated the behaviour of CSs in general, evaluating the role and power of the top leaders in Vietnamese public administrative organizations. Therefore, further study could investigate in detail how leaders in the administrative organizations in Vietnam respond to paradoxical entanglement. In addition, this research has studied and identified five groups of reactions applied by CSs to deal with the paradoxical entanglement in their job performance in the context of VCS system and social cultural context. These reactions interplay together, leading to paradoxical entanglement. In other words, they contradict each other, causing confusion, tensions, complexity and dilemmas in the process of CSs' job execution. Future research could investigate in greater depth specific groups of responsive reactions to paradoxical entanglement.

Secondly, some methodological recommendations for the study of PA can be made. This GT study has proposed a bottom-up perspective to the study of CSs, allowing for the study of CSs' own perspectives and experiences through the interviews, which is suitable to study CSs' values, beliefs and behaviours. The abductive approach was allied with extant literature in the process of data collection and analysis by constant comparison among emerged categories, participants and substantive GT. The application of abductive approach in GT research may be useful for future research in the PA sector.

Thirdly, comparative research in AC studies should be encouraged, as the presence of cultural diversity in the public sector is desirable. Also, according to many scholars' suggestions, the globalization of the administrative culture should be considered carefully, with no single nation or a culture acting as global missionary, or playing the role model to convey its own values, such as those advocated by the NPM movement in

the last few decades (Dwivedi, 2001; Pečarić, 2011). This study may encourage further studies of AC in PARs implementation in a variety of societies and contexts.

Moreover, as the substantive GT was developed within the context of the VCS system, it will not be possible to generalize it beyond the substantive population. However, it could be generalizable in countries with similar contexts. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.56), "more formal theories are less specific to a group and/or place and apply to a wider range of disciplinary concerns and problems. To develop a formal theory of information management, the researcher could begin with a substantive or middle-range theory derived from previous studies, then use theoretical formulations as a foundation for studying a wider range of related topics". Therefore, the theory generated in this research can also be used to generate further research questions for future researchers, which could be investigated using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

Lastly, as this is an exploratory research, applying GT method to investigate AC in Vietnamese CSs' job performance, it could not provide full conceptual descriptions, factual accuracy or verification of the phenomenon. Therefore, positivist paradigm could be further employed to develop generalization of the emergent theoretical concept.

9.7 Summary

This chapter has summarized the entirety of this study. The contributions of the research, in terms of theory, methodology and practice, have also been discussed. Last but not least, the research limitations and recommendation for future research have been presented.

Appendices

BẢN ĐỒ HÀNH CHÍNH NƯỚC CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
ADMINISTRATIVE MAP OF SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
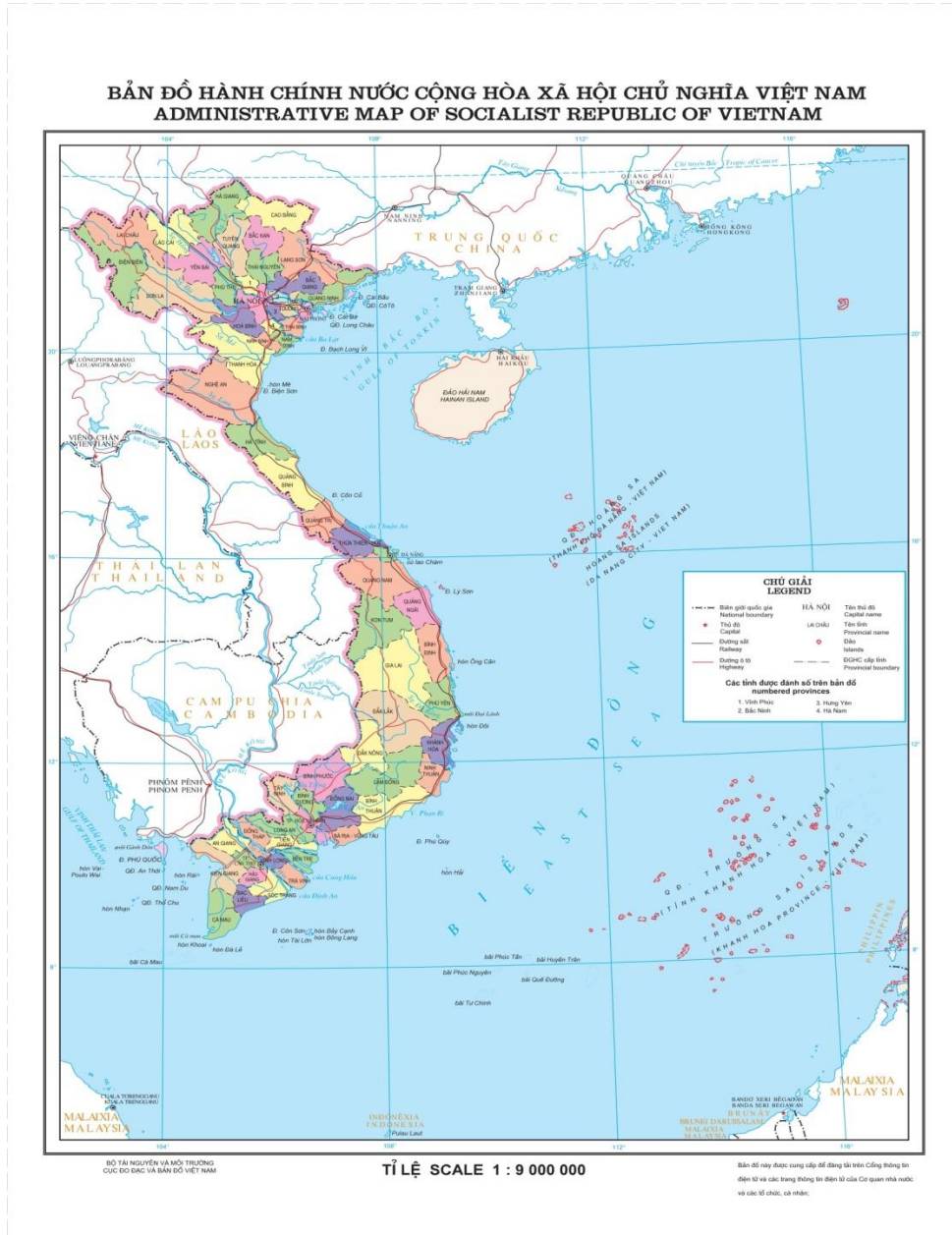
Appendix 1: The Map of Vietnam

Source: Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Government Portal [23]

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[23] http://chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English

Appendix 2: The List of Interviewees

No.	Position	Gender	Type of Organization	Length of service in Administrative Organization	Location of organization	Urban (U)/ Rural (R)	Interview Duration (Minutes)
			**Phase 1. Initial Data Collection (Purposeful Sampling)**				
1	Chief of Division	Male	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	6	Hanoi	U	45
2	Functional Officer	Female	Commune-level People's Committee	10	Nong Trang Ward, Viet Tri City, Phu Tho Province	U	45
3	Chief of Division	Male	District-level People's Committee	15	Ha Trung District, Thanh Hoa Province	R	65
4	Deputy Chairman	Female	Commune-level People's Committee	12	Hoa Binh Town, Hoa Binh Province	U	80
5	Deputy Chief of Division	Female	District-level People's Committee	12	Kim Dong District, Hưng Yen Province	R	75
6	Chairman	Male	Commune-level People's Committee	11	Phuoc Tin Commune, Phuoc Long District, Bình Phước Province	R	87
7	Deputy Chief of Division	Female	District-level People's Committee	11	Thanh Ha District, Hai Dương Province	R	75
8	Deputy Chief of Division	Female	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	14	Hanoi	U	47
9	Functional Officer	Male	District-level People's Committee	11	Binh Xuyen District, Vinh Phuc Province	U	105
10	Functional Officer	Female	Provincial-level People's Committee	12	Thai Nguyen City, Thai Nguyen Province	U	70
			Total: 10 Initial Interviews for the phase 1				
			Phase 2. Main Data Collection (Purposeful Sampling; Theoretical Sampling)				
11	Functional	Female	District-level	10	Viet Trì City,	U	65

	Officer		People's Committee		Phu Tho Province		
12	Functional Officer	Male	District-level People's Committee	6	Thanh Thuy District, Phu Tho Province	R	80
13	Functional Officer	Female	Provincial-level People's Committee	9	Vĩnh Yên City, Vĩnh Phúc Province	U	55
14	Chairman	Male	Commune-level People's Committee	15	Chiềng Sơn Commune, Mộc Châu District, Sơn La Province	R	60
15	Deputy Chief of Division	Male	Department of Home Affairs	7	Tuyên Quang City, Tuyên Quang Province	U	75
16	Chief of Division	Female	Department of Science and Technology	10	Lai Châu City,Lai Châu Province	U	60
17	Functional Officer	Female	District-level People's Committee	8	Kim Dong District, Hưng Yen Province	R	50
18	Functional Officer	Female	Department of Home Affairs	9	Thai Binh City, Thai Binh Procince	U	100
19	Functional Officer	Male	District-level People's Committee	6	Ba Vì District, Hanoi	U	50
20	Functional Officer	Female	District-level People's Committee	5	Phú Xuyên District, Hanoi	U	60
21	Deputy Chief of Division	Male	District-level People's Committee	11	Quế Võ District, Bắc Ninh Province	R	60
22	Deputy Chairman	Male	Commune-level People's Committee	5	Trọng Hóa Commune, Minh Hóa District, Quảng Trị Province	R	90
23	Functional Officer	Male	Commune-level People's Committee	18	Sró Commune, Kroncho District, Gia Lai Province	R	60
24	Functional Officer	Female	Commune-level People's Committee	17	Ia Kreng Commune, Chư Păh District, Gia Lai Province	R	80
25	Functional Officer	Female	Commune-level People's Committee	10	Trà Bá Ward, Pleiku City Gia Lai Province	U	50
26	Functional Officer	Female	Commune-level People's Committee	5	Yên Đỗ Ward, Pleiku City Gia Lai Province	U	60
27	Deputy Chief of Division	Male	District-level People's Committee	10	PleiKu City, Gia Lai Province	U	50
28	Functional Officer	Female	Department of Home Affairs	9	PleiKu City, Gia Lai Province	U	70
29	Functional Officer	Male	Commune-level People's	11	Ia Hlôp Commune, Chư Sê District,	R	80

			Committee		Gia Lai Province		
30	Deputy Chief of Division	Male	Department of Home Affairs	6	Gia Nghĩa District, Đắk Nông Province	U	75
31	Deputy Chief of Division	Male	Department of Foreign Affairs	5	Gia Nghĩa District, Đắk Nông Province	U	65
32	Deputy Chief of Department	Male	Department of Traffic and Transport	24	Gia Nghĩa District, Đắc Nông Province	U	60
33	Chairman	Male	Commune-level People's Committee	10	Nam Ka Commune, Lắk District, Đắk Lắk Province	R	60
34	Functional Officer	Male	Department of Home Affairs	5	Buôn Mê Thuột City, Đắk Lắk Province	U	70
35	Chief of Division	Male	Department of Agriculture and Environment	13	Buôn Mê Thuột City, Đắk Lắk Province	U	75
36	Functional Officer	Female	Department of Home Affairs	6	Buôn Mê Thuột City, Đắk Lắk Province	U	65
37	Functional Officer	Male	Department of Traffic and Transport	11	Buôn Mê Thuột City, Đắk Lắk Province	U	60
38	Deputy Chief of Division	Female	Department of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs	12	Buôn Mê Thuột City, Đắk Lắk Province	U	50
39	Functional Officer	Male	Department of Home Affairs	4	Buôn Mê Thuột City, Đắk Lắk Province	U	110
40	Functional Officer	Female	Commune-level People's Committee	5	EaPăl Commune, EaKar District, Đắk Lắk Province	R	65
41	Deputy Chief of Division	Female	District-level People's Committee	11	Cư Kuin District, Đăk Lắk Province	R	65
42	Functional Officer	Male	Department of Construction	11	Đà lạt City, Lâm Đồng Province	U	65
43	Chief of Division	Male	District-level People's Committee	11	Đam Rông District, Lâm Đồng Province	R	55
44	Deputy Chief of Division	Male	District-level People's Committee	10	Tây Ninh City, Tây Ninh Province	U	75
45	Functional Officer	Male	Province Inspectorate	3	Tây Ninh City, Tây Ninh Province	U	78
46	Functional Officer	Female	Provincial-level People's	10	Vĩnh Long City, Vĩnh Long Province	U	60

			Committee				
47	Functional Officer	Male	Department of Education and Training	10	Vĩnh Long City, Vĩnh Long Province	U	60
49	Functional Officer	Male	District-level People's Committee	4	Phước Long District, Bình Phước Province	R	60
49	Functional Officer	Male	Department of Justice	3	Đồng Xoài District, Bình Phước Province	U	75
50	Functional Officer	Female	District-level People's Committee	4	Phú Giáo District, Bình Dương Province	R	70
51	Functional Officer	Male	District-level People's Committee	3	Tân Uyên District, Bình Dương Province	R	85
52	Functional Officer	Male	District-level People's Committee	5	Dầu Tiếng District, Bình Dương Province	R	50
53	Deputy Chief of Division	Male	Commune-level People's Committee	6	Minh Tân Commune, Dầu Tiếng District, Bình Dương Province	R	140
54	Functional Officer	Male	Provincial-level People's Committee	12	Biên Hòa City, Đồng Nai Province	U	60
55	Functional Officer	Male	Department of Finance	4	Biên Hòa City, Đồng Nai Province	U	75
56	Functional Officer	Male	District-level People's Committee	5	Long Điền District, Bà Rịa Vũng Tàu Province	R	80
Total: 46 Interviews for the phase 2							
Phase 3. Data Collection for theoretical sufficiency achievement (Purposeful Sampling; Theoretical Sampling)							
57	Retired senior manager (Chairman)	Male	District-level People's Committee	23	Phu Tho Province	U	60
58	Retired senior manager (Chairman)	Male	District-level People's Committee	25	Yen Bai Province	U	50
59	Retired senior manager (Chairman)	Male	District-level People's Committee	22	Nam Dinh Province	U	55

60	Retired senior manager (Vice-Director)	Male	Ministry-level	18	Hanoi	U	65
61	Retired senior manager (Chairman)	Male	Department of Home Affair	25	Thai Nguyen Province	U	80
62	Retired senior manager (Vice Director)	Male	Ministry-level	22	Hanoi	U	50
The second round interview was conducted with 04 participants. **Participants' Number: 01, 04, 06, 09 (the interviews were conducted through telephone calls, on average 40 minutes)**							
Total: 10 Interviews for the phase 3							
Total	• **66 Interviews** • **Around 72 hours interviewing**						

Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Interviews from 05 - 10

- *Could I find out a little bit about you, education and background?*

- *What are your position and your tasks/duties at work?*

- *How do you perform these tasks/duties?*

- *Could you tell me your typical working day?*

- *What difficulties have you often met with during your job performance?* (For example: in making decisions; delivering tasks for subordinates; running meetings; making personnel decisions; delivering administrative service…)

- *Could you tell me an interesting situation in your work performance?*

- *How do you feel about your job?*

- *How does your organization evaluate your job performance? How do you think about the procedures and criteria of your organization's performance appraisal?*

Appendix 4: Interview Guide for the Main Data Collection

Themes needed to be explored	Main Questions	Probes and Follow- up Questions
	(The researcher did not ask all the questions in the list below, questions asked depends on the answers of the participant)	
Background of participant	**Greeting/ Introducing/ Breaking the ice and starting conversation** **Asking about the background of the participant** Q1. Could I find out a little bit about you, education and background? Q2. How long have you been working in this organization/ civil service system?	
Job Performance in practices	Q1. Could you tell me your position and your tasks/duties in your organization? Q2. Could you tell me your typical working day? Q3. Besides your main tasks, What other duties do you often do? Q4. How do people from different departments interact? Could you give more details? Q5. Could you tell me the way you deal with your manager/colleague/subordinate? Q6. If you have a problem at work,	➢ How often have you performed job behind the schedule? What are the reasons? What are the reasons for the tardiness of performance? ➢ How will you do in cases where job performance is urgent but the organization's schedule or the leadership's opinion has not yet been made? ➢ Are you supported by your supervisors and colleagues in performance? How do they support you? ➢ What will you do if your colleagues do not

	with whom would you firstly talk with? And how would you solve it?	coordinate with you?
		➢ Have you ever had conflict/ disagreement with your manager/supervisor/leader/colleagues in terms of task performance? How did you deal with it?
	Q7. Do you often cooperate with other organizations or service users in your task? How is cooperation taken place?	➢ How is the process of making decision at your organization taken place?
	Q8. Do you often work with citizens? How is the work taken place? Are there any challenges or difficulties?	➢ What is your role in making decision at your organization? Is decision making centralized or decentralized? Could you give me more details and examples?
	Q9. How to distinguish an excellently-working CS from a well-working or normally-working one?	➢ In your opinion, do you work effectively? How do you know about that?
	Q10. How does your organization evaluate your job performance?	➢ Is your job performance evaluated properly? Why? Could you give more details?
	Q11. How do you know that you are performing well?	
Surrounding working environment	Q1. How do you feel about working in such organization? (satisfied/happy/bored)	➢ What do you like/dislike the most t in your work?
		➢ Could you describe the most difficult situation you have faced up during your performance? How
	Q2. What difficulties/problems do you often run into during your	

performance?

Q3. Could you tell me an interesting situation in your work performance?

Q4. Are you a member of Vietnamese Communist Party? What do you think about the impact of the Communist party on your work performance?

Q5. In your opinion, what is necessary for you or other CSs to work more efficiently?

Q6. How would you describe your organization's culture? To what extend do you think it can affect your performance?

Q7. Do you think that your community culture has impact on your work performance? To what extent?

Q8. What encourages/discourages you to perform your tasks and duties?

Q9. Why do you stay in this job?

did you deal with such situation?

➢ What is the hardest thing you may think of it in your work?

➢ Have you ever thought about changing your job? Why and Why not?

➢ What are the advantages and disadvantages while working with external organizations (superior, peer-to-peer or subordinate agencies)?

➢ What are the difficulties you run into when working with administrative service users? Do you receive any feedbacks from them?

➢ What do you think about the main factors contributing to promotion in the civil service system? Is Civil Service performance outcome the main factors? Or others?

Appendix 5. List of Documents

Type of Documents	Date issued	Source
Ordinance on Cadres and civil servants	February 26, 1998	National Assembly of Vietnam
Decree No.95/1998/CD-CP on the recruitment, employment and management of public employees	November 17, 1998	Government of Vietnam
Circular No.04/1999/TT-TCCP Government Commission for Organization and Personnel guiding the implementation of Decree No. 95/1998/CD-CP of the Government on the recruitment, employment and management of public employees	March 20, 1999	Government Commission of Vietnam
Law No.11/2003/QH11 on Organization of the People's Councils and the People's Committees	November 26, 2003	National Assembly of Vietnam
Law on Cadres and Civil Servants	November 13, 2008	National Assembly of Vietnam
Masters Program on Public Administration Reform for the Period 2001–2010 (attachment to the Prime Minister's Decision No.136/2001/QD-TTg of 17 September 2001)	September 17 2001	Government of Vietnam
Resolution No.53/2007/NQ-CP promulgating the Government's Program of action for implementation of the Resolution of the fifth plenum of the Party Central Committee, Xth Congress, on accelerating administrative reform and raising management effectiveness and efficiency of the State apparatus	November 07, 2007	Government of Vietnam
Resolution No. 57/2010/QH12 on results of the oversight of administrative procedure reforms in some fields directly related to citizens and enterprises under the 2001-2010 public administration reform masters programme	November 26, 2010	National Assembly of Vietnam
Resolution No.30c/NQ-CP promulgating the Masters	November 8, 2011	Government of Vietnam

Program on State Administration Reform in the 2011-2020 period		
Resolution No.76/NQ-CP amending and supplementing a number of articles of the Government's Resolution No. 30c/NQ-CP of November 8, 2011, promulgating the Masters Program on State Administration Reform in the 2011-2020 period	June 13, 2013	Government of Vietnam
Decision No. 225/QD-TTg approving the State Administrative Reform for the period 2016 - 2020	February 04, 2016	Prime Minister
Resolution No. 56/2017/QH14 on continuation of the organizational reform of the state administrative apparatus toward streamlinedness and effective and efficient operation	November 24, 2017	National Assembly of Vietnam
Decision No.29/2006/QD-BXD promulgating the Regulation on publication of administrative procedures for, and attitude and behaviors of cadres and civil servants engaged in, the grant of dwelling house ownership certificates and construction work ownership certificates	September 14, 2006	Ministry of Construction of Vietnam
Decision No. 30/2006/QD-BXD promulgating the Regulation on publication of administrative procedures for, and attitude and behaviors of cadres and civil servants engaged in, the appraisal and approval of detailed construction planning, the supply of construction planning information and the grant of construction planning certificates	September 14, 2006	Ministry of Construction of Vietnam
Law No.26/2004/QH11 amending and supplementing a number of Articles of the Law on Complaints and Denunciations	June 15, 2004	National Assembly of Vietnam
Decision No.144/2006/QD-TT on application of quality management systems compliant with TCVN ISO 9001:2000 standard to the operation of state administrative agencies	June 06, 2006	Prime Minister

Decree No. 107/2006/ND-CP defining responsibilities of heads of agencies, organizations and units for corruption occurring in their agencies, organizations or units	September 22, 2006	Government of Vietnam
Decision No.158/2007/ND-CP on the list of work positions subject to periodical interchange and the term for interchange for cadres, public employees and servants	October 27, 2007	Government of Vietnam
Decree No.20/2008/ND-CP on receipt and handling individuals and organizations feedback and proposals on administrative regulations	February 14, 2008	Government of Vietnam
Decree No.18/2010/ND-CP on training and refresher training of civil servants prescribed the regime, contents, organization and management of training and refresher training for civil servants	March 5, 2010	Government of Vietnam
Decree No. 06/2010/ND-CP defining civil servants	January 25, 2010	Government of Vietnam
Decree No.24/2010/ND-CP providing for the recruitment, employment and management of civil servants	March 15, 2010	Government of Vietnam
Decree No. 36/2013/ND-CP on job positions and structures of civil servant ranks	April 22, 2013	Government of Vietnam
Circular No.05/2013/TT-BNV guiding the implementation of the Decree No.36/2013/ND-CP dated April 22, 2013 of Government on job positions and structures of civil servant ranks	June 25, 2013	Home Affairs of Vietnam
Law No. 42/2013/QH13 on Reception of Citizens	November 25, 2013	National Assembly of Vietnam
Anti-Corruption Law No. 36/2018/QH14	November 20, 2018	National Assembly of Vietnam

Appendix 6: List of Open Concepts and Open Categories and their Properties

Open concepts	Open Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Observed Dimension
• Clear and rigid career path • Guaranteed position • Life –time tenure • Almost no demission • Arranged career • Security Minded	**Civil Servants' Career**	Security of Career Path	High-low Upward-downward Clear - unclear	➢ High ➢ Upward ➢ Clear
		Stable Job Engagement	High-low	➢ High
• Pride of job • Respect from society • Contributions for Society • Rewarding job • Perceived the importance of Civil Service • Perceived the role of civil servants • Perceived the impacts of civil service	**Social Status of Civil Servants**	Social position of civil servants	High – low	➢ High
		Respect from society	High – low	➢ High
		Pride of family and themselves	High - low	➢ High
• Unqualified employees • Civil Servants continuous training • Skilled shortages • Competence difference	**Civil Servants' Competence**	Civil servants' Competence compared to Job requirements	High – low	➢ Low
		Civil Servants' Competence Development	Effective – Ineffective	➢ Ineffective
• Specification	**Job ambiguity**	Job	Clear – unclear	➢ Unclear

		description		
• Large scope of tasks • Difficulty to describe job • Imprecise job description • No standard job description • Difficulty to estimate all of tasks • Performing Urgent tasks; • Performing Odd Tasks; • Performing Non-functional Tasks; • Seasonal Schedule; • Frequency of working outside office hours; • Generated tasks; • Performing Plurality of tasks; • Performing Tasks assigned by supervisors; • Taking part in Unnecessary meetings; • Performing Movement activities; • Unclear strategies and plans; • Job assignment based on competency more than on position; • Job assignment based on feeling; • Unclear job		Ambiguity of Job assignment	High – low Fair – Unfair	➤ High ➤ Unfair

assignment; • Uncertainty of Job Assignment; • Job assignment based on generic functions; • Casualness in job assignment; • Job assignment unconformable with positions; • Weak inspection; • Performance supervision mechanism.		265		
• Unclear evaluation criteria; • Similar evaluation criteria for all positions; • Identification of performance and personalities; • Evaluation of Communist Party member's status is a part of civil servant evaluation; • Feeling-based Evaluation; • Generic Evaluation; • Accommodating in evaluation; • Screening the error of colleagues; • Following the collective; • Neglect to performance	**Unfair Performance Evaluation and Reward**	Evaluation Criteria	Clear – unclear Rigid – flexible	➢ Unclear ➢ Rigid
		Subjectivity of Evaluation	High – low Fair – unfair	➢ High ➢ Unfair
		Egalitarism	High – low Fair – unfair Motivated – Demotivated	➢ High ➢ Unfair ➢ Demotivated
		Seniority's based Payment	Fair – unfair Motivated – Demotivated	➢ Unfair ➢ Demotivated

evaluation;				
• Limited quota of achievements;				
• Limitation of using evaluation result;				
• Achievements reserved for leader;				
• Liking achievement;				
• Individual achievements are a part of collective achievements;				
• Egalitarianism;				
• Distributive achievements;				
• Achievement Obsession;				
• Seniority;				
• Low Salary and other Incentives;				
• Salary is not based on job performance;				
• Unclear bonus.				
• Top-down management; • Unification; • Indispensability to consult with supervisor and leader • Commanding management • Hierarchy within organizations • Hierarchy in administrative	**Democratic Collective Centralization**	Centralized Democracy Principle	High – low	➢ High
		Hierarchy	High – low	➢ High

• agency system • Centralised planning • Centralized Decision making • Asking and Giving Practice • Limited autonomy • Dependency on superior organizations • Limited self-determination				
• Centralized Power • Support from the supervisors/leaders • Job orientation and coaching from supervisors/leaders • Inspired leadership; • Motivated leadership • Influences of the Head on Organizational Culture • Leadership Styles • Sense of justice of the leader • Manager should be a good example	**Power of the leader**	Formal power of the leader	High – low	➢ High
		Informal power of the leader	High – low	➢ High
• Vietnamese Communist Party's constitutional powers • Direct and comprehensive leading of	**Political Interventions**	Communist party's orientations and control	Strong – weak	➢ Strong
		Combination mechanism between	Clear – Unclear	➢ Clear

Vietnamese Communist Party • Working under the Resolution of Vietnamese Communist Party • Civil servant planning made by Vietnamese Communist Party • Being controlled by Vietnamese Communist Party and social organizations • Politicians' intervention • Coordinating between Social-Political and Organizations and administrative authorities • Parallel mechanism between Vietnamese Communist Party and authorities		Vietnamese Communist Party and authorities		
• Complicated but Deficient regulations and laws • Rapid adjustment regulations and laws • Overlapping and contradictory legal normative documents;	**Regulatory Pressures**	Quality regulations	Good – poor	➤ Poor
		Quantity of regulations	Sufficient - insufficient	➤ Insufficient

• Impractical regulations and laws • Outdated regulations • Confusing regulations and laws • Weak sanction				
• Paperwork; • Complex administrative procedures; • Administrative procedures and papers created by civil servants themselves • Unrealisable Reports	**Administrative and Paperwork Pressures**	Administrative procedures and requirements	Complicated – Simple Rigid – Flexible	➢ Complicated ➢ Rigid
		Paperwork	Much –Few	➢ Much
• Multi relationships in organizations • Difficulty of dissection of relationships • Dilemma between maintaining relationships and keeping principles • Promotion based on relationships • Pressure from multi-relationships • Family culture style • Integration of individual relationships into	**Relationships Issues**	Matrix of relationships	Complicated – simple	➢ Complicated
		Family culture Style	Strong – weak Integrated – separated	➢ Strong ➢ Integrated
		Pressures of relationships	High –low	➢ High

job performance • Working based on relationships Partiality				
• Variety of citizen types • Higher requirements of job performance • Citizens' rights and interest • Attitude and Behaviour of citizens • Service Users use relationships to make pressure • Limited confidence of citizens to public servants • Increasing of citizens' complains • Intellectual of citizens • Inadequate legal awareness of Citizens	**Pressures from service users**	Variety of Service users	High –low	➢ High
		Requirements of service users	High –low	➢ High
		Confidence of service users to civil servants	High –low	➢ Low
• Local phenomena • Respect for Regional Culture • Influences of regional culture • Giving the ideas in non-official ways • Respect for emotion • Respect for	**Social and Cultural Context**	Local culture and custom	Complicated–simple Different–similar	➢ Complex ➢ Different
		Local geographic particularities	Different – similar	➢ Different
		Local economic particularities	Stable – changeable Different –	➢ Changeable ➢ Different

humanity • Local phenomena • Geographic particularities • Difficulties in remoted areas • Economic particularities • Fast changes Society • Uncertainty of surrounding environment • Local languages • Local custom • Characteristics of local residents			similar	
• Personal principles • Individual Enthusiasm • Work by heart • Aspiration of contribution to society • Self-responsibility • Desire of creating changes in civil service	**Desire of maintaining public and personal values and ethics**	Following public and personal values	High – low	➢ Depend
		Work by heart	High – low	➢ Depend
		Enthusiasm at work	High – low	➢ Depend
• Contacting citizens through People's Council and the head of community • Applying IT to improve job performance • Participation in community'	**Responsiveness**	Listening to the citizens' voice	High – low	➢ Depend
		Adaptation to the reality	High – low	➢ Depend

• activities • Fact finding to catch the actual situation • Requirement on transparency • Adaptation to suit reality • Taking advantage of loopholes • "The will of the king yields to the people's customs" • Breaking the regulations				
• Importance of Relationships • Avoidance of Conflict • Respect of emotion and relationships • "Save face" • "A soft answer turns away wrath" • Clever behaviour with colleagues • Unofficial ways of giving opinions • Considering relationships as invisible properties	**Harmonization of Relationships**	Avoiding Conflicts	High –low Positive – Negative	➢ High ➢ Depend
		Expanding network	Significant – insignificant	➢ Significant
• Avoidance of responsibility • Collective spirit • Collective responsibilities • Sophism	**Collectivism**	Collective Decisions making	High – low	➢ High
		Cooperation	High – low	➢ High
		Shitting Responsibilities	High – low	➢ High

• Asking the guidelines of communist party • Consultation with Vietnamese Communist Party to deal with complicated and important issues • Low responsibility • Difficulty to lay the blame • Everybody's business is nobody's business		Blaming	High – low	➢	High
• Slow cooperation • Limited innovation • Low motivation • Inactiveness of giving personal opinions • Dilatoriness • Slowness • Job neglect • Limited Outcomes • Low job satisfaction • Decreasing enthusiasm	**Passiveness**	Initiative	Much – less	➢	Less
		Raising the voice	Much – less	➢	Less
		Inactiveness in working manner	High – Low	➢	Low
• Idleness • Casualness in working time • Casualness in performing progress • Doing private business in working hours.	**Dilatoriness**	Using working time	Effective – ineffective	➢	Ineffective
		Tardiness	High – low	➢	High

• Take advantage of position/power to earn money • Partiality • Self-interest • Un-unified application of laws and regulations • Harassment	**Misfeasance**	Public Power	High – low	➢	High
		Interest Issues	High – low	➢	High
		Favouritism	High – low	➢	High
		Corruption	High – low	➢	High
• Performing in a formalistic way	**Counterfeit**	Unreliable reports	High – low	➢	High
		Formalistic	High – low	➢	High
• Strict observance of law and regulations • Observance of laws and regulations is a criteria of good performance • Attachment to administrative principles and procedures	**Observance**	Observance of laws and regulations	High – low	➢	High
		Attachment to administrative principles and procedures	High – low	➢	High
• Respect for power • Paying the supervisor the honour • Complying with supervisors' decisions • Dependence on the leader • Adapt to the supervisors' and leaders' characteristic • Reporting	**Subordination**	Complying with supervisors	High – low	➢	High
		Power oriented attitude	High – low	➢	High

difficulties to supervisors		275		

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