

Original Article

# University Culture - Experimental Study on Universities in Thai Nguyen

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**Abstract** - Universities are social organizations with distinctive cultures relating to the concept of education in society and the state educational management mechanism. Recently changing environmental conditions in Vietnam are exerting a strong influence on universities' primary functions and culture. The university culture in the current period must both inherit the tradition in the culture of Be deferential to teachers and respect for moral of the Vietnamese people with the standard image of the teachers and at the same time integrates with the international education culture with market orientation and financial autonomy mechanism. Based on accessing the understanding of the forms and levels of expression of university culture, the article analyzes and clarifies the importance of building university culture with the following expressions: culture is a great asset of any university; motivates all members of the university; supports coordination and control, limits negativity and conflict; and therefore contributes to improving the quality of educational activities of the universities.

**Keywords** - Behavior culture, Core values, Reputation, University culture, Work environment.

## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, there has been much research about university culture and the influence of university culture on its effectiveness. It is also considered a solution for the university to face the changes in the real world (Knight and Trowler, 2000; Quicke, 2000).

Many scholars and practitioners agree that organizational culture can be a source of the organizational performance and competitive advantage (Barney, 1986; Gordon & DiTomaso, 1992; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Chan, Shaffer, & Snape, 2004; Hartnell et al., 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2014).

Universities are complex social organizations with multiple objectives and standards in teaching, researching, and community service. Therefore university culture is characterized by a cultural mix (Claudia Rus et al., 2017). The university manifests an internally oriented control, using enough centralization and formalization to assure its stability and continuity to obtain predictable performance outcomes. In recent times, with regional and world integration, education reform has taken place strongly; the universities have to adopt the market orientation quickly and be flexible enough to initiate structural changes, internally aligned yet sensitive to a competitive, complex environment.

Building and developing an educational culture in Vietnam is currently a great concern for society. Vietnam has experimented with a number of higher education reforms in the last two decades, with some success in expanding

access but missing opportunities in achieving good results on quality and relevance and furthering equity (World Bank, 2020). Based on recent legislative and regulatory changes, the new vision and the strategic plan that the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has been working on constructing a higher education ecosystem that is favorable to the emergence of the University of the Future in Education Strategy/ Master Plan (2021-2030).

Based on accessing the understanding of the forms and levels of expression of university culture, the article analyzes and clarifies the importance of building university culture with the following expressions: culture is a great asset of any university; motivates all members of the university; supports coordination and control, limits negativity and conflict; and therefore contributes to improving the quality of educational activities of the universities.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Organizational culture

Organizational culture is a topic that soon received much attention from researchers. Organizational culture has officially become a concept in organizational science - management since the late 1970s and early 1980s of the last century and is now a popular and widely popular concept (O'Reilly et al., 2014). Studies have gradually clarified the content of organizational culture, the procedure of building and evaluating organizational culture, and factors affecting organizational culture. Schein is considered to be the most famous theorist of organizational culture who has given the widely accepted and cited definition in the literature on organizational culture: Organizational culture is a set of



recognized fundamental principles that a group of people share; principles that are applied to solve problems that arise within an organization when it comes to adapting to external changes as well as to create cohesion and integration within that organization. Those are the principles that have proven to be effective enough for everyone to recognize its value, and therefore, need to be communicated and trained to new employees, so that they perceive, think and act in accordance with these principles when dealing with problems (Schein 2004).

Syed Z et al. (2011) argue that organizational culture is not only a system of shared concepts that help members of the organization understand how to behave but also a model. Includes beliefs, rituals, customs, and imaginations developed over a given period of time.

Many theoretical literature reviews on the organizational culture show that cultures reflect the values, beliefs, and actions of their senior leaders (e.g., Baron & Hannan, 2002). O'Reilly et al. (2014), with many studies that appeared to investigate both culture and performance explicitly, have shown that there is empirical evidence for a relationship between an organization's culture and its effectiveness.

## **2.2. University culture**

### *2.2.1. About components of University culture*

Edgar H. Schein (1985), from a structural point of view, has pointed out three elements of organizational culture in universities, including: (i) Processes and tangible structures (Artifacts), (ii) Value system declared (Espoused values); (iii) Basic underlying assumption (quote by Jennifer R. Keup et al., 2001). Those elements form a whole capable of regulating the behavior of each member of the organization, giving the organization a separate identity, which is increasingly richer and can change over time. At the same time, organizational culture and cultural change can be used to prepare an environment for transformation, a yardstick for assessing whether or not a transformational change has taken place, and a means of achieving the desired results of an innovation.

Toma et al., 2003 propose a model as an alternative analysis of the cultural organization of the university by identifying those elements of the university culture most affected by the changes required by the university (quote by Folch and Ion, 2009). Authors used 121 items categorized in ten dimensions as follows: (1) Functions: duality investigation; university/society; territory development; (2) the government and the administration of the universities; (3) the finance of public universities; (4) the investigation at the university; (5) Profiles of the lectures at the university; (6) Methodology: knowledge transmission; actual subject matters; introduction of the activities; evaluation of the students; (7) Students and interaction in the community

between teachers and students. (8) Evaluation and innovation at the university; (9) Information and communication technologies in administrative management, education, and investigation and infrastructures; (10) Relations of the university with the environment: agreements; university system; international relations; studies of the third level.

Claudia Rus et al. (2017) used the Competing Values Framework (CVF) to assess the Romanian universities' culture, with 898 participants from 96 teaching and research units. Research shows that in six dimensions of the organizational culture: dominant characteristics, organizational leadership, management of employees, organizational glue, strategic emphases, and success criteria, three main characteristics are suitable for university culture that are organizational leadership, strategic emphases, and success criteria.

The OCAI (Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument) model was initiated by R. Quinn (2005) and is now a commonly used corporate culture assessment model globally.

The OCAI model evaluates corporate culture based on 6 main criteria, including 1. Outstanding characteristics of the enterprise; 2. Business leaders; 3. Employees in the enterprise; 4. the glue that holds people together; 5. Business focus strategy; 6. Criteria for business success

The goal of OCAI is to assess the current corporate culture model and the desired model. There are 4 main corporate culture models to be considered, which are: 1. Cooperative/tribal cultural model; 2. Creative cultural model; 3. Hierarchical/control culture model; 4. Market/competitive culture model.

OCAI is considered a functional instrument of many pieces of research to assess university culture and identify the different types of culture which exist in higher education institutions (Bennett, 2010, quoted from Fatemeh Hamidifar, 2012). Many researchers used the OCAI model to assess university culture as Barbara Fralinger and Valerie Olson (2007); Fatemeh Hamidifar (2012); Caliskan, Aysun & Zhu, Chang (2019); A Rahman et al., (2021)

### *2.2.2. Impact of University culture on performance, effectiveness, and advantage competitiveness*

Akiyomi Oladele John (2012) examines the impact of organizational culture on faith-based universities' performance. the results revealed that organizational culture is very important in every university entity and correlated to their performance. Besides, organizational culture affects the level of employees' commitment to university goals positively. the study also shows a positive relationship between organizational culture and the performance of faith-

based Universities. the general agreement is that positive organizational culture will positively impact the performance of any University. the selected Universities need to work on their cultural elements to improve their performance further.

Fisher and Alford (2000) describe the four factors of a university culture that have the greatest impact on organizational performance: Involvement, Consistency, Adaptability, and Mission (High-performance culture model). Denison, D. proposed this model, and Neale, W. in 1990, and, up to now, it is used for assessing organizational culture in many fields.

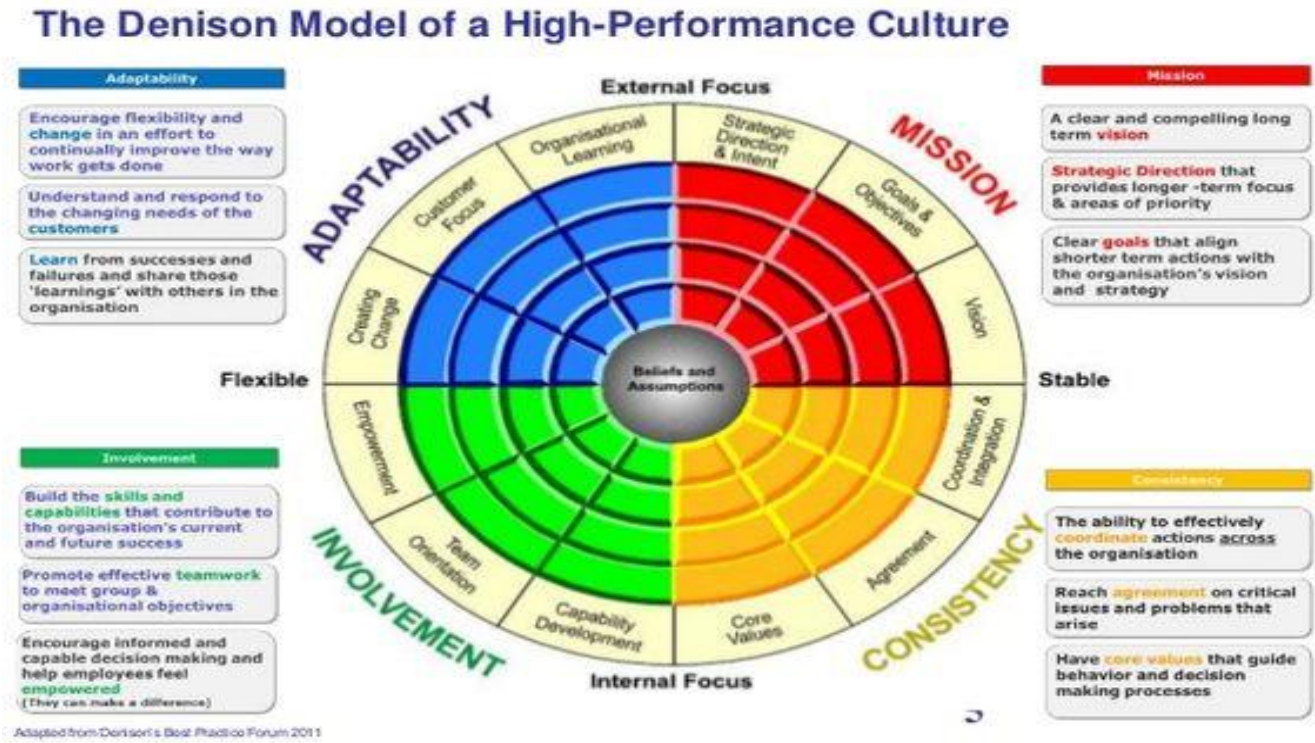


Fig. 1 High-performance culture model

Source: Denison, D. and Neale, W.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The interviewees of this study are managers, lecturers, and staff of universities under Thainguyen University.

3.2. Sample size

Currently, Thai Nguyen University has over 4,146 staff members with over 2,621 teaching staff. the study uses Slovin's formula to calculate the sample size for social research with a defined population size with a confidence level of 0.05. Therefore, 365 sample respondents were randomly selected by snowball sampling method based on sending the questionnaire link to the author's acquaintances at Thai Nguyen University. Then they continued sending the link to their friends.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Item	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100%</b>
25-34	45	12,3%
35-44	240	65,8%
45 and above	80	21,9%
<b>Gender</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100%</b>
Male	142	38,9%
Female	223	61,1%
<b>Position</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100%</b>
Managers at unit level and above	10	2,7%
Faculty and department level managers	112	30,7%
Lecturer, Trainee	198	54,2%
The staff of departments and centers (not lecturers)	45	12,3%

Source: Research result

**3.3. Instruments**

Preliminary information about Thainguyen Universities' culture was collected through an online questionnaire because of difficulties from Covid-19 disease. an online structural questionnaire (with three main parts) was used as the main instrument of the survey.

The first part gathered information on the respondent's profile: age, gender, marital status, number of family members, etc. the second part gathered information on the respondent's knowledge of university culture. the third part gathered information on the respondent's cognizance of Thainguyen Universities' culture.

**3.4. Data processing and analyzing**

After being reviewed, information on questionnaires will be encoded and entered data into SPSS 22.0 software.

The Descriptive statistics and Multiple Linear Regressions method was used to describe the

**4. Results**

**4.1. Knowledge about university culture**

The role of university culture in achieving the target of the university. Most respondents believe that university culture plays a more important role in building a university's brand and building a university's customer service culture than in recruiting and improving operational efficiency in university action

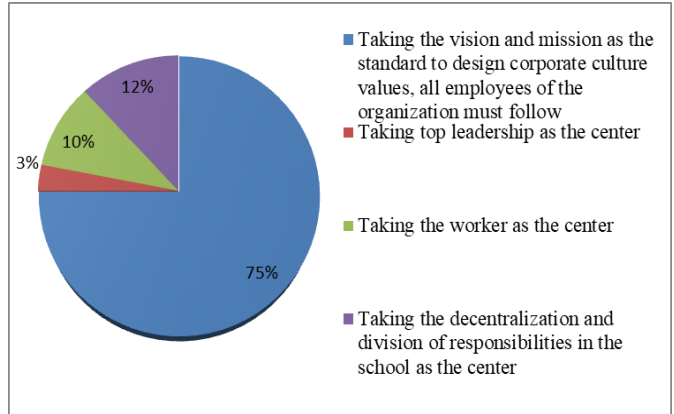
**Table 2. The role of university culture**

Item	Average value	Meaning
Recruiting and training internal people	3,74	Important
Building a customer service culture style (students, businesses, organizations, ...)	4,21	Very important
Orientation of activities to adapt to the external environment	3,57	Important
Improve work efficiency	3,82	Important
Building the school's brand image	4,43	Very important

Source: Research result

**4.1.1. Model of building university culture**

There is a high consensus in the respondents' comments about the model of building university culture; most of the respondents said that the university culture needs to take the vision and mission as the standard to design cultural values. in core culture, all of the organization's personnel must understand and be consistent in implementing this orientation.

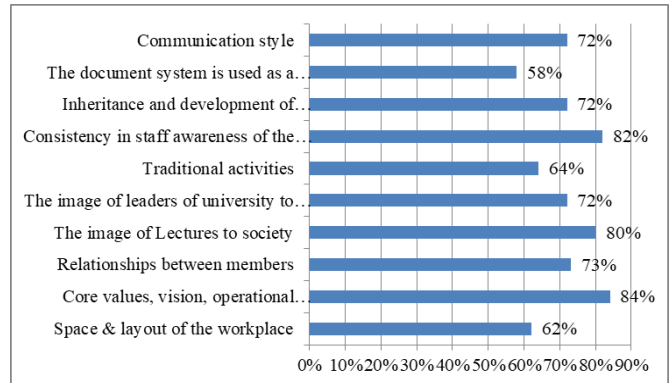


**Fig. 2 Model of building university culture**

Source: Research result

**4.1.2 Components of University culture**

Group of factors related to Core values, vision, operational strategy of the school, Consistency in staff awareness of the Universities' Core Values, vision, and operational strategy, and the image of Lectures to society selected by the respondents as a component of university culture is more than the group of factors Traditional activities, Space & layout of the workplace, the document system is used as a general rule.



**Fig. 2 Components of university culture**

Source: Research result

**4.2. Cognizance of Thainguyen Universities culture**

The High-Performance Culture assessment model was chosen to evaluate the culture of Thai Nguyen University because with this cultural assessment model, and we can consider the relative relationship between the results of the construction and development organizational culture of the school with performance results. At the same time, considering and assessing university culture according to this model, we also identify strengths and weaknesses in the university's organizational culture according to the criteria considered and evaluated.

The scoreboard is given based on the common average scores of the criteria according to the Likert scale of the groups of respondents leading, staff, and lecturers of the university.

**Table 3. Evaluation table of university culture according to the High-Performance Culture model**

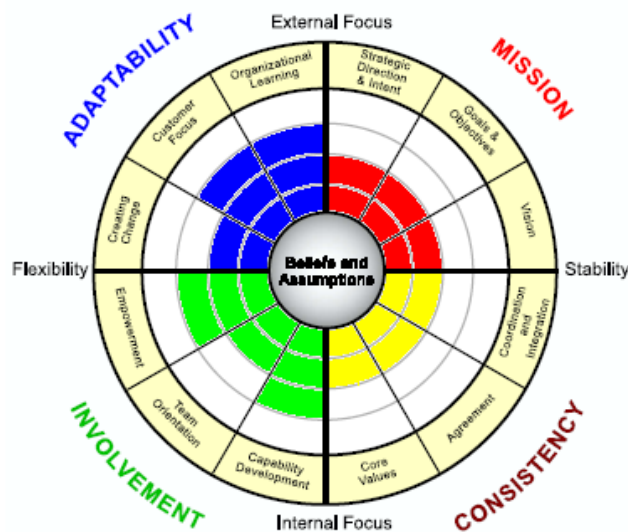
Mission		Average point
1	The strategic direction of the company is clear to me.	3
2	We continuously monitor our progress against our stated goals.	3
3	Our vision creates stimulation and motivation for our employees.	3
Total		9
Consistency		
1	When disagreements arise, we strive to come up with mutually beneficial solutions	3
2	Can easily coordinate projects across different parts of the company	3
3	Ignoring core values gets you in trouble	3
Total		9
Participation		
1	Everyone believes that they can have a positive influence	4
2	Work is organized so that each person can see the relationship between their work and the company's goals	3
3	Bench strength is constantly improving	4
Total		11
Adaptability		
1	New, improved ways of working are constantly being adopted	4
2	Customer input directly affects our decisions	4
3	We see failure as an opportunity to learn and improve ourselves.	3
Total		11

Source: Research result

Convert this total score to a percentage scale according to the following rules:

Point	% point	Characterize university culture
3-5	the first quartile (0 – 25%) <i>Color the first circle from the center</i>	Dangerous Culture Area
6-8	Second quartile (26% - 50%) <i>Color the second circle from the center</i>	Requires cultural attention.
9-12	Third quartile (51% - 75%) <i>Color the third circle from the center</i>	Chances
13-15	Forth quartile (76% - 100%) <i>Color the fourth circle from the center</i>	Strong culture

with the above general assessment results, Thai Nguyen University's culture is described as follows:



**Fig. 4 Result of assessing university culture**

Source: Research result

## 5. Conclusion

It can be seen that the university culture has not been focused on building up in the universities of Thai Nguyen University, so the awareness of university culture among the labor groups in the university is not clear and inconsistent across groups.

In the university - administrative-pedagogical entity, culture is not only the external environment that affects the ideological and emotional lives of its members but also the operating structure, methods, and how the school works. Organizational culture is the driving force for the development of each university. Therefore, paying attention to building and developing the university culture is the right and effective way to improve the real quality of each university. In the current educational reform context, this is an even more important and necessary issue for every school; it requires common attention and specific plans and actions in a reasonable strategic roadmap, not only with leaders and managers but also with all school members.

To build a university culture with a clear orientation, Thainguyn university managers need:

- Researching the environment and influencing factors to plan a development strategy of Thainguyn University suitable for the future.
- Determine what the core values are as the basis for the success of the model of building the culture of Thai Nguyen University and each member unit. Core values should be values that do not change over time; at the same time, they should be the red thread for all activities of Build a vision - an ideal picture of the future - a goal to achieve.

- Focus on researching, proposing solutions to do, and how to close the gap between existing cultural values and planned future culture.
- Drafting a plan, a specific and detailed action plan for each member and the subordinate unit, suitable to other time and resource conditions to execute that plan.
- Disseminate changing needs and prospects for all staff and students to share; from there, motivating them, motivating them; thereby creating a consensus, helping them understand clearly their roles, positions, rights, and responsibilities in making efforts to participate in building and developing organizational culture.
- Institutionalizing, modeling and consolidating, and continuously improving cultural change in member and subordinate units; attach importance to building and motivating units to follow ideal models in accordance with the organizational culture model.

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