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### Quality Culture Research at the University of Labour and Social Affairs

Nguyen Huu Hung

University of Labour and Social Affairs, Hanoi, Vietnam

Corresponding Author: Nguyen Huu Hung

#### Abstract

In the trend of globalization and international integration, quality culture is increasingly important for the existence and development strategy of each universities. The quality culture in higher education institutions in Europe, the United States, and some countries in Asia with developed higher education systems has been studied and organized in many seminars, and this is also important content for Vietnam in improving the quality of education in general and higher education in particular. Research on quality culture will help higher education institutions have a suitable strategic development direction, clearly position quality and quality culture in the mission, vision, and development

strategy; and have a system of quality policies, quality plans, shared values, tools, criteria, and appropriate quality assurance processes. The article applies the framework of evaluating the quality of universities using a value-based approach to study the evaluation of quality culture at the university of Labour and Social Affairs. Descriptive statistical results show that the quality culture of the university of Labour and Social Affairs is at a promising level. Therefore, there is a need for research to propose solutions to improve the quality culture of the university of Labour and Social Affairs to a new level.

**Keywords:** Culture, Quality Culture, Higher Education

#### 1. Setting the Issue

In the trend of globalization and international integration, quality culture is increasingly important for the existence and development strategy of higher education institutions. The term "quality culture" was first mentioned in North America in the early 20th century. The quality culture in higher education institutions in Europe, the United States, and some countries in Asia with developed higher education systems has been studied and organized in many seminars <sup>[1]</sup>.

In VietNam, quality culture is a major concern in higher education, as it is one of the determining factors for the sustainable development of each institution as well as the entire system. Many in-depth research works on quality culture have been carried out in recent years. These works have presented different concepts of quality culture, proposed models of quality culture in universities, and standards for the quality culture of universities <sup>[2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7]</sup>. In terms of state management, the Ministry of Education and Training has issued Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT on quality accreditation of higher education institutions <sup>[8]</sup>. These are the prerequisites and basis for establishing values in building and developing a quality culture in Vietnamese higher education institutions.

This article applies the framework of evaluating the quality culture of universities to assess the quality culture of the university of Labour and Social Affairs, providing a basis for proposing measures to enhance the quality culture of the institution.

#### 2.1 Some Theoretical Issues About Quality Culture

##### ▪ *Concept of Quality Culture*

Currently, there are many different definitions of quality culture:

According to the European University Association-EUA (2006), quality culture is an organizational culture; in which, enhancing quality is seen as a continuous process. Quality culture is characterized by 2 distinct factors: (1) A set of values, beliefs, and expectations towards quality; (2) Management/structure factor with quality assurance processes and collaborative efforts leading to quality for an organization <sup>[9]</sup>.

According to Ahmed (2008), quality culture is a system of organizational values to create a conducive environment for continuous establishment and improvement <sup>[10]</sup>.

According to Berings and colleagues (2010), the quality culture of a higher education institution is the organizational culture with quality criteria formed from the internal and external quality assurance system, unanimously accepted and implemented, aiming to continuously improve the quality of the institution's activities, carried out efficiently and with high performance <sup>[11]</sup>.

According to Le Thi Phuong (2018), quality culture is understood as a special culture of an organization containing beliefs, values, expectations, and commitments based on the efforts of each individual in the organization. Quality culture is also a component of the quality management system with tools, evaluation criteria, and quality assurance [12].

Although there are many different definitions of quality culture, overall, the authors above all share the view that the quality culture of an organization is a system of standards, values, and beliefs established with high consensus and unity of the members in the organization, thereby directing the organization's activities to achieve quality.

**Model of Quality Culture in Universities**

Currently, there are many different models of quality culture suitable for various types of organizations.

According to the quality culture model of the European University Association (2006) [9], quality culture is determined based on 2 factors. First, the technical factor (quality management) is the expression of actions in the quality management system including tools, mechanisms, and processes for measuring, evaluating, ensuring, and improving quality. Second, the cultural factor (quality commitment) is the expression of awareness, the collection of common values, beliefs, expectations, and commitments toward the quality of individuals and groups. The desired quality culture values from the above 2 factors are information, participation, and trust.

According to the quality culture model of Lanarès (2009) [16], it proposes how to monitor the development of quality culture through 2 factors: What people say and what people do at the individual and group levels. The author's proposed content of what individuals and groups say and do is only a few key indicators to monitor the development of quality culture.

In practice, depending on the characteristics and culture of each university, they can supplement, or combine some suitable indicators with qualitative data collection methods, quantitative data collection methods, or a combination of both.

| Framework for observing the development of quality culture |                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Level                                                      | What did they say                                                                                                      | What did they do                                                                                                   |
| <b>Individual level: (Management, staff, students)</b>     | -Comments on quality processes<br>- Percentage of people agreeing with the school's approach to quality and its values | - Participate in quality assurance processes<br>- Self-assessment in teaching<br>- Respond to teaching evaluations |
| <b>Group level: (University, Faculty, Department)</b>      | - Quality concept<br>- Principles of regulating, supplementing, and improving quality                                  | - Quality improvement every year<br>- Applying quality principles                                                  |

Le Duc Ngoc and colleagues (2012) proposed a model of the structural culture of university quality consisting of 5 environmental quality components corresponding to 5 standards, and from there, constructing 20 criteria. This model embodies the culture of the organization and quality assurance activities that need to be implemented (based on the standards of the Ministry of Education and Training, AUN, and ABET) and serves as a basis for assessing the explicit demonstration of quality culture within the educational institution (Figure 1).

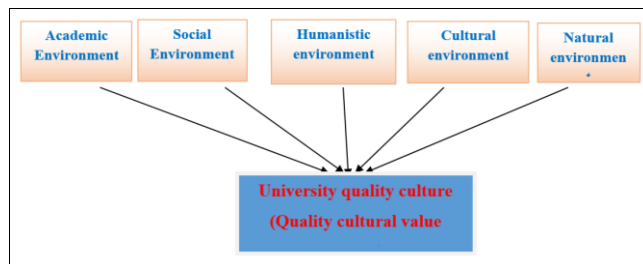


Fig 1: University quality culture model

**Standard Framework, Criteria for Evaluating the Quality Culture of a University According to the Value Approach**

According to Nguyen Thi Ngoc Xuan (2017) [14], based on the quality culture model of Le Duc Ngoc and colleagues (2012), a framework for evaluating the quality culture of a university according to the value approach consists of 5 criteria and 20 criteria (Table 1).

Table 1: Framework for evaluating the quality culture of a university according to the value approach

| Standards/ Criteria | Content                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Standards 1</b>  | <b>Value belongs to the academic field</b>                                                                                             |
| Criterion 1.1       | Freedom to be creative in teaching and scientific research activities                                                                  |
| Criterion 1.2       | Honesty in research and publication of scientific products                                                                             |
| Criterion 1.3       | Appreciate the implementation of academic transmission in higher education institutions                                                |
| Criterion 1.4       | Promote the spirit of cooperation and sharing of scientific research and teaching results                                              |
| <b>Standards 2</b>  | <b>Value belongs to the social field</b>                                                                                               |
| Criterion 2.1       | Affirming the established vision, mission and core values of the school                                                                |
| Criterion 2.2       | Promote the school's autonomy and social responsibility                                                                                |
| Criterion 2.3       | Plan a mechanism to evaluate the quality of work of individuals and units at the school                                                |
| Criterion 2.4       | Ensure openness and transparency in financial management                                                                               |
| <b>Standards 3</b>  | <b>Values belong to the field of humanities</b>                                                                                        |
| Criterion 3.1       | Democracy in management and administration of school activities                                                                        |
| Criterion 3.2       | Ensure benefits according to policies for staff, lecturers, staff and learners.                                                        |
| Criterion 3.3       | Promote the responsibility of officials, lecturers, staff, and learners towards the school and society                                 |
| Criterion 3.4       | Enhance the spirit of solidarity and mutual love within the unit, between units, among individuals and with society.                   |
| <b>Standards 4</b>  | <b>Value belongs to the cultural field</b>                                                                                             |
| Criterion 4.1       | Staff and students have a deep belief in the values established in the organization and actively implement those cultural values.      |
| Criterion 4.2       | Create rules of conduct, cooperation, support, respect, and a civilized and cultural lifestyle                                         |
| Criterion 4.3       | Honoring the school's fine traditions combined with national cultural identity                                                         |
| Criterion 4.4       | Pay attention to cultural activities in school; cultural exchange, cooperation, and integration with domestic and foreign communities. |
| <b>Standards 5</b>  | <b>Value is in the field of landscape and facilities</b>                                                                               |
| Criterion 5.1       | Ensuring the school's architecture and landscape are green, clean, and beautiful.                                                      |
| Criterion 5.2       | Ensure adequate facilities, equipment, lecture halls, and classrooms for teaching, learning, and research in                           |

|               |                                                                                                                 |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               | terms of quantity, quality, and artistic standards.                                                             |
| Criterion 5.3 | Ensure library culture (environment, behavior, communication, reading culture...)                               |
| Criterion 5.4 | Take care of facilities serving food, accommodation, entertainment, and cultural activities for school members. |

On that basis, Nguyen Thi Ngoc Xuan and Le Duc Ngoc (2019) proposed a 5-stage scale for building quality culture in universities <sup>[15]</sup> (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Stages of building quality culture in universities

| Corresponding attainment level/Average score | Level implement the criteria                                                                             | Stage of building quality culture |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Level 1: 1,0 - 1,9                           | The school has not implemented it yet, there are no results regarding its activities at the present time | Early stage                       |
| Level 2: 2,0 - 2,9                           | This activity is still in the planning stage and has no results yet                                      | Progressive stage                 |
| Level 3: 3,0 - 3,9                           | The school has implemented it, but there have been no clear results                                      | Prospect stage                    |
| Level 4: 4,0 - 4,4                           | The school has implemented it and has had initial results                                                | Development stage                 |
| Level 5: 4,5 - 5,0                           | The school has implemented it with clear evidence and good results                                       | Complete phase                    |

**3. Results of Quality Culture Assessment of the University of Labor and Social Affairs**

Based on the criteria in table 1, the study surveyed 365 officials and lecturers working at the university of Labour and Social Affairs in June-July 2022. The evaluation results are shown in Table 3:

| Standards                                                        | Criterion     | Average score criteria | Standard GPA |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Standards 1<br>Value belongs to the academic field               | Criterion 1.1 | 3,5                    | 3,7          |
|                                                                  | Criterion 1.2 | 3,2                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 1.3 | 3,6                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 1.4 | 3,5                    |              |
| Standards 2<br>Value belongs to the social field                 | Criterion 2.1 | 3,9                    | 3,7          |
|                                                                  | Criterion 2.2 | 3,8                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 2.3 | 3,6                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 2.4 | 3,7                    |              |
| Standards 3<br>Values belong to the field of humanities          | Criterion 3.1 | 3,7                    | 3,6          |
|                                                                  | Criterion 3.2 | 3,7                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 3.3 | 3,6                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 3.4 | 3,3                    |              |
| Standards 4<br>Value belongs to the cultural field               | Criterion 4.1 | 3,3                    | 3,3          |
|                                                                  | Criterion 4.2 | 3,3                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 4.3 | 3,2                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 4.4 | 3,4                    |              |
| Standards 5<br>Value is in the field of landscape and facilities | Criterion 5.1 | 3,6                    | 3,6          |
|                                                                  | Criterion 5.2 | 3,6                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 5.3 | 3,6                    |              |
|                                                                  | Criterion 5.4 | 3,4                    |              |
| Average score                                                    |               |                        | 3,5          |

▪ **Criterion 1-Value in the Academic Field**

According to tables 2 and 3, the level of building the quality culture of the University of Labour and Social Affairs in

Criterion 1 is in a promising stage. Specifically:

+ Criterion 1.3 "*Valuing the implementation of academic transmission in higher education institutions*" has the highest average score of 3.6. This result is consistent with the University of Labour and Social Affairs' ongoing innovation in teaching methods, effectively guiding students in scientific research to enhance the quality of education and research. The International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) registration of the Journal of Human Resources and Social Security of the University of Labour and Social Affairs has created conditions for publishing and preserving scientific publications and information. To further enhance this criterion, the university needs to regularly gather feedback from relevant parties such as employers and alumni to develop training programmes that are in line with current trends. Effectively develop, regularly update, and implement legal documents and related policies to develop the quality of training and scientific research activities and serve the community.

+ Criterion 1.2 "*Honesty in research and publication of scientific products*" has the lowest average score of 3.2. Although the University of Labour and Social Affairs has issued regulations on scientific and technological activities, there is no clear regulation on the standards of competence and ethics in research; there is no specific document on copyright protection policies. The university only honours scientists with outstanding research achievements but does not truly emphasise the evaluation and honouring of honesty in scientific and technological activities. To improve this criterion, the university needs to issue regulations on the standards of competence and ethics in research, copyright protection policies; at the same time, it is necessary to periodically honour honesty in academic activities. The team of officials and lecturers should have awareness and effort to improve their professional and language skills; dedication in teaching and scientific research activities, and uphold the ethics of educators and professional ethics.

▪ **Criterion 2 - Values in the Social Field**

According to tables 2 and 3, the level of building a quality culture of the University of Labour and Social Affairs in Criterion 2 is in the prospective stage. Specifically:

+ Criterion 2.1 "*Affirmation of the vision, mission and core values of the university*" has the highest average score of 3.9. The mission, vision, and core values of the University of Labour and Social Affairs are affirmed and widely disseminated to officials, lecturers, and students. To concretise the mission and vision, the university has developed short-term, medium-term, and long-term development strategies suitable for each stage of the university's development. To improve this criterion, the university needs to adjust the mission, vision, and core values according to the era based on the cultural quality environment; at the same time, implement monitoring and timely adjustments to effectively implement short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans.

+ Criterion 2.3 "*Planning the mechanism for evaluating the quality of work of individuals and units at the school*" has the lowest average score of 3.6. The University of Labour and Social Affairs has effectively implemented the assignment of functions and tasks for individuals and units at the school. However, the mechanism for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the work of individuals and units still has some shortcomings; the school's

implementation of the coordinated mechanism for fulfilling tasks between units is not really smooth and effective. Therefore, the school needs to regularly review and adjust the regulations for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the work of individuals and units at the school. In addition, the school also needs to establish a mechanism for coordination between units to fulfil assigned tasks to meet the requirements of work quantity and quality. The system of documents for organizing and managing the school needs to be regularly updated, standardized, and provided with necessary implementation guidelines, fully posted on the school's website.

#### ▪ **Criterion 3-Values in the Humanities Field**

Tables 2 and 3 show that the level of building the quality culture of the University of Labour and Social Affairs in criterion 3 is in a promising stage. Among them:

+ Criterion 3.1 "*Democracy in the management of school activities*" and Criterion 3.2 "*Ensuring the rights under the policy for the staff, lecturers, employees, and students*" have the highest average score of 3.7. Annually, the University of Labour and Social Affairs organizes conferences for officials, civil servants, and workers, and dialogues between the school's leadership and students to create conditions for staff, lecturers, and students to exercise grassroots democracy. In addition, the internal spending regulations of the school are also issued and publicly disclosed for monitoring and implementation by staff and lecturers. The internal spending regulations are regularly reviewed, amended, and supplemented to suit each stage of the school's development. To enhance this criterion, the school needs a mechanism to evaluate the implementation of grassroots democracy for staff, lecturers, and students.

+ Criterion 3.4 "*Promoting solidarity and compassion within the unit, between units, individuals, and society*" has the lowest average score of 3.3. The University of Labour and Social Affairs always advocates for building solidarity among individuals and units, resolutely combating factionalism, nepotism, cronyism, and corruption. However, the implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of measures to implement this criterion are not thorough enough. To improve, the school needs to implement measures to prevent and combat cronyism and corruption, as well as monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these activities in a more detailed and regular manner.

#### **Standard 4-Cultural Value**

According to Tables 2 and 3, the quality cultural construction level of the University of Labour and Social Affairs in Standard 4 is in a promising stage. Specifically:

+ Criterion 4.3 "*Honoring the good traditions of the school combined with the cultural identity of the nation*" has the lowest average score of 3.2. The good traditions of the University of Labor and Social Affairs are always preserved and implemented to motivate members to cultivate their own lifestyles, and working styles, and contribute to the development of the institution. However, the school has not regularly monitored and evaluated the ethical and behavioral training of its staff and lecturers; nor has it effectively solicited feedback on their working styles and communication skills. To improve this criterion, the school needs to strengthen its evaluation and feedback collection on the ethics and working styles of its staff and lecturers, in

order to help them promote their own values and contribute to the honoring of the school's good traditions

+ Criterion 4.4 "*Focusing on cultural activities within the university; cultural exchange, cooperation, integration with the community inside and outside the country*" has the highest average score of 3.4. The cultural and artistic activities and cultural exchanges of the University of Labour and Social Affairs with individuals and universities in the country are always integrated with activities to promote the image and good traditions of the university, and the cultural identity of the ethnic groups. The university always creates a friendly, civilized, honest working environment; the staff and lecturers build a healthy lifestyle, and are thrifty, friendly, and helpful to colleagues, creating a premise to build a strong community. To improve this criterion, the university needs to develop and effectively implement values and regulations on civilized behavior in the workplace, a code of conduct inside and outside the university; and strengthen monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of good cultural traits of individuals and units within the university.

#### **Standard 5-Value in the Field of Landscape and Infrastructure**

Tables 2 and 3 show that the level of building a quality cultural environment of the University of Labour and Social Affairs in standard 5 is in a promising stage. Specifically:

+ Criteria 5.1; 5.2 and 5.3 "*Ensure the architectural and landscape of the school to be green, clean, and beautiful*"; "*Ensure the infrastructure, equipment, classrooms, and study facilities to fully meet the quantity, quality, and artistic standards*" and "*Ensure library culture (environment, behavior, communication, reading culture...)*" all have an average score of 3.6. The University of Labour and Social Affairs has also focused on building a green, clean, and beautiful environment along with investing in modern infrastructure and equipment; fully equipped classrooms to serve well for teaching, learning, and scientific research activities. To improve this criterion, the University needs to regularly gather feedback on the level of infrastructure, equipment, and classrooms to take timely measures for improvement and upgrades. The library needs to be supplemented with sufficient Vietnamese and foreign language books, textbooks, and reference materials to meet the needs of staff, lecturers, and learners. It is necessary to establish an electronic library connected to the network to effectively serve teaching, learning, and scientific research.

+ Criterion 5.4 "*Taking care of the material facilities for eating, living, and cultural activities for members of the university*" has a lower average score of 3.4. The University of Labor and Social Affairs is constantly investing in upgrading its facilities and equipment for cultural and sports activities to serve the entertainment and training needs of staff, lecturers, and students; at the same time, it is concerned about and directs the provision of a good living and learning environment for resident students. However, feedback on these services has not been fully obtained; the canteen for staff, lecturers, and students has been closed for 3 years due to the pandemic situation and the university is currently undergoing renovation and repair. Therefore, the University needs to strengthen feedback on the services of eating, living, and cultural activities to promptly repair and upgrade them.

**Overall Evaluation:** Table 3 shows that the level of quality cultural construction of the university is in a promising stage. Although the average scores of the criteria indicate that the level of quality cultural construction of the University is in a promising stage, there is a difference between these average scores. Specifically, Criterion 2 - social value has the highest average score of 3.7, and Criterion 4 - cultural value has the lowest average score of 3.3. This shows that the current reality of building and developing the quality culture of the University of Labor and Social Affairs mainly focuses on activities that ensure quality internally rather than cultural values.

#### 4. Conclusion

The research results show that the current status of building the quality culture of the University of Labour and Social Affairs is in a promising stage. Therefore, the research proposes measures for the university's quality culture to reach a higher stage, moving gradually from development to perfection. The university needs to carry out the following tasks:

1. Review to adjust the mission, vision, and core values in line with the current era, based on closely adhering to and supplementing the specific content of the university into 5 environments of quality culture.

*Academic environment:* Develop a strategy, plan, and appropriate investment for academic activities that are in line with the mission, resources, and development orientation of the university; Exercise autonomy and social responsibility in academic activities; Encourage cooperation and academic sharing among members inside and outside the university; Continuously provide academic training and development for university members; Promote the dissemination of academic knowledge in line with progressive educational perspectives and contemporary relevance in a high-quality and effective manner.

*Social environment:* Establish a vision, mission, and objectives that align with the resources and position of the university; Establish a clear organizational structure and delineate the functions, tasks, responsibilities, and authority of functional units within the university; Establish operational mechanisms, coordinate activities, and evaluate the effectiveness of functional units within the university.

*Human Environment:* Implement comprehensive democratic rights for the staff, lecturers, employees, and students; fully implement basic benefits according to the state's policies for the staff, lecturers, employees, and students; establish mechanisms, policies, and measures for the staff, lecturers, employees, and students to fully, effectively, and responsibly fulfill their duties to the institution and the community.

*Cultural Environment:* Establish rules of respectful, cooperative, and supportive conduct among members for the institution's reputation and mission; uphold ethics, and healthy lifestyles, and promote the institution's noble traditions combined with the national cultural identity; engage in exchange, cooperation, and integration activities with the local and international communities.

*Natural Environment:* Ensure the institution's architecture and landscape are green, clean, beautiful, harmonious, and rational; guarantee adequate physical and financial resources: lecture halls, classrooms, teaching and learning facilities, and practical and scientific research facilities in both quantity and quality; provide a well-equipped library

for teaching, learning, and scientific research activities; offer good living conditions and accommodation for resident students; ensure security, cultural life, arts, and sports activities for all members of the institution.

2. Develop a specific plan for building and developing a culture of quality, aiming to further promote standards and criteria with good evaluation results. Especially, establish the school's quality standards: Based on the mission, objectives, and reference to the requirements of relevant parties, the school establishes quality standards (output standards, lecturer standards), assessment tools (lecturer assessment, course assessment, service assessment), regulations, and rules. These quality standards, assessment tools, and regulations need the consensus of relevant parties and need to be specified as the responsibilities of each member and organization.

3. Promote awareness among all members about the importance of quality assurance and quality culture for the long-term and sustainable development of the school. The principles and policies on school quality assurance once agreed upon, need to be widely disseminated and promoted in a specific manner to all members and organizations of the school, through various diverse forms (website, bulletin boards, meetings, dramatization, etc.).

4. Implement the construction and development of a quality cultural plan, regularly summarize, and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan implementation. Implement activities to ensure quality for all staff, lecturers, employees, and learners; it is necessary to coordinate systematically among grassroots units, organizations, associations, and individuals. To effectively implement the quality culture in the school, the leadership team needs to set an example and the work must be maintained regularly and continuously.

5. Compliance with the principle of assessment and evaluation is to help individuals and organizations identify strengths and weaknesses, and take timely and appropriate measures to leverage strengths, overcome weaknesses, and continue to strive for better results. Assessment and evaluation are only effective when they help the implementers to recognize the existing issues; it is necessary to encourage and motivate everyone to have a sense of responsibility to perform better rather than to discipline or punish.

6. Transparency is one of the requirements for ensuring quality. The school needs to clearly define the scope, extent, and individuals/organizations responsible for public information. Public information needs to be regularly updated; the target audience for the public information needs to be carefully considered.

7. Review and Adjust: Quality standards, evaluation tools, and regulations only have validity for a certain period. During the implementation process, regular reviews are necessary to provide a basis for adjustment and improvement. The adjustment and supplementation process must involve the opinions of relevant individuals and organizations and be agreed upon throughout the entire institution.

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