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THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL FACTORS ON THE CORE VALUES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SAIGON, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

The culture of a university helps establish its prestige and branding, and is the foundation of university autonomy, regional and international integration, and global trends in higher education. This study surveyed 135 lecturers and 367 students at Saigon University, and explored their awareness of the university's core values and the factors that influenced them. The key factors were positive signs of school culture and the factors that influence the development of the school culture is fixed meaningful. Leadership in cultural development also influenced the core values.

INTRODUCTION

Culture plays an important role in the development of an organization. Each family, office, school, society, or group of people shares a set of characteristic cultural values. Many studies have examined cultural differences between domestic and foreign universities, but few have examined universities in Vietnam. Universities are organizations whose values are different from those of other institutions.

Universities also comprise a number of subcultures, including those of research, management, and academic teaching. The main functions are teaching and research. Teaching is meant to prepare students for careers in the globalized 21st century economy, but also to help them understand the world they live in

and to operate as empowered citizens. The internal resources and cultural orientation of the university can be used to assess its conformation with the actual functional structure and to design strategies to achieve internationalization.

The culture also contributes to the prestige and brand of the university and underpins university autonomy and regional integration. In the case of Vietnam, an additional goal is to integrate the universities into regional and world higher education. Phillips (1996) noted that “The school culture contains beliefs, attitudes and typical behaviors for the school”. Maslowski (1997) spoke of “the basic assumptions, norms and values, and cultural artifacts that are shared by school members, which influence their functioning at school”. According to Peterson and Deal (2009), the school culture is a set of standards, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and traditions that create the “appearance” of the school.

The factors that make up school culture

Schein (2004), one of the leading researchers in organizational culture, divided school culture into three components: tangible processes and structures, value systems, and general conceptions. The organic relationship between these creates an overall culture. Schein’s school culture therefore has two basic components: material and spiritual. Schein’s concept of organizational culture is recognized by the scientific community.

Fralinger (2007) developed the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) as a way of investigating the organizational culture of universities. It probes three important elements of organizational culture: artifacts, agreed values, and implicit assumptions. He found that coordination among members of the university is key to the creation of a productive academic environment. OCAI has been used to investigate the relationship between the culture of the faculty and the psychological dimensions (cognition, thought, and affect) of the students, who want to see what the culture will be like in the next 5 years. This tool can be used to diagnose the organizational culture of a university and propose changes.

Madden’s “Four Pillars to Building a Positive School Culture” (2017) looked for commonalities between excellent schools. The “four main pillars” of the title are “Loyalty and commitment; transparency and effectiveness; belief; teamwork”. These pillars support leadership and the development of a positive culture. The article suggests that change can be successfully implemented if leaders focus on four goals: consistency and creativity in teaching, individual curricula, student participation, and the relationship with the outside world.

The role of leadership in building and developing the school culture

Rashid et al. (2011) discussed the role of a leader in developing an innovative school culture. The principal plays the key role in ensuring that staff, faculty

members, and students agree on the path towards innovation. The principal must therefore interact with every member of the school, and must motivate and reinforce their ethics, competence, and determination. The paper specifically focuses on decentralized leadership and strategic vision as two key areas of positive cultural innovation.

Spicer (2016) investigated the impact that principals have on the culture and atmosphere of the school, and on student achievement. Using an inductive approach, it examined two schools in two different districts and investigated the awareness by both principals and teachers of the role of leadership in developing and maintaining a positive learning environment. A positive school culture helps build consciousness, relationships, and positivity among the school members. The role of the principal is key to raising student consciousness and helping students to become confident in their values.

Piotrowsky (2016) examined the relationship between school leadership and school culture. Under pressure from standards-based educational reform, student achievement has become the key metric. The quality of leadership helps determine teacher retention and student achievement.

Factors affecting the construction and development of school culture

Heifetz and Hagberg (2002) identified two core values that underlie a successful school culture. These values must be maintained over time and regularly evaluated. The culture and standards must be reviewed frequently, as learning values are constantly changing. The propagation of new values must accompany the maintenance of existing values, as outdated standards or values negatively impact the development of the culture.

Gruenert (2008) treated school culture and school atmosphere as separate entities, though they are often considered one and the same. By contrasting atmosphere with culture, the study demonstrated differences between them. The author states: "The atmosphere is the main lever for any culture, meaning that if school leaders want to form a new culture, they should start with an atmosphere assessment". Such research gives us a better understanding of the differences and similarities between the school culture and the school atmosphere, helping us to improve the former.

MacNeil, et al. (2009) reported a survey on the school atmosphere in three types of school: 'Exemplary' schools, 'Accredited' schools, and 'Approved' schools. The classification was taken from the Texas State Accountability Ranking System, in which the atmosphere was measured using 10 metrics from the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI). The school type was a significant variable across all metrics, with exemplary schools outperforming the others. Students from schools with a good learning environment, positive atmosphere, and healthy culture scored higher on standardized tests.

Confeld (2016) also studied the role of a positive school culture and its importance in the success of the school using a content-based approach. The

article provides an overview of the factors that determine whether the school culture is positive or toxic, discusses the significance of leadership, and considers alternative strategies. It analyzes Adlerian theories on school culture and considers the implications for school counselors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires

A questionnaire was constructed using Likert scales from 1: No effect / Strongly disagree to 5: Major effect / Strongly agree. The questionnaire covered 39 items divided into six factors:

- Behavioral culture (6 items)
- Positive signs of culture (9 items)
- Negative signs of culture (6 items)
- Factors affecting the development of culture (9 items)
- The influence of leaders on the development of culture (8 items)
- Culture statement from Saigon University (1 item)

Participants

A convenience sample was drawn of lecturers and students (in 3 or 4 year programs) from 11/20 faculties of Saigon University. The response rate for valid questionnaires was 135 from lecturers and 367 from students (50% 3rd year students and 50% 4th year students). Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients ranged from 0.795 to 0.962.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS 22. Pearson correlation coefficients between items were calculated, and linear regression was used to rate the degree of influence of independent variables on dependent variables.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. The importance of the core values in the development of school culture

The core values	lecturers		students	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Responsibility	4.35	0.861	4.44	0.827
Pioneering	4.09	0.910	4.04	0.903
Harmonization	3.97	0.813	4.19	0.787
Friendliness	4.38	0.752	4.46	0.759
Sharing	4.13	0.857	4.23	0.843
Co-operation	4.40	0.725	4.45	0.737

Commitment	3.94	0.865	4.16	0.839
Belief	4.39	0.802	4.45	0.748
Innovation	4.10	0.816	4.22	0.880
Creativity	4.41	0.672	4.44	0.743
Excellence	3.77	0.892	4.00	0.962

Table 1 shows the awareness of lecturers and students on the importance of the core values.

The majority of the mean values were greater than 4.0, suggesting that both lecturers and students recognized the importance of core values in determining culture.

Responses from lecturers and students were similar. In most cases the lecturers showed higher awareness than students, though the difference was not significant. The core values of responsibility, friendliness, co-operation, belief, and creativity were rated higher than the other values. The ratings given by lecturers were as follows: for responsibility 60%, for friendliness 50.4%, for co-operation 52.6%, for belief 57.4%, and for creativity 51.1%. The ratings given by students were: responsibility 64.3%, friendliness 58.6%, co-operation 57.8%, belief 57.8%, and creativity 57.5%.

Respondents were asked to evaluate the following statement: "Saigon University is a convergence of responsible cadres, pioneering in teaching, researching, and educational activities, valuing harmony, friendliness, sharing, and co-operation between cadres, officials, learners, and stakeholders, attaching importance to outputs and building for the society, promoting innovation and creativity to achieve excellent results". The mean level of agreement by lecturers (4.18) and students (4.06) were similar. Among lecturers the detailed results were: strongly disagree (3), disagree (5), neither agree or disagree (17), agree (50), and strongly agree (60). The corresponding values for students were: strongly disagree (2), disagree (4), neither agree or disagree (80), agree (164), and strongly agree (117).

INFERENCE STATISTICS

Correlations between items and the core values

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to evaluate positive signs of the culture, negative signs of culture, the influence of leaders on school culture, the behavioral culture, and other factors that may affect the culture. The results are shown in Table 2. Items with correlations greater than 0.4 were analyzed using linear regression. Table 2 also shows the r values.

Table 2. Correlation between the items and the core values from lecturer and student opinions

Core values	Items	r coefficient
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<i>Responsibility</i>	Collaborate and encourage communities to participate in issues of education.	0.500
<i>Pioneer</i>	Appreciate others and recognize the effort and successes of each individual.	0.447
	Share vision and power and encourage self-responsibility.	0.406
	Orient awareness of members about the cultural values.	0.404
	Encourage stakeholders to participate in educational activities.	0.412
	Conduct surveys and re-evaluate behavioral culture.	0.500
	Plan and assign tasks for the development of behavioral culture.	0.445
	Evaluate implementation of the behavioral development plan.	0.420
	Awareness of the cultural values.	0.455
	Age of students.	0.532
	Policies and direction of the education sector.	0.492
	Process of educational socialization.	0.448
	<i>Harmonization</i>	Socio-economic conditions and local culture.
Trends in globalization and international economic integration.		0.435
<i>Friendliness</i>	Sharing experiences and exchanging expertise.	0.445
	Encouraging members to learn about and share professional issues.	0.419
	Assessment of current status of school culture to adjust, change and develop.	0.420
	Mobilization of members to operate according to the common goals of the school.	0.445
	“Saigon University is a convergence of responsible cadres, pioneering in teaching, researching, and educational activities, valuing harmony, friendliness, sharing, and co-operation between cadres, officials, learners, and stakeholders, attaching importance to outputs and building for the society, promoting innovation and creativity to achieve excellent results”.	0.419
	Competence of leaders.	0.526
	Quality of lecturers.	0.490
	Awareness of cultural values.	0.493

Co-operation	Appreciate others and recognize the effort and successes of each individual.	0.413
	Lead in the implementation of the defined mission, goals, values, and vision.	0,401
	Decide the development and shaping of the cultural appearance.	0.424
	Assess the current status of culture to adjust, change and develop.	0.467
	Encourage stakeholders to participate in educational activities.	0.527
	Conduct surveys and re-evaluate behavioral culture.	0.407
	Competence of leaders.	0.414
	Awareness of cultural values.	0.500
	Policies and direction of the education sector.	0.473
Belief	Atmosphere of openness, democracy, co-operation, trust and respect for others.	0.406
	Sharing experiences and exchanging expertise.	0.529
	Sharing vision and power, and encouraging self-responsibility.	0.477
	Lead in the implementation of the defined mission, goals, values, and vision.	0.400
	Orient awareness of members about the cultural values.	0.412
	Mobilize members to operate according to common goals.	0.438
	Competence of leaders.	0.480
	Awareness of cultural values.	0.491
	Development of information and communication technology.	0.421
Creation	Encourage stakeholders to participate in educational activities.	0.414
	Plan and assign tasks for the development of behavioral culture.	0.435
	Awareness of cultural values.	0.449
	Policies and direction of the education sector.	0.447
	Process of educational socialization.	0.479
	Trends in globalization and international economic integration.	0.414
Excellence	Evaluate implementation of the behavioral development plan.	0.465
	Age of students.	0.510

LINEAR REGRESSION

- Independent variables

The independent variables that were significantly correlated with the eight core values (r greater than 04) were analyzed using linear regression (See Table 2).

- Dependent variables

The eight dependent variables were the values of responsibility, pioneering, harmonization, friendliness, co-operation, belief, creativity, and excellence.

- Linear regression

Backward stepwise regression was used to eliminate those independent variables that were not statistically significant and to select a model with high reliability. Analysis was conducted using SPSS software, generating n specific models. We then selected the n^{th} iteration of each model for analysis.

Table 3. Linear regression models

Core values	statistically significant independent variables are	R ² value
Pioneer	Appreciate others and recognize the effort and successes of each individual. (*), $r = 0.447$	0.488
	Conduct surveys and re-evaluate behavioral culture. (*), $r = 0.50$	
	Age of students (*), $r = 0.532$	
	Policies and direction of the education sector. (**), $r = 0.492$	
Friendliness	Sharing experiences and exchanging expertise (*), $r = 0.454$	0.467
	Capacity of leaders (**), $r = 0.526$	
	Quality of lecturers (*), $r = 0.490$	
Co-operation	Appreciate others and recognize the effort and successes of each individual. (*), $r = 0.413$	0.441
	Encourage stakeholders to participate in educational activities (***), $r = 0.527$	
	Policies and direction of the education sector. (**), $r = 0.473$	
Belief	Atmosphere of openness, democracy, co-operation, trust and respect for others (*), $r = 0.406$	0.433
	Share vision and power and encourage self-responsibility. (***), $r = 0.529$	
	Orient awareness of members about the cultural values. (**), $r = 0.412$	

	Capacity of leaders (**), $r = 0.480$	
Creation	Plan and assign tasks for the development of behavioral culture (*), $r = 0.435$	0.329
	Awareness of cultural values (**), $r = 0.449$	
	Process of educational socialization (**), $r = 0.479$	
Excellence	Evaluate implementation of the behavioral development plan. (*), $r = 0.465$	0.369
	Age of students (***), $r = 0.510$	
Note: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$		

Table 3 shows the impact of these items on the core values of Saigon University. The items with influence from 32.9% to 48.8% were: pioneering, friendliness, co-operation, and belief.

The significant positive items, reflecting respect for others and recognizing the efforts and success of each individual, influenced the core values of pioneering ($r = 0.447$, $p < 0.05$) and co-operation ($r = 0.413$, $p < 0.05$). Items reflecting sharing of experience and exchange of expertise influenced the core values of friendliness ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.05$) and belief ($r = 0.529$, $p < 0.001$). Items reflecting an atmosphere of openness, democracy, co-operation, trust, and respect for others influenced the core value of belief ($r = 0.406$, $p < 0.05$). Among the factors affecting the development of school culture, the competence of school administrators influenced the core values of friendliness ($r = 0.526$, $p < 0.01$) and belief ($r = 0.480$, $p < 0.01$). The age of students influenced the core values of pioneering ($r = 0.532$, $p < 0.05$) and excellence ($r = 0.510$, $p < 0.001$). The items concerning the policy and direction of the education sector influenced the core values of pioneering ($r = 0.492$, $p < 0.01$) and co-operation ($r = 0.473$, $p < 0.01$). The quality of the teaching staff influenced the core value of friendliness ($r = 0.490$, $p < 0.05$). Awareness of cultural values and educational socialization influenced the core value of creativity ($r = 0.449$, $p < 0.01$; $r = 0.479$, $p < 0.01$). The results suggested that the items which had the greatest influence on the core values were positive aspects of the culture and the development of culture. The behavioral items, which involved reviewing and re-evaluating the culture, influenced the core value of pioneering ($r = 0.50$, $p < 0.05$). The planning and assigning of tasks for the development of culture influenced the core value of creativity ($r = 0.435$, $p < 0.01$). The implementation and assessment of cultural development plans influenced the core value of excellence ($r = 0.465$, $p < 0.05$). Leadership in the development of culture through increasing awareness of cultural values influenced the core value of belief ($r = 0.412$, $p < 0.01$). Encouraging stakeholders to participate in educational activities influenced the core value of co-operation ($r = 0.527$, $p < 0.001$).

In summary, factors that influence the core values are positive signs of school culture and the factors that affect the development of school culture most meaningful. Leadership and the development of culture also affected the core values.

CONCLUSIONS

The descriptive statistics confirmed that the core values were highly appreciated by both lecturers and students, and that awareness was high. These factors influenced the core values, and the relationship between them contributed to the development of culture. The linear regression model showed the influence of different factors on the development of culture. The core values with the greatest influence were pioneering, friendliness, co-operation, and belief. The most significant factors were the development of culture (6 items), behavioral culture (3 items), positive signs of culture (3 items), and influence of leaders on the development of culture (2 items). The remaining factors contributed positively to the development of culture. The university has applied the results as the basis for building and developing the culture.

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