BUILDING AND DEVELOPING QUALITY CULTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LABOUR – SOCIAL AFFAIRS

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Abstract

Ensuring the sustainability of education quality requires the establishment of a quality culture. Building and developing a quality culture entails creating values and characteristics, unique advantages that disseminate the concept of quality and its effects to influence the execution of tasks by individuals and groups. When a quality culture is rightly positioned, all activities of members and organizations are directed towards quality, ensuring the credibility and brand of higher education institutions are affirmed. Building and developing a quality culture is a long process. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain the implementation to achieve quality standards throughout the training process. In terms of state management, the Ministry of Education and Training in VietNam has issued Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT on quality accreditation of higher education institutions. These are the prerequisites and bases for establishing values in building and developing a quality culture in Vietnamese higher education institutions. This is an important factor affecting the entire internal quality assurance system. Building a quality culture helps individuals understand the role and responsibilities of each person in contributing to the quality at the unit. This article presents steps to approach values to build a quality culture to develop an internal quality assurance system at the University of Labour and Social Affairs. Through quality culture-building activities, each member of the university will undergo changes and improvements to enhance the quality of their work and fulfill the collective tasks, contributing to accelerating the development and integration of the university within the national and global higher education system.

Keywords: *Quality culture, education quality, quality assurance.*

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1.   Introducing the issue

Quality culture plays a crucial role in educational institutions in general and specifically for the University of Labor and Social Affairs. Building and developing a quality culture have been and are the top priorities of higher education institutions in Vietnam because it must be in line with the context, conditions, and development objectives of each university. This is a prerequisite for improving the quality of education, scientific research, community service, creating unique characteristics, and enhancing competitiveness with other higher education institutions in the context of globalization. Quality culture is a branch of organizational culture that includes a system of values, beliefs, philosophies, standards, traditions, mechanisms, and policies of the organization to create a favorable environment for establishing and continuously improving quality.

In terms of educational quality management, quality culture is an effective means to support and promote the development of the internal quality assurance system of the university. This is the system of values, standards, methods, and cultural elements to promote development not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality of the University of Labour and Social Affairs in recent years and for the years to come.

The University of Labour and Social Affairs is a public educational institution operating under an autonomous mechanism with sustainable development orientations as follows:

- *Mission*: To train high-quality human resources with a focus on practical applications in strengths such as Human Resource Management, Social work, Insurance, Accounting, and Business Administration; to be a research and technology transfer center, international cooperation in the field of economics - labor - society to meet the development requirements of the industry, the country, and international integration.

- *Vision*: By 2030, the University of Labour and Social Affairs becomes a leading university in Vietnam in training high-quality human resources in the field of labor and social affairs with proficient vocational skills, dynamic, creative in work, and ethical standards; to become a reputable research center, technology transfer, and international cooperation in the ASEAN region.

- *Core values*: "Professionalism - Creativity - Integration"

- *Educational philosophy*: "Comprehensive education - Building the future - Reaching international standards".

Comprehensive education at the University of Labour and Social Affairs is organized with plans and purposes to comprehensively develop learners' personalities in terms of morality, intellect, physicality, aesthetics, emotions, and skills based on ensuring a close combination of theory and practice, between learning and extracurricular activities.

The University of Labor and Social Affairs is an environment for building the future through fostering positive learning habits and thinking for learners: Planning future jobs; forging determination to achieve dreams, aspirations; optimizing time management; accurate and persistent goal setting; positive dialogue, effective communication. The university provides a learning and training environment for learners to have sufficient capacity to shape their own future.

The University of Labor and Social Affairs creates a learning and research environment for learners to access and catch up with advanced standards and levels through building and developing training programs similar to universities in the region and the world; cooperating in training and research with international partners. The university creates an environment for learners to enhance their professional skills, language proficiency, work style, integration skills, thereby laying the foundation for integration.

Within the scope of this article, only some content related to quality culture, the model of building and developing quality culture, presenting influencing factors, and steps to build and develop a quality culture at the University of Labour and Social Affairs are mentioned based on considering quality culture as an effective tool to ensure and improve the quality of the university's education..

2. Research Content
2.1. Concepts related to quality culture
❖ *Concept of culture*

"*Culture*" is one of the most complex concepts in human languages. In 1952, two American anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, identified up to 164 different definitions of culture in famous works worldwide [1].

According to Wood (1998), "*Culture is a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, institutions, and behavioral rules that describe the members of a community or organization.*" [2].

According to the author Tran Ngoc Them (2001), "*Culture is an organic system of values (material and spiritual, static and dynamic, tangible and intangible) created and accumulated by humans through practical activities, in interaction with their natural and social environment.*"

According to UNESCO (2011), "*Culture is a complex system - a synthesis of spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional characteristics... depicting the identity of a family, community, region, country, society... Culture includes not only art, literature, but also lifestyles, basic human rights, value systems, traditions, beliefs...*"

In summary, culture encompasses all spiritual and material values created by humans, unanimously revered, disseminated, and preserved, enriching human life with civilization and happiness.

❖ *Concept of organizational culture*

According to Schein (2004), "*Organizational culture is a set of shared principles among members of a group, formed as the group collectively addresses issues related to adapting to the external environment as well as issues related to internal connectivity. These are principles that have proven to be effective in which everyone recognizes their value, and therefore, they are transmitted to new members to help them develop perceptions, thinking, and feelings when facing group issues.*" [3].

According to Hofstede, G (1990), "*Organizational culture is a set of standards, values, beliefs, and behaviors of an organization, creating the differences between the members of this organization and those of other organizations.*"

According to Williams, A. (1993), "*Organizational culture is the existence of common and relatively stable beliefs, attitudes, and values within an organization.*"

According to Pham Quang Huan (2007), "*The organizational culture of a school is a system of beliefs, values, standards, habits, and traditions formed during the school's development process, acknowledged, followed by the members of the school, and expressed in both material and spiritual forms, thereby creating a unique identity for each educational institution.*"

According to Nguyen Cong Khanh (2009), "*Organizational culture relates to the entire material and spiritual life of an organization. It primarily manifests in vision, mission, goals, philosophies, values, leadership styles, management... and psychological atmosphere; it forms a system of standards, values, beliefs, and behavior rules considered good and accepted by each person in the organization to implement.*"

In other words, organizational culture is the mission, vision, and value system implemented to create the distinctiveness of that organization.

❖ *Concept of educational quality*

According to the perspective of the international network of quality assurance agencies in higher education, the definition of education quality is: Compliance with prescribed standards requires the establishment of quality assessment criteria and the achievement of set objectives. These objectives are established based on societal requirements and the conditions of the institution.

According to Circular No. 62/2012/TT-BGDĐT of the Ministry of Education and Training, education quality is defined as: Meeting the set objectives of educational institutions, meeting the requirements of education laws, amended laws, and supplementing some provisions of education laws and higher education laws, and meeting the demand for human resources for the socio-economic development of localities and the country.

Within the university, for faculty and staff: Higher education quality is meeting the objectives set by the institution, teaching and management activities to ensure the educational objectives requirements of education laws, and meeting the requirements for training human resources for the socio-economic development of localities and the country.

For learners: Higher education quality is meeting personal learning and research objectives. It is the output, level of competency, and knowledge of learners upon graduation.

In summary, higher education quality is meeting regulatory requirements (ensuring external quality), meeting set objectives (ensuring internal quality), and aligning with societal development requirements (employer satisfaction, societal satisfaction).

❖ *Concept 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 endeavor. Quality culture is characterized by two distinct factors: (1) A set of values, beliefs, and expectations oriented towards quality; (2) Management/structure factors with quality assurance processes and collaborative efforts identified to lead to quality for the activities of an organization [4].

According to Ahmed, S. M. (2008), "Quality culture is the value system of an organization manifested through an environment that encourages the formation and continuous development of quality." [5].

According to Berings and colleagues (2010), the quality culture of a higher education institution is the organizational culture with quality criteria formed from internal and external quality assurance systems, unanimously accepted and implemented to continuously improve the quality of activities of the higher education institution, carried out efficiently and effectively[6].

According to Le Thi Phuong (2018), quality culture is understood as a special culture of the organization containing beliefs, values, expectations, and commitments realized 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[7].

According to Pham Trong Quat (2011), "Quality culture is a system of values, standards, and habits of quality work established by every member in an organization to perform their assigned tasks to the best of their abilities." [8].

According to Le Duc Ngoc and collaborators (2008), "The quality culture of an educational institution is understood as every member (from learners to management staff), every organization (from departments, offices to associations) knowing what constitutes quality work and adhering to those quality requirements." [9].

Although there are various definitions of quality culture, generally, the authors above share the view that the quality culture of an organization is a system of standards, values, beliefs established with high consensus and unanimity among the members of the organization, thus guiding the organization's activities towards achieving quality..

2.2. Building and developing quality culture at the University of Labour and Social Affairs
2.2.1. Model for Building and Developing a Quality Culture at the University of Labour and Social Affairs

Building a quality culture essentially involves establishing an environment system for quality activities and continuously improving the quality of the organization. Currently, there are many different models of quality culture suitable for various types of organizations. Based on research and reference to approaches to building quality culture and models of quality culture both domestically and internationally, we have found that an approach based on organizational values and systemic theory is appropriate for building a quality culture in universities. We have chosen the "Model of Quality Culture in Higher Education Institutions" by Le Duc Ngoc and colleagues (2012) [10], which includes five domains, among these, four domains (Social, Humanistic, Cultural, Environmental and Infrastructure) represent the characteristics of the value system of the organization's quality culture, while one domain (Academic) represents the characteristics of the quality culture values specific to universities, serving as a model for developing a quality culture for the institution. This model embodies the organization's culture and quality assurance activities that need to be implemented (based on standards set by the Ministry of Education and Training, AUN, and ABET) and serves as a basis for transparently assessing the degree of quality culture implementation within the institution (see Figure 1).
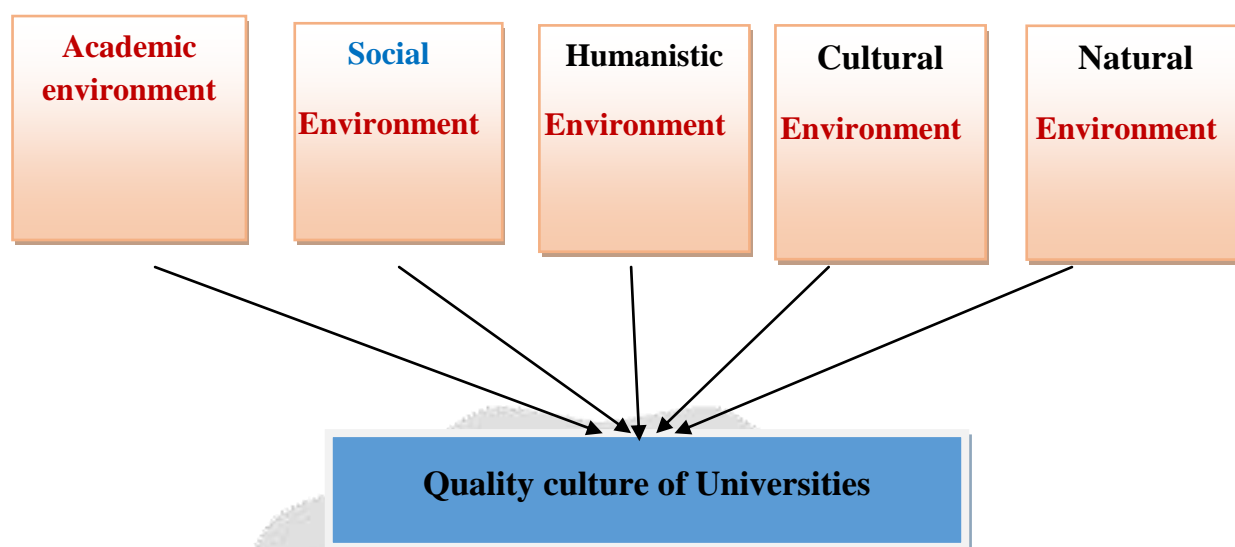
Figure 1. Model of Quality Culture in Universities

The academic environment: It is an environment where academic activities take place, including teaching and learning activities, research, academic exchanges based on educational perspectives and methods, advanced research, and adherence to ethical standards in the profession.

The main content of the academic environment includes: Developing strategies, plans, and appropriate investment for academic activities in line with the mission, resources, and development orientation of the university; Exercising autonomy and social responsibility in academic activities; Encouraging collaborative activities, academic sharing among members within and outside the university; Continuously providing academic training and development for university members; Implementing academic dissemination activities based on advanced educational perspectives and contemporary relevance in a high-quality and effective manner.

The social environment: It is an environment where social relationships are established, including organizations, laws, regulations, commitments, and orientations for the activities and behaviors of the university and its members according to regulations, creating collective strength and supplementing resources for continuous improvement of the university's quality.

The main content of the social environment includes: Developing visions, missions, and goals appropriate to the resources and position of the university; Establishing organizational structures and clearly defining the functions, tasks, responsibilities, and authorities of functional units within the university; Establishing mechanisms for operation, coordination, and effective evaluation of functional units within the university.

The humanistic environment: It is an environment where the rights and obligations of members and stakeholders of the university are explicitly established and adhered to, contributing to improving the quality of the university's activities.

The main content of the humanistic environment includes: Implementing comprehensive democratic rights for faculty, lecturers, staff, and students; Fully implementing basic rights according to state policy regimes for faculty, lecturers, staff, and students; Building mechanisms, policies, and measures for faculty, lecturers, staff, and students to fulfill their responsibilities towards the university and society effectively and qualitatively.

The cultural environment: It is an environment where a system of cultural standards, values, beliefs, and behavioral rules considered good is established and unanimously implemented by members of the university, creating strength for quality activities and continuous improvement of the university's quality.

The main content of the cultural environment includes: Building behavioral rules that respect, cooperate, and support each other among members for the cause and reputation of the university; Implementing ethics, healthy lifestyles, preserving and promoting the university's good traditions combined with the national cultural identity; Implementing exchange, cooperation, integration activities with the community at home and abroad.

The natural environment: It is a landscape, physical infrastructure contributing to ensuring and improving the quality of university activities.

The main content of the natural environment includes: Architecture, green, clean, beautiful, harmonious university landscape; Adequate and quality physical and financial infrastructure: lecture halls, classrooms, teaching, learning, practical, and research equipment in sufficient quantity and quality; Library services well-suited for teaching, learning, and scientific research activities; Dormitories and good living conditions ensuring accommodation for resident students; Ensuring security, cultural, artistic life, and sports activities for university members..

2.2.2. *Plan for building and developing Quality culture at the University of Labour and Social Affairs*

a. *Developing an academic environment*

Building and effectively implementing a system of legal documents and related policies to guide scientific research activities according to the strategic objectives of the university, respect ethics in science and intellectual property regulations.

Encouraging and facilitating the maintenance and development of collaborative activities, sharing experiences in education and scientific research within each unit and between units within the university and external institutions.

Regularly updating and adjusting training programs based on reference to advanced programs both domestically and internationally, as well as feedback from employers and graduates. Building and effectively implementing legal documents and related policies to guide training activities based on advanced educational perspectives, meeting the requirements of credit-based education.

Ensuring that information about training and scientific research on the university's website is regularly updated, providing comprehensive and timely information to students and stakeholders.

Faculty members are conscious and make efforts to enhance their expertise, language skills, dedication to the profession, and maintain the ethics of teaching..

b. *Developing a social environment*

The functions, responsibilities, and authority of departments, management officials, lecturers, and staff are clearly defined and there is a mechanism for evaluating the quality of work.

The system of documents for organizing and managing the university is updated annually, standardized, and accompanied by detailed implementation guidelines, publicly disseminated to all relevant stakeholders of the university.

Members of the university fully understand their responsibilities and authority, conscientiously strive to fulfill their assigned tasks according to the plan and with quality..

c. *Developing a humanistic environment*

The university creates the best conditions to fully exercise democratic rights and fully implement basic rights according to the state's policies for civil servants, employees, and students.

Efficient mechanisms, policies, and solutions are developed and implemented to ensure that civil servants, employees, and students fulfill their responsibilities to the university and society completely, with quality and effectiveness.

Enhancing solidarity and compassion within each unit, with society, and the community. Students are considered the primary beneficiaries within the university, receiving attentive care and support in their studies, activities, and when resolving tasks.

No actions that harm one's own health, dignity, integrity, or the reputation of others and the collective.

No cheating, deceit, fabrication, causing offense, harassment, coercion, threats, or violence against others..

d. *Developing a cultural environment*

Building and effectively implementing values, codes of conduct, cooperation, support, and mutual respect among members, units, regulations on civilized behavior in the workplace.

Fostering the development of self-awareness in each individual in teaching, working, living, studying, in adhering to healthy lifestyles, and promoting the good traditions of the university and the national cultural identity. Constructing a cultural, artistic, and sports life for all officials, employees, and workers who are conscious and strive to preserve and promote the good values of the collective, practice civilized living, ensure safety, security, and order on the university campus.

Not using social media to disseminate, propagate, or comment on information or images contrary to the Party and state's policies, guidelines, and laws, which adversely affect the educational environment..

e. Developing a natural environment

The infrastructure and equipment serving teaching, learning, and research are ensured in terms of quantity, quality, and efficient utilization, meeting the requirements of various academic disciplines.

Facilities for dining, accommodation, and recreational activities ensure the basic needs of members within the university and are continuously upgraded and expanded.

The university library is equipped with a comprehensive collection of Vietnamese and foreign-language books, textbooks, and reference materials to meet the needs of faculty, lecturers, and students. There is also an electronic library networked to serve teaching, learning, and scientific research effectively..

2.2.3. *Factors influencing the construction and development of the quality culture at the University of Labour and Social Affairs*

a. *Macro-level mechanisms and policies of the State and the education sector*

The mechanisms and policies of the state play a crucial role in guiding the direction of higher education institutions. These policies need to be specified in laws and have unified guidance from top to bottom regarding implementation. Currently, the Law on Higher Education (2012) has been enacted. Activities to ensure the quality of education and build a quality culture have been included in the law, but the long-term goals, strategies, and implementation plans have not been adequately specified. This is the reason why ensuring quality and building a quality culture have not achieved the desired effectiveness in recent times.

b. Leadership of the unit

Unit leaders are the ones who provide direction and determine the strategic development of the unit, implementing macro policies into the unit's reality. Leadership influences most of the factors that constitute the quality culture within the unit and plays a crucial role in the success or failure of the process of building a quality culture.

c. Management guidance and direction

Management activities aim to concretize the strategic objectives set by the leadership; to communicate the goals and development strategies to each member within the unit. Management oversees the process of building a quality culture and ensures that this process adheres to the set objectives and strategies..

d. Traditions and culture of the unit

This is an indirect factor impacting the process of building a quality culture. However, it plays a role as the foundation, the cornerstone for every member within the unit in their determination to build a quality culture..

e. Staff, lecturers, and students

These are the individuals directly involved in the process of building and developing a quality culture within the unit. The determination, unity, and solidarity of individuals within the unit are the keys to the success of all goals and strategies of the unit. This is the most important factor and has the greatest impact on the development of the unit. A team of qualified, politically conscious officers and lecturers; Students with knowledge, skills, and good qualities will contribute significantly to the overall success of the unit. Conversely, if the team of officers, lecturers, and students cannot meet the requirements of professional competence or lack ethical and political qualities, then the unit will surely not be able to develop..

f. Objective factors

External objective factors such as political structures, national culture, economic conditions, and support from external organizations and individuals also have a significant impact on the construction of a quality culture. These are not decisive factors but play a considerable role in the successful establishment of a quality culture.

Studies and research have identified factors influencing the construction and development of a quality culture in higher education institutions. The University of Labor and Social Affairs is no exception to this general understanding. However, the current efforts to build and develop a quality culture at the University are in the stage of laying the foundation for sustainable development in the future. Therefore, the factors that most influence the construction of a quality culture at the University of Labor and Social Affairs are leadership, management, and document system.

Leadership plays a critical role in deciding whether to incorporate quality culture into the University, how to deploy it, and its role in the university's development strategy. The leadership's understanding of the quality culture is vital for its successful implementation at the unit level. The credibility of the leadership among

staff, lecturers, and students is crucial for implementing new university directives. Leadership impacts most factors of the quality culture.

Management work helps translate development plans into reality, bringing the quality culture into specific activities of the unit. This is a new policy, not yet a habit in interpersonal relations and task handling among lecturers, between lecturers and students, between managers and lecturers and students, between lecturers and students with the leadership of faculties, functional departments of the University, as well as between the University and the external society. If deployment and management work are not synchronized, the desired results cannot be achieved.

The document system is the foundation for all members of the University to grasp the direction, development strategy, action plans, and specific activities. The document system also serves as the basis for synthesizing, evaluating, and assessing the accomplishments and shortcomings of the unit. An unclear or incomplete document system may lead to a deviation in the construction and development of a quality culture.

2.2.4. Steps to build and develop the quality culture of the University of Labour and Social Affairs

Step 1: Establishing quality standards for the university

Based on the mission, objectives, and references to the requirements of the stakeholders, the institution establishes quality standards (learning outcomes standards, lecturer standards), evaluation tools (lecturer evaluation, course evaluation, service evaluation), regulations, and rules. These quality standards, evaluation tools, regulations, and rules need to be agreed upon by stakeholders and specified as tasks for each member and organization..

Step 2: Dissemination, promotion

Promote raising awareness among all members about the importance of quality assurance work and the culture of quality for the long-term and sustainable development of the institution; The principles and policies on quality assurance of the institution, once agreed upon, need to be widely disseminated and promoted to all members and organizations of the institution through various diverse forms (website, bulletin boards, meetings, theatrical performances, etc.)..

Step 3: Organize and implement deployment.

Implementing the plan to build and develop a quality culture, regularly summarizing and evaluating the effectiveness of the plan's implementation. Implementing quality assurance activities to all staff, lecturers, employees, and learners; there needs to be synchronized implementation among grassroots units, organizations, associations, and individuals. For the effective implementation of the quality culture in the institution, the leadership team needs to serve as role models, and the work must be maintained regularly and continuously..

Step 4: Inspection, evaluation

Evaluation and assessment should adhere to the principle of helping individuals and organizations recognize strengths and weaknesses, thereby devising timely and appropriate measures to leverage strengths and address weaknesses, and continue actions to achieve better results. Evaluation and assessment are effective only when they help the implementer identify shortcomings; it is necessary to encourage and motivate everyone to have a sense of responsibility to perform better rather than resorting to disciplinary measures or punishment..

Step 5: Publicize information

Transparency is one of the requirements of quality assurance, and the institution needs to clearly define the scope, extent, and individuals/organizations responsible for public information. Public information needs to be regularly updated; consideration should be given to the subjects of the information being made public..

Step 6: Adjustment, supplementation

Review and adjustment: Quality standards, evaluation tools, and regulations are only valid for a certain period of time. During the implementation process, periodic reviews are necessary to provide a basis for adjustments and additions to enhance completeness. Adjustments and additions should be based on the opinions of relevant individuals and organizations and agreed upon throughout the institution.

3.   Conclusion

The research results have identified the most common concepts of quality culture; The model of quality culture in universities; The plan to build and develop a quality culture; Factors influencing the construction of a quality culture in higher education institutions in general and specifically at the University of Labor and Social Affairs. At the same time, it also identifies that building and developing a quality culture is a necessary and indispensable requirement for the sustainable existence and development of higher education institutions in general and the University of Labor and Social Affairs in particular. It is also an important condition for improving the quality of education. To establish and develop a quality culture, it is necessary to build and operate an effective internal quality assurance system. On the other hand, only when the quality culture becomes a permanent value in the thoughts and actions of all members of the university can the internal quality assurance system of the university develop sustainably and the quality of the university's education be ensured and continuously improved..

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