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Management solutions for developing institutional culture at higher education institutions in the arts in Vietnam

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Abstract--Institutional culture in arts higher education is shaped by creative freedom, professional mentorship, practice-based learning, aesthetic environments, and the transmission of cultural heritage. These characteristics make culture development a distinctive management challenge in Vietnamese institutions specializing in music, fine arts, theatre, and cinema. This article develops a context-sensitive set of management solutions through qualitative documentary analysis and theoretical synthesis. It draws on published scholarship on organizational culture, institutional change, creative climates, disciplinary differences, artistic pedagogy, and communities of practice, alongside the conceptual structure of a Vietnamese doctoral dissertation on management of school culture development in arts higher education. Five mutually reinforcing solutions are proposed: strengthening strategic planning; organizing culture-building activities around artistic creativity; improving leadership direction and coordination; expanding stakeholder participation; and establishing formative monitoring and evaluation. Three synthesis tables clarify the theoretical rationale, implementation responsibilities, and suggested evaluation evidence. The article argues that institutional culture cannot be strengthened by administrative regulation or isolated cultural events alone; it requires an iterative management process that embeds shared values in teaching, artistic production, professional relationships, and institutional communication. The solutions are conceptual proposals for the Vietnamese context, not interventions whose effectiveness has been causally demonstrated. Future research should test their feasibility and outcomes across artistic disciplines and institutional types.



Keywords---institutional culture, arts higher education, educational management, cultural development, creative environment, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are cultural organizations as well as administrative and academic systems. Their values, traditions, symbols, professional relationships, and everyday practices shape how teaching, learning, leadership, and organizational change are experienced. Tierney (1988) demonstrated the usefulness of cultural analysis for understanding institutional mission and leadership, while Schein (1990) emphasized the interaction between visible organizational practices, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. These perspectives indicate that institutional culture is not reducible to codes of conduct or ceremonial events.

Culture development presents particular challenges in higher education institutions specializing in the arts. Artistic training involves individualized instruction, studio practice, rehearsal, performance, exhibition, creative experimentation, and relationships with professional artistic communities. Disciplinary differences affect academic norms and forms of knowledge (Becher, 1994), and the environment for creative work can facilitate or constrain innovation (Amabile et al., 1996). Consequently, management solutions designed for general academic organizations cannot simply be transferred to artistic institutions without attention to their educational and professional characteristics.

In Vietnam, institutions specializing in music, fine arts, theatre, and cinema are simultaneously responsible for professional education, creative production, and engagement with cultural heritage. Institutional leaders must reconcile respect for artistic individuality with academic standards; maintain institutional identity while encouraging contemporary expression; and coordinate diverse disciplinary communities within available resources. These tensions are management questions because values become durable only when they are incorporated into plans, responsibilities, decisions, professional practices, and evaluation.

Research on organizational change in higher education suggests that change strategies should be responsive to institutional culture rather than treated as universal recipes (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Research on organizational learning further points to the importance of shared interpretation and institutional feedback (Kezar, 2005). Yet a management framework specifically connecting these insights to culture development in Vietnamese arts higher education remains useful. The present article addresses two questions: Which management solutions are theoretically appropriate for developing institutional culture in Vietnamese arts higher education institutions? How should these solutions be implemented and evaluated in a way that preserves artistic specificity?

2. Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative documentary research, combining a structured narrative review, thematic analysis, and theoretical synthesis to develop management solutions for institutional culture in Vietnamese arts higher education. The analysis focuses on institutional processes involving cultural planning, implementation, coordination, and evaluation rather than statistical effects.

Relevant peer-reviewed studies on organizational culture, higher education management, organizational learning, creativity, artistic pedagogy, and communities of practice were purposively selected based on conceptual relevance and verifiable bibliographic information. The doctoral dissertation provided the Vietnamese arts education context and the five-solution framework, serving as a conceptual reference rather than empirical validation.

The analysis involved identifying key cultural constructs, examining their implications for management functions, and adapting theoretical perspectives to Vietnamese arts institutions. Each proposed solution was developed in terms of objectives, implementation activities, responsible stakeholders, enabling conditions, and evaluation indicators. The findings represent theoretically grounded management propositions rather than experimentally verified outcomes.

3. Conceptual Foundations for Managing Institutional Culture

Institutional culture as an object of management

Schein (1990) conceptualized culture as a pattern of shared assumptions that helps members interpret organizational life. In higher education, Tierney (1988) connected culture with mission, leadership, socialization, and institutional decision-making. The managerial implication is that culture-building cannot be limited to promulgating formal values: leaders must create conditions under which those values are experienced consistently in academic work and organizational relationships. Denison and Mishra (1995) also associated organizational culture with dimensions of effectiveness, although their findings should not be treated as direct causal evidence for Vietnamese arts universities.

Why arts institutions require contextualized solutions

Becher (1994) demonstrated the importance of disciplinary cultures, while Gaunt (2010) showed the distinctive relational dynamics of one-to-one conservatoire tuition. Amabile et al. (1996) linked organizational work environments with creativity; Wenger (2000) emphasized identity and learning through communities of practice. Together, these perspectives support a model in which cultural development occurs through artistic work, mentoring, shared practice, and institutional routines. The same principle can take different forms across conservatoires, fine arts schools, and theatre or film academies.

Management principles

Five principles guide the proposed framework: systemic coherence among management functions; responsiveness to institutional circumstances; continuity with valuable traditions; balanced mobilization of internal and external resources;

and explicit recognition of artistic specificity. These principles are consistent with the dissertation's Chapter 3 framework. They also respond to Kezar and Eckel's (2002) argument that organizational change strategies must account for institutional culture.

Table 1. Theoretical rationale for five management solutions

Management solution	Supporting theoretical perspective	Arts-specific management concern
Strategic planning	Tierney (1988); Schein (1990); Kezar & Eckel (2002)	Translate artistic identity and shared values into a coherent, participatory plan
Creative implementation	Amabile et al. (1996); Becher (1994)	Embed values in rehearsals, studios, performances, exhibitions, and creative work
Leadership direction	Denison & Mishra (1995); Kezar (2005)	Coordinate academic units while preserving artistic autonomy
Stakeholder participation	Wenger (2000); Gaunt (2010)	Connect teachers, students, artists, alumni, and cultural partners
Monitoring and evaluation	Schein (1990); Kezar & Eckel (2002)	Use evidence about lived culture, not event counts alone

Table 1 shows why the proposed solutions are complementary. Strategic planning articulates shared purposes; artistic implementation creates opportunities to practice them; leadership and participation sustain coordination; and evaluation enables adaptation. None of these elements is sufficient in isolation.

4. Management Solutions for Developing Institutional Culture in Vietnamese Arts Higher Education

4.1. Strengthening strategic planning for institutional culture development

The first solution is to improve strategic planning so that institutional culture development becomes a recognizable component of the institution's overall development strategy. In many organizations, statements of core values are easier to produce than consistent practices. A meaningful plan must therefore specify how values such as artistic creativity, professional ethics, academic integrity, respect for cultural heritage, and collegial cooperation are translated into activities and responsibilities.

The governing board or rectorate should initiate a cultural diagnosis involving faculty, students, administrators, and representatives of professional artistic communities. This diagnosis may review institutional traditions, student experience, mentorship practices, creative facilities, academic regulations, and existing artistic events. It should identify a small number of priorities rather than

accumulate unrelated slogans. The priorities can then be integrated into annual plans, departmental work programs, teaching and learning arrangements, and institutional communication.

For a conservatoire, strategic priorities may emphasize ethical individual tuition, ensemble cooperation, and performance culture. For a fine arts university, they may emphasize studio critique, exhibition practices, and intellectual property. Theatre and cinema institutions may prioritize collaborative production, equitable credit attribution, and professional conduct in rehearsals and filming. These are illustrative adaptations, not descriptions of verified institutional performance.

The plan should identify accountable units, milestones, resource needs, and indicators. It should also distinguish between outputs, such as approved plans and completed activities, and outcomes, such as perceived fairness or the extent to which shared values inform everyday decisions. Institutional leadership should review the plan annually and allow adjustment when academic conditions change. The necessary conditions include leadership commitment, staff consultation, access to institutional information, and an explicit connection between cultural goals and academic priorities.

4.2. Innovating the organization of culture-building activities through artistic creativity

The second solution is to organize culture development through the activities that constitute artistic education itself. Culture-building becomes more credible when it is visible in the studio, rehearsal room, stage, exhibition, and collaborative production rather than confined to occasional celebrations or administrative campaigns. This proposal is consistent with the argument that creative environments matter for artistic work (Amabile et al., 1996) and that disciplinary cultures influence how professional practices are organized (Becher, 1994).

Academic departments should embed agreed cultural values in course activities, student projects, artistic assessments, and public-facing productions. A rehearsal may include explicit expectations for preparation, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. A studio critique may require constructive feedback, openness to different aesthetic interpretations, and transparent assessment criteria. An exhibition or film project may address attribution, collaboration, and professional ethics. These activities can be accompanied by short reflective discussions so that participants recognize their cultural significance.

Organization must remain flexible across disciplines. Standardized administrative procedures can establish common safeguards, but they should not impose identical creative processes on music, fine arts, theatre, and cinema. Departments need discretion to adapt activities while retaining institution-wide commitments to safety, fairness, integrity, and inclusion. Collaboration between departments can further develop shared identity through interdisciplinary performances, exhibitions, or productions.

Creative infrastructure is a practical enabling condition. Equitable access to rehearsal facilities, studios, equipment, and digital platforms affects who can participate in cultural activities. Institutions should review booking rules,

maintenance, technical support, and accessibility. Evaluation should examine both participation and the quality of artistic and interpersonal experiences, not merely the number of events organized.

4.3. Strengthening leadership direction and institutional coordination

The third solution concerns the capacity of institutional leadership to translate cultural priorities into coordinated action. Culture development crosses organizational boundaries: it involves academic affairs, student affairs, human resources, communications, facilities, and artistic departments. Without clear direction, individual units may pursue worthwhile activities that remain disconnected from shared institutional goals.

The rectorate should establish a coordination mechanism with defined responsibilities and reporting relationships. A designated coordinating unit can support implementation, while deans and department heads adapt cultural priorities to disciplinary practice. Leadership meetings should periodically examine unresolved issues, such as conflicting expectations between academic standards and artistic autonomy, uneven student access to facilities, or gaps in communication among departments.

Leadership should combine formal authority with dialogue. Kezar and Eckel (2002) showed that change in higher education requires sensitivity to institutional culture; consequently, directives alone are unlikely to produce durable cultural change. Leaders can use consultation, explanation, professional exemplars, and negotiated solutions to build commitment. Where disputes involve artistic judgment, decisions should be procedurally fair and allow appropriate disciplinary expertise to inform the outcome.

Capacity building is necessary for leaders and middle managers. Relevant topics include participatory planning, conflict mediation, professional ethics, student feedback, responsible digital communication, and management of collaborative artistic projects. A useful indicator is not simply whether leaders issue instructions, but whether units understand priorities, receive timely support, and resolve implementation problems. This solution depends on transparent delegation, leadership consistency, and a working culture in which criticism can be expressed constructively.

4.4. Expanding coordination and participation among institutional stakeholders

The fourth solution is to develop a participatory network for institutional culture building. Teachers, students, administrative staff, alumni, artists, cultural organizations, and professional partners contribute different forms of experience. Wenger's (2000) concept of communities of practice helps explain why values become meaningful through participation in shared activities rather than through one-way communication alone.

Institutions should create practical channels for stakeholder involvement. Students can participate in designing artistic events, discussing professional standards, and providing feedback on the learning environment. Faculty can contribute to peer mentoring, interdisciplinary teaching, and the revision of

assessment practices. Alumni and professional artists may support workshops, exhibitions, performances, and discussions of professional ethics. Cultural organizations can connect institutional activity with wider Vietnamese artistic life. Participation should be structured rather than symbolic. Responsibilities, decision rights, and communication channels need to be clear. Student representatives should be able to raise concerns about mentoring, assessment, access to resources, and professional behavior without fear of retaliation. Teachers and artists should be encouraged to share practice while respecting different aesthetic positions. In conservatoire settings, attention to the asymmetries of individual tuition is especially relevant (Gaunt, 2010).

The Vietnamese context also calls for a balance between cultural continuity and contemporary artistic engagement. Partnerships may connect students with traditional artistic communities while enabling experimentation with digital media and international artistic practices. The quality of partnerships should be judged by educational relevance, sustained participation, and ethical arrangements, rather than the number of agreements signed.

4.5. Strengthening monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement

The fifth solution is to make monitoring and evaluation a formative part of culture development. Culture is not directly observable as a single variable; evidence must be assembled from practices, perceptions, institutional decisions, and artistic activities. Schein's (1990) distinction between visible artifacts and underlying assumptions warns against equating a polished institutional image with deeply shared values.

Institutions should establish a modest evaluation framework aligned with the strategic plan. Potential evidence includes documented cultural objectives, consistency of departmental implementation, participation in artistic activities, quality of student-teacher feedback, perceived fairness of assessment, access to creative facilities, responses to professional concerns, and examples of heritage-related artistic work. Data can be gathered through document review, anonymized surveys, focus groups, observation of selected activities, and reflective reports.

Evaluation should be proportionate and protect participants. In small artistic departments, identifying details can be inferred easily from individual accounts; reporting should therefore aggregate sensitive feedback and establish clear confidentiality procedures. Artistic quality should not be reduced to crude numerical counts, and institutions should distinguish educational outcomes from publicity indicators. Review findings should be discussed with the responsible units and converted into specific revisions to plans, procedures, or support arrangements.

A cyclical process of evidence collection, interpretation, feedback, and adjustment is preferable to inspection conducted solely for compliance. Kezar (2005) emphasizes organizational learning in higher education; this perspective supports evaluation as a means of institutional reflection. The fifth solution therefore closes the management cycle while also generating information for the next planning period.

4.6. Integration of the five solutions

The five solutions form an interdependent management cycle. Planning specifies priorities; creative implementation makes values actionable; leadership coordination resolves cross-unit barriers; stakeholder participation expands ownership; and evaluation informs improvement. If planning is disconnected from artistic practice, cultural commitments remain rhetorical. If creative initiatives lack coordination, their effects may be fragmented. If participation is absent, values risk being perceived as imposed. If evaluation focuses only on administrative compliance, the institution may overlook lived cultural experiences.

Table 2. Implementation matrix for the five management solutions

Solution	Lead responsibility	Key implementation actions	Suggested evidence
1. Strategic planning	Rectorate; planning and quality units	Cultural diagnosis; shared values; annual targets; resource allocation	Approved plan; stakeholder consultation; unit-level alignment
2. Creative organization	Deans; departments; artistic units	Embed values in rehearsal, studio, performance, exhibition, and production	Activity documentation; reflective feedback; equitable participation
3. Leadership coordination	Rectorate; deans; unit heads	Delegate responsibilities; cross-unit reviews; conflict resolution; staff development	Meeting decisions; response time; staff clarity about roles
4. Stakeholder participation	Student affairs; departments; external relations	Student voice; faculty mentoring; alumni and professional partnerships	Participation quality; feedback channels; sustained collaborations
5. Evaluation and improvement	Quality assurance; departments; student representatives	Mixed evidence; confidential feedback; improvement reviews	Evaluation reports; actions completed; follow-up changes

The matrix in Table 2 is intended as an implementation guide, not a universal staffing prescription. Governance structures vary across institutions, and the designated units should be adapted accordingly. What matters is that each activity has an identifiable owner, relevant evidence, and a route for adjustment.

5. Vietnam-Specific Implementation Priorities

Preserve artistic heritage while supporting contemporary creativity

Vietnamese arts higher education institutions should treat cultural heritage as a living educational resource. Activities may connect traditional repertoire, craft, performance, and visual expression with contemporary interpretation, collaborative production, and digital documentation. Such initiatives should be designed with relevant artistic communities and professional expertise. The goal is neither to freeze heritage in a fixed form nor to replace local traditions with international trends, but to make the relationship between continuity and innovation part of institutional culture.

Respect disciplinary differences within a common institutional identity

A shared institutional framework should establish core expectations for integrity, respect, creativity, and professional responsibility. Departments should then determine how these expectations apply to their own forms of instruction and artistic work. For example, a music academy may focus on one-to-one mentoring and ensemble ethics; a fine arts institution may emphasize critique culture and exhibition practices; theatre and cinema schools may prioritize collaborative production and credit attribution. These are illustrative pathways requiring local diagnosis.

Align governance and resource allocation with cultural commitments

Institutional autonomy and changing governance arrangements create opportunities to integrate cultural priorities into planning, budgeting, staffing, and quality assurance. However, autonomy alone does not guarantee cultural improvement. Leadership should make transparent choices about access to creative spaces, technical resources, digital tools, and opportunities for public artistic engagement. Equity in access and the fairness of procedures are important cultural signals. When resources are limited, priorities should be discussed openly with those affected.

Establish ethical and inclusive artistic learning relationships

Close mentoring relationships are central to many artistic disciplines, but they require explicit safeguards. Institutions should support constructive critique, clear assessment criteria, accessible grievance channels, respect for student autonomy, and professional boundaries. Faculty development can address mentoring practices and feedback quality without undermining legitimate artistic expertise. Such measures are especially important where individual instruction and small professional communities concentrate influence.

Develop evidence-informed cultural governance

The five solutions should be introduced through a manageable sequence: baseline diagnosis, selection of priorities, implementation in selected units, formative review, and gradual expansion. Institutions should avoid claiming success merely because activities have been organized. A combination of qualitative accounts and carefully selected indicators is more appropriate for understanding whether institutional values are being practiced. The framework should be piloted and refined before wider application.

Table 3. Context-sensitive priorities for Vietnamese arts higher education

Vietnamese context	Priority response	Potential monitoring evidence
Distinctive artistic traditions and heritage	Integrate preservation with contemporary creative activities	Curricular examples; artistic outputs; community feedback
Multiple artistic disciplines	Common institutional values with discipline-specific implementation	Departmental plans; cross-disciplinary dialogue
Resource and facility constraints	Transparent access to studios, rehearsal rooms, theatres, and digital tools	Access records; student and faculty perceptions
Strong mentorship traditions	Ethical mentoring, autonomy, and fair assessment	Mentoring guidance; confidential feedback; resolution records
Governance change and international engagement	Participatory planning, responsible digital practices, and adaptive review	Consultation records; revised procedures; documented improvements

Table 3 highlights why the framework should not be implemented identically across all institutions. The combination of artistic specialization, institutional history, student population, and resource conditions will determine which actions are feasible and which indicators are meaningful. Institutional leaders should therefore use the table as a diagnostic starting point, not as a checklist that substitutes for local consultation.

6. Conclusion

This article proposes five interconnected management solutions for developing institutional culture in Vietnamese arts higher education institutions: strengthening strategic planning, organizing culture-building around artistic creativity, improving leadership coordination, expanding stakeholder participation, and institutionalizing formative monitoring and evaluation. The framework treats culture as a system of values enacted through professional relationships, artistic work, organizational routines, and shared interpretation. Its distinctive contribution is to connect familiar management functions with the specific educational and cultural conditions of music, fine arts, theatre, and cinema training.

The framework has practical implications for integrating cultural commitments into institutional strategy, creative teaching, mentoring, resource allocation, and governance. Its principal limitation is methodological: the article is based on documentary analysis and theoretical synthesis, not new empirical testing. The solutions should therefore be treated as propositions for adaptation and assessment. Future research should examine implementation across different Vietnamese arts institutions, collect student and faculty evidence, and evaluate change over time without reducing artistic culture to administrative indicators.

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