The Management of the Culture and Information Sector in Vietnam: Present Situation and Solutions

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Keywords The market economy, management tools, organizational structure, human resource management.

Abstract There is little consideration about whether the management mechanism of the culture and information sector should be innovated and adapted to a new contextualization of a market economy in Vietnam. This paper is based on an analysis and discussion of the present situation of the management of the culture and information sector in Vietnam from three perspectives: management tools, organizational structure and human resources. The paper then suggests solutions for better management. While analysis indicates that there are strengths in the current system, there are still many weaknesses, due to the recent transition from a bureaucratic and subsistence economy to a socialism-oriented market economy. These weaknesses include the incompatibility of the legal system and the lack of necessary knowledge about the management of cultural staff. In the context of Vietnam, solutions relating to the renovation of management tools, organizational structure and human resources are suggested. These measures include capacity building for staff, training for the management of the culture and information sector, and a requirement for more appropriate legal processes.

Biography Nguyen Chi Ben obtained a Bachelor of Education in 1977 and a Doctorate in Cultural Studies in 1995. He worked extensively in the Department of Training and Education and the Department of Culture as a lecturer and a manager from 1984 to 1990. He was appointed as the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Cultures and Arts Studies in Ha Noi, Vietnam from 1995 to 2002. Since 2003 Nguyen Chi Ben has been the Director General of the Vietnam Institute of Cultures and Arts Studies.

The Research History and Research Question

The management of the information and culture sector in Vietnam has both specific characteristics as well as similar characteristics to other socio-economic sectors. However until recently, the issue of innovation of the management mechanism for the culture and information sector of Vietnam has been paid little attention, within and outside the sector. The resolution of the steering committee of the Central Communist Party Tenure VIII, session V (1998: 40-41), touched upon the “drafting and promulgation of culture laws and policies” in its third chapter “Major solutions to expand and develop culture”. However it focused on an orientation without any detailed guidelines and action plan. Pro Hong Vinh in “Culture institution – a necessary tool for culture management”, and in his work, Some theoretical and practical tools for culture development in Vietnam, goes some way to discussing an approach to implementation (Pro, 1998: 40 - 41). However, only five pages of this book dealt with this issue, and only two aspects were covered - current law and customary law.

The National Administrative Academy's curriculum on “State Administration” also covers state administration for culture. However, this curriculum focuses on state
administration as if it is like management in other sectors. The authors discuss current concepts, the role of culture in society and the main issues for state administration for culture in the present situation. This includes issues such as the guiding philosophy for state management of culture and new factors emerging in changes to culture (National Administrative Academy, 1999: 105-131). However, the authors touch upon state administration in culture in a general sense, without discussing specific characteristics of culture and information management.

Pham Danh Nga in her PhD thesis (Pham 1997), researched a more specific topic - “Innovation of the management mechanism of public enterprises in the culture and information sector in Vietnamese market economy”. The thesis consists of three chapters: “State management for public enterprises in the culture and information sector in the Vietnamese market economy”, “Current government management mechanism for public enterprises in the culture and information sector in the Vietnamese market economy” and “Some main viewpoints and solutions for the innovation of the management mechanism of public enterprises in the culture and information sector in the Vietnamese market economy” (Pham 1997). While Pham Danh Nga provides much thoughtful comments and analysis, the author addresses the issue of state management for public enterprises only and not for the culture and information sector as a whole.

“Culture institution innovation” edited by Khang Thuc Chieu (Khang 1996), discusses current cultural management in China in a market economy. In three chapters in particular, “Establishing new and suitable cultural institutions in the current context”, “Improving cultural policies to be suitable to the new situation” and “Study on Chinese socialism culture management” Khang addresses relevant issues to Vietnam. Chinese cultural critics present the typical characteristics of Chinese socialist cultural management and the establishment of Chinese cultural management at different levels (the macro-level, the medium-level and the micro-level). It is the author’s view that this publication has much to teach Vietnamese cultural managers.

The context of the current management of the culture and information sector in Vietnam

The emergence and encouragement of the market economy within Vietnam has increased the urgency for solutions to renovate cultural management mechanisms. The Vietnamese Communist Party Plenum 6 has paved the way for socio-economic innovation management mechanisms including culture and information. Central planning, bureaucracy and a subsistence economy are moving towards a market economy but with a communist orientation. A market economy is the place where all commodity relationships take place between sellers and buyers. In relation to commodities, the market is the operating mechanism with different rules such as demand and supply, competition and monetary circulation. Economists have classified markets as commodity and services markets, finance markets, real estate markets, labor markets and science and technology markets.

It could be argued that the culture and information sector has the general characteristics of a market also, with more specific characteristics such as commodities known as cultural products. However, until now in Vietnam, cultural products have not been recognized as commodities. In fact, cultural managers and artists have not made the transition from a subsistence economy to a market economy. In addition culture and information operations are inconsistent with a market economy, although some culture and information activities such as culture and information enterprises, have become adaptive.

The role of cultural management has become increasingly important from a socio-economic perspective, as the cultural sector experiences both the positive and negative effects of the market economy. The positive effects include a better living standard which stimulates cultural enjoyment, creativity and employment. The negative effects include the flooding of commercial cultural products to fulfill the needs of some people
in society and the degradation of traditional culture. The inter-relation between economy and culture in the market economy reaffirms the role of management.

In Vietnam, the scope of management of the culture and information sector, as described by the decree 81/CP by the Vietnamese Government dated November 8th 1993, includes: culture, arts, journalism, publishing, printing, distribution, cinema, museums and cultural heritage preservation, libraries, cultural campaigns, exhibitions and advertising, photography, national and international culture and information activities. Those in charge of culture and information management are cultural and arts managers, artists and practitioners. Culture is created by the people and for the people and society is the object of culture and information management.

In addition a special characteristic of Vietnam is that it is an agricultural country, heading towards modernization and industrialization. At present 80% of the population is resident in the countryside. Thus Vietnamese culture’s constants are farmers engaged in rice cultivation and village culture. Vietnamese social units consist of individuals, the family, the village, the community and the nation. Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups. Vietnamese culture comprises 54 cultures, each of which has its own character. “Vietnam has a culture in which patriotism and a desire to catch up with human civilization are the most important manifestation” (Nguyen Khoa Diem, 2002: 153).

Strengths of Management of the Culture and Information Sector

In Vietnam the culture and information sector has experienced fifty-six years of development. From a management perspective, there are many issues which could be analyzed. These include the applicability of management rules, the objectives or motives in management, management methods, organizational structure, management tools, information in management and decision-making in management and by managers. This paper will now focus on three management issues: management tools, organizational structure and human resources in the cultural sector.

Management tools

Management tools are the means by which managers lead, guide, encourage, harmonize, and coordinate people and community activities in order to gain set objectives. This is depicted in Model 1.

Model 1

![Management Model Diagram]

Note: Management subject and management object affect each other by the identification and implementation of management objectives.
The application of Model 1 to culture and information leads to Model 2.

**Model 2**

Note: The circle of cultural production goes from the phase of creativity to service phase (reservation, distribution and dissemination) and to the receptive phase of audience. All these phases are influenced by cultural managers and in turn cultural managers are also affected by them. The final objectives of cultural managers are to develop a Vietnamese cultural identity – a traditional but advanced culture).

One example of management tools in the Vietnamese culture and information sector, is legal management tools. These are the laws set in place for each sub-sector of culture and information and are summarized as follows:

**Journalism**
- Law on journalism passed by the National Assembly 8th in session 6; National Assembly adapted it in session 9
- Decree 133 by the government dated April 20th 2002 on regulation of the implementation of Law on Journalism
- Decree 194/CP by the government on advertisement on Vietnamese territory
- Decree 59 dated June 5th 1989 by the Government on royalties for socio-economic, cultural, educational, artistic and technological works. In addition, decree 61 ND –CP dated 6th June 2002 detailed and revised royalties for fifteen types of cultural works from literature to music and information technological works. This decree aims to encourage creativity activities, give authors benefits both spiritually and materially and affirm their ownership and copyright.

**Publishing**
- Law on Publications passed by Congress 8 in 1993
- Regulation on organization and activities on printing as per decision made on August 26th 1997 by the Minister of Culture and Information

**Cultural life**
- Directive 814/Ttg on strengthening management culture and cultural services to prevent social evils
- Directive 14-1998/ CT-Ttg dated March 28th 1998 by the Prime Minister on the implementation of civilization lifestyles in weddings, funerals and festivals
• Directive 24-1998/ CT-Ttg dated June 19th 1998 by the Prime Minister on the establishment and implementation of village regulation
• Regulation on festivals (1989)
• Regulation on festivals (1994)

Libraries
• Ordinances on libraries

Fine arts
• Regulations on statues, huge paintings, fine arts exhibition, galleries and photography

Performance
• Professional performance as per decision 32/1999/QD-BVHTT dated April 29th 1999 by the Minister of Culture and Information
• Regulation on production, export, import and circulation of audio and video tapes and disks

Cinema
• Decree 48/CP on development of cinema

Copyright
• Regulation in the Civil code on copyright

Cultural heritage preservation
• Law on Cultural Heritage passed by Congress X, session 9

Thus cultural and information policy is implemented by the Vietnamese government through the issuing of decrees and publicity campaigns. The decree 90/C dated August 2nd 1997, covered orientation and schemes for education, health care and cultural activities; decree 73/1999/ND-CP dated August 19th 1999 covered policies to encourage socialization of education, health care, culture and sports activities; decree 31/2000/ND/C dated June 26th 2001, covered administrative fines for violations in the field of culture and information. Furthermore, in 2000, a steering committee was established for the campaign “Every person unites in contributing to the development of a cultural life”. These legal tools have assisted the effective management of culture, society, lifestyle and business.

Organizational structure

In Vietnam, the culture and information sector has been set up according to a hierarchy of administrative levels as depicted in Model 3.

Model 3

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  Government
  ↓
Ministry of Culture and Information (national level)
  ↓
Department of Culture and Information (provincial level)
  ↓
Bureau of Culture and Information (district level)
  ↓
Culture and information Section (community level)
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The relationship between the hierarchy is mediated by another relationship from the authorities at different levels. Model 4 depicts the workings of the culture and information sector.

**Model 4**

The Government

- Ministry of Culture and information

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Provincial authority

- Culture and information at provincial level

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District authority

- Culture and information at district level

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Commune authority

- Culture and information at commune level

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At the ministerial level, management is organized into three categories. Firstly, there are consultative bodies including the Department of Personnel, the Department of Traditional Culture, the Department of Training, the Department of Journalism, the Department of International Relations, the Department of Legal Issues, the Department of Planning, the Department of Finance, the Department of Libraries, the Department of Preservation and Museums, the Department of Copyright, the Department of Local Culture and Information, the Department of Cinema and the Department of Performing Arts. Secondly, there are practical and research bodies including newspapers, magazines, museums, theatres, arts troupes, universities, colleges and the Institute of Culture and Arts Studies. Thirdly, there are enterprises including publishers, cultural services, exhibitions and film institutes.

Model 5 represents the three aspects of management as discussed.

**Model 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creativity</th>
<th>Conservation, distribution and dissemination</th>
<th>Reception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- research institutions; consultative bodies and research institute - creativity subject</td>
<td>- museums, libraries - training institutions - mass media organizations - Arts troupes, theatres - Cultural services activities.</td>
<td>- audience of culture and information - managers, leaders - critics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Since 1994 the national plan on culture and information has been implemented within this framework. Actions have included the prevention from degradation of historic sites, cinema development, local culture and information activities and the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage.

Apart from the institutional models discussed thus far, managers in the culture and information sector can be seen to operate with an organizational framework. Model 6 depicts the flow of operation between managers at different levels.

**Model 6**

The models depicted in this section represent the organizational structure of the culture and information sector which contribute to the functioning of state management in the culture and information sector.

**Human resources**

Staff in the culture and information sector obtained management positions by appointment. Over the last fifty years since the introduction of Vietnam’s open-door policy, the personnel numbers and quality in the culture and information sector has improved. According to statistics (by the School for Management Personnel) there are about 45,000 employees in the culture and information sector. This number can be categorized as follows:

- 4,308 - directly managed by the Ministry of culture and information
- more than 40,000 - managed by local levels (22,284 managed at provincial level and about 22,000 managed at district level)

Within the total of 45,000 staff, the numbers that work in management are as follow:

- 450 – at Department level and above
- 9,000 – at State level
- 5,500 – at District level

In terms of education and professional qualifications, (according to the School of Cultural Management’s statistics) by the end of October 2002, the profile of staff included 11 staff with Professorial title, 31 with Doctorates, 7 with a Masters degree, 206 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, 14 with college level qualifications, 2 with People’s Artist titles, 85 with advanced political study qualifications, 115 with intermediate political study qualifications and 58 with pre-intermediate political study qualifications. The sector has generally met the requirements for the management of human resources. The staff has been contributing towards various successes in recent times.

**Disadvantages of the Current Management of the Culture and Information Sector**

**Management tools**

The main argument here is that management tools are not yet compatible and updated for the change to a market economy characterized by new economic factors and a technology boom. For instance the culture and information sector needs to have new
laws. The legal system appears to be slow, thus affecting the necessary adjustment in culture and information activities. Currently we have no law for fundraising or sponsorship. The private sector is encouraged to fund cultural and information activities but is not motivated on the basis of receiving any economic benefit in return (such as tax deductions), but on the basis of philanthropy. The government could look at introducing favourable tax regimes to encourage cultural investment. Thus state management lacks focus and this regularly impacts on the efficient organization of cultural and arts activities. Furthermore investment policies in the television industry and tax policies for television advertising, are inconsistent and poorly linked, when they could be designed to support the industry to a much greater degree.

Although new laws have been introduced, these are not effective. One example is the Law on Cultural Heritage dated 12th July 2001 which replaced the Decree on the Protection of Historical Sites and Famous Landscape, issued in 1984. In fact there are examples of this law being broken illustrated by the illegal trading of antiques and destroying of historical sites.

**Organizational structure**

As previously discussed, the organizational management of the culture and information sector is a top-down structure.

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Ministry of Culture and Information (national level)

Department of Culture and Information (provincial level)

Section of Culture and Information (district level)

Culture and Information Subsection (community level)
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However, in practical terms, the culture and information sector does not have personnel at the community level, as these personnel are also in charge of other works. This means that there is no dedicated staff for the community level. This is unsuitable for the culture and information sector, as the majority of cultural and art activities take place in the communities. Culture and information staff at the community level, are the ones who implement instructions by the government at the grass-roots level. In other words, the top-down structure is flawed and affects the management of culture and information. As discussed earlier, the culture and information sector can be viewed from three perspectives – firstly creativity, secondly conservation and thirdly distribution, dissemination and reception.

From the perspective of creativity practitioners include for instance writers, poets, sculptors and architects. The culture and information sector has yet to establish agencies to manage these practitioners. The practitioners are currently managed by professional associations, such as the Writers Association and the Fine Arts Association. These associations are affiliated to the Central Committee on Associations for Literature and the Arts, Fatherland Front. Therefore, the relationship between the Ministry of Culture and Information and these professional associations is not interdependent but supportive. These associations create and provide works while the culture and information sector uses and distributes the works. This situation presents a difficulty for the macro management of culture and information. In the past, while there have been departments for music, theatre, fine arts, journalism and cinema, there has been no department for literature – a critical component of culture and information. The problem raised is the lack of coordination between Ministry of Culture and Information and these associations. Another problem is that there have been more and more associations, clubs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on culture and
information. The relationship between these bodies and government agencies needs to be taken into consideration. Laws on the operation of NGOs as well as the relationship between NGOs and government agencies need to be formulated. In this way, the policy on the socialization of culture and information could be effectively implemented.

Human resources

The main concern is that managers are not trained at state management level and in the management of cultural and information activities. According to a personnel survey conducted by the School for Cultural Management, at a Departmental level, there are 78 managers who have not been trained in management. The University of Culture also has no training department for the management of culture at Bachelor Degree level. Furthermore, at state management level, those trained in management are not well trained specifically on culture and information management. Management in culture and information is only paid a little consideration in the training curriculum. In the report by Visiting Arts on “Developing cultural and arts management curriculum in Vietnam in a market economy” (Visiting Arts, unpublished report 2002), the authors commented that,

In many cases, the management and administrative work of performing agencies is seen as additional work to performing by high-profile artists. This means that artists have to reduce their time for performing arts to focus on administrative work in which they do not have professional training (Visiting Arts, unpublished report, 2002: 5).

Therefore in the author’s view, there is an urgent requirement for improved professionalism in management at all levels.

On the one hand, Arts and Cultural Management is still seen as general management rather than seeing the practice of cultural and arts management as a specific science. (The author understands that this misconception also existed in Europe before specific training in arts and cultural management became widespread). There has been a belief that generic management skills are suitable for all arts and cultural activities. However, it is clear that to manage different art forms such as performance, literature, fine arts or heritage successfully, diversified skills are needed. On the other hand, the management staff of culture and information services have not got sufficient knowledge about the market economy in areas such as marketing, finance management and market expansion. The cultural and information sector is still operated as a subsidized mechanism. This means that the government funds most of the cultural activities and covers the financial deficits. “Giving and receiving” habits formed in a centrally planning economy within a bureaucratic and subsistence framework, seem to be difficult and slow to change to a market economy.

Finally, there is still a lack of knowledge on the use of modern technology. According to the report on “Developing cultural and arts management curriculum in Vietnam in a market economy” by Visiting Arts,

The use of computers in Vietnamese culture and art agencies has just started… Many managers of culture and art agencies do not have much understanding about computers (Visiting Arts, unpublished report, 2002: 14).

The open-door policy by Vietnam has given the culture and information sector opportunities to exchange and enrich its culture with other countries in the world. Without training, a good grasp of foreign languages and a basic knowledge in information technology, these opportunities will be missed.
Some solutions for innovation within the culture and information sector

Considerations

The current context for culture and information nowadays in Vietnam is a socialism-oriented market economy. The potential for cultural exchange has increased dramatically with the introduction of modern information technology. This innovation in culture and information management should be an urgent priority, with an aim to develop a Vietnamese cultural identity that is modern, but based on traditional culture.

The ideas for a different approach should start from a set of aims, objectives and development strategies. The objectives of culture and information management change reform is to develop a management mechanism suitable to the current conditions of a socialism-oriented market economy; to maximize the positive effects of the market economy and to minimize the negative effects on cultural and information activities. Clearly a holistic and systematic point of view should be applied in order to create solutions for management changes and reform.

Solutions for Human Resources

Human resources are a critical and important issue in deciding the failure or success of the cultural and information sector. Management should be developed with a capacity building plan, which would provide the necessary knowledge for staff within a market economy. At the same time, the following skills should be provided for cultural management staff:

- Time management skills; the ability to use available resources and propose orientation and strategies for certain objectives; the ability to be responsible for work, and to be confident and decisive.
- Communication skills (to be a good listener, to be able to negotiate and pay attention to others’ request, to be good at effective writing to express ideas, to be able to develop and maintain networks and relationships within the culture and information and other sectors).
- Financial management skills and knowledge.
- Knowledge about donors
- A grasp of complex issues
- The ability to be influential, determined and focused at work
- The ability to delegate and supervise
- Chairing skills
- Legal knowledge

In particular, at an institutional level changes are recommended in the area of human resources. Some management agencies should have greater powers to extend their functions and responsibilities to incorporate activities such as journalism or international relations. The Department of Journalism should also be in charge of international correspondence. There should be a new department focusing on the cultural market. The organizational structure from the central level to the community level, and the problem of not having permanent staff at the community level in place, should be addressed. In addition, identifying appropriate selection criteria for staff in the culture and information sector, should be considered. For instance, staff should have culture and information qualifications as well as appropriate management qualifications, even if they work at the community level. A lack of human resources for some work, such as scanning filed books and newspapers within the newspaper and publishing departments, should be addressed.

Solutions for Management tools

It is the author’s view that it should be frankly admitted in Vietnam that many past management tools for culture and information, are no longer appropriate to the new situation of a market economy. Experience can be drawn from other countries and
adapted suitably into the Vietnam situation such as: formulating legal documents guiding the operation of libraries, museums, publishers and copyright and financial instructions for private agencies. In addition the research results of Vietnam institutions on cultural management should also be taken into consideration. Certainly it is necessary to review, analyze and assess the old tools and to discard invalid ones. There should be instruction, advocacy, education, monitoring and evaluation of the performance of management tools for both management subjects and objects. Policy and law-makers should be improved and enriched with knowledge and skills in the fields of law, decision making and strategic planning. Setting up appropriate management tools is of strategic importance and this goes beyond only dealing with individual and small cases.

**Solutions for Organizational Structure**

In order to reform and modernize the organizational structure of the culture and information sector, the following points should be considered:

- That a number of levels of organizational structure are required to ensure flexibility and practicality.
- That the scope, function and responsibility of each management level should be identified, in order to have appropriate assignment for each authoritative body and avoid overlapping tasks or lack of responsibility and accountability for tasks.
- That the relationship between the top-down structure and the parallel structure be identified, in order to have close collaboration in terms of responsibilities and performance between different sections.
- That management cost is minimized, such that practicality and cost effectiveness with best performance is ensured.
- That the goal is stability but not conservatism

Clearly there is a lot to be done. The mechanism of culture and information should be modernized and improved with regard to capacity building in state management. This would ensure effective administration from the central to the grass-roots level. The management structure at the ministry level should also be reshuffled and restructured in such a way as to avoid both overlapping and wasting human and financial resources. The objective is to harmonize the instructions at the central level with the direct implementation at the local authority level.

To improve the cultural management knowledge and skills of staff, one significant issue that needs to be addressed is the setting up of both under-graduate and post-graduate training programs in culture and information management. The development of cultural and arts management curriculum, based on the market economy at various levels, should be the first priority within the training institutions. To do that, first of all the training quality of the School for Cultural Management personnel should be improved.

The task to develop Vietnamese culture into a contemporary structure, while respecting traditional models, has been identified as follows:

The setting up of cultural institutions has been slow and insufficient. Culture socialization policies have been slowly issued. The structure of the culture and information sector has not been reshuffled for more effective management and leadership. The capacity building of management staff has not yet met the demand and some key positions have not been filled (The Central Communist Party Steering Committee Tenure VIII, Session 5).

In order to carry out the resolution, many issues relating to the renovation of management should be addressed. This is crucial to the development of the culture and information sector in Vietnam.
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