

# THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ON INTERNATIONALIZATION OF UNIVERSITIES: A CASE STUDY OF MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE

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**Abstract:** The Internationalization of universities is complex and multifaceted in different contexts. Organizational culture is one of the critical factors that foster or inhibit this process and while this has been widely studied in western context, it has not attracted the same level of interest in Southeast Asia. Thus, this study has sought to assess how organizational culture has influenced the internationalization of a higher education institution via research in Thailand.

Empirical research was used to develop an in-depth understanding of various internationalization activities as well as organizational culture and its influence on the internationalization of Mahidol University International College (MUIC). Employing quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study invited 181 working staff to respond to the survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 working staff at MUIC. The findings reveal that MUIC is dominated by a pre-entrepreneurial culture. The internationalization activities were extensive but ad hoc in terms of systematization. Thus, MUIC is positioned in quadrant C in Davies' (2001) means and style of development of entrepreneurial culture. Suggestions have been made for developing activities that will ensure culture becomes more entrepreneurial with which the internationalization were optimized.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, Organizational Culture, Entrepreneurial Culture, Thailand.

## Introduction

The internationalization of universities is natural and inevitable in the globalized economy. Many countries perceive internationalization as crucial in achieving high academic standards (Knight, 2004). The relevance of collaboration between universities has been described as “more important than ever as mediums for a wide range of cross border relationships and continuous global flows of people, information, knowledge, technologies, products and financial capital” (OECD, 2009). As the importance of this process of higher education institutions grows, researchers have begun to assess the relative significance of the factors that both foster or inhibit internationalization. Organizational culture is one of these factors (Agnew & VanBalkom, 2009). Given that studies on the influence of organizational culture on internationalization in higher education are rare in the Southeast Asian context, there

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is a great need to conduct relevant research in ASEAN countries. Mahidol University International College was selected to be the object of this particular study as it was the first international college under a public University to offer an International bachelor's degree program in Thailand.

### **Objectives**

There are three objectives:

- 1) To synthesize the main internationalization activities at MUIC.
- 2) To identify the various forms of its organizational culture.
- 3) To analyze how that organizational culture has influenced the process of internationalization at the university.

### **Literature Review**

It is critical to begin by attempting to understand the terms used in this research.

#### *Internationalization versus Globalization*

When internationalization is referred in academia, it is often erroneously taken to mean globalization. Extensive research (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Chan & Dimmok, 2008; De Wit, 2009) reveals that the globalization serves as a catalyst for the internationalization of higher education institutions. A similar expression is that the internationalization process is the response to globalization. Knight (2008a) described the internationalization of higher education as the way how a country reacts to the impact of globalization characterized by the effusion of knowledge, people, technology, ideas and values, while maintaining the cultural identity and uniqueness of its own education system. The influence of globalization on each country varies depending on its attitudes towards globalization itself, and its, historical and cultural background. In this study, Internationalization of universities, refers to the process of integrating international and intercultural activities into teaching, research and other academic activities, thereby serving as a means to the sustainable development of universities.

#### *Organizational Culture versus Organization Culture*

Organizational culture is rooted in the American approach to culture as an organizational variable that have impacts on the effectiveness of organizations. Whilst, organization culture is based on Phenomenological/Interpretive epistemology (Kucinskas and Paulauskaite, 2005) in the German academia. The essential difference between these two terms is whether it can be controlled or changed by management. Organization culture is deemed as unique and not duplicated, however, organizational culture aiming for a particular organizational outcome can be created and manipulated to reflect the ideology of the organization authority. Organizational culture in this research, refers to a set of physical and mental activities shared by all members in the organization that determines their feelings, thoughts and behaviors and which can be created, manipulated and changed upon the influence of external and internal environments. In this study, organizational culture consists of pre-entrepreneurial culture and entrepreneurial culture as Davies (2001) defined.

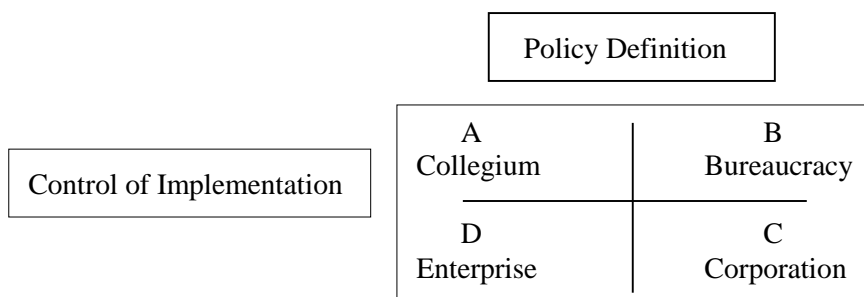
### *Indicators for Internationalization Activities*

Knight (1994) suggested a set of checkpoints to help in the planning or strengthening strategies of internationalization strategies in higher education institutions, and to measure or evaluate the degree of internationalization achieved. It is difficult to measure the degree and success of internationalization. The quantitative aspect can be revealed in the numbers of the activities and participants while the qualitative aspect should be placed in the same critical role where it relates to as the quality of the international experiences, relationships or collaborations as well as other organizational factors. These checkpoints have been adjusted and adapted in actual by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the Bank of Nova Scotia which has given awards for excellence in internationalization since 1997. These indicators, summarized by Bartell (2003), were are used as checkpoints to categorize internationalization activities at MUIC. Davies (2001) suggested that, in the entrepreneurial model, some indications of instruments in particular domains could be discussed in terms of style of policy formation and the flexibility evident in implementation mechanisms. Hence, he advocated three domains: namely the personnel domain, the financial domain and the quality domain: The researcher used all three as aids to propose recommendations for the MUIC policy makers.

### *Research Theoretical Models*

When evaluating the influence of organizational culture, the first step is to identify the predominant culture types in MUIC. The culture in a higher education institution can be categorized into different types and since most higher education institutions have more than one organizational culture type that overlaps one another, these culture types exist in different balances (McNay, 1995). Two models have been employed in this research: McNay's (1995) organizational culture model was used to find out the dominant culture types then Davies' (2001) matrix of approaches to internationalization was applied to analyze the extent to which MUIC was affecting links between culture and international activities.

McNay's (1995) organizational culture model offers an interesting link between higher education and organizational culture, distinguishing as it does between two dimensions: the extent to which a higher education institution has tight versus loose operational control, and the relevant focus on strategy and policy. He suggested four cultural types presented in four quadrants:



**Figure 1: Model of University as Organization (Source: McNay, I. (1995).)**

Collegium culture typically exists in decentralized organizations that institutional freedom is prioritized, which is similar to “laissez-faire”. Bureaucracy culture emphasizes on regulations, rules and norms. Corporate culture is dominated by senior management. The key word is “power”. Enterprising culture is market-oriented in which the organization’s attention is placed on the external opportunities and relationships with stake holders.

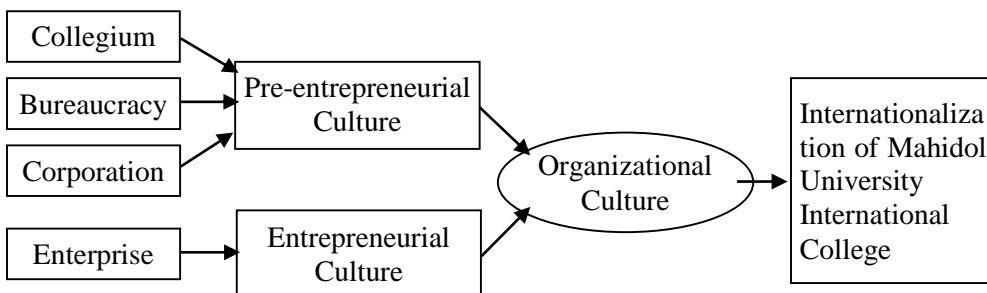
To connect organizational culture with the internationalization of higher education institutions, Davies (2001) suggested a link between these two variables. He articulated that entrepreneurial culture possesses the characteristics of open communication, a willingness to embrace new opportunities and challenges and an ability to evaluate risk and mitigate it with good preparation, and finally the transferal of knowledge gained through experience. Compared with pre-entrepreneurial culture, entrepreneurial culture is more supportive and conducive to developing the internationalization of a higher education institution. But it is not necessarily meant that a pre-entrepreneurial culture is not possible for internationalization activities. Academic rationales trigger international activities (Kalvemark & Van der Wende, 1996). One of the reasons is that the international exchange of ideas is key to professional academic development. In this culture category, the imperative to internationalization lies in its intrinsic motivation rather than deriving from economic pressure (Burnett & Huisman, 2009).

Davies’ model of approaches to internationalization through organizational culture perspectives with the characteristics of each quadrants is presented in the matrix in Figure 2:

(See Figure 2 on the next page)

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on McNay’s (1995) culture type model and Davies’ (2001) development of an entrepreneurial culture model to analyze the influence of organizational culture on internationalization. McNay (1995) clarified four culture types in universities: collegium, bureaucracy, corporation and enterprise. These culture types were coexisting in a higher education institution. To link organizational culture with the internationalization of MUIC, the four culture types were grouped into two categories: pre-entrepreneurial and entrepreneurial.



**Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of This Study**

		Degree of Systematization	
		Ad Hoc	Highly Systematic
Degree of importance of entrepreneurialism permeation and penetration	Marginal	<b>A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Low development</li> <li>● Opportunism</li> <li>● Little incentive</li> <li>● Few supporting procedures</li> <li>● Ground rules implicit</li> <li>● Networks informal + personal</li> <li>● Individual/department-based</li> <li>● “Barons” predominant</li> <li>● Weak market intelligence</li> </ul>	<b>B</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explicit place in mission</li> <li>● Deliberately limited involvement</li> <li>● Selective procedures</li> <li>● Simple structures at the center</li> <li>● Legitimate</li> <li>● Small-scaled but planned connections with core</li> </ul>
	Extensive	<b>C</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● High development</li> <li>● High opportunism</li> <li>● Limited policy frame</li> <li>● Uneven procedural support</li> <li>● Incentives-freedom</li> <li>● Confused structure+ relationships</li> <li>● Ad hoc review processes</li> <li>● Tensions with core</li> <li>● Uneven mission</li> <li>● Confused finances</li> </ul>	<b>D</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● High level of development + opportunism in defined framework</li> <li>● Explicit mission</li> <li>● Business planning</li> <li>● Resource + personnel incentives policies + procedures</li> <li>● Targeted marketing</li> <li>● Specialist organs + roles</li> <li>● Strong connections with academic core</li> </ul>

**Figure 2: Means and Style of Development of Entrepreneurial Culture**  
(Source: Davies, J. (2001).)

- A: Ad hoc—Marginal: no clear instructions and little international activity takes place in the institution.
- B: Systematic—Marginal: The existing international activities are limited but all are under well-defined framework with clear guidelines.
- C: Ad hoc—Extensive: International activities take place throughout the whole institution; however, the activities have an ad hoc character.
- D: Systematic—Extensive: Substantial international works are implemented in many aspects. The vision and mission of internationalization is well-defined and implemented in real academic life with specific policies and supporting procedures.

### Method

As established above, this empirical research involved a case study approach conducted in MUIC. It was chosen as this was the most suitable way to understand a complex issue and a relatively unexplored topic of interest in Southeast Asia. This study employed document analysis to synthesize the main internationalization activities at MUIC, a quantitative approach to find out the main organizational culture

types, and a qualitative approach to analyze the influence of organizational culture on the internationalization of MUIC.

In Phase I, background documents of MUIC, namely, vision and mission statement, prospectus, facts and figures, official website were analyzed to summarize the main internationalization activities.

In Phase II, Cameron and Quinn's (2001) Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument was adaptively used as the instrument in this study. In the original instrument, the respondents were supposed to score each type by similarity to Mahidol University and the scores could be any number from 1-100. To make the questionnaire more user-friendly, the researcher revised the scoring method to be a four-point Likert Scale for the respondent to tick instead of writing down the numbers. Because the originate 100-point impassive scale was distributed according to the participants' perception of how strongly they agreed with each item, this was essentially the same measuring method as the four-point Likert Scale. The Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability test result of 20 items, consisting of five dimensions, was high (0.81).

In Phase III, semi-structured interviews were used with seven initial questions developed in accordance with key terms from review of literature. All data collected were in English.

The target population for quantitative and qualitative research were 320 working staff. The quantitative sample number was 178. Two hundred fifteen sets of self-reported questionnaires were distributed to the working staff at MUIC, and 181 questionnaires were returned. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure all the academic and supporting divisions were involved. For quantitative data collection, nine key participants with over eight years' working experience at MUIC were interviewed. MUIC has six academic divisions and six supporting divisions. In view of their relevance to this research, one representative from each academic division and three supporting divisions were selected - namely, business administration, fine & applied arts, humanities & language, science, social science, tourism and hospitality management, student affairs, academic affairs and research, and international affairs and networking.

## Findings/Results and Discussions

### *Research Objective One: Main Internationalization Activities*

The researcher synthesized all aspects of the internationalization activities of MUIC and categorized them using Bartell (2003)'s indicators for internationalization excellence and three domains by Davies (2001):

**Table 1: Main Internationalization Activities of MUIC**

Three domains proposed by Davies (2001)	Bartell's (2003) indicators for excellence in internationalization	List of main activities of internationalization at MUIC
Personnel Domain	International student participation;	(1). 15% international students are currently enrolled, hailing from 45 countries or regions.

**Table 1: Main Internationalization Activities of MUIC**

Three domains proposed by Davies (2001)	Bartell's (2003) indicators for excellence in internationalization	List of main activities of internationalization at MUIC
	Faculty contributions to internationalization;	(2). 60% of faculty members are from foreign countries outside of Thailand.
	The mobilization of human resources for internationalization	(3). The English level of supporting staff is not strong enough to support academic work.
Financial Domain	The mobilization of financial resources for internationalization	(4). Each faculty member can apply for a scholarship to attend international conferences twice a year.
Quality Domain	Revision of curriculum;	(5). 19 undergraduate programs, 22 minors and 2 master programs are offered. (6). The curriculum, which is revised every 5 years, is internationally-oriented and involves all stakeholders contributing to its improvement.
	Partnership with private sectors;	(7). MUIC enjoys close ties with top international companies which assist in the provision of the following: a Career Assessment Day, Job Fair, Industry Talks, Final Touch, Résumé Workshop and mock interviews for students.
	International partnership;	(8). 115 overseas universities are partners of MUIC, 42 are from Europe, 34 from Asia, 29 from North America, 9 from Oceania, and 1 is from South Africa.
	The mobilization of technological resources for internationalization	(9). The medium of instruction used in classes is English except for some specific classes that require other languages. (10). Growth of infrastructure. A new eight-stores building will be completed this year (2016).
	Research contribution to internationalization;	(11). Strong support for faculty members to do research based on their own interests;
	Contribution of university internationalization development projects to internationalization;	(12). The Study Abroad Program is vibrant and highly encouraged by the management. (13). The Special Projects Program is actively promoted besides Study Abroad Program. It covers short-term exchange experiences, ranging from formal instruction, seminars,

**Table 1: Main Internationalization Activities of MUIC**

Three domains proposed by Davies (2001)	Bartell's (2003) indicators for excellence in internationalization	List of main activities of internationalization at MUIC
		workshops and conferences, field trips and excursions. (14). The Thailand Trust Mark logo has been placed on the MUIC home page by The Thai Ministry of Commerce to acknowledge its provision of high quality international education services.

*Research Objective Two: Main Organizational Cultural Types*

The presentation of this session begins with demographic profiles of MUIC's working staff broken down in terms of gender, nationality, and so on, and the actual results from the questionnaires. The demographic profiles of MUIC sample working staff are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of MUIC Sample Working Staff's Personal Information**

Personal information of MUIC sample working staff	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
– Female	104	57.50
– Male	77	42.50
Nationality		
– Native (Thai)	95	52.50
– Non-native	86	47.50
Working function		
– Academic divisions	72	39.80
– Supporting divisions	109	60.20
Working years at MUIC		
– Less than one year	13	7.20
– 1-5 years	74	40.90
– More than 5 years	94	51.90

The four current and desired types of culture are showed in descending order by average score in Table 3 below. The respondents' opinions reflected the existing cultural types at MUIC and are ranked as follows: Collegium (2.64), Corporate (2.59), Bureaucracy (2.53), and Enterprise (2.45). Meanwhile, the preferred cultural types at MUIC ranked as follows: Enterprise (3.55), Collegium (3.35), Corporate (2.81), and Bureaucracy (2.72).



**Table 3: Rankings of the Four Existing and Preferred Cultural Types at MUIC**

Cultural Type	Existing			Desired		
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Ranking	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Ranking
Collegium	2.64	0.77	1	3.35	0.80	2
Enterprise	2.45	0.75	4	3.55	0.68	1
Corporate	2.59	0.80	2	2.81	0.93	3
Bureaucracy	2.53	0.84	3	2.72	0.99	4

The respondents' opinions showed that the top three existing cultural types at MUIC were Collegium, Corporate, and Bureaucracy. When compared with the conceptual framework in this research, these three dominant cultural types define a pre-entrepreneurial culture (Davies, 2001).

The most popular culture type ranked by working staff was Enterprise; this being equivalent to Davies' (2001) entrepreneurial culture. This could contribute to the proposed suggestions as to how the internationalization process of MUIC may be improved. To some extent, it suggests that people working in MUIC hope to enhance internationalization as they selected the most suitable culture type for internationalization. This has reassured the management team in its efforts to promote internationalization and move towards an entrepreneurial culture.

#### *Research Objective Three: The Influence of Organizational Culture on Internationalization of MUIC*

In this research framework, organization's structure and its commitment to internationalization was analyzed as to understand the organizational culture. Next, the international activities were summarized to identify the extensiveness of the policies and its implementation. Lastly, the influence of organizational culture towards internationalization was deciphered through the findings from main internationalization activities, the main organizational cultural types.

When the staff were asked about the structure of MUIC, they did not have unified opinions. The following statements from interviews were representative:

*"It is centralized when it comes to university and college-level policies. Day-to-day and division level operations, however, are relegated to relevant staff or administrators".*

*"Given being autonomous and doing our things for so long, it's like in the middle path between the two. We follow what we have to and we do things on our way in whatever we can under the Mahidol regulation".*

MUIC started as an autonomous college of Mahidol University 30 years ago. Now it is administrated by the board of deans. The board is responsible for formulating control procedures and college-level policies. In this sense, it is centralized in terms of organizational culture as the policy making procedure is top-down. But several respondents articulated that the college has opted to give more flexibility and autonomy to divisions which suggests a decentralized-oriented style. The mixed structure might be due to the unique identity of MUIC. It is the first and leading international college in Thailand to have given so many privileges to its own management. Mahidol University being a traditional public university, it is

unsurprising that it is and has been influenced by features common to public universities such as centralism. Therefore, the structure is a little bit confused.

All respondents unanimously replied that MUIC was committed to internationalization. One of the senior academic staff gave a comparatively comprehensive description of the organization's commitment to internationalization during the interviews as follows:

*“(1) It conducts all classes in English and follows a curriculum that is competitive globally; (2) It has a foreign exchange program; (3) It has MOUs with international educational institutions within and outside Thailand; (4) It has accreditations that are recognized internationally; (5) It has a strong faculty roster composed not only of Thai but also foreign faculty members; (6) It values academic ranking recognized internationally; and (7) It updates its administrative and curricular policies in keeping with international standards”.*

Another senior academic staff pointed out problems, stating that:

*“They are committed but they tend to see internationalization in terms of English language instruction. They are less committed to critical thinking skills and increasingly uninterested in having foreign faculty hold positions of power”.*

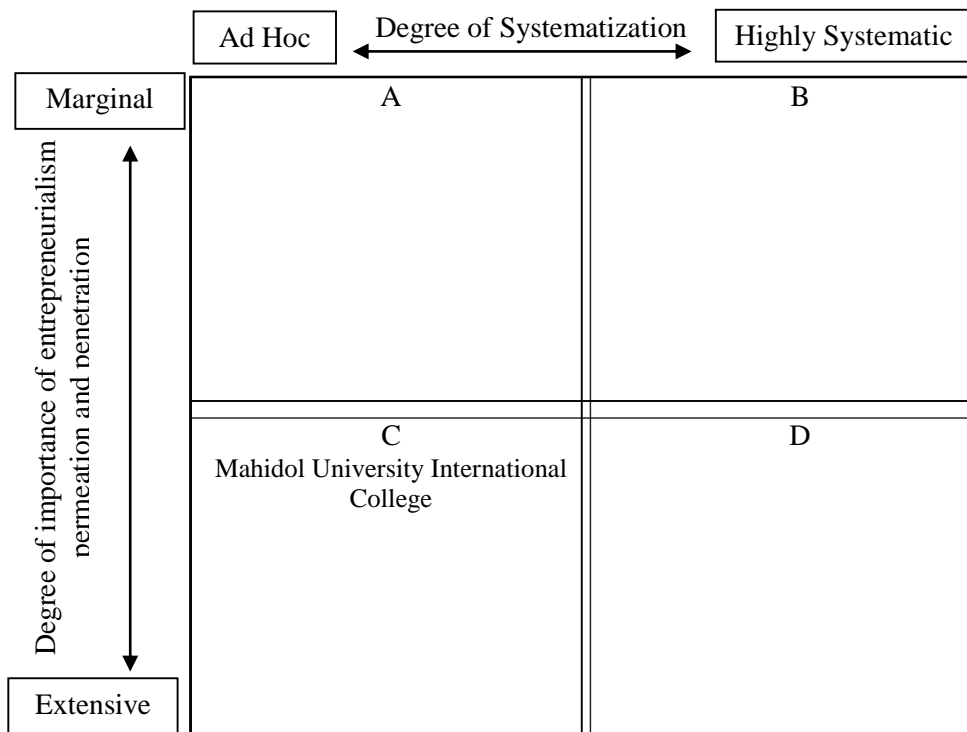
Regarding the implementation of international policies at MUIC, six respondents opined that MUIC “walked the talk” well. The positive implementation of international policies observed by the respondents were facilitated by 1) High English standards. All classes are taught in English except for some particular courses which require different languages. 2) Financial support for faculty members enabling them to participate in international activities and do research. Each faculty member can apply for the financial support for international presentation twice a year. 3) Regular curriculum reviews with standard procedures. The curriculum is reviewed every five years; a process which involves MUIC executives, a faculty member from each division, stakeholders, alumni and external examiners that have expertise in the program being revised.

However, in some operations problems were detected. 1) MUIC tries very hard to attract western professors to come and work in Thailand and to do so they offer competitive incentives similar to those available in Hong Kong and Singapore. Nevertheless, considering the cost of living in Thailand which is lower than Hong Kong and Singapore, it is reasonable and understandable to see that average salary levels in Thailand are not as high as in those two countries. 2) Although all classes are taught in English, some of the after-school student activities are still communicated in Thai which discourages the international students from engaging with other local students. 3) The English language skills of some supporting staff are limited thus further causing difficulties in facilitating the after-class activities. 4) The research database for social science is insufficient. More systematic procedures and regulations are needed to ensure the better implementation of policies. Presently, the implementation of policies is not well organized but come across as rather ad hoc.

With regards to the internationalization aspects of the culture of MUIC, almost all respondents have made appreciative comments: 1) The culture of MUIC is very open and supportive towards internationalization. 2) It is relatively liberal for students and flexible for the faculty members. And 3) a variety of cultures coexist

harmoniously. However, one academic division chairperson commented that: *“In Thai culture, open disagreement is discouraged”*. It can be safely assumed that cultural shocks still exist.

In summary, from the document analysis, it has been found that MUIC has responded to the internationalization process in a positive manner, manifested by its extensive entrepreneurial activities. Nevertheless, other findings from interviews reveal that some of the operations and implementations are not systematic-driven but rather ad hoc-driven. The open and supportive organizational culture of MUIC allows entrepreneurialism to penetrate into its internationalization processes, however, the dominant cultural type at MUIC is still pre-entrepreneurial, as suggested by the quantitative findings. Using Davies’ (2001) model of Means and Styles of development of entrepreneurial cultures, MUIC likely is positioned in quadrant C as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Means and Style of Development of Entrepreneurial Culture**  
(Source: Davies, J. (2001).)

### Recommendations

This study analyzed the influence of organizational culture on the internationalization of MUIC with the aim of improving its processes of internationalization. Davies (2001) suggested entrepreneurial culture is more open and prepared for the internationalization of higher education institutions. The main culture type in MUIC was found to be pre-entrepreneurial at the current stage, therefore, the researcher

proposes some suggestions for the policy makers to facilitate the internationalization process of MUIC towards an entrepreneurial culture in three domains: the personnel domain, the financial domain and the quality domain. The suggestions also refer to the suggestions from the interviews.

1) The personnel domain. On one hand, due to a lack of efficient support and supervision, some of the policy implementation is not carried out well. It is suggested to recruit more supporting staff with good English levels and furthermore, to provide English training for current supporting staff in order to assist foreign students and faculty members. Conversely, as a sizable portion of the faculty are Westerners, it could be suggested to increase the percentage of foreigners in the management team. Then the needs of various groups could be better served. Another aspect could be to pay closer attention to strategies for maintaining employees' motivation levels. One possible way is to increase transparency and provide clear career paths or chances for all, regardless their backgrounds.

2) The financial domain: firstly, research is a critical tool for a higher education institution wishing to compete in the international arena. Thus, it is suggested to increase financial investment in research tools, especially in social science fields, as Mahidol University research database focus mainly on science. Secondly, the economic incentives in Thailand are not directly comparable with those in Singapore or Hong Kong. It is apparent that those two regions are more developed so the corresponding remuneration is higher. Nevertheless, MUIC being an international institution, the standards should be kept in accordance with its peers. If the college could offer more financial incentives, then it would be much easier for it to attract prominent scholars from all over the world.

3) The quality domain: in order to attract more international students and to find partners abroad, it is suggested that MUIC should attempt to gain more international accreditations and to keep itself constantly open to the possibility of implementing reasonable international-level changes and other protocols.

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