Cooperative Education Network in Thailand

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1. Background

The concept of cooperative education was first introduced in Thailand in 1993 at Suranaree University of Technology (SUT) by Professor Dr. Wichit Srisa-arn, the founder of the University. The success of implementing this concept, evidenced by the high employability of SUT graduates, has resulted in the embracing of cooperative education by many universities in Thailand both in public and private sectors. In 2002, the Ministry of Education by the Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) announced strong policy in supporting any universities employing cooperative education system by allocating some budget to them. Moreover, the OHEC has cooperated with Thai Association of Cooperative Education (TACE) organizing workshops on cooperative education in order to prepare university staff to take an active role and full responsibility in cooperative education.

At the beginning, the cooperative education system in Thailand was employed in a bilateral approach between the universities and the workplaces. Nowadays, the cooperation has been developed to a multilateral approach among universities, workplaces, government sectors such as OHEC, and the private sectors for instance professional or academic associations. These two approaches of cooperation have been illustrated in Figure 1 and 2 as follows:
Figure 1: Cooperation in Cooperative Education: A Bilateral Approach


Figure 2: Cooperation in Cooperative Education: A Multilateral Approach

2. The Establishment of Cooperative Education Networks

In 2005, the Office of Higher Education Commission, Ministry of Education announced the establishment of three educational networks as administrative structures in managing and developing Higher Education and as tools promoting cooperation and enhancing collaboration among Institutions of Higher Education to achieve their missions including to be able to support the nation’s policy and to participate in solving the nation’s problems. These networks are a Central Administrative (Network A), a Regional Higher Education (Network B), and a Specific Mission Network (Network C). The structure of network A, B, and C is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Structure of Network A, B, and C.

A Cooperative Education Network is under a Specific Mission Network as its purpose is to develop cooperative education in institutions of Higher Education. Nine regional Cooperative Education Networks were established namely:

1. Cooperative Education Network of Higher Northern Region.
2. Cooperative Education Network of the Lower Northern Region.
5. Cooperative Education Network of the East
6. Cooperative Education Network of the Higher Central Region.
7. Cooperative Education Network of the Lower Central Region.
9. Cooperative Education Network of the Lower Southern Region.
Figure 4: Nine Regional Cooperative Education Networks.

The members of each network are institutions having been implementing cooperative education at the university, faculties, and school levels as well as those prospective ones. The network is administered in a form of a committee with budget allocated annually by the Office of Higher Education Commission. An administrative structure of a Central Administrative Network, a Regional Higher Education, and 9 Regional Cooperative Networks are shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5:** Administrative Structure of a Central Administrative Network, a Regional Higher Education, and a Specific Mission Network.

3. Roles of Cooperative Education Network

The activities of each Cooperative Education Network includes promoting the understanding about Cooperative Education to the public and the people concerned for instance students, lecturers, and institutions’ personnel as well as in the workplaces. Moreover, research on cooperative education, the development of databases and staff enrichment are strongly encouraged. Since the establishment of 9 Cooperative Education Networks, 4 main barriers have been repeatedly reported by the networks. They are: 1) Lack of understanding in Cooperative Education of administrators both in the universities and the workplaces, students, faculty members and job supervisors. 2) Many of university representatives in the coop network committee are not authorized to make decision on crucial matters. 3) There are limited numbers of workplaces cooperating with universities in Cooperative Education. 4) Some universities do not announce a clear and strong policy on Cooperative Education. (Office of Higher Education Commission, 2010: 2)

4. Suggestions for Efficient Administration of 9 Regional Networks

As a matter of fact, 9 cooperative networks have recently been set up and the members need more experience on cooperative networks. Consequently, the management of the networks does not seem to be as productive as it should be. In order to make the management of the cooperative networks more efficient, network administrators should focus on the network development in three systems: administrative, information, and telecommunication system.

The Administrative System involves setting goal, objectives, policies, and rules of network governance. Two key factors affecting the success of the network at the administration system level are visions of the executive-level managers such as a board of directors and the devotion of staff members. The executive-level managers should possess diverse dispositions such as high potential, creativity, positive thinking
towards the importance and benefits of working together as a network. Besides, they must be capable of explaining the concept, method and process of working in a network manner to persons concerned. Staff members of the network should be flexible, eager to learn and work with others, able to accept change with the will to overcome obstacles.

The aim of the information system is to provide a means for processing information to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the network. (Flynn, 1992: 3) Attributes of information system are such as the convenience of access, the quality of information retrieved, ease of use, etc. As a result, management of information system should be adopted. Relational databases should be developed. Therefore, larger base of information and related services and products can be accessed and retrieved easily and more rapidly. Standardization of recording data and information must be concerned. A standard text description language along with a standard query language would provide end-users with the ability to explore across networks and without having to learn a new system (Williams, 1997: 195)

As for the telecommunication system, users from a single workstation must be able to access information sources from anywhere at anytime throughout the world. In order to do this in an effective and efficient manner, lower levels of architectures and standardization must be used. The lowest level of technical design related to network topology, error control, flow control, congestion control, protocols, network access method, database access method, data structures, hardware selection, software design, and performance measures should be well-equipped. The crucial problem of telecommunication system is not related to how to connect the system among institutional members of the network but it is the matter of how to make use of it when the system has already been connected.
Reference


Thai Association for Cooperative Education (2009). Training Kit on Cooperative Education. Nakhon Ratchasima: Thai Association for Cooperative Education.