

Organization Network: Necessary Management Systems in Time of the New Normal Era

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Abstract: Managing organizations in the vulnerable world is not an easy task, especially in time of pandemic breakout. So, cooperation becomes the heart of organizational management in all time because organization is functioned by the unite and cooperation of two or more people deciding to work together to achieve a goal or goals. In former time, cooperation might be the matter of internal management, but recently it extends to external organizations and organizational networks have been formed and operated. After the outbreak of COVID-19, it seems that network become necessary for organizational management than ever, but not for the aim of competition, but survival among us. The objectives of this article are to review the concepts and designs of organization network and propose as a mean for better network operation in time of the New Normal Era. Documentary research technique was applied in this study by reviewing related literatures and best practices that can be reached by the internet. The findings shall cover the concepts of network, network principles, network building, and network management. This study was a part of our research project and the authors would then share a model of organization network for educational organization, mainly focusing to Thai context in the next article.

Keywords: Network, New Normal Era, Management

1. Introduction

Being parts of higher education institutions, we have learned that COVID-19 outbreak, not only affects teaching and learning in all institutions¹, but also obstructs working network among university alliances. Search in wider angles, it could be concluded that the outbreak has affected all sectors of organizations, public and private ones [1]. The situation leads to more cooperation both within and among nations. Organizations in each country must unite, share, and cooperate among each other to achieve more effective operation for better solution. All nations need to provide and share facts and strategies to fight against COVID-19. Shutting down the city or nation might be the best alternative

to prevent spreading the disease, but makes huge impacts to economy and social life. At the same time, if the world needs to move on with business, such as touring business, bubble policy strategy is issued and implemented. And that needs trusted and cooperated alliances or networks. The world is now standing at the crossroad between shutting down the countries or network cooperation.

Cooperation and network have been implemented among Rajabhat Universities in Northeastern part of Thailand for some time, but mostly done based on MOU (Memorandum of Understanding), and through academic activities that need cooperation among universities, or personal contract between lecturers. As academic community, we believe that network and cooperation among higher education institutions would add to stronger bonds within institutions and become crucial strategies of universities to survive, not only in Thailand but any institutions and anywhere. So, my colleague and I have decided to conduct a study on 'A Model of Effective Mission-based Network on Work Development in Area-based Cluster Universities: A Case Study of Northeastern

¹CBS News, (December 15, 2021) reported that after the spreading of Omicron, most universities shut down the campuses. Cornell University, where 97 % students vaccinated, also cancelled onsite classes, and conducted exam on line. [cbsnews.com <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-19-omicron-variant-college-nyu-activities/>]

Rajabhat University Cluster.’ This article is a partial review of related literature that we would like to share in academic community worldwide.

The main theme of the article, as mentioned in the abstract above, is the finding of literature review on the concepts and designs of organization network, proposed as a mean for better network operation in time of the New Normal Era. We add ‘the New Normal Era’ onto the article topic because it is in time of COVID-19 pandemic and new normal behaviors to conform the outbreak that draws our attention to take a closer look at ‘network and cooperation’ among higher institutions in Thailand, especially in the Northeastern Parts of Thailand where we are working. We hope our findings would be useful and fruitful to academic community, especially those who are related to higher education.

2. Network: Concept and Definition

Researching keywords on network or network management revealed that most of articles, blogs, or textbooks on the topic referred the term to computer networks rather than organization networks [2]. However, in Thai context, networks refer to organization network more than computer network. The term is defined to how to cooperate with partner organizations to achieve benefits between or among organizations (Somboon Borasiriraksa [3, 4], Somsak Aimdee [5], Institute of Local Community [6], Saranya Jutanil [7], Sermsak Wisaraporn [8], and The Office of Basic Education Commission [9]). Internationally, organizational network may appear in various aspects from network itself such as partnership, cooperation, alliance, cluster, or participation, to name a few (Sroka & Hittmar [10], Dent [11], Silver & Franz [12], Goldsmith & Eggers [13] and Ehrlichman [14]). Network and organizational management networks have been created as cooperative social entities to achieve goal or goals operated by two or more members who share the same beliefs and goals in addition to conventional organizations. So, the concepts and practices of some kinds like collaboration, engagement, share vision, and the like play key success in organizational management. However, those core efforts have been suggested for within organizational group-networks rather than networks between or among organizations. Recently and nowadays, cooperation between or among organization-networks becomes crucial strategies for many leading enterprises [15].

Straight forewords as it sounds, network is formed by connecting people or groups of people together like a net so that the strong bond of the net will produce mutual power to get the thing done which could not achieve by one party but by network.

Skokan ([16] cited Porter 1990) recited the definition of cluster, which is one form of network, as “geographically close groups of interconnected companies and associated institutions in particular field, linked by common technologies and skills”. This definition pointed out area-based connection and cooperation on technologies and skills

needed for more effective organizations. In his famous book, Armstrong [17] defined networks as loosely organized connections between people with shared interests, either within or between or among organizations.

George & Jones [18] described another form of network as outsourcing and networking structure that outsourcing involved moving a function activity done inside the organization to the outside where another company performed it. To coordinate and cooperate all the works to achieve the goal, networking structure had been designed and operated. With internet and computer software, many organizations run their businesses through this kind of network where the headquarter might design its product and let many their network companies do the rest including selling the products around the world.

Indeed Editorial Team [19] described a business network as a group of people who had built relationships based on business experiences, similar interests, expertises, or others that would connect them for the benefit of the business. Networks could be comprised of a group of individual or organizations of a particular business.

In educational context, Somboon Borasiriraksa [4] defined network in educational administration as a process of administration which enhanced groups of people in educational organizations to cooperate on educational activities to achieve goals by way of flat organization, equality, and continuous learning.

From some definitions mentioned above, it could be summarized that network comprised of two or more parties, within or outside one organization, that organize groups of people or companies who reach for mutual benefit and agreement to work together to achieve a goal or goals.

3. Principles Related to Network

Somboon Borasiriraksa [4] pointed out four related principles of network as (1) Synergy saying that in network process, network parties added synergy power to the process. Wikipedia [20] defined synergy as the interaction or cooperation giving rise to a whole that is greater than the simple sum of its parts. (2) Exchange Theory referring to the administration process where mutual benefits had been agreed so that win-win results would achieve. (3) Participative Management referring to the administration process where organizational members and stakeholders were invited to participate in decision making and implementing. And (4) Network Party Control meaning the level of cooperation among people or organization would be implemented and controlled by all participants.

Andre [21] proposed 10 principles of effective networking as (1) Give more than you get, remembering that network is a two-way-street “give and take”. (2) Be genuine, cooperation is a free will of a person or company, so deal with respect and personal matter. (3) Be proactive for cooperation yield from actions, start off with action, not words. (4) Take a long-term approach, building a strong network is like building a successful business, it takes time, patient, and persistence. (5)

Prioritize quality over quantity, a few quality networks is much worth than a lot of fake ones. (6) Don't focus only on industry leaders, although leaders are crucial to network success, but real deals of a network are done by network members. (7) Be approachable, actions are actual network activities, but approaches or patterns make them sustainable. (8) Set aside time for networking, all network members and parties should dedicate time for network and connection. (9) Be organized, since network is a form of organization, it should be well organized and stay organized. And (10) Network in person when possible, all networks are like any organizations, success is depended on people. So focus on people who we working with as networks.

Snell [22] pointed out 5 principles of effective networking as follow: (1) Win/Win Situations Produce Strong Connections. Mutual benefits seem to be the priority of networking, so win-win benefits would prolong connection and network. (2) Give More Than You Get. In any exchanges, your partners would be satisfied. (3) Activity Beats Inactivity, which refers to be proactive in your network. (4) Quality over Quantity is another key principle of effective networking because the success of networking bases on the cooperation of network partners, not numbers of networks. And (5) People Do Business With People They Like, which is very true because cooperation among people will not happen if members of networks do not get along well.

Network is a form of cooperated organization of people in an organization or between or among organizations. The main objective of network is to synergize collective efforts among people of different expertises, experiences, and abilities to achieve common goals. So, first of all, a clear network objective or objectives, because they are fundamental agreements to start with. Narula & Martinez-Noya [15] suggested that networking objectives were crucial to begin with among networks. Based on networking objectives, choices of sharing information and cooperation could be laid out and working teams among alliances could be formed, either within organizations or among organizations. Secondly, win-win working strategies should be priority rules of successful networking since networking is meant to reach mutual best results. Thirdly, network policy should focus on quality rather than quantity because network achievement is more important than numbers of memorandums signed by executives. Fourthly, proactive actions are much better than celebrated agreements although agreements are needed to start network, but no action-talk only is no use. Fifthly, people are success-factors of networks and organizations, so work with hearts along with heads. Sixthly, successful networking needs time and effort. So, be patient and continuously working, learning, and improving. And finally, successful networking needs well planned and organized work forces. So start networking with a well-organized structure and keeping improvement.

4. Network Building

Although, networking is a profitable management

technique, especially in the new era, but the problem is that not all networks work as they sound. Building a good designed network is promised beginning of successful network management.

Armstrong [17] suggested 10 steps to make network effective. (1) Identify people who can fulfill your need. (2) Seek all opportunities to reach for helpful people. (3) Have a clear idea why network is needed. (4) To get help, you need to contribute as well. (5) Show sincere interests to get help. (6) Ask people what you can help when you ask them for help. (7) Stay in touch, then network will grow. (8) Start informally, but ready for formal agenda. (9) Make all effort to keep network people in touch. And (10) Follow up and improve network activities.

Schawbel [23] suggested seven ways to build a strong network, which included 1) Focus on the right people, qualified and effective network partners are more important than numbers. 2) Create a win/win situation because networking means to share mutual benefits, all parties should get suitable shares of networking. 3) Give before you receive, meaning that all parties shall come forwards of what they can contribute to networking, not focusing on what they will get from working together. 4) Become a connector, the more you could cooperate and get people involve in networking, it is likely becoming an effective networking with caution of rule number one. 5) Remember to reconnect or refresh networking to keep net of work alive and active. 6) Use social networks, people get in touch, share and learn from each other through social networking such as Facebook, Lines, and so on. 7) Start your own networking, do not wait to have it happen.

Uzzi and Dunlap [24], wrote in Harvard Business Review on how to build your network, pointed out 3 steps as follow: diagnose your network, create a map of your network, and then actively manage it. Most organizations use networking of some kinds, but how effectively networking is functioned is more important. So, to redesign a better network, you should start with diagnosing your present network. You should determine what type of network at present, how it had been practiced, what are the problems or obstacles, and what lessons learnt from the past. After you obtain basic information related to your present network, you could design or map your new network. Two approaches suggested in the articles were (1) self-similarity principle, based on persons (or organizations) you thought they would be useful parts of the networks, mapped out who would be the contractors, you yourself or team members. Success of the approach depended on how to get the right people in your network and how effectively cooperation had been carried out. (2) Shared activities principle, based on activities or works needed to be done by network partners. This approach focused on activities or works that need to be done by using networking strategies rather than seeing network partners. However, in our opinions, both approached could be integrated by focusing on activities or works needed to be done and then seeking profitable partners to achieve goals together. 3) After new network had been designed or mapped out, implementing the network was

the only way to ensure the network was working. The final step was to manage the network.

Indeed Editorial Team [19] pointed out that in order to build an effective network, a professional had to make an effort to meet others who could ultimately support their professional careers, and the article suggested ten tips to get started networking. 1) Looking for people who would make a difference in your career. The right partners supported networking. 2) Looking online because more and more professionals were using online as medium of networking. 3) Asking your current network for contracts like snowball technique used in research. Asking your friends to expand your network. 4) Considering your passion, since if you joined network with passion, cooperation was likely successful. 5) Being willing to help first was a good start. If you were ready to help others, it was likely that help would return. 6) Adding value to your relationship, because if you valued something you would work hard for it. 7) Going to networking events, it was a place where you could enlarge your experiences and networks. 8) Developing an online presence in order to keep your profile and information updated. Doing so was not only displaying your ability, it would also show that you were serious on your work. 9) Staying up-to-date in your industry or field. Your up-to-date knowledge, data, information, and situation would keep you stay in interested groups and be resourceful person ready to share. 10) Focusing on meaningful connections, for building good and long-lasting network would take time. So, make it meaningful.

Kullat Hongchayangkul and Pratyana Tiengjanya [25] proposed three steps on building network, (1) Developing change leaders, (2) Establishing network, and (3) Operating and evaluating. There were three actions needed to be done in developing change leadership which included identifying persons who would take parts in network, seeking effective leaders of the network, and analyzing interpersonal relationship of network participants. After network partners had key change leaders, the network establishment would follow by building commitment to achieve goals, building shared visions, and developing cooperate strategic plans. And the final step on building network was to operate and evaluate networking.

From the concepts presented above, it could be concluded that the first step of network building is to identify, locate, and connect network members or partners who will be included in network. Network partners might be initially contracted informally and later more formally. After some types of networks have been formed, all network parties will issue some rules, norms, and mandate to run the network. Informal and formal network organizations have been set up and then network strategic plans, projects, and activities will be laid out. And then, the plans will be implemented, evaluated, and continuously improved.

5. Network Management

Kullat Hongchayangkul and Pratyana Tiengjanya [25]

suggested three crucial functions needed to be done in network management. Firstly, flat organization and management would be suitable for network management by building collaboration, organizing good network organization by designing a good network organizational structure with clear functions, duties, work processes, and coordinating channels. Mutual benefits are important factors that hold network partners together. So, a good motivational mechanic would keep network effective and growth. Second suggestion is building trust, which is promoted by fairness, equality, accepting changes and interdependence, open and honor communication, and creative conflict and problem solving. Finally, network alliance must be aware of risk and good governance, which are caused by both internal and external factors. As Narula & Martinez-Noya [2015] wrote that although network management might be an effective strategy of new era management, but the caution was how much knowledge and information we should share with our alliances and how.

Ojasalo [26] pointed out that key components of network management were (1) Scanning and analyzing an opportunity network: an essential part of effective network management. Scanning opportunities was to identify and predict needs, problems, and sources of value related to organizations. (2) Identifying a manageable key network: a process to identify key actors affecting network management, through whom network would be managed. (3) Strategies for managing actors of a key network: a way to take advantage from network management. And (4) Developing and applying operational level methods for managing actors of a key network: specific methods and tactics organizations would do to achieve a network goal or goals).

Cap et al. [27] proposed that network management consisted of two levels of activities, the whole network level and the ego network level. The whole network level divided into four steps as follow. (1) Assessment of current collaboration status: rating the current state, weakness and strength of the present network. (2) Assessment of future collaboration status: rating the current state, weakness and strength of the future network. (3) Definition of collaboration gap: assessing the differences between present and future collaborations. And (4) Collaboration goals of whole network: defining of what was aspired, portraying the images of how the aspired network would look like. At the ego network level, there were also four steps, consisting of (1) Identifying a key network: identifying opportunities within the network and selecting network actors. (2) Selecting strategies for managing the key network: determining collaborating potential with each network actor and assigning collaboration strategies. (3) Managing actors of the key network on the operational level: developing and applying operational methods for managing key network actors. And (4) Ego level guideline on how to network: network implementation according to the level guideline and improving the network.

Chusak Aekpet [28] presented eight steps of network management in his lecture slides on Educational Network

Management as (1) Need and situational assessment on network. (2) Formulate key network actors. (3) Create share vision and strategies to achieve the vision. (4) Communicate and clarify network shared vision and strategies. (5) Mobilize inter-organization network and solve all related problems. (6) Celebrate any success that networks achieve and continuously improve. (7) Conjugate success to mobilize changes. And (8) Establish network norm and culture.

6. Conclusion and Implication

Based on information and concepts reviewed above and our experiences on network and network management, it could be summarized as three crucial conclusions, namely network concept, network management, and good characteristics of network. Although different authors might define network differently, but most of them mainly describe network as an inter-partnership organization of people or groups of people within or among organizations, aiming to achieve a mutual objective or objectives by designing and operating the inter-partnership organization with the collaboration of network members towards achieving the goal or goals.

Effective network management comprises of three main components, namely network building, network implementing, and network evaluating. When network organization is in need, network partners have to decide whether alliance collaboration is more profitable for all parties. If network organization yields mutual benefits among partner members, strategic network plans will be formulated and network organizations to carry out the plans are created with participatory and mutual agreement manners. In fact, informal network organization and network activities have been functioning as soon as the initial agreement on networking organization has been reached, but formal network organizations will take full actions when network management plans have been adopted and implemented. During the implementation phase, working teams will also measure and gather needed data and information for network evaluation, which is the final step of network management that leads to another cycle of network management.

The final conclusion from this review reveals some good characteristics of network. It seems clear that a good network starts with a good network objective or objectives. The best network objective is the one that leads to mutual benefit of all network parties and members. The network will run smoother and last long if all parties and members hold on to network objectives, and each party and member give and gain what they have and what they need. However, most sources agree that better working climate of network organization is where each party and member share what they have more than take what they want. Trust and honor are also good characters of network characters, especially network among alliances. We must keep in mind that network is formed by mutual objectives and agreement of non-organized structures or even outsources of organizations. So, trust and honor are strong chains that tie network parties

and members together, but authority. The other good character of network is the regular refresh network relationship and network functions. Besides network activities included in strategic plans, network parties and members should keep in touch with each other regularly by both onsite and online channels. Network will function only when there is a net. Without connection, network is over. The last good characteristic of network found in our review is quality of network parties and members is better than quantity of network numbers. So, do not aim at having a lot of network parties and members, but focus on the right parties and members.

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