

Organization/Structure of Think Tanks

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What is a think tank?

- ◆ Think tanks come in all shapes and sizes
- ◆ The term „think tank“ stems from the U.S.-based RAND Corporation, which operated as a closed and secure environment for U.S. strategic thinking after World War II.
- ◆ Popular usage after 1960s for a group of specialists who undertake intensive study of important policy issues

UNDP Definition (2003)

◆ „...organizations engaged on a regular basis in research and advocacy on any matter related to public policy. They (think tanks) are the bridge between knowledge and power in modern democracies“

Mission Statements

- ◆ Connecting researchers and decision-makers
- ◆ Close to, but not part of the government
- ◆ Brain trust, helping governments think
- ◆ Idea brokers, idea agencies for the public
- ◆ Decision-support, developing a vision for country X or policy field Y (IDSC)
- ◆ Scientific methodology, information provider (IDSC)
- ◆ Denken und Verkaufen (thinking and selling)

Ad hoc think tanks

- ◆ The term „ad hoc think tank" can be defined as either a structure or a process.
- ◆ As a structure, a think tank is defined in terms of a temporary organization or group focused on the resolution of a particular problem or task, particularly in the realms of science and technology.
- ◆ As a process or technique, it is defined as an in-depth consideration of issues and challenges whose relevance reaches beyond the individual person or program and the immediate time frame.

Categories of Think Tanks

- ◆ Taking into consideration the comparative differences in political systems and civil societies, the following categories attempt to capture the full range of think tanks found around the world today

Categories of Think Tanks (1-2)

◆ Political Party Affiliated –

- Examples include Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Germany, est. 1964), Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Germany), Jean Jaures Foundation (France, 1990), or Progressive Policy Institute (U.S., 1988).

◆ Government Affiliated

- Examples include China Development Institute (PRC, 1989), IDSC (Egypt), and Congressional Research Service (U.S., 1914), Prime Minister's Policy Unit/Strategy Unit etc. (UK 1971).

Categories of Think Tanks (2-4)

- ◆ Quasi-Governmental - Funded exclusively by government grants and contracts but not a part of the formal structure of government.
 - Examples include: Institute for Strategic & International Studies (Malaysia, 1983), Korean Development Institute (Korea, 1971), and Woodrow International Center for Scholars (U.S., 1968, SWP (Germany 1962).
- ◆ Autonomous & Independent - Significant independence from any one interest group or donor and autonomous in its operation and funding from government.
 - Examples include: Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (Pakistan, 1947), Institute for Security Studies (South Africa, 1990), and Institute for International Economics (U.S., 1981)

Categories of Think Tanks (5-6)

- ◆ Quasi-Independent - Autonomous from government but controlled by an interest group, donor, or contracting agency that provides a majority of the funding and has significant influence over the think tank's operations.
 - Examples include European Trade Union Institute (Belgium, 1978), Bertelsmann Foundation (Germany 1977) and Center for Defense Information (U.S., 1990), European Council of Foreign Relations (?), EU 2006), Avenir Suisse (CH 2001)
- ◆ University Affiliated –
 - Examples include Foreign Policy Institute, Hacettepe University (Turkey, 1974), The Carter Center, Emory University (U.S., 1982) and the Hoover Institution, Stanford University (1918), Center for Applied Policy Research CAP (Germany 1995)

Types of Think Tanks

- ◆ Academic Think Tank
- ◆ Advocacy Think Tank
- ◆ Contract Research Think Tank

- ◆ (Party think tank)
- ◆ (Legacy think tank)

Five Types

- ◆ Independent civil society think tanks established as non-profit organisations or philanthropic operating foundations
- ◆ Policy research institutes located in or affiliated with a university
- ◆ Governmentally created or state-sponsored think tank
- ◆ Corporate created or business affiliated think tank
- ◆ Political party (or candidate) think tank.

Models of Think Tank „Stories“

◆ American model/UK model

- A private policy-analysis industry
- Very strong independence from government, some independence from parties and associations, but not from private and corporate donors

◆ (Continental) European model

- a publicly-funded policy-analysis industry and publicly-funded think tanks
- Arms-length government think tanks, think tanks aligned with parties and associations

Asian Think Tank Story

- ◆ 1st generation
- ◆ Sounding board for government, set up within government
- ◆ State-directed
- ◆ Amplify top-down messages to the rest of society
- ◆ Regime enhancing, rather than regime critical

My Impression / My Question

- ◆ The story of IDSC resembles the Asian think tank story:
- ◆ Analytical weakness of the bureaucracy as a result of practises that rewarded loyalty and obedience, conservatism and conformity forced the leadership to solicit expertise from reform-minded institutes and quasi-independent experts.
- ◆ Should in-house policy advice remain inadequate or irrelevant, the leaders might be prompted to look outside the state for policy advice

Factors that Influence Think Tank Development

- ◆ Political/Institutional Environment
- ◆ Legal and Financial Environment
- ◆ Intellectual/Ideological Environment
- ◆ Labour and Staffing Environment
- ◆ Think Tank / Academic Environment
- ◆ Technological Environment

Key Choices and Trade-Offs

◆ Financing Choices

- National donors/international donors
- Public funding / private funding
- Single payer / diverse funding sources

◆ Agenda Choices

- Full-service think tank with broad research focus
- Specialized think tank with narrow research focus

◆ Image Choices

- Neutral/non-partisan or ideological/partisan image

Key Choices (cont.)

◆ Locational Choices

- Nation's capital, Brussels or member states etc.

◆ Staffing Choices

- In-house research staff or adjunct and project staff

◆ Product Choices

- Academic books and papers, and/or policy briefs
- Oral consultation (briefing seminars for policy makers and the media)
- Dissemination tools

Policy Development and Think Tanks in Country X

- ◆ Position in the world
- ◆ Development model
- ◆ Domestic problems
- ◆ General features of existing think tanks
- ◆ The policy-making environment
 - Who makes policy?
 - State of policy research
 - Universities and tenure system
- ◆ Accessibility of important data
- ◆ Is there a „third“ or philanthropic sector

Types and numbers of ThT in Europe

- ◆ Largest numbers of institutes are being found in UK and Germany
- ◆ Marketplace of Ideas Model
 - Think tanks compete, serving business and public sectors
- ◆ Corporatist or Academy Model
 - Partisan foundation research
 - Research institutes tied to academic world

Consequence(s)

- ◆ There is no single model of operating as a think tank
- ◆ Think tanks must clearly define the „added value“ that they provide to carefully identified stakeholders
- ◆ ThT are expected to add analytical rigour to an otherwise politicized discussion of hot issues

Institutional Profile: Think Tanks...

- ◆ ... sometimes bring together various sides of the debate to a common table
- ◆ ... ensure access to the key speakers for different sides of the argument while maintaining an appropriate distance to any of them
- ◆ ... need a clear definition of purpose and profile of the organization

Can you run a think tank like a university department or a „pure“ academic research institute?

- ◆ Think Tanks need to react quickly to policy initiatives of governments in a nearly journalistic manner
- ◆ ThT need to come up with answers based on in-depth analysis
- ◆ Ideally, think tanks are one step ahead of the public in knowing upcoming policy initiatives
- ◆ The voice of a think tank must not be mistaken for that of the government, party, or a specific interest group

Management guideline

- ◆ Managers of think tanks cannot lean too heavily towards either the academic, journalistic or bureaucratic mode of operation,
- ◆ but instead, they need to use the required elements and as a result come up with a distinctive and customised „business model“ for their organisation

Learning from the U.S. and Europe



Management Issues

- ◆ Staff-related issues
- ◆ Quality control
- ◆ Product development
- ◆ Team leaders and middle managers
- ◆ Board of Trustees and Board of Directors
- ◆ Structuring research staff
- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Overhead

Staffing Arrangements & Research Team Structure

- ◆ Very dominant resident staff (some visitors are present, but not integral for the institute's operations (Brookings model))
- ◆ Resident staff with associates (AEI)
- ◆ Resident staff with visiting scholars (PIE)
- ◆ Blend of resident staff, visiting scholars and associates (CEPS, CFR)

Discussion points: Staff

- ◆ Fixed vs. variable structure of research areas
- ◆ Donors demand more flexibility
- ◆ Expertise areas should match the topics of current debate or contemporary fields of domestic and international policy (e.g. DIW)
- ◆ Loyalties of experts
- ◆ Experts should be closely identified with their home institution
- ◆ Avoid dual careers for experts

Discussion Points: Staff (2)

- ◆ Size and Composition of research teams
- ◆ Drive towards reducing costs must be offset by the need to take on, retain and provide incentives for high-quality experts
- ◆ Form teams of researchers at different levels of experience
- ◆ The ratio of senior to rank-and-file permanent staff members stands around 1:2 or 1:3

Staffing choices

- ◆ European think tanks prefer salaried, full time employment as a standard form of employment
- ◆ Payment of hourly or daily consultant fees is not less expensive
- ◆ Most think tanks use internships to screen potential team members
- ◆ Technical expertise and the advantage of „bringing in fresh blood“ speak for the occasional reliance on additional, non-permanent staff

Recruitment

- ◆ Some organisations prefer to codify their expectations in internal documents, such as staff regulations, work guidelines etc.
- ◆ Some organisations develop their own distinctive culture, i.e. An unwritten agreement, executed through daily practise
- ◆ More mature organisations are in search for mid-career professionals
- ◆ Custom-made contracts

Methods of Recruitment

- ◆ Do you advertise positions in the press?
Rare for entry level positions
- ◆ Vacancy information on the website
- ◆ Everybody in a think tank is on the lookout for suitable additions to research team
- ◆ Potential candidates are located via their outputs or through word-of-mouth
- ◆ Many European institutions agree that it is preferable to hire candidates with little or no experience of working at another think tank
- ◆ „fresh“ staff is preferred

Supervision and Training

- ◆ Information overload and conflicting commitments
- ◆ Analytical methods and time management
- ◆ Coaching by more experienced researchers (mentors)
- ◆ Director of research must solve intra-team conflicts
- ◆ Conflicts may result from unclear allocation of responsibilities and authorities
- ◆ Formal training or learning by doing?

Retention and Incentives to Expert Staff

- ◆ Salaries should be high enough to reduce the incentives for engaging in other non-core activities
- ◆ Universities and government service usually serve as references for salaries
- ◆ In U.S. And Europe tht-researchers might opt for the policy analysis sector to the temporary or permanent exclusion of academia

Profile of „ideal“ staff

- ◆ Graduates from top universities
- ◆ Insightful and rigorous analysts who communicate findings in a concise and understandable manner to the media and the general public, and are well connected to policy-makers
- ◆ Are you looking for „hard qualifications“ only, or rather for a mix of „soft skills“?

Dissemination: General

◆ Think tanks - not academic research institutes - make dissemination an essential part of their mission

◆ How important are books (= monographs) in the product line?

Diversity of Products

- ◆ Working papers
 - Background to key issues
- ◆ Shorter issue papers
- ◆ Policy briefs
 - Diagnosis and forecast of current developments
- ◆ Regular newsletters to membership
- ◆ Post-event analyses
- ◆ A public policy journal
- ◆ Online publishing (up to 75%)
- ◆ blogs
- ◆ Measure downloads, media visibility
- ◆ Pricing and subscription
- ◆ Distribution of products is closely tied to membership policy
- ◆ Discounts for members

Media Relations

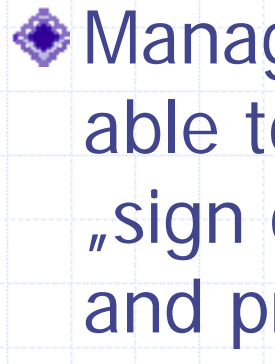
- ◆ Approach media proactively to communicate your generic positions on issues
- ◆ Use opportunities to be associated with specific topics on the public agenda as „your“ field of expertise
- ◆ Experts rarely contribute to the media with op-eds or letters independently of their think tank affiliation
- ◆ Make sure that experts of your organisation provide their affiliations in the by-lines and ensure proper referencing

Publication process

- ◆ In-house publication via website and in-house publication department
- ◆ Some offer their publication via a third party, e.g. a publishing house
- ◆ (Blind) Peer review – other than in academia?
- ◆ Everyone comments on everyone else's work

What is, then, a successful think tank?

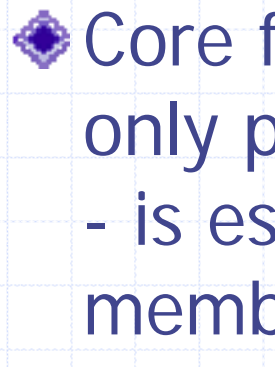
- ◆ Analytical rigour without getting slowed down and violating the time frames set by donors and required by the public
- ◆ Communication of complex ideas and presentation of viable policy choices without trivializing them too much
- ◆ Avoids day-to-day political conflict
- ◆ One that makes clear as to why it is needed on a competitive market of policy ideas and whose mission is apparent to anyone working for it, sponsoring it, reading its publications, or attending its events



◆ Managers must be able to read the „sign of the times“ and proactively modify the structure, operations and external relations, if necessary

Conclusions

- ◆ Develop strong teams of in-house experts, if you can
- ◆ They are indispensable in the dissemination of research results and policy recommendations
- ◆ The quality of „core“ experts will largely determine the ThT's reputation
- ◆ Even small teams of experts require the distinction between senior and junior researchers



- ◆ Core funding – not only project funding - is essential, thus membership can be the solution

- ◆ Project work requires researchers to become fundraisers

- ◆ Design a benefits package for members (with e.g. Privileged access to events, publications etc.

- ◆ Integrate research and dissemination

- ◆ Diversify the instruments of dissemination

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- ◆ Experts should have good communication and dissemination skills
 - ◆ Event and publication managers should have a good understanding of the policy issues the experts are working on
 - ◆ Think more about discussion forums, blogs etc.

- ◆ Think tanks need to be managed differently than other organisations