



ON THINK TANKS EXCHANGE



**LEARNING TOGETHER:  
PERFORMANCE  
SELF ASSESSMENTS  
FOR THINK TANKS**

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# Learning Together: Performance Self Assessments for Think Tanks

by Adriana Arellano, Renata H. Dalaqua, Leandro Echt, Irine Guruli, and Petra Reszkető

## About the On Think Tanks Exchange

The On Think Tanks Exchange encourages and supports exchanges between think tanks to develop new relationships, facilitate collaboration on research projects, institutional development, and policy influencing efforts.

The Exchange project involved a series of face-to-face events and webinars over a period of two years. The participants in the first edition were organised into three groups, each pursuing a different project:

- Think tanks' challenges in communicating and disseminating sensitive topics
- How are we doing? Internal Performance Self Assessments for Think Tanks (PSATT)
- Unraveling business models: cases from Latin America and Indonesia

This report presents a synthesis of findings and lessons from the team working on Internal Performance Self Assessments for Think Tanks (PSATT).

## About our team

The team was comprised of five members representing five organisations:

### **Adriana Arellano – Grupo FARO (Ecuador)**

Adriana is Grupo FARO's Research and Knowledge Management Director. Grupo FARO is an independent, non-partisan, secular, plural Ecuadorian think tank focusing on research, policy influence and capacity building to promote informed dialogue and evidence-based policies. Adriana provides methodological support and implements quality control processes to assure the relevance and quality of research produced in the organisation while promoting internal knowledge management. She also leads area projects, such as "Más Saber: Understanding the relationship between universities and think tanks in Latin America".

### **Renata H. Dalaqua – Centro Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais (CEBRI) (Brazil)**

Renata is a Political Scientist who worked for four years at the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI), a think tank that works on the development of knowledge and promotes debates on topics of international relations by offering support for public policy settings. As CEBRI Project Coordinator (2011–2015), Renata was responsible for policy-relevant research aimed at promoting a better understanding of the international agenda and the role of Brazil on the global stage.

### **Leandro Echt – Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya (CADEP) (Paraguay)**

Leandro is an independent consultant working on research and policy, focusing on think tanks and civil society organisations and the development of their organisational capacities (including influence planning, research communications, M&E of policy influence, fund raising and governance, amongst other issues). He is a member of Politics & Ideas, a think net focused on creating collective knowledge about the links between research and policy. He is also a member of On Think Tanks, the main source of ideas, advice and resources for think tanks around the world. Leandro works as a consultant for the Center of Analysis and Dissemination of the Paraguayan Economy (CADEP) and for a range of public agencies, evaluating public policies and organisational design.

### **Irine Guruli - Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) (Georgia)**

Irine works as a Programme Manager at EPRC, a leading think tank in Georgia which works on empowering the general population with innovative tools to actively participate in the country's economic life. Irine is involved in economic policy research analysis, and preparation of the organisation's flagship product: quarterly and annual economic outlooks for Georgia. Irine also works on budget oversight, monitoring of state-funded programmes, capacity building for civic institutions, and government agencies. She also works with the media for effective engagement in economic policy-making and budgetary processes.

### **Petra Reszkető – Budapest Institute (BI) (Hungary)**

Petra is a founding partner and senior researcher at the Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis, a Budapest-based think-tank. She has led and participated in several evaluation and impact-assessment projects covering related government and civil programmes in Hungary and in the Central Eastern European region.

## Why performance self assessments?

At the start of the On Think Tanks Exchange, we thought collaborations would take place around policy issues. However, it was more natural and feasible to identify common struggles and interests around organisational development issues.

The conversation started around how rankings that evaluate and classify think tanks around the world work, and the level of objectivity and subjectivity of these rankings. The conversation's focus quickly changed to self-evaluations, resulting in a discussion around the challenges and benefits of measuring our own organisation's performance.

Measuring organisational performance is a complex and time-consuming task, which has been developed more in private organisations than in non-profit organisations. Although think tanks are often advised by donors and external parties to perform some type of performance assessment to measure the impact of their research or advocacy activities, their small size and financial constraints make it difficult for them to hire experts to conduct these assessments in a regular and systematic way.

However, we all agreed that undertaking performance assessments and setting up a system to evaluate our work were key steps for organisational learning and development. Our team set out to analyse easy-to-apply, inexpensive tools that could enhance knowledge about our performance and capacities. We then piloted and applied a tool that was adaptable to each of our organisations and produced a self assessment report review on our relevant practices.

## What we decided to do

Performance is affected by multidimensional elements, starting with governance and reaching all the way to human resources, financial sustainability, impact and uptake. We conducted an in-depth literature review to list and map all organisational performance fields. In addition to the literature review, the same self assessment tools used by international donor organisations were employed. The most relevant ones were the Rubric Tool for Assessment (prepared with the support of USAID), and an organisational assessment tool prepared by the Think Tank Fund.

To narrow down the topic and concentrate on a specific number of fields to be examined in depth, all the possible aspects affecting organisational performance were listed and evaluated against four criteria of our own:

- comparability of fields with other think tanks;
- usefulness of a field for organisations;
- sustainability to ensure replicability and building into institutional processes; and
- capacity constraints of the project.

After evaluating the fields determining organisational performance and finding common interests, we selected four fields to base our assessments on: knowledge management, quality control of publications and events, strategic direction, and organisational boards as part of the governance process. Definitions for each of the fields were established and indicators were assigned.

- **Knowledge management** describes the extent to which an organisation applies and incorporates the experience and knowledge of its members and partners through processes, systems and protocols for capturing, storing, and sharing knowledge, experiences, technical expertise, and best practices. This field was analysed in terms of infrastructure (technology, structure, culture) and processes (acquisition, conversion, application, protection).
- **Quality control** describes the mechanisms and tools organisations use to assure the quality of their products, with a special focus on publications and presentations.
- **Strategic direction** is defined as an explicit definition of the goals an organisation wants to achieve in the long term, and how it intends to achieve these. Two aspects of this field were analysed: organisational vision and/or mission and the existence of an strategic plan.
- **Organisational Boards** are described as external bodies not participating in the day-to-day activities of the think tank, but having a significant role in the affairs of the organisation. The field looked at the following: are there any Boards in the organisation? Are they capable of providing adequate guidance to the organisation? Emphasis was put on three aspects: descriptive analysis of the Board(s), the legal roles and the actual operation of the Board(s), and their effectiveness as perceived by an organisation.

## On the self assessment tool

The self assessment was conducted without the involvement of external stakeholders. To complement the secondary data collection method – desk research within the organisation – primary data collection methods were used. These included disseminating electronic anonymous questionnaires within the organisation, conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews with staff, holding focus groups, and participatory observation on the functioning of the organisations.

The online survey was initially tested via Google's Forms tool. Feedback and comments from the participants were taken into account to adjust the content. The final version of the survey was uploaded to the SurveyGizmo software tool. The survey was also translated into Spanish. At the same time, the team elaborated guidelines for the desk research work (questions for guidance, targeted respondents, etc). The final version of the questionnaire was far more user-friendly than when it was initially tested, and it was prepared to be implemented (you can access the questionnaire in Annex 2).

Later on, case studies for each organisation were developed to share not only the results of the institutions according to the evaluation fields, but also to learn about challenges and identify opportunities to improve the methodology.

### Implementing the tool

Each team member coordinated the implementation of the survey at his or her organisation; developing a brief description of the project, an introduction to the survey, and an invitation to fill it out. This was used to disseminate the survey and gather responses. In parallel, we worked on the desk research and interviews to complement the perceptions gathered through the survey.

Using these tools presented different levels of difficulty. The guidelines developed to complete desk research and conduct interviews with key stakeholders were very useful and straightforward, but the online survey tool presented some challenges:

- The survey focused on the perceptions of the organisation's members around the selected fields. Many respondents felt that assessing the organisation's performance through their perceptions was not appropriate and were skeptical about the usefulness of the tool.
- It was challenging to motivate people to complete the online survey, although we used several reminders and friendly messages about the importance of completing the survey. Explaining to the staff the reasons behind it and the potential benefits of getting more knowledge about the organisation increased participation.
- We found that different members of the organisation have different levels of knowledge on each field; some did not feel comfortable answering some questions as they felt they did not know enough about certain topics. Respondents were allowed to leave questions unanswered, but this was not made evident, causing them to feel they had to provide an answer anyway.
- To keep the responses anonymous, the tool we developed did not include log-in information. This created the inconvenience of having partial responses that could not be completed at a later time, hence receiving both partial and complete responses from the same people.
- Some respondents found the survey too long (two sections asked for details for each possibility that was marked, each quality control process and each type of Board).
- In some cases, respondents were biased to give positive answers as they felt they could easily be identified and could get in trouble if they provided honest feedback.

Nonetheless, the survey enabled the group to gain access to subjective perceptions of staff in terms of the four fields of organisational performance.

## What we found from our organisational performance self assessment experience

This section shares some general findings after conducting the self assessment process within the five participating think tanks. For specific information on each organisation, please refer to the individual case studies.

The case studies represent an instrument to promote self-reflection inside the organisations. The results obtained helped identify organisational strengths, as well as shed light on aspects that need further attention.

A positive outcome that was common to all five case studies refers to vision, mission and values of the organisations. Most staff members demonstrated awareness of these elements and indicated they were relevant to their daily activities.

There were other commonalities amongst the case studies. In some organisations – like CADEP, EPRC and BI – an information gap between senior and junior staff regarding organisational processes and procedures became evident. In all three institutions, senior staff were better informed about the organisational issues compared to junior staff.

This finding indicates that internal communication needs improvements. This is especially true regarding strategic planning. Through the online survey, it was possible to see that some staff members in CADEP, CEBRI and FARO were unsure about their organisation's strategic plans.

Thus, one recommendation shared by all organisations refers to improving internal communication efforts, in order to provide staff with a better understanding of the environment in which they work and the specific challenges they face.

In some organisations, this communication problem seemed to be connected to a lack of structured monitoring efforts related to the strategic plan. In this sense, some case studies – CEBRI, EPRC and FARO – highlighted the need for a larger emphasis on implementing and monitoring the strategic plan. This should be done in a way that engages staff members so they can contribute to the plan, connecting strategic goals to their everyday work without a detrimental investment of their time and compromising efficiency.

This overview shows that some of the most challenging issues for the organisations refer to the domains of knowledge management, strategic planning, communication and monitoring. These challenges were indicated by the researchers as “areas for improvement” in each organisation, as shown in the following page.

Table 1. Areas for improvement

Think Tank	Area(s) for improvement	Justification
BI	Strategic Direction	BI shall formulate further tools and strategies to translate the mid-term strategy into the daily work of staff and to communicate strategic challenges to all staff members.
CADEP	Knowledge Management and Quality Control	Diversification of tools, mechanisms and procedures, along with clear responsibilities, will allow CADEP to manage their daily work better, save time, and produce more solid results.
CEBRI	Strategic Direction	The results of the survey show that half of the employees are not aware of the strategic plan. This communication problem is connected to the lack of structured monitoring efforts related to the strategic plan.
EPRC	Knowledge Management	The results of the survey show that the employees find it troublesome to gain access to historical information, which is due to the lack of data sharing and consolidating tools.
Grupo FARO	Strategic Direction and Knowledge Management	<p>The assessment tool showed a disconnection between strategic planning and evaluation and monitoring processes, which could help connect macro objectives to practice.</p> <p>There is a clear need for tools and policies to help improve knowledge management in the organisation (an important area that needs improvement is the employee induction process).</p>

The case studies are also useful in identifying best practices which can be shared with other think tanks. These best practices can contribute to performance self assessment and/or foster innovation in one of the four fields. Table 2 presents basic information on these best practices (more information on each practice is available in Annex 1).

Table 2. Best practices

Think Tank	Field	Best practice	Description
BI	Knowledge Management	Knowledge management system	A common online platform, which enables staff to access, share and manage project documents. A user-friendly guide facilitates the use of the platform.
CADEP	Strategic Direction	Strategic planning	An approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation that puts people at the centre, defines outcomes as changes in behavior, and helps measure contribution to complex change processes.
CEBRI	Knowledge Management	Digital filing system	Infrastructure for knowledge management (internal server, regular backups, and clear system of folders), which makes it easy to find information about past activities and ongoing projects.
EPRC	Organisational Boards	International Advisory Board	An advisory Board composed of highly experienced individuals to provide guidance and advice on different aspects of organisational development.
Grupo FARO	Strategic Direction	Project Approval Committee	A mechanism that improves strategic thinking in the proposal development process and increases probabilities for proposal approval, as proposal drafts are improved and enriched.

## What we learned: recommendations for starting or continuing performance self assessments processes

Through the collaborative process, the group realised there are many advantages to conducting performance self assessments. This type of exercises can be helpful in generating relevant information about the organisation for the organisation, identifying strengths and weaknesses, supporting strategic decisions, and improving day-to-day activities. The main benefits of performance self assessments are summarised in Figure 1.

The group also learned that there are different areas that can be assessed by such endeavors. Thus, an organisation should identify its priorities in order to design the most suitable self assessment procedure. Even though the collaborative project focused on four fields (strategic direction, governance bodies, knowledge management, and quality control), there are many other areas that can be subjected to this kind of examination, as illustrated by Figure 2. In view of this, one avenue for continuing the collaborative project would be to address other fields, in addition to the four that were already examined.

Other possibilities for continuing this exercise were debated, such as including group discussions with staff on the self assessment methodology. The rationale behind this idea is that group discussions can facilitate a richer dialogue, in-depth analysis and may also increase participation.

The self-assessment process could be improved with the participation of an external consultant to facilitate internal workshops and review the issues from a different perspective. This external consultant could either be an expert invited by the group or a participant of the collaborative project coming from a different organisation.

All these ideas were presented during the meeting in Rio, where the group shared its concern with the sustainability of this self assessment process. The participants agreed that it is necessary to conduct this type of exercise on a regular basis, but the methods and the periodicity may vary in accordance with each organisation, considering the specific features of different think tanks (budget, staff, type of activities, etc.).

Figure 1. Advantages of Performance Self-Assessment

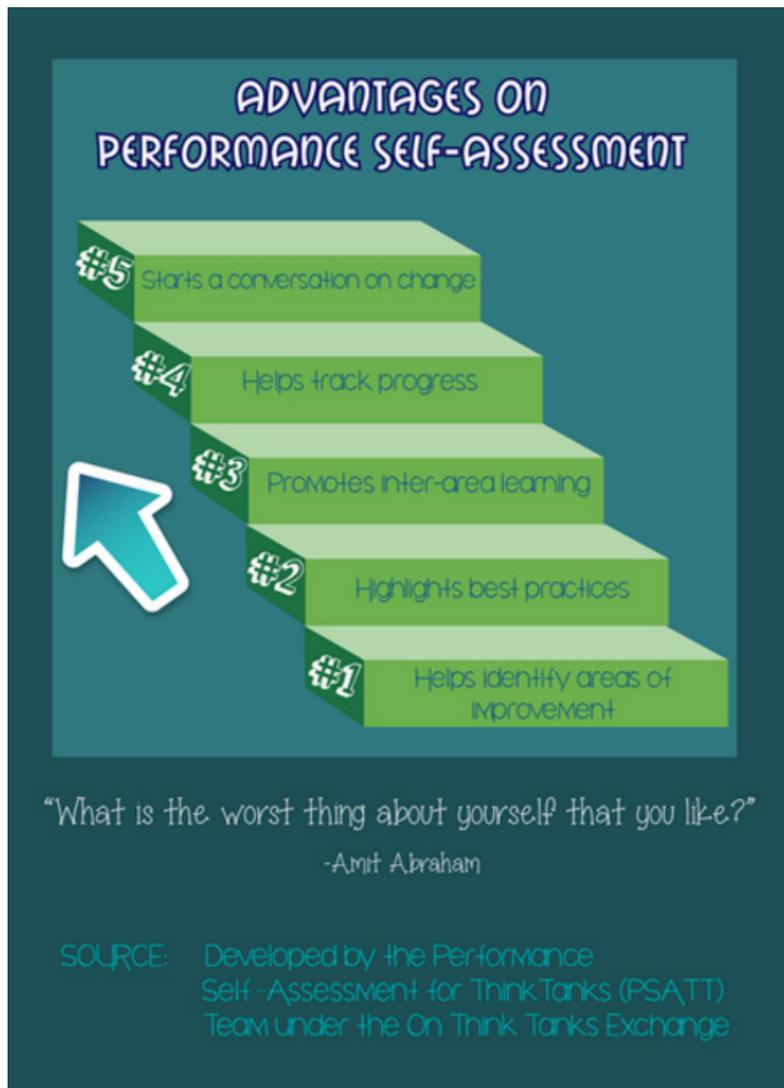


Figure 2. Areas that can be included in performance self assessment



### What we learned about collaboration

From the onset of The Exchange project, it was clear that one of the biggest challenges would be to maintain collaboration across seas, and with people managing heavy-loaded work schedules. At a very early stage we opted for a presidency rule, which saved us serious coordination and motivation problems. The project partners took the role of the presidency on a rotational monthly basis, thereby providing constant impetus to all the group members to run our commonly defined tasks and deliver (even if deadlines were not strictly met).

It was a great social and professional experience for each of us to brainstorm, work and have an exchange with intelligent team members. Our discussions were inspiring to all of us and helped us discover and learn from each other very quickly.

Along with direct project experiences, we have benefited greatly from learning about the political, institutional and cultural contexts of each of the host countries we were fortunate to visit. These visits showed us that despite language, cultural, social and other differences, running a think (and do) tank and aiming at having impact on public policymaking is a challenging job wherever we go. We have also learned what the common “hot” issues and difficulties all of us experience are.

From the beginning, it was clear that each of the participating think tanks has a specific (thematic) profile, even if there are some overlaps in policy areas covered. All group members struggled with engaging their colleagues. The fact that The Exchange project was based on a selection of people as much as specific institutions brought about a special “individualised ownership” from each participant. In addition, the ad hoc selection of countries contributed to the final decision to focus on organisational development issues rather than on thematic issues.

While running this collaborative project we also discussed options for further research and potential directions in which the institutional assessment process could be developed. Two obvious directions would be to complement the self assessment with an assessment exercise by external stakeholders and / or providing an “external audit service” to each other. Inviting peers to audit the self assessment process and to run their own assessment would provide a third eye, which could shed light on weaknesses and strengths not obvious to inside parties.

Looking back over the one and a half years of collaboration we came to the consensus that, without the possibility to meet up every six months in person and to catch up with all the tasks we had defined for ourselves, the whole enterprise would have failed. Online consultations were helpful for fixed and settled tasks, but the personal meet ups are extremely necessary in project phases when brainstorming and problem-solving exercises are crucial for success.

## Annex 1 – Best practices from the self assessment

### A. BI's knowledge management system

#### What?

In the past few years, BI has made extensive efforts to standardise knowledge management platforms and practices.

#### Why?

Knowledge management systems will help both the project management and encourage and facilitate intra-institutional learning processes.

#### How?

We have prepared and developed a common online platform, which enables employees to access and share documents produced in the past and as well as recent projects. For these purposes, BI picked an online cloud service provider (box.com) and we adjusted its business service package to our needs. We use their platform for file sharing and content management. The platform is fit for co-managing (and drafting) project documents, and also for archiving past projects' documentation. To facilitate the user-friendliness and the concise use of this platform, we have created a common users guide which, amongst other things, includes the preferred folder structure, file-naming rules, tagging practices, etc. We also run short, user-problem oriented demo workshops on a regular basis (every half year) and assess the staff members' user-experiences and needs by running online user surveys every year (each December). We occasionally use Dropbox as well, but only in cases where we cooperate with external experts.

For collecting and sharing background literature, we utilise Zotero services and we are trying to adapt our own reports and outputs to their standards.

In order to discuss and facilitate exchange on project results and any professional (and management) challenges of our projects, we organise a monthly workshop (called BI workshop) every second Wednesday of the month. Each session is devoted to presenting one or two closed projects (goals, results, main challenges, lessons) and to consult on professional issues within the institute. Another opportunity for formal knowledge sharing is the Methodological workshop, where junior researchers are encouraged to present one specific quantitative or qualitative method they used in BI projects.

#### Can it be improved?

Based on the feedback received from the demo workshops and the online survey so far, the following areas provide room for improvement:

- More efficient use of tagging;
- Better use of co-drafting;
- More effective enforcement of archiving (compliance with internal regulation on how to archive project documents).

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### B. CADEP's strategic planning with Outcome Mapping

#### What?

In 2013, encouraged and supported by the Think Tank Initiative, CADEP embarked on developing a medium-term strategic plan (2013–2017). The methodology chosen to address this effort was the Outcome Mapping: “an approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation that puts people at the centre, defines outcomes as changes in behavior, and helps measure contribution to complex change processes” (Outcome Mapping Learning Community).

#### Why?

Outcome Mapping is a methodology that helps develop a plan, as well as monitor and evaluate it.

#### How?

The process was guided by an external consultant and it was formalised in a strategy document which presents the organisation's major external and internal objectives during the four-year span, as well as outlining the partners to be engaged to fulfil these objectives.

The design of the institutional strategic plan was part of a comprehensive reform process for CADEP. This process involved the implementation of a new governance and management model to promote greater participation and decentralisation of organisational decision-making.

On the external level, CADEP has defined the following mission: from 2013 to 2017 the organisation will work with national and international research centres, civil society, and the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) to help produce evidence intended to influence public policy decisions in Paraguay.

The strategic plan identifies direct and strategic partners along with the expected outcomes CADEP intends to generate for each stakeholder: research centres, civil society and the CONACYT. Moreover, the document outlines the strategies CADEP will develop to work with the stakeholders, along with a schedule of activities throughout a year and the internal support needed to achieve the objectives.

On the internal level, the strategic plan outlines CADEP's organisational structure and identifies key responsibilities for each area. The section of the document devoted to internal organisational strategies defines key medium-term goals for the following institutional aspects: governance, research and consultancy, staffing and financial sustainability. Thus, the internal mission set in the strategic plan aims to strengthen the area of research, improve governance and implement an evaluation pilot based on the Outcome Mapping methodology.

### Who?

An important characteristic of the strategic planning process is that it was developed with participation of the entire staff. However, the four-year plan is based off annual plans that are defined every year, which are designed by senior staff members of CADEP.

The Coordinating Group, composed of six senior internal members, is responsible for monitoring the organisation's work plan (within the strategic plan) as well as the progress of the organisation's various areas of work.

### When?

Strategic planning (long-term planning) typically takes place every three or five years, depending on the timeline defined in the previous plan. Planning should be conducted before the beginning of the calendar year, and it must be monitored and assessed yearly according to annual plans off which the long-term plan is based on.

### Can it be improved?

There is room to enhance internal communication efforts to ensure the entire staff has equal knowledge of the organisation's strategic direction. This will give staff a better understanding on the purpose of their daily work and will also strengthen the sense of being a part of the organisation.

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## C. CEBRI's digital filing system

### What?

CEBRI's digital filing system proved to be a simple and effective way to organise folders and files, facilitating teamwork and preserving institutional memory.

### Why?

CEBRI has good infrastructure for knowledge management (internal server, regular backups, and a clear system of folders), which makes it easy to find information about past activities and ongoing projects.

### How?

Every member of staff has a unique computer log-in, through which he or she can access the internal server. The server hosts many drives; the two main ones are described below.

- The 'Shared' drive, which contains folders organised by sector or type of activity. The main folders in the 'Shared' drive are: Administrative; Institutional; Events; Projects; Publications; Communications; Mailing; Research Programme. All these have numerous subfolders, referring to year or theme.
- The 'Users' drive, which contains all the individual's folders- one for each person in the organisation. In some cases, the individual folders may be grouped together, like 'Interns' and 'Volunteers'. This happens when a person is occupying a temporary position.

With rare exceptions (mainly referring to financial data), the information stored in the server is available to all employees. This ensures a good work dynamic, where people can navigate through the relevant folders and do not need to ask their colleagues where to find information.

The server hosts all data from 2005 up to today. It also contains documents from the years before 2005, but not in a comprehensive way. The individual's folders are kept after the person in charge of that folder has left the organisation. These practices make it possible to recover important documents, avoid duplication of efforts, and keep institutional memory alive.

### Who?

All members of staff are responsible for storing their files in the shared folders. A specialised IT company is responsible for the maintenance of the internal server, back up procedures, and technical assistance.

### When?

The IT company conducts back up procedures on a weekly basis, remotely and also on-site. A technician comes to CEBRI's office every week, to check all computers as well as the internal sever.

### Can it be improved?

The downside of this system is that it cannot be accessed remotely. The staff needs to log-in on one of the computers that are connected to the server.

Connecting employees' personal notebooks to the system may help someone who is working from home or travelling for work.

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## D. EPRC's International Advisory Board

### What?

An International Advisory Board with seven distinguished members, each of them responsible for a particular topic of organisational development.

### Why?

According to the organisational Statute of EPRC, the founders of the organisation constitute the Governing Board, composed of 4 individuals and an honorary president. The Board is responsible for financial and strategic oversight of the organisation. It meets once a year and ensures the organisation's fiscal integrity, and oversees if the organisation stays true to its mission.

Since EPRC's Governing Board has a financial and strategic oversight function, we found it beneficial for the organisation to establish an Advisory Board composed of highly experienced individuals to provide guidance and advice on different aspects of organisational development.

### How?

EPRC has long-standing experience working with a number of U.S.-based universities. With a track-record of successfully implementing collaborative projects, EPRC's Executive Director approached potential members for the Advisory Board to give their consent and become actively involved in the organisational development of EPRC by providing their guidance and expertise.

### Who?

The leading role in negotiating with potential members was taken up by the Executive Director of EPRC. The Deputy Director on organisational development issues was in charge of preparing the rules and procedures document for the Board members. At present, seven individuals are members of the Advisory Board, and each of them is responsible for a particular field of organisational development:

- **Dr. Frank Fukuyama** – American political scientist, political economist, and a Senior Fellow at the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) at Stanford University. Dr. Fukuyama provides advice on ensuring international visibility and attracting funding from international foundations and endowments.
- **Frohn Nazhi** – Global Business Development Director at Arizona State University. Mr. Nahzi has more than 20 years of experience in management, consulting, training and writing on international development issues. He provides advice on organisational development issues for EPRC.
- **Dr. Rob Melnick** – Executive Dean of the Global Institute of Sustainability (GIOS) at Arizona State University (ASU), one of the largest research universities in the United States. Dr. Melnick has authored, managed and contributed to nearly 200 funded policy studies on topics including economic development, education reform, urban growth, quality of life, workforce development and sustainability. Dr. Melnick provides mentoring on research methodology and quality control issues.
- **Vladimer (Kakha) Ugulava** – served as president of EPRC for several years, and has multi-year experience working in the private and public sectors. He was the head of a commercial bank in Georgia. Mr. Ugulava provides mentoring on the issues of financial sustainability and financial planning.
- **George Chiladze** – Deputy Chief Executive Officer in Risk Management issues at the Bank of Georgia. Mr. Chiladze served as a Deputy Director for EPRC. As part of the Advisory Board, he is responsible for providing guidance on the issues of financial sustainability and financial planning.
- **Goga Gugava** – Head of the Economic Department at the Ministry of Justice in Georgia with extensive experience in public finance management. Mr. Gugava's guidance touches upon the issues of research and future programmatic directions of the organisation.
- **Lasha Dolidze** – Agricultural expert, worked for several years as a Research Director of EPRC. Mr. Dolidze provides guidance on the issues of research and programmatic directions.

### When?

The initiative started in 2015, and is still in the development phase.

### Can it be improved?

EPRC is working on the policy and procedures for the Advisory Board that shall determine the selection process, membership duration

and rotation of each Board member. Meetings are held on a quarterly basis for each of the following subjects: organisational development, international visibility, fundraising, financial sustainability and planning, research and quality control issues, and future programmatic directions. The meetings take place on the webinar platform or, when possible, face to face.

For the initiative to be improved, it needs to be further institutionalised and formalised, so the outcomes of the meetings are better implemented and established in the organisational procedures.

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## E. Grupo FARO's Project Approval Committee

### What?

The Project Approval Committee (CAP) is a space in which proposals are reviewed, commented upon, improved and approved by the strategic areas of the organisation. This mechanism improves strategic thinking in the proposal development process and increases probabilities for proposal approval, as proposal drafts are improved and enriched.

### Why?

In order to develop innovative proposals that secure new sources of funding while maintaining a coherent research agenda, we have designed a space – the Project Approval Committee (CAP) – to help us improve proposals and ensure they are in line with our goals, mission, and vision. Anyone in the organisation is welcome to attend CAP's meetings, but project approval is subject to the votes of its three official members: the Research and Knowledge Management Director (who chairs it), the Communications and Policy Influence Director, and the Finance and Administration Director. Project approval also includes the review (without vote) of the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator.

### How?

After teams or staff members individually identify a call for proposals that is in accordance with Grupo FARO's agenda and goals, the proposal draft starts with a collaborative process of the strategic area teams in research, communications and policy influence, finance and administration, and monitoring and evaluation. Once the proposal is drafted, it is evaluated in a Project Approval Committee meeting in which the team or the individual leading the proposal development presents the project goals and main elements.

In this meeting, each CAP member verifies that the proposal is sound from the perspective of his or her areas of expertise, shares ideas to improve the proposal and raises key questions. CAP members take into account institutional considerations (mission, vision, gender and cultural diversity, social sustainability, impact and relevance...), financial and administrative considerations (donor requirements, overhead percentages, in-kind contributions, taxes, cash flow...), communications and policy influence considerations (key actors, risks, messages, audiences, policy influence process, communications outputs...), research and knowledge management issues (problem, hypothesis, methodology, modes of knowledge production, key experts, outputs, knowledge transfer opportunities...) and monitoring and evaluation considerations (logic model elements, indicators, monitoring and evaluation plan...).

By the end of the meeting, the committee decides either to approve the proposal, to approve it with adjustments, or to reject it (on one occasion, due to the size of the proposal and fundamental questions of conflict of interests, the committee decided to present the proposal for consideration to the Board of Directors and prepared a document with key issues analysed by the committee for the Board's consideration).

### Can it be improved?

The downside of this mechanism or space is that it demands the commitment, time and participation of several staff members, who face time constraints from calls for proposals and the regular work demand of staff members involved. Flexibility in meeting times and in allowing virtual or in-person participation helps to solve some of the difficulties of getting all key staff members together for a CAP meeting.

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## Annex 2 – Tool for performance self assessments for think tanks

### Introduction

This collaborative project provides representatives and decision-makers in think tanks with knowledge on organisational performance self assessment. Within the project, four fields determining organisational performance were chosen, indicators were selected, and the evaluation survey was constructed. By filling out this short survey you will help your organisation measure organisational deficiencies and virtues in management and research practices. The results of the survey are anonymous and are meant to inform the management of your organisation to help them overcome and improve these deficiencies. The survey consists of four parts touching upon the four fields of organisational performance – Strategic Direction, The Board, Knowledge Management and Quality Control. Thank you for your cooperation!

**Please choose your position**

- manager
- senior staff member
- junior staff member
- administration

**Duration of employment at the organisation:**

- less than 1 year
- between 1–3 years
- more than 3 years

### Field 1: Strategic direction

This part is meant to assess the organisation’s performance regarding its strategic framework, with special emphasis to how it articulates its vision and/or mission, as well as its strategic plan.

**1. The vision and/or mission of the organisation is clearly articulated**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**2. The vision and/or mission of the organisation is communicated through:**

- Online tools (e.g. intranet, webpage, group mail, etc.)
- Strategic Documents (e.g. strategy, annual plan, report, etc.)
- Formal meetings (e.g. staff meeting, assembly, etc.)
- Informally
- Other tools/ by other means, please specify .....

**3. The vision and/or mission statement express the organisation’s core values.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**4. The vision and/or mission statements are specific to orient and guide staff and top management in their daily work.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**5. When defining its research agenda, the organisation takes the vision and/or mission into consideration.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**6. When establishing partnerships, the organisation takes the vision and/or mission into consideration.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree



**7. There is a strategic plan in your organisation which translates the organisational vision / mission into operative actions in an adequate way.**

- Yes
- No

**7a. The strategic plan is:**

- a formal/ written document
- informally presented / communicated to the staff

**7b. The strategic plan is:**

- an annual plan
- a multi-annual plan

**8. The implementation of the strategic plan is monitored by the organisation on a regular basis.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**9. The implementation of the strategic plan is assessed against the organisational vision or mission on a regular (yearly / quarterly) basis.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**10. Any good practices you would recommend to improve your organisation’s strategic direction/planning?**

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**11. Please provide any additional comments and remarks relevant to the questions above.**

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## Field 2: The Board of the organisation

This part of the survey is about governance bodies. These are external bodies not participating in the day-to-day business of the think tank which still have a significant role in strategic affairs and decisions.

Please list a maximum of three governance bodies of your organisation (i.e.: Boards, Assemblies, Committees), in order of importance, starting with the one that has the most influential power in shaping the organisation’s strategic decisions. If your organisation does not have any kind of governance body, please skip this question.

**12. Body name**

- Body #1, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Body #2, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Body #3, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Field 2: Governance body #1

**13. Is documentation of the meetings of this body (e.g. minutes) available to you?**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes



14. Do you read the documentation of the meetings of this body (e.g. minutes)?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

15. Do you think that the operation of your organisation would significantly change if this body were to be disbanded?

- Yes
- No

16. Do you think the decisions of this body affect your daily work?

- Yes
- No

17. How many members does this body have?

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18. Please share any thoughts on good practice of your organisation or mistakes to be avoided.

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19. Please share any additional comments or remarks relevant to the questions above.

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## Field 2: Governance body #2

20. Is documentation of the meetings of this body (e.g. minutes) available to you?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

21. Do you read the documentation of the meetings of this body (e.g. minutes)?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

22. Do you think that the operation of your organisation would significantly change if this body were to be disbanded?

- Yes
- No

23. Do you think the decisions of this body affect your daily work?

- Yes
- No

24. How many members does this body have?

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25. Please share any thoughts on good practice of your organisation or mistakes to be avoided.

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26. Please share any additional comments or remarks relevant to the questions above.

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**Field 2: Governance body #3**

27. Is documentation of the meetings of this body (e.g. minutes) available to you?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

28. Do you read the documentation of the meetings of this body (e.g. minutes)?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

29. Do you think that the operation of your organisation would significantly change if this body were to be disbanded?

- Yes
- No

30. Do you think the decisions of this body affect your daily work?

- Yes
- No

31. How many members does this body have?

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32. Please share any thoughts on good practice of your organisation or mistakes to be avoided.

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33. Please share any additional comments or remarks relevant to the questions above.

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**Field 3: Knowledge Management**

This section addresses the existence of knowledge management and learning practices to support the performance of members of the organisation.

34. In your organisation, knowledge management and organisational learning are part of your daily work.

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

35. There are internal tools and mechanism to share what I have learned with my colleagues so they can improve their professional knowledge / work practices.

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree



**36. I use the following tools and mechanisms for knowledge sharing:**

- email
- coaching and mentoring
- bulletin boards
- regular meetings
- internal newsletter
- Facebook group page
- intranet
- written protocols/procedures
- manuals
- workshops
- exit interviews
- after action review
- lessons learned documents
- other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**37. I have been trained to use the mechanisms and tools indicated above for knowledge sharing:**

- In all cases
- In part of them
- Training was available, but I did not participate in any of them
- No training opportunity

**38. Staff members/ managers / directors are co-operative and helpful when asked to share information or advice.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**39. There is no duplication of efforts in the organisation due to lack of communication and information sharing.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**40. Internal staff rotation is actively encouraged to spread best practices and ideas.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**41. Would you agree with the statement: “Our organisation is a learning organisation”?**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**42. How easy is it to find historic information (i.e. on project results/ organisational decisions / etc) in the day- to-day work?**

Very easy	Easy	Difficult	Very difficult

**43. Please share any thoughts on good practice of your organisation or mistakes to be avoided.**

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**43. Please share any additional comments or remarks relevant to the questions above.**

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## Field 4: Quality Control

This part is about the tools your organisation uses to assure high-quality work and outputs.

### 44. The following products are subject to quality control:

- Reports, studies
- Policy Briefs
- Blog posts
- Presentation materials
- Events
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

## Field 4: Quality Control – Reports, studies

The following questions refer to the quality control of reports and studies

### 45a. Reviewers are chosen and appointed by the...

- Executive Director
- Research Director
- Researcher
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

### 45b. The reviews are provided ...

- Internally
- Externally
- Both

### 45c. The reviews are provided ...

- Yes (via designated template/ form)
- Yes (in free format)
- No
- Sometimes

### 45d. Are the reviewers paid for the work they do?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

### 45e. The reviews are provided at the ... stage of research

- Preliminary
- Design (choice of methodology)
- Draft
- Final

### 45f. The organisation has a dispute resolution mechanism (when a dispute arises between a researcher and a reviewer).

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

### 45g. The feedback helps me in my work.

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree



### Field 4: Quality Control – Policy Briefs

The following questions refer to the quality control of policy briefs

**46a. Reviewers are chosen and appointed by the...**

- Executive Director
- Research Director
- Researcher
- Other, please specify .....

**46b. The reviews are provided ...**

- Internally
- Externally
- Both

**46c. The reviews are provided ...**

- Yes (via designated template/ form)
- Yes (in free format)
- No
- Sometimes

**46d. Are the reviewers paid for the work they do?**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

**46e. The reviews are provided at the ... stage of research**

- Preliminary
- Design (choice of methodology)
- Draft
- Final

**46f. The organisation has a dispute resolution mechanism (when a dispute arises between a researcher and a reviewer).**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**46g. The feedback helps me in my work.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

### Field 4: Quality Control – Blog Posts

The following questions refer to the quality control of blog posts

**47a. Reviewers are chosen and appointed by the...**

- Executive Director
- Research Director
- Researcher
- Other, please specify .....

**47b. The reviews are provided ...**

- Internally
- Externally
- Both

**47c. The reviews are provided ...**

- Yes (via designated template/ form)
- Yes (in free format)
- No
- Sometimes

**47d. Are the reviewers paid for the work they do?**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

**47e. The reviews are provided at the ... stage of research**

- Preliminary
- Design (choice of methodology)
- Draft
- Final

**47f. The organisation has a dispute resolution mechanism (when a dispute arises between a researcher and a reviewer).**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**47g. The feedback helps me in my work.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

## Field 4: Quality Control – Presentation Materials

The following questions refer to the quality control of presentation materials

**48a. Reviewers are chosen and appointed by the...**

- Executive Director
- Research Director
- Researcher
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**48b. The reviews are provided ...**

- Internally
- Externally
- Both

**48c. The reviews are provided ...**

- Yes (via designated template/ form)
- Yes (in free format)
- No
- Sometimes

**48d. Are the reviewers paid for the work they do?**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

**48e. The reviews are provided at the ... stage of research**

- Preliminary
- Design (choice of methodology)
- Draft
- Final



**48f. The organisation has a dispute resolution mechanism (when a dispute arises between a researcher and a reviewer).**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**48g. The feedback helps in my work.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

### Field 4: Quality Control – Other

The following questions refer to the quality control of other products you might want to include in this assessment

**49a. Reviewers are chosen and appointed by the...**

- Executive Director
- Research Director
- Researcher
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**49b. The reviews are provided ...**

- Internally
- Externally
- Both

**49c. The reviews are provided ...**

- Yes (via designated template/ form)
- Yes (in free format)
- No
- Sometimes

**49d. Are the reviewers paid for the work they do?**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

**49e. The reviews are provided at the ... stage of research**

- Preliminary
- Design (choice of methodology)
- Draft
- Final

**49f. The organisation has a dispute resolution mechanism (when a dispute arises between a researcher and a reviewer).**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree

**49g. The feedback helps me in my work.**

Totally agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree



## Field 4: Quality Control – Events

**50h. The events are evaluated by**

- The team organising the event
- The communications team
- Participants
- Other: please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**51. Evaluations are performed using a template / form for giving feedback.**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

**52. Please share any thoughts on good practice of your organisation or mistakes to be avoided.**

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**53. Please share any additional comments or remarks relevant to the questions above.**

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# Performance Self Assessments for Think Tanks Case Study: Budapest Institute

by Petra Reszkető

## Introduction

The Budapest Institute (BI) is a non-partisan think tank founded by four economists in November 2008. The Institute has a dual mission: 1) to contribute to public policymaking, grounded in research evidence that will benefit both Hungary and Europe and 2) to promote the evidence-based approach in public discourse and policy debate. The institute is strongly committed to high quality standards, policy impact and integrity.

The Budapest Institute produces independent policy research and analysis. Senior researchers have a strong background in employment policy, social policy, education policy, smart regulation and good governance. The Institute provides policy advice to decision makers, conducts independent public policy research and participates in regional and European research projects. The competences of the Institute's network of experts cover both quantitative (e.g. econometric analysis) and qualitative (e.g. focus group, content analysis) methods.

The Budapest Institute has no core funding, and relies on a wide variety of funding sources. Our partners come from the public sector as well as from civil society, our project clients are international and European organisations (such as OECD, ILO, OGP, and the European Union and its agencies), regional public or civil organisations (e.g. Visegrad Foundation, and the Open Society Foundation), and government agencies from the national or local level. We are active both in international policy research projects (e.g. H2020) as well as in smaller scale regional/national ones with a focus on applied research and/ or on dissemination of research evidence to the broader public.

The Budapest Institute is a limited liability company. Since 2008, staff has grown steadily to reach 16 employees (five senior colleagues, seven junior colleagues, and one administrator at full-time equivalent) in 2015. The organisation outsources the following business support services: accounting, IT maintenance and development. The organisational structure is very flat, with only 3 levels. The two co-directors (co-founders as well) are responsible for the overall management, dividing responsibilities for finance, HR, sales & communication and strategic management. The key strategic decisions are made by the 4 founders. The founders meet up for offsite strategic meetings twice a year and they sit in a sort of supervisory function every quarter year.

Senior researchers are actively involved in the planning and running of the policy and research projects and also take an equal role in capacity management. The institute collaborates with an extended network of external experts to whom it periodically subcontracts on a project basis. Project managers meet weekly to discuss the progress of work in running projects and to plan new ones with the Managing Directors.

## Experience in self assessment

BI introduced a performance assessment system in 2013. This is a formal tool to give direct feedback on staff members' performance, that is, on the quality and efficiency of their work as well as to link the payment schemes to individual performance. Although this performance assessment tool primarily focuses on assessment at individual level, it inherently generates feedback on the overall project management and on intra-organisational relations. That feedback is collated by the senior fellows and discussed occasionally at weekly project management meetings.

### Individual performance assessment

Remuneration is based on a fixed monthly salary and on a variable performance-based payment. (The fixed salary varies between 60 to 70% across staff members – depending on their individual preferences and the assessment of the directors). While senior researchers evaluate junior fellows, they themselves receive feedback by two other senior and one junior colleague on a regular, six-month basis. The assessment template is standardised for senior and junior positions separately and covers various aspects (e.g. administrative and management skills, professional knowledge and experience, knowledge of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, writing and communication skills, networking and other social skills). Although the evaluation criteria are standard, the assessment is tailored on an individual basis, depending on the tasks and responsibilities of the given colleague. The written assessment is followed with a face-to-face discussion where all parties can mutually reflect on the individual and organisational(!) strengths and weaknesses, lessons to be shared and opportunities for further development both on an individual as well as on an organisational level.

While senior colleagues take an active part in shaping the daily operation of the institute and may share their opinion on the strategic management, junior colleagues have a more selective insight into this field. The organisation, however, pays attention to assessing the closed projects with the involvement of both senior and junior colleagues; and junior colleagues were also invited to shape the knowledge management system.

Consequently, BI has greatly welcomed piloting the self assessment tool. We hope to learn more about the perceptions of all staff members and we are sure that the results of this pilot will re-strengthen our commitment to improve the cost-effectiveness of our work as well as to make progress on our professional learning curve.

## Methodology

The online questionnaire was implemented at BI. We decided to follow the standardised survey questions with no variation across positions, but included all the thematic modules (strategy, knowledge and quality control management, and board). The internal survey was announced on 19 February 2015, and the online questionnaire was circulated by one of the managing directors. During a two-week period, all senior and junior researchers filled out the questionnaire (100% response rate), though we had to send out the request twice to bring all colleagues onto the online platform. As for the other research methods, face-to-face interviews with two senior colleagues were conducted and two junior colleagues were involved in the evaluation of the survey results by participating in drawing common conclusions and drafting this report. Interview questions were identical and touched upon the 4 thematic issues mentioned above. A senior and an assisting junior colleague ran the desk research, which covered all the organisational documents and the website.

## Results of the assessment

### Strategic direction

#### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: STRATEGIC DIRECTION

BI has a mid-term institutional strategy (2013-2016). It is not formalised in a strategic document, but instead summarised in a presentation format. BI’s founding partners meet offsite twice a year to evaluate and, if necessary, revise the strategy. They decide on the strategic directions for the year at their first meeting at the beginning of a given year (usually in February) and assess the past (strategic and financial) performance of the institute at the second annual meeting (in July of the following year).

Directors present the strategy and the annual action plan following the partners’ strategic meeting in February. They also provide an overview of all ongoing and future projects twice a year (February and September).

The mission of the institute is communicated when someone is hired. It also appears in written form in project documentation, and it is discussed formally during internal workshops once or twice a year.

Based on the interviews and the survey results, there seems to be consensus on the clarity of the institutional mission, which is clearly articulated both on the institute’s website and in formal communication. According to staff’s views, it expresses the core values of the organisation. While its communication goes through various channels (see Figure 1), formal meetings and online platforms stand out. These survey results were also confirmed in the interviews. Two members of the team referred to a written strategic document, which notably does not exist as a formal document, but probably refer to strategic updates the management shares with all staff members during in-house workshops (see below). One of the respondents encourages “preparing a written strategic plan and sharing it with employees.” An option welcome and strongly promoted by the management as well, but not accomplished yet due to limited capacities.

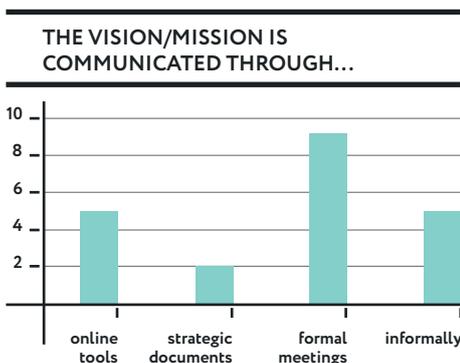


Figure 1: Communicating the institutional mission

Survey results also suggest that the organisational mission and values are taken into account when shaping the research agenda, networking and while setting up business partnerships. However, there seems to be a gap between senior and junior colleagues in their perception of how far the core mission and values guide day-to-day operations. Half of the junior colleagues believe there is a lack of strategic orientation and guidance during their daily work (see Figure 2).

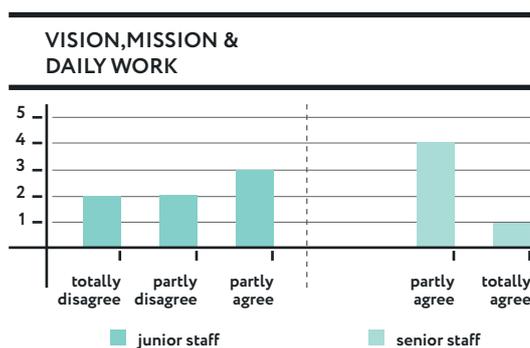


Figure 2: Perceptions on mission-driven daily operations

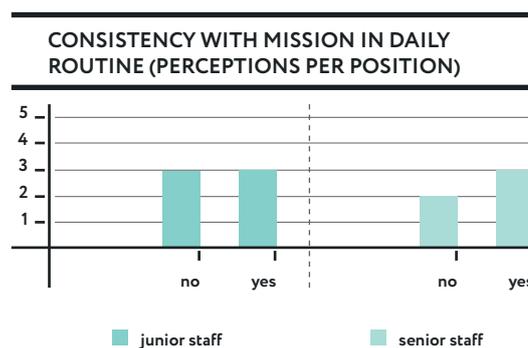


Figure 3: Consistency of the operative actions with the mission

Similarly, junior fellows seem to be less aware of the regular evaluation of the achievement of the strategic goals. One of the possibilities to reduce this gap could be to prepare “explicit, public annual reports on the working of the organisation,” as suggested by one of the respondents.

Interestingly, both senior and junior staff members are divided and more critical concerning the existence and adequacy of an operative strategic plan, which translates the organisational mission into actions in a consistent way (see Graph 3). As one of the staff members highlighted, “... circumstances (country/time effects) do not always allow the company to go for actions that fully comply with the organisational values stated in the mission.”

## The role of the Board

The BI has neither a formal supervisory body nor an advisory one. The founding partners meet regularly to make updates and decide on strategic issues (see Stylised Facts on Strategic Management above). These meetings also provide the opportunity to monitor ongoing business operations. This body is referred to internally as the “Partners’ meeting” and serves as a high-level strategic governance body with the combined functions of supervising day-to-day business and making decisions on strategic issues.

The results of the survey show a clear understanding of the function of this body. A clear distinction is formed between junior members and senior members concerning their access to the documentation of strategic meetings. While key decisions are communicated at formal and informal meetings, the details and memos of the strategic meetings are not shared with staff members. As commented by one of the respondents, this is partly compensated: “Lately they [founding partners] devote more and more time for specific meetings with junior staff in order to give us direct face-to-face feedback and advice, which is inspiring.”

## Knowledge management

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

In the past few years, extensive efforts were made to standardise knowledge management and prepare a common online platform to enable employees to access and share documents produced in past and recent projects. BI uses BOX file sharing and content management service, where both current project documents are stored and past projects’ documentation are archived. To facilitate user-friendliness and ensure the efficient use of BOX, BI has created a user guide which, amongst other things, includes the preferred folder structure, file-naming rules, tagging practices, etc. Besides BOX, BI occasionally uses Dropbox, but only in cases where external experts are involved. Besides these primary platforms, we tend to use Google Drive as well.

For collecting and sharing background literature, BI uses the services of Zotero, whilst trying to adapt their own reports and outputs to the standards of Zotero.

The flow of information is often via e-mail exchanges. Memos of conferences and specific experiences from meetings are shared formally and informally.

To discuss and facilitate exchange on the results and professional (and management) challenges of our projects, BI holds an internal workshop (called BI Workshop) every second Wednesday of the month. Each session is devoted to present one or two finalised projects (goals, results, main challenges, lessons, etc) and to consult on professional issues within the institute. Another possibility for formal knowledge sharing is the Methodological Workshop, where junior researchers are encouraged to present one specific quantitative or qualitative method they used in BI projects.

Based on both interviews and survey results, there is a common perception that BI is a “learning community”. The vast majority of staff members support this view and confirm that development projects launched in this area in the past two years (see introduction of the common online file and project management platform by using the business package from Box.com, the online library – Zotero, and the abundance of internal workshops) play an important role in advancing BI’s daily work.

The survey also shows a wide variety of internal tools used to share information and gain professional experience (see Figure 4). Apparently, e-mail exchange is the most common method of exchange, but internal workshops and regularly organised personal meetings play an important role as well. BI managers offer the opportunity to share professional experiences during individual performance evaluation meetings run every sixth months. Project evaluation sessions are organised regularly after the formal closure of a projects. Alternative tools are also in use, such as communication and exchanges on our Facebook page, lessons learned, and specific internal guidelines (e.g. how-to files on specific tasks, seeing archiving project documents, using Zotero, project management guidelines, etc).

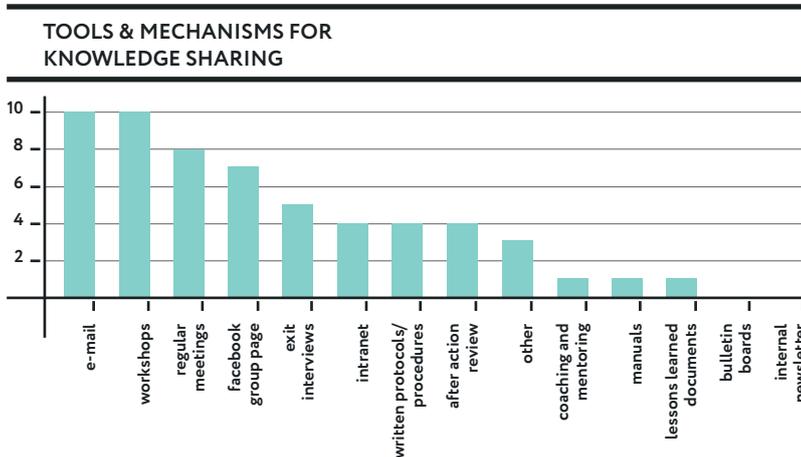


Figure 4: Tools used for knowledge sharing

While most staff members claimed it is easy to find historic information, it is surprising to see that online platforms, where this kind of information is extensively accessible, were not mentioned under the ‘Other tools’ option.

Junior members are divided in relation to the specific training they have received to use these tools. Although the majority of junior staff members agreed that senior researchers are cooperative and willing to provide information or explanations if necessary (see Figure 5), feedback draws attention to the need to focus on having formal trainings, demos and also informal incentives to encourage more advanced use of these knowledge management tools.

The survey results also highlighted the need to improve internal communication. While the online platforms (Box and Zotero) have been introduced with the aim to reduce duplication of efforts, results indicate that junior researchers tend to be more skeptical in this regard (see Graph 6). The survey also suggests that there are potential benefits to be gained from internal rotation of staff members across various tasks. Nonetheless, senior researchers are not convinced about the benefits of such a practice. As noted by one respondent “staff rotation and organisational learning are tricky because, most of the time, those who have a comparative advantage in a future project’s ‘research’ field will be working on it. Thus staff knowledge on the whole is maybe diversified but it is not so much the case for individual knowledge.”

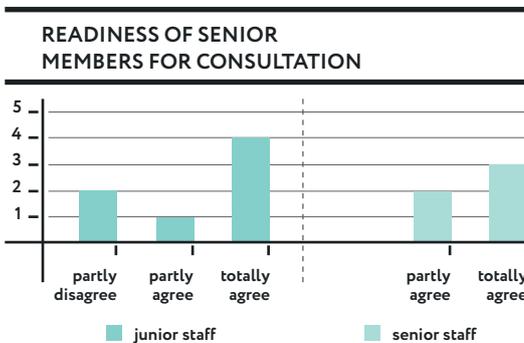


Figure 5: Readiness of senior members for consultation

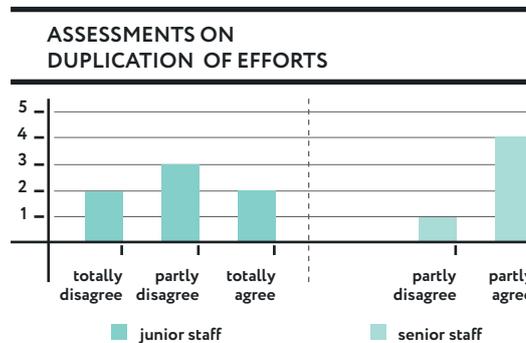


Figure 6: Assessment on duplication of efforts

### Quality control

#### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: QUALITY CONTROL

Research reports are the main project outputs produced by BI. While BI is committed to produce and disseminate research outcome in the form of policy briefs, the institute has limited time and capacity to invest in the production of these materials unless it is one of the deliverables. These are two main pieces of outputs are subjected to quality control.

In most cases we apply internal quality control by one of the senior researchers who has expertise in the field, but is not participating on the specific project.

In the case of comparative reports and analysis, we prefer to invite external evaluators who have expertise in the field and are extensively familiar with the country-specific contexts and details. The external country experts are contracted and remunerated for their work.

As the outputs subject to regular quality controls are predominantly research reports and policy briefs, we limited our assessment to these. While staff members identified presentation materials and events as well, quality control of these dissemination activities is rather ad hoc, depending on the time availability of senior researchers.

In relation to research papers, there is consensus on the way experts are appointed as reviewers. The institute is consistent in demanding both internal and external reviews. Staff members also agree that in most cases the reviewers are paid for their work. The actual practice is dependent on whether an internal or external expert is performing the quality control assessment. The timing of reviews also seems to converge to draft and final versions of research papers, and all of the respondents were clear about asking reviewers for opinions in a free written format.

As mentioned before, BI has less experience writing policy briefs, therefore practices differ. This is reflected on the answers on the survey as well. We prepare policy briefs mostly for dissemination purposes, and in rare cases for specific projects at the request of the client or donor. Therefore, it is not surprising that senior researchers consider the review of these outputs an internal task. In line with this, the results show that not all staff members are aware of the fact that payments for quality control activities are always provided for external reviewers.

The results show a puzzled picture concerning the issue of a dispute resolution mechanism. So far there has been no need to create or apply such a mechanism. While this question will be kept open, the results do not indicate a need to introduce it.

## Conclusions

Running this self assessment process through an institution-wide questionnaire, along with interviews on these issues with senior and junior staff members was a pioneering experience and a very useful experiment for us. On one hand, the fact that all members of staff completed the survey confirmed our interest in repeating the questionnaire after a year. On the other hand, the results have offered confirmation on some assumptions the management had on potential areas and activities to be developed in the future.

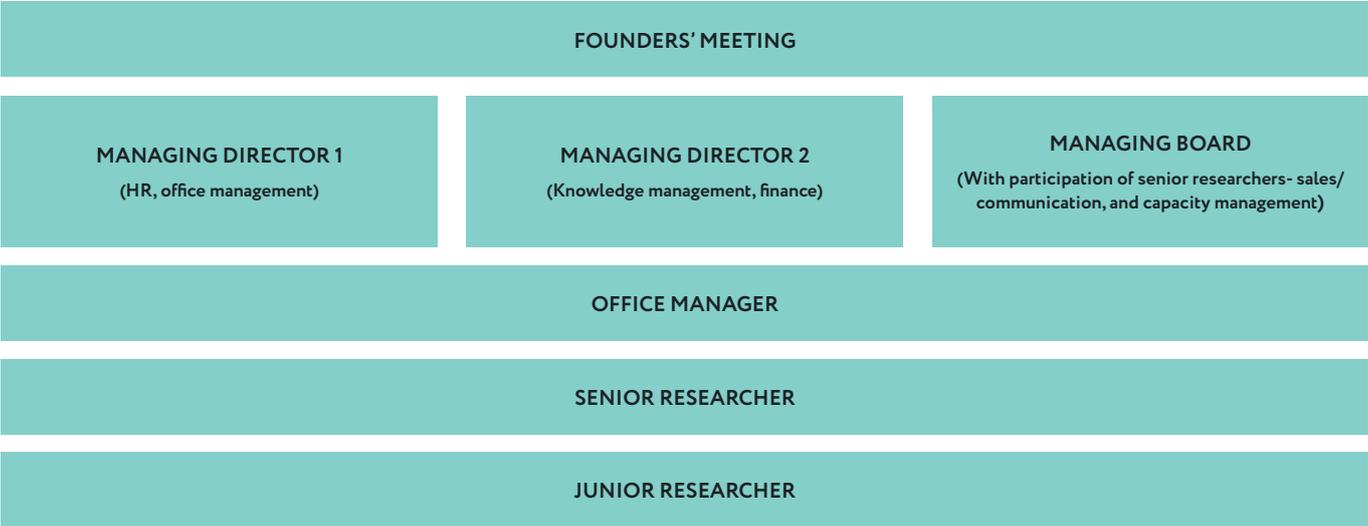
In general, the survey results confirmed the clear articulation of the institutional mission and the fact that founders and directors managed to create a shared, common understanding of the institutional values and mission. However, BI should map further tools and solutions to translate the mid-term strategy into the daily work for staff and to communicate strategic challenges to all staff members.

The survey highlighted the need for further improvement in the effectiveness of the internal knowledge management system. Acknowledging that workshops and regular thematic meetings are one of the most frequently referenced tools of knowledge sharing (see Graph 4), BI sees the demand for more face-to-face meetings and discussions.

Finally, one of the most important lessons gathered from the responses is the emphasis on feedback. The vast majority of respondents (six out of seven junior staff and four out of five senior staff respondents) expressed the benefits of receiving feedback. Moreover, one of the respondents even highlighted that “in the case of internal reviews, direct feedback should be made highlighting not only the strengths and weaknesses with regards to content, but also include feedback on the style, structure, logic of arguments, easy comprehension of the text, etc. Specific recommendations would be helpful as well.”



Figure 1 - Organogram Budapest Institute



# Performance Self Assessments for Think Tanks

## Case Study: CADEP

by Leandro Echt

### About CADEP

The Centre for Analysis and Dissemination of the Paraguayan Economy (CADEP) is a nongovernmental organisation founded in 1990 by a group of social scientists trained abroad. Its founding coincides with the end of the dictatorship in Paraguay. The main goal was to create an organisation capable of conducting research, dissemination and training on issues related to country's economy and its public policy, with the clear objective of influencing public policy decisions.

Since its inception, CADEP contributed to the production of knowledge as a basis for the formulation and improvement of public policies aimed at fostering economic and social development. Over time, the organisation became a reference for the different actors of the national (policymakers, civil society, business sector, and academia) and international (networks, academic foundations, and international aid organisations) policy community.

With a focus on economics, CADEP's main fields of work are tax studies (macroeconomics and fiscal policy), competitiveness, trade policy, poverty and employment, entrepreneurial development and regional economics. In order to work on these different fields, CADEP is organised in the following areas: Research, Consulting, Training, Communication, Institutional development and Administration. The staff body is composed of membered researchers and fifteen associate researchers, shaping an organisation of around twenty-one professionals.

Like many think tanks around the world, CADEP's funding structure relies on a wide variety of sources. International aid organisations' support represent the vast portion of resources, followed by consulting (mainly for the State) and training activities (particularly the Master in Public Management, designed and delivered by CADEP in partnership with the Paraguayan Catholic University).

CADEP's activities and visibility have enabled professionals from the organisation to be a part of several spaces for decision-making in public policies. A notable example is their role in the Paraguayan government administrations in 2003 and in 2008, when one of its founding members became Minister of Finance and the other worked as an adviser at the Ministry of Industry and Trade. CADEP has become an organisation capable of responding to the needs of national economic management, without losing its establishment as an independent academic centre.

### CADEP's experience with self assessment

Throughout its institutional history, CADEP's performance self assessment procedures have experienced different levels of formality.

At the start of its trajectory, performance self assessments were conducted informally by its founders. It took place semi-annually and focused mainly on budgetary issues.

Over the years, more spaces for reflection were introduced in the organisation, promoted by donors such as the Think Tank Initiative (TTI), which is CADEP's funding partner since 2010. However, the evaluation instances corresponded mainly to specific projects, and were conducted by external consultants with a focus on addressing projects' influence in the policy community.

In 2013, coinciding with the first formal strategic plan (also promoted by the TTI), the organisation created a new ad hoc space responsible for monitoring the progress of the plan: the Coordination Group, composed of five permanent members of the organisation including the two founders (one of them is the Executive Director), and three senior researchers with wide experience in the institution. The Coordination Group holds monthly meetings to monitor the progress of different activities and the performance of different areas of the organisation. They make decisions based on those assessments.

In order to monitor and evaluate the organisation's work, CADEP has adopted the Outcome Mapping methodology with the guidance of an external consultant. This methodology is strongly linked to strategic planning and focuses on influence efforts. The Outcome Mapping "is an approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation that puts people at the centre, defines outcomes as changes in behavior, and helps measure contribution to complex change processes" (OutcomeMapping Learning Community).

CADEP's history shows an evolution towards established reflective and self assessment efforts. These efforts were promoted by donors' support and the need to assess the organisation's performance in order to make better decisions related to its sustainability. Another important feature of the self assessment processes is that they are conducted by senior members of the organisation: while all staff is invited to participate in planning stages, assessment is a responsibility that corresponds to the more experienced members of CADEP.

## Methodology

The online questionnaire was run at CADEP during the last two weeks of March and the first week of April 2015. Twelve members of the organisation responded to it. Seven respondents had spent less than a year working for the organisation, four of them had been with the organisation for more than three years, and one had been with the organisation between one and three years. A major challenge was getting the staff to fill out the open ended questions. The online questionnaire was complemented with two other research methods. On one hand, interviews were conducted with the Executive Director (who is also one of the founding partners) and the Responsible of the Institutional Development Area (who is also one of the senior researchers with more experience in the organisation). On the other hand, desk research included the analysis of key organisational documents (strategic plan and foundational documents) and online information (mainly the institutional website).

## Results of the assessment

### Strategic direction

#### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

CADEP developed its first strategic plan in 2011. In 2013, encouraged and supported by the Think Tank Initiative, this effort was strengthened with the development of a new medium term strategic plan (2013-2017). To execute these plans, CADEP chose to use the Outcome Mapping methodology. This methodology helps develop a plan, as well as monitor and evaluate it. The process was guided by an external consultant, and it was formalised in a strategic document which presents the organisation’s major external and internal objectives during the four year span. The document also outlines which partners to work with in order to fulfill these goals.

The design of the strategic plan was part of a comprehensive reform process which involves the implementation of a new governance and management model for CADEP. This model promotes greater participation and decentralisation of organisational decision-making.

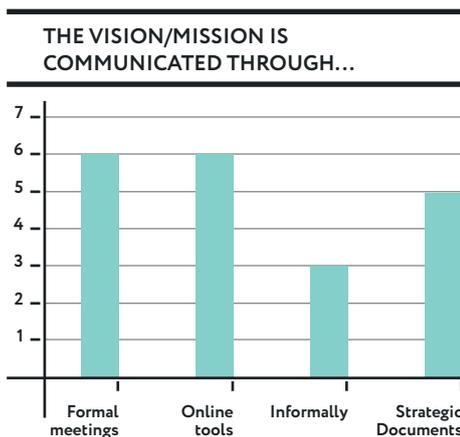
On the external level, CADEP has defined the following mission: from 2013 to 2017 the organisation will work with national and international research centres, civil society and the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) to make knowledge influence public policy decisions in Paraguay.

The strategic plan identifies direct and strategic partners along with the expected outcomes that CADEP intends to generate in each of the three stakeholders: research centres, civil society, and the CONACYT. The document also outlines the strategies the organisation will develop to work with those players within their context, along with a schedule of activities during an annual period, and the specifics of the internal support needed to achieve the plan’s objectives.

On the internal level, the strategic plan outlines CADEP’s organisational structure and identifies key responsibilities for each area. This section defines medium-term goals for the following institutional aspects: governance, research and consultancy, staffing, and financial sustainability. The internal mission set in the strategic plan aims to strengthen the research area, improve governance, and implement an evaluation pilot based on the Outcome Mapping methodology.

Finally, an important characteristic of the strategic plan is that it was developed with the participation of the entire staff. This four-year plan is based on yearly plans that are designed annually by senior members at CADEP.

Along the respondents, there is consensus that the vision and mission of the organisation is clearly articulated (100% of the answers). As per its communication, respondents identify formal tools and channels as the main instances to get familiar with the organisation’s core objectives.



It is important to consider the difference between senior and junior staff’s perspectives: while the former identifies the strategic document and formal instances as the main sources to communicate the vision and mission, the latter get to know about them mainly through online tools.

Respondents also agree that the vision/mission statements express the organisation's core values (100% of the answers). Even though the majority believes that these statements are important when shaping the organisational research agenda and partnerships, not all junior members believe that they are specific enough to orient and guide them in their daily work (40% partly agree and 20% partly disagree with this statement).

An interesting fact is that not all the respondents are aware of the existence of the strategic plan (30%), especially junior staff (50%). The majority recognise that the strategic plan is a formal document (85%), but not everyone knows whether it comprises an annual (33,5%) or multi annual period (66,5%). Finally, not all the respondents consider that the strategic plan is monitored on a regular basis, especially junior members (20%).

A preliminary conclusion of this exercise is that the organisation needs to increase its communication efforts to ensure that all staff has equal knowledge of the organisation's mission and vision and where they can access it, as well as which are the processes through which the institution reflects on how its work is going. As one of the respondents suggests: "the organisation needs to ensure a better communication flow through all institutional members to increase the sense of belonging to CADEP and to allow junior members to present their views regarding CADEP's strategic direction".

## The role of the Board

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

At its start, CADEP was governed by two main bodies: the General Assembly and the Board of Directors.

- **the General Assembly:** has been the highest authority of the organisation since its inception. It was comprised of the four founders and active members of CADEP (since 2001, only two of the four founders remained as active members) and met every two years. It was responsible for defining the general policy of the organisation as well as evaluating the overall operation of its various bodies.
- **the Board of Directors:** until 2012, it was also comprised of the two founders and active members. This body made the final decisions on how the institution functioned on a daily basis.

An important feature of this governance arrangement was that all members of the main bodies were internal, and no external advice or support in decision making was originally considered.

For more than 10 years, CADEP operated with a centralised organisational structure, where decision-making and the design of policies, strategies and institutional actions were the responsibility of its two founding members.

The need to change the governance structure of the organisation is due to two major events:

1. The incorporation of a group of young professionals between 2008-2012, a period in which the two founding and active members were serving in the administration of the national government.
2. The start of the Think Tanks Initiative's support in 2010, which required the implementation of institutional strengthening plans in the areas of research, communication and advocacy, and organisational performance. This highlighted the weaknesses around the management of the institution and the opportunities for improvement that existed.

Consequently, CADEP's leaders began a gradual process of delegating functions and decentralising decision-making. A key milestone of this process took place in 2012, when the statutes were modified to incorporate new active members into the governance bodies. Today, the General Assembly is composed of six members (two of them joined it in 2012 and two others in 2014), and the Board of Directors of three members.

Moreover, since 2013 new non-statutory bodies have been created:

- **The Coordination Group,** composed of the six active members. This ad hoc group is responsible for monitoring the organisation's work plan (in regard to the strategic plan) and the progress of the various areas of work. The Coordination Group makes recommendations to the Board of Directors, who meet fortnightly and make final decisions based on the recommendations received.
- **An Advisory Council,** composed of external members: businessmen, senators, parliamentarians, and academics. This body is intended to guide the organisation through its fundraising efforts and advice on influence issues.

Even though there is no consensus around its names, all the respondents recognise the Assembly and the Board of Directors as the two main governing bodies of the organisation. Regarding the availability of the documentation of the meetings of these bodies, junior staff considers it is not possible for them to access it, while the majority of senior staff responded that such documentation is available to them and almost all of them affirm that they read it regularly (66,5%). It is important to highlight that notwithstanding the importance that the two governing bodies represent to CADEP's functioning, only the senior members believe that the organisation would significantly change if these bodies were to be disbanded and, moreover, that the decisions of the Board affect their daily work. On the contrary, junior staff

does not give these bodies an important influence in their daily activities. Finally there is no consensus around the number of members in each body, but all respondents consider that the Board of Directors is composed by more people than the Assembly.

As can be deduced from these results, there is a substantial difference between junior and senior staff when it comes to address the governing bodies' operation and characteristics. While it seems reasonable that senior staff have acquired more knowledge of the activities of these bodies, mainly because they are the ones who participate in them, many junior staff respondents suggested that there is a need to better understand the objectives and rationale of these governing bodies, and that decisions on CADEP's destiny should be better communicated to other members of the organisation. On the other hand, senior staff believe that there is room to improve the systematic nature of the meetings and also recognise that being part of these bodies requires continuous training. A final thing to note is that there were no mentions about the recent Coordination Group.

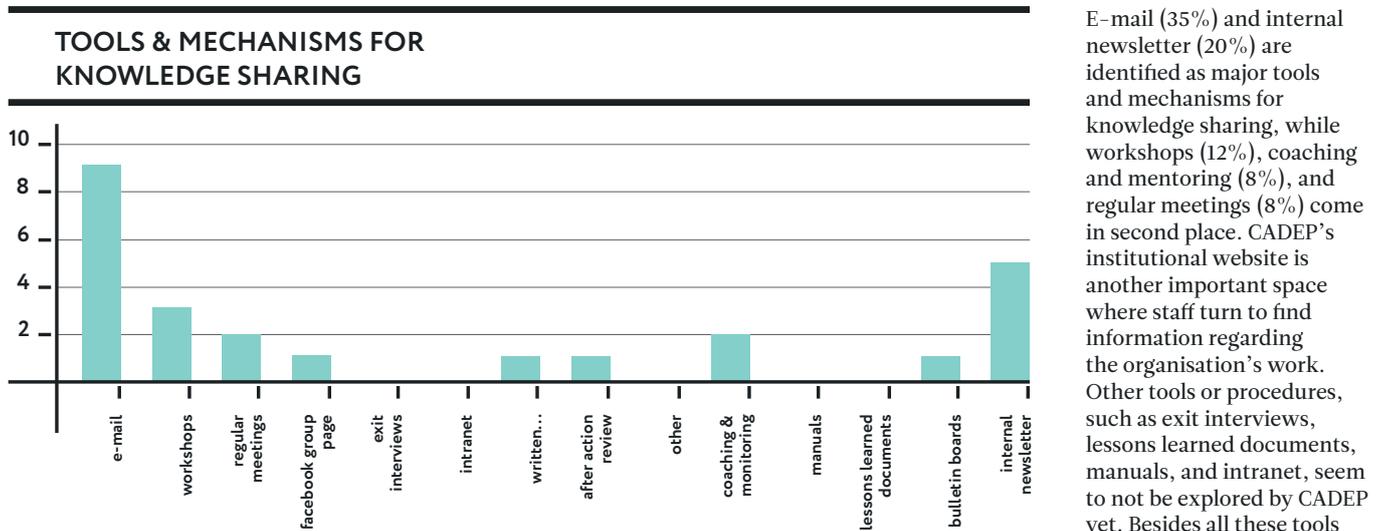
### Knowledge management

#### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Even though CADEP counts on different tools and mechanisms, it has not been able to consolidate a knowledge management system for its staff. They have invested in developing software to share institutional information, but it has not been successful: it was not user-friendly and became rapidly obsolete. The organisation has an informal idiosyncrasy when it comes to knowledge management: staff tends to choose informal and personal paths to access and share information. Members select different tools according to their knowledge and specific needs, with Google Drive and Dropbox used most frequently. Another fact that affects knowledge management is the high level of rotation of CADEP's staff, preventing the archival of information, resulting in it being lost when someone leaves the institution.

Even though CADEP does not have a formal knowledge management system or procedures, all the respondents believe that knowledge management is part of their daily work. 90% consider CADEP a learning organisation.

Respondents identify a broad spectrum of tools and mechanisms for sharing information with their colleagues.



E-mail (35%) and internal newsletter (20%) are identified as major tools and mechanisms for knowledge sharing, while workshops (12%), coaching and mentoring (8%), and regular meetings (8%) come in second place. CADEP's institutional website is another important space where staff turn to find information regarding the organisation's work. Other tools or procedures, such as exit interviews, lessons learned documents, manuals, and intranet, seem to not be explored by CADEP yet. Besides all these tools for sharing information, the majority of junior staff

believes that some duplication of effort takes place due to lack of communication and information sharing (80%). Moreover, finding historic information is "difficult", especially for senior staff (75%), who is supposed to have access to key organisational data given the time working at the institution.

All the respondents recognise that they have been trained, at least in some cases, to use some of the mechanisms and tools for sharing information. 90% of the respondents agree to the statement that the managers and others are co-operative and ready to help when asked to share information or advice. Even though cooperation amongst staff is recognised, 75% does not believe that rotation of members is actively encouraged in order to spread best practices and ideas.

As mentioned below, CADEP does not count on formal procedures or systems to share information. Staff chooses different tools and mechanisms according to their needs and preferences. The results of the survey show that there is room for improving this type of practices. More efforts are needed to share key organisational information, especially with junior members, and also to ensure that all staff have access to the information needed in a timely and friendly manner. This will not only ease staff's daily work, but it will also improve CADEP's performance in terms of research processes, external communication and decision making.

## Quality control

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: QUALITY CONTROL

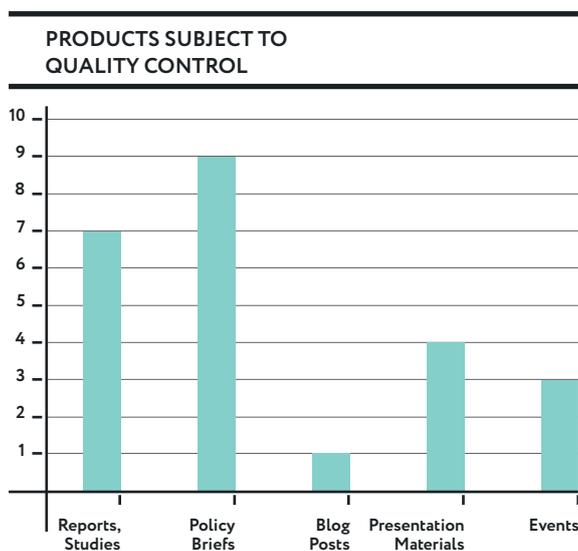
Throughout its history, CADEP has been committed to developing high quality products. At the start, quality control of publications took place amongst founding members, who would review each other’s productions, ranging from academic papers to press articles. As the organisation grew and got involved in more projects, the need to design new and less centralised quality control processes became evident. Unfortunately, CADEP has not yet been able to overcome the issue of centralised quality control processes: the Executive Director still reviews all the organisation’s productions, assessing their quality, relevance, grammar and tone.

Besides the issue of centralisation, quality control for publications is established as a simple process that does not imply several stages: the researcher produces the document and the two founding and active members review them. Only in cases where the document under review requires particular expertise, other specialised senior researchers are asked to review it.

Recently, CADEP participated in a peer review initiative promoted by the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) in Latin America. The idea behind this was to provide an opportunity for think tanks to send documents for review to their peer organisations, and likewise review their peer’s documents. Moreover, the TTI has allocated funds for CADEP to hire external reviewers.

Finally, the responsibility to ensure the quality of big events is shared between the communications team, the institutional development area, and the Executive Direction.

According to the respondents, policy briefs (37,5%), and reports and studies (29%) are the products that deserve more attention in terms of quality control. The Executive Director is recognised as the main person responsible for choosing reviewers for such products, followed by the Research Director.



Reviews are provided mainly in-house (66,5% of the answers), but for some products, such as policy briefs, respondents identified mixed mechanisms: both internal and external (35%). An important characteristic of the review processes is that feedback is delivered without a standard format (90% of the respondents affirm this), where the reviewer chooses the format he or she wants to use. While the majority of respondents (90%) consider that reviewers are paid for their work (65% believes reviewers are paid in a regular basis, while 33,5% believes it only takes place in specific situations), it is not clear how this takes place. Moreover, the reviews are provided through different stages of the research process (preliminary, design, draft and final), and all respondents consider feedback as beneficial for their work. Finally, there is no consensus on whether the organisation has a dispute resolution mechanism when a dispute arises between a researcher and a reviewer (only 65% affirm there is such mechanism in place).

The results of the quality control dimensions show that CADEP has several challenges ahead: formalise a more decentralised quality control process involving reviewers according to their expertise, thus alleviating the responsibility of the executive director in reviewing almost all the organisation’s production. Moreover, it is important to communicate the characteristics of this procedure, ensuring all staff become aware of the steps to be followed when it comes to the review of documents.

Re-shaping quality control processes will enable CADEP to improve its editorial production by setting high quality and design standards and will allow products to be ready in the least time possible with the best quality. Altogether, this will reflect a more professional image of the institution.

A final note on quality control of events reveals that though CADEP has organised lots of events, this product is not considered as one of the flagships of the organisation- publications are seen as the main products of CADEP’s work.

## Conclusions

The results of the survey helped identify organisational issues that deserve further attention by CADEP’s leaders. One key finding is the asymmetry of information between senior and junior staff regarding organisational process and procedures, being the former who gather the knowledge around them. This needs to be understood in the context of an organisation that has worked in a highly centralised way for almost twenty years. Decentralisation and formalisation of processes, a more participatory approach to decision making, and internal communication, represent the big challenges that the organisation needs to address in the short term.

A first step could be increasing CADEP's communication efforts to ensure that all staff has equal knowledge of the organisation's missions and vision and where they can access it, as well as which are the processes through which CADEP reflects on how its work is going. This will give the staff a better understanding of the environment in which they are working and will also strengthen the sense of belonging to the organisation.

Regarding fields for improvement, knowledge management and quality control processes appear as the key challenges ahead, while strategic planning and governance have been further developed with the support and promotion of the Think Tank initiative and the natural growth of the organisation.

When it comes to knowledge management and quality control processes, the survey shows a general consensus on the fact that there is room for improvement and upgrade. For instance, diversification of tools, mechanisms and procedures, along with clear responsibilities, will allow CADEP to better manage their daily work, save time and come up with a more solid production.

The good news is that CADEP is already experiencing a comprehensive institutional reform that involves not only the aforementioned efforts in terms of strategic planning and decentralisation of decision making, but also the revision of the organisation's business model in the search for sustainability. CADEP counts on the TTI's support to help promote self-reflection and carry out reforms to strengthen several organisational aspects.

Finally, when it comes to self assessment procedures, the strategic planning process seems a good practice, along with the utilisation of the Outcome Mapping Methodology to assess the organisations' performance. Some other isolated and project-based monitoring efforts also need to scale up to broader initiatives.

# Performance Self Assessments for Think Tanks

## Case Study: CEBRI

by Renata H. Dalaqua

### About CEBRI

The Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI) was created in 1998 by a group of diplomats, academics and entrepreneurs who identified the need for an independent, non-partisan international relations think tank in Brazil. The idea was to broaden the debate on foreign policy, which was restricted to governmental actors, and incorporate additional, more plural, voices in this discussion.

Since its origins, CEBRI has been dedicated to understanding Brazil's role in the globalised world. The centre conducts studies and promotes debates about Brazilian foreign policy and international relations in general. Its main outputs are publications (policy papers, research reports, and books) and events (closed-door meetings, round-tables, and seminars). CEBRI's activities are characterised by independence of thought and free discussion on the main issues concerning Brazil on the global stage. All written material produced by CEBRI is available for free at the organisation's website ([cebri.org](http://cebri.org)). Audio and video content stemming from CEBRI's events are increasingly made available online as well.

Over the past years, CEBRI's research agenda has been structured around the following themes: Climate and Energy; Democracy and Human Rights; Development and International Cooperation; International Insertion of Brazil; Integration and International Trade; International Politics; Security and Defense.

CEBRI's governance structure is defined in its bylaws and is comprised of the following bodies: Advisory Board; International Advisory Board; Board of Trustees; Executive Committee; and Fiscal Board. In addition to these external bodies, there is also the Executive Secretariat, which is comprised of CEBRI's staff. As of June 2015, CEBRI has eleven employees, four interns and one pro-bono Research Associate.

CEBRI is a non-governmental organisation, recognised by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice as a Civil Society Organisation of Public Interest (OSCIP). This certification allows its supporters to benefit from income tax deduction, as described in Brazilian Law no. 9.790/99.

The largest share of CEBRI's income comes from the annual contributions of the associate members. There are different categories of associate members, ranging from individuals to companies. The members' contribution represents roughly 70% of CEBRI's budget. The remaining 30% usually comes from partnerships with national and international foundations and associations. In the past couple of years, these resources have not been enough to cover all of CEBRI's costs. In view of this, the organisation is currently reviewing its funding strategies and considering new avenues for work, such as offering executive training programmes.

### CEBRI's experience with self assessment

Although CEBRI does not conduct comprehensive self assessment efforts on a regular basis, it does implement practices that help monitor the organisation's performance.

The number of events and publications produced are presented in the biannual report of activities, which is distributed to all of CEBRI's members. This report serves many purposes: it is an instrument of accountability to the donors, it showcases the organisation's work to potential new donors, and it keeps the institutional memory.

There is also spontaneous monitoring of social media, carried out by the communications team. Occasionally, a more systematic effort takes place within the scope of a given project, which may require reports with quantitative and qualitative data about media appearances and engagement campaigns on social media.

The communications team also monitors statistics related to CEBRI's website (number of visits, geographical reach, bounce rate, and average time spent on the website).

There is an external press officer responsible for CEBRI's relations with the media. This person keeps track of all media appearances and presents the numbers annually to the Board of Trustees.

Although measuring policy influence is a very difficult task, CEBRI's staff and governance bodies tend to consider the evaluations of the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index as indicators of impact. Typically, a member of staff summarises CEBRI's results and compares it with previous years. Based on these numbers, there might be a discussion or a written analysis trying to understand CEBRI's trajectory in the index.

Since CEBRI's first year, the external financial audit is carried out by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC). CEBRI's Fiscal Board is responsible for issuing opinions and formal statements on the reports of financial and accounting performance, as well as on the equity operations carried out by the centre. Other governance bodies also participate in this process, especially the Executive Committee. The financial audit is an opportunity to evaluate the previous year's financial result and to discuss the organisation's overall performance. It is also an important practice that ensures transparency and adds credibility to the centre's activities.

Most of these practices are not implemented as a way to measure performance, but rather because they are regarded as measures of good management and transparency. Nevertheless, some of these activities constitute legal requirements: in order to maintain its OSCIP status, CEBRI needs to report annually to the Ministry of Justice, sending information about its productivity as well as its financial statement.

## Methodology

The online questionnaire was circulated amongst CEBRI's staff in March 2015. All 11 members of staff participated, although not all of them answered all the questions. It was possible to identify that a couple of people dropped out in the final part of the survey. Additionally, there were very few comments in the open-ended questions.

The online questionnaire was complemented with two other research methods. On the one hand, interviews were conducted with the Executive Director and the financial administrative manager. On the other, desk research included the analysis of key organisational documents (statute, strategic plan, and annual reports) and online information (mainly, the website).

## Results of the assessment

### Strategic direction

#### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The first strategic plan was conceived by a group of CEBRI's trustees in 2011, to be implemented in 2012-2013. The purpose of this plan was to "find ways to increase the effectiveness, to better meet the stated goals and to present the complexity of operations and the challenges facing the organisation in the current context."

The plan defines CEBRI's mission and values in the following manner:

**Mission:** to develop knowledge and promote discussion on topics that contribute to the better understanding of the interests of Brazilian society in the international system, offering proposals for the definition of public policies.

**Values:** Freedom, Democratic State, Independence, Sustainable Development, Social Justice and Environmental Responsibility, and Standard of Excellency.

The 2011 plan included a SWOT analysis of the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It also proposed a new structure for the organisation, rearranging staff functions and creating new positions.

In practice, the plan gave a clear guidance on the priorities of the research agenda. In a similar way, the document served as a motivation for new research efforts. These were definitely positive outcomes, although it was not possible to implement all that was proposed in the plan.

Monitoring of the plan's implementation was restricted to the Executive Committee, without much involvement from the larger group in the Executive Secretariat.

In 2014, the Executive Committee updated the plan for the 2014-2015 period. The mission and values remained mostly the same, excluding Environmental Responsibility. The scenario analysis was adjusted to incorporate new trends. This updated plan also included an analysis of the operations in 2013. Some sections of the previous version remained in the plan, such as the intention to restructure the organisation.

#### VISION/MISSION

On most publications issued by CEBRI, as well as on the institutional website, the objectives of the organisation are stated clearly.

In the introduction of the biannual report of activities, there is a message from the President of the Board of Trustees, in which he addresses CEBRI's mission aligned to the strategic plans.

There is no mention of the organisation's vision in any document.

The results of the survey show that people are confident of the mission of the organisation and the role it plays in their work. The majority (over 80%) agrees that the mission is clearly articulated. The main tools for communicating the mission are considered to be strategic documents and online tools (Intranet, webpage, group mail), followed by formal meetings.

All respondents believe that the mission expresses the organisation's core values. Again, all people consider that the mission is taken into account in the definition of the research agenda and in the establishment of partnerships.

The majority considers that the mission is specific and orients and guides staff and top management in their daily work.

Regarding the strategic plan, responses were divided and it was possible to detect a degree of confusion. The survey showed that not everybody is aware of the existence of a strategic plan: almost one third of the respondents did not know about it.

The ones that knew about the strategic plan were confused about its duration: 50% stated that it was an annual plan and 50% said it was a multiannual plan.

Regarding the implementation of the plan, there is no consensus: 60% agree that it is monitored by the organisation, while 40% disagree.

Respondents included suggestions to improve the organisation's strategic direction/planning, such as: including the staff in the process of strategic planning and a greater emphasis on implementing and reviewing the strategic plan.

## The role of the Boards

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: THE ROLE OF THE BOARDS

CEBRI's governance structure is composed of five external bodies, described below. Although the functions of these bodies are defined in CEBRI's bylaws, their roles vary depending on the institutional context.

It should be noted that all these positions are unpaid.

**The Board of Trustees** is responsible for defining the lines of action and overseeing the centre's activities. The members of this Board are tasked with ratifying the annual research agenda, seeking additional resources from donations or contributions, regulating the admission of new associate members, and proposing modifications to the Statute. Its members are elected every two years on the General Assembly, where re-election is common. The Board holds two official meetings per year, along with a monthly informal lunch held on the first Monday of the month at CEBRI's office. At present, this Board has 33 members (31 men, 2 women).

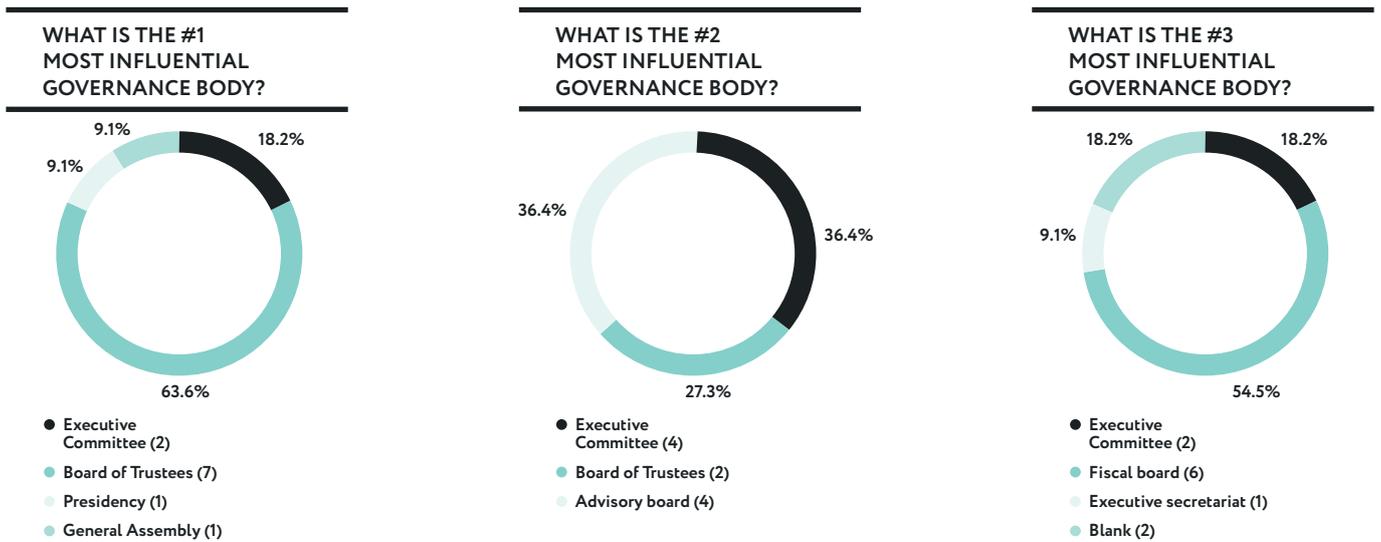
**The Executive Committee** ensures the smooth functioning of the centre. This body makes decisions concerning the daily running of the organisation, such as staff and partnerships management, research proposals, and activities that might represent expenses or revenues. The Committee is comprised of the President and one or more Vice-presidents, from the Board of Trustees. Furthermore, the President can appoint two more members from the Board of Trustees to be part of the Executive Committee. The Executive Director also partakes in the Committee as a representative of the Executive Secretariat. At present, this Committee has 4 members (all men).

**The Advisory Board** is composed of the associate member companies, which nominate a representative to the Board. The members meet once a year on the annual General Assembly. This Board elects the members for the Board of Trustees, deliberates over the administrative accounts and the financial documents, oversees the observance of the centre's statute and, if needed, reforms the statute. At present, this Board has 33 members (28 men and 4 women).

**The International Advisory Board** includes foreigners with reputable knowledge about international relations who are interested in Brazilian foreign policy. This Board is expected to propose actions to improve CEBRI's operations, support the centre's initiatives, and comment the Board of Trustees' proposals. Its members are proposed by the Board of Trustees and elected on the General Assembly. They have a renewable three-year mandate. At present, this Board is comprised of five people (2 men, 3 women). This Board is not very active, but there are plans to review its structure to increase its contribution.

**The Fiscal Board** is responsible for issuing opinions and formal statements on the reports of the financial audit that are presented during the annual General Assembly. It is composed of three active members and three substitute members, who are appointed by the Board of Trustees and elected every two years on the General Assembly, where re-election is possible and very common. At present, this Board is comprised of 3 people (2 men, 1 woman).

When asked to name and rank three of CEBRI's governance bodies in order of strategic importance, most of the respondents considered the Board of Trustees to be number one. The Executive Committee was also listed in this position, but it was mainly regarded as number 2, tied with the Advisory Board. Most people considered the Fiscal Board to be the third most influential governance body of the organisation.



While the main responses for numbers 1 and 2 are aligned with the reality of the organisation, the nomination of the Fiscal Board as the third most influential body in terms of strategic importance is quite surprising, as this board is mainly concerned with past performance and does not have a strategic role.

In this complex governance system, people seem to pay most attention to the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee. The majority (70%) of respondents believes that these are the two Boards whose decisions affect their daily work.

In the comments, it was mentioned that some members of the Boards of Trustees are not really engaged in the organisation’s work and that the Advisory Board members do not participate much. It was also suggested that the Executive Committee should consult more with staff and the Board of Trustees.

### Knowledge management

#### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Through the years, CEBRI has put in place an adequate infrastructure for knowledge management. This has been a successful project, as the centre now has a reliable internal server, regular back-up procedures, and timely technical assistance. All these services are provided by a specialised IT company.

CEBRI follows a simple and clear system to organise folders and files. All files are stored in the internal server, in folders organised by name of activities and people. With rare exceptions (mainly financial data), most of the information stored in the server is available to all employees.

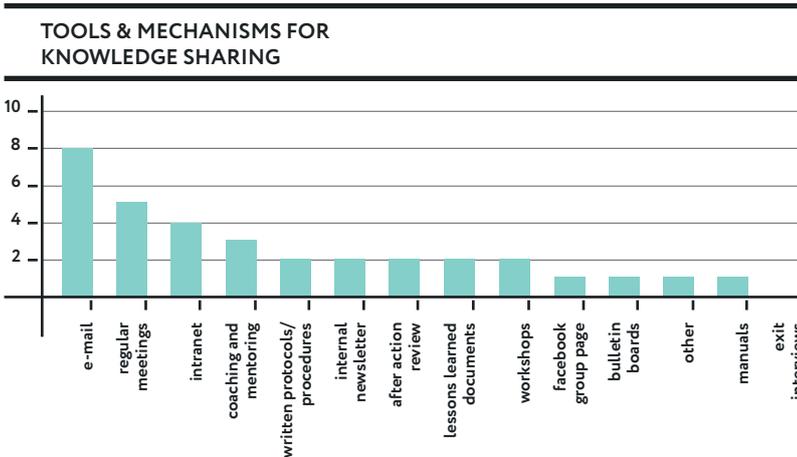
The server hosts all data from 2005 to today. It also contains documents prior to 2005, but not in an easily accessible way. Digital folders are kept after the person in charge of the folder leaves the organisation, which makes it possible to recover important documents, avoid duplication of efforts, and keep the institutional memory.

Most of the time, knowledge exchange takes place in personal interactions and face-to-face meetings. There are few occasions for formal training inside the organisation, but people are helpful and take the time needed to train new members. There is no formal definition of what constitutes the induction process nor established procedures that should be followed when someone joins the organisation. The information is usually exchanged amongst peers during team meetings or bilateral exchanges.

There have been occasions when staff members were allowed to take time from work to undertake a specific course outside of the office. There are no formal requirements to share knowledge gained, but back-to-office reports are encouraged as good practice.

The survey showed that the most used tool for knowledge sharing is email, followed by regular meetings and intranet. As CEBRI does not have intranet, it is possible that the internal server was mistaken by some as intranet.

Despite the many tools available for knowledge sharing, some of the respondents do not consider that they have been trained to use all of them. In fact, roughly one third acknowledged being trained to use all of the tools indicated above, which is the same share of people who reported no training opportunity at all. The rest of respondents, almost half of the total, said they received partial training.



Overall, the results indicate a pattern of cooperation amongst colleagues, despite the lack of formalised procedures for knowledge sharing. Everybody agreed that colleagues are co-operative and helpful when asked to share information or advice. In a similar manner, most people agreed with the statement: “Our organisation is a learning organisation.”

The internal system seems to be working well, as most people considered that it is “very easy” and “easy” to find information about previous activities.

## Quality control

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: QUALITY CONTROL

CEBRI is an institution committed to maintain a standard of excellence in its activities, be it research or events. It has varying practices to ensure the quality of its products. Review processes can take many shapes, depending on factors including the amount of time and financial resources available.

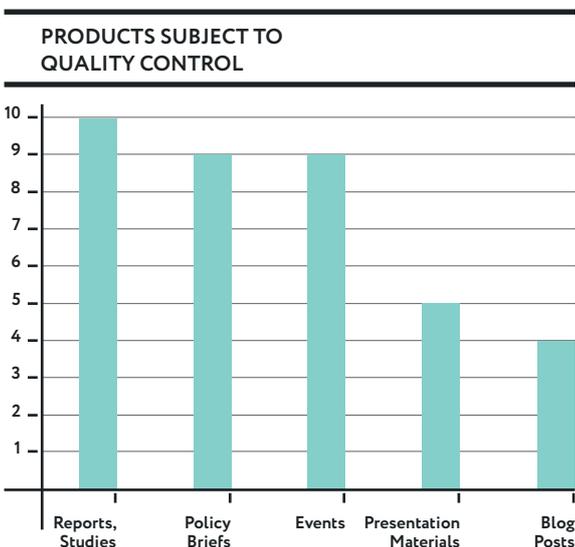
Internal reviews and discussions are common practice. External reviews also take place, but they are less frequent and dependent on the availability of time and financial resources. Studies and research reports are two of the products which are most often subjected to external review, usually at draft stage. Reputation and knowledge on the issues at stake are the main criteria used when selecting an external reviewer, who is often paid for his/her work. There is not an specific review form to be filled out by an internal or external reviewer.

To guide the preparation of events, the organisation developed checklists that vary in accordance with the size of the event. There is no formal evaluation of events, but they are discussed and assessed informally by staff. Occasionally, a participant writes an email providing feedback about a given event or someone who is close to the organisation (partner institutions, associate members, etc.) spontaneously comments about it.

The responsibility to ensure the quality of publications and the events is shared by the Executive Director and the coordinator in charge of the product. Additionally, the events and the communications teams are usually involved in quality control, especially regarding the visual aspects of papers, presentations and events.

There are no formal dispute resolution mechanisms in place. Compromises are often achieved through dialogue. The final decision is usually made by those ultimately responsible for the products.

According to the survey, the products that are more often subjected to quality control are: reports, studies, policy briefs, and events.



### Publications

Regarding publications (reports, studies, policy briefs), the survey indicated that reviewers are often chosen and appointed by the Executive Director and the coordinator in charge of the project.

Respondents acknowledged the existence of internal and external review processes. They noted that the reviews are not always provided through written feedback and the reviewers are not always are paid for their work. It is likely that these answers refer to the cases of internal reviews.

The survey indicated that, most of the time, the reviews are provided at the draft and final stages of the research.

There were divided answers about whether or not the organisation has a dispute resolution mechanism in place. These contradictory reactions are probably related to different understandings of what a “dispute resolution mechanism” is. It is reasonable to assume that the positive answers considered dialogue between the parties as a resolution mechanism, since this is the usual way problems are solved at CEBRI. In this dialogue, the opinions of the Executive Director and of the coordinator in charge of the publication tend to play important parts, since they are ultimately responsible for the quality of the products.

The large majority of respondents considers the feedback received beneficial for future work.

### Events

The survey showed that events are usually evaluated by the team organising the event and the participants (including staff attending the event). Similarly to the case of publications, there is no particular template / form for giving feedback.

In the section designated to indicate best practices, one respondent added that the organisation also monitors references to the event in the media in the days following the event.

## Conclusions

Through this case study, it was possible to gain knowledge about how CEBRI works, its main objectives, and some aspects of the dynamics within the organisation.

Regarding the strategic direction, it became clear that staff is aware of the organisation’s mission and takes it into account in their daily work. The strategic plan, on the other hand, is not really considered by staff in their tasks, as the survey revealed that half of the employees do not even know about it. This communication problem is also connected to the lack of structured monitoring efforts related to the strategic plan. One of the suggestions from this study is that the organisation should put more emphasis in communicating, implementing and monitoring the strategic plan. This should be done in a way that engages staff members, so they can contribute to the plan and connect the strategic goals to their everyday work.

As was demonstrated before, CEBRI has many governance bodies, but not all of them are currently active. Such is the case of the International Advisory Board. The staff seems to have a broad understating of the governance system, but not everybody is aware of the roles of each body. Generally, people tend to pay attention to the Executive Committee and the Board of Trustees, which are perceived as the most important structures and the ones where decisions affect the daily work of the organisation.

It was possible to see that CEBRI has a good infrastructure for knowledge management (internal server, regular backups, clear system of folders), which makes it easy to find information about past activities and ongoing projects. Nevertheless, the culture of knowledge sharing could be strengthened, as there are no structured processes to ensure that information is shared on a regular basis. One of the reasons for this is that people are usually busy completing their tasks and do not think they can “afford” to take the time to share information about the current state of their projects. It is often the case that only when something goes wrong because of lack of information/communication people perceive the real value of knowledge management.

This study showed that quality control works well in CEBRI, even though review processes vary greatly. Most of the publications are authored by an expert and are supposed to represent the opinion of that person, not of the organisation. This is one aspect that makes quality control more dynamic. The centre counts with a qualified events team and written checklists to guide the planning of events. Since it is a small organisation, CEBRI employs practices of quality control that are based on face-to-face interactions and dialogue.

### Selected area for improvement:

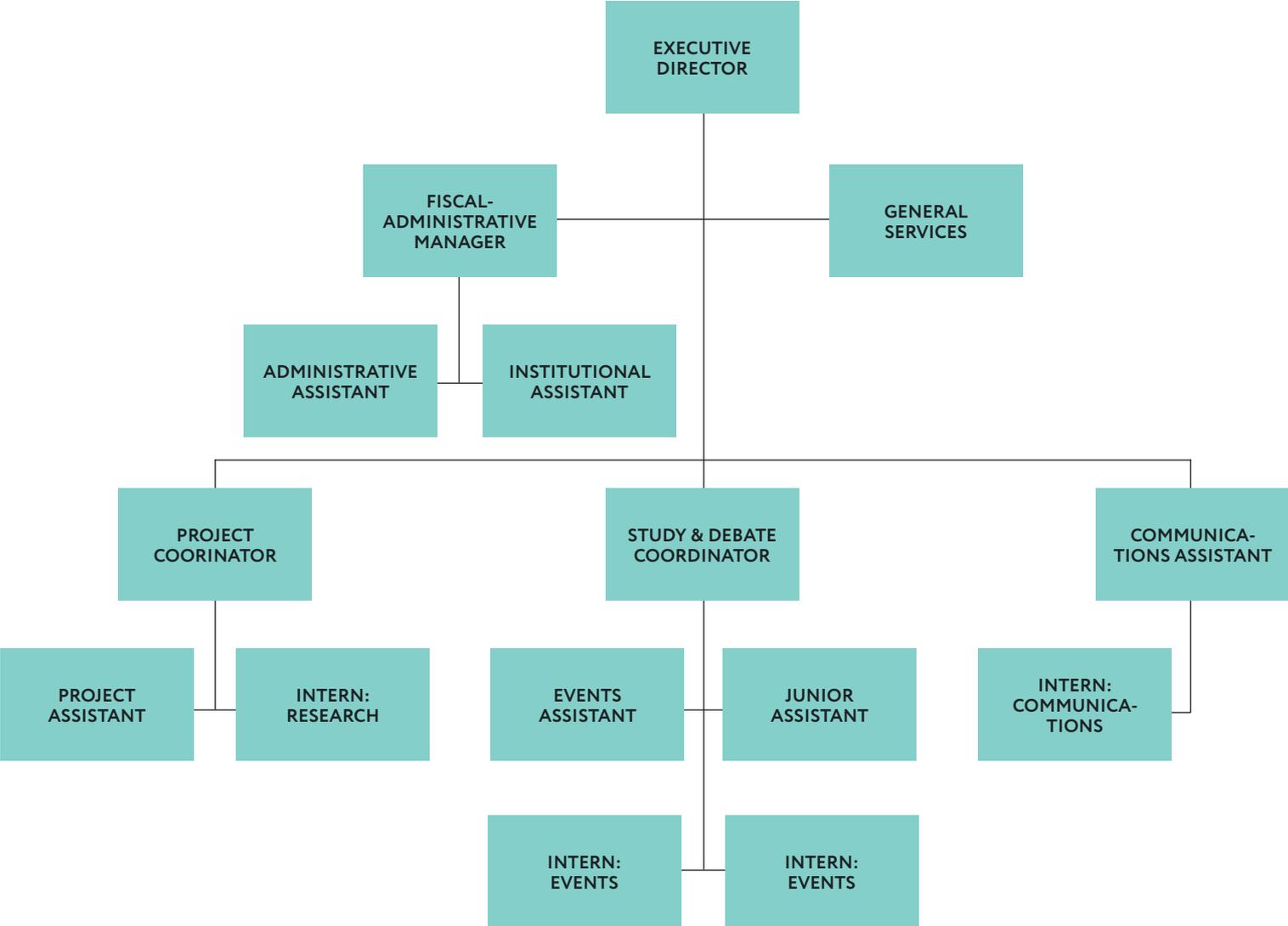
Strategic plan

### Best practice from CEBRI:

Knowledge management/ digital filing system.



Figure 1 - Organogram CEBRI 2015



# Performance Self Assessments for Think Tanks

## Case Study: EPRC

by Irine Guruli

### About EPRC

Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) is an independent, non-governmental organisation registered in Tbilisi, Georgia on November 4, 2002. EPRC is dedicated to multidisciplinary research on economic and social policies in Georgia, with an aim to provide neutral, professional, evidence-based policy advice and guidance. The centre has gained a reputation for producing materials that are balanced, authoritative, accessible to laypersons, and for being responsive to issues the country faces. Its analytical and monitoring outputs have been used to enrich the policymaking process, and to empower NGOs and the media for effective advocacy and other civic action.

EPRC is not a purely academic think tank nor a consultancy organisation. It provides high quality analysis while reaching audiences outside the narrow circles of decision-makers and academics, advocating for policy solutions. EPRC's expertise lies in economic, financial, and social policies related to and affecting poverty alleviation, equitable economic development, and national security. EPRC is engaged in the following activities meant to make an impact in the targeted areas of policymaking:

- Produce and disseminate high-quality policy papers, periodicals such as Georgia's Economic Outlook and the Issue in Focus, policy briefs, and analytic blog posts;
- Support capacity building in relevant public, private, and non-governmental institutions and political parties through trainings and consultancy;
- Conduct civil oversight of the major government programmes and public expenditures;
- Raise awareness of critical economic, financial, and social policy issues and advocate for recommended solutions targeting relevant decision-makers, media representatives, youth groups, wider public, and/or other target groups; and
- Introduce innovative IT solutions in monitoring advocacy campaigns to better reach the computer literate part of society and improve access to information by introducing the most up-to-date data visualisation methods.

**EPRC's core mission** is to contribute to Georgia's economic development and poverty reduction by providing expertise and recommendations to all stakeholders in the country, and by empowering Georgian society through easing access to information. In the medium-term future EPRC aims to become a leading economic think and do tank in Georgia and one of the reputable and widely recognised analytic institutes in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

The centre relies on funding from major international donor organisations operating in Georgia. Its major funders are USAID, Open Society Foundations Georgia (OSGF), US Embassy in Georgia, EU, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia. EPRC has received a two year institutional support grant from the Think Tank Fund (TTF), and is now starting another two year organisational development grant from the same donor.

The organisation's payroll system is project based. Currently, the organisation has 12 staff members (3 of them are administrative). Researchers or experts are hired on contractual basis when necessary. EPRC has an honorary president who does not directly engage in managerial issues, but rather serves as an advisory figure. The Executive Director is the head of the organisation, with three programme managers in charge of each of the areas of EPRC's activities. Working jointly with the deputy director and the finance manager, the Executive Director is responsible for strategic organisational development, fundraising, and oversight of programme implementation. Programme managers work with and supervise coordinators, junior staff (research associates) and other temporary staff recruited according to the needs and terms of reference of individual projects. Due to the small number of core staff members, functions are not clearly defined and much depends on the flexibility and dedication of staff. This means that functions may vary across people and projects, depending on the need of the ongoing assignment. Staff is aware of each other's work, which allows allocations of different views and opinions. In the short and medium terms, EPRC has a loose organisational structure. This is as an advantage for the organisation in terms of flexibility in the decision making process, although it might also be viewed as a constraint since much is dependent on staff motivation.

### EPRC's experience in self assessment

EPRC does not have a formal self assessment system for organisational development aspects. Only recently, EPRC prepared a formal Human Resources Management policy and included staff appraisal and assessment documents in it. Starting this year, EPRC plans to start enforcing staff retention and motivation practices, making it part of the organisational culture. These motivation practices can vary from conference attendance, to inclusion of good performers in more projects which will reflect in their remuneration as well. The staff appraisal forms will be filled and face to face interviews will be conducted once a year by an employee's direct supervisor. The Executive Director will appraise the deputy director, the financial manager, along with three more managers. Programmatic Managers will appraise programme

coordinators, senior analysts, and other junior staff. The appraisal forms and the in-depth interviews will enable the management to correctly assess staff and plan future training and qualification courses. In order to expand the system and make it full-fledged, EPRC plans to give junior staff an opportunity to assess seniors and peers.

The types of self-assessment that EPRC has done before include post-event reviews and post-training assessment forms. These forms were completed by participants or attendees and they have helped staff improve various aspects of performance. As an informal practice, EPRC's Executive Director and programme managers constantly go through each other's media commentaries and advise each other on the issues to improve upon.

Self assessment is intertwined with monitoring and evaluation practices in the organisation. Programmatic and organisational performance is sometimes hard to distinguish. The organisation pays far more attention to assessing the success of an individual project, rather than focusing on the organisation as a whole. However, success of individual projects make up the overall success of the organisation. The process is as follows: each project has policy influence goals, as well as expected long and mid-term outcomes, outputs and indicators for measuring its success. Indicators might include the following: Quality of research and recommendations provided; validity and diversification of sources used in the research; number of participants in the expert panel; number of media appearances, articles and blogs; number of presentation participants; reactions and level of cooperation from policymakers.

Junior researchers are responsible for collecting the necessary data according to the pre-set indicators, while the programme manager is in charge of writing the evaluation report of the project and share it with the entire organisation.

## Methodology

The online questionnaire was run at EPRC during the last two weeks of February 2015. In total we received answers from 11 out of 12 staff members (response rate: 91%). The questionnaire was not filled out by an IT specialist/web administrator. 6 of the respondents have been working for the organisation for three or more years, while 5 of them under or up to a year. The major challenge was getting staff to fill out the open ended questions. As for the second research method – in-depth, face to face interviews with the top management at EPRC were conducted (these included interviews with the Executive Director and her deputy on organisational development and fundraising issues). All questions were identical and touched upon the four thematic issues. Desk research at the organisation was conducted by Research Programme Manager Irine Guruli, and included a careful study of the organisational documentation, statute and website.

## Results of the assessment

### Strategic Direction

#### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

EPRC has a medium term institutional strategy (2014-2018). It was written in 2013 as a formal strategic document. This document is the groundwork, identifying major objectives and challenges during the four year span.

The Strategic Development Plan has three parts:

1. **Situational analysis:** this includes the assessment of EPRC's external environment including socio-political and economic situation, donor landscape, and a brief overview of EPRC's major competitors and allies in the civil society. The internal assessment looks at EPRC's competitive advantage on the civil society "market", as well as its disadvantages compared to others.
2. **Strategic Plan:** outlines EPRC vision and mission, its key principles and values, and key objectives in the short and medium term future.
3. **Action Plan:** the last and the largest part of the document, which covers EPRC's major challenges and the strategies to overcome them. These challenges include institutional building, fundraising and financial sustainability, outreach strategy and international partnerships, improvement of the quality of research and analysis, and meeting the needs of the human resources. The Action Plan is closely monitored, while the strategic document serves as a guideline for action.

#### Vision

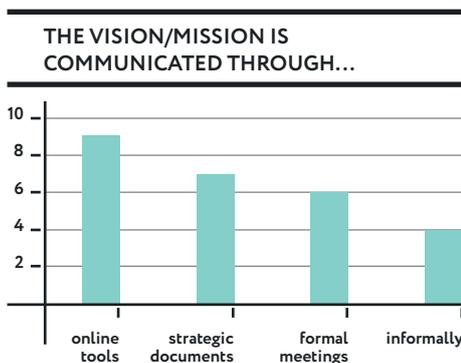
By 2018, EPRC wants to be established as a leading economic think and do tank in Georgia, and as a reputable and widely recognised analytic institutes in the South Caucasus and Easter Europe. EPRC strives to make change and influence economic and fiscal policies in Georgia, and educate the wider public on critical socio-economic issues.

#### Mission

EPRC's core mission is to contribute to Georgia's economic development and poverty reduction by providing expertise and recommendations to all stakeholders in the country, and by empowering Georgian society by facilitating access to information.

EPRC's vision and mission are communicated to newcomers through formal introductory meetings. The mission is also communicated through its website.

Everyone interviewed believes that the vision and mission of the organisation is clearly articulated. When it comes to communicating it, the most popular choice was that it is mainly disseminated through online tools, namely the webpage. The EPRC's vision/mission statements are available on the homepage of the site ([www.eprc.ge](http://www.eprc.ge)). Seven respondents said that the organisational vision/mission is communicated through the formal strategic document, while six respondents identified formal meetings as the main source of communication. Everyone agrees that the vision/mission statements express the organisation's core values. The majority of respondents also agrees with the statement that they are specific enough to orient and guide staff and top management in their daily work. Similarly, the majority believes that these statements are important when shaping the organisational research agenda and partnerships. All staff are aware of the existence of the strategic plan, however one junior member considers that it is an informal one rather than a formal, written strategy. This means that the organisation needs to work a little bit harder to ensure that all staff have equal knowledge of the organisational development documentations that are in place.



When it comes to the question of whether or not the organisation is monitoring the implementation of the plan, respondents are not that sure, and only partially agree to this statement. The organisation needs to carefully monitor and evaluate undertaken activities and benchmark them against the objectives and plan stated in the strategic document.

One of the respondents highlights the importance of engaging all staff in the review of the strategic plan, since often interesting initiatives could be coming from new employees or junior staff. In line with this, the respondent suggests holding meetings every quarter or bi-annually to assess implemented activities and projects against the objectives of the plan.

## The role of the Board

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

According to the organisational statute, the founders of the organisation constitute the Governing Board. This Board is composed of 4 individuals and an honorary President, and is responsible for the financial and strategic oversight of the organisation. The members meet once a year to ensure the organisation's fiscal integrity and that the organisation stays true to its mission. The board members do not get remuneration for the work they conduct.

A year ago, the organisation started to establish an Advisory Board composed of thoughtful and prestigious individuals to provide guidance and advice on different aspects of organisational development. At present, EPRC has preliminary written commitments from 7 individuals to be members of this Board. Each of them will be responsible for a particular field of organisational development: international visibility and fundraising, management, consulting, training, research methodology and quality control issues, research and programmatic directions.

EPRC will prepare the policy and procedures document for the Advisory Board, determining selection practices, membership duration, and rotation policy. The formalisation of the board structure and its implementation will begin this year.

Even though the advisory board is not formally functioning yet, most of the respondents have named both Boards: the Governance Board and the Advisory Board. The minutes of the Governance Board's annual meeting are available at the organisation (circulated via e-mail and also in hard copy). However, the respondents only sometimes take the time to read and get acquainted with this documentation. It is noteworthy, that notwithstanding the fact that the Governance Board is a formality and does not have an active role in managerial issues, all of the respondents state that the organisation would significantly change if this Board were to be disbanded and, moreover, that the decisions of the Board affect their daily work. This indicates the need to have a defined checks and balances system within an organisation. In contrast, when it comes to describing the Advisory Board, respondents were not so sure of its significance for the organisation, nor that its functions affect the daily management of the organisation. This might be explained by the fact that the Advisory Board is not yet functioning at its full potential, and its benefits are not tangible yet.

## Knowledge management

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

EPRC began taking important steps towards improving its knowledge management system recently. Currently, information exchange takes place mainly via e-mail exchanges or on the Google Drive platform. Main information is

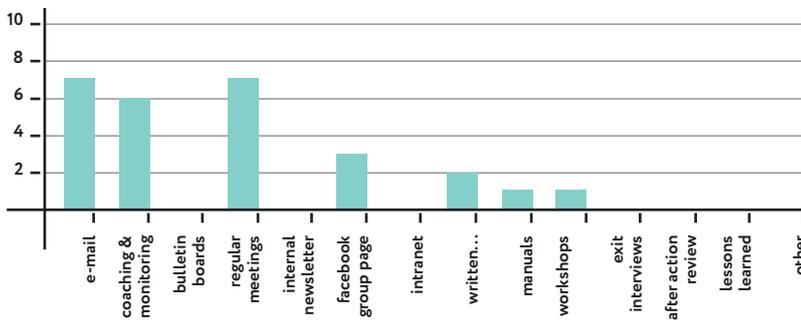
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gathered in managers’ computers, and they create separate folders for each project. The organisation does not have a unified system of naming and filing documentation. The most pressing issue is to create an intranet and hold an internal meeting to require staff share their documents and file them accordingly on the shared drive. The plan is to hold an internal meeting to highlight the benefits of filing documents on the shared drive, such as minimizing time spent searching for historic data. EPRC currently has five to six projects running simultaneously, which makes it quite a challenge to keep all staff informed on the developments of each ongoing project.

Managers are usually responsible for familiarising new members with organisational documentation, ongoing projects, etc. They dedicate a significant amount of time to mentor junior staff.

**TOOLS & MECHANISMS FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING**



The fact that respondents believe that knowledge management and organisational learning are part of their daily work is a good indicator. There is general agreement to the statement that *EPRC is a learning organisation*. However, the survey results show definite areas for improvement.

E-mail and regular meetings were identified as major tools and mechanisms for knowledge sharing, while coaching and mentoring are a second popular choice. The graph on knowledge sharing tools and mechanisms indicates that a wide range of tools are yet to be explored and implemented. This leaves room for sharing experiences with other think tanks and applying some of the tools from our peers.

The survey showed that it is important to provide training on the available tools to junior members more actively. At the same time, the majority of respondents agree to the statement that the managers and others are co-operative and ready to help when asked to share information. However, they should also work proactively and take initiative rather than wait for junior members to turn to them for help.

Finding historic information is “easy” however there is room for additional efforts in this area. As mentioned, the organisation lacks unified naming and filing procedures for simplifying search for historic information. With the organisation being more than twelve years old, a large volume of information has been accumulated. This effort needs more human resources to systematise the data.

**Quality control**

**DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: QUALITY CONTROL**

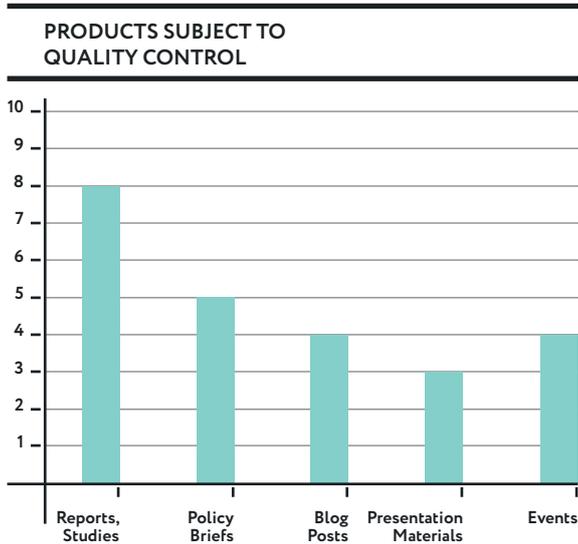
EPRC strives to maintain high quality of all analytic products signed under the organisation’s name. To keep the credibility of the organisation’s reports and recommendations, EPRC employs strong international quality control procedures. First and foremost, EPRC is committed to hire and retain highly capable staff members, which is one of the best methods to ensure high-quality work. Factors that allow for staff retention include project-based payments, visibility in the media, and flexible working hours. All staff is involved to ensure the data presented is accurate and that recommendations provided are based on solid grounds and are well argued. EPRC’s goal is to produce diverse written material- full scale reports, policy briefs, policy papers and blogs- targeted to different audiences. When it comes to quality control, special attention is paid to full-scale reports, as they are a major deliverable. The process is coordinated in the following way: the paper is circulated amongst senior staff first, and then amongst junior staff for additional proofreading. To streamline the process, the document is either uploaded to the Google drive or senior staff takes turns reviewing the paper. There is not an official template for reviews, in an effort to give reviewers freedom to shape their feedback based on the specifics of the paper. Quality control is carried out once the report is close to finished. The review is done for last control, verification and revisions.

Depending on the research topic, reports are often circulated amongst external reviewers who are experts in particular fields. These reviews are mostly done on a voluntary basis, thanks to the personal relationships that exist. However, the fact that reviewers are not paid is sometimes a shortcoming. If they are paid, the reviewers respond more responsibly. Reviews of blog posts, presentation materials, and policy briefs are always done in-house.

To ensure the high quality of events and trainings held, EPRC asks participants to fill out feedback forms. The forms let participants rank the event/training according to different aspects. These forms are later collected and aggregated by junior staff.

When looking at the responses, the most interesting point is that even though events are subject to quality control mechanisms, it was named as a product that is not subject to quality review process. After an event, feedback forms are sometimes used for assessment. However, the process is mostly based on internal assessment, where staff makes a decision to change some aspects of an event in the future to improve it based on experience from previous events.

Another interesting find in the survey answers was: evaluators are often free to use a template to provide feedback, but the majority of respondents stated that they do have a feedback form. In this particular field, the answers between junior and senior staff members varied significantly. It seems that junior members are less aware of the quality control procedures that are in place at EPRC. In all of the other fields, the information availability to junior and senior staff is not significantly different.



The issue of appointing reviewers and having a dispute resolution mechanism between a researcher and a reviewer shows controversial results. While there is no formal dispute resolution mechanism at the organisation and if such issues arise they are solved on a case by case basis, respondents think that a dispute resolution mechanism exists and is used.

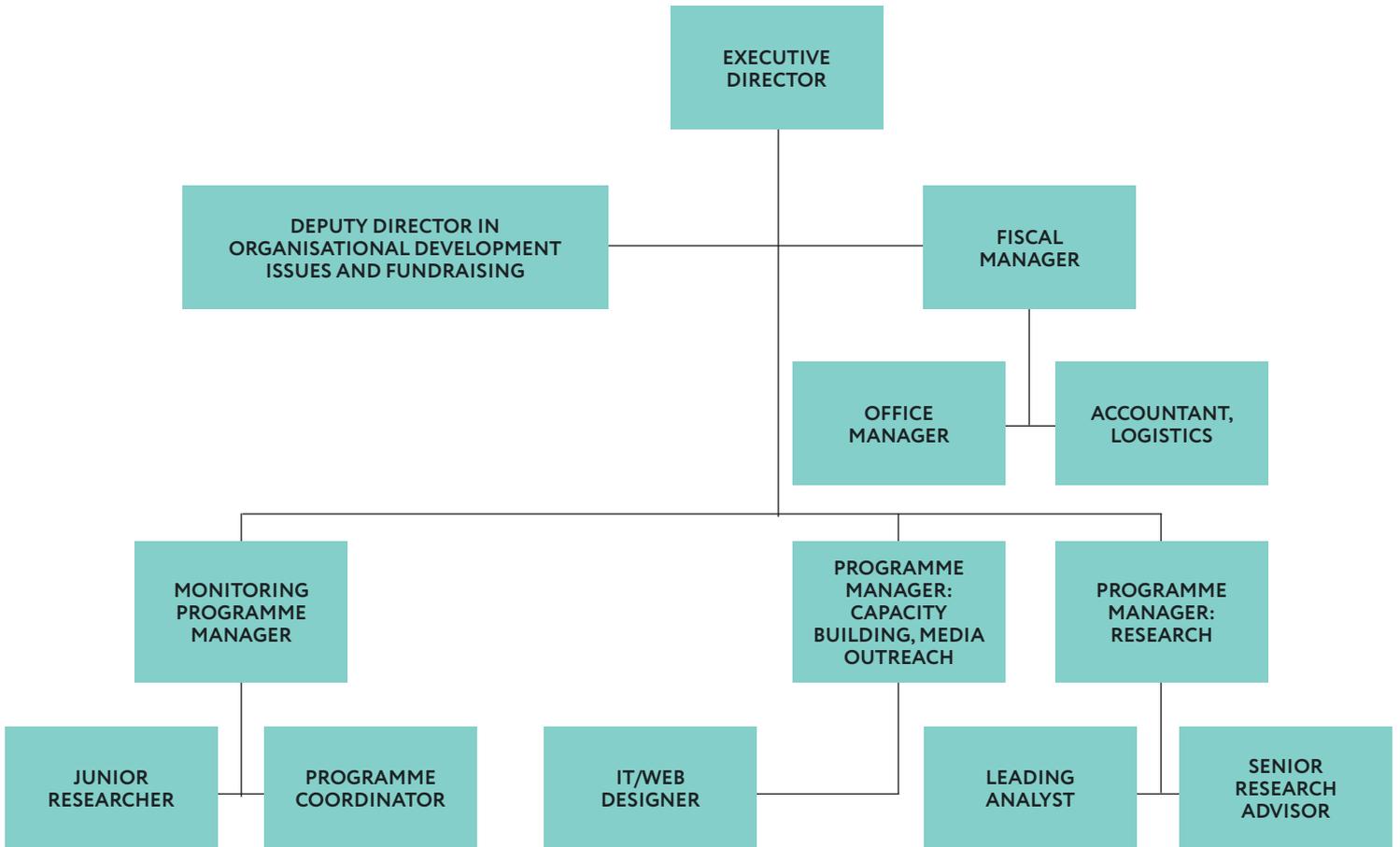
## Conclusions

The results of the survey were beneficial to detect the problematic aspects as well as strengths in the organisational processes at EPRC. It helped identify the fields that need further attention. The most important finding was that there is an information asymmetry in the organisation; senior staff is more informed about the organisational processes and procedures than junior staff, who are unsure about some aspects. Another important finding was that the knowledge management field needs further attention, and there are a number of tools and mechanisms that are yet to be implemented at EPRC. The application of these tools will foster better accumulation of organisational knowledge and save staff’s time when trying to access to historic data. The survey highlighted the need for better execution along with consistent and participatory monitoring of the strategic development plan. There is a demand from employees to track the implementation of pre-set objectives and review it every half a year, along with better engagement from junior staff. Additional information should be provided to staff regarding the newly formed Advisory Board, its functions, and importance.

### EPRC’S appointment for good practice

The International Advisory Board, where each member responsible for an specific field of organisational development.

Figure 1 - Organogram EPRC



# Performance Self Assessments for Think Tanks

## Case Study: Grupo FARO

by Adriana Arellano

### About Grupo FARO

Grupo FARO (Fundación para el Avance de las Reformas y Oportunidades) is an Ecuadorian independent, non-partisan, plural, and secular think-and-do tank, founded as a civil society organisation in 2004. The organisation was born in a fragmented context, where Ecuador's democracy had had seven presidents in eight years, there was a decreasing credibility on political parties and public institutions, and a widespread lack of evidence-based policies.

The organisation was born as an independent space to support the capacities of the State, the civil society, and the private sector to develop better public policies. Grupo FARO's theory of change proposes 3 key elements to overcome fragmentation and promote informed dialogue and collective action: research, to produce evidence and public policy-applied knowledge; capacity development, to strengthen the capacities for dialogue and use of evidence from actors in the public sphere; and policy influence, to translate evidence into policies, present it to policymakers and promote policy implementation.

Throughout its first ten years, the organisation has established itself as a main actor in the analysis and discussion around transparency and citizen participation. Key areas in which Grupo FARO has worked include: education policy and citizen participation in the monitoring of policies of the sector, budget monitoring for the health sector, governance and transparency of extractive industries, forest and environmental monitoring, the development of capacities of local governments, civil society organisations, amongst others.

Grupo FARO is organised in strategic and programmatic areas. The strategic areas are: research and knowledge management, communications and policy influence, administration and finance, and monitoring and evaluation. The programmatic areas are: extractive industries, capacity development, as active programmes, education, health, knowledge society, and environment and society.

The organisation is funded by international donors and cooperation organisations. To maintain its independence, Grupo FARO enforces an internal policy that limits the amount each donor can contribute to a maximum of 30 percent of the institutional budget.

Since its inception, Grupo FARO has promoted informed dialogue and collective action. In 2009, the organisation focused on the formation of a collective of civil society organisations to generate evidence and work together to strengthen the sector, which was operating on a restrictive normative. In 2013 the Confederación Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil was created, comprised of 100 civil society organisations. This collective has embarked on accountability and transparency efforts, proposed a new normative for the sector, led dialogues with the State around current regulations, and promoted capacity development in civil society organisations.

With this experience, Grupo FARO has promoted a similar effort at the regional level, leading the creation of the Iniciativa Latinoamericana de Investigación para Políticas Públicas. This initiative is comprised of 12 think tanks who share the objective to generate policy-applied knowledge for the region and strengthen member organisations.

### Grupo FARO's experience in self assessment

Grupo FARO has engaged in different self assessment exercises, mostly promoted by donors seeking to contribute to the organisation's knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses in order to define strategies and actions for organisational improvement. These exercises, although very useful to identify areas of improvement, have been isolated efforts that were not institutionalised.

The most relevant self-assessment exercises conducted have been: the self-assessment tool implemented under guidance from USAID and its programme Iniciativa para la Conservación en la Amazonía Andina (ICAA), and the exercise conducted under guidance from the IDRC through the Think Tank Initiative (TTI). The implementation of these self assessment efforts were coordinated internally by the Executive Committee (formed by the organisation's directors) and the Institutional Development Coordinator.

In 2014, the organisation changed its organisational structure. Through this change, it eliminated the institutional development coordinator position and created an evaluation and monitoring coordinator position (the new role was carried out by the same person as the previous role). The creation of the evaluation and monitoring position has institutionalised the efforts of evaluation and monitoring. As of today, the area has defined 4 levels in which monitoring and evaluation (M&E) will be conducted: people, programmes, organisation, and context. The system for M&E is being developed around specific indicators of performance for each of these levels, linking monitoring and evaluation to the strategic and operative plans. It also includes the results of human resources' performance evaluations, which have been in place for three consecutive years.

The PSATT efforts have produced valuable baseline information for the fields evaluated. These have contributed to the development of the M&E system and given clear action pathways to improve knowledge management, quality control, strategic direction and governance aspects within the organisation.

## Methodology

The PSATT self assessment efforts focused on 4 dimensions: quality control of research and communication products, strategic direction, governance, and knowledge management. The self assessment was carried out through: desk research, an online questionnaire designed collaboratively, and interviews with key members of the organisation. The online questionnaire was ran during the first two weeks of March and received 19 responses out of 20 staff members (it is important to note that 9 were partial responses). The respondents were: one directive, four senior staff, three junior staff and three administrative staff. 2 respondents have been with the organisation for more than 2 years, 5 have been with the organisation between 1 and 3 years, and 4 have been with the organisation for less than a year.

It was very difficult to encourage staff members to fill out the survey, especially considering several people have spent less than a year in the organisation and feel they do not have the information or knowledge to assess certain fields. The survey was complemented with desk research, which mostly consisted of the review of institutional documents and the organisation's website, and conversations with the Executive Director (a staff member who has been the longest in the organisation and who is one of the founders), and the evaluation and monitoring coordinator, who was previously the institutional development coordination, and has participated in several self assessment exercises and organisational evaluations.

## Results of the assessment

### Strategic direction

#### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Grupo FARO's first strategic plan was developed in 2009 for a period of four years (2010-2014). In parallel, the organisation also developed and documented its theory of change and an intervention agenda (2012-2015). All these documents constitute key elements that synthesize the strategic direction of the organisation.

The strategic plan was developed using the Balance Score Card, which seeks to measure the organisation's activities according to its vision and strategy. Grupo FARO's strategic plan (2010-2014) outlines the organisation's mission, vision, strategic map, and 11 strategic objectives. These are then detailed within performance, stakeholders, and internal process indicators. However, none of these indicators have been monitored since the validation of the plan. The theory of change describes the focus of the problem of the organisation's efforts, the changes needed, and the strategies designed to promote change. The intervention agenda outlines the sectors prioritised by Grupo FARO's research, capacity building, and policy influence activities.

Grupo FARO's mission is: "To influence public policy to promote a more democratic, innovative, sustainable and inclusive society through research, informed dialogue, and collective action." Its vision states: "Grupo FARO will be recognised globally as a think tank that promotes sustainable development based on knowledge, both in Ecuador and Latin America." It is important to note that Grupo FARO's original mission was to "support civil society, the private sector, and public institutions to participate actively in the proposal, implementation and monitoring of local, national and international public policies to achieve a more efficient, equitable, inclusive and democratic State, through plural dialogue, research, citizen action, and the interaction with global networks focused on the promotion of public good." However, this mission changed as the country's context changed from political and institutional instability to increased institutional and technical capacity along with better political and democratic stability.

The problems that are identified in the organisation's theory of change are: fragmentation, inability to act for common good, and lack of responsibility from citizens. To tackle these problems, Grupo FARO proposes 3 things:

1. To promote informed dialogue based on evidence and focused on generating sustainable agreements amongst change actors;
2. To create and strengthen the capacity to transform ideas into actions in the general public; and
3. To promote transparency and accountability of individuals and collectives.

Finally, the Intervention Agenda outlines priority areas of work that include: society and the environment, equity and social opportunities, public governance, information society, and transversal themes. Transversal themes include natural and knowledge economy, cities and local governments, links between evidence and public policy, and citizenship and civil society organisations.

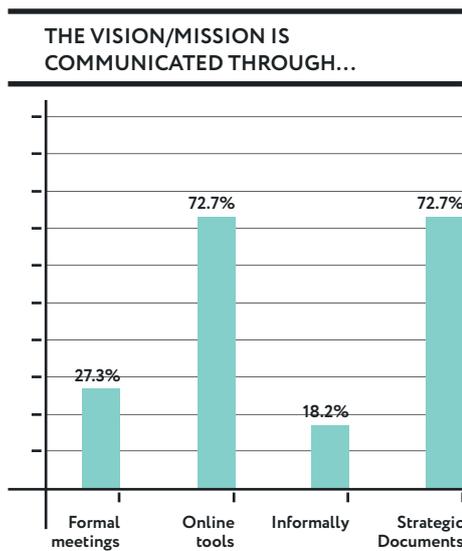
These documents present a clear strategic direction for the organisation. However, these are not necessarily known and internalised by all staff to turn over rates and irregular induction processes. Also, performance, stakeholders, and internal process indicators have not been monitored and measured throughout the duration of the strategic plan.

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In terms of operational efforts, the organisation develops an annual operative plan that is designed by area or programme and is linked, in general terms, to the strategic plan. Traditionally, this plan was developed by the heads of area or programme directors but, as of 2015, the institution made efforts to have a participative process and have plans designed with specific indicators linked to the M&E system. A new strategic plan will be developed this year and will be linked to the M&E system to assure its relevance.

In general (27,3% totally agree and 72,7% partially agree), the staff perceives the vision and mission of the organisation as clearly articulated. According to respondents, these are communicated mostly through formal channels:



The members of the organisation also state (50% totally agrees, 50% partially agrees) that the vision/mission statements express the organisational core values and are specific enough to guide daily work. It is interesting that most staff members believe the strategic plan is an annual plan (75%) and only a small group (25%) knows that it is a multi-annual plan. Meanwhile, there were a few staff members that were not aware of the existence of this plan until they were asked about it in the survey. Finally, 60% of respondents state that the strategic plan has not been operationalised or measured by its indicators.

A preliminary conclusion for this field is that the organisation needs to improve its internal communications efforts, taking advantage of informal channels and induction processes to ensure that all staff knows and becomes acquainted with the strategic plan, the theory of change, and the intervention agenda documents, along with all the elements within them. Moreover, the new strategic plan to be developed has to be designed through a participative process, along with a communications plan and clear links to the M&E system that is being implemented.

**The role of the Board**

**DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: GOVERNANCE**

According to Grupo FARO’s statutes, the organisation is governed at 3 levels: at the directorial level by the Board of Directors and its President, at the executive level by the Executive Committee and the Executive Director, and at the advisory and audit level by Advisory Boards and the evaluation and monitoring coordinator, within its audit functions.

The Board of Directors is the maximum governance body, with the mission to promote the strategic direction and add value to the work of the organisation, providing guidance and making decisions at the highest level. The Board of Directors was established in 2011, and is composed of 3 to 7 voluntary members from diverse backgrounds, serving for a period of 4 years. They are invited to the role by previous members. The Board of Directors meets 3 times a year, and their travel expenses are covered by the organisation. It is important to note that before 2011, the statutes determined that the Board of Directors was formed by the founding members and did not state clear roles for it.

The Executive Committee is the governance unit at the executive level. It is formed by the directors of the different areas of the organisation and led by the Executive Director. This committee meets every week for a 3 hour meeting where operational issues are addressed, informed, decided, and followed-up. This Committee periodically invites staff members to participate and inform about specific projects, activities or issues, in an effort to maintain closeness with the teams working on the different projects and areas, and to provide support needed from the executive level.

Grupo FARO’s Advisory Boards are: the Academic Advisory Board, comprised of 10 individuals with varying expertise from the academia or similar institutions; and the Business Advisory Board, currently being developed to involve businessmen and businesswomen in a collective effort to influence public policies, provide advise and insight on the priorities of private businesses, and help the organisation strengthen its links with the private sector.

As for the audit level, current regulations for civil society organisations require that they have an auditor within the organisation, additional to the external financial audit required annually. Grupo FARO has assigned those responsibilities to the monitoring and evaluation coordinator, as the work under this position complements the information requirements

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for an audit. In addition to the governance levels and bodies defined in the statutes, there are several non-statutory spaces within the organisation that contribute to the decision-making process. These are:

**The Project and Ideas Approval Committee:** a space in which project proposals and new project ideas are presented, analysed, discussed, enriched, and either approved, approved with adjustments or rejected. The Committee is made up of one representative of each strategic area (Research and Knowledge Management, Communications and Policy Influence, and Administration and Finances) and the evaluation and monitoring coordinator. The team developing a project presents it to the Committee members for their analysis on its strategic alignment, policy influence, and the different strategic components (research methods, communications strategy, political strategy, financial and administrative design, and monitoring and evaluation scheme) before its presentation to a potential donor.

**The Crisis Committee:** this Committee is formed by members of the organisation who are invited by the Executive Director due to their knowledge of the organisation and their political and strategic capacities. The Committee is activated to respond to complicated political contexts (internal and external). They are to analyse the complications and propose actions to prevent a crisis or to minimize the effects of one.

**The Human Resources Committee:** formed by the Administrative and Financial Director, the Research and Knowledge Management Director, the coordinator of human resources, the assistant to the Executive Director, and the area that is hiring. The purpose of this committee is to conduct interviews, analyse profiles, and deliberate on human resources related issues.

All survey respondents identified the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee as the most important governing bodies at Grupo FARO. Other bodies recognised by a few respondents include the Advisory Board and other decision-influencing groups such as the Project and Ideas Approval Committee. As reflected by the responses in the survey, there is no clarity on the number of members in any of these bodies.

The Board of Directors meeting minutes are not available to staff in the organisation, while the Executive Committee meeting minutes used to be presented in a synthesised version and disseminated within the organisation. However, this practice stopped for a few months due to a reduction in communications staff. Staff members' responses to the survey indicate that they feel they can still access the minutes for the meetings of this governing body. It is important to note that the Advisory Board does not hold regular meetings; members of this board are approached individually to provide advice on different projects. Therefore, meeting minutes are not generated for the Advisory Board. As for the other groups mentioned by respondents, such as the Project and Ideas Approval Committee, they generate meeting minutes which are disseminated amongst those participating in the committee (committee members, the team presenting a project or proposal, and members of the organisation who participated in the discussion).

There is a clear divide in perceptions between senior and junior staff. In general, senior staff members perceive governing bodies as key to the organisation's functioning and clearly identify the links of their functions and decisions to everyday activities. Meanwhile, junior staff members perceive that these bodies do not contribute to their daily work and feel their disappearance would not affect the organisation. Then again, there is widespread demand from junior staff to strengthen the links between these governing bodies and all members of the organisation. That refers to getting the Board of Directors more involved and making them acquainted with current projects, teams and team members, as well as having a representative for the researchers in the Executive Board (programmes and researchers in the projects under them were represented in the Executive Board through the Programme and Fundraising Director; however, this position is been vacant due to financial constraints).

## Knowledge management

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Grupo FARO has identified knowledge management as a constant challenge along its 10 year history. Due to the context that surrounds civil society organisations (limited funds available, funds linked to project implementation, competition for human resources with the public sector and universities, etc) and to the fact that Grupo FARO attracts young professionals that aspire to pursue an academic career, the organisation suffers from high levels of rotation. This, along with the lack of current tools, software, and policies for knowledge management, presents serious difficulty for storing, sharing, finding, and using knowledge within the organisation.

In 2013, Grupo FARO created a Google site that serves as the organisation's intranet. Initially, teams were required to update information on this site as part of their personal performance goals. However, staff did not prioritise this activity and the intranet site has several areas that are not updated, so its usability is very limited. Other tools which have been put in place to improve knowledge management are: internal newsletters, bulletin boards, a monthly organisational two-hour meeting called "Hablemos de FARO," a Facebook group for organisation members, and a yearly Open House for each area/ programme to share their work.

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In 2014, the organisation installed periodical automated back-up processes for all the information stored in staff’s computers. However, due to the lack of standardised filing procedures, the back-up system does not help with information recovery when the organisation attempts to find information from the files of a former staff member.

In the same year, Grupo FARO modified its organisational structure and assigned knowledge management responsibilities to the Research Area, now called the Research and Knowledge Management Area. This area has initiated a process to clarify what knowledge management is and its importance. The area has developed new tools to promote better knowledge management within the organisation. Some of these tools are:

**Project profile forms:** a form that compiles key information of a closed project. This form was used to generate project profiles for the 10 most relevant projects implemented since the beginning of the organisation.

**Short workshops:** a monthly 2 hour space where members of the organisation teach something they have learned through workshops, research, conferences, or other platforms, that is relevant for others in the organisation. So far, there have been four workshops on: qualitative research methods and the basics of impact evaluations, literature reviews and the use of an interactive blackboard tool, defensive driving, and the curse of natural resources and transparency in extractive industries. There are topics in line for future workshops: communal urban gardening, gender equality, and publishing papers.

**Lessons learned infographics:** visual summaries of lessons learned in the implementation of a project, the coordination of an event, or the development of research.

**Calls, courses and tools newsletter:** a newsletter that compiles information on courses, grant calls, and new tools for research.

**Project end checklist:** a checklist that ensures that the project leaves the information required for future use.

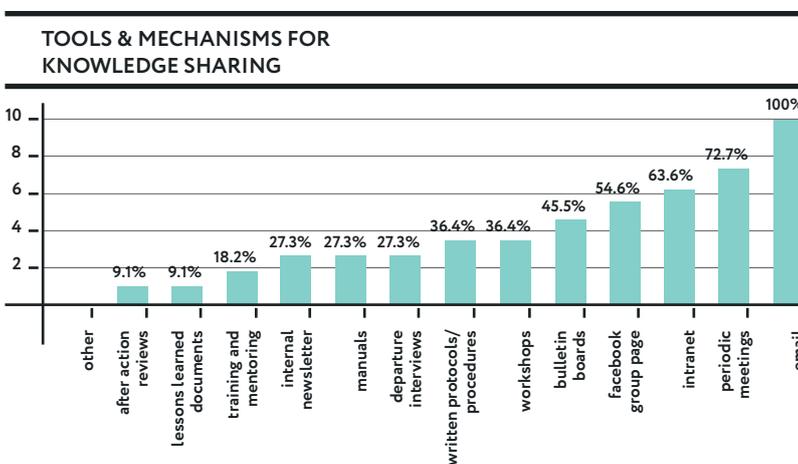
**Promoting the use of the “Hablemos de FARO,”** a space to share experiences in courses and workshops attended by staff members (promoting the sharing of relevant files and papers through the internet).

**Communication tools:** Flickr and Youtube accounts, and contact database.

There are also plans to update and optimise the internet, develop a filing guide/protocol and review personnel induction and departure processes.

All the respondents perceive knowledge management and learning as key elements of their daily work (9,1% totally agrees, 90,9% partially agrees) and the majority (18,2% totally agrees, 81,8% partially agrees) feels that the organisation has internal tools and mechanisms that promote knowledge management and learning. However, responses do not reflect a consensus in terms of identifying Grupo FARO as a learning organisation.

The tools and mechanisms used for sharing information inside Grupo FARO are:



E-mail, periodic meetings and the intranet are the tools and mechanisms for knowledge sharing that are mentioned most, followed by the Facebook group page, bulletin boards, workshops and written protocols. However, respondents report that training on the use of these tools and mechanisms were available only in some cases (63,6% in some cases, 36,4% did not receive any training) . Moreover, responses to the survey indicate that historic information is difficult to find (54,6% difficult, 36,4% very difficult), and there are instances of duplication of efforts due to lack of communication. Staff members feel that, for the most part, people within the organisation are cooperative and helpful when trying to find information (36,4% totally agree, 36,4% partially agree, 27,3% partially disagree). However, early information is very difficult to access as there are very few members that remain from the start of Grupo FARO.

Finally, a recommendation that stands out amongst respondents is the identification of knowledge management and knowledge sharing tools and mechanisms that are friendlier to the user. In addition, mentoring is mentioned as a mechanism that is given little attention and could prove useful to promote knowledge transfer amongst staff members.

## Quality control

### DESK RESEARCH / INTERVIEWS: QUALITY CONTROL

Grupo FARO became a Think Tank Initiative grantee in 2010. Since then, the organisation has had the space and resources to dedicate more attention to quality control, especially regarding research outputs. Since mid-2010, Grupo FARO created a Research Area in the organisation with the mission of promoting the high quality of research outputs, advising teams and coordinating peer review processes. This area developed protocols and tools to ensure the quality of research products, and continues carrying out this work.

Research quality control occurs in different steps:

It starts with the development of the research proposal or the project. The Project and Ideas Approval Committee, through the Research Director, enriches proposals' research aspects. When the project is being implemented, the team conducting it and the Research Area get together to discuss the research protocols of the project. Together, they define specific aspects of the research process and methodologies, identify resources needed, and plan activities and outputs.

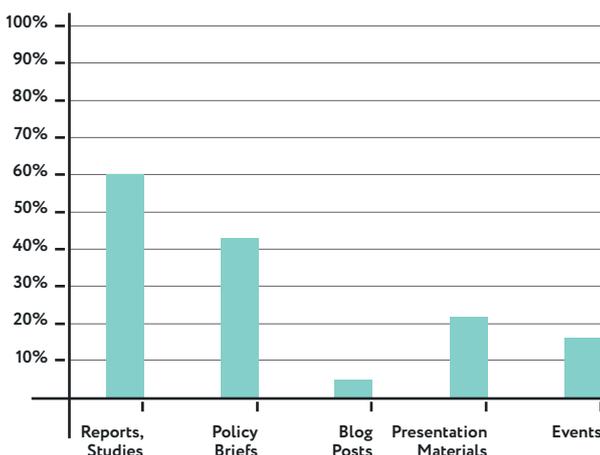
When a research output has been drafted, it goes through three reviews additional to the team's internal reviews: a first review done by the Research Area, followed by a review of the revised draft conducted by external peers (contracted by the Research Area and remunerated when funds are available), and a review of the final version of the document once it has been revised considering comments of external reviewers. When the document is politically sensitive, an additional review from the Communications and Policy Influence Area is included in the process.

Quality control of communications products is institutionalised for publications, but not as much for events. Publication design and dissemination is coordinated by the teams in partnership with the Communications and Policy Influence Area. There are editorial guidelines and branding manuals to ensure the quality of the format. Events are carried out by the project teams with support and guidance from the Communications and Policy Influence Area. There are checklists and evaluation guides that can be used for the coordination and evaluation of an event. The use of these tools is not institutionalised, although there are recent efforts to increase usage of these and make event evaluations, both internal and external, mandatory.

In addition, the organisation carries out a biannual perception study to gather feedback from different sectors and audiences of Grupo FARO around the organisation's role, its contributions, its products, and its image.

Reports and studies, along with policy briefs, are the products that are mentioned most in relation to quality control. The Research Director is identified as the person responsible for coordinating the review processes (internal and external) of these products. There is widespread clarity amongst staff members on the processes followed for research quality control, with most respondents identifying the first draft as the point in which quality control is implemented, but with many respondents also mentioning quality control taking place at other moments of research activities (preliminary, research design, and final draft). There is also widespread knowledge of the conditions under which peer reviews are coordinated with almost all the respondents mentioning that external reviewers receive payment for their contribution some times (this depends on the availability of resources). Finally, all respondents feel that reviews and feedback received through quality control processes are useful to their work, but respondents suggest increased follow-up of the research process, along with the involvement of more international experts.

PRODUCTS SUBJECT TO QUALITY CONTROL



In terms of communications products, specifically events, staff members do not identify a clear process of quality control and feel that teams are autonomous in the coordination and execution of these. Suggestions include increasing the involvement of the Communications and Policy Influence Area and the development of guidelines and tools to help improve quality control of presentation documents and events.

## Conclusions

The self-assessment exercise has been very important to:

- Identify areas of improvement in the fields analysed and to plan concrete actions;
- Bring attention from the entire organisation to 4 fields that are key for its performance;
- Motivate staff members making them feel that their opinions are important to the organisation;
- Lose fear of carrying out self assessment processes; and
- Legitimise an action plan to correct areas that need improvement in the 4 fields.

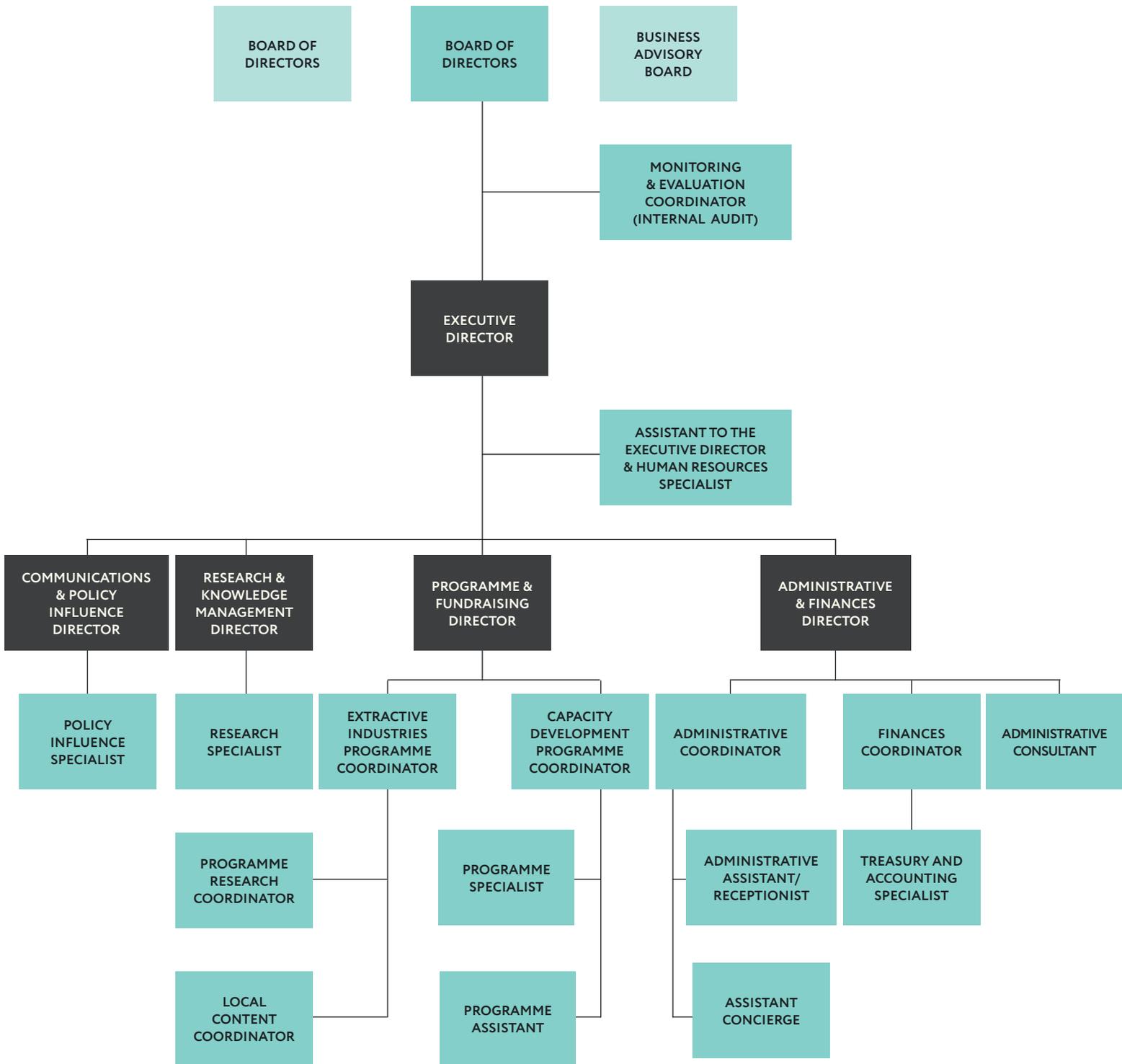
Key areas of improvement include:

- **Governance:** Grupo FARO has institutionalised its governance and achieved a good level of progress in this field. However, it is important that governing bodies become more connected to junior staff to ensure a two-way flow of information. Specifically, researchers and programmes need representation in the Executive Committee.
- **Internal communication:** there is a clear need for better communication between governing bodies and staff, better dissemination of meeting minutes from the different governing bodies, better dissemination and internalisation of strategic planning documents, and the identification of friendlier channels to share knowledge.
- **Evaluation and monitoring:** with the development of a new strategic plan, it is important that the evaluation and monitoring system that is being developed is connected to goals and objectives in the plan, allowing the monitoring of specific indicators.
- **Operative planning:** operational plans need a clearer link to the strategic plan. It is important that staff members develop the capacities to connect strategic goals to everyday work and the operational plans they design and implement.
- **Knowledge management:** although the organisation has tools and mechanisms in place or being developed, it is important to design tools that are friendly but also find incentives for the use of these tools. The organisation should also carry out efforts to recover institutional memory from its start.
- **Quality control:** there is a request from researchers for accompaniments from the Research Area in the research process, as many feel that most of the efforts concentrate on the peer review process. In terms of communication products, there is a great need for tools and mechanisms for quality control, but also a closer involvement from the Communications and Policy Influence Area in the design, implementation and evaluation of these.

Considering specific fields, knowledge management and strategic planning are the ones that require the most attention. Governance and quality control also have areas for improvement, but they have been further developed and established in many of their aspects.

Finally, although self-assessment processes can be subjective and have the potential to generate heated discussions within the organisation – depending on the fields being evaluated and the perceptions around them –, these processes need to be institutionalised and seen as complementary to the M&E system being developed. However, for future exercises, the recommendation is that these processes are not done through surveys but through group discussions that allow for a richer dialogue, in-depth analysis and increased participation. A self assessment process could be a valuable element to close the year and develop the operative plan for the next year.

Figure 1 - Organogram Grupo FARO



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**On Think Tanks is a global platform dedicated to studying and supporting think tanks.**

**Founded in 2010, it focuses on key issues of relevance and interest to think tanks as well as their staff and supporters. On Think Tanks believes that supporting think tanks to be more strategic in the way they make short and long term decisions can result in better policy advice and better policy outcomes.**

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