

# IMPACT OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE ON INTERNAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION: A CASE STUDY OF THE AFRICA INSTITUTE OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **Shingi Muzondo**

South African Institute of International Affairs  
University of the Witwatersrand, East Campus  
Braamfontein, South Africa  
Shingi.Muzondo@wits.ac.za

## **Ezra Ondari-Okemwa**

Department of Library and Information Science  
University of Fort Hare, Alice, South Africa  
EOndari@ufh.ac.za

## ABSTRACT

This article reports on a study that investigated the impact of organisational culture on internal knowledge production and assessed the challenges of producing knowledge at the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA), which is seen as a model knowledge producing think tank in sub-Saharan Africa. The broad objectives of the study were: identifying AISA's achievements in knowledge production; finding out the challenges AISA confronts in producing knowledge; examining how AISA's organisational culture impacts on internal

knowledge production; and suggesting ways in which knowledge production at AISA and other think tanks may be improved. A case study was conducted and self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, document analysis, and observation were used to collect data. The findings showed that AISA's knowledge production efforts are confronted by several challenges, including: organisational culture and employees' negative attitudes towards sharing knowledge freely, and employees encountering difficulties in finding the information and knowledge they need. If these challenges could be identified and clearly confined, it is argued that AISA would be in a better position to effectively produce and utilise knowledge, enabling it to achieve its objectives more efficiently. It is recommended that AISA acquire knowledge from external sources; produce knowledge internally which it uses and is used by its clientele; and establish itself as a knowledge-based organisation by creating a knowledge friendly culture as a framework for addressing the issue of organisational culture. The study results will hopefully lay a foundation for understanding ways of improving knowledge production at AISA and thus influence positive public policy in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Keywords:** knowledge production, think tanks, knowledge management, organisational culture, Africa Institute of South Africa

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years or so, the proliferation of non-university institutions, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), think tanks and activist, media and cultural organisations engaged in knowledge production has signalled less of an 'epistemological revolution' and more of a political challenge to the university and its monopoly of knowledge production (Rossiter 2011). Rossiter (2011) argues that such a shift is further amplified by the increasing tendency for Anglophone universities to rely on a casual labour force to undertake a raft of teaching, administrative and occasional research. Universities seem to have enjoyed a monopoly of knowledge production for a long time, or maybe knowledge production has for long been associated with universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs). Arguably, the landscape of knowledge production seems to be changing rapidly and think tanks are emerging as major players in knowledge production. As a region, sub-Saharan Africa faces complex challenges which demand the best of intellectual capacities and think tanks are potentially one of the best-suited organisations to develop innovative and advanced solutions to such challenges (Mbadlanyana, Sibalukhulu and Cilliers 2011). Mbadlanyana et al. (2011) are of the opinion that think tanks have a special role to play in shaping African futures, both as knowledge providers and policy formulation partners.

Major changes, like information and communications technologies (ICTs), have brought about faster production and processing of information, thereby increasing people's knowledge of it, the demand for it and the need to organise it (Bhatt 2002). Society has passed into a new era where knowledge, not capital or technology, may be seen as the primary driving force in think tanks (Wigg 1994). Without knowledge, an organisation could not continue to operate and exist, since its structures, traditions and culture, technology and operations, systems and procedures and the quality of its services and products are all based on and embedded in the organisation's knowledge and expertise (Wigg 1994). Thus, the creation of new knowledge is the key for almost every domain in a society, business or think tank, more so if the main product or service is focused on knowledge (Peschl and Fundneider 2008).

## 2. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Knowledge production or creation, as defined by Nonaka (1994, 14–37), 'is the formation of new ideas through interactions between explicit and tacit knowledge in individual human minds'. Explicit knowledge is knowledge that can be processed, that is, collected and stored within databases and expressed either in words or using a system of symbols and comes in the form of books and documents, databases and manuals (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). Tacit knowledge, however, is knowledge that is unstructured and based on people's expertise and is rooted in action, experience and subjective insights. It is hard to catalogue because it is highly personal and difficult to document in any detail, for example, the indigenous knowledge residing in people's minds (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). Davenport and Prusak (2000) explain that knowledge exists within people and that knowledge derives from information as information derives from data.

The information arena is an integral part of the wider culture and society of an organisation. Knowledge production would then take place within organisational culture (Griffiths and Remenyi 2007). Organisational culture includes the values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organisation and that control the way colleagues call on each other to obtain advice, insights and information both within and outside the organisation (Parker 2000). In this study, organisational culture is looked at as how people communicate with each other within the organisation, the tone of messages (formal, informal, pleasant and hostile), attitudes and beliefs (e.g. their thoughts on promotions, dress code and the extent to which they share knowledge amongst themselves). According to Schein (2004), think tanks face innumerable challenges in producing, nurturing, sharing and managing knowledge and this may be as a result of organisational culture. Organisational culture may negatively shape how organisation members feel, think and behave and could hinder continuous learning, as well as the transfer and production of knowledge in organisations.

Coupled with the industrialisation and commercialisation of knowledge (Lyotard 1984), the rise of the university as a teaching machine that polices the practice of research as the preserve of tenured senior faculty who manage projects, has prompted critical research to migrate beyond the territory of the university (Homes 2011). Arguably, conditions are in place for a substantive epistemological transformation predicated on institutional and technological cultures – something along the lines of Kuhn’s paradigm shift or Foucault’s epistemic rupture (Rossiter 2011). Given the modern constitutive relationship between epistemology and disciplinarity, it is unlikely that such a change will be generated from within the borders of the university. Today, the conditions for epistemological change are no longer tied in any exclusive manner to the contours of disciplines within university settings. While the challenge of method and practice of concept production might be considered as something disciplines within the humanities, at least, are largely inclined to avoid given their conservative predilection, it would be a gross oversight to suggest that inventive methods and wild concept production have stalled in society at large (Lovink and Rossiter 2011).

For long, universities have been known to be centres of knowledge production. However, Cummings (2005) opines that universities are merely institutional expressions of the academic disciplines, implying a community of scholars working within an agreed intellectual framework and therefore able to charge one another’s work. Cummings (2005) argues that while academic disciplines are undoubtedly valuable, and academic authority rightly continues to carry weight beyond the university, the alternative – what might be called ‘public scholarship’ – implies a different standard of intellectual authority.

Most organisations recognise the importance of culture but they find it either difficult or impossible to articulate the culture-knowledge relationship in ways that lead to action (De Long and Fahey 2000). Several organisational cultural problems that hinder effective knowledge production, such as reluctance to share knowledge and information, have been noted. Bartol and Srivastava (2002) support this view by saying that an employee’s attitude and competencies may impede knowledge sharing, for example, employees who fear a loss of superiority and knowledge ownership after sharing their own personal knowledge. If think tanks fail to consider organisational culture, the knowledge production cannot be addressed effectively since organisational culture is embedded into an organisation’s system of norms, beliefs, values and rules (Holowetzki 2002).

### 3. THINK TANKS

What is a think tank and what role does it play in the modern world? The term ‘think tank’ was first used by the military during World War II according to Abelson (2002), Rich (2004) and Smith (1991). Abelson (2002) further explains that the

term was used to refer to a type of secure environment where top military planners could meet for discussions on strategy. Abelson (2002) contends that in the currently mainstream society, think tanks are now associated with a type of non-academic institute where the brightest minds are gathered together to address societies' most pressing social, economic and political problems. Scholars have not as yet agreed on a universal definition of the term 'think tank' (Abelson 2002; McGann and Weaver 2000; Smith 1991; Stone and Denham 2004). McGann and Weaver (2000, 5) define a think tank as 'a policy research organisation that has significant autonomy from government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups, and political parties'. Rich (2004, 11) defines think tanks as 'independent, non-interest-based, nonprofit organisations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policymaking process'.

According to McGann (2005, 2), 'Public Policy Research, Analysis and Engagement Organisations (also known as Think Tanks) play a vital role in the political and policy arenas at the local and national level in the United States'. McGann (2005) argues that the function of think tanks is unique, as they provide public policy research, analysis and advice, are non-profit, and operate independently from governments and political parties. While the primary function of these civil society organisations is to help government understand and make informed choices about issues of domestic and international concern, they also have a number of other critical roles, including:

- playing a mediating function between the government and the public that helps builds trust and confidence in public officials;
- serving as an informed and independent voice in policy debates;
- identifying, articulating, and evaluating current policy issues, proposals and programs;
- transforming ideas and emerging problems into policy issues;
- interpreting issues, events and policies for the electronic and print media thus facilitating public understanding of domestic and international policy issues;
- providing a constructive forum for the exchange of ideas and information between key stakeholders in the policy formulation process;
- facilitating the construction of 'issue networks';
- providing a supply of personnel for the legislative and executive branches of government; and
- challenging the conventional wisdom, standard operating procedures and business as usual of bureaucrats and elected officials (McGann 2005).

McGann (2005) contends that the activities involved in fulfilling these functions involve a balance between research, analysis and outreach. The range of activities

in which think tanks engage include: framing policy issues; researching and writing books, articles, policy briefs and monographs; conducting evaluations of government programmes; disseminating their research findings and conducting various outreach activities (public testimony before congress, media appearances and speeches); creating networks and exchanges via workshops, seminars, and briefings; and supporting mid-career and senior government officials when they are out of office (what I describe as a 'Human Resource Tank').

### 3.1. Think tanks in sub-Saharan Africa

Looking at a map of sub-Saharan Africa, it can be seen that the region is dotted with a number of think tanks, though they are not distributed evenly among the countries of the region. The major issue with which think tanks in sub-Saharan Africa should engage is the question of how knowledge, as developed and appropriated by Africans on the basis of their historical experiences, can be valorised for purposes of empowering the state in the pursuit of democracy and development. Regarding the relevance of knowledge produced in Africa, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA 2004, Bulletin 1) says thus:

After nearly three decades of unsuccessful orthodox economic reforms imposed by the international financial institutions under the guise of the so-called Washington Consensus, development thinking for the purpose of re-building the foundations of African economies appears to be at a dead-end and begs the question of alternatives that could enable the continent to turn the table of underdevelopment. Furthermore, a massive process of social re-ordering appears to be under way across Africa as various social players seek parts of the continent, including the collapse of state legitimacy and central governmental authority. These developments call for a rethinking of state, economy, culture and society in ways that depart radically from conventional wisdom. In addition, a fresh commitment to extend the boundaries of pan-Africanism appears to be in evidence with the launching of the new, bolder African Union in replacement of the Organisation of African Unity, a development that has been accompanied by pleas for a harnessing of African knowledge for the advancement of peace, stability and unity.

Yet, in the face of the different changes occurring across the continent and the intellectual challenges which they pose, the inherited analytic tools derived from the European scholarly heritage by which African scholars have sought to grasp the transitions and shifts taking place in their societies, appear increasingly ill-adapted to the phenomena they are meant to capture and the environment to which they are applied. Also, the institutional context of knowledge production and dissemination, epitomised by the university, is undergoing a severe crisis of identity, mission and relevance (CODESRIA 2004, Bulletin 2).

Given this background the aim of the study was to assess the challenges of producing knowledge embedded in AISA's organisational culture or environment and to recommend ways of producing and sharing such knowledge more efficiently.

## 4. OVERVIEW OF THE AFRICA INSTITUTE OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) was established in 1960. It is a statutory body of the Department of Arts and Culture and of the Department of Science and Technology. It is located in Tshwane, Gauteng, South Africa. According to AISA, it is a government funded research organisation and think tank focusing on the production of knowledge on political, socio-economic, international and development issues in contemporary Africa. This was a major consideration for the researcher to conduct research at AISA. It is dedicated to knowledge production, education, training and promotion of awareness on Africa for Africans and the international community. This is achieved through independent policy analysis, the collection, processing, interpretation and dissemination of information and knowledge. Clients of AISA include research institutions (e.g. universities), individual researchers, the private sector (e.g. businesses), the public sector (e.g. various government departments), students and the general community who want information about Africa (AISA 2008). The majority of management consists of researchers from the research division who support knowledge production at AISA by producing the bulk of research and contributing to the development of knowledge production on Africa. The AISA management structure at the time of writing included the chief executive officer, chief financial officer, corporate affairs manager (who is also the acting outreach and international liaison [OIL] manager), human resources (HR) manager, director of research, director of publications, director of library and documentation services (LDS) and an office manager. AISA has about 70 staff members categorised into the research division, LDS, OIL department, corporate affairs, HR, finance, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and housekeepers.

### 4.1. Knowledge production at AISA

At AISA, knowledge is mainly produced through the research division. The division undertakes research on African affairs; networks with other knowledge producing institutions; undertakes capacity building activities; and hosts research interns who are mentored within the division. The division also conducts the AISA Campus Lecture Series and hosts the Young Graduates Programmes (AYGS). As part of their work, researchers in the division interact constantly with the outside world through attending and reading papers at national, regional and international conferences. They also undertake briefings and consultations with stakeholders, including policy and decision-makers, researchers and academics interested in African affairs. The range of outputs achieved in all their activities includes books, chapters in books, occasional papers, policy position papers, journal articles and book reviews. The overall strategic objectives, key performance measures and targets are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Output of research division

<b>Strategic objectives</b>	<b>Key performance measures</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual figures in AISA Annual Report 2007/08</b>
Promote knowledge and understanding of African affairs through leading social scientists acting in concert and across all disciplines and through training and education on African affairs	Conduct 2 fieldwork projects per researcher in terms of research agenda of AISA	11 researchers × 2 fieldwork per researcher per annum = 22 manuscripts	1 sole authored book (7 chapters); 27 book chapters; 6 co-edited books; 7 monographs; 16 policy position papers; 15 journal articles; 2 book reviews
	Develop 4 high-level position papers per researcher	11 researchers × 4 position papers per annum = 52 electronic monographs or publications in Inside AISA newsletter	
	Networking/seminar attendance	1 per researcher per year	52
Increase the international profile of AISA	Encourage researchers to deliver papers at international conferences	11 researchers to each attend 1 international conference per annum and present a paper	12 national; 27 international; 1 national (CEO); 2 international (CEO)
Support National System of Innovation (NSI) objectives by creating a pool of highly-trained researchers from disadvantaged groups	Recruit interns from historically disadvantaged backgrounds for a period of 6 months (renewable contract)	Appoint 10 interns	5 with extended contracts to 1 year for some of them
	Train 100 post-graduate students in research methodology from historically disadvantaged institutions	100	192

Source: AISA (2008)



The division is divided into five research desks, namely: Central Africa and the Great Lakes; East Africa and the Horn; North Africa; West Africa; and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The LDS disseminates the knowledge and information that AISA generates through publication articles, for example, *Africa Insight*, *Africa A–Z* and *Africa at a Glance*, book chapters, policy briefs, seminars, interviews with various media (both print and radio), papers, books, emails, posters, newsletters, maps, pamphlets, sample material at seminars/workshops, school outreach projects, memos and embassies. Other forms of disseminating knowledge and information generated at AISA include the AISA website ([www.ai.org.za](http://www.ai.org.za)). The LDS also has an archive that stores journals dating back to 1970.

At the time of the current study, AISA did not have a specific policy on knowledge production, knowledge management or information management except the Records Keeping Policy designed for the HR division. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that files should contain all HR information, except medical and health insurance files.

## 5. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge production is creating new knowledge based on ongoing experience in a specific domain (Davenport and Prusak 1998). The produced knowledge then needs to be managed so that the think tank obtains maximum benefits from it. Knowledge management is a fairly new research area that has emerged and been established since 1995, with varying opinions about the paths, methods, and even the objectives of knowledge management. However, the intricacy of knowledge management and its importance in an organisation's long-term success and survival has been widely recognised. According to Morrow (2001, 383), knowledge management 'is a term used loosely to refer to a broad collection of organisational practices and approaches related to producing, disseminating and applying knowledge. It incorporates having knowledge about your organisation, staff, competitors and products and using this knowledge to the organisation's advantage'.

Unfortunately, the lack of empirical work in the area of knowledge production has limited people's understanding of this important phenomenon of knowledge management. Specifically, organisational culture has emerged as one of the biggest impediments to effective knowledge production. Scarborough and Swan (2001) view the available literature on knowledge management as glossing over the impact of organisational culture on knowledge production. Previous studies have focused on limited aspects of the overall knowledge production process, for example, the importance of informal networks found in organisational culture as important sources of information. As a result, the understanding of knowledge production is limited to certain aspects, rather than understanding the whole process that incorporates environmental and organisational factors found in culture.

According to Bock and Kim (2002), knowledge sharing is the most important part of effective knowledge production. Additionally, sharing activities have to be voluntary and cannot be forced (Käser and Miles 2002). An employee's attitude and competencies may impede knowledge sharing and in turn knowledge production. Many employees are unaware of the importance of sharing and transferring knowledge. According to Bartol and Srivastava (2002, 65), 'some individuals possess an attitudinal "unwillingness to share" due to personal insecurity, such as a fear of being seen as ignorant'. This of course may not be true and the source of this insecurity may be lack of information on the benefits of sharing to both the employee and the organisation.

The literature suggests that organisational culture remains an important aspect of effective knowledge production. Enquiries into AISA's organisational culture brought up information that helped knowledge professionals to gain a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between organisational culture and knowledge production.

## 6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was based on Mode 2 of knowledge production. Gibbons et al. (1994) came up with theories of knowledge production which they labelled Mode 1 and Mode 2. The traditional form of knowledge production, Mode 1, takes place within disciplinary communities, and its outcomes are those intellectual products produced and consumed within research-oriented institutes, such as universities. The legitimacy of such knowledge is determined by institutional standards and academic values, such as peer review. Within the knowledge area or discipline, academic journals disseminate the knowledge to others in the field. Career paths follow traditional academic paths.

Mode 2 involves the identification and solution of practical problems in the day-to-day life of practitioners and organisations. Rather than being focused on the academic interests of a discipline or community, Mode 2 is concerned with problem-solving around a particular application and context. Mode 2 does not replace Mode 1 – rather it builds on the knowledge base while drawing on different sets of cognitive and social practices (Grosjean 2004). In Mode 1, academic intelligence is judged by an individual's ability to reproduce knowledge acquired in the classroom. This is laid down according to academic testing traditions that remove knowledge from an individual's ordinary experience and usually require one correct answer by way of one correct solution (Grosjean 2004). This then has made Mode 1 inapplicable to situations that are outside academic institutions.

Mode 2 holds practical intelligence which engages problems in the workplace. Such problems are usually unformulated and relate to everyday experience, and are characterised by multiple correct solutions, none of which is without flaws. Mode 2

has been seen as bringing about new forms of knowledge production and research assessment in the basic sciences. While the notion of Mode 2 knowledge production has attracted considerable interest, critics such as Gulbrandsen and Langfeldt (2004, 237) ask the questions: ‘Could it be that Mode 2 is nothing but traditional “academic” science with a stronger emphasis on public and commercial application? If so, is it actually being assessed, and supported, by the different public and commercial criteria?’ Despite these questions and other literature that critique Mode 2, the framework remains suitable in addressing the relationship between knowledge production and organisational culture. Mode 2’s characteristic features, such as: applicability to the work place; ability to bring about new forms of knowledge production; and ability to bring about new forms of research assessment make it the most suitable framework for the study. Mode 2 allows individuals at AISA, such as interns, to acquire a broad-based, general education and discipline-specific work experience and at the same time be part of continuous learning.

Interns at AISA accompany researchers into the field to conduct research and return with output, such as journal articles that they would have written, and then hold seminars to impart the knowledge they have acquired. They are also entitled to publish at least four articles, one policy brief or a chapter as part of their knowledge production on return from the field, thereby bringing in new forms of knowledge production as well. This means that the students who would have come from academic institutions (Mode 1) supplement Mode 1 foundational understandings from the classroom with Mode 2 broad-based, experimental learning from the workplace. This strengthens the interns’ experience, and provides opportunities for them to benefit from participation in both modes (Grosjean 2004). As they learn from their supervisors and co-workers they participate at more responsible levels of professional activities. In this way they begin to develop tacit knowledge and its accumulation constitutes Mode 2 knowledge production.

## 7. RESEARCH METHOD

As a research method, a case study was conducted at AISA over a period of five weeks. Fifty questionnaires were prepared and distributed along with conducting face-to-face interviews of approximately 20 minutes each, document analysis (collected newspaper clipping, article, journal and paper that pertained to AISA) and observation of employees in their natural settings. Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) describe case studies as intensive investigations of particular individuals. They may also be studies of single families, units (e.g. hospital wards), organisations (e.g. NGOs), communities (e.g. an informal settlement), or social policies.

A sample of 50 was taken from the 70 staff members categorised into researchers, library department, policy makers, publication department, HR department, finance, clerical and housekeepers. The sample comprised those who are directly involved

in knowledge production. The main concern in sampling is representativeness. The aim is to select a sample that will be representative of the population about which the researcher aims to draw conclusions. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the 50 cases. It is a non-random method of sampling where the researcher selects information-rich members for in-depth study. Purposive sampling has several categories, such as model instance sampling, expert sampling, quota sampling, heterogeneity sampling and snowball sampling (De Vaus 2001). The researcher chose to use expert sampling which involves those who are directly involved in knowledge production, for example the researchers and the LDS staff members. Expert sampling involves the assembling of a sample of people with known or demonstrable experience and expertise in some area (Trochim 2006). In the current study, these were the areas of knowledge production and knowledge management. It was the best way to elicit the views of persons who have specific expertise. Although purposive sampling does not achieve the best representativeness, it can be used when a sampling frame is not available (like in case studies) and is useful when obtaining a range of responses on ideas that people have (De Vaus 2001).

The collected data was then analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Other techniques used were face-to-face interviews. Quantitative methods were used to analyse the data collected through the questionnaires. This method seeks to quantify data by applying some statistical analysis. Qualitative methods were also used to analyse the data found in the open-ended questions on the questionnaire, especially when asking questions about the norms, values and beliefs of the staff members. The advantages of using such a technique include feedback from the respondents and eliminating interviewer bias as respondents are left on their own to complete questionnaires. Using both approaches cross checked one method against another thereby producing quality data. For example, when a question was asked through qualitative methods, quantitative methods would show how many were involved.

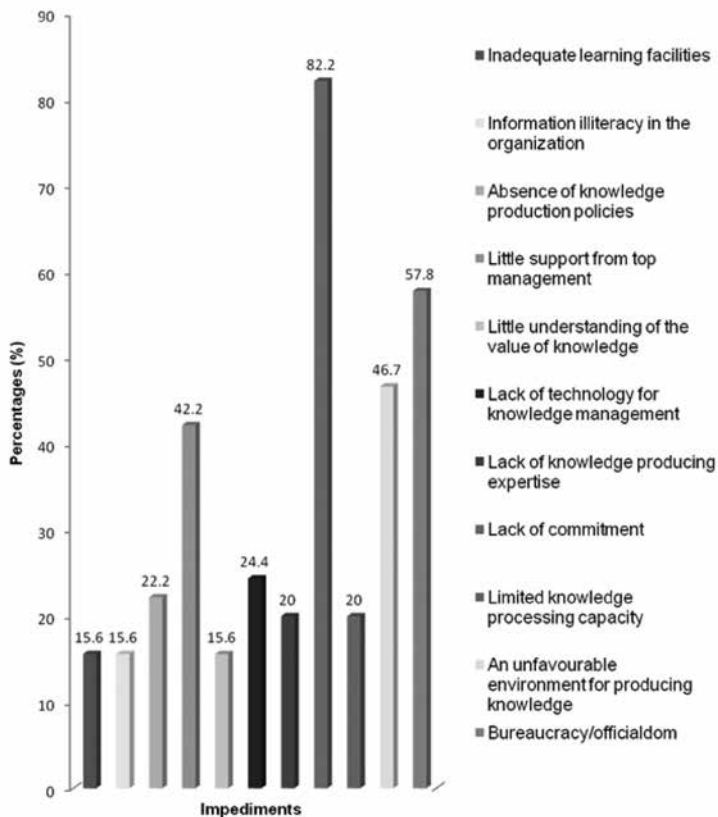
Using both quantitative and qualitative methods involved using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine relations between concepts and variables. The SPSS is among the most widely used programs for statistical analysis in the social sciences. It provides over 50 statistical processes, including regression analysis, association and analysis of variance (Answers Corporation 2009).

## 8. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND CONCLUSIONS

Over the years, AISA has had many achievements that have contributed to its existence today. These achievements have resulted in a strong demand for material produced by AISA, hosting of quality seminars and conferences locally and internationally, facilitation of young graduates, collaborations and increased knowledge on African affairs. AISA is able to identify clients' knowledge requirements, which is a challenge

for most research institutions as they try to adapt to the ever changing knowledge and information environment. Among others they identify their knowledge requirements whenever socio-economic challenges in Africa crop up, through fieldwork, user needs analysis (though a formal method has not been established), policy analysis and annual research retreats.

However, like any other organisation in today's knowledge and information era, AISA has faced and will continue to face different challenges in producing knowledge. Challenges as shown in Figure 1 include: inadequate learning facilities; information illiteracy in the organisation; absence of knowledge management policies; little support from top management; little understanding of the value of knowledge; lack of technology for knowledge management; lack of knowledge producing expertise; lack of commitment; limited knowledge processing capacity; an unfavourable environment for producing knowledge; and bureaucracy/officialdom.



**Figure 1:** Impediments to knowledge production ( $n = 45$ )

Under the ‘specify any other’ section some respondents added as an impediment, limited capacity, pressure on researchers and bias of publication. Below the researcher describes a few others.

### 8.1. Lack of knowledge management

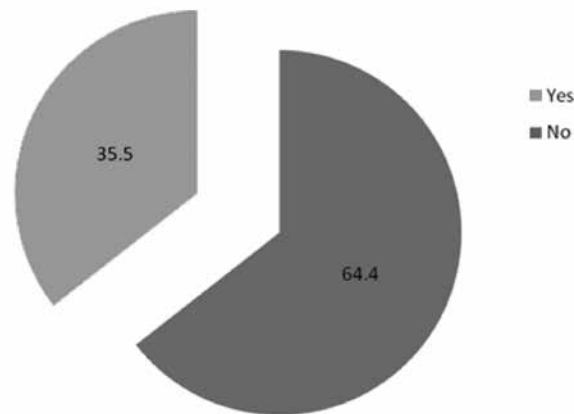
One of the major challenges is lack of knowledge management. Although knowledge is valued at AISA, the study established that knowledge management has not yet been embedded in the day-to-day activities of AISA and therefore there are no formal knowledge management programmes or knowledge management policies at AISA. The lack of a knowledge management policy means there are no guidelines as to how knowledge should be processed, stored, accessed, retrieved and shared among employees of an organisation. Knowledge management through knowledge sharing is vital for sustainable knowledge production. Employees are left to manage tacit knowledge on their own and are not accountable to anyone for its sharing for continued knowledge production.

### 8.2. Organisational culture

Culture defines not only what knowledge is valued, but also what knowledge must be kept inside the organisation for sustained innovative advantage (Long 1997). Creating a knowledge friendly culture is one of the most critical factors of success for a knowledge producing organisation (Davenport and Prusak 2000). Organisational culture affects how the organisation accepts and fosters knowledge production and knowledge management initiatives.

The study revealed that AISA’s organisational culture to a significant extent negatively shapes how organisation members feel, think and behave and in turn hinders maximum knowledge production. Sixty-six (66.7%) of the respondents said that AISA does not have an organisational culture that promotes knowledge production. In general, respondents summarised AISA’s organisational culture as follows: performance led; silo mentality; secretive; full of uncertainty; does not address the needs of junior staff; entrenched in its past failures and shouldered by extreme bureaucracy; filled with paranoid beliefs; and welcoming to visitors alone.

More than half the respondents (64.4%) felt that AISA staff members’ beliefs, values and norms are an impediment to knowledge production. Figure 2 shows that 29 (64.4%) said ‘yes’ while 16 (35.6%) said ‘no’.



**Figure 2:** Beliefs are an impediment to knowledge production at AISA ( $n = 45$ )

They said that such beliefs, values and norms affect knowledge production through making employees resist change; lead to failure to improve ICT infrastructure which then cripples conditions of service; through lack of recognition of achievement in other people irrespective of their status; through ineffective time management which slows down knowledge production activities. This has limited AISA's ability to produce knowledge up to its maximum capacity. AISA employees believe that certain areas of AISA need to be improved and as a result employees feel discouraged in producing knowledge.

Respondents were also of the belief that bad behaviours, such as: laziness; coming late to work; not filling in leave forms; rudeness by certain staff members; lack of a disciplinary policy; people doing as they like; having a silo mentality; disrespectful managers; bureaucratic attitudes; unfriendliness; closed door policies; and unwillingness to help other employees or share knowledge, are tolerated at AISA. With such beliefs and attitudes it is hard to produce knowledge efficiently and effectively and to the full potential of the organisation.

### 8.3. Lack of commitment

Lack of commitment to knowledge production was found to be a challenge as indicated by most respondents. Lack of commitment might come from employees who are not motivated enough and find it hard to get the necessary knowledge because of a culture of secrecy that promotes the hoarding of knowledge and prohibits sharing it freely. The bureaucratic environment might also be causing lack of commitment as employees feel alienated. Employees are also not held accountable to anybody regarding the sharing of knowledge with others and other departments so in the end

no new knowledge is generated through the combining of ideas (Lave and Wenger 1991). The researcher established that there are very few incentives for sharing knowledge, thereby underestimating the importance of incentives for individuals to share knowledge.

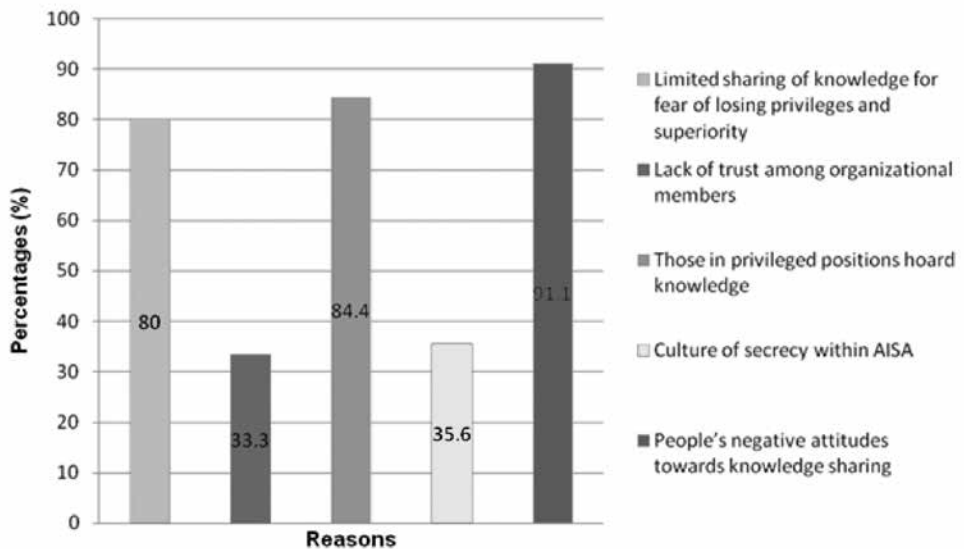
#### 8.4. Communication channels

A good organisational culture should support open relational channels of communication as a way of helping an organisation to achieve its goals. According to the respondents, the most widely used form of communication at AISA is memos (84.4%). This is indicative of the bureaucratic environment in which communication is limited and has a centralised control. Not having other forms of interactive communication indicates a culture of information silos with poor communication. A general lack of awareness of useful internal knowledge that people could benefit from is also very likely in such a context. The respondents (55.6%) stated that AISA does not encourage listening or questioning the habits of organisational members as part of its culture.

#### 8.5. Knowledge sharing

According to Bock and Kim (2002), knowledge sharing is the most important part of knowledge production. One of the bad behaviours tolerated at AISA is unwillingness to help other employees and to share knowledge. For example, when employees want to empower themselves by furthering their education, those who have done the subject/course are unwilling to help or guide them. As shown in Figure 3, reasons for unwillingness to share knowledge and information ranged from: fear of losing privileges and superiority; lack of trust among organisational members; those in privileged positions hoarding knowledge; culture of secrecy within AISA; people's negative attitudes towards knowledge sharing; and fear of scrutiny in the way that they write, produce and present knowledge.





**Figure 3:** Unwillingness to share knowledge and information ( $n = 45$ )

Respondents cited ‘people’s negative attitudes towards knowledge sharing’ as the most significant reason. After probing respondents further, it seems that individuals who are unwilling to share knowledge possess personal insecurity, such as a fear of being seen as ignorant or fear of losing superiority and knowledge ownership after sharing their own personal knowledge. This is attributed to lack of information on the benefits of sharing knowledge to both the employee and the organisation. It is also attributed to tradition which has taught people to hoard knowledge in order to achieve power.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 9.1. Knowledge management practices

As a research institution, it is recommended that AISA become knowledge orientated with knowledge management initiatives and knowledge management policies. The knowledge management policies will provide guidelines as to how to access, generate, process, store and retrieve knowledge to AISA’s advantage. The knowledge management initiatives should involve knowledge production, knowledge use, knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing and transfer. Knowledge management practices should be embedded in the day-to-day activities of employees. Positions should be created such as knowledge managers and officers who seek accountability

for managing tacit knowledge and manage it. These managers will be there to make sure that there is internal training and education that serves the purpose of sustainable knowledge production and converts tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Knowledge management practices should involve having a criterion to measure the value of knowledge even though it is not an easy task. Employees lack proper understanding of knowledge as being of strategic importance and as a result knowledge is not treated as an important organisational resource. By having a criterion employees will be able to understand the value of knowledge and the benefits of sharing it. This knowledge management strategy may become more popular after AISA's management starts to appreciate the strategic importance of managing knowledge-based assets.

## 9.2. Organisational culture

Just as knowledge production is critical to an organisation's survival, organisational culture is critical to an organisation's definition and execution of its goals. Though organisational culture is complex, creating a knowledge friendly culture is the best framework for addressing the issue of organisational culture. This can be done by making knowledge production an integrated aspect of how work is done in an organisation, thereby making it an integrated aspect of the culture. The knowledge friendly culture will encourage people to create and share knowledge within. Employees will end up learning that the most valuable employee is the one who becomes a source of knowledge and actively shares that knowledge with other organisational members. It also prompts employees into getting out of the habit of asking for instructions especially in cases where a bureaucratic environment is evident. The organisation will also need to reward knowledge entrepreneurship, inquiry and innovations.

The researcher recommends that AISA discourage beliefs, attitudes and assumptions about what knowledge is; which knowledge is worth managing; who is expected to control specific knowledge; who must share it; who can hoard it; and how knowledge can be used by educating and informing employees about what this asset is about. This will change people's behaviour to make their experience and expertise available to others.

## 9.3. Information and communications technologies

Over the years, the definition of ICTs has broadened to include not only technology but activities such as knowledge mapping, people and processes. It combines the attributes of culture, history, business processes and human memory. As a result it is recommended that AISA's ICTs be provided in adequate quantity and quality. They should be flexible and tailored to the type of knowledge being captured, shared, or produced in order to be effective and efficient, for example, providing

an intranet which allows people to share information voluntarily with the rest of the organisation. The intranet can highlight individuals' recognised skills so that employees know who knows what, and where the best expertise could be drawn upon to solve problems quickly and effectively.

#### 9.4. Management style

The traditional structure of organisations, whether organised by function, region or business unit, tends to prevent the free flow of knowledge throughout organisations because of the focus on silos. AISA should find a management style best suited for it and that permits flow of knowledge regardless of the employee's role, job function, or other traditional boundaries. It also allows for leadership that applies rewards and sanctions to overcome resistance. Its organisational structure should encourage learning through knowledge production and sharing. This involves teams, work groups and communities of practice (COPs) which create even more knowledge. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), COP is a term that describes a group of people who share an interest, a craft, and/or a profession. The group can evolve naturally because of the members' common interest in a particular domain or area, or it can be created specifically with the goal of gaining knowledge related to their field. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally. COPs can exist online, such as within discussion boards and newsgroups, or in real life, such as in a lunchroom at work, in a field setting, on a factory floor, or elsewhere in the environment.

#### 9.5. Communication

AISA should emphasise the importance of conversation because the best medium for knowledge is the human brain (Lave and Wenger 1991). It is recommended that AISA find ways to generate conversation, build relationships and develop trust among employees. This should not be done within departments but across various departments. For example, you cannot empower someone whom you do not trust and who does not trust you. AISA can build formal and informal skills networks in order to map activities and provide supporting tools through virtual teams and face-to-face meetings. An organisation's ability to harness the intellectual capacity of its rapidly evolving workforce is its key competitive advantage.

### 10. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the impact of organisational culture on knowledge production in a think tank at AISA. A case study was used as the research method. Questionnaires were distributed to AISA employees and interviews were conducted. The data

collected was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study revealed that AISA has a well-defined system of knowledge production with a strong demand for material produced by AISA, hosting of quality seminars and conferences locally and internationally, facilitation of young graduates, collaborations and increased knowledge on African affairs and dissemination of this knowledge. However, it faces different challenges with the main one being organisational culture. Challenges found in producing knowledge include: inadequate facilities; absence of knowledge production policies; overlapping functions; little understanding of the value of knowledge; lack of commitment; limited knowledge processing capacity; an unfavourable environment for producing knowledge; and bureaucracy/officialdom. AISA's organisational culture does not fully promote knowledge production. To a significant extent it negatively shapes how organisation members feel, think and behave and in turn hinders maximum knowledge production.

From the findings, the researcher recommends that creating a knowledge friendly culture is the best framework for addressing the issue of organisational culture. It is also recommended that AISA's ICTs be provided in adequate quantity and quality and that they should be flexible and tailored to the type of knowledge being captured, shared, or produced in order to be effective and efficient. AISA should find a management style best suited for it and that permits flow of knowledge regardless of the employee's role, job function, or other traditional boundaries. It is further recommended that AISA find ways to generate conversation, build relationships and develop trust among employees.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**SHINGIRIRAI MUZONDO** received her BA Honours and Master's degrees in Library and Information Science from the University of Fort Hare Alice, South Africa. She is currently a Librarian and Partnership Coordinator at the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). Muzondo's areas of expertise are knowledge production, and information and library science. Her passion lies in an online knowledge resource on policy related issues in Africa – the Africa Portal.

**EZRA ONDARI-OKEMWA** (PhD) is a professor and Head of the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Fort Hare. His research interests are knowledge management, knowledge production, scholarly communication, information resources management and open access publishing. He is the author of several journal publications, one book and two book chapters.