

Knowledge Management

Knowledge Management (KM) is the newest addition to the HSRC's range of activities. The creation of KM reflects the transition of all economies toward a more knowledge-intensive service industry orientation. The so-called "techno-economic" paradigm, with its rapid changes in the organisation of production and services, requires a nimbleness of decision making that in turn requires new ways of managing information.

Central to the debates concerning such new paradigms is the ability of organisations and economies constantly to innovate, and the ways and means that promote this capability. Knowledge management seeks to harness organisational information and practice toward such innovation. This is recognised at the highest level of government and is to be given substance through the Presidential National Commission on the Information Society and Development, in which the HSRC President serves as a Commissioner. The research programme will work with this Commission.

The Knowledge Management research programme was established in March 2002, and at the moment comprise only of Dr Kahn. This is set to change with up to four staff likely to be appointed over the next few months.

As a starting point, the research programme will conduct research and develop strategies in three main areas:

- government and the knowledge economy
- National System of Innovation studies
- HSRC as an innovative research organisation

The key users of this work will be government, especially the Presidency, Departments of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), Statistics South Africa, Public Service and Administration, Education, Trade and Industry, and Communications. The anticipated benefits of the work will enable government to meet its strategic imperatives, namely to harness the "information society", promote effectiveness and efficiency, and attain greater competitiveness and create employment.

Current and recently completed research projects

Government and the knowledge economy: At present, KM is collaborating with the Presidential Commission. This work builds upon research that the HSRC conducted under tender for Department of Public Service and Administration in late 2001 on the issue of "information for corporate decision making". It will be extended under a Forum for South African Directors-General (FOSAD) mandate to examine how information is managed and used across government, thus leading to detailed examination of the enabling and regulatory environment and intellectual property rights.

As new technologies sweep into operation it becomes even more necessary constantly to avoid duplication and the hoarding of data and information. The additional requirements of the Promotion of Access to Information Act also motivate organisations to organise their information in a more coherent fashion. The collateral benefit of such coherence is that it offers the potential to unlock value that is latent in such information. As government becomes increasingly "on-line", new legislation will become a necessity for control and to enable secure information flows. The HSRC will be a key resource in this conversation.

National System of Innovation (NSI) studies: As the transformation of the science and technology system has taken shape, it has become essential for policy to be informed and guided by evidence-based research. Such capability is essential for DACST National Research and Development Strategy to enjoy solid implementation. The research programme is actively engaged in supporting this strategy through three projects:



- The national R&D survey is the largest project under the National System of Innovation studies. It is conducted for and funded by DACST, following the "Frascati Manual" guidelines. The survey will form the baseline for the construction of a reliable and valid time series that will eventually become part of official statistics. It is concerned with quantifying the inputs to the conduct of research and development, namely people and money. It will survey government, parastatal, higher education, business and non-profit organisations. The information will be captured to a database that the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) will construct and maintain. The timeline for delivery is early 2003.

- The survey on the mobility of R&D workers for the National Advisory Council on Innovation (NACI) is linked to the above survey, though it runs on a different timeline. Requested and funded by NACI, this study seeks to understand the scale and nature of the mobility and circulation of R&D workers and forms part of the national debates on the virtue or negativities of the circulation of high-level skills. This work is being affected in co-operation with the CSIR. The R&D survey will include questions on mobility, which will become available to the NACI project.

- The NACI study on utilisation of research findings, in consortium with the CSIR and the National Research Foundation (NRF) entails the careful construction of a set of case histories of publicly funded research projects. It examines the extent to which they have influenced policy. The case histories form part of a larger project that seeks to develop policy options and strategies toward research utilisation.

The three projects will provide important information on the workings of the National System of Innovation. A further set of projects is being scoped to support the first phase of implementing the National Research and Development Strategy.

HSRC as an innovative research organisation: The HSRC is in the process of the most significant transformation in its history. Its quest to provide "social science that makes a difference" is met by means of excellent anticipatory intelligence, responsiveness to user request and the use of a mix of funds from the Science Vote and external sources. The programme will play its role in enabling the HSRC to develop knowledge management systems that accord with this vision and needs. Such systems must take into account the necessity for "boundary-less" operations that are already emerging as the organisation draws on the knowledge resident in its remote sites.

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