

Testing the World Bank's Knowledge Bank
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Introduction

The World Bank has always sold ideas, not just loans. Yet in 1996 then World Bank president James Wolfensohn rebranded the World Bank by articulating a formal vision of a “Knowledge Bank” - a provider of state of the art expertise on development. While the concept of a “knowledge bank” has evolved over the years, as described in this paper, the essence of the notion that the Bank will play a key role in knowledge collection, dissemination, and sharing is still very much a part of its philosophy and *raison d’etre*. In its current mission statement, the World Bank claims that: “Our mission is to fight poverty with passion and professionalism for lasting results and to help people help themselves and their environment by providing resources, *sharing knowledge, building capacity* and forging partnerships in the public and private sectors.” (World Bank, 2010)

We begin by reviewing the history of the World Bank’s knowledge initiative. The concept has evolved over the years and has had its share of revisions and reincarnations. The concept of the Knowledge Bank was at its pinnacle in the late 1990s. This is evident in the then President’s speeches and Chief Economist’s position papers which highlighted the innovative and progressive approach to development policy. The number of Bank publications and initiatives related to its role as a knowledge broker has nevertheless declined over the years. The original concept has not only seen its name evolve from Knowledge Management to Knowledge Sharing today, but the idea of the Knowledge Bank has also been quietly tempered down. The knowledge role only appears in the Bank’s mission statements today and in self-referential claims. Moreover, the once frequent World Bank commissioning of external assessments of the knowledge bank policy has also diminished.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the Bank’s track-record in its role as the ‘knowledge bank’. Such an effort is particularly warranted after the relative decline of evaluations noted above. The Bank’s achievements can be appraised by examining the experience of two key stakeholders. The first are the bank’s staff, and their ability to prepare and execute high quality loans, based on sound objectives and implementation methods. The second are the Bank’s clients, and the ease and speed with which they have been able to access and use relevant information. This paper reviews staff and client evaluations of the knowledge bank policy, and adds impact among peer organizations as the third prong of a comprehensive evaluation.

We review assessments of the bank's research and knowledge production and extend these by offering two quantitative measures of relative impact: the institutional research tail of the bank vis-a-vis other international organizations, and the citation impact of its papers. These are justified indicators because they capture a measure of knowledge value by experts, bank staff

are partly judged on their contributions to academic journals, and other knowledge institutions such as academic departments, use these measures to judge their own performance and that of their researchers. We conclude with both policy recommendations and theoretical implications of this study.

The Imperatives of Testing the Knowledge Bank

The onset of the financial crisis in 2007 sent many analysts, pundits, and policymakers in search of new ideas and solutions to the quagmire created by the financial sector. As Bhattacharya and Lombardi (2010) note, global financial and development institutions will be needed in combating the current financial crisis which creates an opportunity for the Bank to demonstrate its relevance. We argue that the quality and applicability of the ideas the Bank produces and disseminates is a crucial aspect of its institutional future. It has become a widely accepted argument that governments of developing states accept the authoritative role of international organizations like the World Bank not only because they control access to material resources, but because they posit themselves as experts of development ideas and policies. (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004) As Cord Jakobeit notes... "Due to its financial clout alone, the Bank as a globally leading (if controversial) think tank and a globally committed donor has a special position in international development policy. Because it has in many cases the power of definition and interpretation, its publications must be taken seriously". A growing body of academic literature in international organization theory, loosely labelled as constructivist, have further argued that international organizations instruct civil servants on how to better perform their work. In this vein, international organizations are viewed as the agents of change, moulding client state preferences by 'teaching' them how to conform their behaviour to international standards (See Finnemore, 1996). International organizations have highly respected bureaucrats with noted expertise that accords them great influence with states (Finnemore and Sikkink:899; Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). Consequently, the Bank prides itself on strong economic research that member states acknowledge to be grounded in the best economic analysis available. This gives the Bank deference and respect for its policy advice, opening the channels for states to learn from it.

International economic organizations, particularly after the international financial crisis, need to maintain their relevance, hold legitimacy in the eyes of its members and clients, and keep trust and confidence of its donors. While there has been significant recent attention of the G20's efforts to re-engage and reform the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank has only seen limited mention and funding in G20 statements and has had modest reform proposals suggested by this new node in the global governance architecture. The need to evaluate the World Bank's response and vision for the future of its organization is therefore vital to its continued relevance and merits further study.

So to begin, we are reminded that the World Bank continues to claim its leadership role in knowledge production, dissemination, and sharing. Indeed, the Bank has renewed its commitment to playing a role in providing to and sharing knowledge with its member countries and in particular to its developing clients. In its 2009 annual report, the Bank reaffirmed the value of its role as a knowledge broker, its access to a development policy network, its strengthened relationships, important presence in the international financial systems, and the tools it created since its 1996 initiative was formalized. The Bank stated:

“Knowledge is the key to development effectiveness and the driver for a successful development institution. The Bank is able to draw on a global network of platforms in 120 countries, close and long-standing relationships with partners, a deep understanding of global and national policy issues, an unparalleled pool of development data and expertise, a strong balance sheet, and a highly motivated and entrepreneurial workforce.” (World Bank, 2009)

Rather than taking the opportunity to provide self-reflection on the challenges encountered in its pursuit of a knowledge bank role, the World Bank claims that in the aftermath of the crisis, it is and will continue to be the provider of ‘unconventional wisdom’. Again, its 2009 annual report states that “The global financial crisis and the associated questioning of conventional wisdom will create more demand for the Bank’s knowledge services over the coming years, underscoring the critical need for the Bank to strengthen its knowledge base” (World Bank, 2009). The Bank’s self-proclaimed role as a knowledge broker has not been without criticism and will be reviewed and analyzed in this paper.

History of the Knowledge Bank Policy

After only a year in his post, World Bank President James Wolfensohn announced in the 1996 Annual IMF and World Bank meetings that the World Bank will be a ‘Knowledge Bank’ and turn acquired knowledge into commercial value. As Weaver and Leiteritz (2005) describe, the impetus to change the World Bank’s mandate at that time was partly internal and externally driven. Externally, the World Bank was losing many clients as developing countries sought out financing on capital markets. Moreover, the non-governmental community and other civil society actors mounted numerous advocacy campaigns that undermined the World Bank’s legitimacy in development circles. Internally, the World Bank conducted its own study in 1992, called the Wapenhans report for its principal author that showed low country compliance and weak organizational behaviour within the Bank (Weaver and Leiteritz, 2005). On an individual level, the story often told is that Wolfensohn was motivated to initiate the Knowledge Bank after speaking to a World Bank employee who was about to leave the Bank with all of his files and store in his personal home after grunting that the Bank would not know how to preserve this valuable information. When Wolfensohn claimed that this was illegal, he would soon find out that it was not, and that the World Bank had no system in place to preserve the knowledge created in the organization (Leautier, 2005, p.100).

Wolfensohn, an international investment banker, was motivated to promote change within the World Bank and he believed that the ‘Knowledge Bank’ would be a positive and transformative approach. Wolfensohn stated that:

“Can you imagine putting online all the experience we have had in preschool education, to allow an education minister or a researcher in a distant country to have direct access to the Bank, without waiting for various documents? Or just think: through our satellite system, interactive, thirty-person classrooms around the world can participate in direct teaching. Bank offices can provide classes and discussions with developing countries throughout the world, in whatever language necessary. This is not science fiction; this is

today. So we will take advantage of technology, and we will take advantage of the new opportunities we are finding” (Wolfensohn, 1997).

The Knowledge Bank vision would see the World Bank help in creating knowledge in its research department, then sharing knowledge within the Bank staff, member countries, and the stakeholders involved in development, then applying this knowledge in country programs. Ideally the creation of knowledge would then be cyclical where Bank research would adapt its acquired knowledge from the experiences of member countries and the application of previous ideas and acquired knowledge (World Bank, 2004). This would serve as a feedback loop into the cycle of acquiring and sharing knowledge. As Wolfensohn noted in his speech, the use of information communication technologies allowed the acquisition, organization, and dissemination of knowledge to be used more effectively than had been in the past. The World Bank would capitalize on its ability to play a pivotal role as a broker in the described knowledge cycle.

The Global Knowledge Conference was convened in Toronto, Canada in 1997 and gathered world leaders, policymakers, and development stakeholders to discuss ways of combining the gains in information communication technologies and the struggle for development in the South. From the Toronto meeting, Wolfensohn took the Knowledge Bank concept one step further. As part one of four pillars in a larger reform package called the ‘Strategic Compact’, the knowledge bank would serve as one component of the overall internal reform plan. Bank creditors supported Wolfensohn’s Knowledge Bank vision with \$50million per annum to overhaul the Bank’s operations. This involved shifting more resources from headquarters to member countries like video-conferencing that host interactive and distant education classes, promote internal sharing of acquired knowledge through a new data management system. The World Bank, for example, launched the ‘Virtual University’ for Africa where its database of information on development would be used to train professionals and government officials in best-practices. To govern these new initiatives a Knowledge and Learning Council was also established.

The World Bank’s Chief Economist, the outspoken Joseph Stiglitz, was instrumental in proposing the Knowledge Bank concept. Stiglitz’ life-time academic work and views on the subject was noted in his address to UNCTAD’s annual Prebisch Lecture in 1998. Stiglitz said:

“Development requires closing the gap not only in ‘objects’, in human and physical capital, but also in knowledge. Knowledge and capital are in fact complements: improved knowledge enhances the return on capital, while additional capital provides the opportunity to make use of recently acquired knowledge.” (Stiglitz, 1998)

Stiglitz and other World Bank researchers would articulate the concept further in the World Bank’s premier annual publications, the *World Development Report*, in 1998. The “Knowledge for Development” report had identified two deficiencies in development: knowledge gaps in technical issues (such as health care, agriculture, and finance) and information problems related to attributes (such as country member’s creditability as borrowers or product quality). The developing world suffers from these two deficiencies in development, more so than the developed world. The former are not poor solely for a lack of capital, but also for a lack of

knowledge (World Bank, 1999). Here the World Bank was to be transformed from the ‘conditionality bank’ to the ‘knowledge bank’ - two competing paradigms about the role of the World Bank (Gilbert et al., 1999).

The role of the World Bank is to share the knowledge already created, so as to not ‘reinvent the knowledge wheel’, that could be used by governments, donors, and private actors in carving development policies (World Bank, 1999). To begin the knowledge bank transfer of ideas, the World Bank’s offices around the world were connected into a global communication sharing system in 1998. Subsequently, three initiatives were launched in 2000 to pursue the ‘Knowledge Bank’ objectives. First, the Development Gateway was an online portal that housed information on development and poverty reduction that could be accessed by member countries, the private sector, the non-governmental sector and international donors. The Gateway once posted on its website that its role was to “solve development problems by sharing high-quality information from local and national sources, tailored to users’ needs by topic and community” (Wilks, 2001). With this grand goal, the Gateway offered an online bookstore, links to a quasi-encyclopaedia of development issues, access to participating Country Gateway sites, and a database of donor and aid agency projects (Wilks, 2001). The Gateway was effectively privatized into its own independent entity in 2001 and continues to operation from Washington, DC.

Second, the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) was a partnership with regional centres that provided videoconferencing and distance education classes to promote cross-country discussion on development and poverty reduction issues. Among the issues currently featured on the GDLN website include Telemedicine, climate change, food crisis, water, and leadership. The GDLN comprises of over 120 affiliated global institutions in more than 80 countries that seek to coordinate and collaborate learning projects on development. These affiliates include academic units, think tanks, research centres, government agencies, or private sector organizations. Most of the GDLN’s work is involved in promoting learning sessions with virtual conferences consisting of multiple countries (GDN, 2010).

Third, the Global Development Network was a virtual research institute that promoted research capacity and policy ideas, bridging the gap between theory and practice. In cooperation with the United Nations, the GDN fostered seven regional research networks that acted like local think-tanks for development issues in each of the respective regions. The regional research units are generally biased towards hiring economists, but the East Asian and the Eastern European units are more diverse in their hiring (Stone, 2003). In 2001, the GDN became an independent non-for profit body operating in Washington, DC, but with continued links to the World Bank (WB OED, 2003:2). It later launched GDNet, portal and repository of research papers and policy papers emanating from regional economists, many of which have ties to the regional research centres. After becoming an international organization, GDN moved its operations to India in 2008.

Before reviewing the external, internal and comparative evaluations of the Knowledge Bank policy, we first discuss the academic and policy analysts’ views on the Knowledge Bank concept to better understand the merits of criticism and support for the initiative.

Academic and Policy Analysts' Take on the Knowledge Bank

While many have supported the Bank's role as knowledge bank, more often the concept has had its critics, many from academia, think-tanks, non-governmental organizations, and civil society actors. The external reflection on the concept has centred on three main arguments: questions of Bank impartiality and objectivity, its promotion of universalist knowledge as opposed to context specific, and partiality towards neo-liberal prescriptions.

First, on the question of objectivity, Gilbert et al. (1999) have argued that the Bank is in the perfect position to be a knowledge broker because knowledge is a public good that is best produced by an objective party like the Bank. They argue that the Bank can produce and 'bundle' knowledge and ideas more effectively than either academia or the private sector because it can use lending to help 'the money carry the ideas' (p. F610). Particularly in the age of globalization and with the need for policy congruence in an age of global governance, the Bank is well positioned to be a knowledge broker; moreover, with the rise of capital markets, the Bank's *raison d'être* as a lending institution is limited and it can therefore play a more effective role in brokering development ideas (Ibid).

In contrast to Gilbert et al, there has been more frequent criticism of academics and non-government actors has been that the Bank is not in a position to be an objective broker of knowledge on development when it holds the power of the purse in determining many developing countries' financial welfare. As Robert Wade of London Economics points out, for example,

"It raises the question of whether the world is served by having as the principle provider of development statistics an organisation exposed to arm-twisting by its member states and needing to defend itself against constant criticism. We would not want Philip Morris research labs to be the only source of data on the effects of smoking even if the research met professional standards." (BWP, 2001)

Others have also echoed these same questions whether the Bank can in fact be impartial in presenting alternative ideological views on development (Standing, 2000). The question is whether the Bank take issue with the policies it has prescribed and will it foster open dialogue with known critics. After all, who will challenge the potential 'knowledge hegemony' emanating from the Bank? Who and what are the checks and balances on the Bank? (Standing, 2000). Moreover, there is no internal Bank framework used to assess the value and opportunity costs of playing this central role (Kapur, 2006). Devesh Kapur argues that the Bank would be better off concentrating on lending and consider supporting the research of developing country institutions which would presumably be better at incorporating local knowledge (Ibid).

Second, Diane Stone (2003) argues that the Bank has been uncritical about how the knowledge bank is utilized. She notes that in the case of the Global Development Network, the World Bank has at times promoted a discourse that seems to be void of appreciation for developing countries' social context. The general criticism of Bank policies and advice as being void of social context is a frequently cited point (Woods, 2006). The knowledge bank initiative is

similarly seen as having exhibited all the trappings of technocratic and apolitical understanding of developing countries' social contexts. Moreover, Lyla Mehta (1999) argues that the Knowledge Bank concept, as first envisioned in the 1998/1999 World Development Report is patronizing the poor as lacking knowledge and the implies the rich are enlightened; the solution to this problem is a top-down and universalistic knowledge transfer that fails to appreciate local circumstances of poverty. She adds:

"The Bank's knowledge agenda often tends to be centralized and absolutist and draws on economistic and technocratic models. These trends contribute to the emergence of a narrow knowledge agenda that both neglects sociocultural issues and those concerning a wider political economy. Thus, the plural nature of knowledge is denied and the Bank's own problematic role in knowledge generation is not reflected upon (Mehta, 2001)."

Specifically, Stone finds that the GDN research and discourse had maintained a public goods approach that favoured free markets and open economies (2003, 43-33). The Bank is unable to act as a neutral knowledge broker when it has a preferred method of understanding and fixing development problems.

Third, it is argued that the Bank does not allow internal discourse within the Bank itself and is therefore stunting the knowledge production cycle. As Nicholas Stern and Francisco Ferreira point out:

"[World Bank] researchers are not free to follow intellectual inspiration ... and the atmosphere is much more deferential than one would find in universities. There is an understandable concern with what superiors will think of their conclusions." (1997)

Stunting internal discourse is evermore problematic when the Bank places a significant part of emphasis on knowledge creation in the knowledge bank cycle. Again, the Bank germinates internal research to be fed into the knowledge production cycle, while in theory the Bank opens the cycle to other researchers and practitioners that are part of a feedback loop into the generation of new ideas. But, Robin Broad found that the World Bank's department in charge of the germination of knowledge, specifically in the Development Economics Vice-Presidency (DEC), controls internal World Bank debate through stunting discordant ideas and giving incentives in hiring and promotion for those who reinforce the Bank's agenda (2006). This was further supported by a recent paper, commissioned by the World Bank, which noted that: "... research was used to proselytize on behalf of Bank policy, often without taking a balanced view of the evidence, and without expressing appropriate skepticism. Internal research that was favorable to Bank positions was given great prominence, and unfavorable research ignored." (World Bank, 2007:6). Broad found that the World Bank's research department have deemed its ideas to be superior to those in area or functional departments which had closer relations with debtor countries (2006:394). This system of 'paradigm maintenance' has influence and impact outside of the Bank (Ibid; Stone, 2003.).

To take this one step further, critics claim that the World Bank has legitimized its place in global governance through the ideas and knowledge it produces and the audience or 'norm consumers' that internalize it (St. Clair, 2006). The Bank has used academic language, rigor, and

claims to scientific analysis to legitimize its agenda (Ibid: 78). The Bank thereby creates its own epistemic community, with an army of norm diffusers constantly shaping the agenda in development discourse and monopolizing the data and methodology to further policy debates (Ibid.). The ideas produced by the World Bank and other IOs, serve to create legitimate frames that limit further discourse or that make dissonant ideas deemed radical- this is a form of Gramscian ‘ideological hegemony’ that needs to be unpacked (See Boas and McNeill, 2004; Wade, 2002).

Insiders and Clients’ Assessment of the Knowledge Bank and Comparative Indicators

As we consider the task of assessing the effectiveness of the Bank’s knowledge bank initiative, we are immediately confronted with the question of standards. There has not been a consistent standard of effectiveness with corresponding metrics against which one can evaluate the Bank’s performance. This is problematic because standards not only provide criteria to assess *what* is working and how well, but also *why* some aspects of the knowledge bank strategy are working and others not. Standards evoke *subjective* beliefs that justify particular strategies. Hence, if a strategy is ineffective we may trace our way back to the beliefs on which it is founded, and consider if all stakeholders share them *intersubjectively* (i.e deem them appropriate for the Bank’s strategy)¹.

If knowledge management is only as good as the use it receives (Martensson, 2000), the Bank needs to consider client standards of effectiveness, and contend with external beliefs of relevant knowledge. Bank clients have particular expectations of what information collection and sharing activities should comprise, and assess the Bank’s achievements accordingly. Client standards of the Bank’s knowledge initiative can be inferred from client survey responses such as the OED’s five-country consultation in 2002.

Finally, since the Bank’s stated goal is that of becoming a state of the art institution in development knowledge, it is reasonable to evaluate its output among its peers. We use the broad indicators of citation tail and impact among the journals that constitute the primary academic sources of development research. Consequently, this section is divided into three parts, the first considers internal reviews of the knowledge initiative, the second clients’ perspectives and the third assesses impact relative to peer organizations.

The Insiders’ View:

How do we find standards of effectiveness in the absence of explicitly stated ones? They are embedded in goals and objectives, terms of reference for evaluations, and the design of survey questions among other sources. For the purposes of this paper we rely on the following goals for an assessment criteria of the knowledge bank policy: James Wolfensohn’s first announcement of the knowledge initiative in 1996; the Strategic Compact’s re-direction in 1999; and the 2001 strategic framework which revised the Bank’s knowledge strategy (Gwinn 2003).

¹ For this distinction we rely on constructivist theories of International Relations which have called to our attention the “significance of intersubjective understandings” to make sense of social outcomes. (Adler, 2002, p. 103)

President Wolfensohn's statement focused on the importance of adequate technical infrastructure to link the Bank's development experience with people in developing countries who could benefit from it. The statement also showed a concern with positioning the Bank as a knowledge leader in development. Effectiveness would thus be measured by the technological capacity the Bank developed, and recognition by staff, clients and peers. This short synopsis shows an evolution in standards of effectiveness, from product-centered outputs (systems and institutional recognition) to products and processes (operational learning, sharing and access). Two evaluations in 1999 and 2003 describe how the Bank performed against these standards.

In 1999 IBM's Institute for Knowledge Management conducted a staff evaluation. The team consulted roughly 500 staff members, including nineteen vice presidents, using focus groups, interviews and surveys. The report gave the Bank's knowledge initiative its full endorsement, calling it a strategy that it "far-sighted in conception and sound in its fundamentals, and positions the Bank to play a key role in the world economy of the 21st Century." (Prusak, 1999). It also commended the Bank for accomplishing much in a short amount of time and with limited resources, including: forming thematic groups and appointing thematic leaders, creating web pages for dissemination of information, an expert directory listing staff specializations, and revising staff evaluations to incorporate performance in knowledge bank dimensions. However, the report's findings and recommendations revealed significant gaps in implementation. Staff responses on the clarity of the policy and its effectiveness showed that about half of the staff understood and agreed with the knowledge bank policy. The other half was split between those who disagreed with the policy and those who were not sure. And only 37% of staff said that the Bank's knowledge resources were accessible. Thematic groups, which were identified as a keystone strategy for knowledge bank implementation, received mixed reviews. Most participants said thematic groups added value to Bank work. However, the evaluation team warned that the groups were in danger of unravelling because staff saw the extra tasks as an additional burden.

Hence, by 1999 the Bank had fallen short of meeting many of its own standards of effective knowledge bank. It did not enjoy its own staff's recognition as a knowledge leader, since the policy was not clear to them nor was their own ability to contribute to it. Technological capacity was promoted but mismanaged and disjointed. Information resources spread across several networks including regional and thematic group sites, the intranet and the external world wide web. The knowledge bank intranet alone contained 900 dead ends (Prusak, 1999). According to the evaluation report this was not a product of missing investments in technology but of lacking organizational structures that would guide the processes of capturing and storing information in coherent ways.

Billed as a "plan for renewal" the 2001 Strategic Compact was an agreement between the Bank and its shareholders at a time when the institution's legitimacy among shareholders, clients and NGOs was critically at risk. The Bank was being heavily criticized for its centralized, top-down management structure, abstract approach to knowledge and universalist prescriptions for development that were producing a record number of unsatisfactory-rated projects (Weaver and Leiteritz, 2005). The Strategic Compact noted the problems in conceptualizing the knowledge bank within the organization and the lack of organizational

cohesiveness in the Bank's approach: "The knowledge management system is fragmented and insufficiently integrated with operational processes. It is also supply rather than demand driven, and insufficiently orientated towards the needs of clients... [Moreover,] There is no shared understanding of what the knowledge bank is, nor how its various elements fit together". The organizational failures were also highlighted as well: "There is a fairly widespread (but as yet unmeasured) perception that the Bank's 'internal market' is a significant disincentive to knowledge sharing, as it places staff working on similar issues in competition with each other". (Strategic Compact, 2001). To move forward, the 2001 strategic framework set out more clearly than before three goals for the knowledge bank initiative: improved operational quality, enhanced sharing with partners and clients, and enhanced client access to the Bank's information resources (World Bank, 2001). The compact put in place organizational changes to enable operational learning from its knowledge bank activities (Laporte, 2004).

In 2002, after six years and \$280 million invested in implementing the knowledge policy, the Operations Evaluation Department (OED) conducted an extensive internal and external assessment. The evaluation relied on a knowledge bank literature review, surveys and interviews with networks within the Bank, individual staff and management, academics, NGOs and private sector representatives. This 2002 evaluation showed a sharp increase in ease of access to information, at least internally and as compared to the 1997 findings from the IBM team. Thematic groups still received mixed reviews from staff, but internal and external web resources became more integrated and a more widely used tool for knowledge sharing. Since 2000, and for five consecutive years, the organization won a most admired knowledge enterprise award from Teleos, a knowledge bank research company. In 2002 Yahoo Spanish economic and business section also gave the Bank an award for its external website and in 2002 the Nielson Norman Group for design of its intranet. Help desks became another well-established strategy for responding to general internal and external requests. They did not provide in depth analysis but supplied quick responses to queries on publications or statistical data. However, much of the information being collected was still not integrated into operations. Hence, while networks within the Bank were doing a better job at capturing and storing information, these remained separate activities that were not parlayed into program and project work at the country level (Gwinn, 2003).

On the quality of World Bank research, the Bank commissioned an independent academic evaluation of its research in 2006 that is often referred to as the Deaton Report. It assessed the process of selection, topical emphasis, analytic quality, and relevance of research produced by the Bank (An Evaluation of World Bank Research 1998-2005 Deaton, 2006). They found some outstanding work being carried out primarily by economists measuring global poverty and health. But once again, the evaluators echoed prior criticisms on the selection and use of information "to proselytize on behalf of Bank policy, often without taking a balanced view of the evidence and without expressing appropriate scepticism" (Deaton, p. 6).

The report confirmed earlier findings that the Bank remains disorganized in its internal data gathering, archiving and dissemination operations. It also found that research is not sufficiently well connected to project preparation on the ground. This perpetuates technically flawed projects that continue to run for years. The panel took note of the Bank's flagship publication, the World Development Report, and how it had changed the way we think about

development, health, poverty and population. However, it warned that in recent years, the report had become diluted by trying to reconcile too many points of views and framing trade offs as win-win situations. Because these reports are so influential, it remains a challenge for the Bank to navigate the tension between policy advocacy and serious intellectual research. Overall, given its mission to be a leader in development knowledge, and the centrality of a knowledge broker role noted in the Bank's mission statements and annual reports, the evaluators found that the organization was significantly underfunding its research activities.

The Client's view

A client evaluation of effectiveness formed part of the 2002 OED evaluation. The evaluation team surveyed 121 respondents in a five-country study that included Bangladesh, Brazil, Poland, Senegal, and Tanzania. Most were government officials and academics, and a minority came from the NGO, media or private sector. The majority were economists by background, with experience in development and familiar with the World Bank.

The questionnaire gathered quantitative and qualitative responses on the use of World Bank advice and how it was obtained, the quality and applicability of the advice and information offered by the World Bank, the effectiveness of information dissemination strategies, factors that impact effective information sharing, and the impact of the Bank's knowledge products and services. (Gwin, 2003) The summary findings of the report describe an institution that has progressed in establishing internal production processes, but not been as successful in sharing knowledge externally. On the quality of the information produced, respondents across the five countries gave the Bank high marks on technical knowledge, rating reports as valuable because of their comprehensiveness, analytical strength and detail. But much of the criticism concerned the practical application of the best practices promoted by the Bank. The majority of respondents were critical of the organization's "presumption of correctness" (Gwin, 2003, p.65), disregard to alternative approaches and local knowledge, bias toward macroeconomic solutions and inflexibility in considering applicability to local conditions. Information dissemination was also seen as one of the Bank's weaknesses.

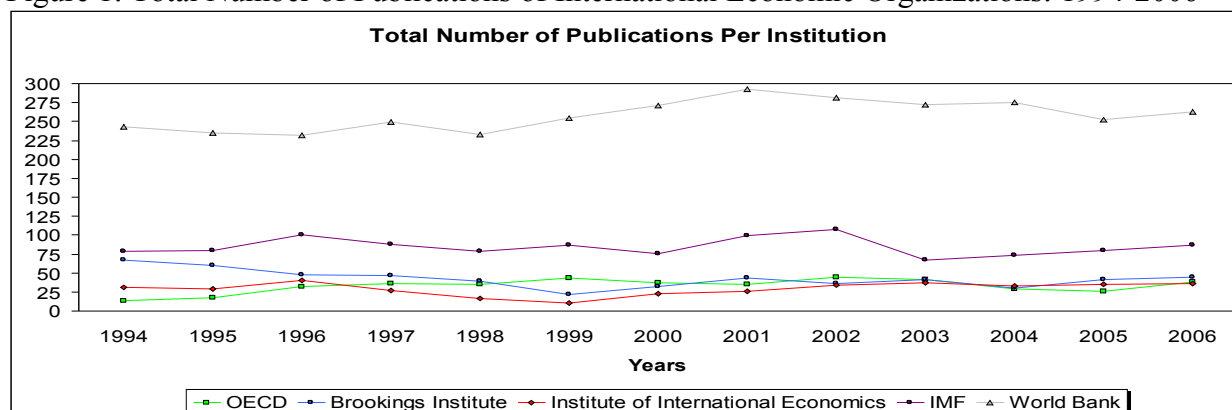
These divergent views of effective knowledge bank among the Bank and its clients can be better understood through the lens of two competing approaches to knowledge. The first, which the Bank has adopted, is a content perspective that views knowledge as a product. As such, it can be codified and stored. Since knowledge is a good or service, there is a market for it to be shared, traded, bought or sold. The Bank's strategy to become a knowledge broker becomes clear based on this view of knowledge. The second is a relational perspective where knowledge is contextual and dynamic (Hayes and Walsham 2003). Proponents of this approach are critical of the content perspective because it is highly prescriptive, promotes over simplified, black box solutions packaged as cutting edge best practices, and is supplier-focused (Newell et al, 2000). The client responses obtained through the OED country studies empirically confirms these claims.

Relative Impact Among Peer Organizations

Robin Broad quotes a World Bank senior official who found that from 1998-2003, DEC papers had a 4.22 average citation impact (using ISI Thomson Scientific Database set), while the World Bank overall had 3.63 and overall papers had a 1.71 impact (2006:397). The point being that the World Bank overall is listened to in the development circles and its research department even more so. We have conducted our own assessment of the relative levels of publication activity, (dissemination activities) and impact on academic discourse in development. Our data does not determine quality of the publications, or the types of ideas that are being promoted, nor if there has been any learning as a result of these activities.

As Figure 1 indicates, the World Bank staff publish more frequently in academic journals than the IMF, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Institute of International Economics (IIE), and the Brookings Institute. But, this is owing to the fact that the World Bank staff is much larger than the other organizations. In 1994 and 2006, the World Bank had employed 9400 and 10000 people; the IMF had employed 2500 and 2633 people.² The World Bank staff was 3.8 times larger than the IMF staff in both 1994 and in 2006. Of course this does not give us a break down of economists and support staff, but one can derive a clear difference in sheer staff size. If we were to assess how many journal publications were authored by the World Bank and IMF per staff member, the IMF actually outperforms the Bank.³

Figure 1: Total Number of Publications of International Economic Organizations: 1994-2006



Source: Data derived from Thomson ISI Web of Knowledge.

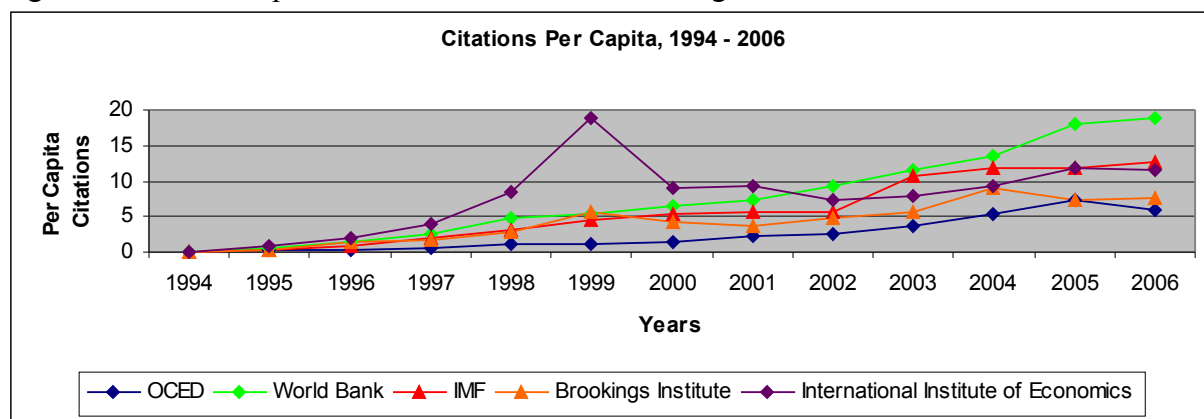
² Derived from IMF and World Bank website and GAO (1995). IMF staff employed 2,633 in 2006; 2,297 in 2000; 2,212 in 1998; 2,203 in 1997, 2,500 in 1994. The World Bank employed 10,000 in 2006 and 9,400 in 1994.

³ World Bank researchers in the DEC are expected to publish two academic journal papers per year (World Bank, 2007: 8). However, no such quotas have existed at the IMF.

Over the 12 years examined, both the World Bank and the IMF have been pretty consistent in their number of external academic publications they produce. But as Figure 1 notes, the World Bank and the IMF reached a peak in their number of academic publications in 2001 and 2002. At the IMF, the most significant increase in publications came in 2001 when they published 30% more articles in academic journals. Both institutions, however, decreased their number of publications after 2002. The IMF, most dramatically, decreased the number of its academic publications by 62% from 2002 to 2003. Reduction in IMF staff numbers is perhaps partly the cause in this decrease.

Is academia listening to the Bank? What is the impact of Bank academic publications compared to other organizations? The academic community on average cites Bank academic publications 8.23 times per publication; compared to the IMF 6.43, OECD 2.5, and Brookings Institute 4.07. Over the 12 years examined, as figure 2 notes, Bank publications have been progressively improving their citation impact. One real surprise, however, were the IIE publications which were more frequently cited in 1998 through to 2001. This is perhaps explained by the Asian crisis.

Figure 2: Citation Impact of International Economic Organizations: 1994-2006



Source: Data derived from Thomson ISI Web of Knowledge.

Conclusion:

The Bank moved to establish processes and systems before grappling with some central questions on the substantive elements of knowledge⁴. For example, what counts as knowledge, how does it differ from information, what is the genesis of learning and who are the learners⁵. After years of efforts dedicated to creating technological infrastructure, the Bank started to ask itself more substantive questions about knowledge and learning⁶. It became more attuned to the

⁴ For a review of knowledge subjectivities in development see Mike Powell, 2006.

⁵ For a distinction between knowledge and information see T.D. Wilson, 2002.

⁶ This is a common problem in KM initiatives. See Hayes and Walsham, 2003.

need to produce information based on client demands, rather than staff initiative. It also became more sensitive to the cycle of knowledge and the relationships between inputs and outputs.

However, the Bank has still not come full circle to value the primacy of local knowledge in local conditions. The prevailing approach is universalistic; a search for best practices that imply general applicability. The Bank has also not incorporated a culture of learning from the client. Though there has been some experimentation on the margins, within regions and among particular self-motivated task managers, the organization has remained concerned with learning from its own implementation successes and mistakes, but not from the millennia of knowledge available among its clients⁷. Results from the OED's five-country study and academic assessments reflect these concerns with the Bank's beliefs and approach to knowledge and learning.

If the Bank is to bolster its legitimacy it must pay attention to feedback processes between the organization, its clients and the wider development community. This is central to the nature of relational knowledge. The KNOLWEDGE BANK evaluation of 2003 showed a concern with "activities [that] have done more to *push out* knowledge than *pull it in*—thus missing out on opportunities to refresh the Bank's knowledge" (Gwinn, 2003 p. 10). Clients are thus meant to learn from the Bank and its expert advisors, while the reverse relationship receives little institutional attention (Easterly, 2006). When the Bank promotes a unidirectional approach to knowledge sharing, it not only perpetuates perceptions of a legitimacy deficit but also risk its own effectiveness as a knowledge leader. More recent research literature from the World Bank recognizes the importance of this claim (Laporte and Cohen, 2004) but a gap remains between its literature and operations. Former World Bank employee David Ellerman argues that the Bank should in fact be a learning organization and this would be in direct conflict with its proclaimed knowledge bank role (2002). As then advisor to the UNDP on the Human Development Report and former World Bank employee and former Pakistani Minister of Finance, Mahbub Ul Haq, had stated: "This whole desire to build a research empire here, to duplicate a Harvard or a Yale, to try to do better than they do, to publish, has been very counterproductive. There is a lot more of an argument to have indigenous research because it would be a lot more suited to the cultural and other peculiarities of each nation." (quoted from BWP, 1998)

The Bank's knowledge initiative efforts have been extensive, and in time seen by many as notably improved. But as the Bank points out in its own assessments, there are implementation challenges. We have argued that these are a product of divergent beliefs about knowledge, which the Bank must take seriously if it is to go beyond packaging information and move towards meaningful partnerships with clients to unpack development options.

⁷ For instance a notable exception is the Africa Indigenous Knowledge Initiative.

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