

## **SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE STRUCTURE AND OPERATION OF STRATEGY AND POLICY RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS SERVING STATE MANAGEMENT UNDER MINISTRIES AND MINISTERIAL-LEVEL**

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### **Abstract:**

*In the national system of science and technology (S&T) organizations, institutions in charge of policy and strategy studies under ministry and ministerial-level agency (hereinafter referred to as Ministry institutions) are those entities being assigned with research function with a view to providing scientific and practical basis for development of strategies, mechanisms and policies for state management of the host ministry. By conducting study and analysis of international experiences and practices of Vietnam, the author of this paper proposed some solutions that should be simultaneously undertaken for further improvement of the performance of this kind of organization, in respect of (1) Creating a freedom, democracy environment for social science research; (2) Improved mechanism of assigning research task to ministry institutions in charge of policy and strategy study for state management; (3) Cost-effective mechanism of steering, coordination and cooperation in policy research and development for management and (4) Autonomy of ministry institutions in charge of policy and strategy research in respect of organization and human arrangement with the aim to improve the organizational and operational model of this kind of institution in the future.*

**Keywords:** *Think Tank; Strategy and Policy Research Organization; State Management.*

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## **I. OVERVIEW OF POLICY RESEARCH, ADVISORY ORGANIZATION IN THE WORLD**

### **1. Think Tank concept**

It is to address a policy institute or policy research organization<sup>2</sup> (often called *Think Tank* in English or *Tang duy* in Chinese-Vietnamese). This concept is used to indicate an organization or a group of individuals conducting research to provide policy, strategy advice in different areas, initially in military field, and then expanded to other areas such as politics,

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<sup>2</sup> For convenience, in this article the author will use the word Think Tank in English (uppercase, singular) as it appears in the original references

economics, culture, education, S&T, environment, etc. Many Think Tanks operating in US and Canada are non-profit organizations, and some other Think Tanks were founded, funded by governments or individuals.

The terminology Think Tank was much mentioned about in the world in 1950's. So far, it is still under controversial debate with regard to which Think Tank was the first established in the world. After World War 2, the number of Think Tank grew rapidly in all over the world, many new Think Tanks were set up to meet the need of counseling in many different areas of the government's concern from civil, economic, trade to security, defense sector. According to figures of the report published in 2011, *The Civil Society and Think Tank Program*, by the University of Pennsylvania<sup>3</sup>, there were 6545 Think Tanks existed in 182 surveyed countries around the world, listing in descending number, namely US-1815, China-425, India-292, England-286, Germany-194, France-176, Argentina-137, Russia-112, Japan-103.

## **2. Some characteristics of Think Tank**

### ***2.1. Think Tank is a policy research, advisory body***

Think Tank is not an academic research institution, the purpose of each Think Tank activity, at any scope (enterprise, local, national), or under any form of ownership (private, state, mixed) is always to try to make its research result be approved by policy making agencies and be institutionalized under the form of policy documents.

In order to meet the requirement of the policy advice, in terms of quality, each Think Tank often mobilizes/attracts some renowned intellectuals, specialists in one or several closely linked areas to conduct research, give advice for a certain number of organizations or customers. The value of Think Tank is always evaluated based on the effectiveness and quality of the policy advice provided, however, sometimes it should wait until the final answer comes from the practice.

### ***2.2. The independent characteristic of Think Tank***

Based on the form of ownership, Think Tank can be classified as government Think Tank or civil/private Think Tank. For government Think Tank, due to the dependent nature, in terms of organization and administrative relationship with higher level agencies, this Think Tank group cannot act in an objective way as well as it would find difficult in proposing breakthrough policies. Meanwhile for civil Think Tank with

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<sup>3</sup> Source: *The Global Go to Think Tanks Report* (Final Edition, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012), The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, 2011, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA USA 19104-6305.

independent relationship with the system of state agencies, it is easy to make objective and comprehensive policy proposals. Some countries consider civil Think Tank as an institution lying between the civil society and public administration.

Think Tank should not directly involve in drafting policy documents, the role of them in the process of policy formulation is to review, assess existing policies and propose policy suggestions based on the results of their previously serious and objective conducted studies for useful development of the country that the government should follow. Results of these studies may coincide with, or may be completely different from the intent of the ordering agent [16].

### ***2.3. Specialization of the Think Tank***

Currently, there are about 6,545 Think Tanks in 182 countries around the world. Financially, some Think Tanks were funded with budget up to several dozen millions of US dollars, there are also groups operating on volunteer spirit by their members. Regarding the scope of activities, there was Think Tank conducting research on macro issues at global scale, while others were only interested in issues at regional or even at national level, or in a more narrow scope of issues to serve specific development goals of a business, a university, or a social group.

Normally, Think Tank is classified by type of ownership or field of activity. By ownership there are government, private and semi-government/private Think Tank. Each type of Think Tank has its own strengths, weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages in the research and policy advice provision process.

Though Think Tank is under any form of ownership or any field of activity, the ultimate goal of them shall be obtaining good research results, accepted to be used in the government's national development policy. It means that policy advisory organization or the Think Tank is not directly involved in drafting policy documents, this task is assigned to competent professional agents.

## **II. EXISTING SHORTCOMINGS IN ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL MODEL OF MINISTERIAL INSTITUTIONS IN CHARGE OF STRATEGY AND POLICY RESEARCH FOR STATE MANAGEMENT IN VIETNAM**

According to the organizational structure of the government apparatus, XIIIth term (2011-2015)<sup>4</sup> there are currently 18 ministries and 4 ministry

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<sup>4</sup> Adopted at the first session of the XIII National Assembly meeting held from 21<sup>st</sup> July 2011 to 06<sup>th</sup> August 2011.

equivalent agencies. Except the Office of Government, in all of these 22 ministries and ministry equivalent bodies, there exist subordinate institutions in charge of strategy and policy research for state management of their host ministry.

Ministerial institutions responsible for strategy and policy studies are of government/state Think Tank type (according to the classification criteria for Think Tank of China and the US), they shall have to conduct research to provide scientific arguments for the promulgation of policies for management of the Ministry. Thus, the correctness and feasibility of the policy documents directly issued by the Ministry or submitted to the Government, the National Assembly for their promulgation will greatly depend on the research, advisory capacity of the strategy and policy research organizations. In addition to the results obtained, there still exist in the organizational and operational model of ministerial institutions in charge of strategy and policy studies some shortcomings, as follows:

## **1. In respect of organizational aspect of the model**

### ***1.1. There still exists embarrassment of the host Ministry in the use of right functions of the strategy and policy research institution under their competence***

Sometimes line Ministries utilize this kind of institution as a policy-making agent rather than a policy research, advisory institution. At the same time, other subordinate organizations such as functional departments assisting Minister in performing the state management also have direct involvement in research and policy making process. This causes "encroaching" between policy research institute and different management units within the same ministry.

In the context of limited funding for policy research for state management of the Ministry (funding mainly comes from the State budget with insignificant annual rate of increase), the existing duplication of policy research function among different subordinate organizations can make resources disperse and have direct impact on the quality and results of the research. Furthermore, the way of using experts, specialists by policy makers is also ineffective, for instance, requirements of managers, policies makers expressed in terms of reference for the policy research often stop at proposed solutions to institutionalize and to realize the policy, direction imposed by the Party and State. This was also the reason why policy research organizations of Vietnam had weak position during the policy making process, especially in major national policies (for example, in establishment of state economic group model, expansion of Hanoi city, building a mega city along the Red River, express railway development project, etc.).

### ***1.2. The boundary between policy research, advisory service and policy-making is unclear, sometimes there is duplication with the functions of management units within the Ministry***

The scope of work of policy research institute has not been clear. To what extent would the institute carry out their studies to provide scientific and practical basis for the ministry to develop management policies of the Ministry? Whether or not should the policy research institute get involved in the elaboration/formulation of policy documents? Should they stop at suggestions/recommendations for policy proposals to be submitted to the competent authorities concerned for approval and promulgation? It should be noted that there exists great difference between policy research, policy advice and drafting policy documents by the nature of the work, by the subject of concern, and by the method and process of implementation<sup>5</sup>. Presently, ministerial policy research institutes continues to be in charge of drafting state management documents (this work should have been done by functional management departments of each Ministry), this will distract the main research function of the institute, i.e providing arguments, scientific evidences for policy proposals of the Ministry. This is also the most notable characteristic to distinguish research conducted at policy research institutes and research carried out in universities, academic institutions, technology research institutes.

## **2. In respect of operational aspect of the model**

Shortcomings in the operation of the model of strategy and policy research institution for state management of the Ministry can be mentioned as below:

### ***2.1. Research activities intended to provide scientific arguments for the development of the Ministry's management policies have not been carried out as expected in comparison with the position and mission given to the policy research institution***

As a professional organization of the Ministry<sup>6</sup>, many policy research institutes are not only doing research for state management of the Ministry

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<sup>5</sup> Being directly in charge of drafting policy documents is a challenge for many policy research institutes, because the formulation of policy document requires strict compliance with rules about timeline, process and participants involved, in many cases, research institutes has less advantage than functional department in the Ministry if they are assigned to perform this task. In the study of Dang Kim Son (2005), it was said that: the role of policy research institutes in policy-making processes was not clear, whether it should directly involve in the formulation of policy documents or only giving advice, argument based on the research results had been accumulated. In the study by Nguyen Thi Anh Thu (2000) also raised the opinion of the Trade Research Institute regarding redefined role of policy research institutes in the policy making process, specifically, as a research institution the institute should only stop at providing scientific arguments for the development of management mechanisms and policies in the trade sector, while the institutionalization of the policy into specific regulations would be the duty of the functional department of concern of the Ministry of Trade.

<sup>6</sup> The other names are: Subordinate Unit under the Ministry, Public research organizations under the Ministry, Public scientific unit for state management of the Ministry.

but also other tasks such as postgraduate training; focal point of management of the ministry S&T activities; providing public services in pursuant to laws; developing international cooperation in the field of their competence, etc. With this multi-diversified function, it had much affected to the results obtained and the quality of policy advice of the institute, particularly in the present condition of limited and insufficient human and financial resources<sup>7</sup>.

In addition, limited quality and not timely completion of researches serving as basis for policy-making for state management makes the policy development for state management of the Ministry not always be guaranteed. The number of accepted successful research projects was not high, and there was much delay in implementation of research themes. Through discussion with a number of ministry policy research institutes<sup>8</sup>, it was observed that there were three reasons affecting the quality of research in the institutes of this type: **First**, the selection of research topics and the formulation of research programs, despite significant improvements, remains scattered, unsystematic and of short-term, narrow vision on the development needs of the sector (economic, social, cultural, human, science, education,...); **Second**, research methodology, research process, research technology applied in policy institutes is still relatively backward leading to unconvincing policy conclusions, recommendations; **Third**, funding for policy research activities was modest, affecting the implementation and the quality of the study, especially in the topic requiring large budget for practical survey and trial. Therefore, some institutes have admitted their uncompleted advisory mission provided for leaders with unappropriated ideas, models, policy solutions, for long-term socio-economic development, and with theoretical issues far from practice of the sector development.

## ***2.2. Lack of relationship in steering, coordination and cooperation among different organizations concerned in the process of conducting policy research, policy advice for the sector management***

From the organizational characteristics of the ministerial policy research institutes, there appeared a specific relationship between policy research

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<sup>7</sup> "Ministries in Vietnam do not have professional agencies specialized in policy making, which can mobilize true talented specialists with high preferential treatment, researchers in this field have been considered as public servants doing a lot of works at the same time and not receiving proper preferential treatment to get rid of anxiety on living and when they draft strategy they often incline to the interests of their own Ministry" Quote from the report on continued reform of Government (CIEM, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Development Strategy Institute, Institute of Information and Communications Strategy, Institute of Vietnam Education Science, Institute of Social and Labour Sciences, Institute of Trade, Institute of Foreign Affairs Strategy and Central Institute of Economic Management.

institutions and policy-making/management agencies in the same ministry. This relationship can be classified into 2 groups:

- *The first group* covers the relationship with leaders of Ministry, functional departments and other units in the Ministry;
- *The second group* relates to collaborative relationship with policy research institutions in other ministries and sectors; and with academic research institutions, universities.

Whereby, the first group of relation plays a particularly important role.

The collaborative relation of policy and strategy research institutes with other departments, research institutions, centers and universities in the ministry showed a number of shortcomings, namely:

- Untighten and unstable relationship, sometimes it depends on personal relation<sup>9</sup>;
- Arbitrary form of cooperation: either it can be formal under service contract arrangement to hire consultants to work in research programs/projects, or semi-formal just to provide and exchange information, knowledge already accumulated by each party<sup>10</sup> involved;
- Asynchronous and outdated information provided for policy, strategy research institutes.

In the cooperative relation between policy and strategy research institute with other research institutions in the country (research institutes, centers and universities, and equivalent policy research institutes in other ministries/sectors), there exist some shortcomings as follows:

- There is less formal relationship at institute level. Cooperation is influenced by personal relation, it may be changeable when there is a change of the head of organization;
- Diversified modality of cooperation, from research contract, participation in research programs, projects, exchange of information, experts, to participation in seminars/workshops, graduate and postgraduate training programs;
- Passive, short-term cooperative relation (mainly to resolve specific immediate research tasks) and sometimes is formalistic (inviting external

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<sup>9</sup> "Due to without state management authority the strategy and policy research institute has less right to enquire official information from departments in the sector"(Opinion of the representative of the Institute for Industrial Strategy and Policy in discussion with the research team)

<sup>10</sup> Bach Tan Sinh. (2011) Policy and strategy research in Vietnam: Present situation and Role in policy making. Presentation at the seminar under the Vietnam - Canada research cooperation program hosted by the National Institute for S&T Strategy and Policy Studies.

collaborators, experts to take part in the study to comply with regulations);

- Low effective cooperation, kicking the ball of responsibility among agencies in the formulation of interdisciplinary strategy, policy. This made a huge impact on the quality and progress of the development of macro management interdisciplinary legal documents;
- Low degree of decentralization given for strategy and policy research institute for them to establish by themselves collaborative relation with entities outside the ministry, in many cases asking for permission from superior authority was a must.

### ***2.3. Regarding the quality of research staff working in ministerial institutes of strategy and policy research for state management***

The quality of staff presently conducting policy studies at ministerial institutes of strategy and policy research for state management is an alarming issue. The common problem is lack of qualified research leaders with enough experience, passion and ability to conduct independent research as well as determine to propose breakthrough policy recommendations to the agencies concerned. On the one hand, while young researchers are still lack of passion for research work, some have not been equipped with necessary skills and methods that policy researchers should have had. In the survey, many research institutions confirmed that this problem was not easy to overcome in the short time, it may take 3 to 5 years by training of staff to be capable of policy research and analysis, as this is a profession which requires particular working methods, skills and experiences. On the other hand, there was no outsourcing mechanism to allow policy research institutes to mobilize highly qualified researchers from outside or retain retire personnel who still are capable of participating in research work.

The recruitment of research staff is usually undertaken in two ways, such as examination and direct consideration. The first way has been utilized by many strategy, policy research institutes in recent years but remain formalistic, not really meeting the requirement of work. The content of exam has not really reflected the ability, attitude and competencies required of future research staff (not enough perception on the requirement of the job and the quality of the research staff unlike requirement for administrative staff). In general, the Institute organizes examinations first to fill the number of vacancies and then arrange work division for newly recruited staff. The problem was that after being recruited, new staff may find the job unsuitable to their expectations, they may work for some time and decide to move to other organizations or agencies, it was a common phenomenon occurred in this kind of research institutes.



### **III. SOME SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL MODEL OF THE MINISTERIAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGY AND POLICY STUDY IN VIETNAM**

#### **1. Solution regarding the creation of a freedom and democracy environment for social science research**

The Regulation on democracy in social science research is currently drafted by the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences as host agency in collaboration with the Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Academy of Science and Technology of Vietnam. In this draft, there are many new provisions in relation to schools of science, the right of scientists to dialogue publicly with the organ publishing critique on their works, their opinions; the right of scientists to express opinions, research results different to the views of the Party and State, etc. The Regulation on democracy in scientific research shall be issued by Prime Minister with the aim to expand democracy, promote free creativity to make full use of the scientific research potential, conduct valuable theoretical studies to protect the right of freedom, democracy of individual and collective scientists<sup>11</sup>.

It is requested that there should be issued a Regulation on democracy in S&T research. This was also confirmed in a number of recently issued legal documents, such as the statement in the strategy for S&T development for 2011-2020<sup>12</sup> *“Promulgate and implement regulations on democracy in S&T activities, particularly in social sciences and humanities to promote innovative capacity and enhance the responsibility of scientists in providing policy advice, critical opinions and social assessment on socio-economic development policies and projects”*.

The above solution is proposed based on the following important arguments:

##### ***1.1. On theoretical aspect***

The leading mission of ministerial strategy and policy research organizations is to provide scientific basis for management decisions of Ministry by conducting relevant research works. Therefore, in these organizations, there would need qualified, enthusiastic scientists who dare to speak, propose ideas which have been the result of their studies in a honest, objective manner to the competent management at appropriate

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<sup>11</sup> In the government Decree No. 201/2004/ND-CP dated 10<sup>th</sup> December 2004 issuing Regulations on social sciences and humanities management, it confirmed the first principle in management of social sciences, i.e. *“Respect and ensure democratic rights and promote creative capacity and enhance the accountability of organizations and individuals in social sciences”*.

<sup>12</sup> Decision No. 418/QĐ-TTg dated 11<sup>th</sup> April 2012 of the Prime Minister approving the strategy for Vietnam’s S&T development for the period 2010-2020.

levels. On the other hand, in order to not become just a illustrating research organization, the Government should issue regulations on democracy in scientific research to create a legal basis for scientists to actively provide as many valuable comments as possible in a constructive spirit, propose many policy options to select, at the same time promote collective creativity as well as create motivation for scientific development from the democratic mechanism applied in scientific research.

One of the characteristics of intellectuals (specialists, scientists) is the capacity of independent thinking including outstanding thinking compared with general popular thinking in society. Thanks to independent thinking, not imposed or influenced by any ideology or social institutions it allows intellectuals have thinking ahead and beyond the times they live. In the world, ruling parties always use those thinking ahead of intellectuals to promote social and community development. With the intellectuals' creativity, independent thinking beyond the times scientists need an environment of freedom, democracy to perform their scientific research activities.

A lot of illustrative examples can be found from the story of dedicated scientists not only in Vietnam but also in the world who need to have an environment of freedom, democracy in scientific activity.

### ***1.2. From international experiences***

Considering the history of the establishment and development of Think Tanks in the world, it was observed that it was associated with the trend of liberalization, democratization of all aspects of social life with the spirit of respect and listening to independent analysis and objective opinions of scientists by the highest level of national leadership.

In that spirit, in most of developed countries, the following elements are indispensable in the structure of policy formulation:

- Central government Think Tank consisting of professional policy research forces;
- Civil society Think Tank (universities, private policy research organizations and social groups,...);
- Local government Think Tank.

With such a institutional structure, the Think Tank system, on the one hand, either it is government or private they are both active in a cooperative and competitive environment in which it can propose objective and comprehensive policies serving as the basis for management agencies to issue management decisions, and on the other hand, as users of policy research results and policy advice, government agencies can have various policy options to select the best and appropriate one for the management need of the country.

### ***1.3. From the angle of limiting existing inadequacies in the organizational and operational model of the institute in charge of strategy and policy research for state management of ministry***

As mentioned earlier, the mandate of ministerial institutes in charge of policy and strategy research is to provide the scientific basis for development of management policies including finding out and proposing new issues arisen in the management of the sector, it is therefore necessary to promote democracy, freedom in expressing new ideas, alternatives for comparison and selection, controversial opinions should be carefully noted because the nature of policy science is a social science, there are issues of breakthrough and new in nature that need to be respected, it should avoid the tendency of "criminalization" [1] of scientific research activities. In recent years, in Vietnam there appeared a lot of studies in social sciences. However, only a few of them had breakthrough nature to pave the way for practical management, most of them were illustrative studies rather than pioneer research. In reality, there existed the feeling of "*fear to touch upon sensitive matters*" or "*happy with the destiny*". This situation may kill creativity, the concept of doing something in contrary to identified subjects (probably indicated in resolutions, directives, or in the opinion of a few senior leaders) shall be considered reactionary, also led to narrow creative thinking of policy advice researchers, specialists.

Some scientists are really good in social sciences in the system of public research institutions (state owned "think tank") but due to ideological constraints and fear of being considered as reactionary, downturn they in many cases could not tell the truth of what they had found in their study. Intellectuals need a professional research environment, where exists academic freedom for open debate, ideas must be exchanged/shared with others to find the most reasonable and truth instead of only inviting some qualified experts to provide recommendations to conservative leaders as the current model, which was clearly ineffective because the acceptance of recommendation, without open assessment, depends largely on the subjective judgment of a few leaders.

## **2. Solution in respect of task assignment mechanism for ministerial institutes in charge of strategy and policy research for state management**

This group of solutions should be undertaken with three following main contents:

- To assign right tasks to ministry institutes in charge of strategy and policy research for state management, i.e research work assigned is to provide scientific arguments for developing mechanisms, strategies and policies for macro management of the sector;

- Limit the scope of research, the policy for state management proposed by the institute of this kind would be in the form of policy analysis report, policy recommendations/proposals, policy critical comments, etc. Policy research institutes should not continue to be in charge of the elaboration of policy documents for management, this job must be under the responsibility of functional departments of Ministry;
- It should be provided with sufficient conditions such as enough time, finance and information for the policy research institute to implement research tasks on policy, strategy for sector development.

This solution is proposed based on the following important arguments:

### ***2.1. On theoretical aspect***

From the need of having a research organization to provide scientific arguments for management decisions of the Ministry, policy and strategy research institutes were established in most of the ministries and ministry equivalent agencies. The existence of these institutions with the following characteristics: (1) by nature they are non-profit organizations, the result of their research is to provide the scientific basis for developing mechanisms, strategies and policies for the sector management; (2) The ultimate users are state agencies only (namely the host ministries), policy research institutes have no revenues from production and service sector; (3) Result of their studies has a direct impact on the management at macro level of the country/sector. These characteristics are also the basis for differentiating the policy research carried out at policy research institutes and the policy research conducted at academic research institutions or universities.

This solution is also to implement the task of review of functions and tasks of the subordinate units of the Ministry in pursuant to the government Decree No. 36/2012/ND-CP dated 26<sup>th</sup> February 2012 prescribing functions, jurisdictions, responsibilities and organizational structure of Ministry, ministry level agencies, and respective government decrees afterwards regarding specific functions, responsibilities and organizational structure of each ministry. Accordingly, in a ministry, there is a clear distinction between two groups of subordinate units, namely advisory agencies for management and service organizations, including the policy, strategy research institute for state management of the sector.

### ***2.2. From international experiences***

Think Tank is not an academic research institution, the goal of every Think Tank whether at any scale (national, enterprise, local) or under any form of

ownership (state, private, mixed) is to have their research results accepted by policy-making agents and introduced into policy documents.

Think Tanks do not carry out purely academic research, they conduct studies to suggest feasible solutions, policies to contribute to change a certain social status in a certain historical period. Research result of the Think Tank is usually announced in the form of policy report submitted to Government or put on mass media or in other forms of information exchange for orienting public discussion, taking advantage, support of the public, and attracting the attention of national leaders.

Think Tank would not directly involve in drafting policy, the role of Think Tank in the process of policy formulation is to make assessment, provide critical comments on existing policies based on the results earlier obtained by conducting serious and objective studies; simultaneously Think Tank would propose policy recommendations to be conducive for the development of the country that the government should follow. Results of this kind of study may be identical and can be completely different from the intent of the management who assigns the task.

### ***2.3. From the angle of inadequacies in the organizational and operational model of ministerial institutions in charge of policy and strategy research***

From the finding of research in section 2, it was observed that many policy research institutes have not only done research for state management of the Ministry but also other tasks such as postgraduate training; focal point of management of the ministry S&T activities; providing public services in pursuant to laws; developing international cooperation in the field of their competence, etc; With this vast spectrum of function, it much affected to the quality of research and policy advice of the Institute, particularly in the current condition of limited human and financial resources allocated for policy research institutions.

There was no clear provision of Ministry regarding the role of strategy, policy research institute. To what extent their research would go further? Until the submission of policy proposals or directly involvement in drafting policy documents to be submitted to the competent authorities for promulgation. It should be noted that there is a substantial difference between research for policy advice and drafting policy documents, in terms of nature of work, drafting agent status, methodology and implementation process. Continued direct involvement of strategy, policy research institutes in drafting management policy documents will distract the main tasks of them, i.e - conducting studies to provide scientific basis for management decisions.

### **3. Solution relating to steering, coordination and cooperation mechanism in institutions in charge of policy research, policy advice for state management**

**3.1. Enhanced regular attention, involvement of the Ministry leadership,** especially of Minister to help policy research institutions capture the requirement, difficulties needed to be solved and major macro management tasks of the sector.

Host ministries should promote the directive role and regular review over the operation of their institute of strategy and policy research, make oriented decision on professional activities of the institute. Specifically, it is suggested that Minister have quarterly meeting with the institute, this regular contact with leaders and functional departments of the ministry is very useful because *on the one hand*, it helps the institute grasp the orientation, directive of the ministry that need to be concretized, the major tasks and management requirements of the sector so that it can propose relevant research to support management policy making in right direction, *on the other hand*, it helps obtain quickly/in time the orientation to address interdisciplinary policy proposals relating various sectors of concern. This was the reason why the Institute of strategy and policy studies suggested a regular contact be arranged with leaders of the ministry especially the Minister<sup>13</sup>.

This solution is proposed based on the following important arguments:

#### **a) On theoretical aspect**

Because of the important mandate of policy research institution, i.e to provide scientific arguments for the formulation of policies for the sector management, it is quite obvious that the institute is always placed under the direct supervision of the Minister.

Multidisciplinary nature of management policies requires orientation, directive opinions of the Ministry leadership right in the formation of policy ideas. Minister is an important agent in the transformation process from policy research results into policy documents (scientific basis, leader's determination and social consensus). The objectivity and scientific element of the study results could be translated into important national policy decisions or not, it depends on the perception of Minister, as well as on the determination, political spirit of the person assigned to perform state

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<sup>13</sup> Practical experience of the Institute of State Organization, Institute of Information and Communications Strategy, Institute of Health Policy and Strategy, etc., Minister attends annual and semi-annual review meeting and gives opinions on the operation and development of the Institute.

management function in the sector<sup>14</sup>. In reality, it is too difficult to assess the impact of scientific content provided by policy research because scientific basis is one of the factors of successful promulgation of policy decisions. Other factors like economic, ideological or moral sometimes can be considered more important than scientific content. In any case the opinion of senior management plays a crucial role in deciding what factors to be selected in the policy development process [18].

Some successful institutes of strategy and policy research have confirmed the role of Minister in supervising the implementation of intensive research, the cooperation and coordination with other functional units in the Ministry to fulfill the function and tasks of policy research, policy advice of the Institute.

#### ***b) From international experience***

Senior leaders have clear perception that it would maintain regular consultation with expert groups during the policy making process. Scientific research for policy-making is an obvious requirement of every country in the world (*in the US: all the country's major policy decisions must be based on pioneering studies of scientific community; in China: there is a policy of science-based decision making*).

In China, since the 80's of XX-th century, strategic consulting forces have played a decisive role in the country development, helping leaders the country move from planning thinking to strategic thinking, from idealistic leadership to combined "*leadership-intellectual*" modality. Strategic consultants play a key role in policy-making process the linkage between politicians, leaders, and this workforce is getting closer. Experts from this advisory group are often invited to attend periodic high-level consultations together with experts in political area and government officials.

In the United States, as of 1980 the number of Think Tank has doubled, only in Washington D.C there were near 400 headquarters offices of Think Tank. Since the 70's onwards, not any candidature who intended to be head of the White House without using Think Tank as their consultants to prepare an election campaign for US president. So, after the new president took office, many experts of the Think Tanks were assigned with responsibility in the new government apparatus. When the term of President comes to an end, they returned to work for their old Think Tank. Therefore, Think Tank obviously became a gathering place for talented people, statesmen, politicians of high prestige of the nation.

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<sup>14</sup> In some institute of strategy and policy studies believed that Minister played a particularly important role in the transformation of results of new, breakthrough research into policy documents.

***c) From the angle of existing inadequacies in the organizational and operational model of the institute in charge of strategy and policy research for state management of the ministry***

The institute in charge of strategy and policy research for state management of the ministry is characterized by having connection, close collaboration with management agencies, specifically with leadership and functional units of the Ministry. This relationship is of fundamental character reflecting the mission and mandate of the organization is accounted for, at the same time it also serves as the basis for distinction with other organizations when they jointly implement research activities. However, the existing collaborative relation is still far from expectation.

Expression of this ineffective cooperation is the low capacity in meeting the need of management or policymaking agency. It causes waste of resources in many research institutes, or doing research of low practical value, or incompleteness of research results to meet the requirements of the users, e.g. policy makers. There still exists a phenomenon where policy research results could not find users, and sometimes policy research institute has not been ready to provide policy advice as ministries and agencies are in need.

***3.2. Strengthened coordination with concerned functional departments, General department, and other specialized research institutions of the Ministry*** to timely capture information on daily operation and management of these units. On the side of the institute for strategy, policy studies, it needs to be active and proactive in collaboration with other units in the Ministry, at the same time listen attentively to the orientation, directive of leadership of the Ministry

In order to be active in doing research and propose research questions arising in practice relating to state management of the Ministry, the institute for strategy, policy studies should also closely observe and support the performance of other units in the ministry, provide them with policy recommendations of sound scientific basis and high feasibility.

This solution is proposed based on the following important arguments:

***a) On theoretical aspect***

As mandated, ministry institutes in charge of strategy and policy research are public professional organizations for scientific research, it shall have responsibility to conduct studies to provide scientific basis for management decisions of the Ministry, so besides receiving regular directives from Ministry leaders, the institute of this type is also characterized by close association with service and functional units of the Ministry. In this relationship, these service and functional units are clients that the work of



the institute should be directed to, or in other words research projects of the institute should be developed and implemented towards solving the problem arising from the practical state management of the sector, an area where the functional units of the Ministry are accounted for.

From doing research, policy research institutes will provide policy makers with comprehensive information to serve as a basis for issuing appropriate management policies. To do that, policy research institutes should actively coordinate with concerned functional departments, other research institutions of the Ministry for timely taking note of new problems arising in management practice of the sector.

In some research papers on policy science [18], it was confirmed in the relationship between policy researchers and policy makers always existed an obstacle, i.e (1) How do policy makers can best use the research result produced by policy researchers in the process of developing evidence-based policies; and (2) How do policy researchers can best use the results of their research so that they can make positive impact on the policy making process. Successful nations with appropriate management policies are also successful countries in overcoming these shortcomings.

#### ***b) From international experience***

Experience of China shows that government policy research and advisory institutions enjoy more incentives than other research bodies. Special position in the national administrative structure allows them with the right to access to highly confidential information sources. Located nearby the center of power, they also have more channels to convey their policy recommendations to Ministry level or Government. For the above reasons the government policy research organization and advisory institutions are the most influencing agents in the development of macro policies among the Think Tanks in China.

Think Tanks of China often utilize two main channels to convey policy research results to competent policy-making authorities. First, they send directly research reports where expressing their views via official offices because each government policy research organization or advisory body in China has a separate channel to submit internal reports to leadership via secretary or to Committee of external relations of the Party Central Committee. Second, they can also use the channel of unofficial contacts or personal relations network of their own. Leaders of policy research organizations or prestigious experts may have personal and direct relation with decision-makers at highest level of the state. "*Unofficial*" relationship sometimes is an important factor affecting the content of issued policy documents.

***c) From the angle of existing inadequacies in the organizational and operational model of the institute in charge of strategy and policy research for state management of the ministry***

Constraints, limitations, difficulties in cooperative relations of policy, strategy research institutes with other units in the same Ministry have already been analyzed in section II.2.2 above.

***3.3. Strengthened partnership between ministerial institutes for strategy and policy studies*** and their cooperation with academic research institutes, universities in social sciences in order to inherit the research results of these institutions for policy development.

To establish a network of strategy and policy research institutions to support effective policy research, policy proposal making.

The solution is proposed based on the following important arguments:

***a) On theoretical aspect***

The birth of advisory science for decision and policy making in Western countries with different names such as soft science, policy research, policy analysis, applied systems analysis, social engineering research, etc. This is an interdisciplinary field of study with the interference of natural sciences, social sciences, engineering sciences, mathematics and philosophy. This is entirely of new application nature and for the first time the two concepts "policy" and "science" were merged together. The appearance of the subject on methodology such as systems analysis, cybernetics coming from this research method had created favorable conditions for the soft science to have new breakthroughs when studying practical issues [6].

The demarcation of boundary of state management sector in the national economy is only relative, it is difficult to make development policy of any one sector in isolation without involving other sectors. As research organizations performing the task of providing the scientific foundation for management policy of Ministry, each policy research institution should attach importance to the expansion of cooperation with institutions of similar function in other different ministries.

***b) From international experience***

The Think Tank system in the United States are jointly financed by state and private funding, they mainly conduct studies to express their views on hottest issues, formation of policy measures that are feasible to solve immediate or long-term problems.

As a key step in the process of policy-making, the United States attaches great importance to the role of policy advice organizations in the military formation and development of the national military potential.

***c) From the angle of existing inadequacies in the organizational and operational model of the institute in charge of strategy and policy research for state management of the ministry***

Constraints, limitations, difficulties in the cooperation of policy, strategy research institutes with institutions of similar function in different ministries have already been analyzed in section II.2.2 above.

**4. Solution concerning autonomy of ministry institute for strategy and policy in respect of organization and human resources management**

*Autonomy in organization:* Policy, strategy research institutes are entitled to be more active in organization and implementation of S&T tasks and are fully accountable for their commitment to management agency (Host ministry only plays the directing, guiding role); They have the right to actively organize, rearrange the structure of their internal set-up either in the hard form (research departments) or in the soft form (research team, team of experts) to best meet the requirement of S&T task implementation assigned by superior management.

*Autonomy in human resources management:* based on the functions, tasks assigned, strategy and policy research institutes have the right to be proactive in recruitment, use of personnel for the S&T task implementation. The recruitment of personnel at these institutes should be in line with the reform in terms of right number of vacancies and qualifications required. In organizing the recruitment, it should clearly identify specific requirements of the vacancies. Applying the form of recruitment of researchers by direct assessment instead of by examination in order to be more relevant with the actual requirement and the nature and characteristics of the work at institutes for strategy and policy research for state management. At the same time, it would expand the network of experts, collaborators, and involve management officials in policy research and policy proposal elaboration.

In addition, there should be specific training programs in universities in the country for policy research, policy advice personnel. The contingent of future policy, strategy researchers, policy advisors of the country should have ample knowledge, be capable of thinking, analysis, judgment at international level.

***4.1. On theoretical aspect***

Policy research for providing scientific basis utilized in policy making required qualified human resources, in the book *Vietnam Economic*

*Thinking 1975 - 1989* by Dang Phong (2012), it was confirmed that to form economic thinking in true sense, it may need many conditions, but at least: (1) it must have thinking skills; (2) it must have information as the raw materials for the development of thinking; (3) There must be freedom of thought in mind. Therefore, teams of advisors with strategic thinking play a very important role in suggesting theories, strategies, ideas or solutions of advisory nature for national leadership.

This kind of personnel is sensitive, they are able to recognize and discover new issues, put them in a large reference system of social life, from where positive-negative impacts are evaluated for immediate and long-term benefits of the community. This analysis helps to form theoretical and practical basis for the formulation of policies, select appropriate plans for the intervention of the state in socio-economic development, evaluate direct or indirect effects on socio-economic development; or give recommendations for policy revision and improvement.

#### ***4.2. From international experience***

The original meaning of Think Tank is the place to gather elite gray matter sources of the country in a certain specialized area. In fact, Think Tank in the US is a gathering place for talented, statesmen and politicians, even in Think Tank of the US Defense Department's there are researchers who were the senior officials of the government and have resigned because they still possess personal experience and are independent, prestige people in making policy proposals.

US and China: Think Tank is the place to gather talented, prestige statesman and politician of the nation. The success and reputation of each Think Tank is always associated with the name of specific persons. The role of the head of the organization is especially important because policy advice work needs knowledgeable, professional, reputable persons with political bravery (dare to propose new policies based on the results of studies conducted objectively and independently before), capable of mobilizing and organizing people to implement research tasks.

Learning the experience on post rotation of the US and Chinese Think Tank, especially in the US, experts working in Think Tank are requested to move to leadership and management positions. This "rotation" allows scholars having the opportunity to move from research institutions to management agencies, after working there for a period of time they returned to research as scholars. This increases the mutual understanding between policy makers and policy researchers [8].

#### ***4.3. From the angle of existing inadequacies in the organizational and operational model of the institute in charge of strategy and policy research for state management of the ministry***

Policy research is a job which has not been received formal training in Vietnam. Though there was likely some preliminary specialized subjects in public policies it is not enough because policy research needs research staff, small in quantity but highly qualified in quality, flexible in organization of research teams, every researcher besides professional qualifications, they must have analytical, synthesis thinking and also need to understand state management issues of the sector via practical exercises. Finally, they should have certain experiences, willingness to work for consulting, policy research work, and be brave enough to make proposals to their direct supervisors<sup>15</sup>.

Capacity and quality of personnel is the biggest problem of institutes for strategy, policy studies. It is a common situation that there is lack of leading persons, competent experts who could manage research tasks independently. Staffing for this kind of research institutes is limited while meeting the requirements of the leaders requires regular recruitment of skilled researchers. Furthermore, the process of recruitment of researchers is still similar to the normal recruitment process for public servants, some institutes recruited researchers without considering the specific characteristics of policy research, policy advice work, it should apply the modality of recruitment by assessment instead of conventional recruitment by examination which has a lot of drawbacks.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

In the structure of policy formulation process, it is indispensable to have a qualified, professional policy research, policy advice manpower, i.e the Think Tank. Think Tank is quite diversified in forms of ownership, for instance, policy research, policy advice institutions of the Government, Think Tank of civil society (mainly are private research organizations), Think Tank of local administration, universities, etc. All Think Tanks coexist and operate in a cooperative and competitive environment in order to produce research results, provide policy advice, independent and objective policy judgment/basis for the formulation and promulgation of macro management policies of Government.

Even in developed countries like US and China there is the same agreement that at national scale, the performance of Think Tank is measured by the application of their research or advisory service results as important bases for the government use in the policy making process.

Vietnam is perfecting its socialist-oriented market economy with many opportunities and challenges in a mixture of old and new things, convenient and difficult conditions, cooperation and competition, traditional and modern practices. In this context, the formulation of national and sectorial

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<sup>15</sup> Directive No. 242-CT on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1982 by President of the Council of Ministers on the organization and responsibility of the Central Institute of Economic Management.

development strategy and policy has a very important significance. More than ever, attention to confirm and promote the role of policy, strategy research teams, organizations have been put out. To improve the organizational and operational model of ministry institutions in charge of policy, strategy research for the state management, the four solutions described above should be simultaneously undertaken in coming time.

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