



## CHALLENGES OF THE THINK TANK: A CASE STUDY OF IRAN

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### Abstract:

The United Nations promotes the think tank as a bridge between knowledge and power. The purpose of this research is to "investigate the challenges of Iran's think tanks in 1402". In terms of research design and in terms of data collection, this research is non-experimental and descriptive (survey), and in terms of purpose, it is applied and developmental, and in terms of research method, it is quantitative and qualitative and was conducted using the fuzzy Delphi method. The statistical population of this research is experts in the field of Iranian think tanks. According to the nature of the fuzzy Delphi method and using the purposeful and cluster sampling method, 15 people with experience and opinion in the think tank field were selected. The process of implementing fuzzy Delphi method was done in three stages. The practical tool of data collection is a structured and semi-structured questionnaire, and the analysis of the data by Baroosh Delfi Fazi showed that Iran's think tanks are facing eleven main challenges, which are: 1- Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept 2- Lack of suitable financial resources 3- Lack of suitable human resources 4- Weakness of think tanks in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public 5- Lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea 6- Lack of necessary training in the field of thinking and thought 7- Defective structure of the organization that does not have the possibility of accepting transformative ideas 8- The feeling of elitism in senior managers and inattention to ideas 9- Inability to direct and make decisive policies 10- Not having a clear strategy 11- The lack of real need of senior managers for thinking room

**Keywords:** think tank, challenge, fuzzy Delphi, Iran

### Introduction

Think tanks are one of the main players in civil society (McGann 2016:9). The think tank is a bridge between the government and the general public. The United Nations proposes the think tank as a bridge between knowledge and power (Traub-Merz 2011:4). Also, the think tank has been proposed as a bridge between the university and the decision makers (McGann 2016:6).

Dr. "Jeta Forrest<sup>1</sup>" says in the introduction of Puhan's<sup>2</sup> book: Think tank plays a very important role as a source of ideas in society (Puhan 2008:5). In a research, the result of counting think tanks in 2015 in the world showed that more than 6750 think tanks are active in 182 countries of the world (McGann 2016: 30). The majority of researches have listed the countries with the most think tanks as follows: America, China, India, England and Germany (Ibid, 31). Ninety percent of the world's think tanks were created after 1951 (Chance 2016: 5). The number of American think tanks has doubled since 1980 (Ibid). In fact, this shows that developed countries have the most think tanks. The variety and

different pattern of development and the method of their localization in a society are all the result of new rational and intellectual processes.

The functions of the thinking center include things such as: producing new ideas and thinking in the field of national interests for senior government officials, providing specialized human resources in government affairs, bringing together political research experts and gathering of thinking strategists, to explain national and international policies and programs, strategic meeting and holding seminars and conferences and communicating with government officials, providing expert advice to decision-making institutions, increasing the attention of the public opinion to the products of the centers to create context and facilitate dialogue and play the role of mediator in national and international conflicts (Adiani, 2013:50).

The government's expectation from think tanks is to provide a comprehensive definition of politics, policy research and policy-making so that everything has an intellectual support; then, with the basis of policy research, present a strategy for policy making. (Ibid.: 42)

In this regard, many think tanks have been formed in the last decade in Iran. But these think tanks performed poorly in achieving what they were designed for.

In the report of fundamental governmental studies of the Iranian Parliament, it is stated in this regard: "Although in all analyses, opportunities and planning, thinking centers are mentioned; But we don't know much about the creation of new ideas. In the current situation, there is no nationalization in the thinking centers and only the syntactic words think room, think tank or thinking centers are used. These centers have been organized in terms of policies and functions in such a way that no trace of hope can be seen in them." (Ediani, 2012: 50)

On the other hand, most of the literature produced about the center of thinking is related to the perception of the think tank. (Adayni 2012; De Bono 2008; Dickson 1972; Traub-Merz 2011; McGann and Weaver 2002; Medvetz 2008; Pautz 2011; Rich 2004; Sherrington 2000; Smith 1991; Stone 1996, 2001, 2007; Stone, Denham and Garnet 1998; Stone and Denham 2004; Weaver 1989; Weiss 1992). Therefore, examining the challenges of Iranian think tanks in implementation can have important results in the productivity and efficiency of these think tanks both in Iran and globally. Failure to recognize these challenges can make Iran's way to achieve a collective native model in the field of thinking a challenge and fail one of the opportunities created in this country to develop thinking skills. This article is prepared from a research whose main question is "Investigation of the challenges of think tanks of Iranian government organizations from 2006 to 2013 in Tehran". This research has identified and categorized the challenges of think tanks. Due to the wide range of research results, only 8 main challenges have been discussed in this article. The purpose of this research was to identify and prioritize eight main challenges of think tanks in Iran.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **think tanks**

Various definitions have been provided for the think tank and each of them has addressed this issue from a specific angle, some of which are given below. At first, it should be noted that there is no agreement on what necessarily defines a think tank, many definitions have been proposed, but none of them were satisfactory. (Koellner, 2013:1)

" Merriam-Webster<sup>4</sup>" defines a think tank like this, a think tank is a group or center organized by the government or the private (commercial) sector to conduct research on organizational issues (and problem solving) (MWD, 1994).

### **Merriam-Webster Dictionary**

The American Heritage Dictionary (AHD<sup>5</sup>) defines a think tank as a group or institution established to conduct problem-solving research in the field of social affairs, technology, and political or military strategies (AHD, 2016). Think tanks are named as an organization whose main mission is to shape and influence public policy based on research and analysis (Koellner, 2013:1).

"Boucher" defines the center of thinking like this and emphasizes that these 9 rules are based on previous academic research (BOUCHER, 2014:2,3).

1-Think tanks are sustainable organizations. 2-They are experts in producing solutions for public policy. 3-They have permanent employees dedicated to research. 4-They produce fresh ideas, analysis and recommendations. 5-They are the link between decision makers and public opinion, so they should have a website. 6-As an organization, they are not responsible for government activities. 7-They generally try to make their research independent and not dependent on special interests. 8-Their main activity is not for training or obtaining a scientific certificate. 9- The main and explicit goal is to increase the public interest, not like mere commercial groups.

In a definition, Goodman considers the center of thought to be an organization that is responsible for conducting research on specific issues and encouraging and facilitating the interaction of scientists and intellectuals to discover new solutions for the set goals (Goodman, 2005: 1).

"Andrew Rich<sup>6</sup>" also describes think tanks as follows:

"They are non-profit and independent organizations that fundamentally rely on expertise and ideas to gain support and influence the policy-making process" (Rich, 2004).

The new literature on thinking centers suggests newer definitions that often correspond to American mental perceptions that need to be revised. As an example, the hypothesis accepted by Americans is about self-management and independence (Weaver, 1989: 563; Rich, 2004: 11; Koellner, 2014: 6).

This issue has been challenged both empirically and theoretically (Medvetz 2012: 32; Koellner, 2014: 6).

In Western literature, there are also differences in the field of think tanks. Some have defined the think tank as an independent organization (McGann & Weaver, 2000; Rich, 2004).

Others questioned the think tank's independence from business or political interests. (Pautz, 2012; Stone, 2007)

"Doctor Adani" defines the thinking room as follows:

"Thinking room is a room for conceptualization and conceptualization in the human domain. This room is a rational-logical strategy for institutions of thinking, reflection and reconstruction of thoughts. The thinking room is a room for thinking and methodical thinking in the house of darkness" (Ediani, p. 272). The focus of thinking as political research is for policy-making and policy-making (ibid., 265).

The simplest definition for think room can be stated as "a structure for methodical collective thinking. (Rahdari, 2013, p. 40)

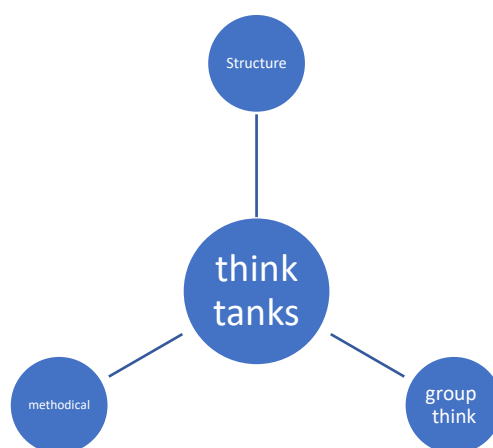


Figure 1. Three components of the definition of a think tank (Rahdari, 2019: 40)

The author of the book "Thinking room in 10 steps" has given such a definition for the thinking room: "Thinking room is a structure for the systematic management of thoughts for the purpose of problem solving, decision-making, policy-making, thinking school, thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking and intellectual excellence with thought-on-thought management. (Rahdari, 2013: 40)

The following definition is equivalent to the above definition, only the type of management is expressed with other words and more details.

"The thinking room is a structure for the systematic management of thoughts for the purpose of problem solving, decision making, policy making, thinking school, thinking, intellectual research, thinking and intellectual excellence with methodical individual and collective intellectual self-management". (Rahdari, 2013, p. 42)

It is necessary to mention the words of idea factories, brain factories, clean factories, brain boxes, idea production companies, idea and mind traders, brain banks, bodies of knowledge and the like, are expressions used by different experts about think centers or think rooms. (Adiani, 2013: 20)

### Research background

The research done in the past and their results are listed in table number one. In general, there are two approaches in studies related to think tanks:

1. Based on issues such as management, resources, staff and strategies, which are more related to the independence component of the centers.
2. Another approach based on the influence of thinking centers on politics and policy-making (Jabri, 2013, p.12).

Much of the literature produced on the focus of thinking is related to the perception of the think tank. (Adayni 2012; De Bono 2008; Dickson 1972; Traub-Merz 2011; McGann and Weaver 2002; Medvetz 2008; Pautz 2011; Rich 2004; Sherrington 2000; Smith 1991; Stone 1996, 2001, 2007; Stone, Denham and Garnet 1998; Stone and Denham 2004; Weaver 1989; Weiss 1992).

**Table 1.** The proposed components regarding the challenges of the think tank

row	Challenges of think tanks	Author Name	year	Source type	Title	Country
1	1- Employing unmotivated and low-quality people 2- Negative thinking 3- Controversy 4- Political and ideological orientation 5- Being too serious 6- Selfishness 7- High flying	Dubono	1933	Book	thinking skills	America
2	1- Change in the budget 2- Change in development 3- Appearing 24/7 media 4- Expansion of technology, especially the Internet 5- Increasing political support 6-Continuing to find globalization	McGann	2004	Article	How think tanks can be opponents of environmental changes.	America
3	1-Inability to attract elites 2- Inability to maintain elites 3- Inability to direct and decisive policy 4- Lack of access to important and influential institutions and people	McGann	2014	Article	Ranking of think tanks in the world	America
4	1- Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept 2-Lack of necessary training in the field of think tanks 3- To develop practical skills in the field of thought and thinking 4- Theoretical knowledge in the	Yunus Edani	2007	Book	The fundamental logic of thought	Iran

	field of thinking and thinking 5-Lack of practical skills in implementing the think tank 6- Lack of appropriate and defined work in think rooms					
5	1- Publicism in the think room 2- Self-centeredness 3- Not having the necessary training 4- Fear of expressing thoughts 5- Filing thoughts 6- The weak manager of the think room 7- Go to executive works 8- Management weakness 9- Stopping the room 10- Acceleration at the exit 11- Non-respect of intellectual property 12- Weak evaluation of thoughts 13- The think tank is the size of the entire country or organization 14- Anti-thinking think room 15- Attending without studying 16- Being too serious 17-Political and ideological orientation 18- Making the subject of thinking interesting so that it impresses the main goal 19- shift management 20- Selfishness 21- High flying 22-Controversy 23-Negative thinking 24- Not having a specific goal 25- Missing the exit level of the thinking room 26-Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept 27-Lack of necessary training in the field of think tanks 28-Lack of practical skills in the field of thought and thinking 29-Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of thinking 30-Lack of practical skills in implementing the think tank 31- The absence of a suitable and defined task in the chambers of thought 32- Rushing to get out 33-Lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea 34-Lack of necessary skills in think tank management	Rahdari	2013	Book	Think room in 10 steps	Iran

	35-Lack of intellectual culture, including criticism and two-way dialogue, etc 37- Lack of communication with other think tanks in the country 38- Understanding and observing the lack of independence of the think tank 38- Incompetence of senior managers in the field of thought					
6	1- Financing 2- Not having the tools to shape the opinions of elites and policy makers and the opinions of the general public	Tannert	2006	Article	center of thought	America
7	1- Inability to evaluate the real think tank 2- Lack of financial resources 3- Inability to prepare a specific agenda 4- Absence of tamarind 5- Management challenges 6- Restrictions on the use of information and publication 7-Traditional and inflexible employees and supporters 8- Understanding and observing the lack of independence of the think tank 9- Clash of cultures in think tanks	Stark	2002	Book	center of thought	America
8	1- Fierce competition for influence in decision-making centers 2- Adequate financial resources 3- Appearance and shape are as important as content 4-Weakness in presenting the idea and its plan in the media 5-Simple and transferable ideas 6- Increasing international activity 7- The challenge of networking 8-Competition to produce a business idea 9- Failure to understand the place of the center of thought in public policy	Hart Worman	2008	Book	center of thought	America
9	1- The subjective perception of critics 2- pressure tool for 3- Centers of political power Political encounter 4- Limited number and weak activity of the thinking center 5- Theorizing the issues or based on the non-native model	Samane Lajevardi	2011	Book	Management of thinking centers in the field of public policy	Iran

	<p>6- Thinking centers do not have a deep analysis of the past, present and future</p> <p>7- Lack of independence</p> <p>8- Not using educated people</p> <p>9- The nature of the problem or the nature of the people present (predominance of the opinion of the political or economic authority on the meeting)</p> <p>10- Luxury goods</p>					
10	<p>1- Financing</p> <p>2- Scientific credibility</p> <p>3- The challenge of decision makers and media</p> <p>4- Management of conflicts between academic degree and financing</p> <p>5- Effective consultations to reach influential decision makers</p>	McGann and Bohr	2005	Book	Focal points Thinking Europe	European Union
11	<p>1- Financing</p> <p>2- Dependence on government financial resources Government support is always limited.</p> <p>3- Not producing an idea that is intended to be implemented.</p>	Taleb Jaberri	2015	Scientific Report	Centers of German thought	Iran
12	<p>1- Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept</p> <p>2- lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea</p> <p>3- Lack of necessary training in the field of thinking and thought</p> <p>4- The defective structure of the organization that does not have the possibility to accept transformational ideas</p> <p>5- The feeling of elitism in senior managers and inattention to ideas</p> <p>6- Inability to give decisive direction and policy</p> <p>7- Not having a clear strategy</p> <p>8- The lack of real need of senior managers for a think tank</p>	Alireza Rahdari Mustafa Nasr	2017	Article	Challenges of think tanks in Iran	Iran
13	<p>Lack of diversification to the actors in the policy arena</p> <p>Governments, as the main players in policy making and adopting vertical solutions,</p> <p>Insufficient space provided to think tanks</p> <p>The first is the quality of human resources and the second is the commitment of think tanks to the country</p>	Habibullah Zafarian	2013	interview	Dialogue of think tanks	Iran

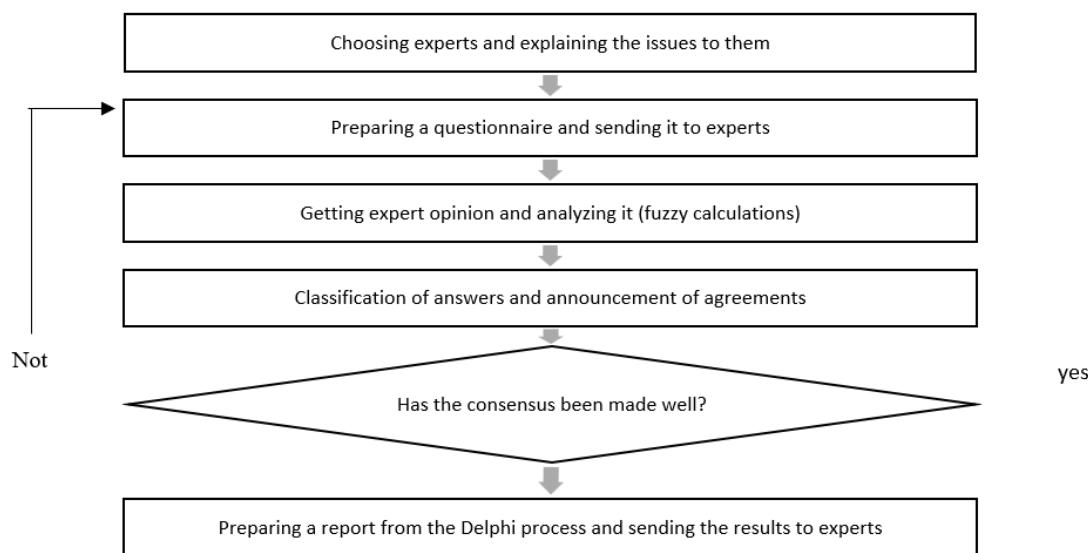
14	Under the pressure of recommendations and prescriptions, they do not get a chance to work on the basics, and as a result, their prescriptions usually turn out to be shallow, superficial, and sloppy. On the one hand, we have financial poverty in think tanks, which has also led to intellectual poverty	Mehdi Kharatian	2023	Interview	Examining governance issues in 1401; Neglect of think tanks	Iran
15	The weakness of think tanks is in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public	Kast Fram Kelly Collection Research Group	2021	Research	Challenges of think tanks in the 21st century	London
16	Competitive challenges Resource challenges Technological challenges	James J. McGann	2019	Research	Go To Think Tank 2019 (GGTTI)	America
17	Financial resources of governance and management of political challenges, use of evidence and decision-making processes of domestic economic problems	Andrea Baertl Stephanie Nicolle Dustin Gilbreath	2023	Report	THINK TANK STATE OF THE SECTOR 2023	America

**Description of the research implementation method**

Delphi technique with fuzzy approach can be used to determine the importance of indicators and screen the most important indicators identified in a scientific research.

The fuzzy Delphi implementation algorithm is as follows:

chart 1. (Mirspasi, 2010)



One of the main advantages of the fuzzy Delphi technique compared to the traditional Delphi technique for screening indicators is that one step can be used to summarize and screen the variables. (Habibi et al., 2013: 33)

The algorithm for implementing the fuzzy Delphi technique includes the following steps (same):

Very important	important	medium	unimportant	Very unimportant
(0.75,1,1)	(0.5,0.75,1)	(0.25,0.5,0.75)	(0,0.25,0.5)	(0,0,0.25)



- Identifying the appropriate spectrum for fuzzification of verbal expressions
- Fuzzy summation of fuzzed values
- De-fuzzification of values
- Selection of threshold intensity and screening criteria

In the algorithm for implementing the fuzzy Delphi technique for screening, first, a suitable fuzzy spectrum should be developed to fuzzify the verbal expressions of the respondents. Variables whose values are words or sentences of natural language or artificial languages are called linguistic variables. (Qoli Pouromhammedzadeh, 2013: 68)

**Table 2.** Triangular fuzzy numbers equivalent to the 5-degree Likert spectrum (Habibi et al., 2013: 33).

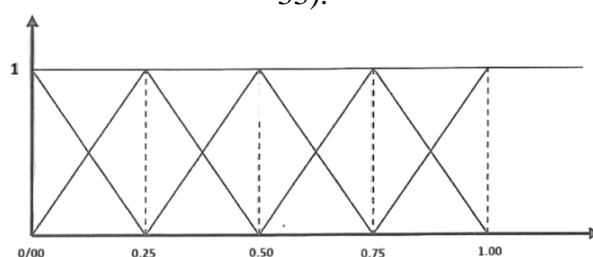


Table 2. Triangular fuzzy numbers equivalent to 5-degree Likert spectrum (Habibi et al., 2013: 33).

If the point of view of each expert is displayed as a triangular fuzzy number  $(l, m, u)$ , in this research, the fuzzy average method is proposed to aggregate the experts' point of view. The fuzzy average of  $n$  triangular fuzzy numbers will be calculated as follows (Habibi et al., 2013: 33):

$$F_{AVE} = \frac{\sum L}{n}, \frac{\sum m}{n}, \frac{\sum u}{n} \quad \text{Formula 1 (same)}$$

After fuzzifying the experts' opinion, the obtained values should be de-fuzzified. There are different methods of defuzzification. In this research, the following formula will be used for defuzzification.

$$F = (l, m, n) \quad \text{Formula 2 (same)}$$

$$X = (l + m + u)/3 \quad \text{Formula 3 (same)}$$

After choosing the appropriate method and de-fuzzifying the values, a tolerance threshold<sup>7</sup> was considered for screening the items. The tolerance threshold is usually considered to be 0.7 (Habibi et al., 2013, p. 34).

### 1-2-3- The spatial territory of research

Iran's think tanks have been investigated.

### 3-4- Time domain of research

It was investigated in 1402.

### 3-5- Statistical Society

The statistical population of this research is active members of active think tanks in Iran, both public and private organizations.

### 3-6- Sampling method

The main purpose of sampling is to construct and create a subset of the population, a subset that is completely representative of the main areas of interest (Easterbay et al., 2014: 224). xIn the Delphi method, experts should be consulted. Therefore, choosing a sample that is also an opinion leader needs people who have executive experience in a think tank or who have written or researched in this field. The Delphi method is exactly focused on such a thing.

**Table 3.** The composition of the organization of participants

Row	Type	number of people
1	Governmental	10
2	Private	5

**Table 4.** Level of education and gender of research participants

gender	plenty	Master	PHD
male	15	10	5

### Data collection method

In order to identify the challenges, the researcher designed a preliminary questionnaire while studying the library and reviewing the documents and documents of previous researches and with the help of experts, he localized the issue and through the final questionnaire, which is a tool of the fuzzy Delphi technique, he identified the challenges more accurately and comprehensively from the experts' point of view. In each step of the survey, parameters have been added to the questions in the form of questions according to the opinion of the experts. Finally, the results have been approved by the experts in order to get out of the current situation.

### Validity of measurement tools

The meaning of the validity<sup>8</sup> of a test is whether that test measures the desired characteristic or not? In other words, test validity means appropriateness, meaningfulness and usefulness of certain inferences that are made from test scores (Khorshidi, Qureshi, 1386: 163). In order to confirm such inferences, it is necessary to gather evidence. (Ibid.: 164) Usually, in order to estimate the validity of the questionnaire and the questions asked in it, it has been used according to experts, experts and professors who are familiar with the subject of the research and the questionnaire. Due to the fact that the questionnaire was prepared based on numerous articles and interviews conducted with at least six experts, so the tool is valid.

The validity of the Delphi method does not depend on the number of participants in the research, but on the scientific credibility of the experts participating in the research. Participants in Delphi research include 5 to 20 people. The minimum number of participants depends on how the research method is designed.

### Reliability<sup>9</sup> of measurement tools

Reliability is one of the technical characteristics of a measuring instrument. The mentioned concept deals with the concept that the measuring instrument gives the same results under the same conditions (Sarmed and Bazargan, 1392: 166). The questions used in this research have been selected from previous researches, only in some cases, according to the opinion of experts, according to the culture of Iran. In some cases, the parameters that Iranian researchers had mentioned in their research were also added. Also, the tool was reviewed and tested on several occasions using the opinion of the most experienced and specialized people in the field of think tanks in the country, and in this way the reliability is also confirmed.

### Data analysis methods and tools

The method of this research is quantitative and qualitative, and the fuzzy Delphi tool is used for data analysis, and the calculations are done manually.

**Table 5.** Table of data analysis methods and tools

research plan	Non-experimental, descriptive (survey)
Research Methodology	Fuzzy Delphi (quantitative and qualitative)
data gathering tools	Library documents and questionnaires
Data collection method	Quantitative and qualitative
Data analysis tools	Fuzzy Delphi
Calculations	manual
Target	Practical and developmental

### The first stage of the survey

The structure of the questionnaire of the first stage was designed based on past researches using the opinions of subject matter experts. At this stage, the agreement of the experts regarding the extracted parameters is as follows.

**Table 6.** The results of counting the responses of the first stage of the survey

Components		Degree of agreement				
		very little	Low	average	Much	very much
1	Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept	0	0	0	0	15
2	Lack of necessary training in the field of thinking and thinking	0	0	0	3	12
3	Lack of practical skills in the field of thought and thinking	0	0	6	0	9
4	Lack of training in the field of think tanks	0	3	0	6	6
5	Lack of practical skills in the implementation of the think tank	0	0	3	6	6
6	Lack of appropriate and defined mechanism in think rooms	0	0	3	3	9
7	"Hurry to exit"	0	3	0	3	9
8	Lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea	3	0	0	6	6
9	Lack of necessary intellectual skills in government managers	3	0	3	0	9
10	Lack of intellectual culture	0	0	3	0	12
11	Inability to truly evaluate the think tank	0	3	3	0	9
12	Lack of financial resources	0	0	0	0	15
13	Employing unmotivated and low-quality people/lack of suitable human resources	0	0	0	0	15
14	Not having a clear goal	3	0	0	3	9
15	Lack of communication with other think tanks	0	0	6	3	6
16	Inability to prepare a clear agenda	6		6		3
17	Lack of concentration	0	3	3	3	6
18	clash of cultures	0		9	3	
19	Management challenges	0	0	6	6	3
20	Restrictions on information use and publication	0	6	0	3	6
21	Traditional and inflexible employees and supporters	0	3	0	6	6
22	Lack of independence of the think tank	0	0	3	3	9
23	Inability to attract elites	0	0	9		6
24	Inability to maintain the elite	3	0	0	3	9
25	Inability to direct and decisive policy	0	0	0	6	9
26	Inability to access important and influential institutions and people	0	0	9	3	3
27	Not having a clear strategy	0	0	6	0	9
28	Too much pragmatism	3	3	0	3	6
29	Lack of a native think tank model in Iran	0	6	0	9	0
30	Weakness of the leadership of the think tank	0	0	0	15	0
31	Failure to use productive ideas in the think tank	0	0	0	15	0
32	The possibility of growing even to high levels in the organization without thinking and creating ideas	0	0	3	9	3
33	Turning think tank meetings into regular meetings of the organization	0	0	0	12	3
34	Not turning the think tank into an organizational discourse	0	0	0	12	3

35	The lack of real need of senior managers for think tanks	0	0	0	9	6
36	Knowing the efficiency of the current situation from the point of view of the senior managers of the organization	0	0	3	9	3
37	The defective structure of the organization that does not allow the acceptance of transformational ideas	0	0	0	3	12
38	A feeling of elitism in senior managers and disregard for ideas	0	0	0	3	12
39	Lack of real needs assessment for the think tank	0	0	0	12	3
40	Too many and worthless agendas	0	0	6	9	0
41	Not addressing the main issues	0	0	3	9	3
42	Self-censorship of think tank members	0	0	0	9	6
43	Self-voting of the manager of think tank meetings	0	0	3	9	3
44	Lack of research skills of idea makers	0	0	3	12	0
45	Weakness of thinking room meeting management skills	0	0	3	6	6
46	The weakness of think tanks is in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public.	0	0	0	0	15
47	Lack of diversification to the actors in the policy arena	3	3	0	3	6
48	Governments, as the main players in policy making and adopting vertical solutions,	3	3	0	3	6
49	The weakness of the country's governance in using the capacity of think tanks	3	3	0	3	6
50	The weakness of the words and ideas that are given in the think tank	3	3	0	3	6
51	The infancy and little experience of the current of thought in governance	3	3	0	3	6
52	Insufficient space provided to think tanks	3	3	0	3	6
53	They are under the pressure of recommending and prescribing and they don't get a chance to work on the basics, and as a result, their prescriptions usually turn out to be shallow, superficial and sloppy.	3	3	0	3	6

**De-phased:**

**Table 7.** Fuzzy answers of the first stage of the survey

Components		Triangular fuzzy average					De- phased average	
		(	max	,	m	,		min
1	Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept		1		1		.75	.91
2	Lack of necessary training in the field of thinking and thinking		1		.95		.07	.88
3	Lack of practical skills in the field of thought and thinking		.90		.80		.50	.73
4	Lack of training in the field of think tanks		.90		.75		.5	.71
5	Lack of practical skills in the implementation of the think tank		.95		.8		.55	.76
6	Lack of appropriate and defined mechanism in think rooms		.95		.8		.55	.76
7	"Hurry to exit"		.75		.5		.55	.60
8	Lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea		.8		0.7		0.55	.68

9	Lack of necessary intellectual skills in government managers		.8		.7		0.5		.66
10	Lack of intellectual culture		0.95		0.9		0.20		.68
11	Inability to truly evaluate the think tank		.85		0.75		0.2		.36
12	Lack of financial resources		1		1		.75		.91
13	Employing unmotivated and low-quality people/lack of suitable human resources		1		1		.75		.91
14	Not having a clear goal		.8		.75		0.6		.71
15	Lack of communication with other think tanks		.9		0.65		0.5		.68
16	Inability to prepare a clear agenda		.6		0.4		0.25		.41
17	Lack of concentration		0.85		0.7		0.3		.61
18	clash of cultures		0.7		0.4		0.2		.43
19	Management challenges		0.9		0.7		0.45		.68
20	Restrictions on information use and publication		0.8		0.65		0.4		.61
21	Traditional and inflexible employees and supporters		0.9		0.75		0.5		.75
22	Lack of independence of the think tank		0.95		0.8		0.55		.76
23	Inability to attract elites		0.85		0.7		0.45		.66
24	Inability to maintain the elite		0.85		0.75		0.5		.71
25	Inability to direct and decisive policy		1		0.9		0.65		.85
26	Inability to access important and influential institutions and people		0.85		0.65		0.40		.63
27	Not having a clear strategy		1		.9		0.65		.85
28	Too much pragmatism		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58
29	Lack of a native think tank model in Iran		.2		0.55		0.3		.35
30	Weakness of the leadership of the think tank		1		0.75		0.5		.75
31	Failure to use productive ideas in the think tank		1		0.75		0.5		.75
32	The possibility of growing even to high levels in the organization without thinking and creating ideas		0.95		0.75		0.5		.73
33	Turning think tank meetings into regular meetings of the organization		1		0.8		0.55		.78
34	Not turning the think tank into an organizational discourse		1		0.8		0.55		.78
35	The lack of real need of senior managers for think tanks		1		0.85		0.6		.81
36	Knowing the efficiency of the current situation from the point of view of the senior managers of the organization		.95		0.75		0.5		.73
37	The defective structure of the organization that does not allow the acceptance of transformational ideas		1		0.9		0.7		.86
38	A feeling of elitism in senior managers and disregard for ideas		1		.9		0.7		.86
39	Lack of real needs assessment for the think tank		1		0.8		0.55		.78
40	Too many and worthless agendas		.7		.95		.4		.68
41	Not addressing the main issues		.95		.7		.45		.70
42	Self-censorship of think tank members		1		.8		.55		.78
43	Self-voting of the manager of think tank meetings		.95		.75		.5		.73
44	Lack of research skills of idea makers		.95		.7		.45		.70
45	Weakness of thinking room meeting management skills		.95		.8		.55		.76
46	The weakness of think tanks is in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public.		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58
47	Lack of diversification to the actors in the policy arena		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58
48	Governments, as the main players in policy making and adopting vertical solutions,		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58
49	The weakness of the country's governance in using the capacity of think tanks		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58

50	The weakness of the words and ideas that are given in the think tank		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58
51	The infancy and little experience of the current of thought in governance		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58
52	Insufficient space provided to think tanks		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58
53	They are under the pressure of recommending and prescribing and they don't get a chance to work on the basics, and as a result, their prescriptions usually turn out to be shallow, superficial and sloppy.		0.75		0.6		0.4		.58

**The approved parameters in the first round are as follows:**

**Table 8.** Confirmed parameters in the first round

Row	The approved component of the experts in the second round	Percentage of agreement
	Lack of financial resources	0.91
	Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept	.91
	Employing unmotivated and low-quality people/ lack of suitable manpower	.91
8	Lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea	.90
	Lack of necessary training in the field of thinking and thinking	.88
37	The defective structure of the organization that does not allow the acceptance of transformational ideas	.86
38	A feeling of elitism in senior managers and disregard for ideas	.86
	Inability to direct and decisive policy	.85
	Not having a clear strategy	.85
35	The lack of real need of senior managers for think tanks	.81
33	Turning think tank meetings into regular meetings of the organization	.78
34	Not turning the think tank into an organizational discourse	.78
39	Lack of real needs assessment for the think tank	.78
42	Self-censorship of think tank members	.78
45	Weakness of thinking room meeting management skills	.76
18	Clash of cultures	.76
	Lack of practical skills in the implementation of the think tank	.76
	Lack of independence of the think tank	.76
	Traditional and inflexible employees and supporters	.75
30	Weakness of the leadership of the think tank	.75
31	Failure to use productive ideas in the think tank	.75
	Lack of practical skills in the field of thought and thinking	.73
43	Self-voting of the manager of think tank meetings	.73
36	Knowing the efficiency of the current situation from the point of view of the senior managers of the organization	.73
32	The possibility of growing even to high levels in the organization without thinking and creating ideas	.73
11	Inability to truly evaluate the think tank	.73
	Lack of appropriate and defined mechanism in think rooms	.71
	Inability to maintain the elite	.71
	Not having a clear goal	.71
23	Inability to attract elites	.71
9	Lack of necessary intellectual skills in government managers	.70
41	Not addressing the main issues	.70
44	Lack of research skills of idea makers	.70

In the first phase of the survey, fourteen parameters have been confirmed by experts.

### **The second stage of the survey**

In this stage, the parameters that were not approved in the previous stage, in addition to the new parameters that were obtained from the experts in the first stage, formed the structure of the questionnaire of the second round and the survey was conducted by them. None of the parameters were approved.

### The third stage of the survey

In this round, the unconfirmed parameters in the previous stages are re-surveyed, and one parameter was approved by the experts.

**Table 9.** The results of counting the responses of the first stage of the survey

Components		Degree of agreement				
		very little	Low	average	Much	very much
46	The weakness of think tanks is in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public.	0	0	0	0	15

Components		Triangular fuzzy average					De-phased average		
		(	max	,	m	,	min	)	
1	The weakness of think tanks is in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public.		1		1		.75		.91

### Research findings and discussion

The list of parameters confirmed by experts using the fuzzy Delphi method from fifty-three extracted parameters, a total of thirty-three parameters have been confirmed in three rounds of the survey using the fuzzy Delphi method. In the table below, eleven main parameters have been sorted from ascending to descending according to the level of agreement above 80% by the experts.

**Table 10.** List of parameters approved by experts

Confirmed parameters as challenges of think tanks in Iran according to the average agreement obtained from experts	Percentage of agreement	The parameter confirmed by non-Iranian researchers	The parameter confirmed by Iranian researchers	New parameter
Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept	.91			
Lack of adequate financial resources	.91			
Lack of suitable manpower	.91			
Weakness of think tanks in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public	.91			
Lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea	.90			
Lack of necessary training in the field of thinking	.88			
The defective structure of the organization that does not have the possibility of accepting transformational ideas	.86			
The feeling of elitism in senior managers and disregard for ideas	.86			
Inability to direct and decisive policy	.85			
Not having a clear strategy	.85			
The lack of real need of senior managers for think tanks	.81			

#### 1. Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept

One of the important challenges of Iran's government think tanks is the lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of the think tank concept (according to Table 17). The lack of theory and necessary content about the think tank allows different and diverse perceptions of the think tank and causes the think tank to quickly deviate from its own path. This theoretical knowledge can include defining the output, recruiting members, evaluating, controlling and managing the think tank. Where the think tank should start and where it ends should be mapped out in the theoretical field so that the people who enter this

field are well acquainted with its details. Adiani says about this: because they neither created a concept for think tank nor understood the created concepts well, and they only use the syntactic term think tank in different ways, which lacks the concept of meaning and fundamental logic of thought. (Adiani, 2012, p. 524)

This is a parameter that has only been mentioned in research and among Iranian experts, which has been confirmed.

## **2. Lack of adequate financial resources**

This parameter was also presented and confirmed in non-Iranian research. On the one hand, we have financial poverty in think tanks, which has also led to intellectual poverty. The lack of financial obstacles causes think tanks to go towards issues that money determines for them and they may deviate from their right path. The lack of financial resources makes people with quality and skills less willing to work with think tanks.

## **3. Lack of suitable human resources**

This parameter was also presented and confirmed in non-Iranian researches. Due to the type of work of think tanks, there is a strong need for human resources that have intellectual skills, including analysis and innovation. Universities with a degree-oriented approach basically do not produce such human resources. The think tank needs manpower with special skills, while nowhere is such a manpower created for think tanks.

## **4. Weakness of think tanks in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public**

**This parameter was also presented and confirmed in non-Iranian researches.**

This parameter is the output of the research and survey conducted by the Cast from Clay research group in 2021. In this text, the authors have examined the challenges of think tanks in the 21st century. The challenge that attracts the most attention is the weakness of think tanks in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public. They say we think experts are still important, but they need to communicate better with public opinion. (<https://iranthinktanks.com/challenges-of-think-tanks-in-the-21st-century/>)

In 2018 research, we found that only 17% of people in the UK and 20% in the US trust what think tanks say. However, the good news is that only 28% of them were completely distrustful, and the majority did not know what their exact opinion was. (Ibid)

The fact is that according to the people participating in these surveys, hardly half of the people know what a think tank is and what it does exactly. Even among people interested in politics, only two-thirds know what the think tank does. Therefore, in order to increase its effectiveness, the think tank must give necessary explanations to the public about what it does and the positive role it can play in sound and evidence-based policy making. (Ibid)

## **5. Lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea**

The second challenge that the respondents emphasized is the lack of a suitable customer for the idea. That is, the idea is produced, but because there is no need for consumption in organizations, the idea is practically abandoned without a consumer. When you in the organization can enjoy logical growth without the need to generate ideas, then there are no ideas in the client's organization. It means that something is actually produced that does not have a customer. This is a parameter that has only been mentioned in research and among Iranian experts, which has been confirmed.

## **6. Lack of necessary training in the field of thinking and thinking**

The next parameter that was confirmed is the lack of education in the field of thinking and thinking (according to Table 17). Thinking room and thinking are tied together. If people do not have the necessary training in the field of thinking and thinking skills, their presence in the thinking room will



be useless and will not be effective. This is a parameter that has only been mentioned in research and among Iranian experts, which has been confirmed.

#### **7. The defective structure of the organization that cannot accept transformational ideas.**

The defective structure of the organization that does not have the possibility to accept transformational ideas is another parameter that has been emphasized (according to Table 17). The traditional and inflexible structures and the lack of updates make the transformative ideas, even though they are designed correctly, not to be used in practice. Defective structures not only do not use the idea, sometimes they also argue with the owners of the idea and actually cause the work to fail. This is a parameter that has not been mentioned in previous researches.

#### **8. The feeling of elitism in senior managers and disregard for ideas**

Another parameter that was confirmed is the feeling of eliteness in senior managers (according to Table 17). A management that considers itself elite practically prevents any attempt to improve itself or use ideas. A senior manager who considers himself the best manager and his methods are the best does not need to use ideas. The next parameter, which is also confirmed, is somehow related to this parameter. This is a parameter that has not been mentioned in previous researches (according to Table 17).

#### **9. Inability to direct and decisive policy**

The next parameter is the inability to direct and make decisive policies (according to Table 17). That is, the think tank does not have the ability to direct, maybe the best ideas and thoughts are produced, but in general, it is unable to change the organizational direction. The room cannot make a decision and ultimately make a decisive decision. This is a parameter that has not been mentioned in previous researches (according to Table 17). This is a parameter that was only mentioned in western research that has been confirmed.

#### **10. Not having a clear strategy**

The next parameter is not having a clear strategy (according to Table 17), that is, there is no clear strategy in the think tank, every day a new path is taken and it is left unfinished. The thinking room itself is confused and this issue will affect the output of the room as well. This is a parameter that has not been mentioned in previous researches (according to Table 17).

#### **11. The lack of real need of senior managers for a think tank**

The senior managers of the organization do not need a think tank, and their view of the think tank is more propaganda, which makes their disbelief in the think tank visible (according to Table 17). This is a parameter that has not been mentioned in previous research.

#### **In rooting out the challenges of Iran's think tanks, two important issues can be mentioned:**

- **Failure to form the foundation of modern societies**

The center of thinking is one of the needs of modern societies that need power distribution and democracy. In January 2009, representatives of 30 less developed countries and emerging economies gathered in Cairo and announced in a statement that the promotion of think tanks in developing countries can lead to better governance and more correct decision making. In countries where public participation in decision-making is lower, think tanks play a significant role in presenting different ideas to governments (Jaberi, 2013: 3).

Therefore, "if reliable research and analysis is not available, the basis of decision-making in policies will become money, interests and lobbyists" (ibid.). In a society that needs public participation in policy-making, ideas, new thinking and finally think tanks are valued. The media coverage and the attention of politicians and the increase in academic literature about centers of thought in developed countries indicate their increasing role in general policy-making (Jaberi, 2013: 3). The important point is that the center of thought was born of modern conflicts. The center of thought was a military

invention of World War II and showed the complexity of modern conflicts, and it was used to explain the safe conditions of military planners (ibid: 3).

When societies become modern, complicated problems are formed that require thinking to solve them. Such a platform is the birthplace of the center of thought. As an example, at the beginning of his research on think tanks, Boucher considers the formation of the European Union as the result of a rational process (BOUCHER, 2014: 1).

The need for transparency, accountability, quality, productivity, prosperity, distribution of wealth and national and public participation, meritocracy, creativity and innovation, and constructive and healthy competition, are all born from the concepts of modern societies and the modern society needs a lot of ideas and thinking in order to reach these. In the list of challenges of Iran's think tanks, there are three factors: "the lack of real need of senior managers for think tanks", "the feeling of elitism in senior managers and inattention to ideas" and "the lack of a suitable organizational client for the idea" indicates the lack of formation of suitable rational platforms for the growth of think tanks in Iran, which is inconsistent with the platforms that successful think tanks in the world have followed.

- **tribal culture**

"Sari al-Qalam" says in his book about Iranian culture:

"The fact that Iran's political culture has always been characterized by negative individualism, mistrust, institutionalism, lack of consensus, nepotism, thousands of families, lawlessness, insecurity, national identity crisis, and the imperfect process of nation-building, it seems to have its roots in the tribal construction of this vast land. If we want to examine the political system of Iran, we have to do ethnology. (Sari-ul-Qalam, 2013: 65-66)

If we look again at the concept of the think tank, we will realize that the think tank is a bridge between the owners of ideas and power, on the other hand, politicians have a huge part of this power. It is generally agreed that think tanks raise questions about the interaction between science and stakeholders in political recommendations (Dahl Kelstrup: 2015).

According to Goodman, a think tank is an organization that supports research on specific issues and encourages the discovery of solutions to these issues and facilitates the interaction between scientists and intellectuals (intellectuals) in the pursuit of these goals. (Hart, 2008:137)

Medvetz says: think tank spaces occupy a central place in the power component and it is for this reason that think tanks constantly find themselves "under the attack of other fields" (Medvetz, 2008: 10).

Another expert says: the role of think tanks as a private supporter for governments is largely the result of influence in the administration of elites (Weaver, 1970: 570). The expert of Chinese think tanks says: But still the center of thinking gives way for the main influence on the gradual evolution of the opinion of the elites (abb, 2014: 18). That is, the think tank is also concerned with the evolution of the idea of the elites.

Ili culture can't spread think tank because it doesn't need ideas and thoughts and elite management. Because the interaction between wise men and politicians is formed when there is a need and in fact the division of power is done rationally or at least there is a desire for this.

"Sari al-Qalam" says about the indicators of growth in such a society (ibid.):

"The central importance of the family and the element of kinship makes one look at social relations from the perspective of this phenomenon. The assessment of a person depends on his family situation. The roles that are handed over do not belong exclusively to him, but include the whole family. As a result, when a member of a family is promoted socially, in fact, his family is promoted, on the other hand, at the time of social promotion, a person tries to hold the hands of other family members and relatives so that they also enjoy more social benefits. This tribal trait has continued in the field of Iranian politics and economy, and as we discussed more, it is rooted in the search for security and the rule of one's duty.

Perhaps all the above contents have been expressed by Yunus Ediani in the book "Fundamental Logic of Thought" in one line: "In this house, thoughts and writings are boycotted like people" (Ediani, 2013: 20). One of the experts of the think tank to express the necessity of the existence of the think

tank says (Ahamad & Bakhsh Baloch, 2010: 111): Our thinking should not flatter powerful politicians. While the Ili culture does not have a suitable platform for promoting rationality due to lack of proper rational platforms.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research was prepared in response to the main question, "What are the challenges of Iran's think tanks in 1402?" This research was conducted using the fuzzy Delphi method with the participation of 15 experts in the field of think tanks. In this regard, eleven challenges of think tanks were identified and graded according to importance, which was the main goal of this research. These challenges are: 1- Lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of think tank concept 2- Lack of suitable financial resources 3- Lack of suitable human resources 4- Weakness of think tanks in communicating and introducing their activities to the general public 5- Lack of suitable organizational client for the idea 6 - Lack of necessary training in the field of thinking and thinking 7- Defective structure of the organization that does not have the possibility to accept transformative ideas 8- Feeling of elitism in senior managers and indifference to ideas 9- Inability to direct and make decisive policies 10- Not having a clear strategy 11- The lack of real need of senior managers for think tanks

In the analysis of the formation of these challenges, two fundamental issues were addressed. 1- The think tank is one of the needs of modern societies in which power and wealth have been widely distributed. In societies where there are limited and exclusive ways to distribute power and wealth, thinking will not be formed because the thinking of ideas is ineffective. As a result, the think tank will not be acceptable.

2- The social culture in which the think tank is formed plays a very key role in the strength or weakness of the thinking center. If the culture has few rational stimuli, such as the Ili culture, the think tank will not have much effect in that society. In Iranian society, there is a weak intellectual drive to support thinking and ideas. If the culture of a society does not support thinking, the think tank will be more like fashion, advertising and decor in the organization.

### **Offers**

1. Creating a center in the country to manage think tanks at the national level, such as Mira in Japan. Such a position can have a very effective result on the formation process of think tanks. Such a center can prevent think tanks from going astray with specialized training and create a native and practical method for the creation and growth of think tanks.
2. A research on the creation of a local think tank model in Iran can open the way for many think tanks in the country. Creating a local and national model will solve the problem of many think tanks in the country.
3. A research in the field of intellectual education and its history in Iran and the causes of the backwardness of the Iranian society in this field can give the correct answer to many challenges of Iran's think tanks. Because thinking room and thinking are tied together and have no separation from each other.
4. A research on different typologies of think tanks in Iran, including government, private, academic, military, economic, social and political, can provide a significant knowledge of think tanks in the country.
5. Creating a model to connect the country's think tanks with the country's power centers is a research that can play an important role in the process of improving the country's think tanks.
6. Staffing and staff training for think tanks can be proposed as a research topic to solve another challenge of Iran's think tanks.
7. The role of think tanks in the modernization of Iran is another issue that can be proposed as a research topic.
8. A model for establishing connections between Iran's think tanks and the chambers of other countries and nations should be studied as a research topic, because in today's world, without global communication, there can be no significant growth.

9. Creating a training model for people who want to attend the think tank can be proposed as a research topic.
10. A comparative study of Iran's think tanks with China, Germany, Japan and America is one of the researches that can be done in the future.

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