

Innovation in motion

Birth of the South African Innovation Network



Establishing the South African Innovation Network (SAINe) has been a dream, a vision born out of the realisation and belief that South African innovation is unique.

SAINe is context driven to fit our landscape and to enable us to compete with the best in the world as far as innovation and creativity is concerned. South Africans however, need to share, learn from each other and work together to capitalise on our local know-how. We need to start believing in our own international competitiveness and need a platform to do this; a common place where innovation managers from various organisations as well as South African entrepreneurs and other role players could interact and add value to each other and enrich the South African innovation capability. It is with this perspective in mind that the South African Innovation Network (SAINe) was born. Many role players like the SA Innovator magazine and RIIS toyed with the idea of an innovation network but it was during the Innovation Systems Leadership Programme piloted by the Cooperation Framework on Innovation Systems between Finland and South Africa (COFISA) whereby participants came up with ideas/ roles and commitment on how to take the main learning points like collaboration and building networks in innovation further. One of the main ideas participants felt should be taken further was to start a South African Network for Innovation to address the needs as described above.

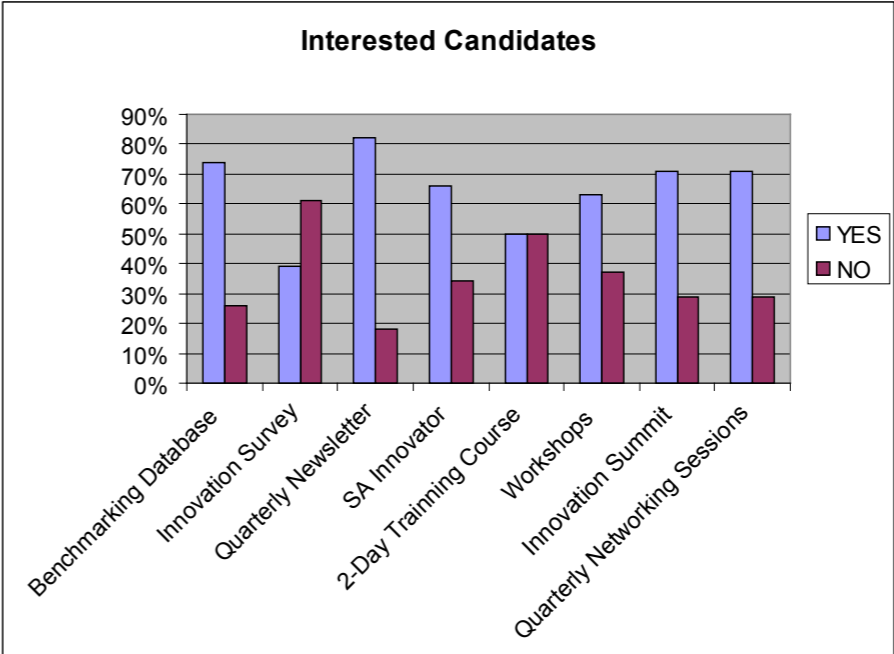
In parallel to the COFISA pilot, the SA Innovator magazine hosted South Africa's First National Innovation Summit with the theme: "Innovation on Trial". This summit was used by The Research Institute for Innovation and Sustainability (RIIS), who was one of the content organisers of the event, to survey the need amongst participants for a networking club amongst role players from the academic, government and business sectors. Of the organisations and individuals that were in attendance at the summit, forty-three indicated that they felt a need for a network in innovation. This result is graphically depicted overhead. The summit participants also indicated that they wanted the network to be formalised for

it to contribute pro-actively to the innovation landscape in South Africa. Suggestions included members funding research projects on innovation, discussion of case studies and innovation lessons learnt and that best practices in innovation management be benchmarked.

SAINe's main aim

The main aim of the activities associated with the innovation network is to remedy the current lack of reliable data on innovation related topics as well as contribute to information on progress made in South Africa on innovation. It will also serve as a national resource, providing information on upcoming and ongoing innovation activities as well as assisting with local and international benchmarking (one company already indicated that they will sponsor a benchmarking capability for management of innovation practices).

A huge amount of goodwill already exists in terms of providing seed funding, facilities, hosting events and contributing knowledge from both COFISA, the other founding members and the role players in the summit. RIIS will play the champion role in enabling this network. The network is currently managed by a steering committee that was nominated by the founder members. The founder members consist of the following role players who are making themselves available in kind and in many instances deliver what is needed free of charge or by means of sponsorships. The founder members involved at present include: Hettie Du Plessis: SeTAR Centre UJ, Karen Eksteen: Cape Biotech Trust, Isaiah Engelbrecht: Eskom, JP Fourie: SAVCA, Nicki Koorbanally: Meraka Institute, Jeanette Morwane: Activator Programme, Vusi Mantsho: University of Jhb, Henra Mayer: RIIS, Jayshree Naidoo: DBSA, Pieter Nortje: Eskom, Nirvashnee Seetal: Cofisa Department of Science and Technology, Audrey Verhaeghe: RIIS, Adrienne Viljoen: SABS Design Institute.



SAINe Focus areas

The following areas have initially been identified as SAINe priorities:

- Networking, publicity, information sharing and events to foster innovation and innovation management practices
- Creating case studies on the success of innovation
- Research and benchmarking on innovation in the South African context
- The creation of standards for "Innovation Management"

Progress to date

SAINe was officially established at a stakeholder meeting on 17 June 2009, attended by the aforementioned individuals. The following matters have already received attention:

- A brand strategy had been developed and

approved by the founder members and a website is being developed that will include a content management system.

- A steering committee has also been approved and appointed. They consist of: Audrey Verhaeghe: Chairperson (RIIS), Jayshree Naidoo: Public relations (DBSA), Karen Eksteen: Marketing (Cape Biotech Trust), Nicki Koorbanally: Fundraising (Meraka), Nirvashnee Seetal: Web content sourcing and networking (COFISA), Riette van Schalkwyk: Secretary and website administrator (RIIS)

Sustainability and Benefits

The project will address a real need amongst open innovation managers in South Africa, many of whom are pioneers but have limited access to peers in the field as this is an emerging niche area.

The network will contribute by creating case studies in innovation in the SA landscape. It will also generate knowledge around innovation by conducting surveys on issues such as "how do you measure and how do you reward innovation in an open innovation system?" As acknowledgment of the value of SAINe to the South African innovation landscape, sponsors for events in the first year have already come forward. There is also longer term commitment from parties who would benefit from surveys and research related to innovation practice. The benefits of SAINe can therefore be summarised as follows:

- The development of a common language and practice for the management of innovation.
 - A networked niche that picks up momentum and can deliver real value in terms of economic growth and job creation.
 - A lobbying force for standards, benchmarks and contextual information about SA innovators and innovations.
 - The sharing of knowledge.
 - Bridging the innovation chasm in SA; and finally
 - The opportunity for a networked environment wherein South African innovators can share, learn from each other and add value to the innovation capability in South Africa.
- SAINe welcomes all interested parties that would like to assist in demystifying innovation and making it the business of all thus contributing to a dynamic system of innovation that will grow our country's economy and improve the quality of life of all South Africans.

If you would like more information on SAINe or want to get involved in any way, please contact Riette van Schalkwyk at RIIS on (012) 844 0673 or riette@riis.co.za.