

Foreword

The world is moving at unprecedented speed. Four fundamental changes are unfolding: the change in technology, which is triggering a societal transformation; climate change, which is increasingly urgent and the geopolitical shift from West to East. As is always the case, these changes are accompanied by wicked problems and unexpected effects, as well as potential benefits. It all represents a huge pressure on policy and politics to deliver fast and resolve complex problems. The time is short and stakes are high. Evidence, and in particular sound scientific evidence, is badly needed to inform policymaking. Science is however not fully ready. It is struggling to cope with the change. It is too entrenched in thematic silos, challenged by its own integrity problems, and very often alienated from society. All this, together with the explosion of data, in particular fake data, has created a toxic mix, which sometimes results in post-fact policy decisions and distrust of experts.

We, in the European Commission's science service (JRC), were in the middle of this storm. Although we undoubtedly delivered many important pieces of evidence in the fields of nuclear, food safety and security, environment, climate, energy, transport, resource efficiency, etc., we were often left at the fringe of the policymaking process. Struggling to deliver transversal knowledge, failing to foresee the foreseeable, unable to establish and communicate societal trends, we were increasingly ill at ease in our role.

It was time for a change. Our linear, deficit model of science for policy was in many respects exhausted. It was clear that we were going to face more and more difficulties in fulfilling our mission of 'putting science into the heart of EU policymaking'. So, we started to experiment with and develop a new model which we call Science for Policy 2.0.

First, we focussed on better understanding the ever-changing policy world by interacting more closely with policymakers. We introduced placements of scientists into policy departments and created safe places for mutual exchanges. A specific training programme for all scientific staff was designed to breed a new type of professionals, fully embracing both science and policy. The old science-policy demarcation model is no longer effective. Nor is it necessary. We believe that, with the right arrangements, we can provide objective advice to policymakers, while working alongside them.

Breaking the scientific silos was our second priority. The basic principle was to put science at the service of complex, transversal policy issues, rather than keeping it in comfortable, well-defined, scientific boxes. This entailed a dramatic change in our internal organisational structure and our work programme.

Thirdly, we entered into the new field of knowledge management, helping our colleagues in policymaking departments to deal with the deluge of data, information and knowledge which is now available. We have developed several tools, products and processes enabling effective vertical and horizontal knowledge management. Our aspiration is to deliver cutting edge knowledge when and where it is needed by policymakers.

Finally, we introduced a series of measures to improve our future-oriented competences and tools, like horizon scanning, foresight, trend analysis, quantitative modelling and complex science.

Our new approach was met with an unexpectedly fast, enthusiastic and positive response from our policy colleagues. Expressions like ‘finally we can use your science’, ‘now we understand what you are doing’ and ‘we did not expect that science can be so useful’ were frequently used at different meetings and bilateral encounters. It was very encouraging and motivated our staff to do more.

In this handbook, we set out ‘what works’ in the context of European policymaking in our experience but do not claim that this works everywhere. Still, we hope very much that it can be useful and inspire others. At the same time, we also raise a large number of questions, with further reflections to come as we learn from the responses to COVID-19. We know that we are only just beginning to get grips with this big, new field of Science for Policy 2.0 and that we need contributions from other players. That is why, as well as sharing our experiences, we want to trigger a discussion and collaboration with all who are interested in joining us in this endeavour.

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