

Analysis and synthesis centres: their role as knowledge brokers between science and policy

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We are faced with many complex challenges in today's world. Socio-environmental challenges in particular often have significant spatio-temporal coverage, require multiple disciplinary expertise, and is coupled with an increasing urgency for scientific knowledge to be transferred to policy-makers. As most of the contributors of the necessary knowledge are disciplinary specialists, and many must remain so to ensure quality of information, innovative tools need to be employed to ensure good communication (boundary-spanning) between the domains involved, and a coherent product is generated for and potentially with policy-makers.

Knowledge brokering describes an active flow between the generators of knowledge and those that wish to use it. It is situated along a spectrum of knowledge processes from conventional, linear dissemination of information (science communication), through intermediary and brokering strategies, to co-production of knowledge. Knowledge brokers or translational professionals exist to assist this process, but I will argue in this presentation that synthesis centres perform this role as well, if not better, than the translational professional.

Synthesis centres provide a supported environment for teams of disciplinary experts (the generators of knowledge) to assemble their knowledge and understanding around a specific (co-identified) question and generate synthesised evidence for their co-generated understanding. Knowledge brokering is inherent in this constructed environment, as complex individual perspectives and understanding are 'brokered' into a synthesised product. Synthesis centres can perform as boundary organisations with the incorporation of decision- and policy-makers in the synthesis teams providing their disciplinary expertise and perspectives alongside the other team members. There are many spin-offs from this process, including vicarious learning, as each member 'learns' from the others in the team, reducing the knowledge barriers between them and creating new partnerships.