# The European Commission's Use of Research in Immigration Policy: Expert Knowledge as a Source of Legitimation?

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**Introduction**[1]

Bureaucratic organisations are dependent on expert knowledge in a variety of ways. On the traditional Weberian account, bureaucracies are characterised by the rationality of their structures and action (Weber 1948: 220), implying a concern to ensure decisions are based on sound reasoning and empirical knowledge. Expert knowledge is thus valued in an instrumental sense, as a means of maximising the effective delivery of the organisation's mandate and policy goals. But the Weberian account also implies a second, more symbolic function of expert knowledge: the use of knowledge as a means of legitimising particular decisions, and/or legitimising bureaucratic domination *per se*. In this second sense, knowledge utilisation could be seen as akin to Weber's concept of "legal authority" (*ibid.*: 79). It bestows legitimacy by demonstrating the organisation's conformity to certain rational rules (in this case logical reasoning and empirical knowledge), which can help substantiate decisions, or legitimise the authority of decision-makers.[2] So in the first case, knowledge is valued for its instrumental, or problem-solving role; in the second, it is valued more symbolically, either (a) as an indicator of the validity of decisions, and/or (b) as an indicator of the soundness of the organisations making decisions. I term these two symbolic functions, respectively, the "substantiating" and "legitimising" functions of knowledge.

Literature on knowledge utilisation has in some cases acknowledged the existence of these symbolic functions of knowledge (see, for example, Weiss 1986; Knorr, 1978; Sabatier 1978). However, it has failed to develop a theory to underpin these insights, or to explore them through more systematic empirical enquiry. In the first part of this paper, I sketch the contours of a theory of the different functions of expert knowledge in (bureaucratic) policy-making. I set out a number of conditions under which one could expect organisations to draw on expert knowledge to perform these three functions: instrumental, legitimising and substantiating. The conditions relate for the most part to features of organisations and their political environments, and characteristics of the policy areas in which they are operating.

In the second section, I go on to explore how this theory applies to the case of knowledge utilisation within the European Commission, especially in the area of Immigration and Asylum. The European Commission is an interesting case, representing in many ways an extreme case of symbolic knowledge utilisation. I consider how far the Commission's role and activities in this policy area approximate to the various characteristics set out above, and what this implies about the Commission's rationale for drawing on expert knowledge.

In the third and final part of the paper, I see if these expectations about knowledge utilisation are substantiated, taking the case of the European Migration Network, a body

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[1] This paper has been prepared as part of a four year project on the functions of social knowledge in migration policy, being carried out as part of an FP6 Excellence Grant on "Expanding the Knowledge Base of European Labour Migration Policies" (KNOWMIG). See www.migration-networks.org.
[2] It has been suggested that this could be termed 'epistemic authority" – see Geuss 2001: 18-19; Herbst 2003: 484.

set up by DG Justice, Liberty and Security in 2003 to gather and analyse data and research on immigration and asylum. Not surprisingly, I find that the EMN has played a largely symbolic function, seen as a means of legitimising DG JLS's role in this policy area, and substantiating its policy preferences. However, the findings also suggest the need to nuance parts of the theory developed in the first part of the paper. In particular, it shows that knowledge can play divergent functions for different parts of the organisation, and that these functions can also change over time.

## 1.      Knowledge Utilisation: Instrumental, Legitimising or Substantiating?

In the introduction, I made a distinction between what I term instrumental, substantiating, and legitimising functions of knowledge. This section sets out a number of conditions under which one might expect organisations to make use of expert knowledge in these three ways.

*Some Hypotheses*

All accounts of knowledge utilisation are premised on a set of assumptions about organisational action: i.e. the sources and nature of organisational interests, and how these translate into organisational action. Most accounts adopt rational choice accounts of organisational action. Organisations are assumed to be interested in maximising power, and/or realising mandated goals. My account follows what can be characterised as a "non-rationalist" neo-institutionalist theory of organisational action. This account assumes that administrative agencies are fundamentally concerned to secure legitimacy. They are keen to secure both internal legitimacy from their members, whose loyalty to organizational rules and practices is critical for the functioning and reproduction of the organization (Brunsson 1986: 18-21). And they need to secure external legitimacy from their environment, whether this be in relation to political leaders (a minister or government), organised interests, consumers, or, on occasion, the general public. Now contrary to rational choice approaches, this quest for legitimacy should not be understood in terms of a rationalistic logic of maximizing performance, or expanding power. Members of organizations are fundamentally concerned with reducing uncertainty and stabilizing social relations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 19; Scott 1995: 21; Weick 1995: 86-7). They establish shared norms, beliefs and practices that help to provide stability through rendering patterns of behaviour more predictable, and providing a shared cognitive map for making sense of the organization and its environment (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). The result is that there is often a quite substantial divergence between an organization's ascribed mandate and goals (its formal structure), and the norms, beliefs and practices that guide the actions of members (its informal structure) – a phenomenon that has been coined "institutional decoupling" (March and Olsen 1994).

This account implies that there can be no reliable link between objective features of the organization and its environment, and its self-defined interests and actions. However, we can posit a number of general conditions that influence organizational

strategies for enhancing their legitimacy. For a start, an organization is more likely to feel under pressure to secure legitimacy where it perceives itself to be operating in an unstable environment: typically, uncertainty about its future, or about the distribution of resources between itself and rival agencies (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 30-31). But the second point to stress is that the channel for deriving legitimacy will vary between organizations. Here it is useful to introduce a basic distinction between two ideal typical organizations: the action organization, and the political organization (Brunsson 2002). Action organizations derive legitimacy from their output, or performance. In the case of administrative agencies, this can be defined as the (observed) impact of their societal interventions. By contrast, political organizations derive legitimacy from what Brunsson calls "talk" and "decisions", rather than "action". The importance of "talk" implies the need to be seen to espouse certain norms and values in the organization's formal structure and its rhetoric. The importance of "decisions" refers to the need to be seen to take action to respond to issues that have been framed as requiring political action.

Put in the simplest terms, we can assume that action organizations are more likely to use knowledge instrumentally. They are motivated by the functional imperative of enhancing their performance. Thus where they consider their legitimacy to be in question, they will generally be motivated to draw on whatever resources may improve the quality of their output. By contrast, political organizations are likely to use expert knowledge as a source of legitimation. They will attempt to enhance legitimacy through aligning their structures and decision-making style to expectations about what constitutes legitimate action. This may involve drawing on knowledge as a means of demonstrating adherence to rationalist decision-making styles, or competence in a particular policy area. Indeed, since the development of modern bureaucracies, state agencies typically derive legitimacy from their adoption of a technocratic policy style, including through demonstrating possession of expertise (Weber 1978: 956-1005; Meyer and Rowan 1977: 42). In this sense, the use of knowledge may be essentially symbolic, exercising little or no influence over the organization's performance.

The categories of action and political organizations are, as I mentioned, ideal types. Organizations will typically derive legitimacy from a combination of observed societal impacts, formal structures and ideologies, and decisions. But certain administrative agencies do veer quite sharply towards the political side of the spectrum; and, as I shall argue in this paper, the European Commission is one such organization. The Commission derives legitimacy predominantly from its talk and decisions rather than its actions, the societal impact of which tend to be diffuse and difficult to discern. My expectation, therefore, is that the Commission's use of knowledge will be motivated predominantly by the perceived need to legitimise its role in migration policy, rather than to enhance the quality of its societal impacts.

If action organizations are likely to use knowledge instrumentally and political organizations use it as a source of legitimation, under what conditions will knowledge play the third function mentioned – that of substantiating policy positions? In fact, both action and political organisations may draw on knowledge to substantiate policy preferences (see Table 1). The crucial distinction here concerns the degree of contestation

over policy. Organizations facing opposition to their policy preferences from other agencies or organised interests may find it expedient to draw on additional resources to lend credibility to their views. The decision to use expert knowledge will also depend on the mode of justification considered appropriate for the organization: in other words, whether the organization finds it expedient to justify policy preferences through a technocratic mode of justification (drawing on scientific evidence and rational argumentation), or a democratic mode (drawing on popular support or electoral mandates).

**Table 1**                               **Organizational types and functions of knowledge**

|  | **Action Organization** | **Political Organization** |
|---|---|---|
| **Contentious policy area** | Instrumental knowledge<br>Substantiating knowledge<br>*(e.g. employment agency)* | Legitimising knowledge<br>Substantiating knowledge<br>*(e.g. foreign office)* |
| **Consensual policy area** | Instrumental knowledge<br>*(e.g. hospital)* | Legitimising knowledge<br>*(e.g. arts council)* |

In addition to these features of organisations and policy areas, there are two further factors influencing the use of knowledge. First, some policy areas are more likely to place a premium on expert knowledge than others. Political organizations are likely to be keen to demonstrate their utilization of knowledge where the policy community considers access to, or possession of, expert knowledge to be crucial for making well-informed decisions. The organization's members are more likely to be motivated to conform to these expectations where they have intense interaction with their peers, creating pressure to demonstrate they are drawing on knowledge in the relevant way. In the case of action organizations, expert knowledge will be seen as crucial where the policy area is characterised by epistemic uncertainty: gaps in knowledge about the phenomena that are the object of policy-making, or the impacts of policy on these phenomena.

*Some Indicators*

It should be noted that many of the hypotheses posit that certain features of the organization or policy area are likely to generate the use of knowledge for all three functions. This overlap between the conditions likely to prompt instrumental and symbolic uses of knowledge clearly poses a challenge for the empirical testing of these claims. However, we can disentangle evidence of instrumental and legitimising uses of knowledge through setting out some indicators about the sorts of features we would expect to observe in each case. I shall list three such features that can help indicate whether knowledge is being used for instrumental, legitimising or substantiating purposes.

First, where knowledge is being used instrumentally, we would expect the organizational structure, goals and research agenda to be constructed in a way that closely

corresponds to the organization's output needs. In other words, they will be designed to help meet performance targets. This will not necessarily be the case with legitimising knowledge, where the research agenda is likely to be influenced more by the policy community's perceptions of research *desiderata* than by the requirements of enhancing the quality of output. In the case of substantiating knowledge, one would expect research themes to be selected according to the most contested policy issues.

Second, in the case of instrumental knowledge, we would expect there to be mechanisms to ensure effective transfer and utilisation of knowledge by policy makers; and to see evidence of intensive interaction between decision-makers (including at senior level) and the researchers or research department. Again, this will not necessarily be the case with legitimising knowledge, although officials may be keen to demonstrate that they are in possession of such knowledge, or have access to it. In the case of substantiating knowledge, one would expect senior officials to be interested in the selection of research topics and in research results that substantiate their policy preferences, but not in detailed aspects of the findings or methodology.

The third point is about the publicity of knowledge utilization. Where knowledge is being used as a source of legitimation, the organization in question is likely to be keen to make its use of knowledge explicit to actors in its environment. It will want to show that it has the relevant research capacity, or is basing decisions on expert knowledge. This interest in demonstrating research utilisation will not be present in the case of instrumental utilization of knowledge. Where knowledge is drawn on to improve the quality of output, the organization will in principle be indifferent as to whether its use of knowledge is being observed or not. And where knowledge plays a substantiating function, research will be publicised selectively according to its potential to substantiate particular policy preferences.

These indicators can be summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**                    **Indicators of Types of Knowledge Utilization**

| Instrumental Knowledge | Legitimising Knowledge | Substantiating Knowledge |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Organizational structure and substance of research reflect performance targets | 1. Looser fit between structure/substance of research and policy goals | 1. Structure and substance of research reflect lines of contention |
| 2. Intensive interest in and take-up of research by decision-makers | 2. Looser ties between decision-makers and research unit | 2. Some exchange between decision-makers and research unit |
| 3. No obvious interest in publicising knowledge utilization | 3. Clear interest in widely publicizing knowledge utilization | 3. Selected interest in publicizing utilization (to relevant policy-makers) |

**2.** **The European Commission and the Functions of Knowledge**

The hypotheses and indicators set out above may seem rather abstract. This section aims to flesh them out, by showing how far these features apply to the European Commission and DG JLS. This will enable us to generate some more specific expectations about the functions of the EMN, which will be explored in section 3.

*The Quest for Legitimacy*
The first thing to note about the Commission as an administrative agency is its relatively fragile basis of legitimation. It is not headed by elected representatives, nor is it tasked with implementing a democratically mandated policy programme. Although many areas of EU cooperation (and by extension the role of the Commission) are by now well-entrenched, the Commission's functions and very existence are not taken for granted in the way that those of national administrations are. Rather, its role is continually being questioned, and its activities subject to demands for justification (refs). Such challenges are not just symbolic. There is a continuous process of debate and decision-making on the Commission's scope of competence in EU policy-making, and on the distribution of power between the Commission and other institutions. This implies that it is operating in a highly unstable organizational field, and thus likely to be constantly striving to enhance its legitimacy.

In the area of Immigration and Asylum, much of this insecurity derives from inter-departmental wrangles. The intensity of inter-service battles between different Directorate-Generals has been traced in part to the way in which competences are distributed between different departments. Since the Commission's role in policy is defined in a strictly contractual, treaty-based way, Directorate-Generals are keen to expand their influence through laying claim to jurisdiction over particular areas of competence set out in articles of the treaty. These legal bases determine the distribution of competence over particular policy areas to a greater extent than any performance-based, budgetary or political criteria (as is often the case at national level). Commission departments are therefore likely to invest substantial energy in inter-service turf wars as a means of expanding areas of competence, and show a tendency towards "possessive territorialism over particular policy areas" (Stevens and Stevens 2001: 143). A second factor explaining inter-service rivalry is the lack of any overarching party political, national or ideological affinity (Peterson 2006: 94). This can undermine a sense of unity between different departments, implying the predominance of more sectoral interests and agendas. Both factors are likely to encourage individual Directorate-Generals to find ways of enhancing their legitimacy in order to consolidate their position vis-à-vis other departments, especially in policy areas where there is some dispute over departmental jurisdiction. Immigration is certainly one such area. While the Directorate-General Justice, Liberty and Security is technically the lead department, the Directorate-General Employment and Social Affairs has been at the forefront of developing regulations to address labour market aspects of immigration and integration. Rivalry between the two is widely acknowledged to be quite intense. Meanwhile, the Directorate-General External

Relations has become increasingly involved in the "external dimension" of immigration and asylum, conducting bilateral negotiations and concluding treaties on issues of migration control.

The Commission also has good reason to feel insecure about its external environment. In addition to the typical rivalries with the Council and concern to enlist the support of the Parliament, the Commission is engaged in a continuous struggle for competence with member states. Immigration and asylum is one of the most sensitive areas of European cooperation, with many governments resisting the development of common policies, especially in relation to rules governing the entry and integration of foreign nationals. While there has been considerable Europeanization in this area over the past decade, the Commission has also faced numerous set-backs, seeing various proposals rejected or considerably watered down. All of these uncertainties make the Directorate-General Justice, Liberty and Security likely to draw on resources that will enhance its legitimacy as a key actor in immigration and asylum.

*The Commission as a Political Organization*
Much of the literature on the functions of the Commission has stressed the importance of its image as a technocratic agency, keen to portray its actions as being based on rationalistic decision-making procedures and the use of expertise. It attempts to enhance its authority by being seen to put forward proposals and take decisions based on specialised knowledge. Some scholars link this to the Commission's role as mediator and consensus-builder between European Union member states. In order to minimise political conflict between governments, and to avoid opposition to its proposals, the Commission tends to present policy proposals in a rather technocratic, non-ideological way (Cini 1996: 30). In this respect, it is useful to present itself as having privileged access to data on all member states, enabling it to get the sort of cross-national comparative perspective that is unavailable to national governments. Access to this type of knowledge – whether on economic performance, population statistics, or legislative arrangements – also allows the Commission to identify common problems and highlight areas that arguably require Union-level regulation (Stevens 2001: 139; Cram 1994: 211). Other commentators have argued that it also contributes to the image of the Commission as an "honest broker", attributed a higher degree of impartiality than the Council presidency, parliament or interest groups (Hooghe and Nugent 2006: 153).

This reliance on technocratic competence observed in the literature becomes more explicable if we consider the Commission's distance from the societal impacts of its policy interventions. National civil services have multiple channels of feedback via those involved in implementing, or affected by, its policies. They have extensive opportunities to gauge the impacts of policies through their direct involvement in implementation, or at least through close cooperation with agencies and professionals involved in implementation. This contrasts with the Commission, which has a very proscribed role in implementation. In many areas it monitors the implementation of European Community law, but it does not apply laws itself. National administrations are also more regularly exposed to public reactions to policies, through interaction with those affected by their

interventions. Crucially, such impacts also become the object of party political debate and mass media scrutiny. Again, this is not generally the case for the Commission. Barring some exceptional cases, public perceptions of accountability still tend to locate responsibility at the national (or regional) level. Even where the EU is attributed responsibility, the mass media will tend to target critique at national governments. This contributes to the Commission's distance from the societal impacts of its actions, and its lack of direct accountability for these impacts.

All of this has two implications. First, the Commission perceives itself to be judged on its talk and decisions, rather than its performance. It is an almost paradigmatic case of a political organization. It invests far more energy in securing support for its proposals and monitoring their implementation in national legal systems, than on systematically following up or trying to adjust their societal impact. Second, this abstraction from societal impacts has practical implications for the Commission's source of social knowledge. Rather than receiving direct feedback on the societal impacts of its policies, the Commission tends to rely instead on the collection of data on specified social and economic indicators (usually supplied by national governments), or comparative analysis of national legislation. To be sure, it is frequently exposed to claims and demands from lobby groups. But it is not exposed to the constant flow of information and comment on societal questions typical of mass media communication in national settings. The Commission's sources of social knowledge are thus far more abstract and actively structured than those of national bureaucracies.

The Commission is therefore forced to rely on specialised knowledge to a greater degree that member states. It has more work to do justifying its role through its expertise, since it cannot secure credibility through its impact. As John Peterson points out, its influence in policy discussions depends to a great extent on how far it is able to 'earn respect by the quality of its analysis' (Peterson 2006: 96). And it is obliged to rely on abstract knowledge, since it has limited opportunities to observe societal processes through engagement in praxis.

On the other hand, though, the Commission also has a comparative advantage in its capacity to analyse and compare cross-national data, and to present such analyses as transcending individual national perspectives. This is an enormous source of power in negotiations, giving the Commission unique knowledge that generally trumps knowledge grounded in national perspectives in the context of Council discussions.

*Knowledge as a Source of Legitimation in the Migration Policy Community*
The Commission is especially likely to use knowledge to boost its legitimacy where important actors in its environment sees expert knowledge as a source of authority. In other words, where the policy community recognises the role of such knowledge in legitimising the organization and justifying its role in the policy area. Where this is the case, it is likely to trigger mimetic isomorphism: the imitation of styles in knowledge utilization observed in the organization's environment.

The policy community in the area of European immigration and asylum policy includes a wide array of officials from national and international organizations (including

the Council of Europe, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and a number of United Nations agencies as well as the obvious European Union institutions and member state administrations); and various NGOs and lobby groups with offices in Brussels (notably the European Council for Refugees and Exiles; Amnesty International). Many of the larger organizations now have a dedicated research department.[3] NGOs meanwhile have increasingly recruited specialised "research officers". The research function often involves gathering and synthesising research findings from academic sources, commissioning research from third parties, or producing in-house research (often syntheses based on secondary material). Over the past decade, debates on migration policy have also increasingly incorporated think tanks combining research expertise with the promotion of particular policy agendas – including the Brussels-based Migration Policy Group, the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute, the Canadian-Dutch coordinated International Metropolis Project, and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

Commission officials in the Directorate-General Justice, Liberty and Security obviously have structured interaction with member state officials and other European institutions. And they are exposed to lobbying activities from NGOs, which, as we saw, often lay claim to expert knowledge. But they are also increasingly active in a variety of fora bringing together research and policy communities. Commission officials regularly participate in conferences and workshops; they have frequent meetings with researchers in the Commission; they sit on advisory boards for research programmes, projects and funding bodies; and they even contribute articles to research publications. There is therefore a fairly intense pattern of interaction within the policy community. This implies that JLS officials are regularly exposed to other members of this community who expect or require expertise as a condition for legitimacy.

A senior official describes well the importance of these interactions, in an account of first initiation into this community on joining the DG from another policy area.

> I remember I went to a big meeting ... just after I'd joined in the year 2000 and everybody in integration – all the people in integration, all the key academics – were there. And of course I didn't know this – I didn't know any of them. But nevertheless you immediately and quickly begin to identify the leaders in this whole field, and since then I've got to know most of them, and you can get into the network very quickly ... We've been involved in so many discussions at different levels, both with partners, with governments, but also with academics and researchers in the field, and so gradually you build up your knowledge and you network yourself so that you get to know what's going on (Interview, June 2006).

We can expect that this type of interaction places Commission officials under pressure to draw on expert knowledge – not just to enhance their legitimacy, but even simply to be able to keep up with debates.

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[3] IOM, UNHCR, ILO, interior ministries in Germany and the UK

*A Contested Policy Area*

The features described above make the Commission likely to use knowledge as a source of legitimation. But we can also point to a number of factors that indicate the usefulness of knowledge as a means of substantiating policy preferences. Chief among these is the fact that immigration and asylum policy is a highly contested policy area, with member states and EU institutions displaying considerable divergence of views. Within these debates, the Directorate-General Justice, Liberty and Security has developed quite a distinctive set of beliefs and norms that shape its policy preferences. One important element is a professed attachment to norms of human rights and international refugee law, at least in comparison to the position of many national justice and home ministries. This commitment is formally codified in the Commission's role as 'guardian' of the EC. The Commission favours a relatively multi-culturalist approach towards immigrant integration, although it is careful to stress that this is primarily an area of national competence. Probably most striking is its liberal and business-friendly approach to labour migration: it is a strong advocate of increased migration to fill what it perceives to be substantial shortfalls of labour in many European countries. This may well reflect the influence of staff transferred from the Directorate-General Employment and Social Affairs. Perhaps somewhat inconsistently with this goal, the DG also stresses in its rhetoric the need to take into account the concerns of developing countries with regard to the potentially negative impact of emigration from their countries. Whether these positions are politically feasible or even mutually reconcilable is not the concern here. The point is that the department has a clearly discernible set of policy preferences, which it is keen to defend in debates with member states and other actors.

It is important to stress that this set of tenets is not inconsistent with strong support for increased harmonization of national policies. Indeed, support for international and human rights law, or the goal of promoting a more economically oriented labour migration policy, can be seen as routes towards the same goal. Both imply the need to ground policies in more rational, liberal and universalistic principles. For example, one of the DG's arguments in favour of a common EU policy on immigration is that it would imply more transparent and efficient policies. To quote a Commission official:

> We believe that having clear channels for legal migration, making it clear what possibilities for legal migration there are, is a help in preventing people coming as illegal migrants. Then, the obvious way of making it transparent is to have some simple, common rules that everybody can understand outside and which makes it clearer, not 25 different national ways, 25 multiplied by a factor of probably 10 in each country ... It makes it very complicated for people outside.

So there is frequently a clear coincidence between the case for a common EU immigration policy, and the goal of promoting more liberal and economically rational approaches, as well as policies that are grounded in international legal norms.

Now this type of rationalist, universalist argument is eminently suitable for forms of substantiation based on expert knowledge. I mentioned earlier that knowledge is likely to be used where the claims being asserted are susceptible to technocratic rather than democratic modes of justification. And positions based on arguments about efficiency,

economic rationality, or universal principles clearly fit this specification. They make claims to transcend more populist or nationalistic perspectives. They are backed up by evidence and reason, rather than popular beliefs or sentiment.

This technocratic mode of justification, moreover, is highly appropriate given the very particular institutional status of the Commission as an administrative agency. As an organization run by unelected commissioners, it has fairly limited scope for drawing on democratic modes of justification, especially compared to officials from member states or the European Parliament. But it has been able to use its distance from national political contexts to advantage. It can portray itself as uniquely able to abstract itself from immediate political exigencies, and take a longer-term perspective.

This combination of an ideological preference for rationalistic policies, and the Commission's unique institutional status, is therefore not coincidental. The Commission has recognised how it can use its particular status to advantage, depicting itself as an agency transcending populist national concerns, and advancing policies based on universal and rational principles. These are ideas that are susceptible to technocratic evidence and reasoning, rather than justification based on popular appeal.

There is a second, rather different way in which use of knowledge may help promote the Commission's policy preferences. A number of authors have observed that in cases where the Commission fails to secure political agreement on a proposal, it frequently employs a strategy of "softening up" (Majone 1992?). It puts the proposal on hold, biding its time, but continuing to devote attention to technical and procedural aspects of the policy (Cini 1996: 31). For example, it may continue to gather evidence to support its claims on the need for the regulation in question, or establish a procedure and deadlines for monitoring national developments in the policy area (e.g. through the open coordination method, or scoreboards). Over time these procedures become institutionalised, and national governments become accustomed to the idea of cooperation in the given area. Laura Cram describes how this strategy was used to effect in the area of social policy from the mid-1970s onwards. Faced with opposition to its proposed agenda, the Commission turned its attention to "establishing research projects, and small-scale social programmes, issuing communications and drawing a range of actors into the European Union policy process…" (Cram 1997: 38). Cram stresses "the persuasive role of policy analysis" in this context, which helped convince members states that action was required, and, of course, favoured the line of action backed by the Commission (ibid).

It may well be that this form of "softening up" characterises the Commission's use of bodies such as the European Migration Network. The very process of defining and discussing the Network's research agenda may help to normalise the idea of cooperation in otherwise sensitive policy areas. By launching the discussion in a seemingly harmless forum, the Commission is able to draw national governments into debates that would not be politically feasible within the committee structure of the Council of Ministers. Detailed discussions on comparability (or not) of national data and legal provisions can meanwhile help highlight disparities between member states, potentially bolstering the Commission's case for harmonisation. While the fact that government officials are

involved in knowledge production adds political (if not scientific) weight to the findings, effectively making national ministries 'stakeholders' in the studies and reports produced. This a rather different notion of the substantiating function of knowledge. It implies that the very *process* of producing expert knowledge bolsters the European Commission's policy preferences, rather than the substance of research. But it is an interesting thesis, which we will return to later in the paper.

In sum, the European Commission and especially DG JLS strongly display characteristics that make them likely to use knowledge symbolically. The Commission is operating in an unstable environment, prompting it to find ways of enhancing its legitimacy. It is likely to do this through its talk and decisions, rather than actions, implying a propensity to draw on knowledge as a source of legitimation. The pressure to be seen to draw on expert knowledge is particularly pronounced in the area of immigration and asylum, where there is intensive interaction between officials and researchers, and many organizations dealing with migration have set up their own dedicated research unit. Moreover, this is an area which is highly contentious, and in which the Commission has a distinctive ideological agenda. This makes it likely that the Commission will draw on knowledge as a means of substantiating its preferred policy choices – whether through making use of the content of research, or through exploiting the process of knowledge production.

## 3. Some Evidence

It is difficult to 'test' these propositions in any rigorous manner. What we can do, however, is to try to gauge the functions of knowledge through observing patterns of research utilization, and comparing them with the key indicators set out in Section 1. More specifically, we can consider whether various features of the European Migration Network and its relations with the Commission conform to the patterns we would expect to observe for each type of knowledge utilization: namely, the Network's mandate and structure; its research output and the take-up of research by Commission officials; and strategies for disseminating and publicizing the Network and its output. The research is based on nine interviews with Commission officials and members of the EMN; participant observation of three EMN meetings; and analysis of Commission documents, EMN reports and papers.

*Mandate and Structure of the European Migration Network*
At the initial stages of the development of the new Network in 2002, the Commission does not appear to have had a very clear or conscious preference concerning its mandate and structure. The aims and scope of the network were defined in an extremely broad way. They included not just gathering and analysing data from governments, but 'setting up a systematic basis for monitoring the multidimensional phenomena of migration and asylum in the EU, by covering the legal, demographic, economic, social and political aspects, and in identifying associated underlying causes.' (EMN web-site). It was also

foreseen that the Network would eventually assume the additional function of informing the public about immigration and asylum issues. And the Commission's 2005 Green Paper on the future of the EMN mooted a possible future role of issuing opinions and recommendations on policy. So the definition of the mandate of the Network was so wide as to offer a sort of blanket, catch-all set of goals. As one official put it:

> In a way it was deliberately very broad, because particularly at the early stage one wasn't exactly sure how it would evolve, and you couldn't say, right, you're going to concentrate on this. Also because you didn't really know the expertise of the national contact points. So I think the whole thing was deliberately broad. (Interview, September 2006)

This ostensible lack of design on the part of the Commission certainly does not suggest an interest in the instrumental function of knowledge. If anything, it implies that the Network may have been valued as a source of legitimation. The Commission's decision to establish the Network is a good example of coercive isomorphism (see DiMaggio and Paul, 1983), in the sense that the Commission felt compelled to adopt the trappings of a research competence because of expectations set up by the Laeken European Council. As one official commented, 'In a way, it [the Network] has an amazingly high profile by being included in European Council Conclusions, and so on. And I think beforehand, it's not really met expectations. I would like to think now that it is starting to do so.' (Interview, September 2006) It may also have represented a form of mimetic isomorphism, insofar as the Commission sought to emulate patterns of knowledge utilization on the part of other organizations in its environment. Although Commission staff on the whole display rather limited knowledge of research departments in other organizations or national ministries, there is certainly a general awareness of the sorts of features that might lend credibility to such a research network. A number of these features, such as the emphasis on including stakeholders, and the importance attached to dissemination and transparency, were incorporated into the design and activities of the Network. So if any pattern of knowledge utilization emerges, it is that of knowledge as a source of legitimation. And this is certainly consistent with the Commission's concern to establish the Network, but in the absence of any clear agenda regarding its goals and output.

The Commission did display more pronounced preferences when it came to the structure of the network. Initially, the Commission had been in favour of establishing a network of researchers from each member state, independent of government agencies but with access to official data. The idea was to ensure high quality, independent analysis by experts in the field. The Network was to be led by a research institute, the 'scientific coordinator', with the Commission acting as funder and host to the meetings. In this respect, there appears to have been a clear interest in ensuring the Network produced high-quality and independent research. Given the ambiguity surrounding the goals and remit of the Network, this interest probably signified above all a desire to ensure the credibility of the Network. A Network composed of, and coordinated by, highly respected experts would have more weight as a research body. If one considers the Commission's vagueness about the remit and goals of the Network at this stage, it is likely that this concern about quality of research reflected a desire to bolster the

legitimacy of the Network, rather than to produce research that would improve the quality of decision-making. So again, the implication is that the Network, at least in this initial phase, was valued for its legitimising function.

For a number of reasons, though, this model proved unworkable. For a start, interior ministries were keen to select their own national contact point, and in most cases preferred this to be a government official. The data and analyses being produced were considered sensitive, and governments wanted to retain control over the gathering and exchange of information. Moreover, the Commission realised there were certain drawbacks to relying on independent experts. This is how one senior official describes the reasoning:

> Initially we started in this rather naïve way, believing that by involving mainly research and scientific institutes you could create something like an objective view of migration, which is – forgive me my clear works – utter nonsense. Because whatever you say, whatever you do, it will be politically instrumentalised by one side or the other, for whatever purposes. So in the end we realised, whatever this network does, in whatever way it is composed, the Commission will be responsible for it. (Interview, September 2006)

In other words, the Commission became aware of the impossibility of deliberating these issues in a purely technocratic mode. And once it had acknowledged the inseparability of knowledge and politics in this policy field, it became clear that both the Commission and governments would have to be more involved in the Network's output. Indeed, the system that emerged was essentially inver-governmental: each interior ministry would choose its own national contact point. The Commission did establish certain loose criteria for screening this selection, but member states were basically free to select their representative. By the second half of 2002, ten states had designated their national contact points (Austria, Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK), with Finland, France and Germany joining in 2003. In most cases the nominated national contact point was an official from an interior ministry or a statistical department. In some cases it was a research institute or NGO, and in the case of Austria it was the national office of an international organization.

For similar reasons, the Commission also abandoned the initial practice of allowing the scientific coordinator to chair the meetings.

> Gradually we realised the outcome is less productive or the meetings are less productive than we expected, because the scientific coordinator lacks the authority to impose its views. Because if you have national contact points from the Interior or linked to Interior Ministries, they do not accept being told by a university professor or even by a scientifically well reputed man or woman if they are allegedly failing in a policy area … And this is why we decided to take this more in our own hands, taking a stronger lead in the meetings. (Interview, September 2006).

Again, the implication is that governments refused to treat migration and asylum issues as technocratic policy domains, to be settled through evidence and rational argumentation. So the Commission's initial preference had clearly proved unviable. The structure which emerged was that of an inter-governmental network, composed of officials rather than researchers, and coordinated by the Commission. The scientific coordinator's job was

relegated to that of drafting 'synthesis reports' based on country reports supplied by the national contact points. Even these summaries were subject to close scrutiny and repeated editing by government officials, in a cumbersome drafting procedure that meant research reports generally took over a year to prepare.

Even more striking, perhaps, was the resemblance of Network meetings to committee meetings of the Council of Ministers. Each national contact point was seated behind a plaque stating the name of their member state, and addressed one another as 'the UK representative', 'the Dutch national contact point', and so on, rather than by personal name or organizational affiliation. Simultaneous translation was generally available for six to eight languages, and delegates signalled they wanted to make a statement by placing their country plaque on its side. The proceedings were generally quite formal, and certainly a far cry from academic style discussions or committee meetings. As an observer, one had the impression of sitting in formal inter-governmental negotiations, rather than the deliberations of a research network.

Not only did the structure of the Network change after 2002, but its goals were also increasingly crystallised in terms of an instrumental function. This can be attributed partly to a process of trial and error, which enabled the Commission to become clearer about what the Network could and could not be expected to deliver. As one official put it:

> I think what is coming out more, and if you like, in terms of the EMN finding its niche, is this idea of it being much more to support policy and decision-making. .. And that way, you can base decisions – at member state or EU level – hopefully on what is the particular situation in each member state. (Interview, September 2006).

The focus on providing information to support policy-making also corresponded to the recommendations of an evaluation carried out by a Brussels consultancy firm, the European Evaluation Consortium. The evaluation recommended that the 'future EMN should further reinforce its integration in asylum and migration policy within the EU. This will strongly depend on the extent to which it can meet the information needs of the Community and its ability to deliver reliable, up-to-date, more importantly (sic), comparable data and information' (EPEC 2005). And it was the consensus view that emerged from the consultation on the future of the EMN, which was carried out in the first half of 2006. So the Commission became increasingly committed to the idea that the Network's work should feed into Union policy-making.

One can therefore discern a quite marked evolution in the Commission's reasoning in relation to the European Migration Network. At the outside there was a rather limited sense of direction, and some concern about the Network's legitimacy. But with time this shifted to a clearer emphasis on the instrumental function of knowledge. It remains to be established if this interest in the instrumental function of the Network was borne out in practice, or whether it was instead a form of rhetoric adopted to enhance the credibility of the new structure. This should become clearer by considering patterns of research production and utilization.

*Research Agenda and Research Utilization*

The shift towards an instrumentalist function certainly appears *prima facie* to be borne out in the Network's choice of research studies. The Network was initially tasked with producing two types of study: respectively, large-scale and small-scale research studies. It also produced coordinated responses to so-called 'ad hoc requests'. As with the Network's mandate and structure, it was only from around 2004-5 onwards that the Commission started to develop a clear idea of what sorts of studies to select.

The choice of topic for the first large-scale study was widely considered to have been a mistake, or as one official put it, 'an unfortunate choice'. The study examined 'The Impact of Immigration on Europe's Societies', with each national contact point producing or commissioning a synthesis of existing research on the economic, socio-cultural and political effects of migration in their country. It soon became clear that the project was far too ambitious. The quality of country reports diverged substantially, and many of the contact points were unable to meet the initial deadline. More significantly, the synthesis report prepared by the 'scientific coordinator' proved highly controversial, leading the Commission to cancel a planned meeting to present the results in Summer 2005. The report finally came out in March 2006, after substantial editing. As one Commission official observed:

> This was such an unfortunate choice for the first study. I mean, this could have been the crowning work after several years of developing this network. Instead, we started with the most controversial and difficult and complex issue … this could not but end in disaster, as it did. (Interview, September 2006)

Subsequent studies were more tightly defined, and on the whole geared towards providing information of direct relevance to up-coming policy issues. Interestingly, though, a number of these were produced too late to be able to contribute to policy discussions. For example, the third large-scale study on return was expected to be concluded in November 2006; this was some months too late to feed into Council discussions on the Commission's September 2005 proposal on return. As a Commission official admitted, 'yes, it's relevant, and in a way topical, but it comes slightly late because the proposed Directive is already out and it's being discussed'. Likewise the first small-scale study on reception systems was published in May 2006, after the Directive on reception systems was already in force. So the impression one gets is that of a general aspiration to produce policy-relevant research, without this being possible to put into practice.

**Table 3**

| Study | Publication | Relevant Policy |
|---|---|---|
| 1st Small-Scale Study Reception Systems | May 2006 | Directive was already in force. |
| 2nd Small-Scale Study Health Sector | Still preparing country reports | Controversial, and Commission is interested in developing policy |
| 3rd Small-Scale Study Highly-Skilled Workers | Still preparing country reports. | Controversial. Upcoming Directive on rights and responsibilities of workers |
| 1st Research Study | Final report issued | Controversial, and no clear link to a policy |

| Impact of Immigration | early 2006 | |
|---|---|---|
| 2nd Research Study Illegal Migration | Final report expected Autumn 2006 | Communication, July 2007 |
| 3rd Research Study Return | Final report expected November 2006 | Commission proposal on voluntary return (already drafted before publication of study) |

Other studies, though, have been more carefully selected to coincide with policy deliberations. Indeed, the Commission has begun to plan the Network's annual research agenda to coincide with upcoming proposals and legislation. Thus the second large-scale study on illegal migration is scheduled to be completed prior to the Commission's Communication on this topic, planned for July 2007. The third small-scale study on highly-skilled workers should be ready in time for a forthcoming proposal for a Directive on the rights and responsibilities of migrant workers in the European Union. Discussions on the work programme for 2007 put a clear premium on relevance for planned Commission proposals and communications. For example, the Comission was keen to include a study on seasonal labour programmes in different countries, a topic on which legislation was foreseen for 2007. So there appears to be a much clearer sense that the work of the Network should feed into policy planning.

One can also detect a clear preference for studies that will help substantiate the Commission's policy preferences. Good examples of this are the second and third small-scale studies, on the health sector, and on highly-skilled workers. Indeed, the rationale for selecting these studies approximates closely to the 'softening up' strategy mentioned in the previous section. In both cases, the policy in question is highly politically sensitive, and/or discussion on the area has been blocked at the level of the Council of Ministers. As a senior Commission official observed of the study on the health sector:

> It's one of these very, very delicate issues that for the moment we'd rather steer clear of, I'd have to say, and this is just a little bit of information gathering. It's an issue that's totally explosive, and you have to be so clear about the facts, what you're doing, and how you present it. (Interview, June 2006)

But the expectation is that discussion of this issue in the Network can help provide a better indication of where the problems lie.

> Each member state knows what's going on in its country, and what is particularly sensitive in its own country. And you have to bear that in mind, so it's a very good antennae because we see as much as we can from here and we try and keep in touch as much as we can. (Interview, June 2006)

Likewise, in the case of the study on highly-skilled workers, there are clear indications that Commission is trying to 'soften up' member states.

> You have to be very pragmatic in this area. We tried a general Directive, and that approach didn't get anywhere – I wouldn't say it was rejected but it didn't get anywhere. So then we went back through the process – let's open the dialogue, open up discussion on these issues. (Interview, June 2006)

More generally, the selection of studies seems to be designed to produce comparative analyses of the situation in different member states, rather than evaluate policy impacts, or ascertain good practice. Studies almost all involve collecting and

comparing information on labour needs, problems with migration control, or existing legislation and practice on immigration and asylum in each country. Such comparative analyses can help highlight divergences in national practices, and provide an excellent starting-point for justifying possible new areas of cooperation between European Union states.[4] They are less useful for aiding knowledge transfer between member states on the impacts of different sorts of policies, what approaches have been deemed successful, and so on. All of these points suggest the existence of a substantiating function for the Commission.

Probably the most telling indicator of the functions of the Network's research is the involvement of other Commission officials in shaping the research agenda, and in making use of research results. In this respect, there appears to be a rather pronounced disjuncture between the professed goals of the Network, and take-up of its research by Commission staff. Apart from the handful of officials directly involved in the management or coordination of the European Migration Network, few staff appeared to be making use of, or are even aware of, its studies. Instead, they continue to draw on a range of other sources to provide input into policy proposals and draft legislation. We can see this clearly in the case of policy on asylum systems. The Commission's Communication on a single asylum procedure drew more than anything on a study commissioned from a German law professor, as well as two conferences it organised, bringing together legal expects. Officials also drew on existing studies from member states and the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees. For the Directive on reception systems, staff are awaiting an evaluation from the Odysseus Network, an independent network of academics and lawyers dealing with EU asylum issues. It was considered that this evaluation would be more useful than the forthcoming study of the European Migration Network. As an official commented, 'with the EMN you have to digest each member state perspective – it's difficult to have a consistent approach from all twenty five.' (Interview, September 2006). Another official put it rather more bluntly, 'I haven't discussed it [the Network] with colleagues since I've been here, no-one's really mentioned it'. Instead, the official concerned preferred to derive information from existing studies produced by research institutes, or through attending conferences.

This failure to make use of the Network's studies may in part reflect the fact that the Network is relatively new. As the officials more directly involved in it admit, it is only just getting into its stride, and beginning to produce studies that can be of real use to officials. But the disconnect also suggests that the Network's research agenda may not be targeted primarily at meeting the information needs of Commission officials. Indeed, there is good reason to question whether the latter even see a clear need for the Network as a source of instrumental knowledge. Ten officials in the Immigration and Asylum Unit were asked about whether they considered there were big knowledge gaps in their area, and whether the Directorate-General should have more resources to develop a research

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[4] By way of contrast, we can compare this type of analysis with the reports produced by another inter-governmental network, the Intergovernmental Consultations on Immigration

unit. The answers were extremely varied. Six respondents considered there were gaps in knowledge; of these, four supported the idea of devoting additional resources to establishing a research capacity within the department. But six respondents did not see the need for a new unit. Three of these considered information gathering was better done by officials dealing with the policy area, and two thought that it was more useful to commission research from outside sources (the sixth did not give a reason). So there is certainly no clear consensus on the need for a dedicated research capacity: at least half of the officials either consider they have enough information already available; or if not that, it can be better supplied through other channels.

Not surprisingly, this contrasts with the opinions expressed by those officials most closely involved in running the network. Here, the main emphasis tends to be on the instrumental function of the European Migration Network. The Commission staff who organize meetings and coordinate the Network's activities appear concerned to portray the Network as contributing to policy development. The most obvious explanation for this is that they are concerned to conform to expectations on the part of the wider policy community about the functions of knowledge. Senior officials involved in strategic planning, on the other hand, appear to be more interested in the potential of the Network to substantiate Commission policy preferences - whether through 'softening up' governments through normalizing debate on sensitive issues, or through producing research that lends credibility to the case for policy harmonization. So there is a clear discrepancy between the functions of knowledge for different parts of the organization.

We can try to shed more light on these divergent approaches by turning to the third and final indicator of different types of knowledge utilization: strategies for publicising research and activities of the Network.

*Dissemination and Publicity*
The Commission has consistently emphasised the importance of publicising the work of the network. But as in other areas, the rationale for dissemination has not always been clear. Publicity of the Network has been pursued through four channels: the website, the Network's publications, through the national networks of the contact points, and through the annual conference. Concerning publications, Commission officials closely involved in the coordination of the Network have been keen to circulate studies produced by the Network, in the form of attractively designed brochures containing the 'synthesis reports', with attached CD-Roms which contain individual country studies. For example, it produced 1,000 copies of the report on reception conditions, intended to be circulated to national officials, NGOs, and members of European and international organizations. In Meanwhile, the first annual 'extended meeting' was held in December 2005. The Commission invited representatives from several NGOs and other migration-related research networks, as well as a number of individual researchers nominated by the national contact points.

In the run-up to negotiations on the future legal basis of the Network, the Commission stressed to national contact points the importance of disseminating information on the EMN to senior policy-makers in the Council and the European

Parliament. The concern was to ensure that officials and Members of the European Parliament got a good overview of the network's activities, by receiving publications and being invited to participate in the planned December 2007 conference. The conference in particular was seen as an opportunity to 'sell' the Network to policy-makers (EMN Meeting, September 2006). One official summarised the concern about dissemination this way:

> The more studies the EMN produces the more it becomes visible, and the more it's growing, and the more visible you become the more people are interested in what you're doing. They show up, they enquire what you are doing. And this is why we are advocating, also by means of conferences and by means of nice shiny looking brochures which we produce at our own cost, at the Commission's cost, in high numbers, that the first reports get the necessary circulation and spread. So we send them with letters from the Director General to MEPs, chairmen of committees who are concerned, the Commission, Member States, NGOs, and so this is the kind of advocating and promoting of this network – in order to increase its visibility. And at the end of this preparatory phase we are now planning another open conference in December to celebrate - between quotes - the completion of the preparatory phase and the transition to a more permanent structure. (Interview, September 2006)

The Commission has also encouraged national contact points to organize national meetings to publicise work to other researchers and 'stakeholders' within each participating country. Each national contact point is encouraged to host one such meeting each year. But there is little control over the format and content of these meetings, and as a rule the Commission is not represented there. There appears to be a general concern to 'ensure a representative range of institutions, organisations and initiatives at Member State level, which would allow the voices of all relevant stakeholders to be heard' (EMN Work Programme 2007, MIGRAPOL Doc 105). But it is unclear in what sense this concern to involve stakeholders fits with the research goals of the Network. It is quite possible that Commission officials are embracing modish notions about the need to involve stakeholders as a means of enhancing the legitimacy of the Commission and the Network. The website appears to have been somewhat less of a priority for the Commission. Indeed, because of a number of changes in the contractees administering the website, there were several phases where the website was not operational, or could not be up-dated.

It is difficult to derive any very cut and dried conclusions from this pattern of dissemination. Certainly the Commission appears to have been concerned to publicise the Network. And one can detect a priority to target members of the research community, rather than the general public, or even the policy-makers most closely associated with decision-making in the areas of study. Part of this seems to have been related to a deliberate strategy to secure support for the EMN from decision-makers in the Parliament and Council. In other words, it signifies a direct interest in consolidating the position of the Network. But it also reflects a less tangible concern to conform to external expectations about legitimate structures for this type of research Network. Specifically, the Commission was concerned to demonstrate the political relevance and use of its output; and the fact that it adopted an inclusive, consultative approach to research. In both

cases, then, there are indications that strategies for publicizing served a legitimising function.


**Conclusion**

The Commission is an example of a political organization *par excellence*, deriving its legitimacy from talk and decisions rather than action. As such, the expectation was that it would draw on knowledge primarily to enhance its legitimacy or the credibility of its policy positions, rather than to improve its performance. Given the contested nature of European Union immigration and asylum policy, and the Commission's relatively strong ideological agenda, the expectation was that research would be valued as a means of substantiating the Commission's policy agenda.

The case of the European Migration Network does, on the whole, support these expectations. But the picture that emerges from a more detailed examination of the Network's structure and activities suggests we need to nuance this account in a number of ways. In the early stages of the EMN's development there was a marked absence of any clear design on the part of the Commission, with the latter being quite open about how to define the goals and work programme of the Network. This implies that the Commission had little interest in the EMN playing either an instrumental or a substantiating function. This is also borne out by the relative lack of interest or knowledge about the Network and its output on the part of officials working on relevant policy areas in the Commission. Instead, the concern appears to have been to build up a Network that would be viewed as scientifically reputable and politically independent. The predominant function of the Network therefore appears to have been envisaged as a means of bestowing legitimacy.

However, the Commission thinking on the Network underwent quite a pronounced shift between 2004-2005. First, the experience of the initial phase made it clear that the structure and work programme of the Network would have to be rethought. The Network's activities were deemed too politically sensitive for it to be composed of independent researchers, implying a more active role for governments and for the European Commission. And the rather difficult experience with the first studies encouraged the Commission to think more strategically about how to select topics. This resulted in a reorientation towards a more instrumental function for the Network, at least in the Commission's rhetoric. But second, and just as important, it also became clear that this new structure had some potential to play a substantiating function. The involvement of national governments in selecting, designing and producing studies could help normalise debate on controversial policy issues, and make them more likely to endorse the findings. The choice of comparative country analyses could also provide the basis for making a case for the need for harmonization. So rather than ruing the shift from the original plan of a network of independent experts, the Commission appears to have embraced the new structure, and exploited the new possibilities for substantiating knowledge.

However, the analysis also pointed to a divergence between the views of officials, depending on how closely involved they were in running the Network. It was noted that senior management appeared to be interested in the substantiating function of the Network. By contrast, those most actively involved in the Network continued to set store by its supposedly instrumental function. They were keen to propagate the view that it was feeding into policy-making, though this was not borne out by the experience of their colleagues working in the relevant areas, who displayed rather limited interest in using the Network's findings. Officials coordinating the Network were also keen to adopt other features considered to enhance the Network's legitimacy, as evidenced by the concern to include 'stakeholders' in the Network's deliberations (something that is not easy to explain in terms of an instrumentalist function). They also displayed a strong interest in disseminating the Network's studies to the policy community (though not necessarily to the wider public, or to those policy makers most directly involved in the areas covered by the Network's studies). All of this seems to support the thesis that, at least for this group of officials, the Network played a primarily legitimizing function.

The findings have wider implications for a theory of knowledge utilization. First, they suggest that it is possible for different parts of an organization to nurture quite divergent beliefs and expectations about the functions of knowledge. The difference appeared to be contingent on the organizational role of the officials concerned – be it senior management, middle-level managers involved in more detailed policy development, or those with a more concentrated involvement in the Network. Second, they also suggest that organizations do not necessarily have a fixed or even reflected strategy of knowledge utilization. This may be the case even in the context of deliberations over the establishment of a new research body, a point at which one would expect rather careful reflection and planning on the uses of knowledge. Instead, ideas about the functions of knowledge can become crystallised or change over time, through a rather erratic process of trial and error.

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