

Scientists, politics, government, public sector and non-technical management: part 2



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Goals

- improve the world with our knowledge
 - help our governments and public institutes make better STEM-informed decisions
 - .. There are other ways ..
- **have a fun life**

- Better informed governments take better decisions
 - Huge challenges: climate, energy, world security
 - Need more of our input
- The most technical policy departments have $\pm 10\%$ technical staff
 - **They don't know what to do with us**

- Where do governments get information and advice?
 - Own staff (supposed to increase)
 - Consultants / advisory firms
 - Lobbyists
 - (semi-)government institutes (TNO, RIVM, KNMI etc)
 - Think tanks
 - Academia (formal/informal)
 - Political parties / members of
 - Conferences, seminars, events
 - **Media**

- How to deal with media/government requests for help
 - **Yes!**
- Do not underestimate your knowledge
 - Really
- If you know an **AVAILABLE** person that really is better, refer to that person
 - Otherwise, you are it
- As long as you don't lie, you can be useful, even if you don't have all the answers
- If you were useful, they'll ask for more help later

- Media
 - You've heard lots already
 - Mixed blessing, could be terrible, could be great
- For politicians: **IF IT ISN'T NEWS IT IS NOT HAPPENING**
- Even if you appear in a small newspaper or magazine, your words end up in the 'media selection' at government departments
 - Great multiplier
- Niche podcasts can also be useful
- **But do learn from the professionals you've heard from so far**



 DIGITALE ZAKEN 

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Opgestapte toezichthouder: 'Nieuwe inlichtingenwet kan tot Noord-Koreaanse taferelen leiden'

- Think tanks / policy researchers / NGO
 - Partially spontaneous research
 - Partially commissioned
- Create ideas & spaces for governments to discuss
- "Talk for ages about energy, learn a lot, commit to nothing"
- Pay is terrible (REALLY terrible) – be sure you can afford to work there
- Lots of fun though, and integrated over a lot of time can have huge influence
- Concrete opportunity since most think tanks are light on STEM, but want to get there

- **Political parties & their scientific bureaus**
- You could be **outrageously** influential there
 - “Help write the coalition agreement”
 - Nearly STEM-free zone
- The political parties set the tone and often the substance for policy the coming 4 years
- Downside, have to find a party you can agree with
 - ...
- Your party might also not get any meaningful power

- **Really working there: Integrating with the natives**
- They've been running the show, with little knowledge, for ages
- Your help is theoretically helpful, but painful
- Everyone should be super grateful!
 - But no, you are making it clear how little they know
- Tread very carefully, they could reject you
 - “either all of us suck, or this Bert guy is crazy”. Guess what.
- **TAKES SIX MONTHS AT LEAST**
- **The time you spend on getting your facts right, they spend on gossip and “coalition building”**

- **European Commission / Parliament / JRC**
- Much energy/climate/industrial policy actually comes from Brussels
- Brussels values knowledge more than most national governments
 - Far harder to become an EU government worker
 - Pay is also better
 - Get really good people from all over Europe
- Your actual world impact through Brussels might be HUGE
- Also has its own research department (3000 people), the Joint Research Centre

- **Helping from the outside**
- Can be extremely helpful. You are providing help for free!
- You are not a lobbyist, being academic/from academia makes you pretty neutral
- They'll launder your wisdom so they appear really smart
- Or: Your words turn into ACTUAL LAW TEXTS!! 
- Try to be helpful even if it is not quite your field
 - “explaining kWh is good work”
- They'll remember you when it IS your field
- Can work with government workers or members of parliament (both useful)

- **As Eppo mentioned: study the structures**
- Who is asking for help?
- What is their role? / What is their power?
- What are their worries / incentives?

- **DO YOUR HOMEWORK:** What did they publish previously?
The people you are talking to, where do they come from?
What are their backgrounds?

- **The quiet lady in the corner might be the director general.**
- **FACTS MATTER BUT SO DO PEOPLE**

- **Public formal communications**

- Consultations at the office

- 1:1 meetings at the office

- “Hallway track” at events

- **THE BAR AT EVENTS**

- Very difficult for senior government people to really ask the important questions in public

- **SO MANY CONFERENCES, EVENTS, PANELS**
 - Often free, or you can even sneak in
 - Ask questions, you'll get noticed. Promote your work/research ('my question is more of a comment..')
 - Reverse engineer what their uncertainties/worries are
 - Be helpful!
- Yes, you are welcome there, no it is not weird
 - Just go
 - Often free drinks and food too!
- **One random meeting at a conference/event is worth 20 emails**

- **You can be helpful on many levels**
 - Sometimes you'll be explaining the most basic of basics
 - It is terrible, but impact is near infinite – people come from 0 knowledge
 - Slow burn knowledge: if your field has a point to make, make it for a few years, and it finds its way into policy
 - Providing friction for nonsense:
 - Hydrogen is prime example
 - “Solar panels in bicycle paths”
 - “Quantum communications to fight the Chinese”

- **(Semi-)government, agencies**
 - TNO
 - RIVM, KNMI, RDI, veiligheidsregio's etc
 - Boards / committees / agencies (AWTI..)

- Generally have more knowledge (yay!)
- But also more distance to the action

- **Summarising**
- Many ways in which you could be helpful:
 - “In the center of things”: Your government or EU
 - “Creating / contributing ideas”: Thinktank, NGO, Political party
 - “Advising, silently or in media”: 1:1, conferences, panels
 - “From slight distance”: committees, agencies
- Any help is welcome, even if only providing friction, or educating on the basics

- Further reading:
 - On being useful: <https://berthub.eu/articles/posts/on-being-useful/>
 - Some business advice for academic startups/spinouts: <https://berthub.eu/articles/posts/some-academic-business-advice/>

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