

Transcript | Policymaking 101

Hello and welcome to this Policymaking 101 masterclass! My name is Derek Alton, and I am the Community Engagement Lead here at Apolitical.

It would be great to hear from all of you. So, do post in the chat where you're joining us from and what organisation you work for.

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Today we will be covering perhaps the most fundamental function and skill within government and conducting back to the basics at policymaking.

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How does policymaking work? What skills, behaviors do great policymakers need? And how do non-policy roles, how do non-policy roles influence policy outcomes are all questions we're going to try to answer as well as many from you.

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For those of you who are joining us for the first time, welcome.

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Apolitical is the world's largest community for government used by over a quarter of a million public servants.

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From over 170 different countries. Our mission is to make government smarter, and we do this by putting the best knowledge and skills at the fingertips of public servants like yourself.

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From around the world. So who do we have here with us?

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I saw some people from Vancouver. Excellent. Toronto. A lot of Canadians, as you can tell, I'm Canadian from my thick Canadian accent. So loving the people from lots of representation from Canada, see from people from the States as well.

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Penticton, that's also in Canada, Montreal has the second best hockey team in Canada. Watch the people here.

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Awesome. Scotland, excellent as well. A bunch of people from Scotland as well here. France, excellent.

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Salud. Excellent. Welcome. Welcome everyone, everyone. All right. Well, we're thrilled to extend an invitation to join our speakers today and your peers in public service from across the globe to a global policymaking community. We have a bunch of different communities and forums

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On a political and we've won specifically for policymaking. So whether you're just starting out in policy profession or a seasoned analyst.

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This form is the place to share resources, ask questions, and gain collective wisdom from your peers global policy professionals from all over the world. If you're not a member yet, I really hope you'll consider joining today.

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The link is in the resources tab on this webinar and should be at the bottom of your screen.

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I'm going to get a few technical notes out of the way before we get into today's conversation. This event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself.

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Contact details for privacy concerns are in the apolitical homepage footer. Closed captions are available and can be toggled off in your screen setting.

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Okay, so before we introduce our speakers, we're going to run a few quick polls and get a sense of where you're coming from in today's conversation.

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All right, so poll number one. Which skills?

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For policymaking, are you most eager to develop? Systems thinking?

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Futures and foresight thinking. Applying behavioral insights and policy.

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Written and verbal communication skills and data management. So which skills for policymaking are you most eager to develop And I will note, I mentioned earlier, we have a bunch of different communities and forums, a bunch of different topics. We have communities on each of these topics from systems thinking.

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Foresight and futures. I was just saying that we're looking at starting a scanning club in the foresight and futures thinking group. So a global scanning club.

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As well as written verbal communications. Our writing community is in fact one of our most popular communities. Speaking of which, interesting to see futures and foresight thinking appears to be the most popular, followed closely by systems thinking and behavioral insights, which is near and dear to my heart. I study behavioral insights in university so

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Quite exciting about these topics here. All right. Let's go to the next poll.

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Second one, simple one here, yes or no question. Are you using generative AI to support your current policy work?

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Are you using generative AI? For your current policy work. And don't feel like you need to answer this if you're not doing any policy work. You don't have to worry about answering this question, but it's kind of interesting to see about a quarter of people are

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Currently using AI, generative AI, and three quarters none. It'll be interesting to see how that shifts in the year to come.

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Excellent. One final question here. If you are using AI to support your policy work, please describe how you're using it in one short sentence.

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And if you're not, please describe the biggest barrier you face to using AI in your work.

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Because of the stylist, I won't be able to share the answers with you.

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But please do, we'll incorporate the answers into conversations as the session goes along.

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Let's just take a few minutes to a few seconds, I should say, to answer that question.

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AI technology is just, it's everywhere these days. And so it's really interesting to see how people are using it and also what's holding people back from using it. Because as we saw, three quarters of you on this call right now are not using AI. So the question is, you know.

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What are the different reasons you have? And maybe it doesn't make sense, but there could be barriers that might be interesting to dig into.

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And I've seen some people also replying here in the chat about it, you know, being, for example, forbidden to be used, which is pretty common in many places in government. There's still a lot of hesitancy around using AI.

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All right. Thank you, everyone. Let's jump into speakers. We're really lucky to have some great speakers with us here today.

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So first off, Natalie Corbett. So Natalie is the head of policy professionalism and ministerial advice at His Majesty Revenue and Customs, or HMRC as we call it here in the UK, and is undertaking a doctorate in policy research and practice at the Institute of Policy Research at the University of Bath.

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And our second speaker is Dr. Kareem, who is an executive president of the Policy Center for New South in Morocco.

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He's also Executive Vice President of Muhammad V or V6, the Polytechnic University and Dean of its humanities, Economics, and Social Sciences cluster. You can read the full bio by visiting the resource tab at the bottom of your screen.

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And heading to speaker section. Before we launch into today's masterclass, I thought we could start with a quick icebreaker question.

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If a policy is a set of rules or guidelines to create, if it's created by an organization, a government, or an individual.

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To guide decisions and actions to achieve specific goals. What's one policy or rule in your personal life that you think is has had positive outcomes.

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So a policy or a rule you've created for yourself that has had a positive outcome in your life.

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Kareem, I'm going to come to you first, but everyone else dialed in. Feel free to share your own responses via The link and my colleague will share in the chat.

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So Kareem, I'm going to come to you first. What are your thoughts on this?

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Icebreaker question. Nice, easy one to start the conversation.

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It's a... It's a difficult question. Nothing comes to my mind.

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But I think we'll come back to that. There's no silver bullet in policy making so There's no mystery, no secrets, no sort of uh So bold.

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But I'm thinking just like in your own personal life. So for example, I think one for me is I always try to use a small plate when I get food to stop myself from eating tons and tons of Because I love to eat and I would be probably three times bigger if I didn't have that rule that I small plate, only put food on the plate that I can have. That's a personal rule that has steered me well.

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Which i read every day, read every day, read something every day, I think.

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You know old-style reading.

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Makes sense. Natalie, how about you?

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Is there anything that you specifically do that you find helps with that?

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Mine's probably something around having a growth mindset and trying to make sure that every day is a learning day no matter

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Every night before I go to bed, I literally ask myself, what have I learned today? And have I been Today, and I've done that for as long as I can remember. So I find that even on days when I might not be doing formal learning or I might not be you know have much time

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Actually, I've learned something around the world, around my colleagues things that make life better to navigate and are of interest.

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Excellent. I think that's a great it's a great one. I'm going to steal that one and use it in my own life a bit more.

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There's a good one here from changing a phrase I won't to I don't.

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As an empowering statement. I really like that one as well.

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It's interesting how language, just the shift in language, which we talk a lot about in policymaking, how important language is, can really change how you think about things and what becomes possible.

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Well, let's jump in. So without further ado, Natalie, I think I'm turning it over to you for a quick presentation.

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Yes, if I can come off mute. And I think Joel's got some slides that he's going to share on my behalf if that's okay.

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Let me know when you can see them because I can't currently.

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They're coming up just as we speak. Here we are. They're up now.

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Thank you so much. Hopefully this works. Okay, so good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us today. So as Derek mentioned, I'm Natalie Corbett. I'm here with probably two hats on.

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Because I basically eat, sleep and breathe policy. So whilst I'm at HMRC at the minute, I've worked across government in the UK. So I've worked in the Ministry of Justice, what is now the Department for Health and Social Care.

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And also the Department for Education. So working on a really broad range of topics from family social work to prison corruption.

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And that probably links back to that sort of growth mindset that I said about really trying to throw myself into different types of policy roles, different ways of doing things.

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And getting the best grasp I can on how to do policy.

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So what I'm really passionate about actually is developing policy capability in the profession. So when asked today to speak on policymaking 101, I can really say no. So I'm going to move on a slide, if that's okay. And I thought it might be worth spending just two minutes on some definitions. So what is policy? I don't think we probably ask that enough.

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So the answer isn't very clear cut. I'm not going to lie to you.

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There are tons of academic definitions. And the one that's quite often quoted as craft and Furlong, which was back in 2009.

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And that said that policy is what public officials within government, and by extension the citizens they represent.

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Choose to do or not do about public problems. In the UK, and I'm very much going to talk to you from a UK perspective today, the UK government claims that Public policy is the management of the government's role in improving the welfare, security and prosperity of the nation.

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But my favourite definition and what I teach people when I run policy courses is how policy was first described to me in practice.

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So I was very brand new to the civil service. I was working as an analyst back in the day.

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And I asked a senior policy person to explain to me what exactly policy was, as I didn't quite get it from the outside.

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And they told me that when you look at everything the government does and you take out all those niche specialist skills, so legal, analytical, everything like They said policy is the mess that is left in the middle.

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And honestly, I've never found a better definition ever since I've worked in policy.

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So as a policymaker, it's my job to take something from a ministerial ambition to a deliverable reality. And this is the maze that we navigate to do that.

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So moving on one slide, if we can, it's how do we navigate that? Now, some of you will have seen this before. We call it the Rome F cycle.

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Which means rationale, objectives, appraisal, monitoring, evaluation and feedback. In the UK, this is contained in the Treasury's Green Book. It applies across governments, not department specific.

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But there are various policy cycles and models across the literature from different countries.

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Broadly, they're all broken down relatively similarly with about five to seven stages.

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And I would say that most of it is pretty self-explanatory, but there are some nuances.

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So if I can move on one more slide, I think the one thing that always jumps out to me as missing with Romef in particular is an eye, is that implementation.

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And it might not sound as catchy and I'm not quite sure how you would pronounce Roy and meff, but that implementation is fundamentally important.

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So this means that you need to think about delivery early.

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The people, in my opinion, who fail at policy are those who design something beautiful.

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But are oblivious to the fact that it has to actually work in the real world.

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So if I could move on again, the way to make sure that your implementation is effective is by getting that challenge when you're appraising your options. So in that appraisal section.

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And I said a minute ago that most of Rome F is pretty self-explanatory. I've never been asked, for example, why it's important that we have a good feedback loop and that learnings from one policy design help inform another.

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I've also never been asked why it's important that we understand the rationale behind our actions.

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But what I am repeatedly asked is how we effectively appraise options bring in evidence, engage stakeholders and sort of do policy in that space.

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So I'm going to move on a slide and I've spent a little bit of time thinking about this question lately.

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Following a tax policy school that I run, I've created this sort of high level framework for what it actually means to appraise options. So how we basically deliberate well.

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And this is nothing official. This is not found in any government publication or anything like that.

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But it does have a strong evidence base behind it. And I think it reflects the reality of how we actually make policy. So I thought it might be useful to share it.

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So these are the bits that you might not find in a textbook, but will make you a good policymaker.

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So source, I will run through these one by one so it's not a random word. Source is where you get the necessary inputs from a broad range of sources.

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In HMRC, we may get data, evidence or insights from some of it's our internal teams Analysts, lawyers, compliance specialists, people like that.

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We might run consultations or do cause for evidence. We'll get stuff from other government departments or the devolved governments, from charities and think tanks.

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Publicly available data, what's out there in the academic journals or the academics that want to talk to us.

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From trusted stakeholders, international counterparts. But that's absolutely not exhaustive and there are many more and it will depend on your field.

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But there's a lot. And then we move to liaise. Which is basically, we talk to a lot of people to get a really deep understanding of the relevancy of everything that we're seeing and we're hearing.

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So often in that source stage, you get that big picture information. On that policy landscape, whatever it might be you're looking at.

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But in the liaise stage, you can make it far more tailored and applicable to that particular and probably sensitive problem that you're actually trying to tackle.

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And this is that stage where having good networks in your specific policy area will pay dividends.

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Getting you the answers that you need, often at pace, giving you a sounding board when needed to walk through tricky concepts.

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And then I think you can do that at the same time as what you're navigating.

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So that brings me back to that mess that policymakers find themselves in. And as a policymaker, no matter where you're doing policy or how You will have to navigate between different disciplines, different departments, different industries.

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So in HMRC, we're often navigating between different legal, tax, compliance, digital experts.

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All with different aims and ambitions. So it's your role as a policymaker and my role as a policymaker to bring that all together.

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And for me, that's where policy gets really fun So I do encourage though people take that digest bit seriously. And it's one of the things that's always overlooked when people talk about policy Policy is about problem solving.

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And so you need to deliberate with an open mind and give yourself that chance to reflect on what has been read and discussed. And I understand the time constraints and I understand sometimes that has to be done very quickly.

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But it's also important for your moral values, your ways of working.

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In the UK, we have a civil service code different policymakers have different versions of this. For us, it's all about Impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity.

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So digesting gives myself the space to really challenge myself. And make sure that I'm embodying that at all times.

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And then you have assess. Which is something that many new policymakers find the hardest.

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This is where you weigh up the credibility of inputs. But it's often done behind closed doors and there's little talk about how this really happens.

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So some analytical evidence may be clear and that's great. If you have an internal analytical team that are giving you top-notch evidence that they're completely confident in, it's really robust.

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Then your job is a lot easier. But often that's not the case.

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Think carefully about the weight that you're putting on something. Where has it come from? What is their agenda? Is it scientifically sound? Is it politically useful?

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And then that brings you to select. So I like to think of As a policy professional stood in front of a wall of pickamix. I have actually previously sketched this for people, but I'm not a good artist, so I thought I'd save you.

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But this pick and mix wall contains the evidence only that you have deemed to be shortlisted at assess stage. So that which is credible, that which you're happy with the source and the quality of.

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And then it's about which ones you pick for your metaphorical sweet bag. So you can't take everything. It's just not possible.

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Our minds are limited for space. And so are our ministerial submissions templates.

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So that's where you down select effectively. And then you take what you've selected and you have to translate it. And that's effectively a knowledge brokerage rule.

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So you have to take everything that you've sourced, digested, assessed that will often be in very varied sometimes technical forms into something usable.

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And you cannot translate that without caveating. So some of these will be highlighted from others if you do have that brilliant internal analyst that has given you fantastic data.

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They will give you analytical caveats such as, I don't know, we base this on a survey and it has a low response rate.

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But many caveats you have to identify and communicate based on your own policy expertise.

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So for example, the parliamentary arithmetic. What is the strengths of the government's majority? Because that's going to impact how it lands.

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Or what we call the Daily Mail test. So could a recommendation become front page bad news, for example? Those are the sort of caveats I would expect to see.

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And they have to come in a form that ministers for us, you might have a different person that you're aiming for, but that ministers will receive and be able to take on board.

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And that brings you to that advise section. So not all of you are from the UK, so it might not be ministers. The setup might vary, but in the UK, we have a really clear distinction. Officials advise ministers decide.

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I worked out that in my current role in the past three years I've been doing policy professionalism and ministerial advice I have served five chancellors Seven economic secretaries to the Treasury, six exchequ secretaries to the Treasury and five financial secretaries to the Treasury.

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It's been a turbulent few years. But I tell you this so you can see how important understanding your minister is.

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Every minister is human. They have different preferences and ways of working.

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I've served ministers who love to get into the detail of spreadsheets And earlier in my career, I worked with one who refused to take more than 200 words in writing at a time.

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Some love slides, some thinks they're a ridiculous civil service habit. But you can only advise effectively if you can work out how they will want to receive your advice.

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What works for them. So I'm going to move on to the next slide in the interest of time and I will stop there and say a huge thank you for your time. I think we're going to be hearing from Kareem in a second for the second masterclass, but then I'm very happy to have any

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Questions that you want to throw at me in the Q&A if that works.

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Thanks so much, Natalie. That was fantastic and lots of love in the chat. So thank you so much, everyone, for that as well.

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So I'm going to hand over to Kareem in a second. But before I do that, I just want to take a moment to encourage everybody to submit questions in our Q&A. This is a 101 event after all, and we're here to really learn from each other. And so please ask any question you can think of to do with policy. That's what we're here for.

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So there's no such thing as a bad question here. Kareem.

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Over to you.

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Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm glad to be here.

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Let me try to share a little bit my experience that has been on advisory halls at the World Bank.

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And here now where I am at a think tank and also at the university where we prepare for the next generations of policymakers like you here But also as a policy maker at the central bank I don't want to, you mentioned that most of our audience are young professionals or

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I don't want to sort of scare you but policy making and natalie said that a little bit already So I draw from this experience that policymaking is complex, messy, difficulty inefficient. We do policies like we used to do them centuries ago. Governments are more or less organized as they were

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Back in centuries uh it's very political so sometimes irrational from your own standpoint but not from the standpoint of the politician But it is passionate. It is interesting it is fantastic sometimes you'll be depressed, sometimes you'll be enthusiastic and it's like playing soccer or any sport

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When you win, you score a goal or whatever, there is this adrenaline that comes so But you have to be mindful of that.

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And to take it to your advantage and to manage your expectations.

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I started as an economist, you know, we do projection, everything is perfect. We do models. It's in equilibria Well, how come it's not happening? I cannot convince the minister I was advising for the World Bank on the reform of a subsidy system that was very inefficient

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And then they wouldn't listen. How come, you know, this subsidy is benefiting the richest people in the country, the poorest are not getting it. And it couldn't happen for political reasons because there was an election coming and the government didn't want to sort of take any risks.

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You have to also assume that policymakers In general, politicians that make the decisions are risk averse. I mean, 90% of them, unless you're Elon Musk and you are just you know, the sphere and you're not sort of you don't have much skin in the game in fact that's that's very interesting and we can have a discussion

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But most of policy decision makers are risk averse and it is very frustrating for when you're a young policy advisor or you work in a ministerial cabinet or whatever so You have to be aware of that. Second, hygiene, that doesn't mean that it's if it

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If it is that messy etc that doesn't mean that science has nothing to do with it and good hygiene that was presented to you by natalie you collect your data, you analyze them, you do surveys, you mobilize the tools of you know different sciences

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So it is still, you have to go through that serious process of let's say build evidence-based policy making and to go to the cycle of public policy making which is you know data formula praise whatever i think it's fundamental

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It avoids mistakes. So again, and I'll come back to that for me policy making and advising at a certain level is almost a philosophy it's an art because you have to mix this data this sort of engineering component of what you do which is very science-based

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Numbers data impacts models whatever for you know sociological surveys for polls but at the same time you need something more that makes it and that's the implementation of Natalie.

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So to implement, it takes more than just following protocols. It takes art it takes magic, it takes something else. And this is why in many countries we had governments that were fantastic at doing reforms. They had the same advisors, but they achieved much more.

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Because it is an alchemy. It is a formula that you cannot build based on science.

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And you'll develop that as you grow, as you gain experience, you'll become sort of above the technicalities of what you do. But it doesn't mean, again, please don't misunderstand me that you don't you shouldn't go through that stages What I meant, it's efficient policy making takes something else

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That's beyond that. And you want to organize yourself to be able to reach that space, that zone. It's a little bit like in sport when you're, you know, he's playing tennis, he's in the zone any any way he hits the ball it's in, he wins whatever he's sort of

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Above something else you know uh flying and i think that's that takes you know that takes experience, that takes the hygiene of going through the protocols and the science and the data, etc.

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But it takes something else. The second, so it's messy It's an art. It's passionate it's fantastic. Why? Because if you care about you know in the end, coming back to the definition of policymaking there were some fantastic definitions in the chat. It's having an impact on our fellow citizens. Of course, a positive impact so improving childhood you know nourishment whatever you how you take it. So I think that is

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In the end, the end goal and that was so many people you know are renouncing great salaries in finance and opting for government policies. So I think we have much more fun in what we do than trading on the screen, even if we're less rich but that's that's

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That's really what you have at heart. And Michael, I've seen you know with my colleagues along my career at the World Bank, at the central bank having an impact on society. It's really the end

the fantastic side of public policy making. Of course, one day you could be yourself a decision maker, not necessarily only in a position of advising.

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And Natalie said it, the different styles. That's where the alchemy, their different artists in a way if you take it as a definition for a minister Another dimension I wanted to touch upon is also beware of your biases.

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And it was touched upon by Natalie as well you know confirmation biases Natalie has a great idea. She's my colleague But I'm going to kill the idea because I hate Natalie. I can't stand her.

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So, you know, and Derek is my friend and we're gonna sort of build a coalition against Natalie okay And so on and so forth. And really, that's the ethic of public policy. That's true ethics. It's not just what is written in uh you know in separation of functions

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Through ethics, it's to recognize great ideas. It's being modest so being modest is to accept that others can have better at the ideas on a specific topic and that that's difficult you know to put your ego and put it in your pocket

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Because again, policies, policy making policy work is so serious because it's not like messing up your own company If you mess up a policy, you're messing up many citizens in a country, in a region, in a municipality or wherever you do it. So it has impact. Even an engineer that builds a bridge that breaks down

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There are a couple of people that dies. It's a tragedy, but it's nothing compared to a disease center you know screwing up the vaccination protocols or whatever that will affect generations of kids. Can you imagine so that's that modesty is, I think, one of the

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Key sort of psychological feature and and it's so it's work we don't born modest it's something we we and we need some ego also to achieve things so it's a balance you know we need the Both of those. But beware of the biases, you know, confirmation biases and

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All kinds of biases. You should read a little bit on that trust your intuition versus your trust reason that's the Kanban thing slow thing fast that you should all be reading the Nobel Prize in Economics, if I can recommend literature.

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That's at some point was, you know, his main argument was to say that you know don't don't trust your intuition, but only your reason. But I think, no, it's both of those. It's reason and intuition but you shouldn't trust neither of those. So make sure you rely on those and you develop. And the intuitive part takes experience. So try to venture and try to work in many policy units

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So you can gather a broad experience and become a you know sort of a someone that has a broad view of things that have a good understanding of different disciplines you know of methodologies, I think is also is also essential

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And finally, not to be too long. Policymaking is about it's also a lot about telling stories and narratives and you don't mobilize people with technicalities you create a movement and political support for policy through stories that are enlightening that can make people dream and that can

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Make them see a positive objective at the horizon. And that's part of your job.

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That's the packaging you should build for it to be to sell it to the policy maker it's Natalie's job where if she shared her experience with different ministers with different styles so changing the packaging And that the Muir minister will need that to sell it to his constituency, to sell it to the nation and to parliament. So to be good at stories and narrative

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And read philosophers read literature. It's very complementary to policy making in my sense and myself it has helped me a lot through the different functions I had.

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In my career because there is nothing that is mechanistic automatic in policy making.

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Even in central banking, where it is very organized, where the decision are transparent and we do as much as we can to be a rule-based automatic sort of decision-making process by publishing you know the the debates that are taking internally in the monetary policy committee there is still a discretionary component that is needed it's in the interest

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Of a country to to leave that space For those very smart people that are in the monetary policy board to be able to assess and to excel and to go beyond. Otherwise, we will be all substitutable so you know we are unique

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And you're bringing value to your policies, the policy work you're doing.

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As a person, your direct your natalie your someone else, it's different it's not equal to have Karim or Mahdi or anyone else. So I think develop your own style and your own view and philosophy of public policy. So look around, be curious. And that's a cardinal value

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And of, I think, a good policymaker. Wherever you go, try to learn the maximum, you know, extract knowledge from your colleagues. You have fantastic colleagues that have been maybe 20 years to a place you just arrived yesterday you should go in two, three, four years having extracted all the knowledge of this person and you can do it in very nice ways around coffee, but ask questions

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Be curious and look also put yourself and i'll conclude here direct put yourself on others shoes. Try to understand why moroccans why South Africans, why Spaniards are reacting differently to a policy you are conducting in your own country that is affecting them or you guys live in Canada, we are all affected by global trends

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Try to see how others are affected and you will learn a lot in that and understand why they are reacting this way will make you also you know in sort of wise a wiser person for your work, but also in general. Thank you very much.

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Thanks so much, Kareem. And I really like that point about empathy and putting yourself in other people's shoes. One thing I didn't mention at the beginning is before I was with Apolitical, I worked for the government of Canada for six and a half years.

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One of the things that working in government really shifted me on was a lot of my long-held fairly entrenched perspectives on different things because when you're in the process of making policy, you are forced to not just think of your own perspectives, but all sorts of other perspectives. And it naturally opens you up to things that I had never thought of before.

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Just being intentional about that, I think it's one of the most powerful things you can do as a policymaker. All right, so we're going to jump into Q&As. We've already had tons of questions coming in. My gosh. But keep them coming.

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While people are putting in some of those questions in the Q&A, I just want to again remind you, we have a global policymaking community that I really encourage you all to join if you haven't already. A lot of the questions that are coming in are about resources.

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Where can I find resources? What resources what should I be reading? What I'm going to suggest is that let's collect all that and put it in the policy community. So both Natalie and Kareem are part of that community. They'll post a bunch of resources in there. And that way those resources will be a place that we can and we can as a community keep adding to those resources as well.

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All right. So for my first question, Natalie, I'm actually going to go to you. There's a couple questions about how do you get into policymaking, particularly if you don't have a policymaking background?

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But there's also a question in there specifically for you about how you, Natalie, specifically got into policymaking yourself. So I was wondering if I could throw that your direction, both to share your own story of how you got into policymaking and then maybe sort of expand it to be like, how can others get into policymaking through potentially non-traditional pathways.

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Yeah, certainly. So I came into policy through what we call the government fast stream in the UK, which is a graduate program. So I'd been to university. I didn't study policy at university. I am not someone that has a master's degree in policy, for example. I know there is a myth and you know different countries might do different things in the UK you do not need an academic policy background to be able to join as

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As a policy professional. I went into the civil service as an analyst for two years and loved it, really loved the civil service. I was incredibly passionate about improving the public's lives. But I thought that policy looked too much fun to ignore. So when I took a promotion two years in, I also changed departments and I went into policy then because I wanted to test myself.

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And I wanted to go and try it. And I said to myself, you know what? If I go in and I hate it, I can always go back to something different, whether that's analysis or something else.

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I thought leap of faith, sink or swim, give it a shot.

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Went back and absolutely loved it. So that was how I personally moved into policy. I don't think you need any particular background for policy. I think that policy works best when it has diverse voices in a room and actually that means that people that have come from

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It doesn't matter if it's operations or it doesn't matter if it's industry. It doesn't matter where you've come from. Everyone has a view on the world. Everyone can be innovative and problem solve and think about an issue if they're given the right tools and training. So I genuinely believe that it takes all backgrounds to go into policy.

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I stopped muting myself. Kareem, why don't I sort of throw that to you as well, but I'm going to add a second question.

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Actually, I'm going to add two questions to it. So maybe give us a quick sort of brief on how you got into this role.

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In terms of policymaking. But the two questions I want to add to it is one, you talked a lot about biases.

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How can policymakers mitigate against their biases? Are there concrete steps they can do to mitigate that? And then there's a second, actually, I'm going to hold there. There's a second question I'll get to after that that's somewhat related, but we'll start there.

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Well how do I get into this it was a bit natural since I did the PhD in economics or working on developing countries so most of development economists have a natural a natural sort of slope towards policymaking you know solving the problems of the world basically and understanding why nations do not develop and grow etc so I think it's a

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It's unnatural that I work for the world bank so which policy institution advising governments And then I went at the central bank so it was sort of a natural But truly, I was never and this is where I still teach a class so often I ask my student

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Do you think you're more of a transactional person or an analytical person? So if you're a transactional person I don't think you belong to the policy making world. You belong to the business world. And if you're an analytical person.

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But you're still someone that likes to implement things and get things doing vis-a-vis academia, pure academia.

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It's the right place to be. You know you you like you're very analytical. You have a PhD, you can do some sophisticated kind of uh you know analytical work that is academic like and you like to see results and implementation and apply things i think

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Any governmental institutions, international financial organization is the right place to use. And I think I was in you know that's where I see, you know, I see myself and I enjoy it I wouldn't have enjoyed an academic career purely.

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You're writing papers for peer-reviewed journalists now i said i've done this and I still do it from time to time, but I like the applied component and the managerial dimension of my job as well.

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On the biases. You see you're as much as you're good, Derek.

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You know, some ministers are great, some are just not great this is you know that's that's the way uh and you can see it very quickly look at who's around them So if you see someone surrounded by very smart people, you know that he's a wise man and that he's aware of his biases. And also people that are very different from him.

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That I never agree with him. And it's always good to have a friend that can tell you through to also that is able to talk to you because the higher you are the less people talk to you.

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They tend to be the court phenomena. So I think first thing you see look who's around. If he has very smart advisors and he's giving a hole and place to very smart civil servants.

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And he accepts contradiction and it is also very different people around themselves. They need to be very different.

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The militaries are very good at that. They're masters of organizing the decision-making process. So you always need an economist around you.

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That has always a bizarre idea that will sort of so uh that's how you protect yourself from biases and some, of course, personal introspective work introspection is important.

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That's more a personal thing. But in terms of organizing your day-to-day job and decision-making process is really the collective in the end but it doesn't in the end, you are responsible you take the decision. That's also persons that also assume

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That what they do is i think a way also to uh to to not fall on those biases.

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Yeah, I think that's a really good point. Really understanding who's around you and how they shape your thinking. I just posted a video in the chat that's one of my all-time go-to favorite videos about how we think that I think has some good lessons that I try to keep in mind about how information works, how our thinking works and the biases that then shape it.

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Know yourself, Derek. It's important. Is around 30 years old you should know you should more or less, it takes some time, particularly for it's longer But around 30 years old, you should know what you like and you don't like and don't do things that you don't like. Don't accept slipping slopes.

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Don't accept things that you don't feel. Rely on your feeling internal feeling for things you know when you sense that you're going towards something just to please someone, it's a bias or you've becoming just you want to impose your own decision you need to have some internal breaks

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And develop that capacity that will make you progress in fact way beyond your potential if you don't do that.

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Yeah, I think this is where the curiosity piece that you talked about comes in as well. Be curious, not just externally, but internally curious about yourself, your reactions to things.

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Natalie, I want to sort of build on this with a bit of a challenging question for you.

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What do you do as a policymaker if you're in a context where the political directions that you're being given differ from your own sort of views on things. And we're seeing obviously the world

seems to become more and more political and as policymakers are meant to be apolitical, we're meant to be neutral as we approach these things.

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But we're also humans. How have you seen that navigated well?

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What advice would you have for people in that situation?

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So I think there's two tiers for me. So I mentioned the civil service code where impartiality is absolutely fundamental. So I... have been in the position many times where I have advised X and the minister has decided Y and I fundamentally disagree with their decision because I think it isn't you know evidence-based. I don't think it's necessarily the right outcome for citizens, whatever it might be but actually it's my job to go okay that's fine. I have given you a solid set of recommendations based on evidence that I believe in. I've had the opportunity to communicate that effectively

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To answer clarifying questions, you have made a decision which is political and that is absolutely okay.

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Don't get me wrong, there is some work there to do with my team when you have to turn back around and go, really sorry guys, but everything that you're planning, we're scrapping that. We're doing this instead.

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But that is the role of a policy professional in the civil service. However, there is a different tier for me as a human around areas of work that I fundamentally would disagree with the direction. And I said at the start

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That every night I ask myself, what have I learned today and have I been a good person today? I have to look myself in the mirror. So the civil service is broad, policy is ginormous. You can do anything. So I have personally selected areas that I know that I'm passionate about, that I know I can do good in

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And have avoided throughout my career and will continue to do the couple areas where I know I would fundamentally have a difficulty as a human working on that approach and that is okay you know i've never ever been forced to go and work on an area that I wouldn't feel comfortable with doing so.

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And I would view my impartiality in that regard as having the right to say, actually, I'm not convinced I could be impartial in that specific space, so use my skills somewhere else where I can be more value and I know I can embody that value.

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I like that. Yeah, I definitely like that. I think it's something I said, this is a conversation I've been having with public servants all over the world and it's a challenging one, but I think that provides sort of a pathway forward. So thank you.

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The next question I have, and Kareem, I'm going to come to you with this one, risks.

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You mentioned this whole idea of this risk aversion that exists within policymaking.

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Can you sort of unpack that a bit, both in terms of Where is it okay to be risk averse? Where is it a good idea to be risk averse? But then there's also a second question of where do particularly you know as young policymakers, how do we push back against an overly risk averse environment, whether it's sort of leadership or just the context we're in. So both where is risk

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Valuable and we should be careful and where and how do we push to take on more risk.

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I think we all have personal sort of personal

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If a hameter we all have risk aversion.

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Level which is a personal thing which comes from for many reasons. But in general, the functions also add another dimension and so when you have a when you have a responsibility And your actions are how national wide consequences the whole system around you makes you risk averse anyway. It's institutional it's in

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You know it's in the walls of this institution where you are So I think I think In retrospect, you know, I was in Natalie's position when she mentioned the decisions were not taken as I wish they were. But when I look at some and then I was a bit frustrated because I wanted things to move faster etc

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But in retrospect, I understand the decision now and I think I would have done the same in fact so I don't know if it's me or the decision itself, but it's a complex issue and But you need to take some risks at the same time. The question is how you pack if you're not the one as a policy advisor or staff working somewhere, you're not the one

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Taking the political risks. In the end, it is the decision maker. So it is his decision to spend some political capital or to put his career in balance. So you can't in a way blame him for that. Your role is to blame him

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Package the decision in a way that is you know he can absorb and he can sell so That's the same decision can be packaged in different ways, can have some mitigation, you know, some mitigation sort of measures can have also satisfies a few constituents etc up to a point otherwise it becomes pork barrel it becomes uh you know completely inefficient so there's a fine line. This is why I said it was

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In the end, it has an artistic component, this capacity to package complex decision to address this risk aversion that I think has increased because of the... you know the social networks and the transparency of political life so it has

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Been it's getting worse and it has become more difficult in fact uh that that and i think it it's it's not it's not a good news in fact you need to keep some mystery at some point for good reasons in the decision-making process. Of course, that doesn't preclude from transparency or these things to be assessed exposed but at some point of extra transparency makes it more difficult because people get

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Are becoming more risk adverse because it involves even family issues etc this is why we have less and less younger generation wanting to get into politics. It's one of the reasons they're becoming they're more risk averse in fact And we're losing lots of talents in every countries of the world.

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Talent doesn't go to politics anymore. So my understanding is that it is linked this those two dimensions. So there are no clear response to that. And I don't think we're in a good position today, particularly because of the privacy views of social networks and the transparency that goes with it.

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Well, it makes me think so. One of the first lessons I learned when I joined the government of Canada many many years ago, was this idea that senior leaders, a lot of the decisions they make is really around managing risk.

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And this is where it's sort of the empathy and the curiosity piece comes in and being empathetic to that reality.

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That that's going to be the considerations they make. So when you're trying to put forward a policy idea, part of it's like laying out what are the risks of doing this policy or going this direction.

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But the other side of it is like, what are the risks of not doing it? And it's really important to also add that there is risk to not doing stuff.

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There's risk to not taking... an innovative approach to things or not doing things differently. The status quo has a risk to it. The difference is that risk is usually hidden. And so it's your responsibility as a policymaker to surface not just the risks of whatever it is that you want to suggest, but also the risks of not doing that thing, of maintaining the status quo.

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And I think that is one way to serve shift the conversation around risk. The risk is everywhere, but you surface all of it and that then gives them the opportunities to make decisions based on that.

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Natalie, I've got a final question for you. We have a couple questions here about academics, and particularly how do you like the bridge between policymaking and like academia and how what does that relationship look like? How do we best engage with academia? Some fields, it's done really well. Other fields are like different worlds. What advice does someone who's sort of got a foot in both worlds right now?

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Would you have in terms of how to make that navigation?

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Yeah, so I don't think it's just across different fields probably inconsistent. I would say you know even across different teams in the same department, in the same government, it can be very inconsistent. I would say that if you are in academia or you're outside government and you are trying to influence

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Then networks are your absolute key. So when I spoke through that framework and we were talking about that source and that liaison stages.

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There are people that have worked on the policy areas I've worked on in say academia. They've got a new article out they will email it because they will know that a lot of people in government won't actually be able to access the academic journal databases.

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They will warm us up, tell us that it's coming. They will ask if they can come into the department and do a seminar about their findings.

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They will be on like a trusted stakeholder list. So depending on what we're going to share, sometimes we need ministerial cover, but I've never found that difficult to get.

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Where we can actually go out and pick their brains and say we are thinking about doing X based on everything you know. How does that sound to you? What do you think the reaction would be? Do you have data that I don't know about that can feed into this process?

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Academics are normally really generous with their time and I've never met a policy professional that doesn't want to be approached. Invite us to your conferences if you can give us free places, then we're much more likely to attend. Think about what the barriers are that we're facing, time, money, those sort of constraints.

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And how in academia you can actually work around that. We will normally turn up to things if invited, particularly if you're known in our area, if you build a good relationship with that policy professional, then you will get a seat at the table formally or informally. And it will be absolutely welcomed that you can work with us it's not a sort of in or out impermeable

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Ivory tower, as some people call it. I really don't believe that.

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I agree. I think this comes down to the point that was made earlier. Just be curious. Be curious about your field. Be a nerd. Dig into the academics, the academics who are researching this stuff and then actually just reach out and ask, hey, can.

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Virtual coffee? Would love to learn. Academics love talking about their research.

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All right. Well, let's wrap it there. This has been an incredibly... Great conversation. We've had such incredible wisdom from each of our speakers and also insights in the chat. So thank you so much for your chat, your questions.

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Wow. I'd like to ask you all to give me, to join me in giving Natalie and Cream a virtual round of applause.

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Got there eventually. And then most importantly, thanks to all of you for attending and for joining us here and for being so engaged. So many questions. I think we almost had 30 questions that were dropped here, which is fantastic.

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The team's going to pull up a quick poll to find out how you felt about today, which will help us to continue to improve our content. And we really appreciate your feedback on this.

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So if you can fill out that poll. Well, so you're responding, I want to reiterate that this isn't the end, but the beginning of a conversation. We'll keep sharing ideas and challenges and questions in the global policymaking community that I've mentioned once or twice or 10 times already.

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This is what I work on. So I'm very passionate about the community. As a thank you to everyone who's attended, we're giving you all access to one of our most popular policy resources. You're talking about resources. There'll be lots in the community But there's a special resource that you can get. So the policy briefing note template.

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Which is a fantastic template to guide you through creating a policy. To claim your link to the policy template, go to the global policymaking community and leave a comment on the post pinned at the top of the page. Yes, comments don't make a post.

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There'll be a host from me, Derek Alton, talking about it. So go to that post comments and then we'll send you an email with the link after the event.

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Okay, well, that's all we have time for today. We hope you found it helpful and we want to say a huge thank you once again to everyone who's made today happen and to you for taking the time out of your busy, busy days. Keep an eye out for an email coming your way. Sorry, I should

mention people are asking about slides and resources, there'll be an email coming your way
With the slides, with the resources from everything from today. So that will be coming your way
with the recording resources.

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And other than that, we hope you join us for an apolitical event very soon, as well as one of our
many communities. So have a great day, everyone. And we'll talk to you soon.

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TakeThank you