

Structuring a discussion: Contributed by Andy Hoffman

How to play (tactics, pitfalls) the "public intellectual" without stepping over the line to losing the objectivity of academia?

1. How far outside our area of specialization can we drift in our public comments? We have seen economists comment on climate modeling, and climate scientists comment on cap and trade. Is this out of bounds for us as academics?
2. On that count, where do we draw the line between being an academic and being a public citizen? Certainly we can talk in the abstract about putting different hats on. But in practice it is not so easy or clear.
3. When we get hostile emails, do we reply? When we have hostile comments following an article or editorial, do we reply?
4. Are there any outlets are illegitimate (journals, editorials, blogs, tweets, business conferences, skeptic conferences, etc)?
5. Should we lend our name to notably political issues? For example, there is a referendum on a Renewable Portfolio Standard here in Michigan (25% by 2025). Is there any risk to my academic legitimacy by adding my name so such an initiative? What if it was more extreme – a ban on all meat sales, to be extreme.
6. Roger Pielke describes the “Honest Broker” as one who “expand the scope of choice available to decision-makers...and explicitly integrate scientific knowledge with stakeholder concerns in the form of alternative possible courses of action.” He/she provides all information on a particular topic and allows policy makers and the public to reduce the scope (i.e. make a decision). He differentiates this from the “Pure Scientist” (who focuses on research with no consideration for its use or utility. He adds that this role is more frequently found in myth than practice), the “Issue Advocate” focuses on the “implications of research for a particular political agenda,” and the “Science Arbiter” who will answer questions from decision makers to clarify research (i.e. the National Academies). Do people agree with this structure, or do they find it too confining?

Pure scientist¹:

Focus on research with no consideration for its utility—“more frequently a myth”

Issue advocate:

Focus on implications of research with a particular policy agenda—“reduce scope of available choice”

Science Arbiter:

Seeks to stay removed from politics, but resolves positive questions from politicians (ie. National Research Council)

Honest Broker

Seeks to integrate scientific knowledge with a stakeholder concerns by offering alternate possible courses—“expands scope of available choice”

¹ Roger Pielke Jr. *The Honest Broker: Making Sense of Science in Policy and Politics*. 2007.

7. Pidgeon and Fischhoff² argue that the current climate debate will require the coordination of multiple roles within climate science: “(1) Subject-matter experts to present the latest scientific findings, (2) decision scientists who can identify the most relevant aspects of that science and summarize it concisely, (3) Social and communication scientists who can assess the public’s beliefs and values, propose evidence based designs for communicating content and processes, and evaluate their performance, and (4) Program designers who can orchestrate the process, so that mutually respectful consultations occur, messages are properly delivered, and policymakers hear their various publics.” Does this resonate with people? Should academic scholars rely on others in the research process stream to disseminate their work?

8. Do people have good role models of academics who stay academic scholars while wading into the public and political debate?

9. How does the idea of playing the role of public intellectual change our publication strategy and outlets?

10. Is this a role that can only be played at certain stages of our careers?

11. How do we work this idea into the four part structure that Roger Pielke develops in his book *"The Honest Broker"*?

12. What other questions are out there for how to play this role? I feel that the terrain is not well mapped out.

² Nick Pidgeon & Baruch Fischhoff. “The role of social and decision sciences in communicating uncertain climate risks.” *Nature*. March 2011.