Show, don't tell

No need to take notes. I'll share my slides, references and checklists afterwards

Thanks for your introduction, and thank you for the invitation to this event.
I've enjoyed all presentations so far.
Since my talk will be the last one, I will keep it light and hopefully inspirational.
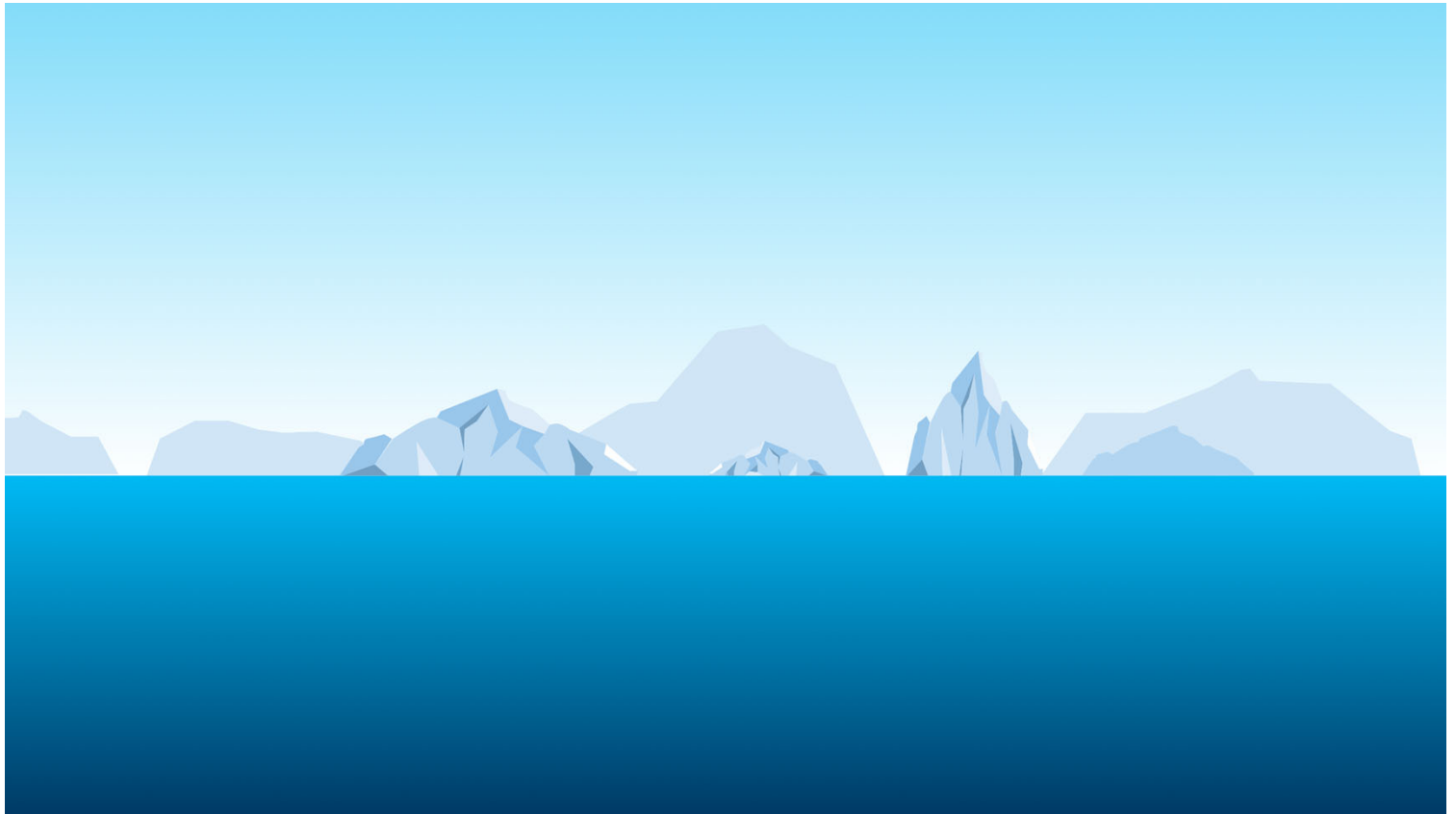
No need to take notes…

Integrated assessment
is the scientific "meta-
discipline" that integrates
knowledge about a problem
domain and makes it available
for societal learning and
decision-making processes.

Like Roel, I found this definition of
integrated assessment on the TIAS website.
And I figured that your work is more
important than ever.

Clear key-message

Relevant insights

Better analysis

Smarter models
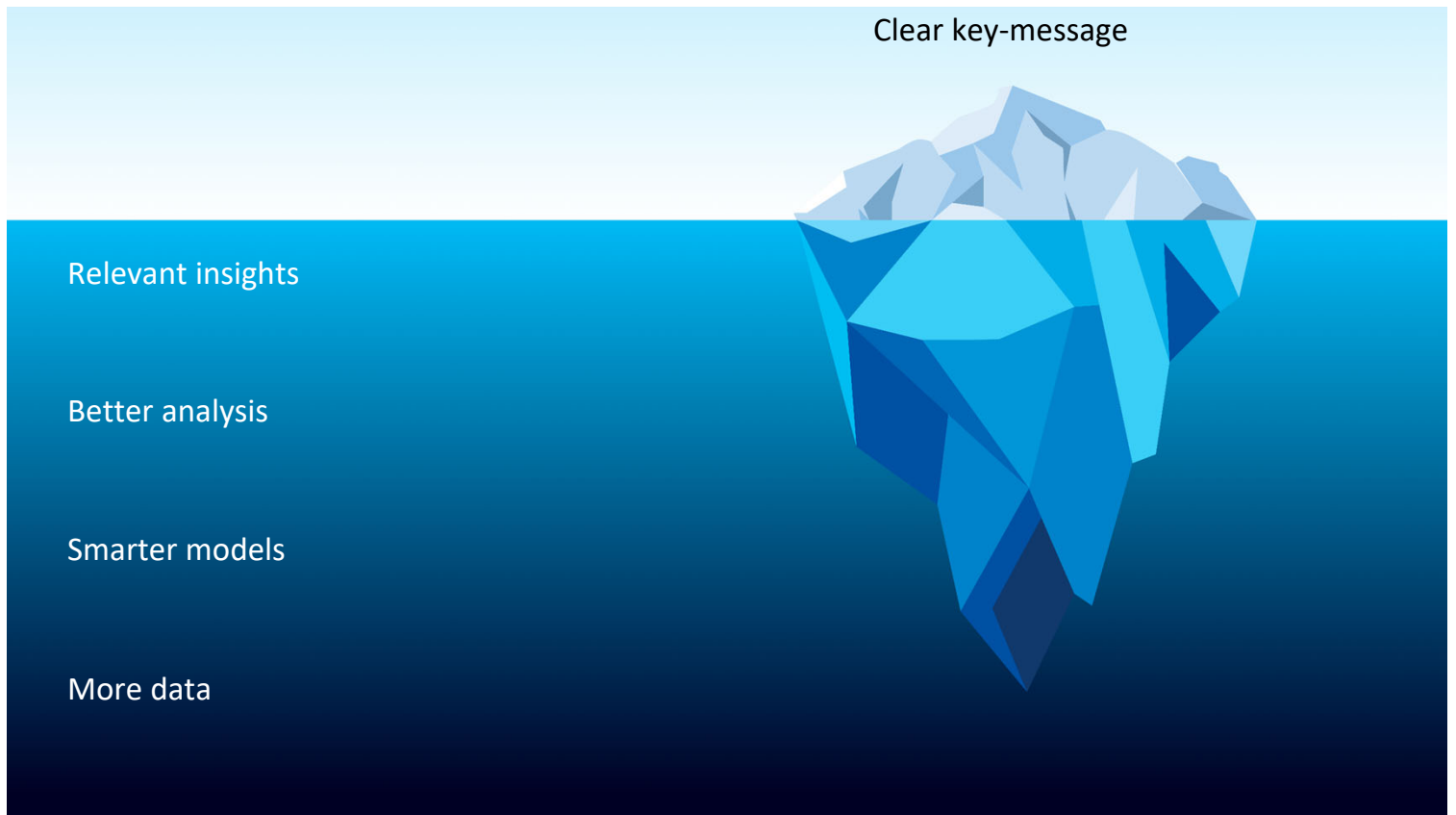
More data

There is more data than ever, models are more precise than ever,
allowing you to make better analysis than ever,
resulting in more and more relevant insights. HOWEVER…
Most of this data and information will never reach your audience. Which isn't a problem, as long as you get your message across.

But it's like Roland said:
if you want to be heard, you have to stand
out in a sea of stories.

Now that's easily said,
but how to be done?

Integrated assessment
is the scientific "meta-
discipline" that integrates
knowledge about a problem
domain and makes it available
for societal learning and
decision-making processes.

How about
making it
accessible?

What I like to talk about today,
is how to make knowledge accessible,
in stead of only making knowledge
available.

Information Design

Make information clear and accessible

I can only talk to you about this from my own perspective as an information designer.
Making information and knowledge clear and accessible is the essence of my job,

Therefore I would like to show you how I would approach this,
and how **you** can get started too.

Information Design

Roots in journalism

Make information clear and accessible

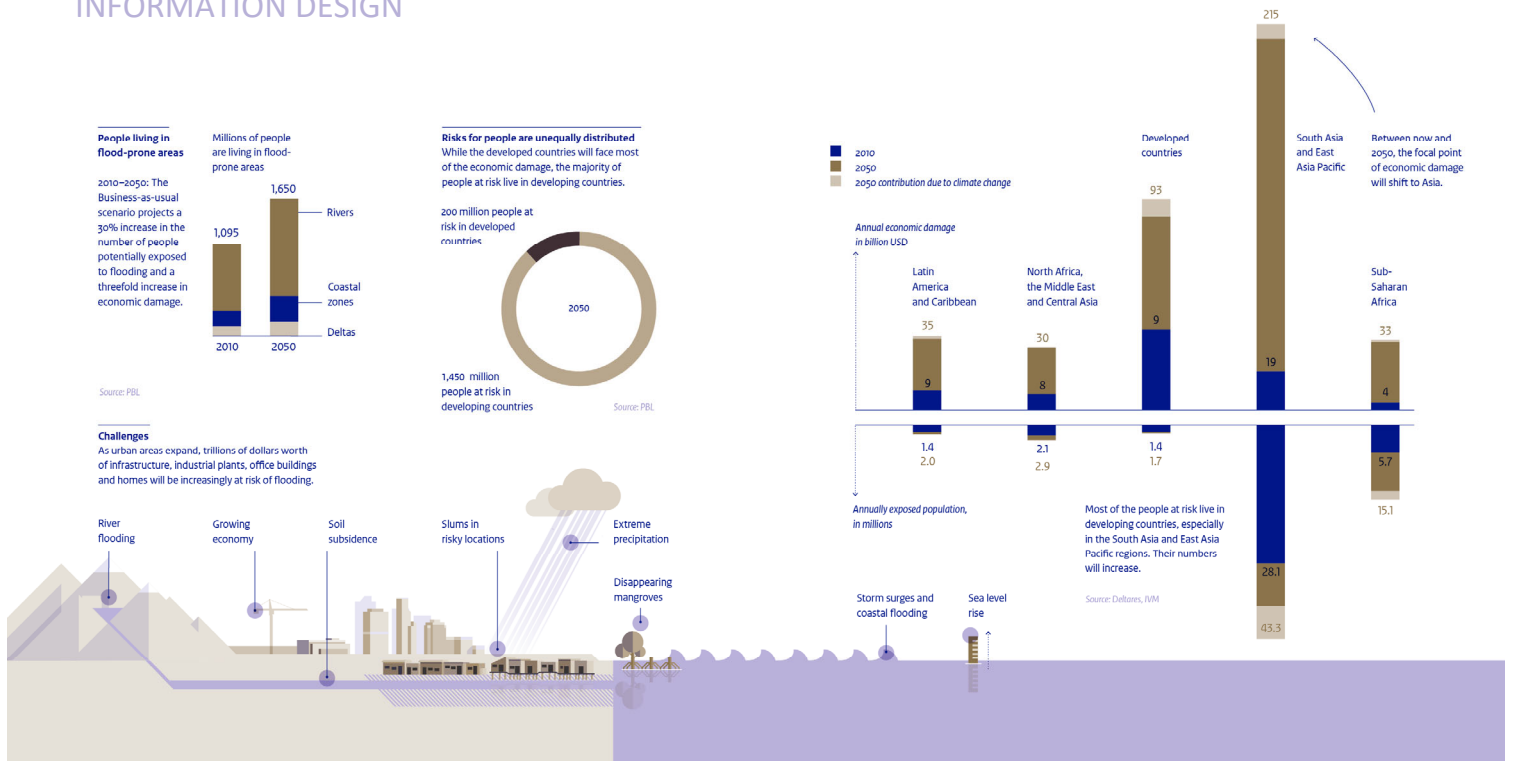By the way: information design finds its roots in journalism.
And that's why I like to show you some inspirational examples
from news media in my talk.

I work for a variety of clients, mostly on topics about water and climate change. Some of you might be familiar for the work I did for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.

People living in flood-prone areas

2010–2050: The Business-as-usual scenario projects a 30% increase in the number of people potentially exposed to flooding and a threefold increase in economic damage.

Source: PBL

Millions of people are living in flood-prone areas

1,650

1,095

Rivers

Coastal zones

Deltas

2010 2050

Challenges
As urban areas expand, trillions of dollars worth of infrastructure, industrial plants, office buildings and homes will be increasingly at risk of flooding.

River flooding

Growing economy

Soil subsidence

Slums in risky locations

Extreme precipitation

Disappearing mangroves

Storm surges and coastal flooding

Sea level rise

Risks for people are unequally distributed
While the developed countries will face most of the economic damage, the majority of people at risk live in developing countries.

200 million people at risk in developed countries

2050

1,450 million people at risk in developing countries

Source: PBL

2010
2050
2050 contribution due to climate change

Annual economic damage
in billion USD

Latin America and Caribbean
35
9

North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia
30
8

Developed countries
93
9

South Asia and East Asia Pacific
215
19

Sub-Saharan Africa
33
4

Between now and 2050, the focal point of economic damage will shift to Asia.

Annually exposed population, in millions

1.4
2.0

2.1
2.9

1.4
1.7

28.1
43.3

5.7
15.1

Most of the people at risk live in developing countries, especially in the South Asia and East Asia Pacific regions. Their numbers will increase.

Source: Deltares, IVM

For the Geography of Future Water Challenges
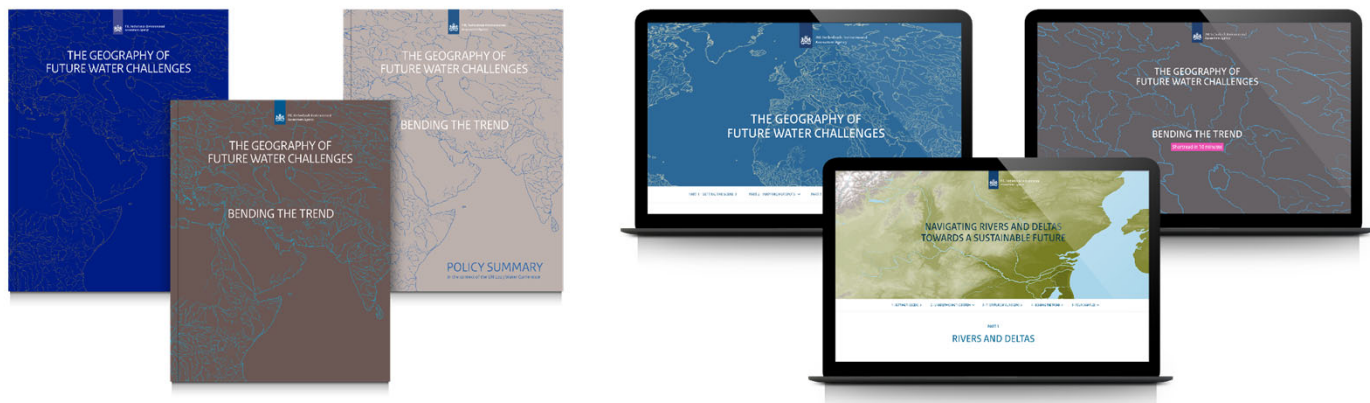I developed the over-all visual concept and over 500 maps, graphs, illustrations and interactive infographics.

Resulting in a series of three books
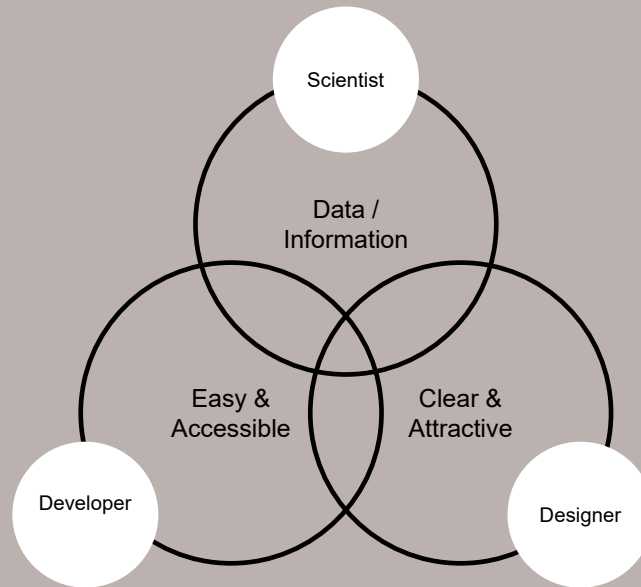
And a hand full of websites

In these projects, everything I love about my work comes together:
A relevant topic,
Tons of data and information,
the opportunity to develop next level infographics

Scientist

Data /
Information

Easy &
Accessible

Clear &
Attractive

Developer

Designer

… and above all: working with an A-team of multidisciplinary experts.
Because more than anything, productions like these are a team effort.
I will get back to this at the end of my talk.

Available

Available does not equal accessible

I believe that scientist, practitioners and policy advisors
have great skills in making their knowledge
available.

WHY CLEAR COMMUNICATION IS KEY
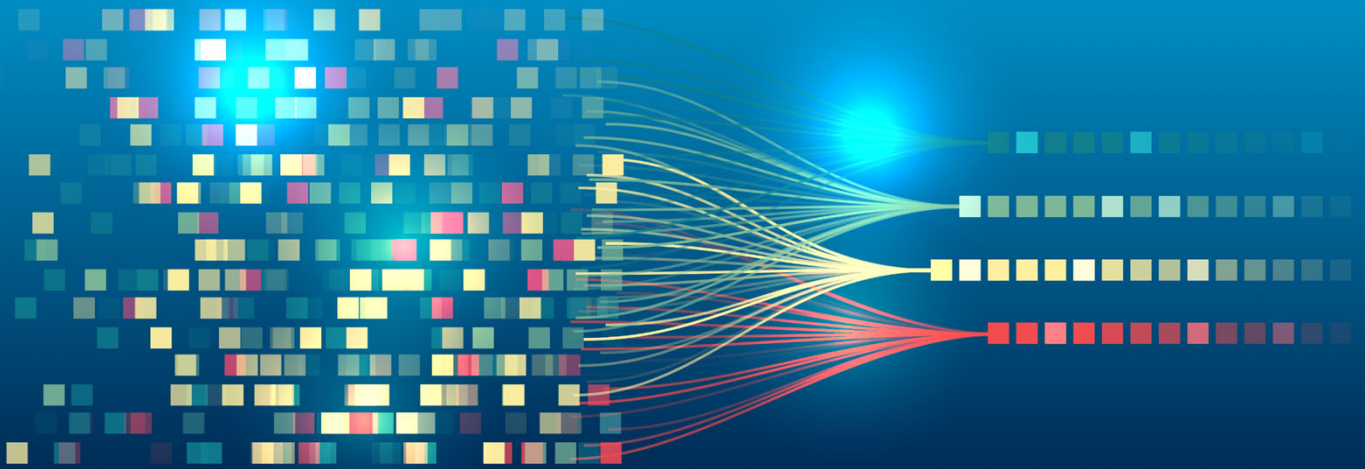
They transform data into information. And
information into knowledge.

They are excellent at drawing precise conclusions,
having extensive consultation with peers,
and endless negotiations over exact wording.

The result, therefore, is often impressive.

Literally, impressive. Or should I say… impossible?

Don't get me wrong, I understand why precision and consensus are important, especially with such an important publication as for example the one from the IPCC.

But it also makes me desperate.
Desperate that all this valuable information,

all these urgent messages,
will probably never reach the audience that
actually needs to take action.

TIAS:

Integrated assessment
is the scientific "meta-
discipline" that integrates
knowledge about a problem
domain and makes it available
for societal learning and
decision-making processes.

Now, lets take a closer look at your target
audience.

For one of my clients, the Dutch National
Delta Programme,
I did a series of interviews on how their
advisory report
was being used in the decision making
process.

Decision makers

They requested me to develop a visual summary of their annual publication.
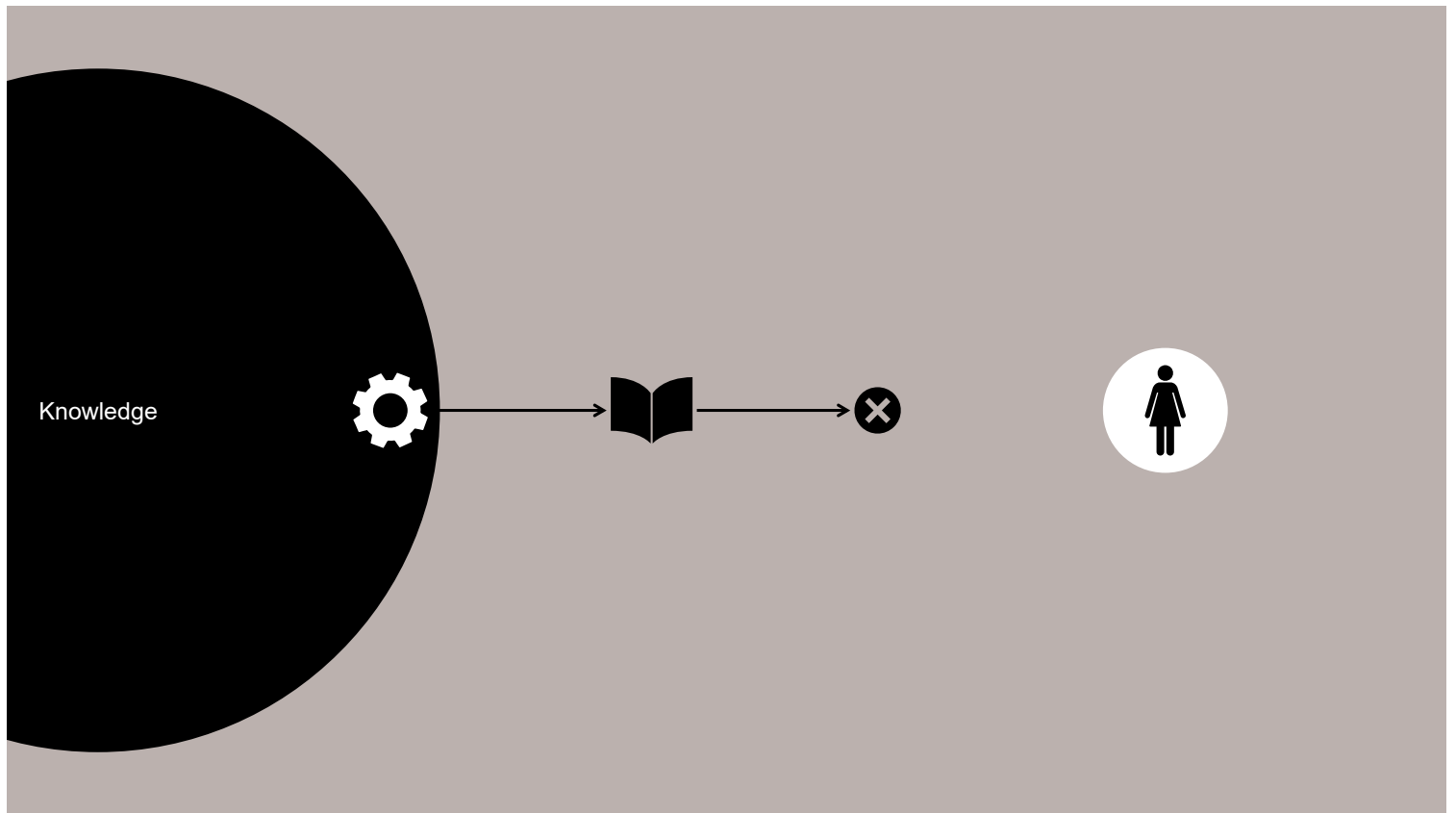
Before I could get started with a visual concept, I wanted to know **how** their primary target audience was using the **traditional** publication. Consisting of 200 pages of text.

The first thing I found out, is that not a single politician we interviewed, actually had ever read the report.

Not even if it is about their own domain. They simply don't have the time.
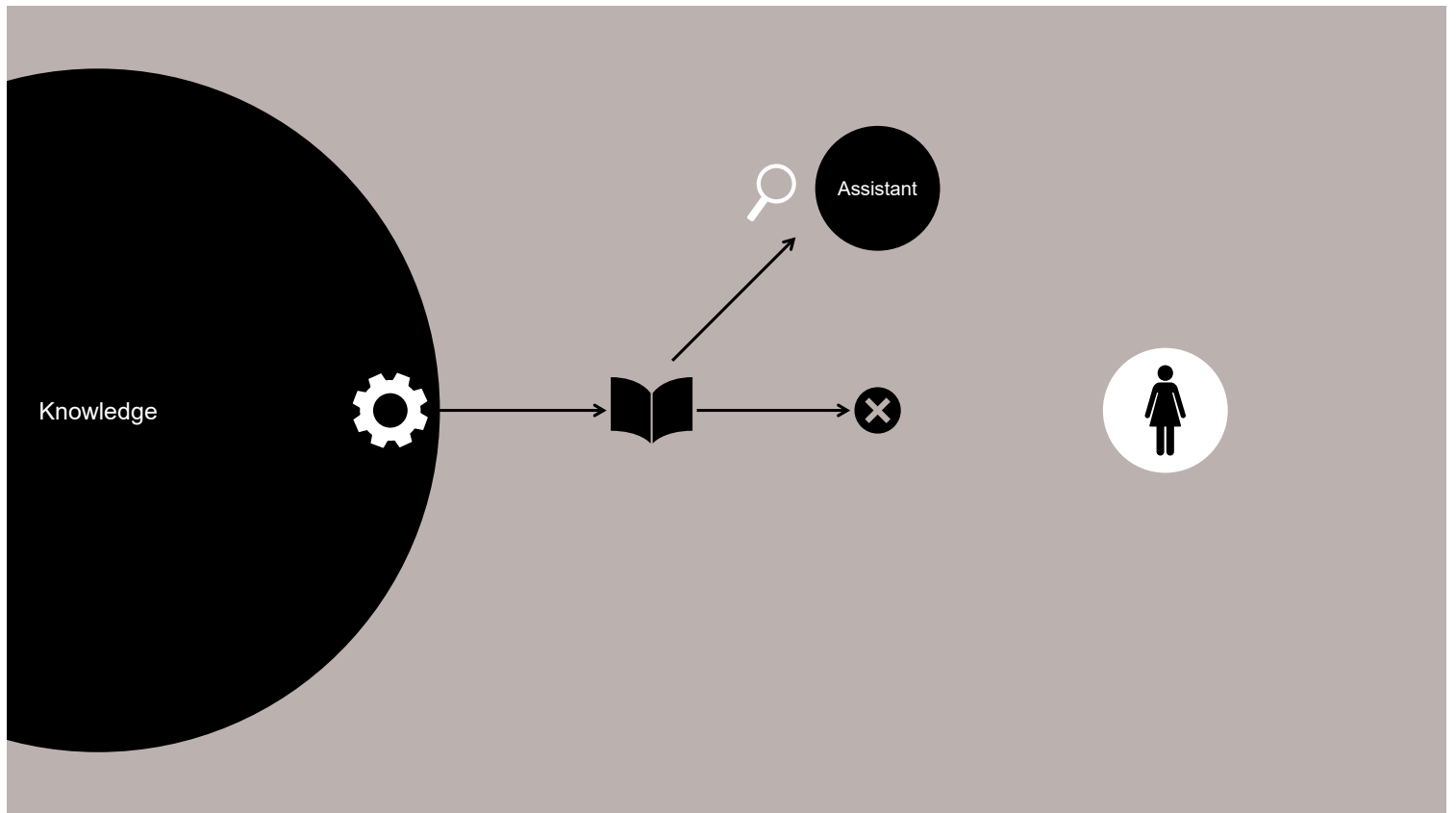
Their assistants have limited time as well,
but on a daily base they **scan** piles and piles
of pdf's.

We found out that they do this by
'shopping' for relevant topics,
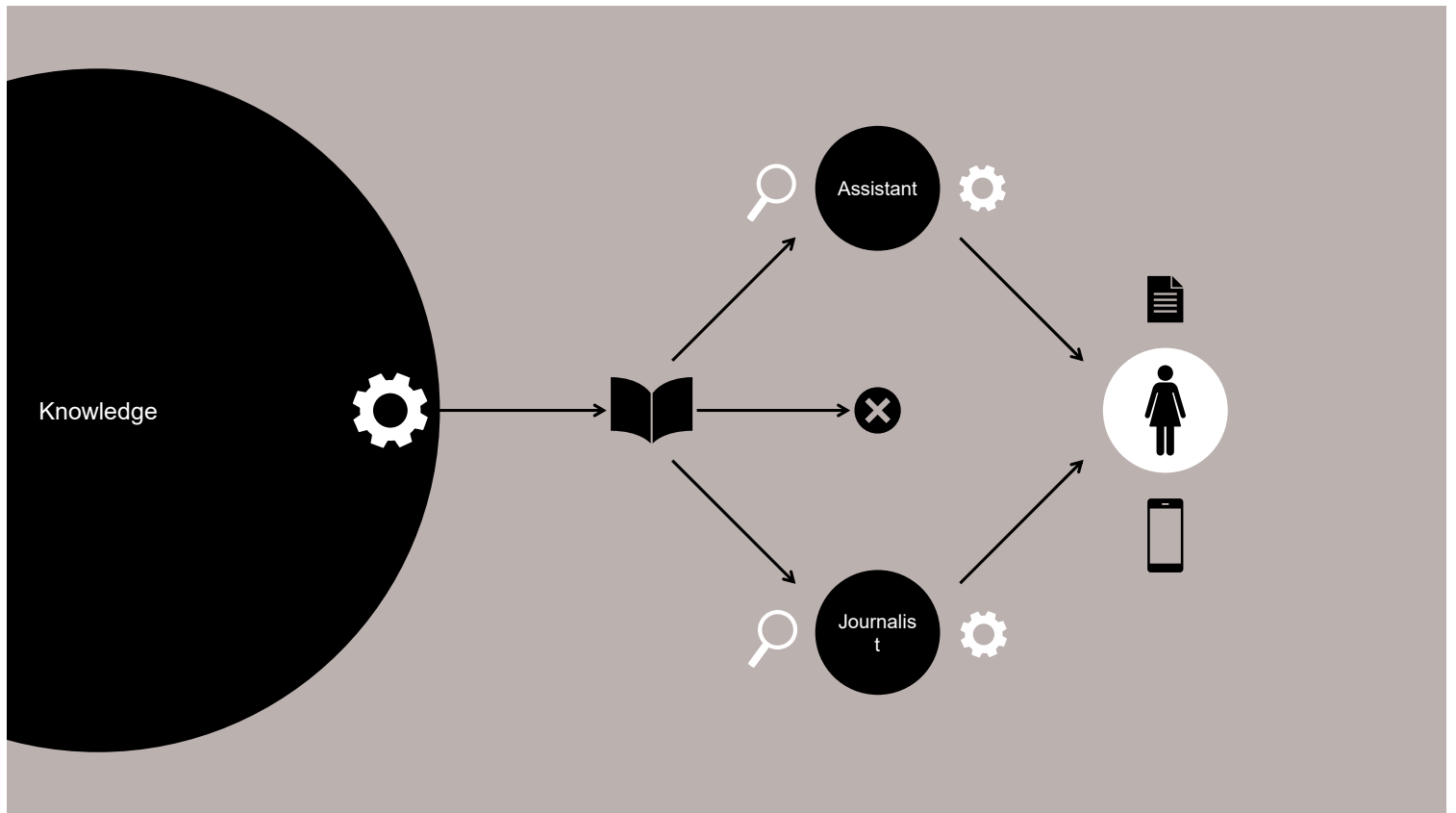using the search bar in their pdf-reader.
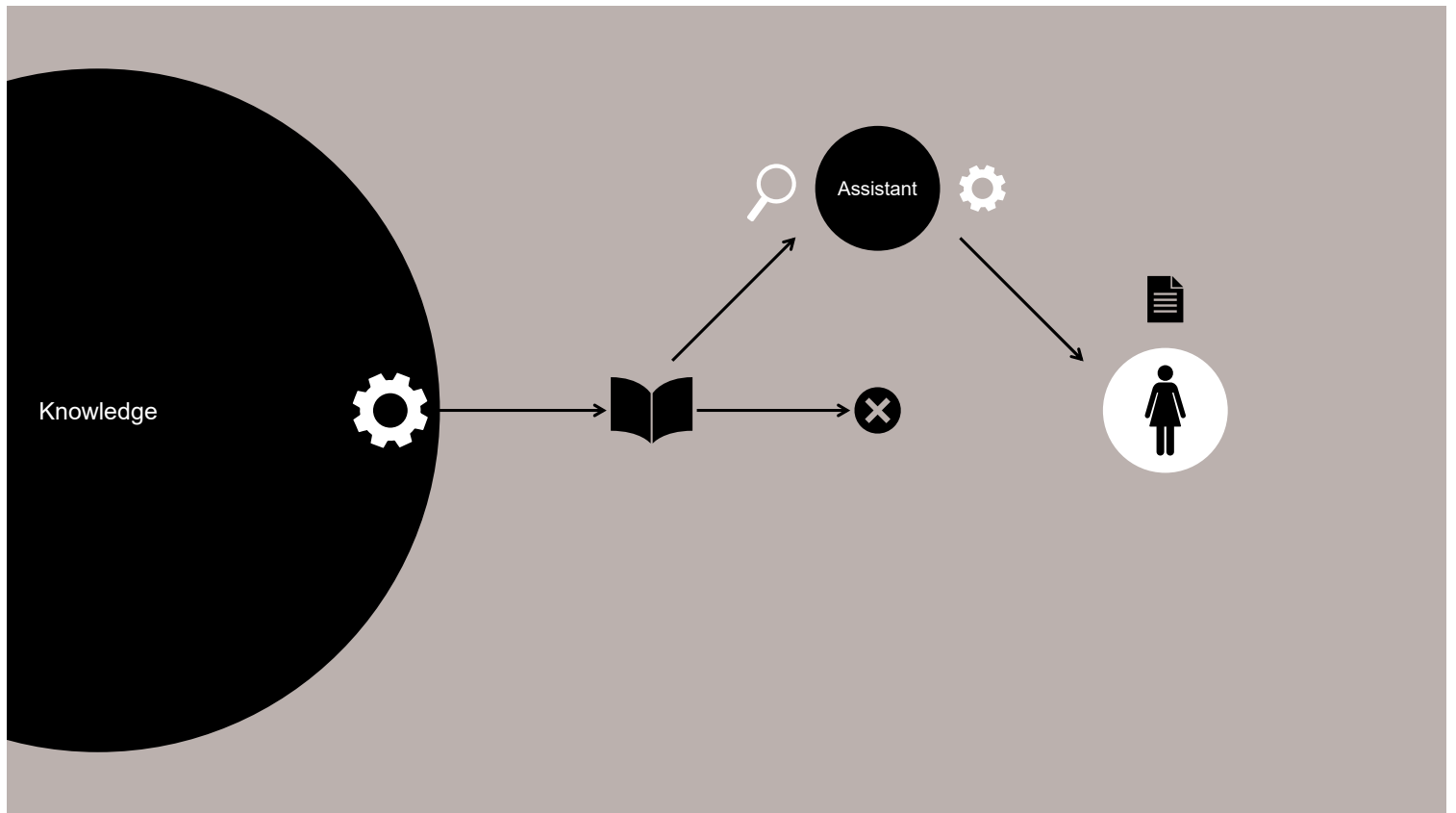
If they find information that **they** think is
relevant for their minister,
they translate the highlights into a memo
with bullets.
Meaning you depend on their filter.

The next thing we found out…
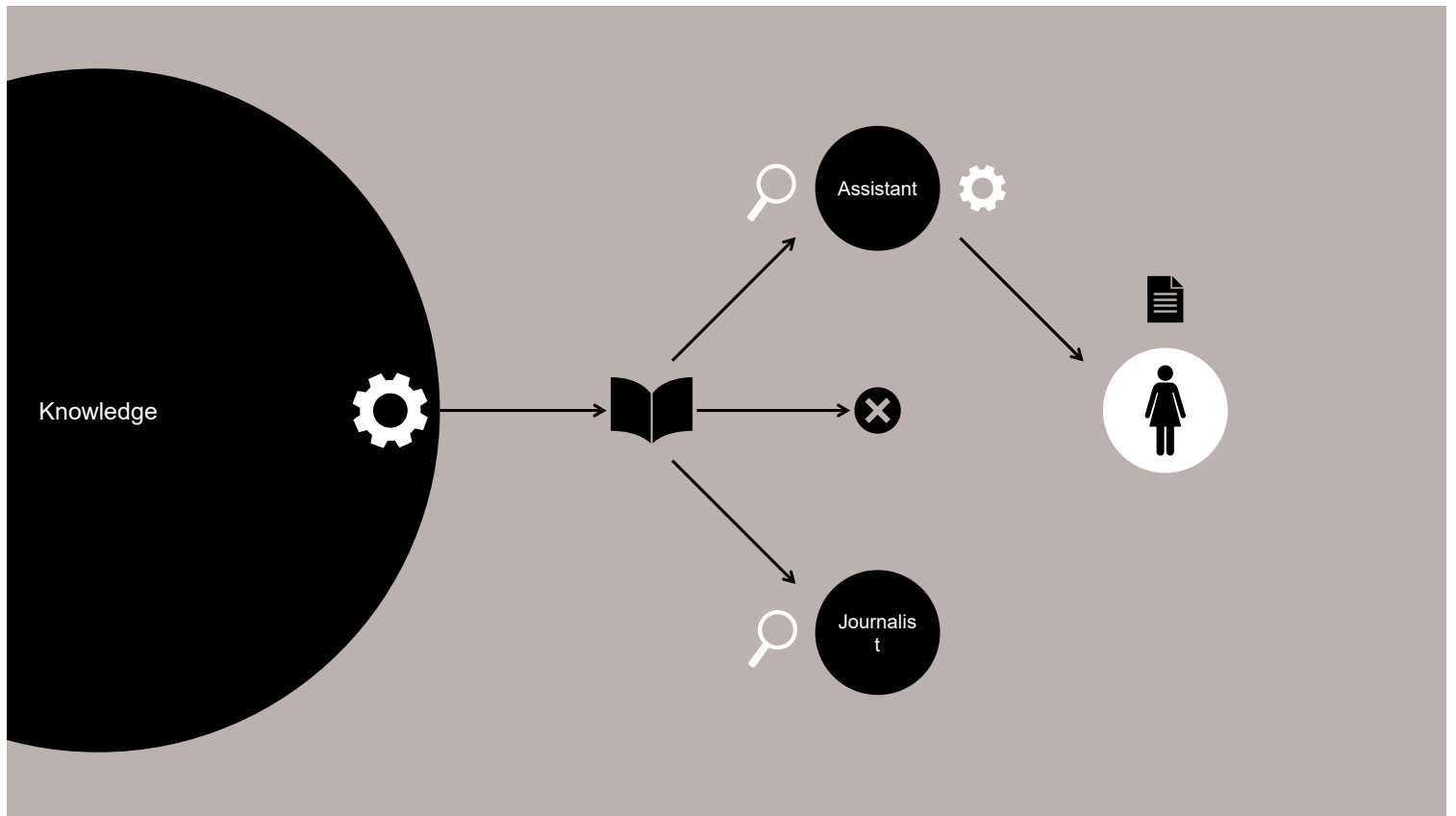
...is that journalist or other external stakeholders
often DO read the report.

If they think the topic is relevant,
they simplify the information into a social
media post or a short news item.

Ideally, news media do this objectively, but
as we all know: objectivity is an illusion.
It just depends on which information you
share and which information you don't.
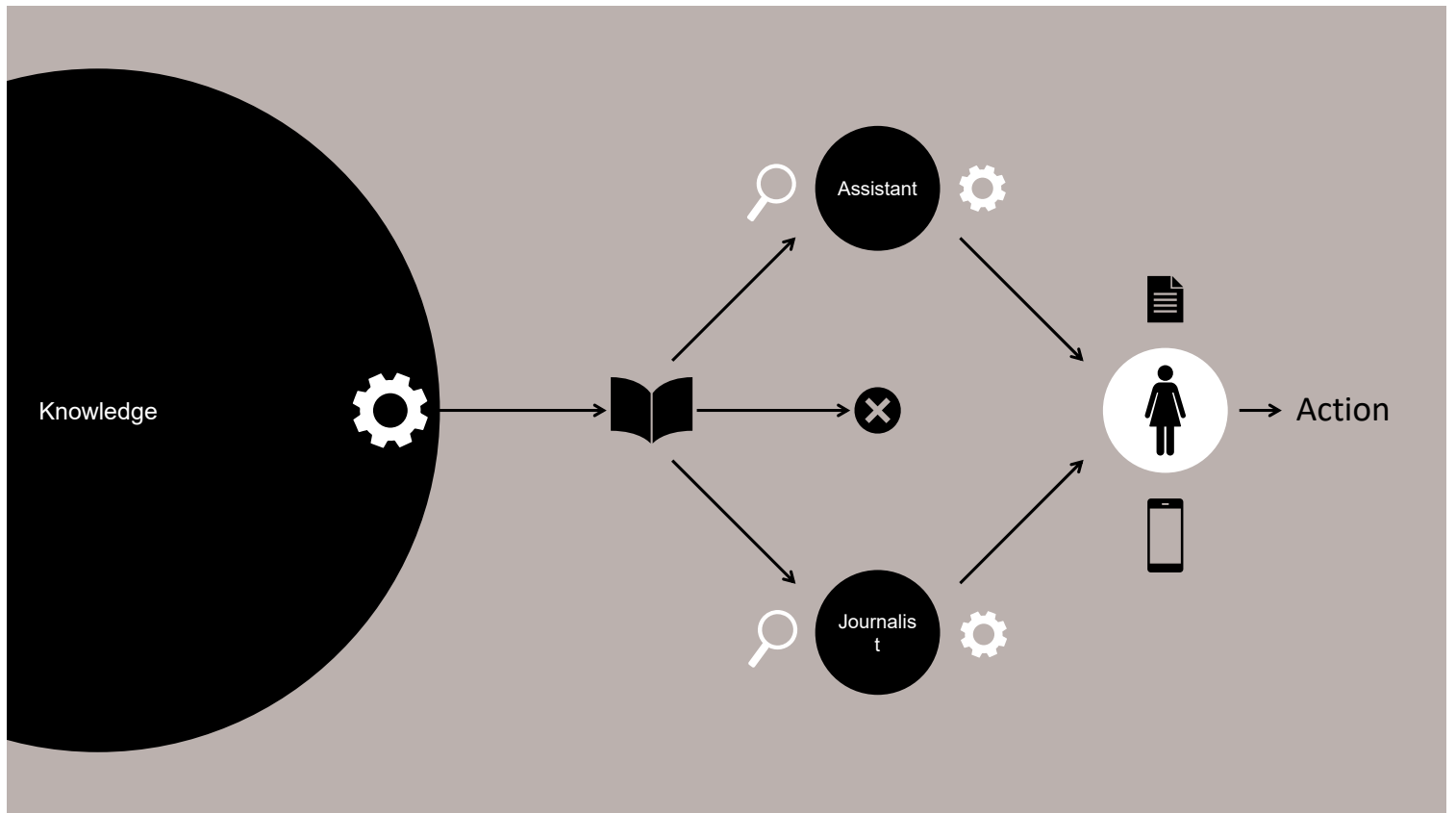
The **irony** is that politicians DO respond to
what's in the media.
My conclusion was that if you want to be **in
control**
over the message that **does** reach your
target audience,
you better make your communication
accessible yourself.

Even for political assistants or journalists,
so you depend less on their filters.

TIAS:

Integrated assessment is the scientific "meta-discipline" that integrates knowledge about a problem domain and makes it available for societal learning and decision-making processes.

We didn't investigate how a the general public perceives publications like these, but you don't have to be a rocket scientist to conclude that they read even less.

Specifically, if you look at a younger generation,
we all know that they are looking for clear and simple
information, preferably available on mobile.

WHY CLEAR COMMUNICATION IS KEY
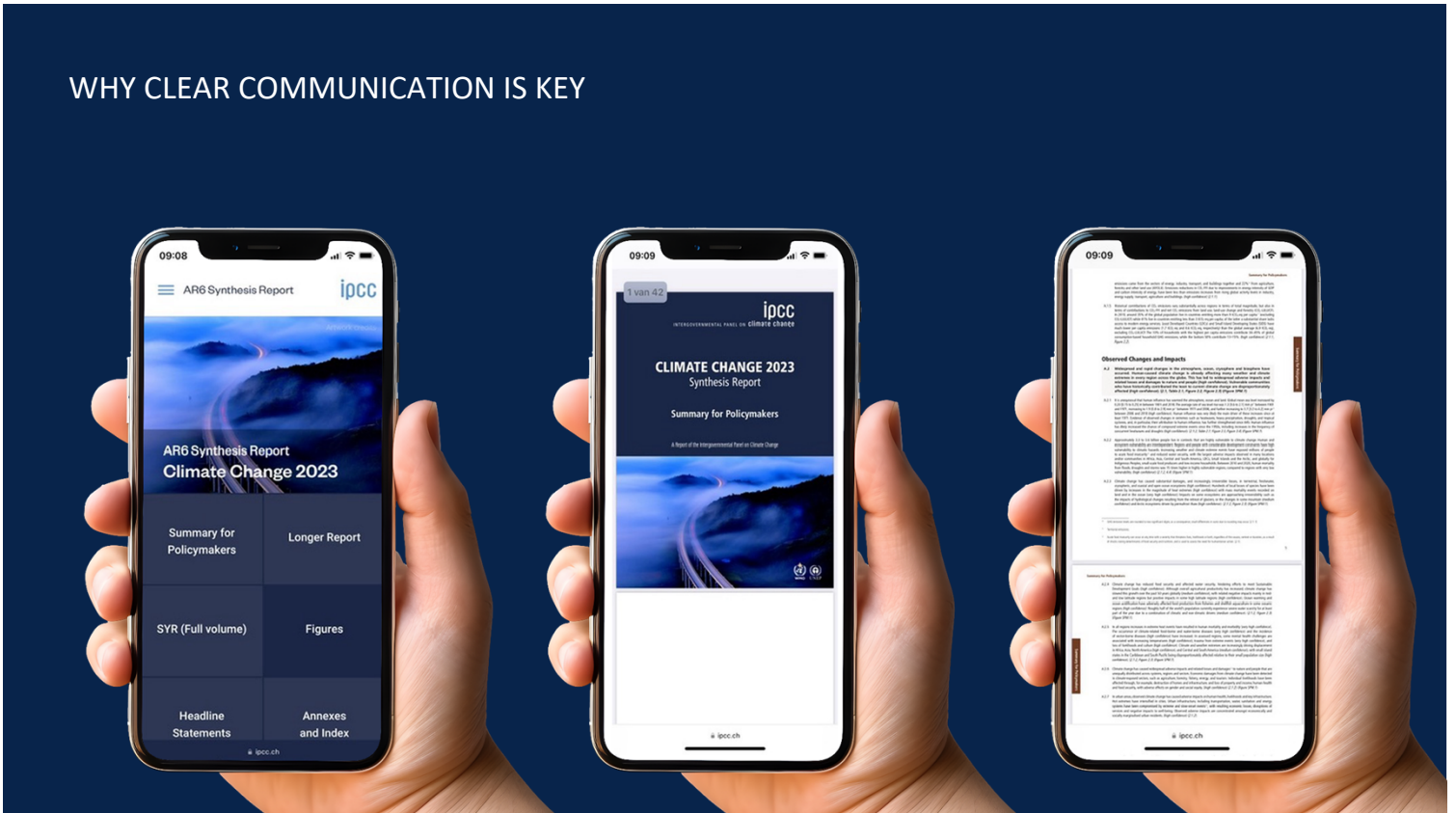
In case you think: well, people can simply find the pdf online…

Please realize that even a 45-page summary will not be read by anyone.
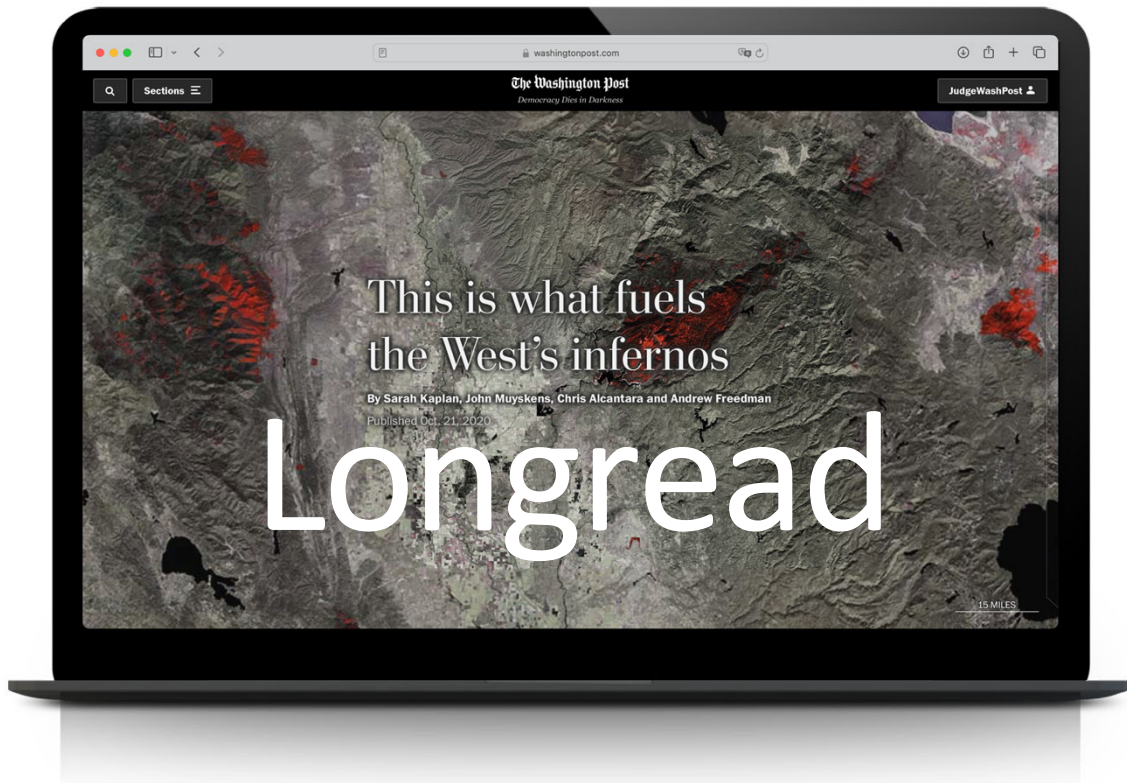
Availability is not the same as **accessibility**.

Accessible

So if the traditional way of communication
is not the way,
how can we do it differently?

What can we learn from others to make
knowledge more accessible?

I want to show you a few examples on how news media
combine beautiful storytelling techniques
with complex data visualisations.

I will show you a few so called 'longreads'.
News media use this format if they want to
dive deeper into a specific topic.
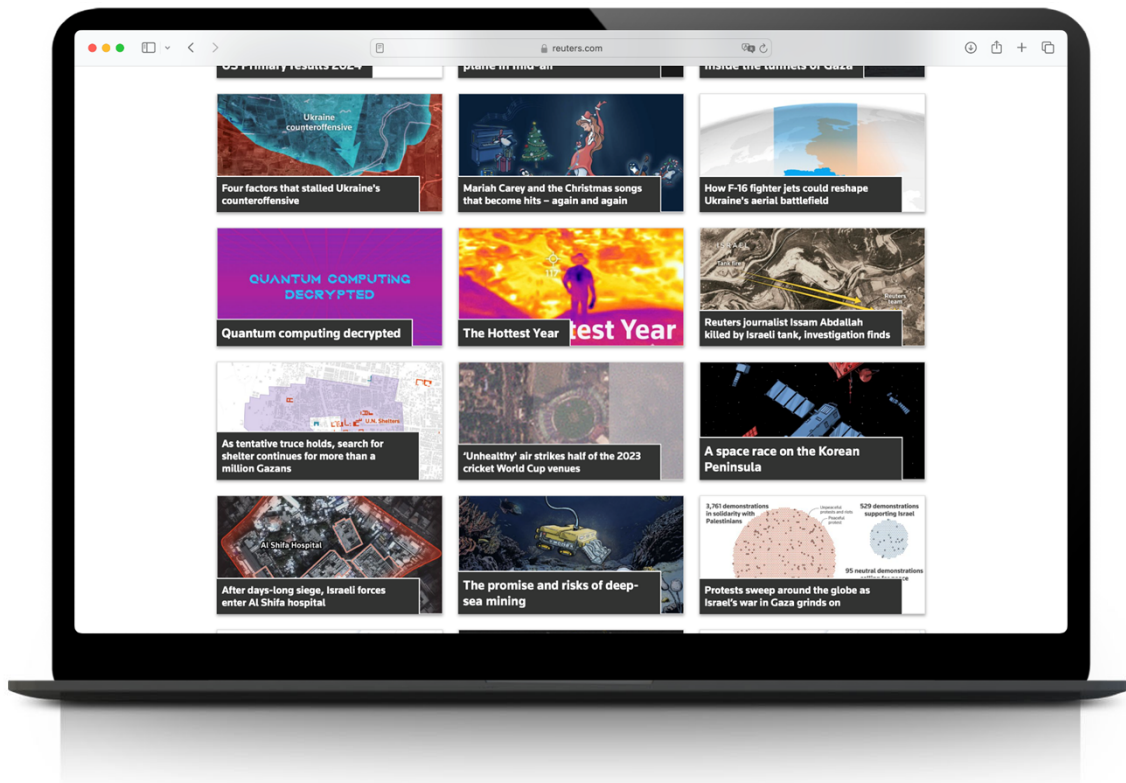
One of my major role models is the graphic department of Reuters Graphics.
Their work is really exceptional.

Unfortunately I don't have time to show you more,
but I'll share a link to Reusters archive, where you can find many more visually stunning longreads.

Longread? Shortread!

It's a matter of perspective

I showed you a few examples of a 'longread' in news media.
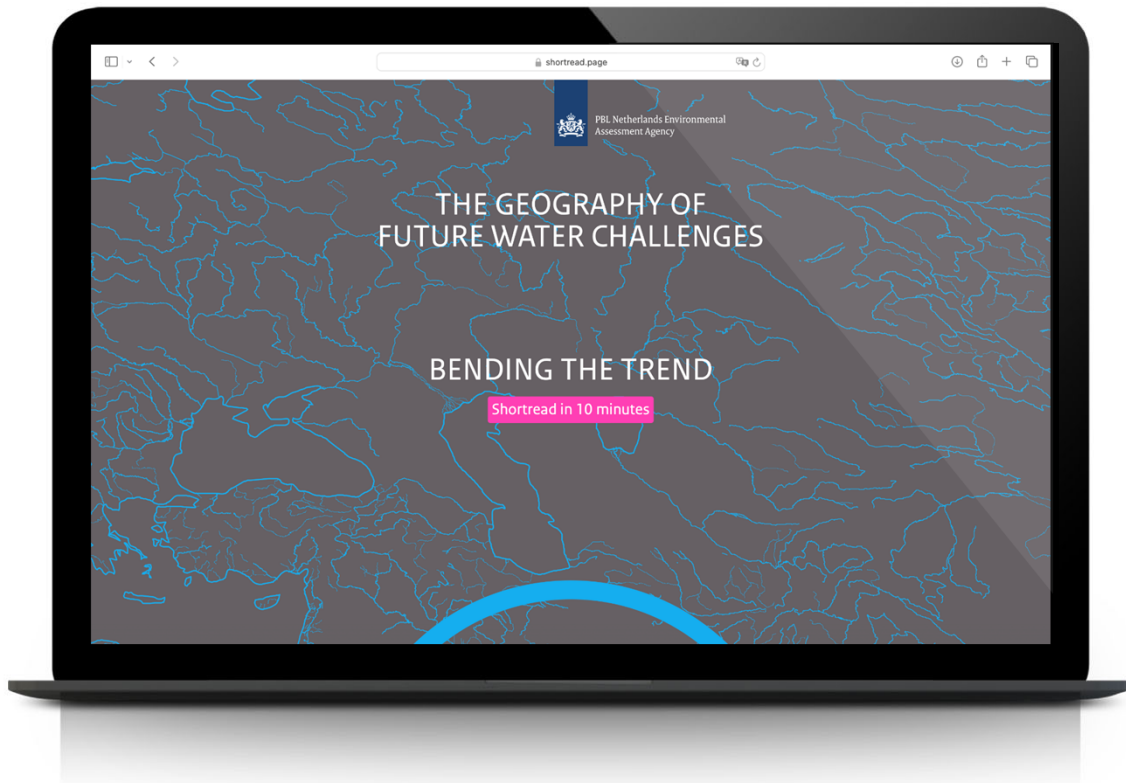But long or short depends on the context.

Compared to a news item, a one-pager, is long.
But compared to a 200-page report, it's actually short.

That's why my partners and I invented the term 'shortread'

for communicating scientific knowledge in a clear and appealing way.

For the Netherlands Environmental
Assessment Agency,
we recently published our first two
'shortreads'
about the Geography of Future Water
Challenges.

The first one is a summary of the book
'Bending the Trend'
Since we were still in the learning process,
I have to admit it is still a bit too long.
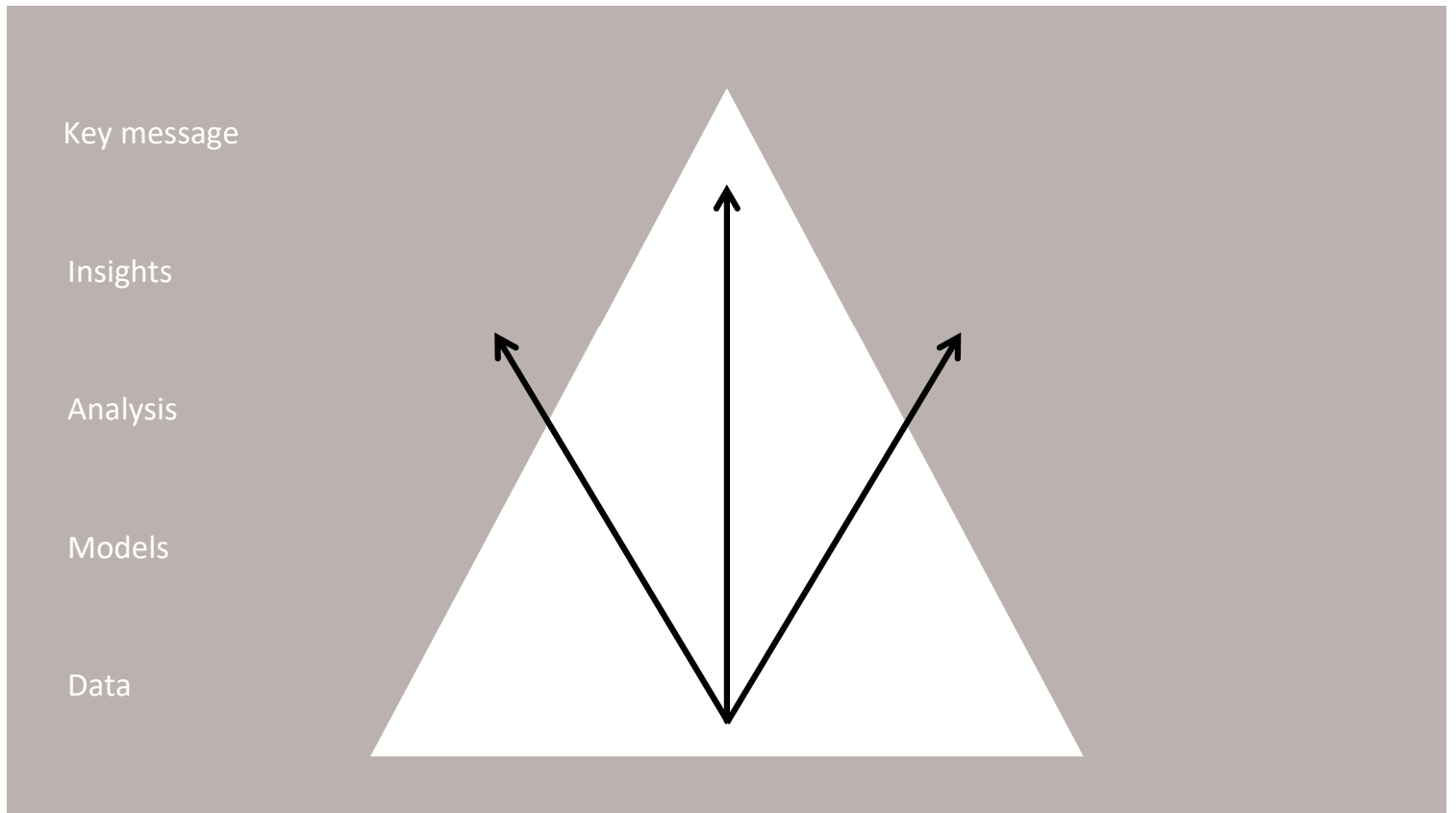
How to get started?

Keep it simple

There are many ways to make knowledge more accessible.
A 'shortread' is just one of many formats.

The key is not so much WHICH format you choose,
But HOW you get there.

Key message

Insights

Analysis

Models

Data

After working with scientist and other experts for over 20 years,
I found out that the biggest challenge is to keep it simple.

The challenge is **not** to start with **all** the data, and work bottom up.
Because if you do so, you end up in a never ending process of
new insights, other possible storylines, and more relevant data.

Great fun, but not if you're on a budget or if have a deadline.

Key message

Insights

Analysis

Models
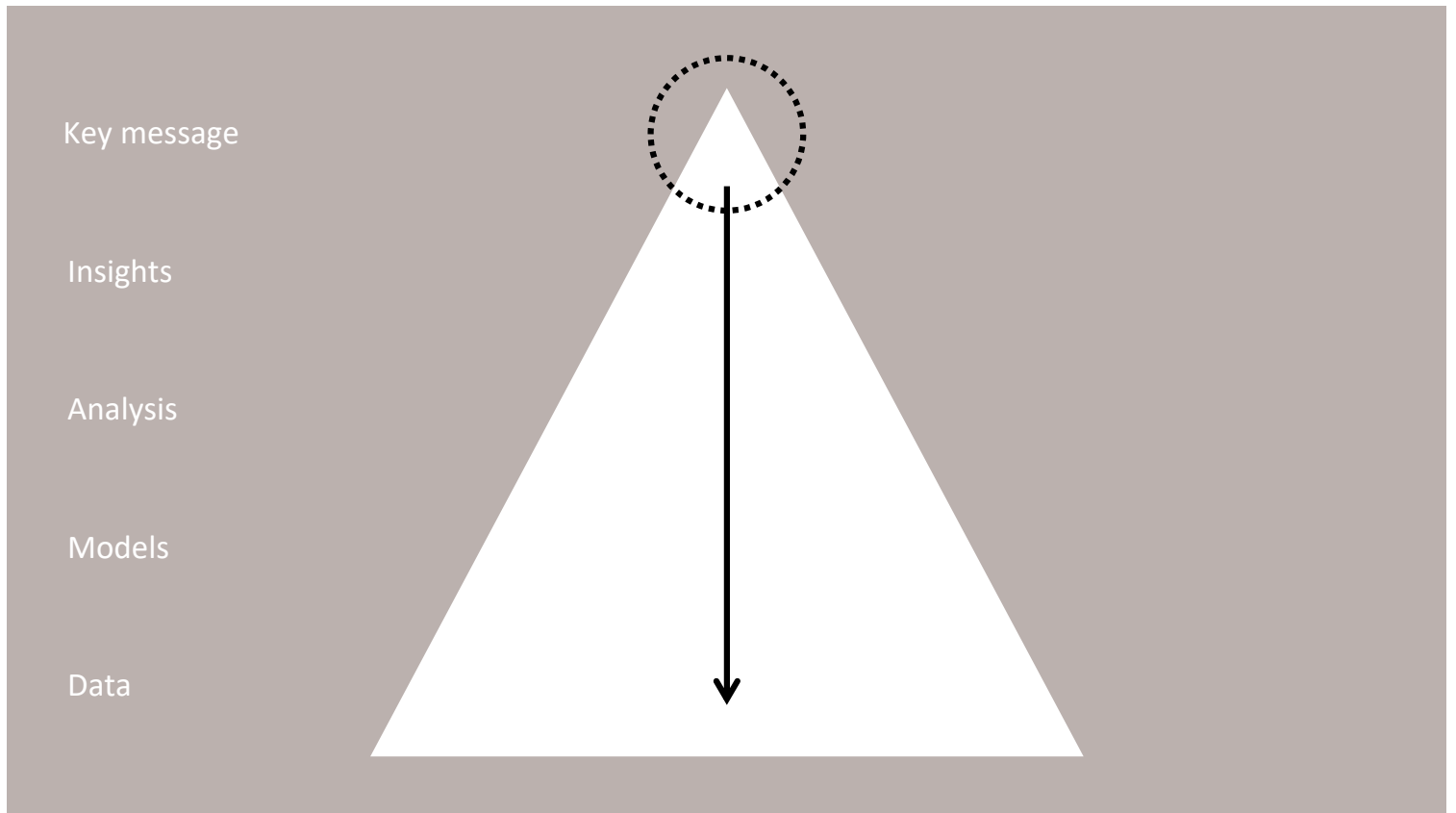
Data

While… if you zoom out, based on your insights,
you probably already have a pretty good idea about the key message.

From there, you can start selecting information that supports this message.
All other data and knowledge is not relevant. At least, not for your publication.
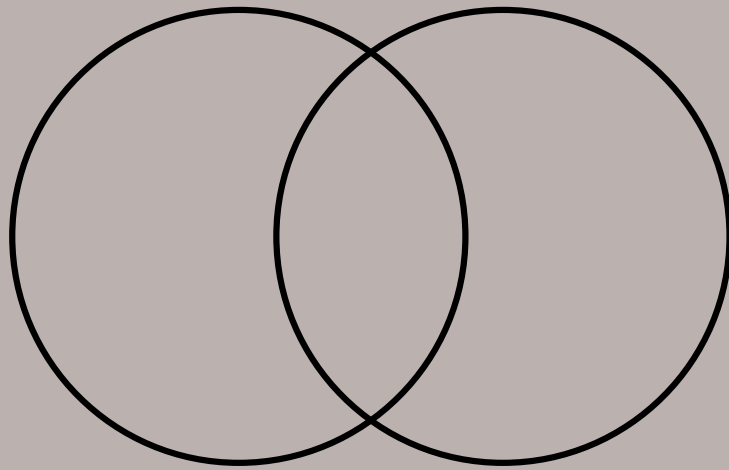
JohnVenn method

Keep it simple

I found out that the process of getting to a clear key message is actually really simple. I'm not saying it's easy, but it IS simple.

The last couple of years I invested in a method, that I call the JohnVenn method

JohnVenn method - Venn diagram

The logical relation between two sets

Why JohnVenn?

Because it comes down to the basic mathematical principle of the Venn diagram:

Finding a logical relation between two sets.

In only a few sessions we create a shared image. Literally.

We work with the right people on the right things.

1. Small team of experts
2. Clear strategy
3. Keep it simple

Keep it simple

I'm afraid I don't have time to explain the full method,
but in the short version it comes down to three things:

1. Small team of experts
2. Clear strategy
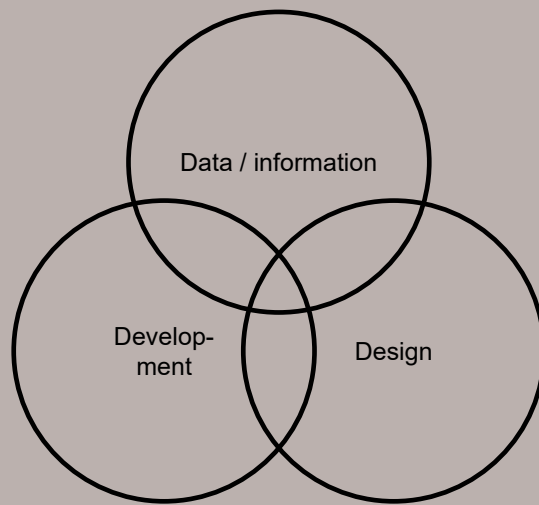# 3. Keep it simple

Keep it simple

The first thing is to work with a small team
of experts.
In many projects I did in the past,
my client thought it would be a good idea
to involve a large group of stakeholders.

Great - if you're looking for nuance and
consensus,
even better - if you are a fan of never
ending feedback rounds,
but **not a good idea** if you want to develop

a clear and accessible story.

Data / information

Develop-
ment

Design

Keep it simple

In my experience, you need tree types of expertise in your team.

They can represent more stakeholders if necessary,

as long as you have one person with mandate per expertise.

My ideal team would always consists of 2-3 scientists

1.   Small team of experts
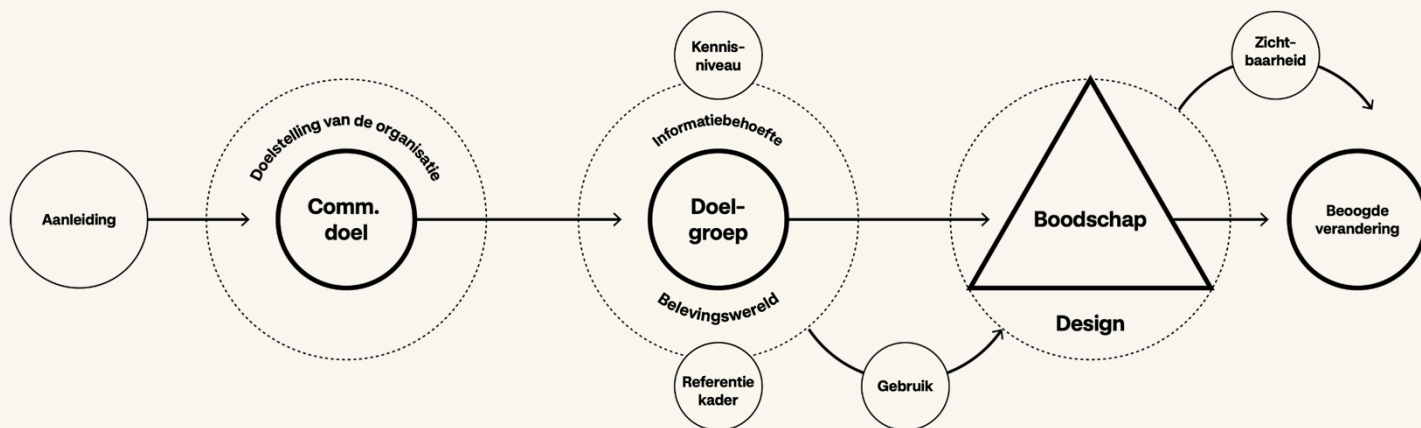2.   Clear strategy
3.   Keep it simple

Keep it simple

The second key ingredient is a clear idea about your strategy.

Consisting of

- your target audience

- your communication objective

- and the type of media you choose to use

JohnVenn model

Or in other words: to whom, why and how.
For my method, I developed a model that can help you
to get a clear picture about these principles.

I will share an English version of this method afterwards,
and I'll be happy to answer any questions about how to start your own project.

It sounds easy, but it is important to be very precise
in your communication objective and target audience.

You have to think this over really well,
because every decision you will make from now on,
has to support this objective. Wether it is data, text or design.

1.   Small team of experts
2.   Clear strategy
3.   Keep it simple

Keep it simple

Last but not least:

Every time I work with scientists or other experts that know a lot about their topic, they are convinced that every detail is important.

Always keep in mind your target audience ask yourself:

what would be **the one thing** you want them to remember?

And then... kill your darlings.

I'm still finetuning the JohnVenn method,
but I'm excited to find out how enthusiastic
my clients are.

For this recent project I did,
we were able to decimate the number of
feedback rounds,
while the end result was a clear and
accessible one-pager
that got a lot of positive feedback.

What if...

Now back to your practice.

What if…
policy makers, journalists, and educators
could simply understand your message?
What if they can easily find and share it?

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is the scientific "meta-
discipline" that integrates
knowledge about a problem
domain and makes it
accessible for societal learning
and decision-making
processes.

It would be great if from now on
accessibility
would be the starting point of your
communication too.

Because in the end –by keeping it clear and
simple–
your work can really make a **difference**.