Tech Careers Case Study: Radhika & Theodore Policy Managers, Amazon

Radhika Madlani, Public Policy Manager, UK Public Policy, Amazon

I joined Amazon in July 2020 as Public Policy Programme Manager, having previously worked at a legal regulator as a Public Affairs and Stakeholder Relations Officer. I started my career at an educational organisation in Parliament, where I was responsible for overseeing and developing the coordination of the programme for parliamentarians and businesses. During this role, I carried out a secondment at Tate and Lyle Sugars within their Corporate Affairs team. I gained insight into the politics and policies of pro-Brexit advocacy. I graduated with a degree in BSc (Hons) Politics and International Relations. During my time at university, I did a split placement, spending part of the year as a General Election Research Intern in London and the rest of my year in Amsterdam as an Editor of International Affairs for an online media company. Before starting university, I volunteered with the International Citizen Service working with tribal communities in India.

What advice you might have for others looking to work at the intersection of policy and tech?

What's essential is that you have a passion for the work that you're doing. In order to excel, there are a number of skills that are beneficial in this area. These include: networking, communication and the eagerness to learn. For me, having the ability to build trust and relationships across different sectors is important. Communication is key, to succeed in public policy you need to translate what you learn in language that non-political experts can understand. Tech is a dynamic area and policy is ever changing so you have to constantly educate yourself on the challenges or opportunities to ensure you are questioning your own assumptions. Stay curious and you will continue to evolve.

What one thing you wish you knew sooner about the world of work/careers?

Reach out to a mentor or a coach sooner. Mentors not only guide you with what to pursue but also what to avoid. You can share a lot with your mentors/ coaches including discussions of opportunities and challenges. They will give the much-needed nudge you will need but also make you accountable for the next stage/ path you want to take. Additionally, standing out is better than blending in. Being authentic and using your lived experiences can be used to your advantage when considering what area of work, you want to go into.

Theodore Smith, UK Public Policy Manager, Amazon

My name is Theodore Smith and currently work as a UK Public Policy Manager at Amazon. I have been at Amazon for 3 ½ years and started out as a Program Delivery Operations manager and then an Area Manager whilst then temporarily moving into Public Policy. Before university, I received a Gap year scholarship from the Royal Geographical Society to take a gap year and volunteer abroad. I worked in Borneo for 2 months and travelled to Australia and New Zealand for 6 months in total. I graduated with my Bachelors in Geography at Keele University, my first masters at Durham University studying an MSc in Global Politics and then my MPPA Master of Public Policy & Public Administration at the London School of Economics. During my time at all three universities, I worked as an intern for a Global Policy Journal and as a Cybersecurity Policy Researcher whilst also working for an NGO on a 3-week research placement in South Africa for political re-construction.

What advice you might have for others looking to work at the intersection of policy and tech?

My first advice is to first be extremely passionate about policy and be well versed on the political landscape within the tech world. I would ensure I understand the regulatory landscape and know what the biggest issues tech companies are facing when operating in your country. You need to be somebody who is very outgoing who is not afraid to put themselves out there and network with people in the field, whether through LinkedIn or joining events/conferences. You will need to be someone who is strong at building relationships and making people see and buy into your passion for the field. At Amazon we have a leadership principle called "Earn Trust" which embodies the skillset you will need to have when building those strategic relationships. You need to be resilient in an ever-changing landscape and have a strong ability to make complex policy topics accessible to non-experts. Lastly, always show willingness to learn more and think big about what could impact a business from government regulation, then work backwards from there.

What one thing you wish you knew sooner about the world of work/careers?

I would have started my outreach sooner during my time at university to understand the Public Policy space, I was not aware of the vastness of the field until I joined Amazon and wish I started this journey sooner. I would speak to professionals in the field and get guidance on where to start from as well as joining events to build your network up. Networking is so important in this field as it is all about building relationships, the sooner you do that, the better standing you will have to not only navigate the landscape, but to also be in better standing for job opportunities. Last thing is to take ownership of your own learning and be proactive in learning and networking, this will put you ahead in your early career.