



Climate  
Centre



Climate-KIC is supported by the  
EIT, a body of the European Union



# HUMOR FOR SYSTEM DYNAMICS

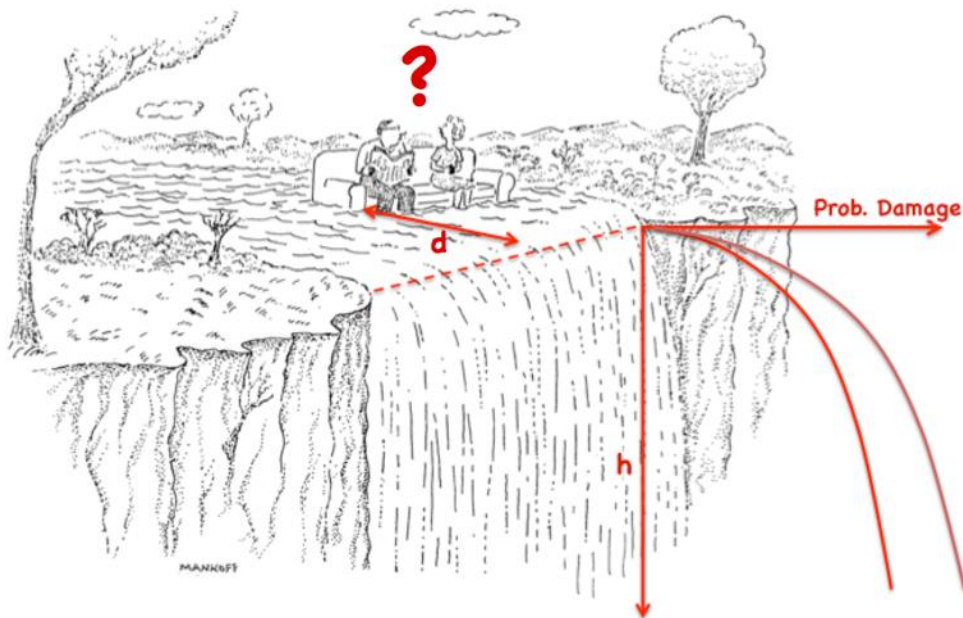
*Brief report for EIT Climate-KIC's Deep Demonstration on "Forging Resilience"*

*By Pablo Suarez, associate director for research and innovation  
Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre*

*with Bettina Koelle, Franziska Gaupp, Piotr Magnuszewski, and Samantha Vuigner*

## Introduction

The evidence is irrefutable: Humor can help improve communication, build relationships, enhance problem solving, increase productivity, and strengthen leadership. Because our work requires creative learning and dialogue, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre has been working with partners to explore humor as an unconventional approach to enable difficult conversations about systems, focusing on what can go wrong and what to do about it.



Cartoon by Bob Mankoff / [CartoonCollections.com](http://CartoonCollections.com)

In the context of EIT Climate KIC's "Forging Resilience", and building on previous work (see [TEDx Talk](#)), we have partnered with CartoonCollections, the Centre for Systems Solutions, IIASA, and the Adrienne Arsht – Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center to create innovative approaches for learning and dialogue about climate risks, including humor for system dynamics. This brief report outlines the tasks carried out during 2019 involving our "humor for system dynamics" explorations, including:

1. Short learning events at *Forging Resilience* workshops in Vienna, Sevilla and Dolomiti
2. Humor-infused sessions at COP25 in Madrid
  - a) *High-level Resilience Roundtable*
  - b) *InsuResilience Global Partnership Forum 2019*
  - c) *UNFCCC Capacity-Building Hub on Loss and Damage*
  - d) *Development & Climate Days*
  - e) *Resilience Lab: Reimagining adaptation – innovation in practice*
3. Humor-infused sessions in other contexts
  - IPCC Special Report on Oceans & Cryosphere: Cartoon-based summary for humanitarians
  - Workshops with various stakeholders

### 1. Short learning events at *Forging Resilience* workshops in Vienna, Sevilla and Dolomiti

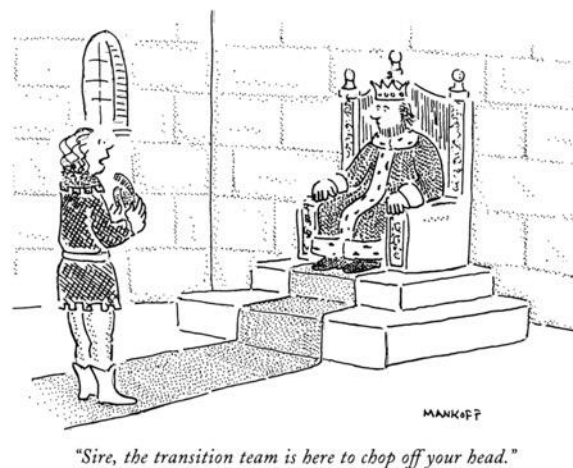
During the July 2019 workshop at IIASA (near Vienna), we introduced the idea of using humor to inspire reflections and ideas about radical transformation of systems, through a short interactive presentation followed by an activity whereby participants were invited to look at a selection of cartoons and then converse about the challenges and opportunities posed by the *Deep Demonstration* process. Participants resonated with the approach, and particularly Sevilla and Dolomiti stakeholders expressed interest in integrating humor into their upcoming work.

On September 30 at the workshop in Sevilla we offered an improved version of the "Harnessing Humor" workshop, which was also well received and captured the attention of our new partners from Glasgow. We are now in ongoing conversations for infusing this innovation into their work.

At the last workshop in Dolomiti, Piotr Magnuszewski shared our new presentation for "Humor & Systems": a cartoon-infused powerpoint file that can guide *Deep Demonstration* teams in examining how complex system dynamics play a key role in our work forging resilience.



[Drew Dervavich / CartoonCollections.com](http://Drew.Dervavich/ CartoonCollections.com)



[Bob Mankoff / CartoonCollections.com](http://Bob.Mankoff/ CartoonCollections.com)

The ppt file, included as addendum to this report, has annotations for each slide to facilitate delivery by other stakeholders, and includes the following elements:

- System Thinking & Transformation
- Coping with Complexity
  - o Cause & Effect (non-linearities, unwanted effects, feedbacks, etc)
  - o Delays
  - o Uncertainty
- How to foster transformation in complex systems
- System's resistance to change

## 2. Humor-infused sessions at COP25 in Madrid

Numerous teams reached out to the Climate Centre to include participatory humor in the design and facilitation of serious events at the UNFCCC COP25. While many such requests had to be declined due to scheduling etc, here is a synthesis of the main contributions. All of these events featured EIT Climate-KIC's logo in the opening powerpoint slide (see ppt files attached).

### a) High-level Resilience Roundtable: Accelerating Action to Build a Resilient 1.5 C World

Convened on December 10<sup>th</sup> by the *Global Resilience Partnership* and numerous other entities, and available through [video recording](#), this event featured two humor-infused interactive sessions focused on:

- Tensions around the concept of resilience through a collaborative game of rock~paper~scissors (see video, minute 14:23 to 19:50)
- Options for turning conflict onto collaborative action (see video, minute 54:55 to 1:03:16).



**1. Stand Up, Find a Partner** (& back-to-back)

**2. Collaborative Game**

Partners 'Match'? → Shout "YES!"



Naoko Ishii (CEO of the GEF) plays 'collaborative Rock~Paper~Scissors' with Sheela Patel (Slum Dwellers International)

As shown in the agenda, high-level speakers included Naoko Ishii (CEO of the GEF), Mami Mizutori (Head of UNDRR), Andreas Ahrens (IKEA's Head of Climate), Kamal Kishore, (India's National Disaster Management Authority), and Maria Flachsbarth (Parliamentary State Secretary, BMZ). Importantly, during the humor-infused activity all hierarchies were dissolved: serious play engaged teams of unlikely partners, thus increasing learning and dialogue.

Organizers and participants expressed gratitude for the original approach to interaction (see for example [Tweet1](#), [Tweet2](#)), and numerous opportunities emerged for future work harnessing humor for climate resilience.

#### b) InsuResilience Global Partnership Forum 2019

With participants including high-level representatives of the World Bank, national governments, insurance companies and civil society, this event included a 30-minute humor-infused session focused on “*challenges and opportunities we confront when setting up collaborations and partnerships, esp in the context of climate risk finance and insurance solutions.*”



*"Sometimes I think the collaborative process would work better without you."*



*"You'll see, this is going to cause real trouble."*



*"Uh-oh, your coverage doesn't seem to include illness."*



*Charles Barsotti*

*"No, Hoskins, you're not going to do it just because I'm telling you to do it. You're going to do it because you believe in it."*

Cartoons by 1- [P.C. Vey](#); 2- [Charles Barsotti](#); 3- [Bob Mankoff](#); 4- [Charles Barsotti / CartoonCollections.com](#)

In one of the highlights of the session, a participatory activity involved the audience self-organizing in trios, looking at a tailored selection cartoons that were placed under their chairs, and then having a conversation about the many ways in which disaster risk financing and insurance often leads to failed collaborations, resulting from entirely predictable yet unspoken forces shaping the creation and sustenance of partnerships. See [Tweet3](#), [Tweet4](#), for some reactions to the value of humor in inspiring difficult conversations.

### c) UNFCCC Capacity-Building Hub on Loss and Damage

The Paris Committee on Capacity Building (PCCB) selected the Climate Centre's 90-minute training workshop on Harnessing humor for climate risks for the Loss & Damage Block (December 11<sup>th</sup>) held at the [Capacity-Building Hub](#) in Hall 4 of the UNFCCC COP venue in Madrid. Combining the fascinating science of how humor works with serious-yet-fun activities and insights, in this intensely interactive session about 30 participants experienced a set of safe, innovative communication approaches that make people smile, reflect, and wonder - in ways that support risk management and development work with relevance for the contentious negotiations on Loss & Damage under the Warsaw Implementation Mechanism. See for example [Tweet5](#).

A key result of this session about humor for Loss & Damage: one of the senior representatives from the UK government, who played an active role in the session and involved in shaping negotiations at COP26 in Glasgow, reached out to his colleagues proposing to integrate constructive interaction in the design of events for negotiators.

All,  
Pablo and I discussed the adversarial nature of the negotiations at COP, with Pablo noting that a change of style in meetings could help to enable a more collaborative atmosphere.

While it might be hard to change the style of the contact groups and informals, there may well be scope to come up with some other form of meeting to build consensus through COP 26 in an informal informal setting.

Pablo has offered to work with us (he is the guru on getting constrictive interaction and has worked with the at levels from White House staff to community groups.

This is to put us all in touch so we can continue the conversation.

### d) Development & Climate Days

In the 2019 edition of the [D&C Days](#), the spirit of the traditional "Out of the Box" session was actually present throughout the event, including through intentionally designed humor interventions.



This was particularly true in the opening session (especially the "Face It!" activity in collaboration with satellite artist Santiago Espeche), the closing session (especially the "Participatory Huayno+Candombe" musical performance), and the parallel session entitled "From Darkness to Illumination: Climate grief and resilience in a sea of warnings" featuring artists, humanitarians, and Peter Jin Hong – neuroscience advocate at Google who actually

made people burst into laughter while addressing the complexities of how our brains experience cosmic grief (and can turn grief into a source for action through empathy and gratitude). For reactions from D&C Days participants, see for example [Tweet6](#), [Tweet7](#), [Tweet8](#), [Tweet9](#). Full event report currently under development.

### e) Resilience Lab: Reimagining adaptation – innovation in practice

SEI and partner organizations were granted the December 9<sup>th</sup> slot at COP25's [UNFCCC Resilience Lab](#), focused on 'Managing transboundary considerations equitably.' They learned that there was a condition to the UNFCCC offer of that valuable time and space: the "[Reimagining Adaptation](#)" session had to be genuinely experimental and innovative (the idea of "Laboratory" is in the name for a reason!). Organizers reached out to the Climate Centre for support in design and facilitation of innovation for the session, and agreed to experiment with a humor-infused approach to complement the presentations by participants from UNEP, GCF, UK Met Office UNECE and other stakeholders.

Thanks to a rapid collaboration with [CartoonCollections.com](#), we co-created a session that used cartoons to enable out-of-the-box discussions about the reasons why transboundary climate risks require very particular consideration of the challenges of collaboration.



For reactions from event participants, see for example [Tweet10](#).

### 3. Humor-infused sessions in other contexts

The Climate Centre has integrated humor in numerous other instances linking science, policy, and humanitarian practice. Notable examples include:

#### IPCC Special Report on Oceans & Cryosphere: Cartoon-based summary for humanitarians

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 2019 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its Special Report on Oceans and the Cryosphere ([IPCC SROCC](#)). While the summary for policymakers aims to convey key messages to a non-scientific audience, even the title of the report makes it clear that there is a need to make the contents of this important work more accessible to decision makers, including climate risk managers.



Building on the Climate Centre's collaboration with IPCC, we distilled the messages that appeared most crucial for the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and partners, and created an

8-page summary that uses intelligent cartoons to reach out to humanitarian workers – released on the same date (see [Tweet11](#)).

### Workshops with various stakeholders

Our humor-based approach has been in high demand since the beginning of the *Deep Demonstration* endeavor. As a result, we've been invited to deliver sessions on humor and risk in a diverse range of settings, including:

- *Policy events*: examples include a meeting with The Elders (see [Tweet12](#)), the keynote speech at the NetHope Global Summit in Puerto Rico (see [Tweet13](#)), and our innovative blending of BeatBox and Hip Hop Improv Comedy during a high-level session at the UN Climate Summit in New York (see short [video](#), [Reuters](#) article)



- *Humanitarian events*: Examples include the ICRC's "InspiRED Days" (see [blog](#) explicitly mentioning the value of humor for tough talks on climate, conflict and geoengineering), a Spanish Red Cross training workshop (see [Tweet16](#)), and the Forecast-based Financing Dialogue Platform in Berlin.
- *Events with Private Sector and other stakeholders*: See for example presentation at [IBM Research](#), and keynote speech at the [Applied Improvisation Network](#) Global Conference.
- *Academic events*: examples include face-to-face sessions at Unicversity College London (UCL STEAPP, see [Tweet14](#)), University of Reading (see [Tweet15](#)), the Fletcher School of Diplomacy, and a geoengineering workshop co-facilitated with legendary [cartoonist Bob Mankoff at Harvard University](#).

# Humor

## to Enable Tough Discussions

# on Geoengineering



by

**Bob Mankoff & Pablo Suarez**

 **CARLOON  
COLLECTIONS**



**Climate  
Centre**

