

# Negotiator Briefs on Cognition and Climate Change

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## A Different Take on the Problem

by Manjana Milkoreit

Welcome to the *Negotiator Briefs on Cognition and Climate Change*! This introduction to the series outlines what the *CCC Briefs* will be about, why they are important and whom they are for. It also mentions some of the topics the series is going to address. The format and content of the *Briefs* are specifically targeted to the current needs and challenges of participants in the global climate change negotiations – diplomats, climate policy experts, members of the UNFCCC Secretariat, representatives of non-governmental organizations and stakeholders, climate scientists and domestic policy-makers.

Global climate change negotiations have become a normal part of international political life, with incremental but insufficient progress over the last two decades. The scholarship on climate change politics and governance has been largely pessimistic, pointing to multiple reasons for non-cooperation without offering practical remedies that might help accelerate the process. Over the last few years, the combination of a lack of multilateral cooperation and its scholarly justification have led to a shift of focus away from the global to other levels of governance, such as sub-state actors and initiatives, and procedural changes that might kick the UN process into a higher gear.

This situation is unsatisfying, not just from a scholarly but also personal perspective. Therefore my own research and this series of *Negotiator Briefs on Cognition and Climate Change (CCC Briefs)* take a different approach. Integrating important advances in the cognitive sciences and international relations theory, I hope to offer insights that can support the negotiation efforts in a number of ways.

Primarily I seek to explain the working of the human mind when it comes to climate change and multilateral cooperation, focusing on the effects of cognitive and emotional factors on the motivations, decisions and behaviors of various political actors at the global stage. I hope to present a useful type of knowledge that helps political actors increase their own analytical capacity regarding the political dynamics unfolding around them, and consequently their effectiveness as negotiators in a highly complex, dynamic environment.



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Manjana Milkoreit is a Post-doctoral Fellow with the Walton Sustainability Fellowship Program at the Global Institute of Sustainability, Arizona State University. Her research focuses on the role of cognition and cognitive change in global climate change politics and governance. Her work merges cognitive science with international relations scholarship, seeking to leverage existing knowledge about the functioning of the mind for understanding and facilitating political processes.

Dr Milkoreit holds German law degree, a Master in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School and a Ph.D. in Global Governance from the Balsillie School of International Affairs at the University of Waterloo (Canada). Her professional experiences include international organizations, the public, non-profit, and private sectors.

"There are kinds of action, for good or ill, that lie so far outside the boundaries of normal behavior that they force us, in acknowledging that they have occurred, to restructure our own understanding of reality. We have to make room for them."

Guy Gavriel-Kay



## What will you learn?

This series is designed primarily for the benefit of various participants in the UNFCCC negotiations. Using some cognitive science concepts, some international relations scholarship and a lot of data from recent research, the *Briefs* will illustrate a number of challenges and opportunities for the negotiation process. Each Brief will contain a small number of ideas and data points that can help you understand the way the mind works, including the crucial relationship between thought and feeling - cognition and emotion. These insights apply primarily to individuals, but also to groups and relations between different groups. You will learn to:

- Reflect on your own thought patterns, value commitments and emotions.
- Better understand the differences between the views of various actors you interact with in the negotiations, especially the complexity and subtlety of these views, and the necessity to understand negotiation positions as a result and integral part of belief systems.
- Better understand how differences in certain parts of people's belief systems create completely different views concerning climate change governance, and appreciate the difficulties of changing these cognitive system effects.
- Identify options to improve your negotiation or political strategies aimed at changing other people's minds, either in the UNFCCC context or back home, where important political fights still have to be won.

These lessons include the ability to distinguish between negotiation positions (reflections of interests) and beliefs and convictions (deeper motivational drivers), and to recognize when inconsistencies between these two levels can and cannot be resolved within the negotiation process. Not all cognitive obstacles to cooperation can be solved by the negotiation participants at the multilateral level.

## What to expect

Over the next year I will publish one or two short *Briefs* every month, each focusing on one specific insight and/or theory. Each *Brief* will raise a specific question and offer ideas that will help you answer this type of question in the future. While this one-issue-at-a-time approach helps you focus and learn, it is important to recognize that and how all of these topics are connected. The final *Brief* will make an effort to bring these insights together and highlight their systemic linkages.

Below I list some of the topics the series of CCC *Briefs* is going to cover, including limits to rationality, the importance of emotion, the challenges of dealing with long time horizons, and the reasons why some people see multilateral climate governance through a normative lens and others don't.

- Rationality 1: A closer look at cost hierarchies and risk perceptions
- Rationality 2: Rationality and ethics – Are you a non-utilitarian?
- Rationality 3: What happened to benefits? And who has the numbers?
- The importance of identity – Who do you fight for?
- Zooming in on place-based identity
- Who cares about norms? Which norms?
- Do you (still) care about science? Here is why you should.
- Tipping points – in the climate system, politics, or your mind?
- Pondering time
- Have you ever thought about the distant future?
- Agency and hope – Why you need one for the other
- Solution Space – How much of it do you cover?

These *Briefs* are intended to be conversation starters. First, I hope you will use them to contact me with questions, ideas, or evidence that I might be wrong or missing something. Second, my arguments will arm you with new ideas for conversations within your delegation, with other negotiation groups or participants. Maybe you can think of even more uses for the insights of the CCC *Briefs*. Please do not hesitate to be in touch, raise questions, make suggestions or ask for advice. Much of this work is in an early stage and will benefit greatly from your critical feedback and curiosity.

## About this document

This document is part of the publication series "Negotiator Briefs on Cognition and Climate Change" that builds on research conducted by Manjana Milkoreit since 2011. The series is co-sponsored by the Walton Sustainability Solutions Initiative (WSSI) at Arizona State University's Global Institute of Sustainability (GIOS) and the Waterloo Institute of Complexity and Innovation (WICI) at the University of Waterloo in Canada.

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## About the Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Initiatives

The Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Initiatives are the result of a \$27.5 million investment in Arizona State University's Global Institute of Sustainability by the Walton Family Foundation. Within the Walton Sustainability Solutions Initiatives, diverse teams of faculty, students, entrepreneurs, researchers, and innovators collaborate to deliver sustainability solutions, accelerate global impact, and inspire future leaders through eight distinct initiatives.

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## About the Waterloo Institute for Complexity and Innovation

The Waterloo Institute for Complexity and Innovation (WICI) is a research hub that promotes the rigorous transdisciplinary study of innovation within—and the resilient and beneficial transformation of—the complex adaptive systems essential to human wellbeing in the 21st century. WICI aims to (i) pursue leading-edge research that significantly advances complexity science and its practical application to humanity's problems, (ii) create a vigorous university-wide research community in the field of complexity and innovation studies, (iii) link this community through research projects and exchange of knowledge with the global complexity-science community; and (iv) establish the University of Waterloo as a world leader in efforts to use complex-systems ideas to promote innovation to solve multi-scale, systems-level global problems.

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