

How is Coronavirus transforming our ways of working and how can we nurture the positives?

A Cartoonathon – Using humour to drive insights



On May 7th over 150 participants from more than 60 countries took part in a “cartoonathon” to explore transformation and change within our network.

Participants discussed how COVID-19 is shifting concepts of vulnerability and the type of organisation that can effectively address these changing risks. The Italian and Spanish Red Cross gave short presentations on how they have had to innovate and change their ways of working. In small groups, participants then together explored how we can continue to innovate and accelerate our transformation to ensure that we can rise to meet the challenges in the coming months and years.

Professional cartoon artists from [cartooncollections.com](https://www.cartooncollections.com) were listening to these conversations and simultaneously producing draft cartoons aimed at provoking discussion and insights, humorously reflecting experiences and learning.

Participants selected their favourite cartoons and used these as inspiration to explore the topics further, developing ideas that can help us to be innovative, agile and capable of transforming our work.

There were broadly three major areas of transformation that participants addressed in the Cartoonathon: (1) **Complexity and Chaos**, (2) **Rapid Digitalisation** and; (3) **Innovation and Agility**.

With feedback from participants, the artists turned their drafts into the final versions shared below.

1 Complexity and Chaos; The new normal?

Participants recognised an increasingly complex world with an array of interconnected challenges and of course ‘out of the blue’ events that force us to constantly shift, adapt and respond to new challenges. They saw this as the new normal and something we would have to get better at dealing with. For many this meant better systems approaches that acknowledged and tackled issues as connected and dynamic – that traditional vertical programming and funding were unfit. They also recognised this as a humanitarian system-wide problem, not just that of the RCRC.



No no, this money is only for that one problem, right there.

PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

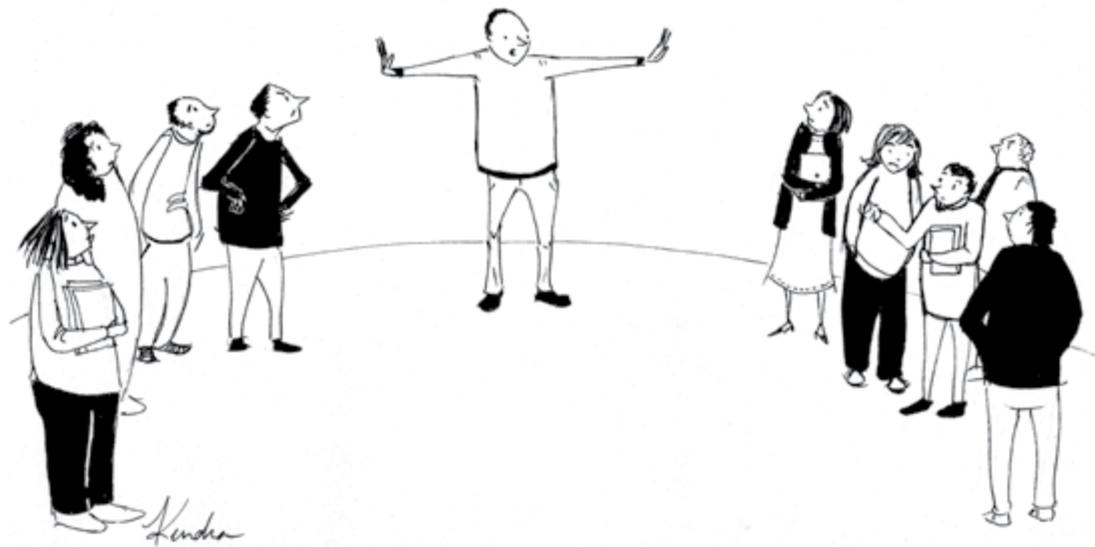
“Competing priorities, quantity above quality, lack of acknowledgement of interrelated vulnerabilities”

“We are receiving money only for 1 single issue but one problem is actually 9 problems!”

“With the current crisis, there is a need for Donors to be more flexible in how funds are used as new needs are arising every day”

“This captures the limited financial resources and capacity/shows how we have put all the other issues to one side but it all intersects! Extremely important, not only in Corona times.”

Participants also saw this as sometimes an issue of prioritisation;



Ok, you still have all the old problems, but we're adding new ones
and you can't touch.

PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

*"The old problems seem less important now...
how will we approach the old problems"*

*"We need to be good at letting go of our
old priorities, not just adding new ones"*

2 **Rapid Digitalisation, the ones and zeroes**

Digital transformation has been heralded by most National Societies for some time as an area that needed focus, but it has rapidly accelerated during COVID times. Many felt we had achieved more in a month than we would normally in years. But there are many concerns as well, in particular how to reach the most vulnerable and those with low connectivity. Many were also wondering if we can keep the advances we have made once COVID has slowed.



Believe it or not, this is now our best path forward.

PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

“Changing to this virtual world is the best path forward. In climate space, can we go back to flying around and having so many in person conferences now that we have seen how we can work this way”

“Everything right now is digital based, and we don’t feel so stable... but digitalization is the way.”

There was also concern about those that are left behind in the digital world;



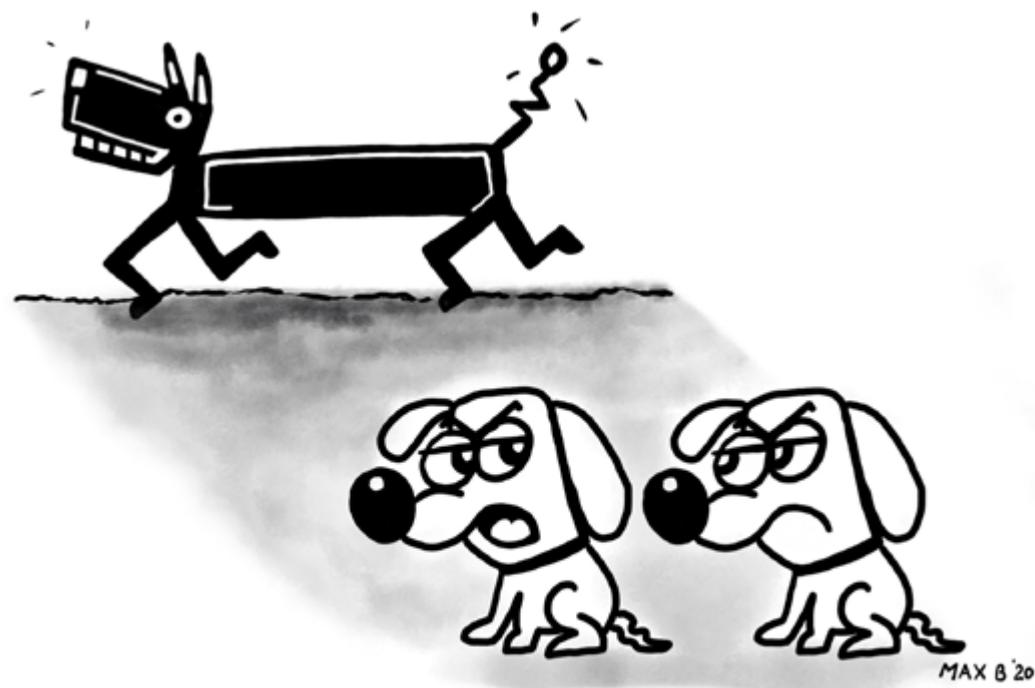
PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

“What to do with those who cannot take the step into the digital world, how to close the digital divide, but also recognizing that it wasn’t that everybody was included in the old ways of working either”

“Will COVID-19 and the ‘new normal’ increase inequalities? Or might it also take away limitations”

“(Digital) is definitely the way forward and we just need to get all our Branches and Volunteers to this point so we can all evolve together

There was a recognition from participants that not everyone was coping well with the sudden pace of change to a digital environment;



- I was not expecting automation
for another 10 years...

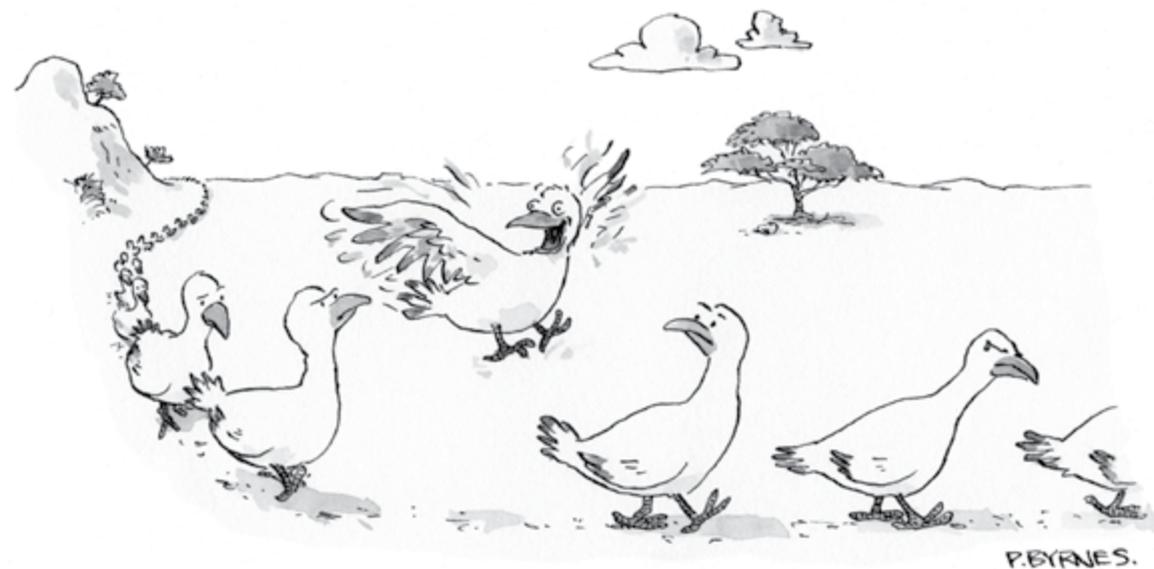
PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

"Young people are (adapting quickly) sharing more on social media etc – but the traditional systems of organizations are not keeping up"

"We need to be sensitive to the effects certain innovation and adaptation for the crisis will have on persons and agencies which may be replaced and marginalised in the aftermath... this may lead to loss of income, food and accommodation insecurity and increased vulnerability"

3 **The trials of Innovation and agility**

Innovation has always occurred throughout the network. However, it is often on the margins or confined to experiments, but its pathway to the centre of the organisation is much slower and much more challenging. The COVID pandemic has rapidly thrust the need to innovate. Along with it the leadership, decision-making, processes and culture needed to enable and help it move quickly through the organisation. This inspired considerable reflection from the participants, as there have been mixed responses to this.



"HEY! HAVE ANY OF YOU GUYS EVER TRIED THIS?"

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"The current crisis has created new ways of doing things, has encouraged agencies to innovate, think outside the box and explore new possibilities. I hope we shall not lose these new and helpful benefits when the crisis is over"

"People do what they know, not just in crises, but in general, but there's a need to break out from the norm!"

"Use swarm brilliance! Listen to new partners and incorporate their knowledge. Think outside the box"

Some felt that the changes were coming so quickly and from so many different areas that it was hard to keep on top of it and to be coordinated;



"IT'S GENIUS. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO CALL IT?"

PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

"we're using new methods to reach new frontiers and it's all very confusing for us. How to manage to visualize and be aware of all the change that is happening"

"we as a movement could do more to work together to align our innovative approaches"

Other participants worried that innovation was still working inside the same silos and systems that created the challenges in the first place;



"LET'S PUT PEOPLE BREAKING DOWN SILOS IN THIS BUCKET,
AND PEOPLE THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN THIS ONE."

PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

"We think we are thinking out of the box yet we often remain thinking along our silo"

"Easier to spend time classifying things rather than trying to understand the ideas. We spend a lot of time discussing and classifying and not a lot of time doing!"

Many in the cartoonathon referred to our current situation as 'the new normal'. But recognised that not everyone was comfortable with that;



PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

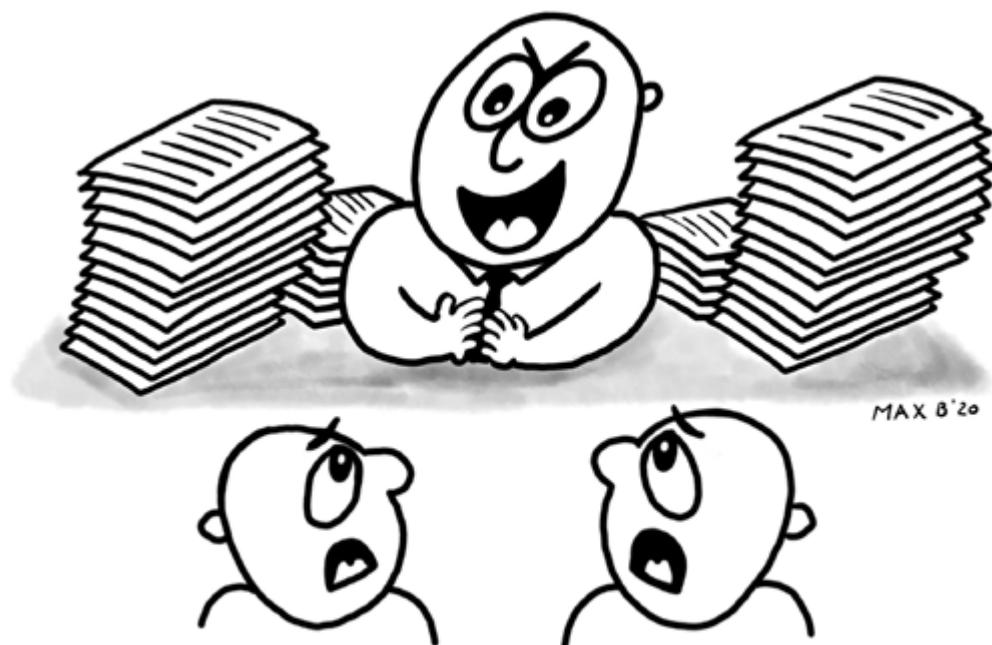
"What is the new normal? I think we really need to invest time and energy in understanding what we want to keep in the future."

"It shows a very popular reluctance to go to the new normal. How can we inspire people that don't like change"

"We should consider living with COVID-19 as the new normal? But we should consider whether the previous normal was actually "normal"? Because that normal brought us to where we are today."

"Science fiction movies now look boring, real life is so much more unpredictable"

Finally, and perhaps most commonly expressed was the concern that our gains in transformation of our organisation would be lost once this was all over;



- Now that the crisis is over, we can go back to our usual inefficiencies.

PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

"We must use internal reflection regularly, even if covid is still around for a good while. The innovative, other ways of thinking, need to become a new reflex way of working."

"Hilarious. Education or organizational learning can completely change – this is highlighting that. Fear of innovation dominates. There is a risk of falling back into business as usual. We need to accept the new normal"

"People still want to plan for when we go 'back' – they don't dare to be bold"

Participants were also invited to share their feedback on this event, addressing both the substance and the intensely interactive process.

PARTICIPANT QUOTES:

“The cartoons being drawn should educate inform and entertain, thank you, visual communication is very effective.”

“Totally enjoyed today’s session – knowing what the Italian and Spanish RCs are doing and how they’re going about it, chatting with new people, consolidating ideas, and having them all illustrated in a single drawing... fantastic!”

“It’s a good format to get us thinking. 90 mins went by fast, and have left us with food for thought. No not food, cartoons!”

“I was expecting to get a lot of positivity about the things we will keep as we transition into “new normal” but am pleasantly surprised to clearly see through these images how our structures and beliefs in the Movement stand in our own way when trying to be of service in the world’s new normal. It’s a roadmap of the blockages we need to remove.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This cartoonathon was hosted by the IFRC Solferino Academy, designed and facilitated by the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, with support from EIT Climate-KIC.



Paul M. Bisca

Paul M. Bisca is a cartoonist who also works with the **World Bank** and who uses cartoons to reflect on his experience of bureaucracy in international development.

Rebeka Ryvola

Rebeka Ryvola is a creative strategist/facilitator, and artist who works with the **Climate centre Academy**. She has done creative work with the **United Nations**, the **World Bank** and **Black Lives Matter**.

Pat Byrnes

Pat Byrnes is an American cartoonist best known for his work for **The New Yorker**. He created the comic strip **Monkeyhouse**, which ran for three years and received the National Cartoonists Society Advertising and Illustration Award.

Kendra Allenby

Kendra Allenby is a New Yorker Cartoonist and graphic facilitator based in NYC. She teaches travel drawing and generally uses cartoons to make sense of the world.

Feggo

Feggo is an award-winning artist, illustrator, cartoonist and animator from Mexico whose work has been published in the **New York Times**, **Mad Comics** and **The New Yorker**.

Andrea Arroyo

Andrea Arroyo is a Mexican-born, New York-based artist working in a variety of media. Her artwork has been published extensively including in **The New Yorker**, **The New York Times**, **The Nation**, **The Manhattan Times** and **The International Herald Tribune**.



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