

Dealing with the uncertainties of climate engineering: Warnings from a psychological complex problem solving perspective

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Abstract

Decision-makers in the context of climate politics are confronted with considerable uncertainties due to the complexities inherent in the relevant natural and social systems. Nonetheless, pressure on decision-makers to find solutions to dangerous climate change is rising due to the inertia in the climate system. Considering these pressures, technological options (climate engineering) have been proposed to counteract the effects of climatic change. However, introducing options that bear their own scientific uncertainties means further adding to the complexity of the situation. By adopting the psychological perspective of complex problem solving research, we analyze one frequently neglected source of uncertainty with regard to climate engineering: errors of the political problem-solver in his interaction with the situational demands of complex problems. More specifically, we examine the psychological sources for human error that are common in dealing with the uncertainties implied in this type of problem. We will conclude from the complex problem solving perspective that a consideration of climate engineering in the context of climate change can provide a dangerous illusion of controllability.

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