

Tackling Wicked Problems: The Case for Facilitative Leadership

Martín Carcasson

*Director of the Center for Public Deliberation
Professor, Department of Communication Studies*

**CSU Center for
Public Deliberation**

*Dedicated to enhancing local democracy through improved public
communication and community problem solving*

EMAIL: cpd@colostate.edu

CPD website: cpd.colostate.edu

CPD Projects, 2006-2016

- Civic mission of schools
- Grade configuration of Poudre School District schools
- Statewide dropout rate
- Colorado Health Care Reform
- Student housing
- Improving higher education
- Childhood obesity
- Bicycle safety
- Diversity Dialogues at CSU Diversity Conference
- STEM education in K-12
- Arts Engagement Summit
- UniverCity Connections (CSU/Old Town collaborative project)
- School budgeting issues/school closures
- Medical Marijuana
- Regional visioning process
- Water and growth issues
- Poverty in Larimer County
- PSD Student Think Tank facilitator group
- K-12 school improvement
- Improving higher education through student-faculty reciprocity
- Politics of food
- Issues surrounding aging
- Early childhood education
- On campus stadium proposal
- Senior transportation
- Campus smoking
- School safety
- Bullying
- Mental health
- Nature in the City
- Larimer County Landfill/Wasteshed
- Diversity and Inclusion in Fort Collins
- CSU Innovation and Economic Prosperity
- CSU parking and affordable housing



Which statements describe your view of the quality of public discussion and debate?
(choose up to three)

- 0 1. High-quality, well-informed
- 0 2. Mean-spirited
- 0 3. Polarized
- 0 4. Involves a broad range of voices
- 0 5. Simplistic, uninformed
- 0 6. Dominated by a few loud voices
- 0 7. Dominated by experts
- 0 8. Robust
- 0 9. Weak/limited, people are apathetic
- 0 10. (press 0) Productive

Three key questions regarding 21st Century public engagement

What is the nature of the problems we are facing in our communities?

What kind of communication or engagement processes help us address those problems?

How can we best build community capacity to support those processes?

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The Nature of Problems in the 21st Century: Tame v. Wicked Problems

Tame problems are problems that are essentially **technical** in nature and can be **solved by experts** through **scientific means**. They can be divided into **manageable** parts, and efforts to solve them are primarily judged in terms of **efficiency**. (Rittel & Webber, 1973)

The Nature of Problems in the 21st Century: Tame v. Wicked

- Wicked problems inherently involve competing underlying values, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that cannot be resolved by science.

Water in Northern Colorado as a Wicked Problem

Some things we care about:

Healthy river with
healthy ecosystems

Recreational
opportunities

Economic vitality

Water for homes &
lawns

Open space and
wildlife habitat

Low cost of living

Water for local
farms

Local food
economy

Freedom of choice
of where to live



We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

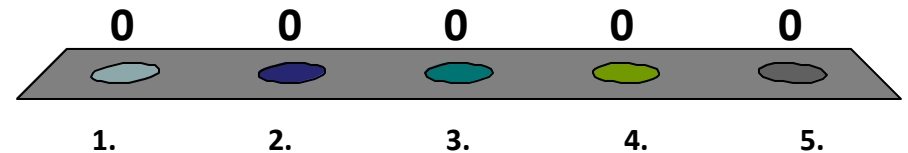
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to form a more perfect Union, establish
Justice, insure **domestic Tranquility**,
provide for the **common defense**, promote
the **general Welfare**, and secure the
Blessings of **Liberty** to ourselves and our
Posterity, do ordain and establish this
Constitution for the United States of America.

Key American Values

| Preamble | Current Phrasing |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Justice | Justice |
| Domestic Tranquility/ Common defense | Security/Safety |
| General Welfare | Equality |
| Liberty to ourselves | Freedom (for us) |
| Liberty for our posterity | Freedom (for future generations) |

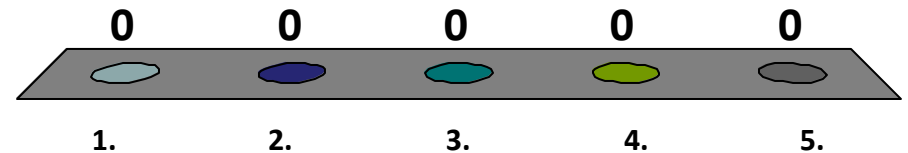
Which is most important to you? (choose only one)

1. Justice
2. Security/safety
3. Equality
4. Freedom (for us)
5. Freedom (future generations)



Which is least important to you? (choose only one)

1. Justice
2. Security/safety
3. Equality
4. Freedom (for us)
5. Freedom (future generations)



Inherent Democratic Tensions

- Freedom v. Equality
- Our Freedom v. Freedom of Future generations
- Freedom v. Security
- Justice is a tension within itself (justice as the ideal between too much and too little credit or punishment)

Some others

- Individual v. community
- Short term v. long term
- Unity v. diversity
- Top down v. bottom up
- Cooperation v. competition
- Flexibility/Innovation v. Consistency/Tradition
- Best use of resources (money, time, people)

FOOD AS A WICKED PROBLEM

WE WANT OUR FOOD TO BE:

Inexpensive

Fresh

Nutritious

Safe

Long lasting

Delicious

Convenient
(Accessible, Easy to prepare)

Ethically grown
(labor/animal welfare)

Our choice

Supportive of a
local economy

Supportive of a
agriculture
community

Grown and
delivered in a
environmentally
responsible manner

Supportive of
efforts to reduce
hunger locally and
globally



HEALTH CARE AS A WICKED PROBLEM



High Quality

Accessible

Low cost

Capitalism as a wicked problem

- The “Triple Bottom Line” of
 - Profit (economics, also tied to jobs and taxes)
 - People (social justice, equality, fairness)
 - Planet (environment)





Parking at CSU as a Wicked Problem

Some things we care about:

Low cost

Fairness

Safety

Work productivity

Flexibility

**Aesthetics/
Campus beauty**

**Convenience/
Low time cost**

**Low community impact/
Good neighbors**

Employee morale

Environment

Consistency/Ease of use

Works for staff

Works for faculty

Works for visitors

Works for students

**Works for working
parents**

Works for commuters

Competing values in improving student success

Quality/High expectations

Affordability/Access

Efficiency

Individualized Instruction

Consistency/Stability

Flexibility/Innovation

Fairness/Equality

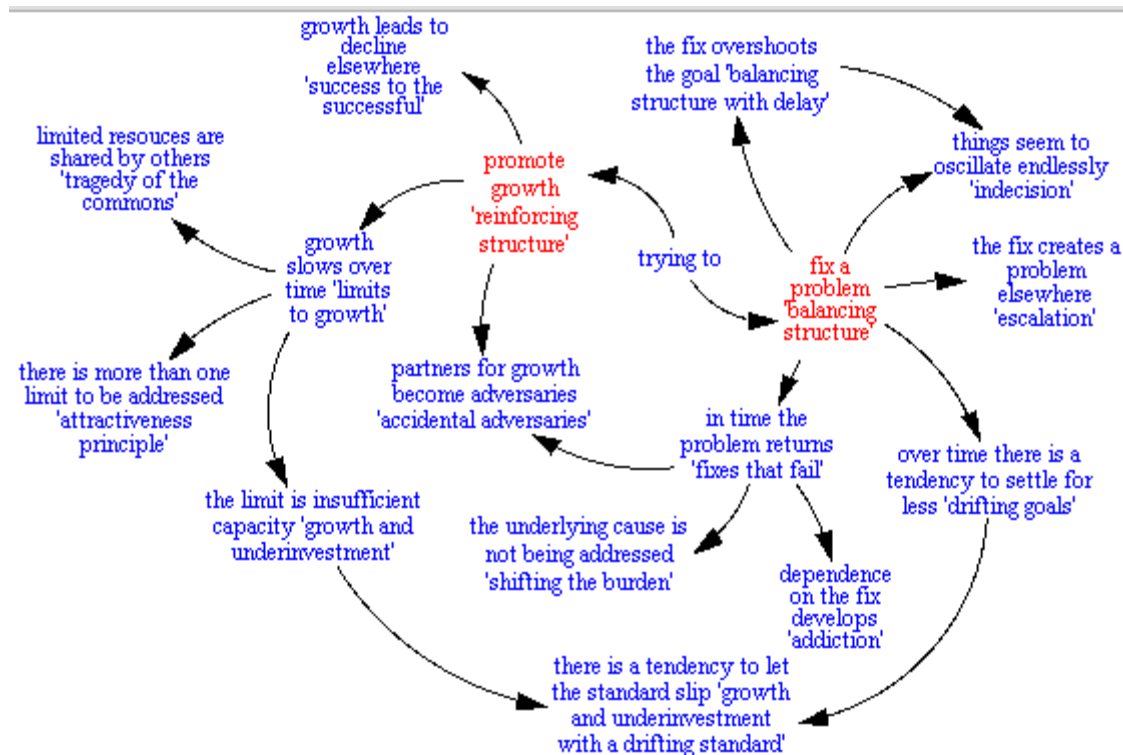
Completion / Graduation

Focus on the Whole Child

Focus on Basics (Math, Science, Reading, Writing)

The Nature of Problems in the 21st Century: Tame v. Wicked

- Wicked problems inherently involve **competing underlying values**, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that cannot be resolved by science.
- Wicked problems are **not solvable**, because any proposed solution to a wicked problem **tends to create new problems**. Wicked problems are **systemic and interconnected**.



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- Optimal solutions to wicked problems often **require adaptive changes** rather than technical ones. Multiple stakeholders must be a part of any solutions.



Actions to address wicked problems come from multiple levels



The Nature of Problems in the 21st Century: Tame v. Wicked

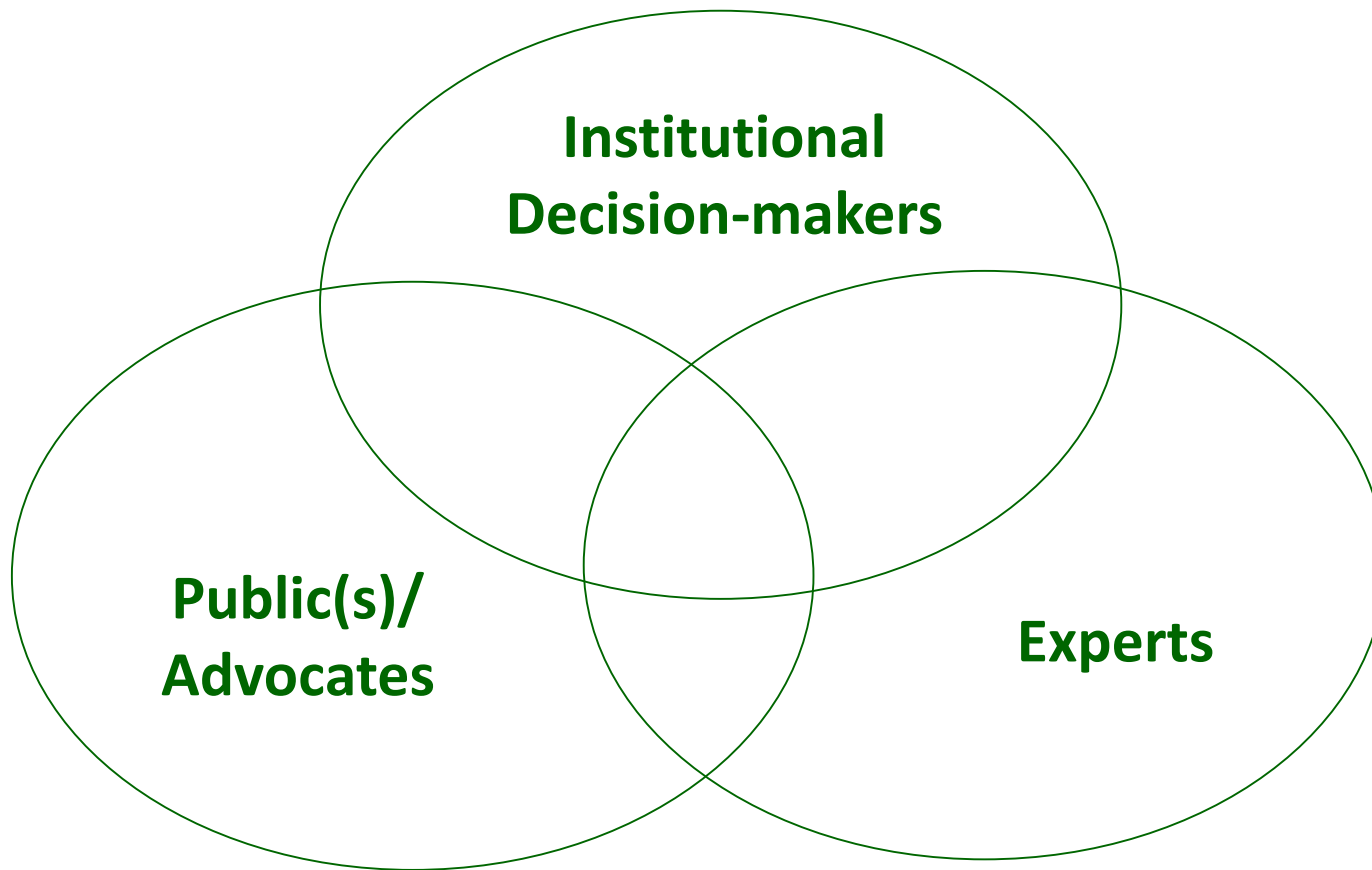
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- Addressing wicked problems thus necessitates **effective collaboration** and **communication** across multiple perspectives.



Not



Democratic Communication



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- Optimal solutions to wicked problems often require **adaptive changes** rather than technical ones. The public must be a part of any solution.
- Addressing wicked problems thus necessitates **effective collaboration** and **communication** across multiple perspectives.
- Wicked problems often require **creativity, innovation, and imagination**. They can't be adequately addressed through the accumulation and application of knowledge, but call for the **ongoing process** that relies on collective **wisdom** and the application of sound **judgment**.



Three key questions regarding 21st Century public engagement

What is the nature of the problems we are facing in our communities?

**What kind of communication or engagement processes help to address those problems?
(not solve)**

How can we best build community capacity to support those processes?

Three Primary Models of Public Communication about Problems

- **Adversarial** (competitive, pro/con, activists, campaigns, interests groups, mobilizations, elections, votes, coalitions, etc.)
- **Expert** (experts, data focused, research, facts, technical solutions, bureaucracy, etc.)
- **Deliberative** (cooperative, participatory, collaborative, public participation, conflict resolution and transformation, mediation, community focused, civic participation, etc.)



Drawbacks of Overly-Adversarial Processes

- Often focuses on “winning” vs. solving problems
- Zero-sum game incentivizes “bad” communication, strategic research, and problematizes implementation
- Often focuses on blaming (them) vs. taking accountability (us)
- Relies on narrow value frames (thus avoids tensions)
- Plays into flaws of human nature
- Attracts/privileges organized, entrenched voices
- Negative side effects like polarization, cynicism, and apathy (which then cause even worse communication)
- Assumes a narrow role for citizens (citizens as voters, consumers, or spectators)



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BRAIN HAPPY
WHY YOU SHOULD
DO THE OPPOSITE



DAVID DISALANO
FOREWORD BY WRAY HERBERT

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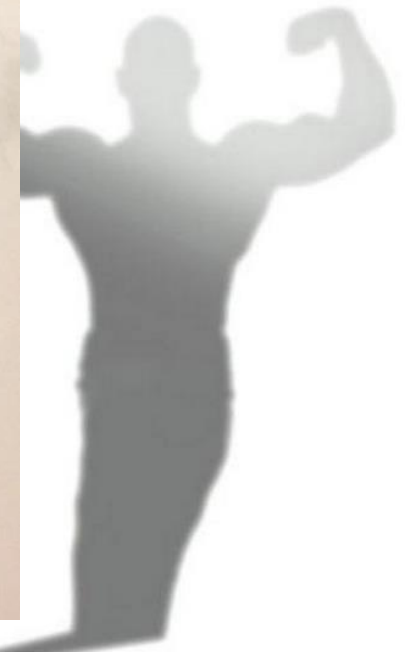
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I'm
Right
and
You're
an
Idiot

THE TOXIC STATE
OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE
AND HOW TO CLEAN IT UP

James Hoggan
with Grania Litwin

TE

IND
S OWN



What Are We Learning from Brain Science?

The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative



What We Are Learning from Brain Science

The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

We strongly prefer to gather with the like minded

We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views

What We Are Learning from Brain Science

Stages of motivated reasoning

What and who we expose ourselves to

selective exposure /echo chambers

How we interpret new evidence

confirmation bias

How we make attributions and tell stories

egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias

How we make decisions

heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof

What we remember

availability bias

How we interpret new evidence?

“when we want to believe something, we ask ourselves, ‘Can I believe it?’ Then...we search for supporting evidence, and if we find even a single piece of pseudo-evidence, we can stop thinking.... In contrast, when we don’t want to believe something, we ask ourselves, ‘Must I believe it?’ Then we search for contrary evidence, and if we find a single reason to doubt the claim, we can dismiss it“

Jonathan Haidt and Tom Gilovich

What We Are Learning from Brain Science

Stages of motivated reasoning

What and who we expose ourselves to

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How we interpret new evidence

confirmation bias

How we make attributions and tell stories

egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias

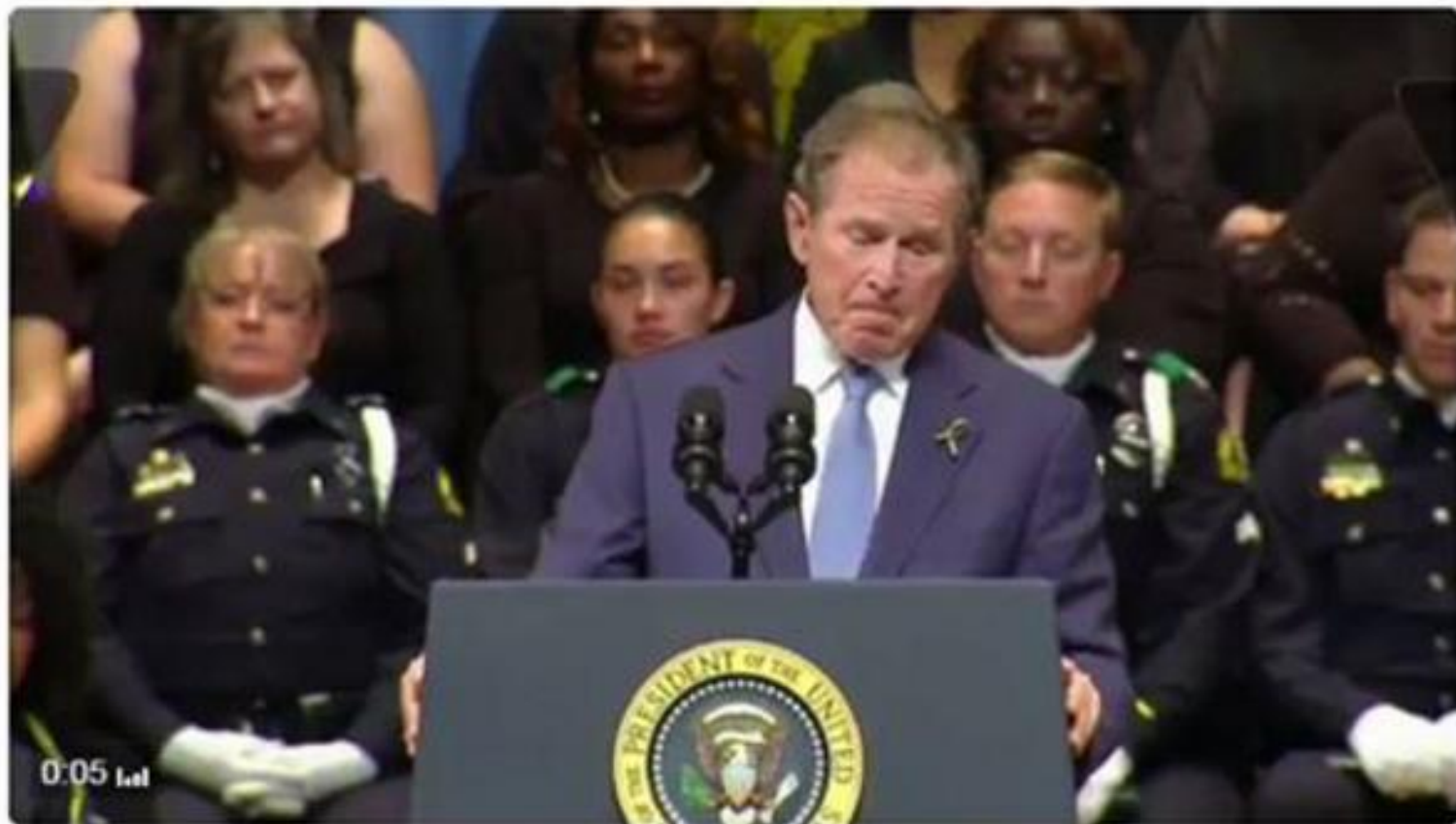
How we make decisions

heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof

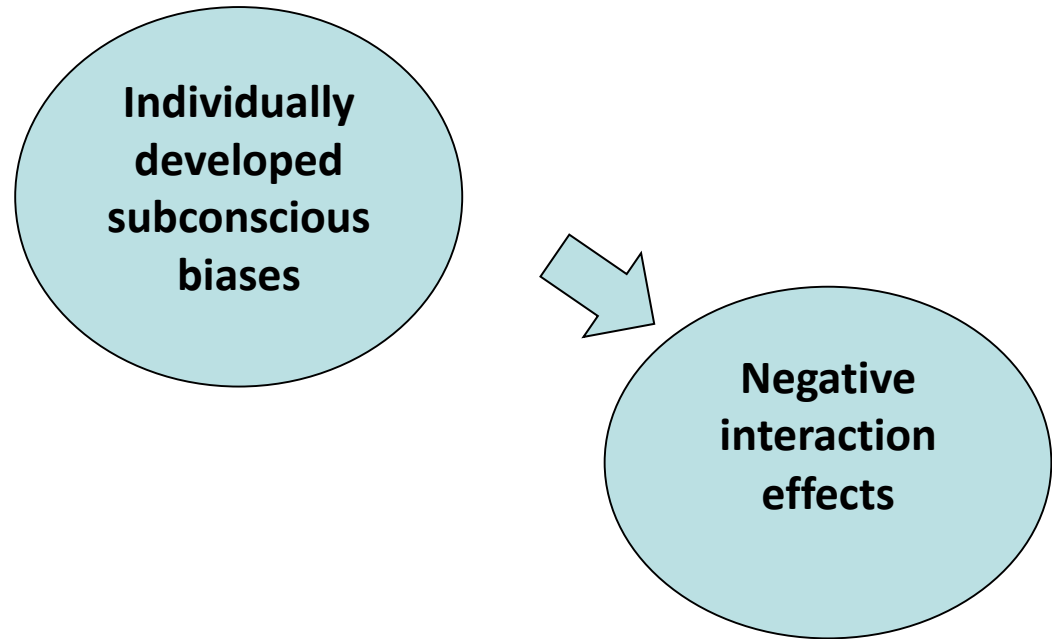
What we remember

availability bias

Bush: 'Too often we judge other groups by their worst examples, while judging ourselves by our best intentions'



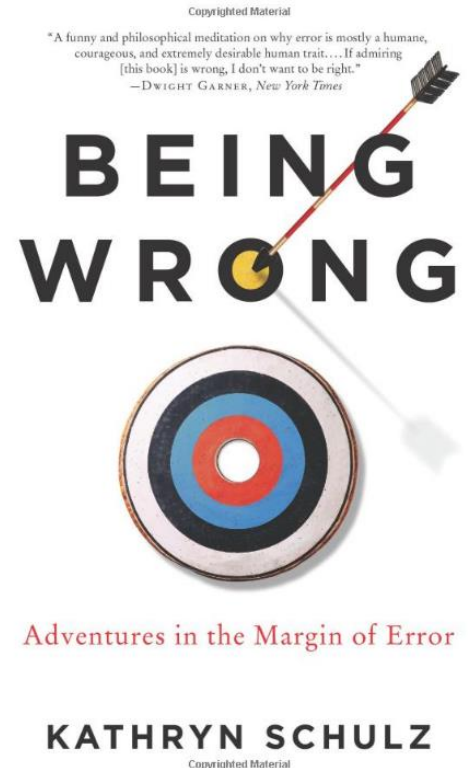
The Vicious Cycle of False Polarization



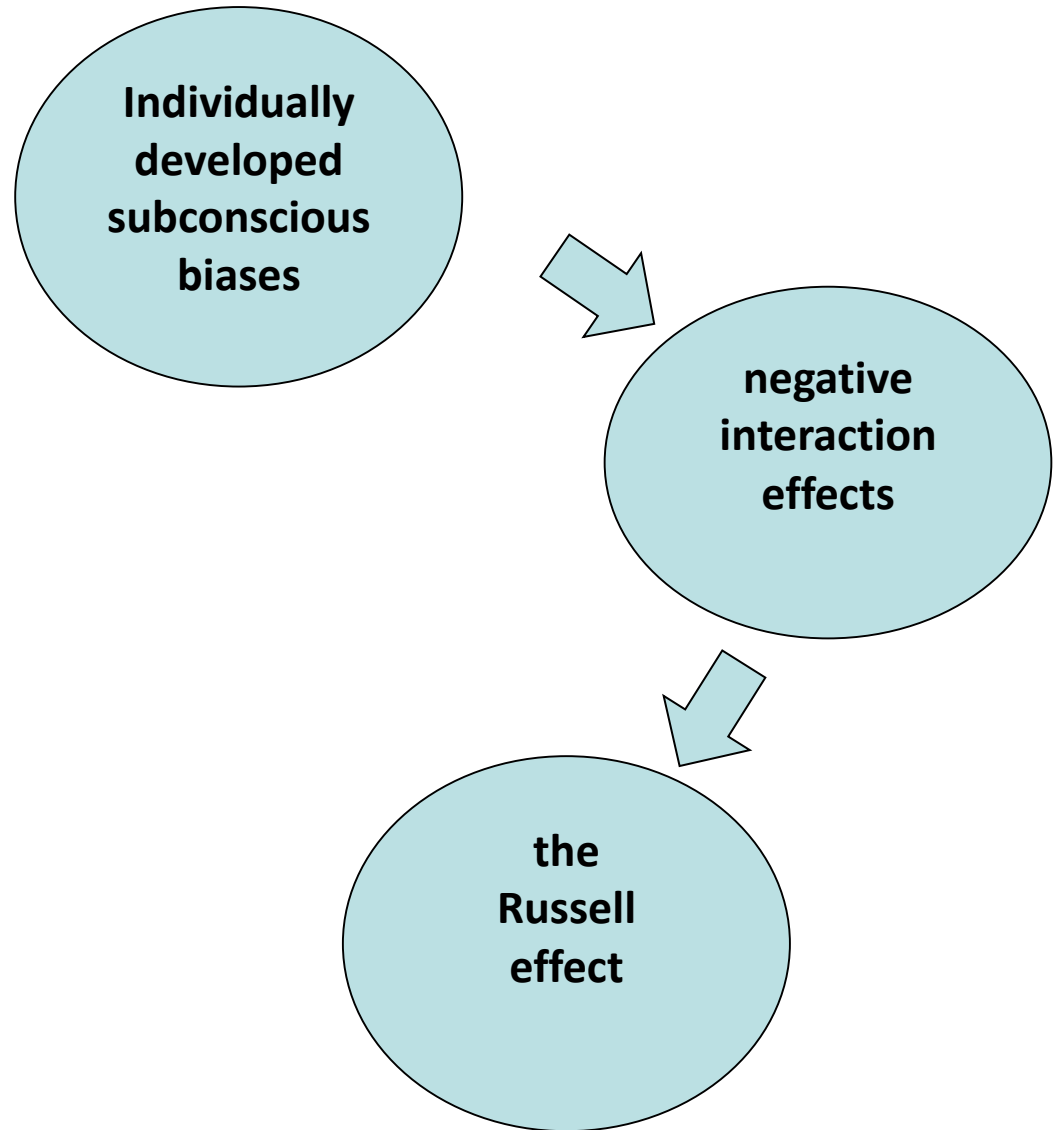
Negative Interaction Effects (i.e. Bad Process)

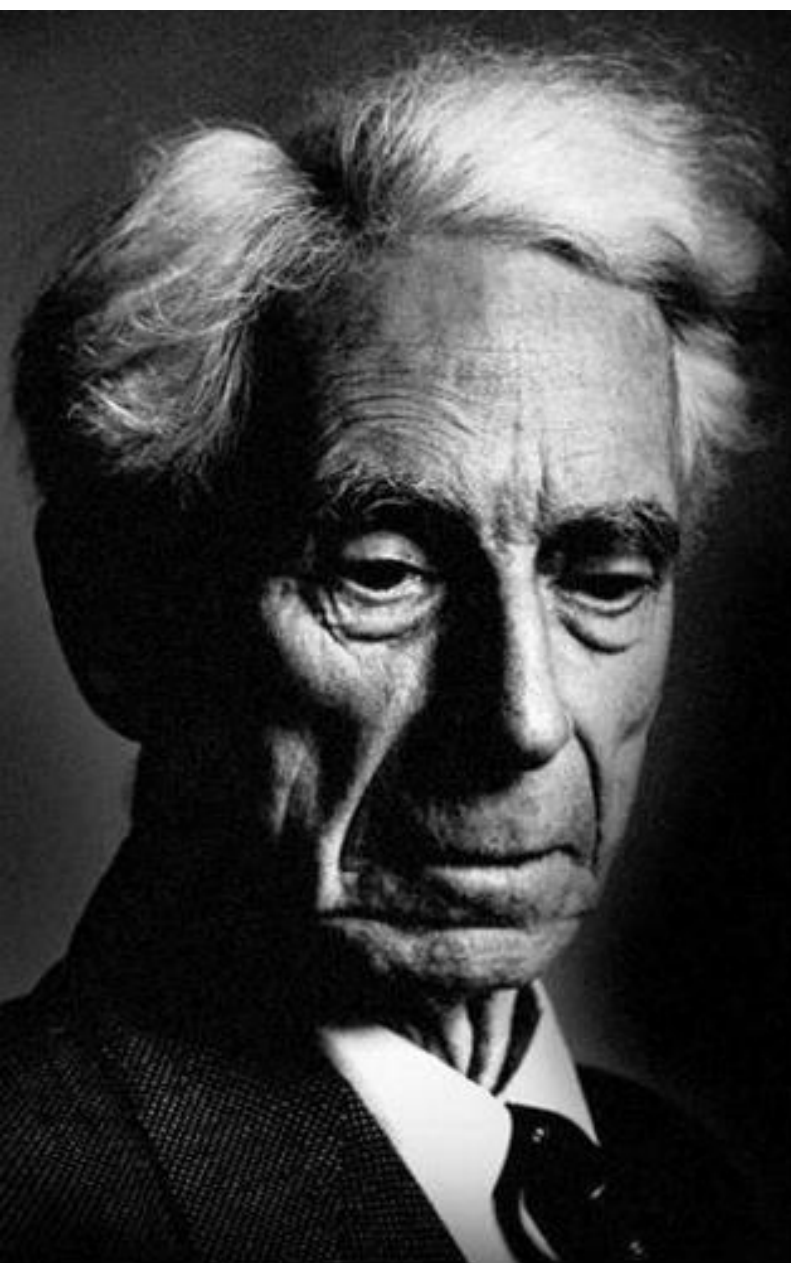
Kathryn Shultz – *On Being Wrong*

- First step: Ignorance assumption
- Second step: Idiot assumption
- Third Step: Evil assumption



The Vicious Cycle of False Polarization

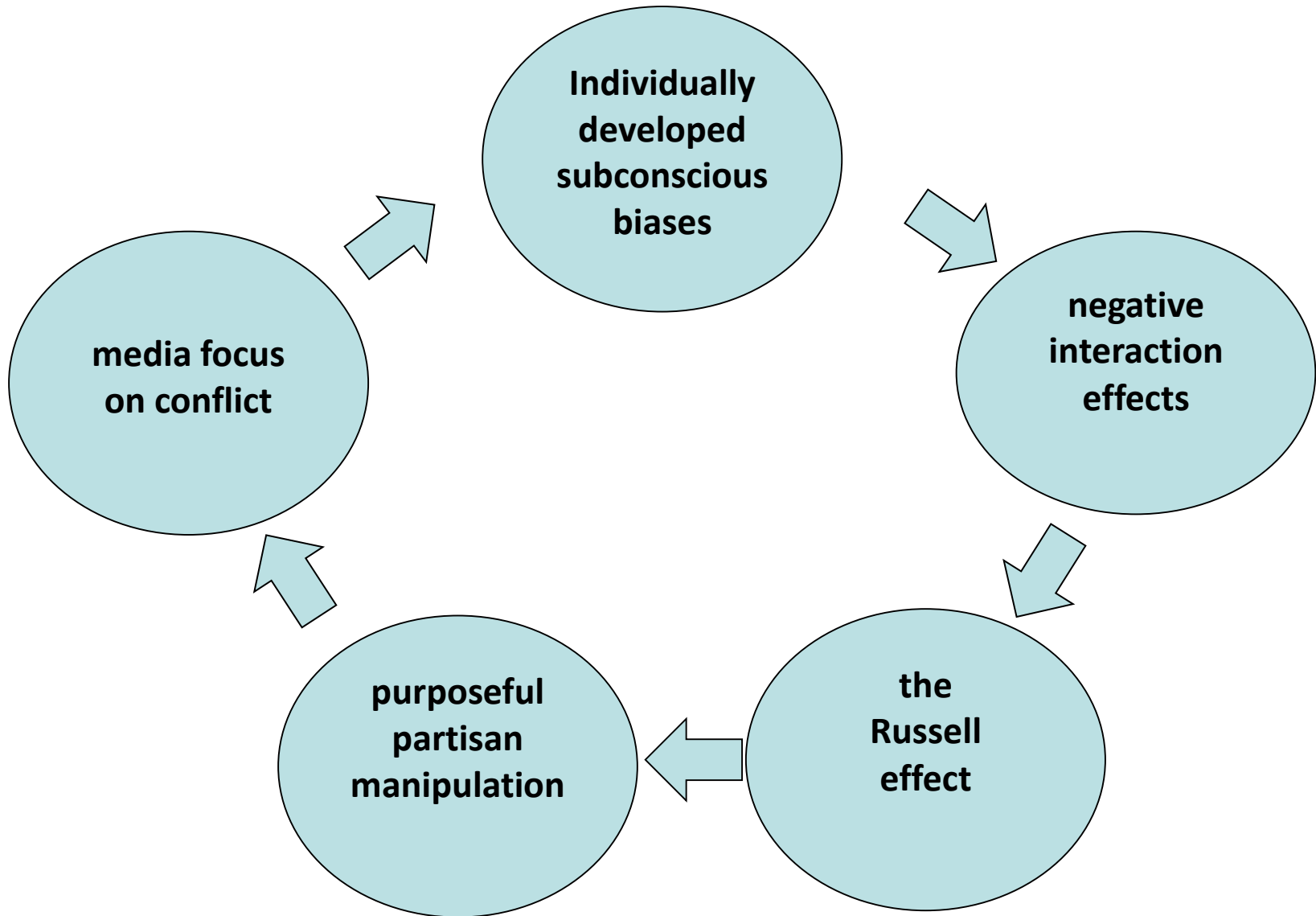




The whole problem with the world is that fools
and fanatics are always so certain of themselves,
and wiser people so full of doubts.

-Bertrand Russell

The Vicious Cycle of False Polarization



What We Are Learning from Brain Science

The Problematic

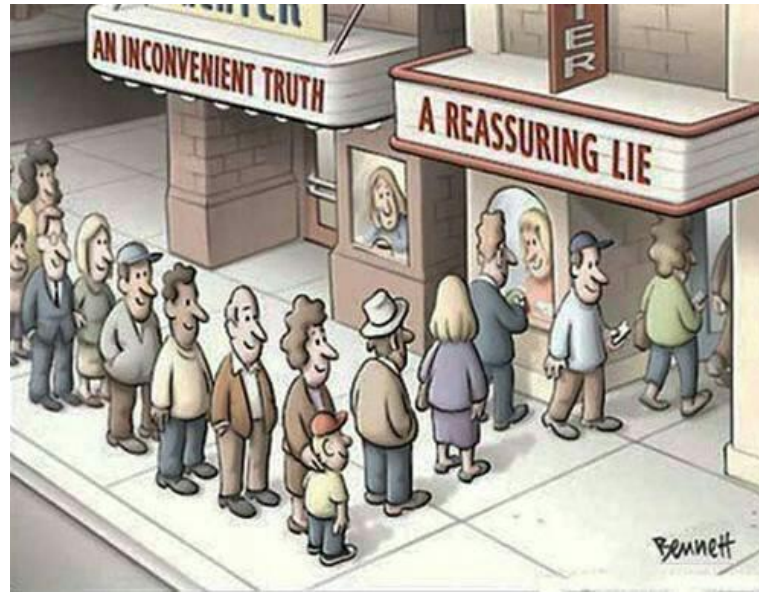
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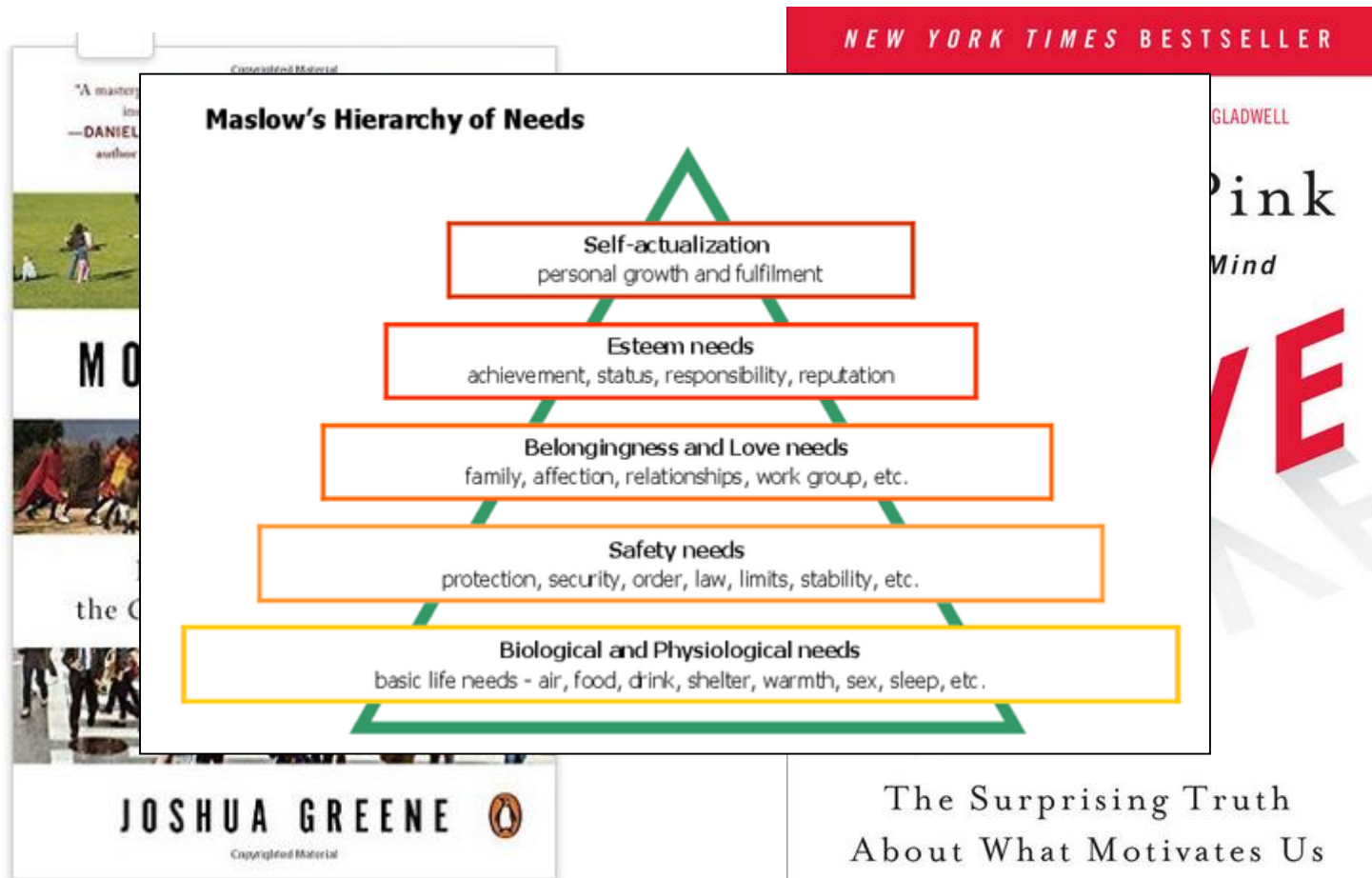
We avoid values, tensions, and tough choices



What We Are Learning from Brain Science

The Good

We are inherently social and seek purpose and community



What We Are Learning from Brain Science

The Good

We are inherently social and seek purpose and community

We are inherently empathetic

What We Are Learning from Brain Science

The Good

We are inherently social and seek purpose and community

We are inherently empathetic

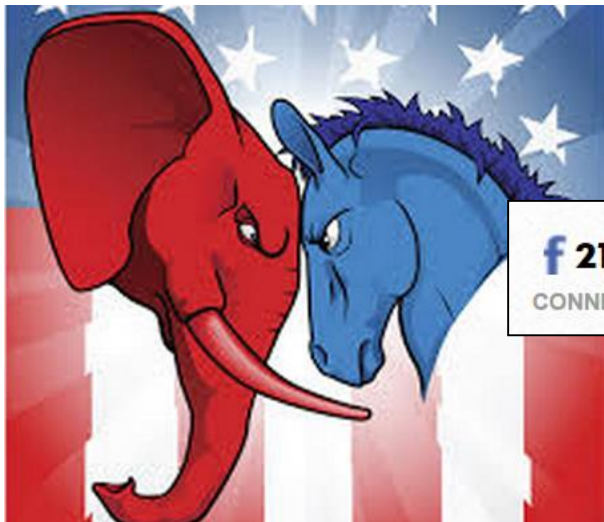
We are inherently pragmatic and creative

We can overcome our bad tendencies and build better habits



The Problem We Face

Most of our processes for public engagement and community problem solving primarily activate the negative aspects of human nature, and rarely tap into or nurture the positive.



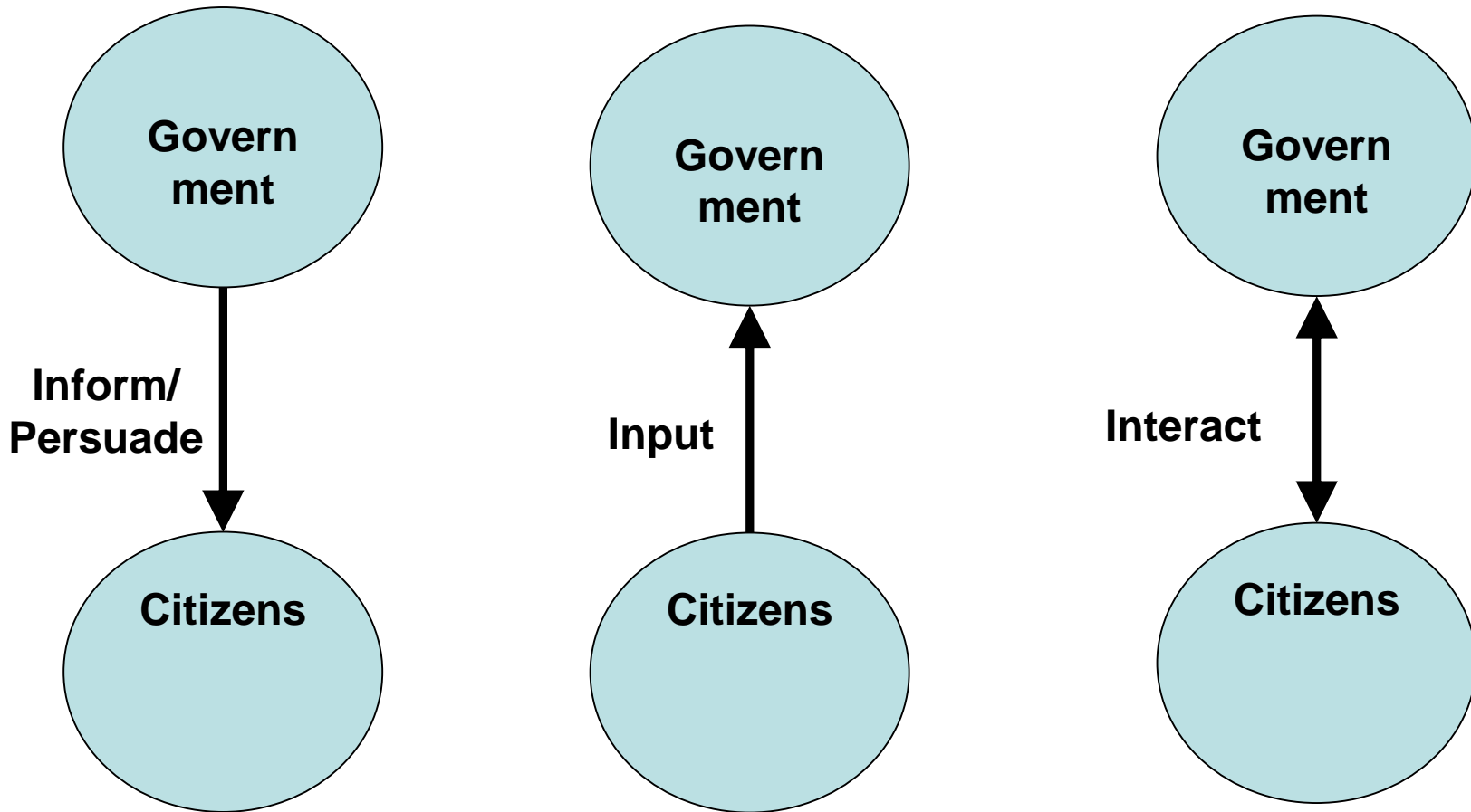
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|---|--|---|--|
|  212 CONNECT |  TWEET |  LINKEDIN |  28 COMMENT |
|---|--|---|--|



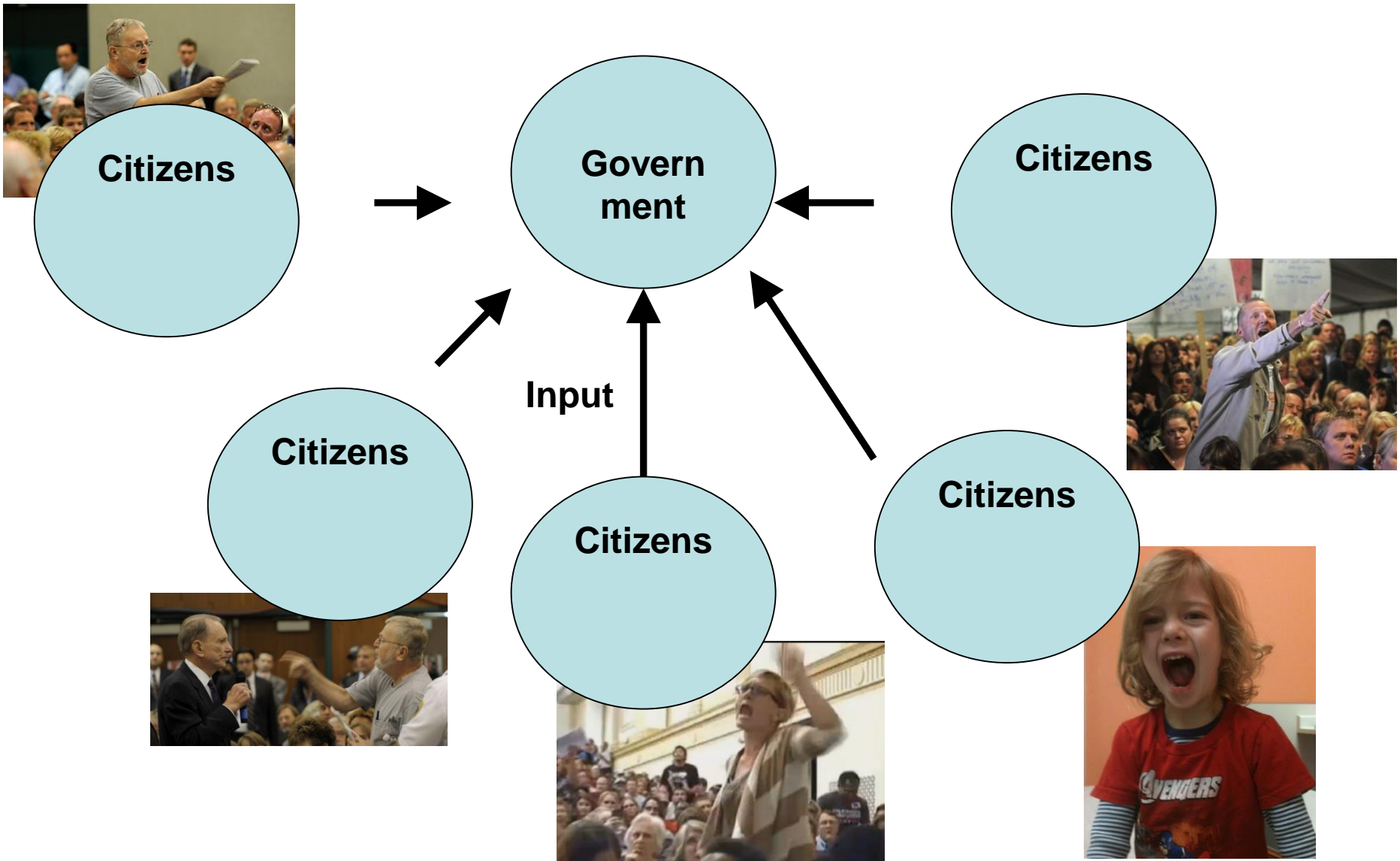
Consider our Typical Public Processes

- *Our two-party system*
- *Campaigns, referenda, and elections*
- *Think tanks*
- *The media*
- *Interest groups and lobbyists*
- *Congressional deliberations and legislative debate*
- *Social media political engagement*
- *Public comment and public hearings*
- *Political debates*
- *Expert panels*
- *Letters to the editors and emails to policymakers*

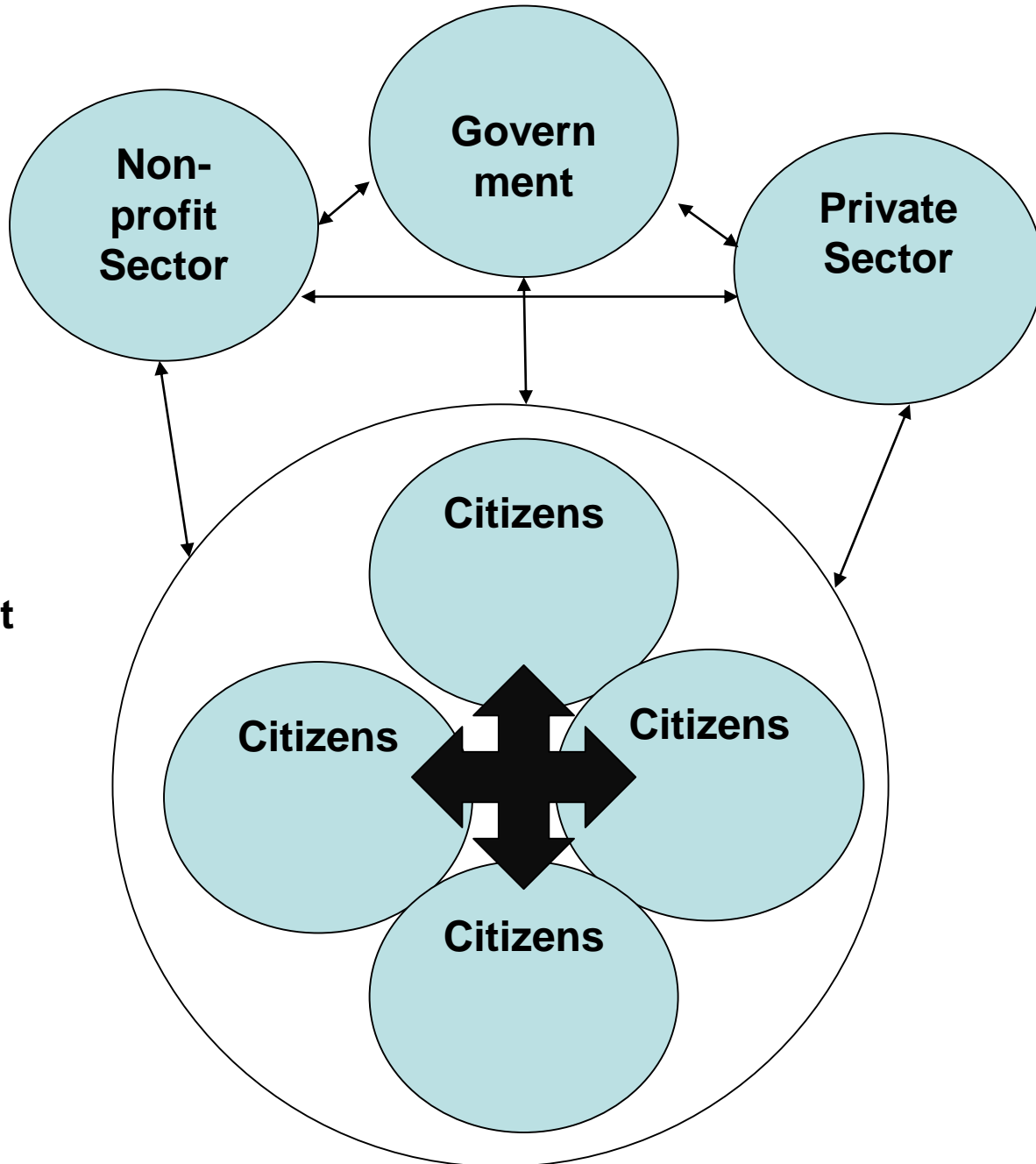
Traditional Forms of Public Participation



Traditional Forms of Public Participation

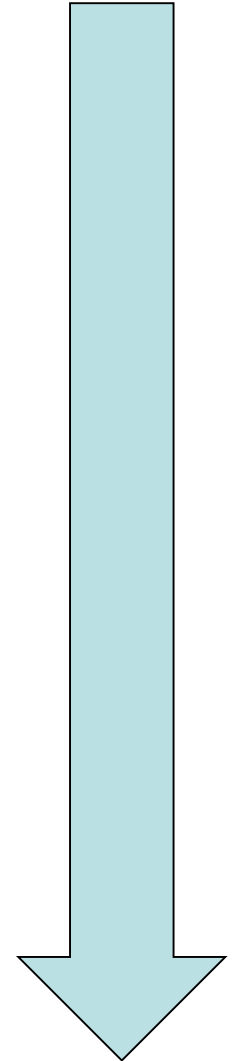


**Deliberative
Engagement**



What we need public process to do

- Provide opportunities for **voice** and public input
- Support **listening** and genuine **interaction**
- Build mutual **understanding** and development of **respect**
- Help **differentiate** good and weak arguments
- Spark **collaborative learning** and the refinement (not just expression) of opinion
- Build capacity for **collaborative action** and co-creation



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Drawbacks of Expert-Dominated Processes

- Experts by definition are focused on a specific, narrow aspect of the problem (struggle with systemic issues).
- Experts often focus on being “value free” (they tell us what *is* or what *could* be, not what *should* be)
- Expert perspectives can overemphasize what can be measured and underemphasize what cannot
- Wicked problems can be informed, but not solved by data
- Good data is undermined in a polarized environment
- Facts don’t change minds or behavior
- Expert dominated processes shut out the public



The Bottom Line

- We face serious problems
- Many do not have technical solutions
- They involve paradoxes and competing values that will require tough choices
- Facing them calls for tough conversations, productive collaboration, innovation, and coordinated action across perspectives and many areas of society
- Current communication and problem-solving processes are inadequate and often counter-productive....**and we know about much better ways to make tough decisions**

What is Deliberative Engagement?

Deliberative democracy
Community problem-solving
Collaborative problem-solving
Participatory decision-making
Slow democracy
Strong democracy
Multi-stakeholder dispute resolution
Public participation
Democratic governance
Collaborative governance
Organic or community politics
Consensus building or seeking processes
Organic politics

What is Deliberative Engagement?

Deliberation is an approach to public engagement and collaborative problem solving in which **citizens**, not just experts or politicians, are deeply involved in public decision making.

Often working with facilitators or process experts who utilize a variety of deliberative techniques, citizens **come together** and **consider relevant facts and values** from **multiple points of view**;
listen to one another in order to think critically about the various options before them;
consider the underlying tensions, **tough choices**, and varied **consequences** inherent to addressing public problems;
are willing to **refine and adapt their opinions and interests**;
and ultimately seek to come to some conclusion for **collaborative action** based on a **reasoned public judgment**.

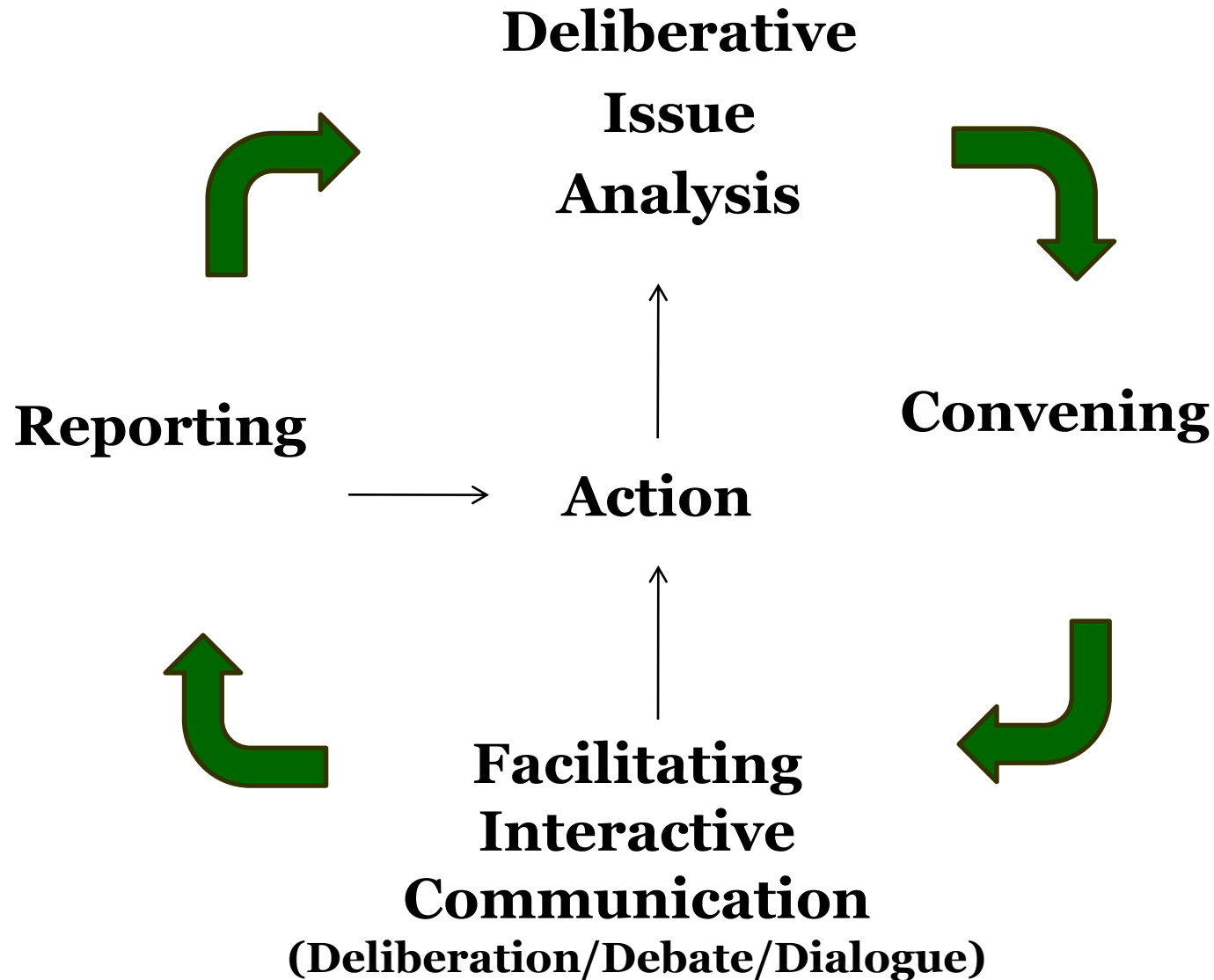


Key Components of Deliberative Engagement

- Overall deliberative framing
 - Wicked problem, multiple approaches, broad range of actors
- Discussion guides/backgrounder
 - Base of information, something to react to
- Safe places to gather
- Small, diverse, representative groups
- Deliberative facilitators
- Time (to talk, but also for results to matter)
- Connection with institutional decision-makers/resources



The Cycle of Deliberative Inquiry



(Carcasson & Sprain, 2015)



Resource Guide on Public Engagement

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation

http://www.ncdd.org/files/NCDD2010_Resource_Guide.pdf

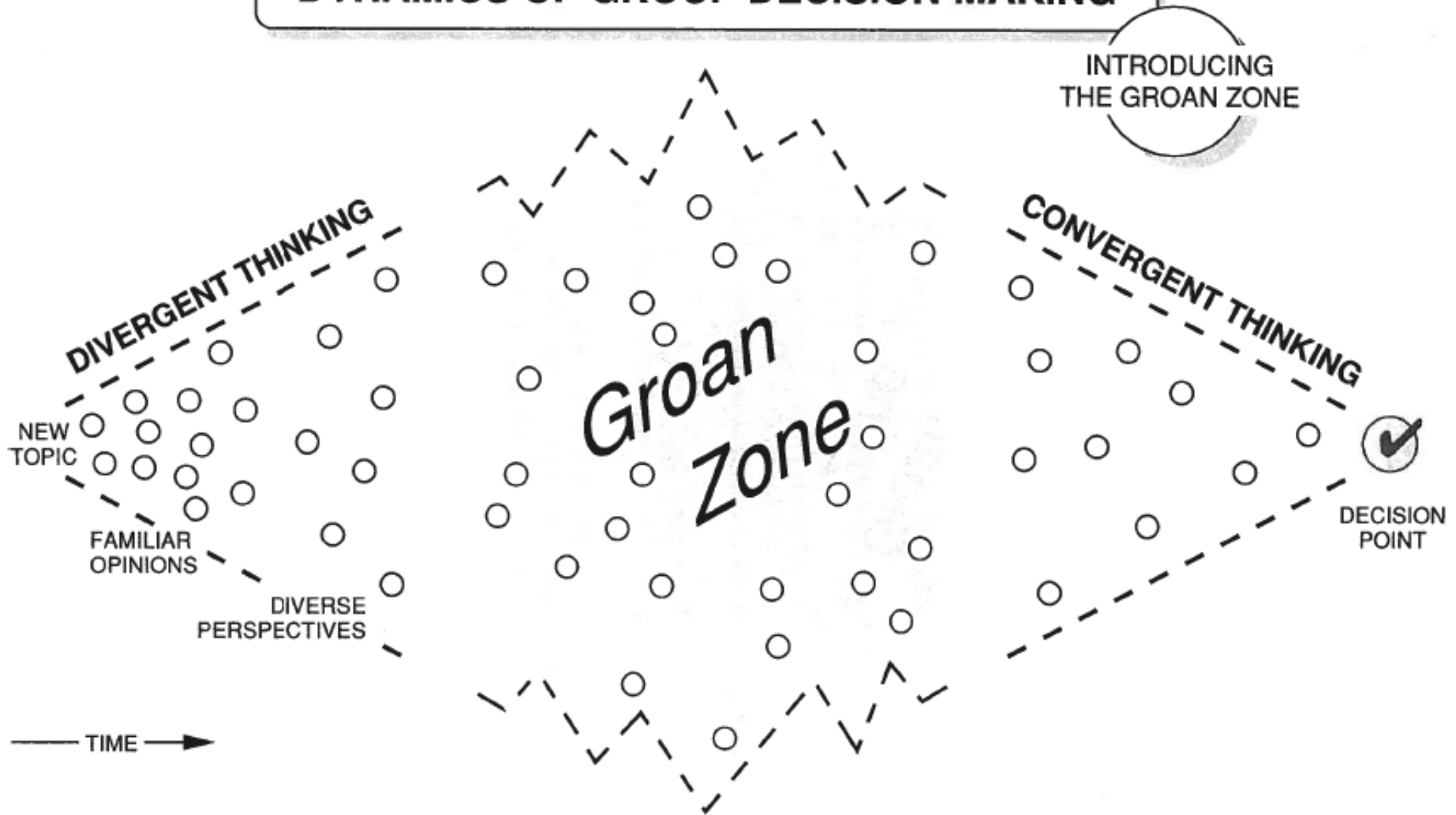
Engagement Streams

A Matrix of Proven Practices.

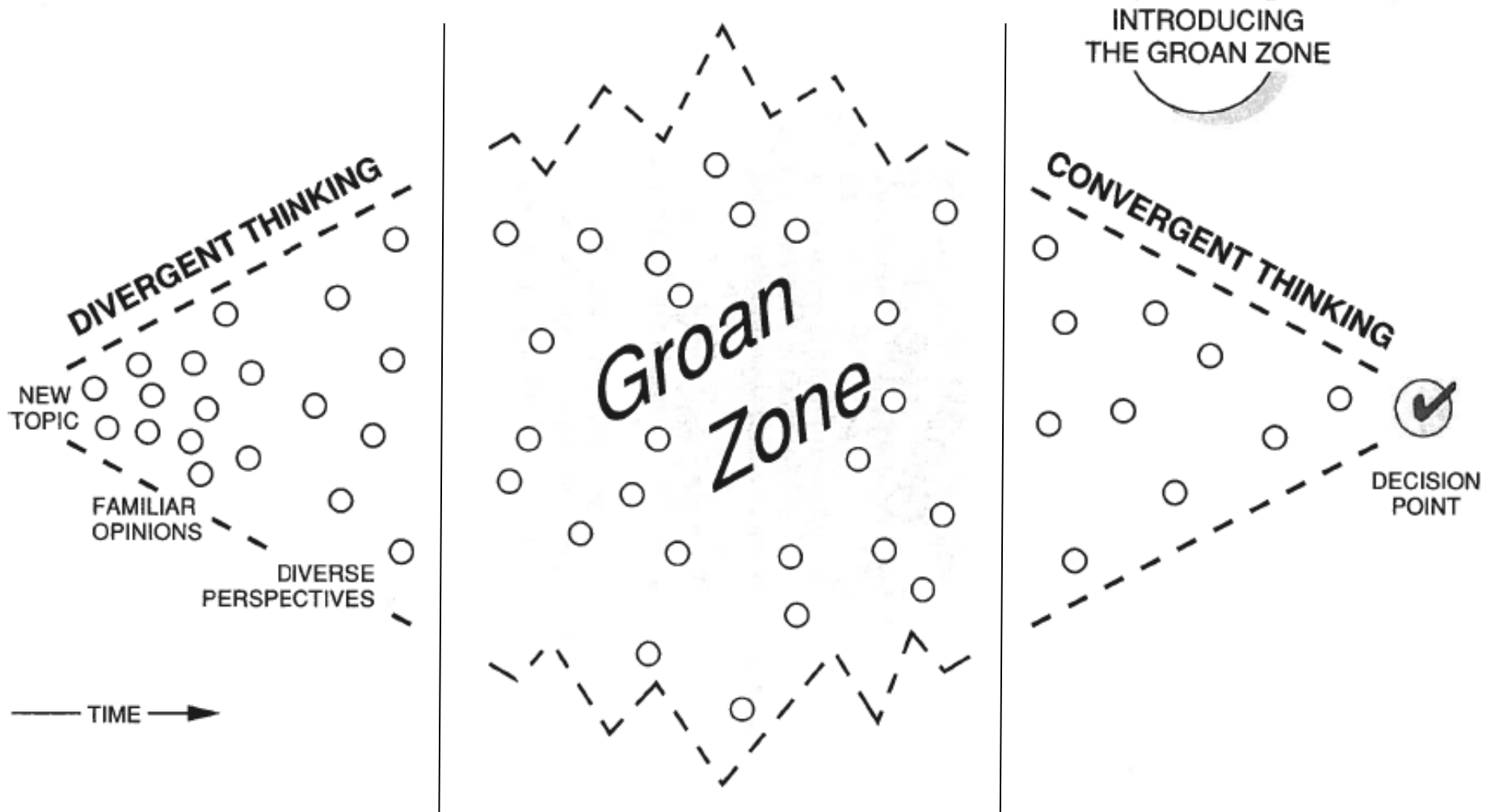
| Name of Engagement Stream | Primary Purpose |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Exploration | To encourage people and groups to learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue, and possibly discover innovative solutions |
| Conflict Transformation | To resolve conflicts, to foster personal healing and growth, and to improve relations among groups |

| Name of Engagement Stream | Key Features |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Decision Making | To influence public decisions and public policy and improve public knowledge |
| Collaborative Action | To empower people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution |

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

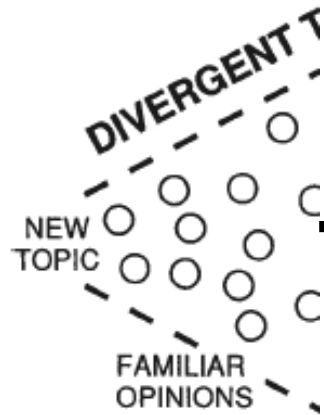


DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING



Not allowing enough divergent opinion

leads to



False consensus

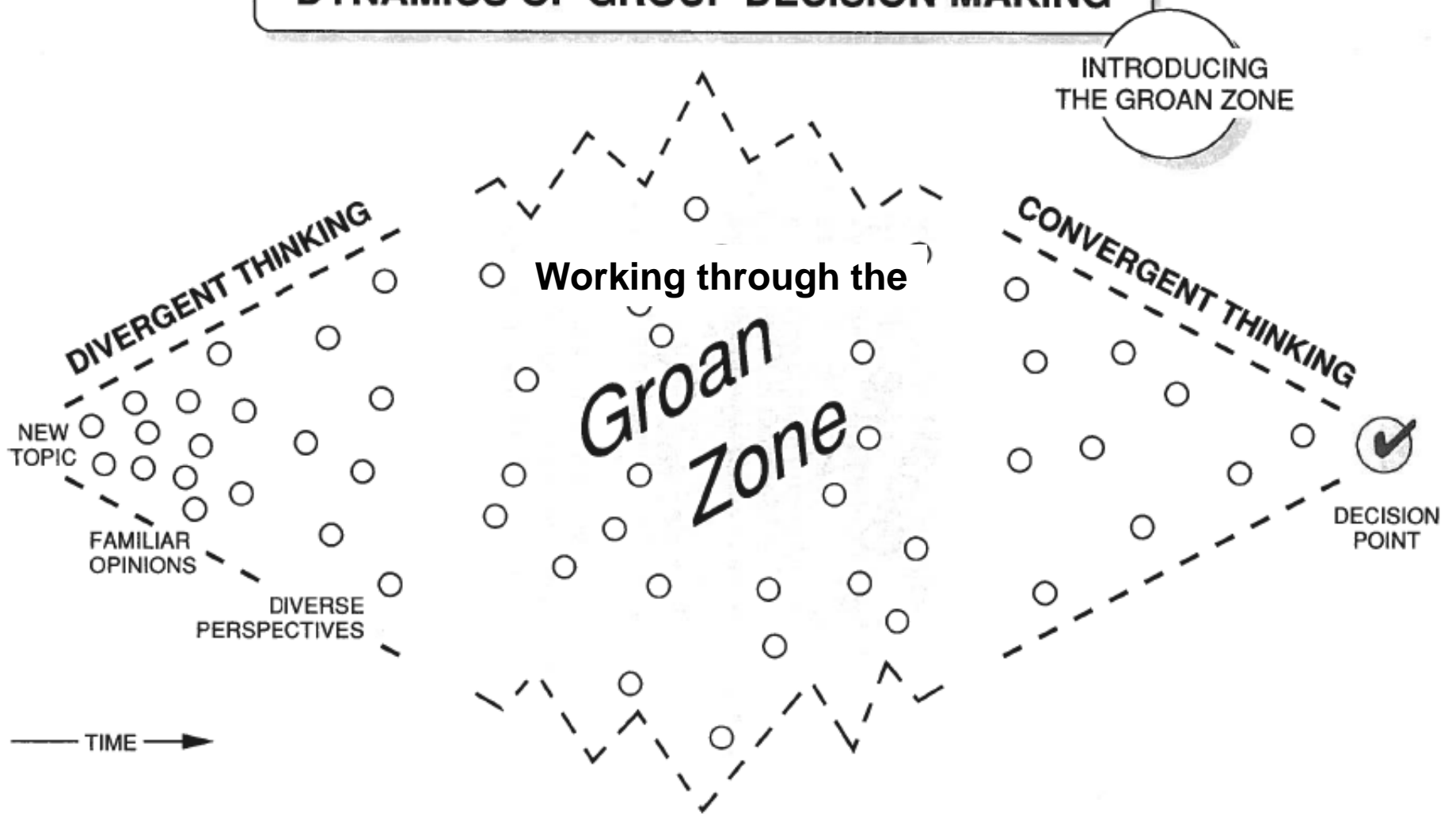
PERC (dissent not heard, wishful thinking supported, decisions likely either faulty or unsustainable, often attracting strong opposition)

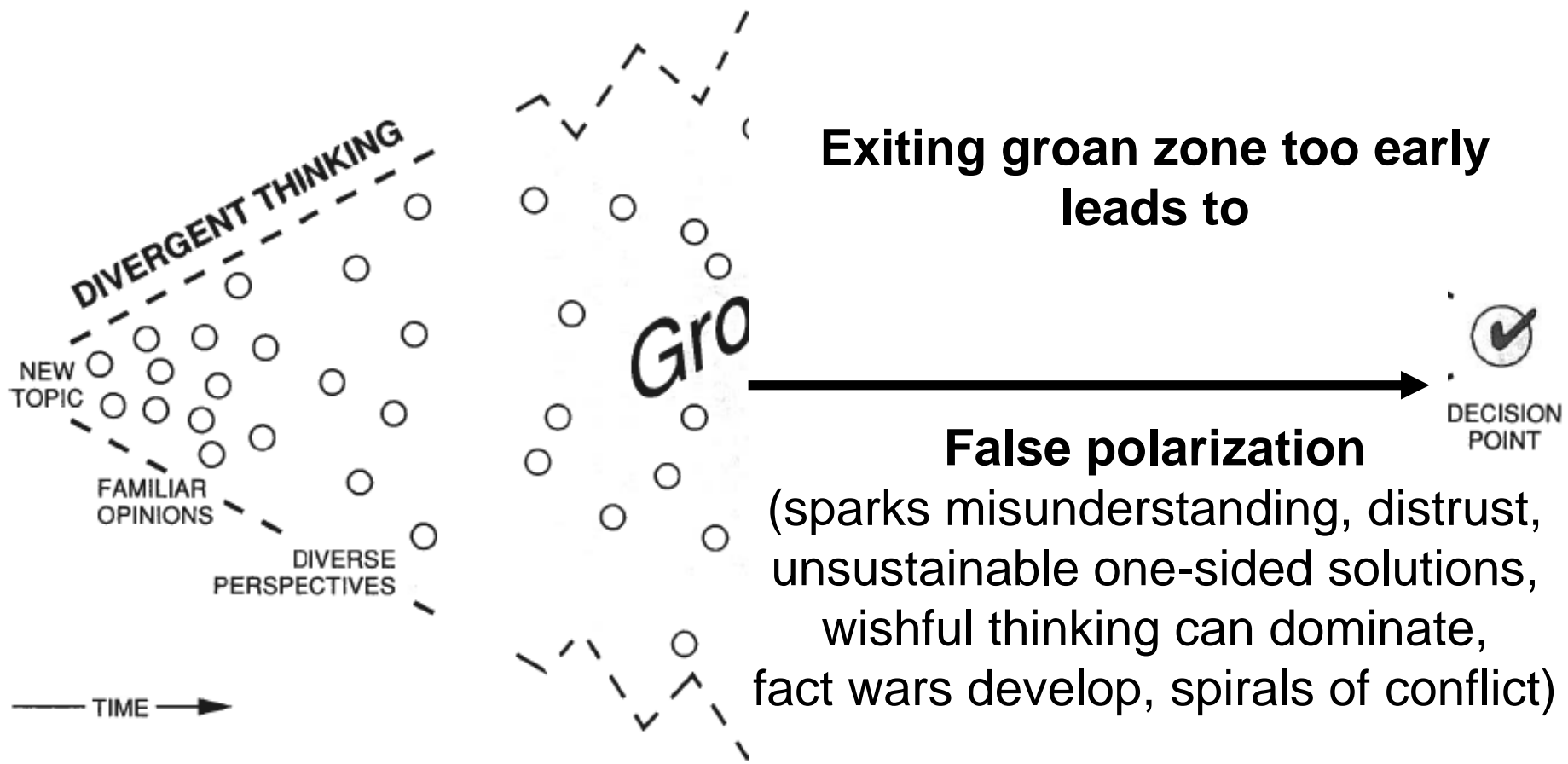
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To avoid false consensus:

Communities need better processes to insure adequate divergent thinking and that voices are heard.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

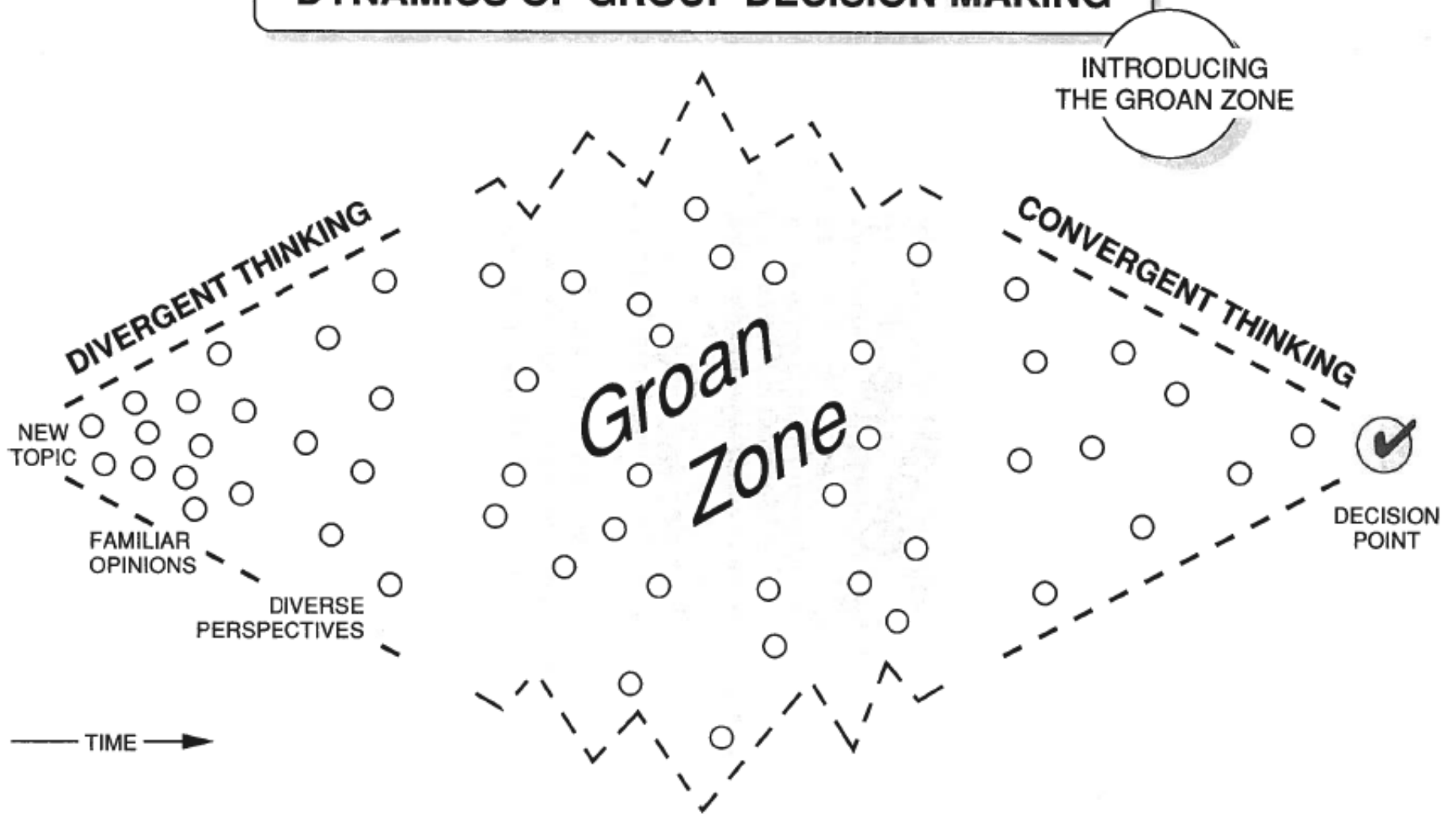


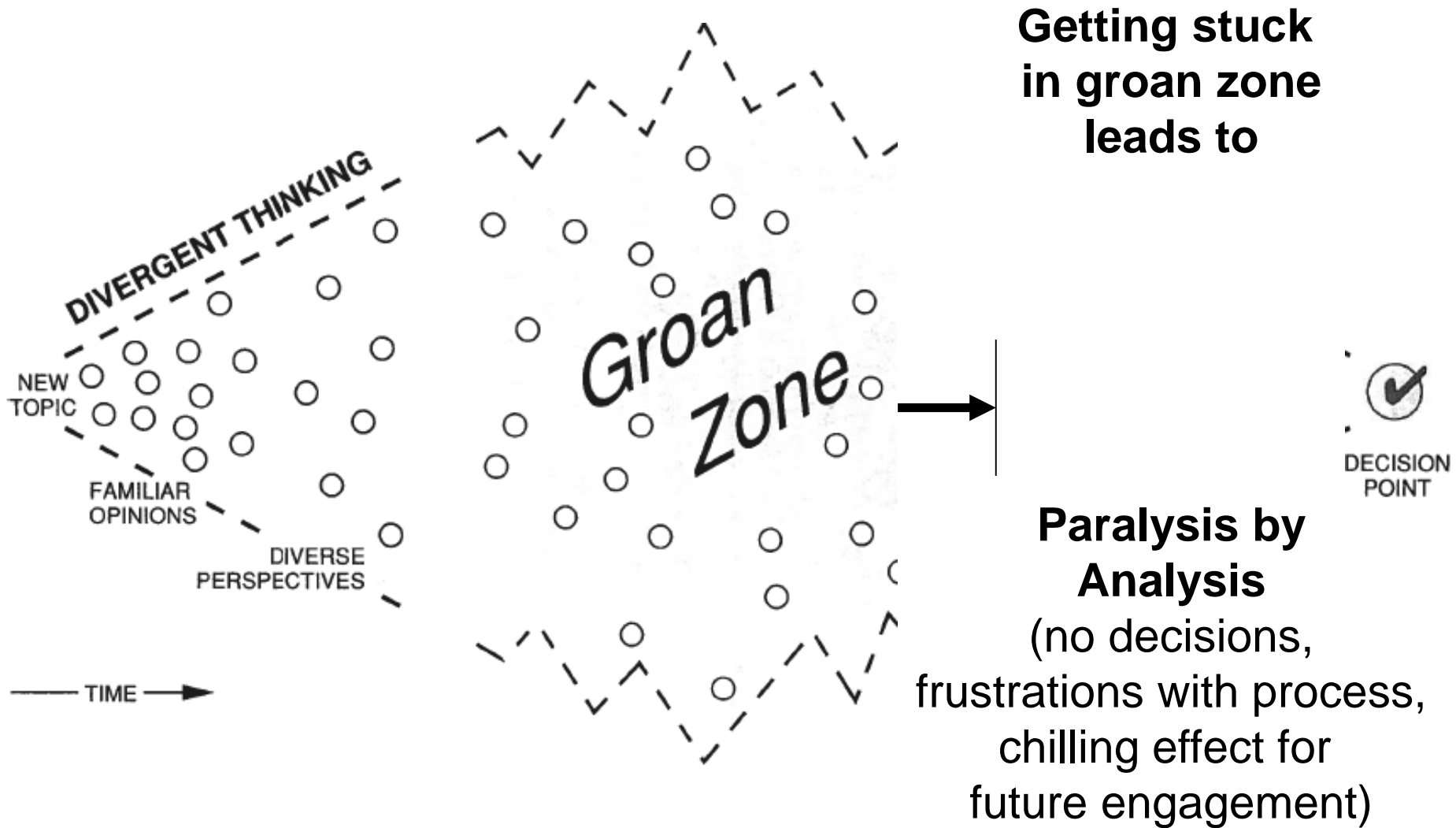


To avoid false polarization:

Communities need better processes to help them interact and work through tough issues. Key elements include trusted conveners, high quality issues framing, and opportunities for genuine interaction.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

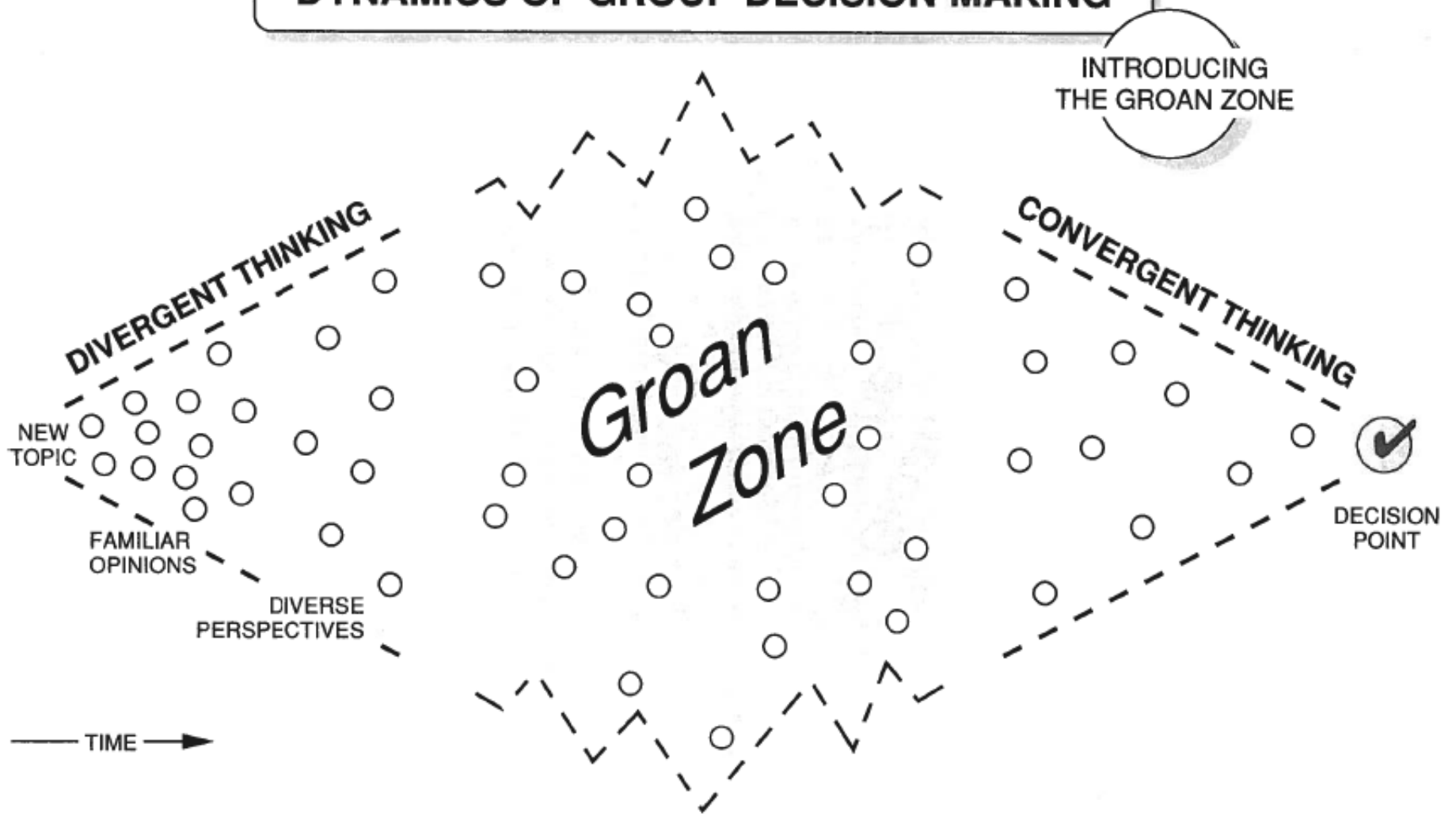




To avoid paralysis by analysis:

Communities need better processes for convergent thinking and moving from talk to action

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING



Three key questions regarding public engagement

What is the nature of the problems we are facing in our communities?

What kind of communication or engagement processes help to address those problems?

How can we best build community capacity to support those processes?

The first step is realizing you have wicked problems



Implications

- To public engagement processes
- To the nature of leadership
- To K-12 and higher education
- To experts

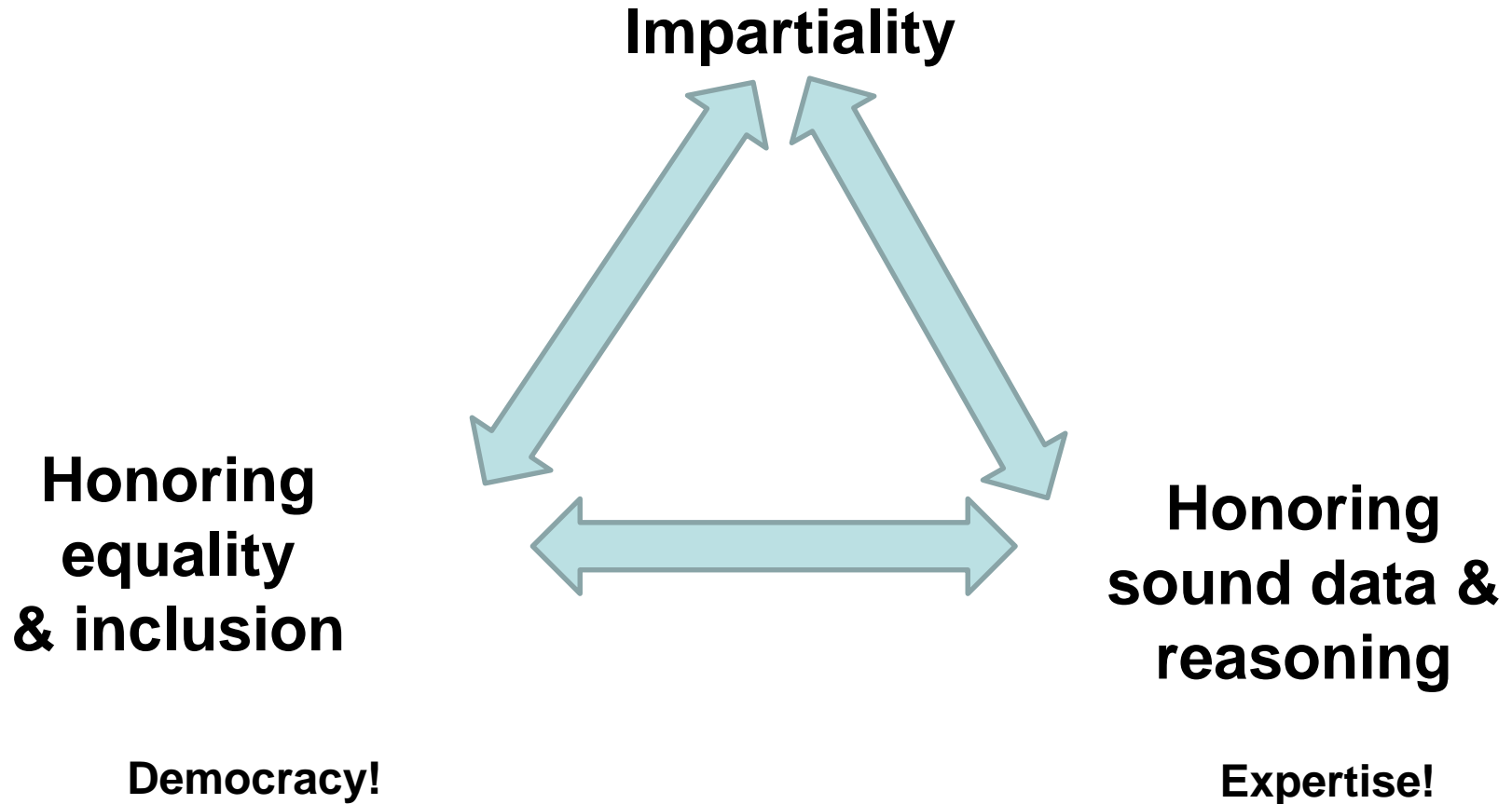


Key Elements of Facilitative Leadership

- Takes responsibility for the quality of communication around you
- Focus on process (exhibiting “passionate impartiality”)



Passionate impartiality
The recognition of the tensions between:



Key Elements of Facilitative Leadership

- Take responsibility for the quality of communication around you
- Focus on process (exhibiting “passionate impartiality”)
- Work against the negative consequences of adversarial processes and the limits of expertise
- Help your community identify and work through tough choices and address wicked problems
- Work to improve communication and increase productive interaction between decision -makers, experts, and the public.



Table Discussion

What are the most pressing wicked problems in your community?

Wicked problems are systemic issues with inherent competing underlying values



Table Discussion

**Analyzing wicked problems:
What are the key underlying
values and key stakeholders
related to your chosen wicked
problem?**

Brainstorm individually for a couple minutes,
and then share out

Table Discussion

What are the dominant key tensions that must be negotiated?

A tension or tradeoff is a situation where:

- *We can't have more of something we want without also having more of something we don't want. (like more democracy without more inefficiency)*

or

- *We can't have more of something we want without also having less of something we like. (like more economic equality without less economic freedom)*

or

- *We can't have less of something we don't want without also having more of something we don't want. (like less fraud and abuse without more monitoring of behavior)*

or

- *We can't have less of something we don't want without also having less of something we like. (like less bureaucracy or government costs without less oversight, assessment, and information)*

Polarity Management

Addressing Key Tensions

Freedom

Security

Freedom



Anti-freedom

Security



Anti-security

Polarized:

**“I am for security,
you are anti-security (i.e. pro-terrorism)”**

vs.

**“I am for freedom,
you are anti-freedom (i.e. pro-long lines)”**

All Freedom
No Security

Freedom
>
Security

Balance
Security
and
Freedom

Security
>
Freedom

All Security
No Freedom



Aristotle's Theory of Virtues

- Aristotle defined a virtue as “a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect...virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate”

Cowardice ← ----- Courage ----- → Recklessness

Lack of ambition ← ----- (Ideal ambition) ----- → Excess of ambition

Apathy ← ----- Gentleness ----- → Short temper

Grouchiness ← ----- Friendliness ----- → Flattery

Self-depreciation ← ----- Truthfulness ----- → Boastfulness

Injustice (gives more and receives less than one's due) ← ----- Justice ----- → Injustice (gives less and receives more than one's due)

All Freedom
No Security

Freedom
>
Security

Balance
Security
and
Freedom

Security
>
Freedom

All Security
No Freedom



Polarized:

“I am for security, you are anti-security (i.e. pro-terrorism)”

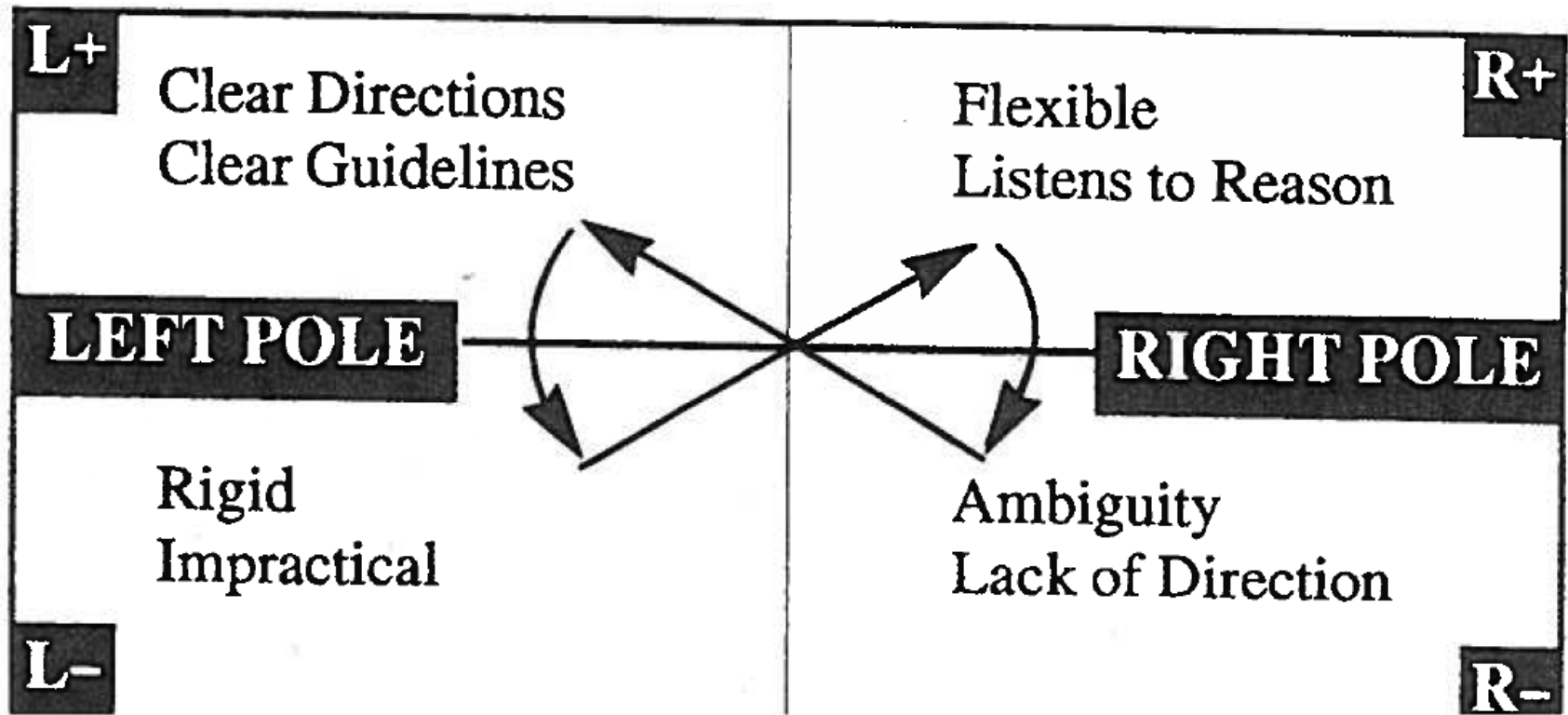
vs.

“I am for freedom, you are anti-freedom (i.e. pro-long lines)”

De-polarized

“We are both for freedom and security, but I believe freedom is more important than security, and you think security is more important than freedom”

Polarity Management



Polarity Management

| The Case for Consistency | The Case for Flexibility |
|--|---|
| Dependable, Clarity, Allowing comparisons, Tradition, Principled, Fair, Just, Reliable, Steady, Standards, Measurability | Innovation, Adaption, Individuality, Creativity, Outside the Box thinking, Pragmatic, Thinking on your feet |

The Case for Consistency

Dependable, Clarity, Allowing comparisons, Tradition, Principled, Fair, Just, Reliable, Steady, Standards, Measurability

The Case for Flexibility

Innovation, Adaption, Individuality, Creativity, Outside the Box thinking, Pragmatic, Thinking on your feet

When Consistency dominates Flexibility ...

Dogmatic, Stubborn, Unaccommodating, Stiff, Simplistic, Stuck in the past, Uninspired, Rigid, Soul-sucking, Obstinate

When Flexibility dominates Consistency ...

Wishy-washy, Ambiguous, Inconsistent, Erratic, Untrustworthy, Irregular, Unreliable

The Case for Consistency

Dependable, Clarity, Allowing comparisons, Tradition, Principled, Fair, Just, Reliable, Steady, Standards, Measurability

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The Case for Flexibility

Innovation, Adaption, Individuality, Creativity, Outside the Box thinking, Pragmatic, Thinking on your feet

When Flexibility dominates Consistency ...

Wishy-washy, Ambiguous, Inconsistent, Erratic, Untrustworthy, Irregular, Unreliable,

Inherent Democratic Tensions

- Freedom v. Equality
- Our Freedom v. Freedom of Future generations
- Freedom v. Security
- Justice is a tension within itself (justice as the ideal between too much and too little credit or punishment)

Some others

- Individual v. community
- Short term v. long term
- Unity v. diversity
- Top down v. bottom up
- Cooperation v. competition
- Flexibility/Innovation v. Consistency/Tradition
- Best use of resources (money, time, people)



COMPETING VALUES™ FRAMEWORK



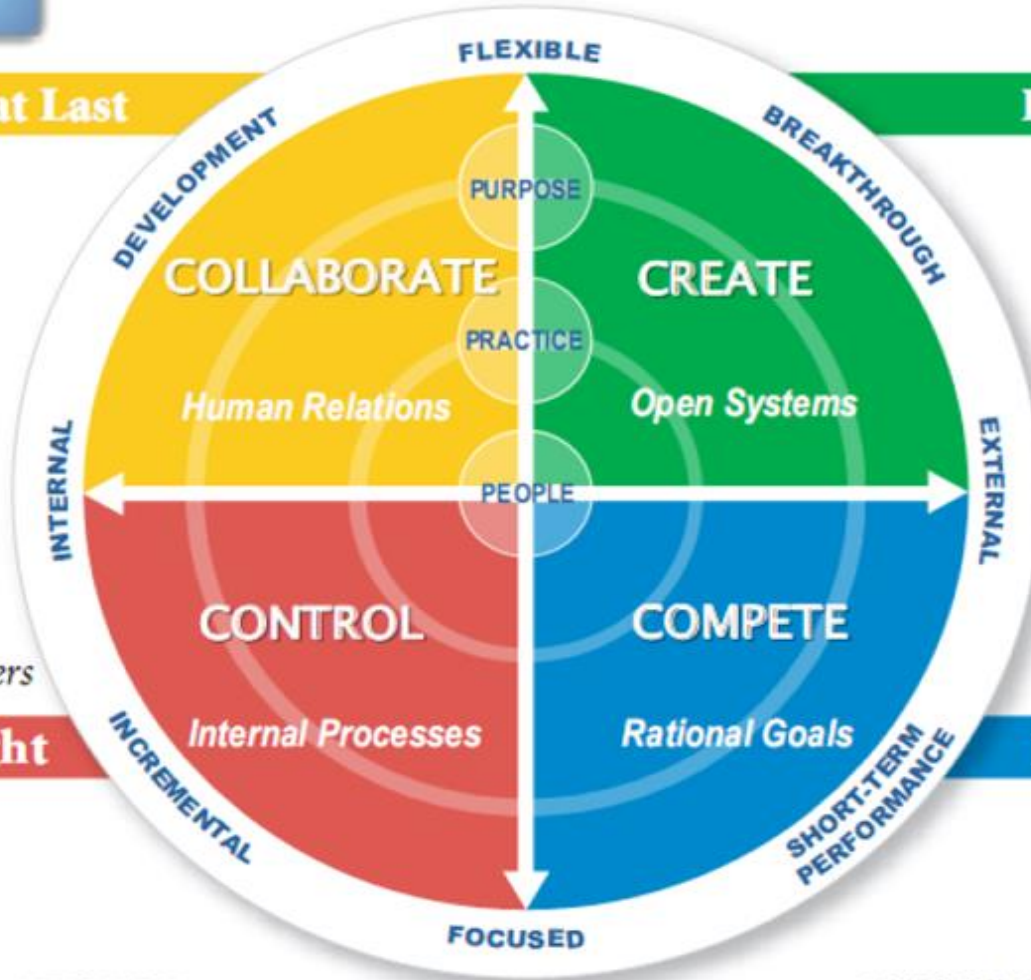
Competing Values

Do Things That Last

- **PRACTICE**
Incubating...
Workplace Values Learning
- **PURPOSE**
Knowledge Community
- **PEOPLE**
Teachers Counselors Community Builders

Do Things Right

- **PRACTICE**
Improving...
Systems Structures Standards
- **PURPOSE**
Efficiency Quality
- **PEOPLE**
Problem Solvers Engineers Professionals



Do Things First

- **PRACTICE**
Inventing...
Products Markets Ventures
- **PURPOSE**
Innovation Growth
- **PEOPLE**
Artists Visionaries Entrepreneurs

Do Things Fast

- **PRACTICE**
Investing...
Performers Initiatives Acquisitions
- **PURPOSE**
Speed Profits
- **PEOPLE**
Competitors Motivators Dealmakers

Polarity Management Worksheet

The Case for _____

The Case for _____

When _____ dominates _____

When _____ dominates _____

Steps in the Basic Exercise

- Polarity or tension is identified and named
- In groups, brainstorm the positives for each end of the polarity one at a time, making the best possible case
- Groups then complete the out of balance problematic alternatives
- Groups can then potentially combine or compare their work
- Individuals can self-identify their preferred spot on the continuum, and their perception of the current state of the tension
- Conversation can then focus on responding to the tension

Responding to Key Tensions

- Recognize tension, still **prefer** one side while accepting the tradeoffs
- Recognize tension, seek **balance** (which may mean moving in one direction or the other, seeking compromise)
- Recognize tension, seek to **transcend or integrate** tension through innovation (seeking win-win)
- **Recognize tension**, focus on **developing nimbleness** to adjust
- Recognize tension, allow **different groups** to seek **alternative ends**
- **Disagree** with tension

Small Group Discussion

**Identify a specific tension,
and work to complete the
front of the polarity
management worksheet.**

Brainstorm individually for a couple minutes,
and then share out