Beginning with the Brain in Mind

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CENTER FOR
PUBLIC DELIBERATION
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

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

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CPD website: cpd.colostate.edu
Facebook: Wicked Problems Mindset page

CPD Projects, 2006-2017

- 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
- Fort Collins City Plan

Webinar Overview

1. The bad news from brain science and social psychology

2. How our interactions, institutions and typical processes make things worse

3. The good news from brain science and social psychology

4. The promise of deliberative engagement

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

REVISED AND
EXPANDED EDITION

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WHAT MA...
BRAIN HA...
WHY YOU...
DO THE ...

DAVID DiSALVO

FOREWORD BY WRAY HERBERT

"A SPLENDID, INFORMED, ACCURATE, WITTY, CLEAR, COMMONSENSE BOOK."
—Martin Gardner, author of *The New Ambidextrous Universe*

HOW WE KNOW WHAT ISN'T SO

THE FALLIBILITY OF HUMAN REASON IN EVERYDAY LIFE

THOMAS GILOVICH

"A tonic to the noxious sw...
an acknowledgment of o...
the quirks of being hu...

VID
...UNDER OF Y...

"A landmark contribution to humanity's understanding of itself."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

THE RIGHTEOUS MIND

WHY GOOD

...believer in everyone
...st when self-taught.

WikiScholar
A book? I can find all the info I need online for free, thank you very much.

THE DEATH OF EXPERTISE

AGen1usIRL
Is that really how you spell expertise?

AnAmPatri...
According to my...
little reason to as...

The Campaign Against
Established Knowledge
and Why it Matters

DrMom_312
This title just sounds like yet another elitist appeal to authority.

TOM NICHOLS

Luv2Read
And why do we care what this so called "expert" has to say???

WebSurfBum

What Are We Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?
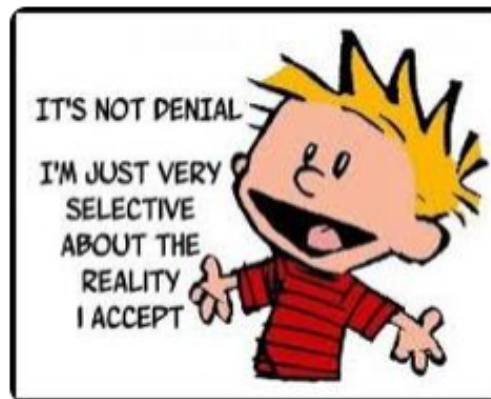
The Problematic

     We crave certainty and consistency

     We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

     We are "groupish" (prefer to gather with like-minded)

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

The Problematic

      We crave certainty and consistency

      We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

      We are "groupish" (prefer to gather with like-minded)

      We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

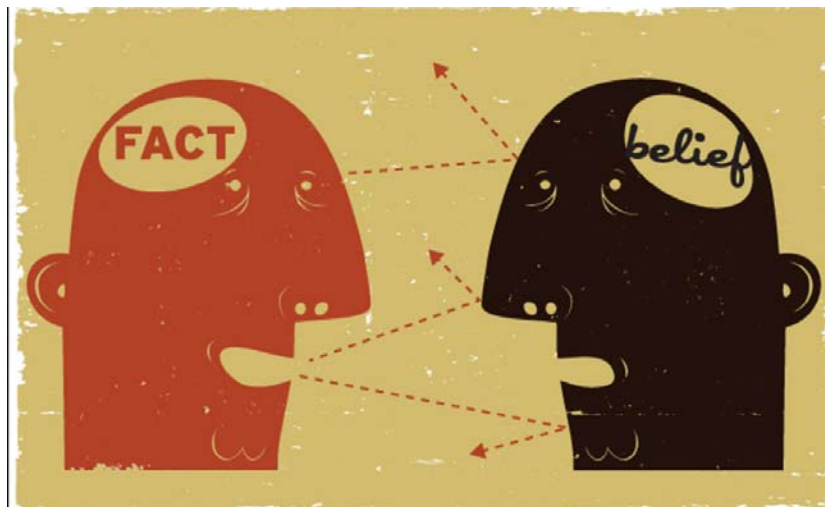| Stages of motivated reasoning	
What and who we expose ourselves to	*selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles*

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Stages of motivated reasoning	
What and who we expose ourselves to	*selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles*
How we interpret new evidence	*confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance*

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 and Social Psychology?

Stages of motivated reasoning	
What and who we expose ourselves to	*selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles*
How we interpret new evidence	*confirmation bias, **backfire effect**, cognitive dissonance*

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Stages of motivated reasoning	
What and who we expose ourselves to	*selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles*
How we interpret new evidence	*confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance*
How we make attributions and tell stories	*egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias*

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

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Stages of motivated reasoning	
What and who we expose ourselves to	*selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles*
How we interpret new evidence	*confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance*
How we make attributions and tell stories	*egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias*
How we make decisions	*heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof*

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

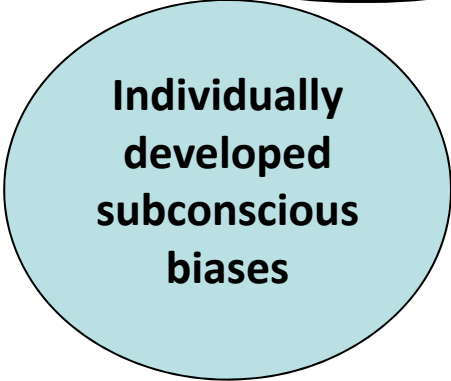| Stages of motivated reasoning	
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What we remember	*availability bias*

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2. How our interactions, institutions and typical processes make things worse

3. The good news from brain science and social psychology

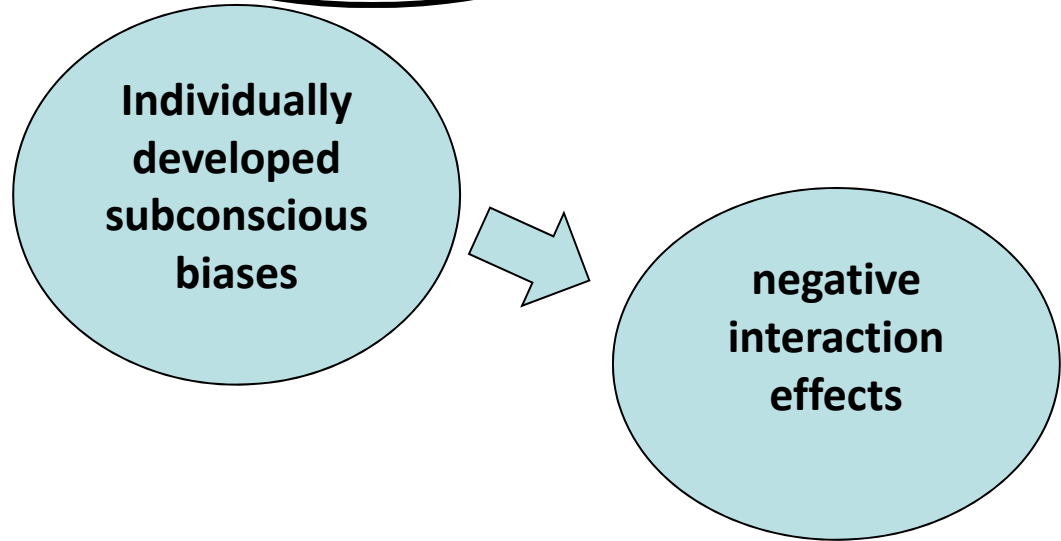4. The promise of deliberative engagement

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The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

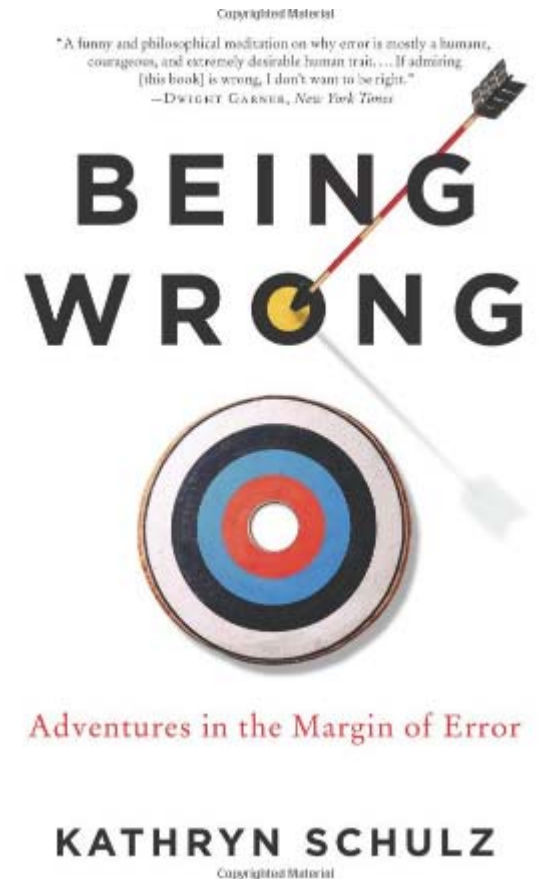Individually developed subconscious biases

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

Individually developed subconscious biases
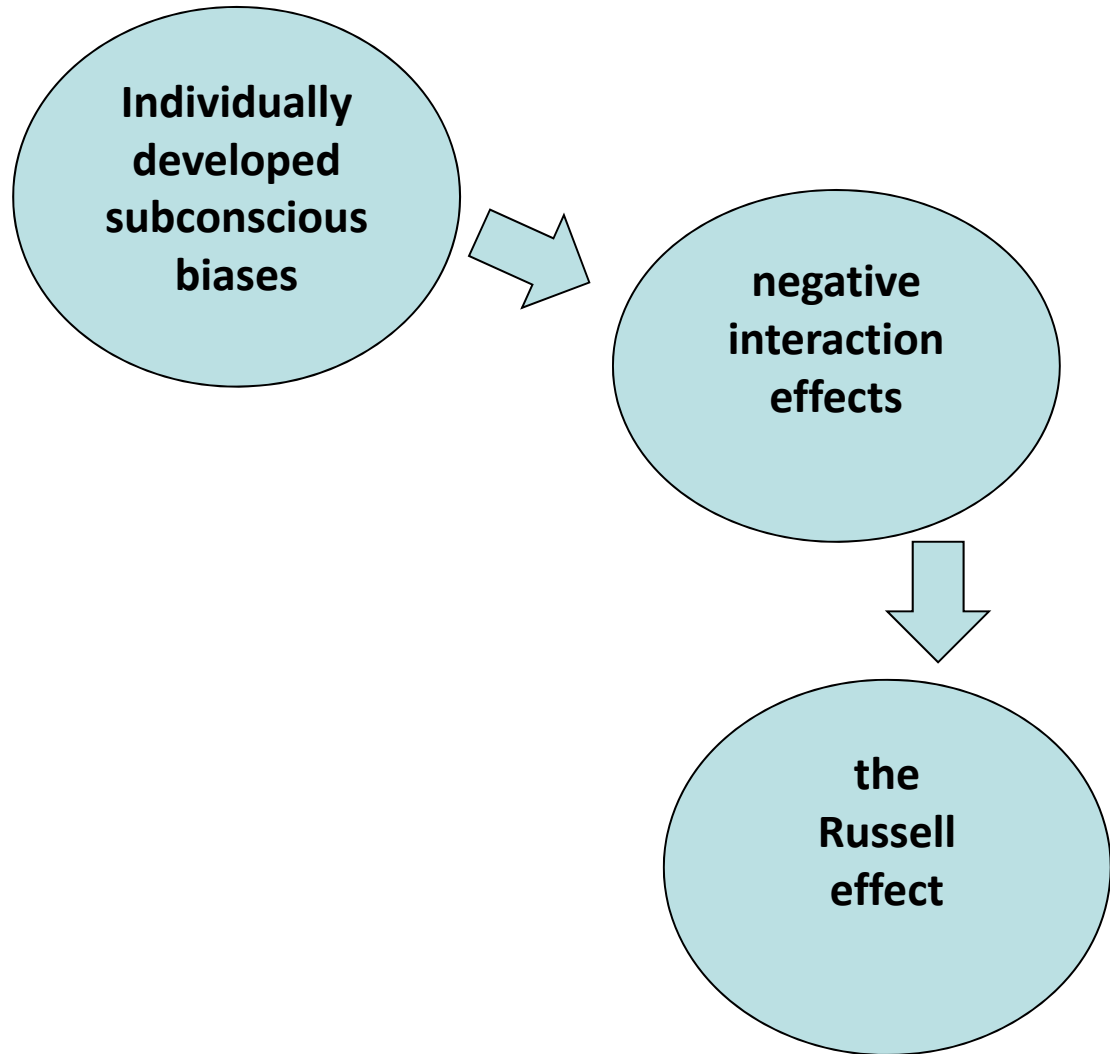
negative interaction effects

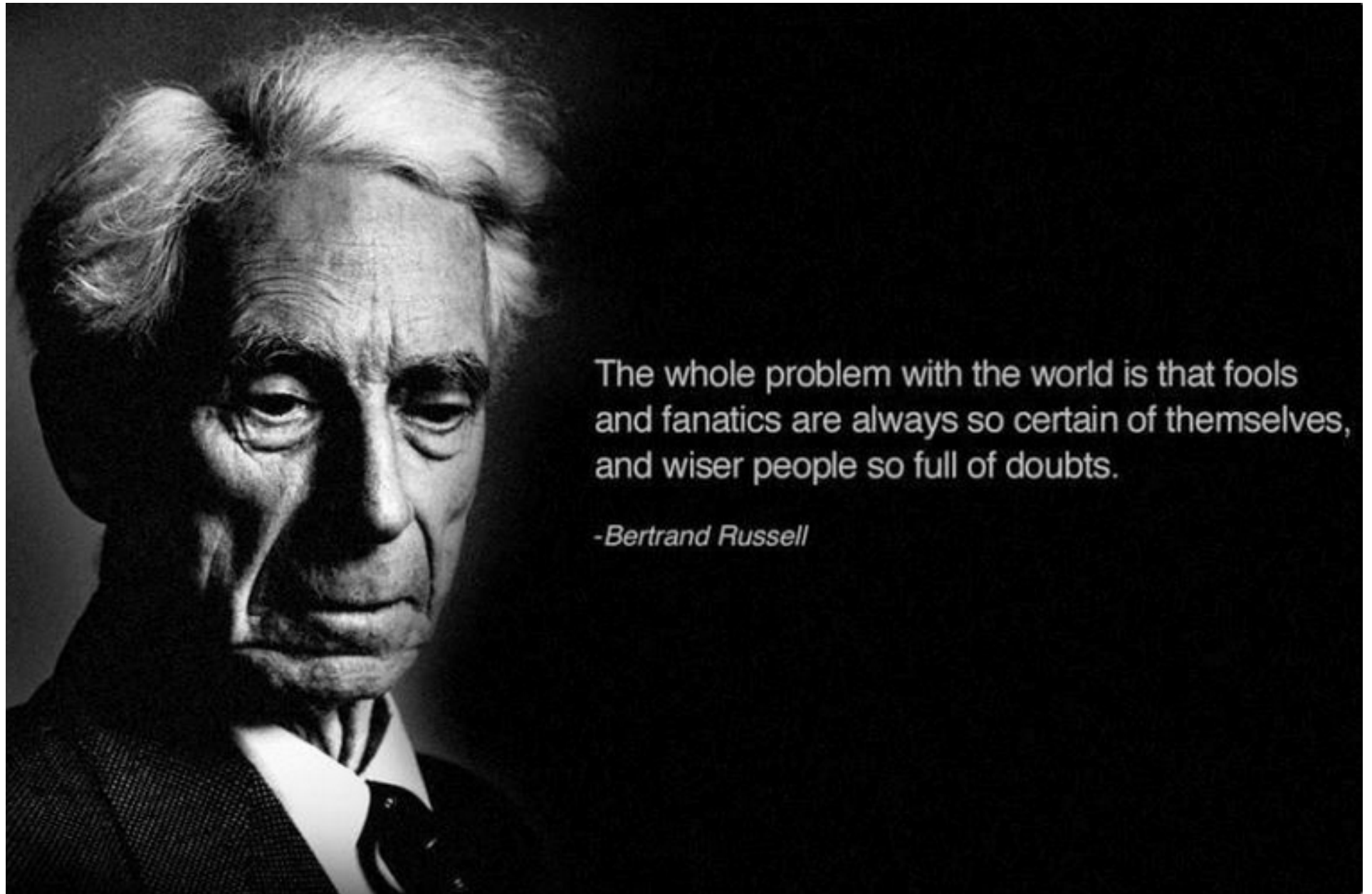# Negative Interaction Effects

Kathryn Shultz – *Being Wrong*

- First step: Ignorance assumption
- Second step: Idiot assumption
- Third Step: Evil assumption
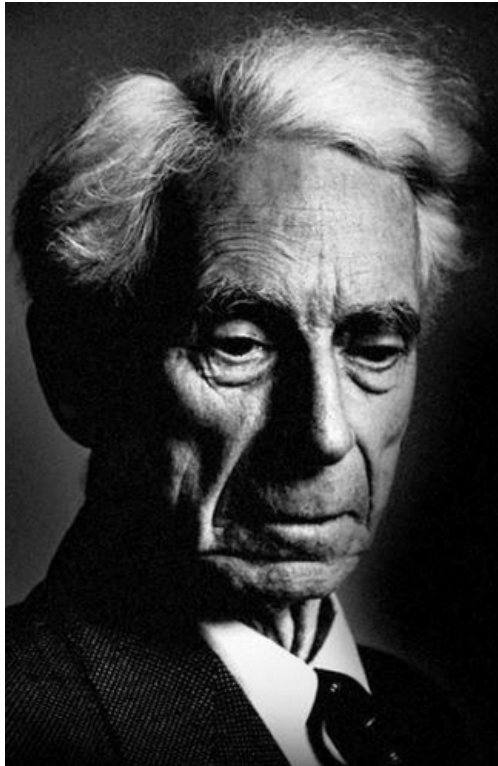
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

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 Russell Effect

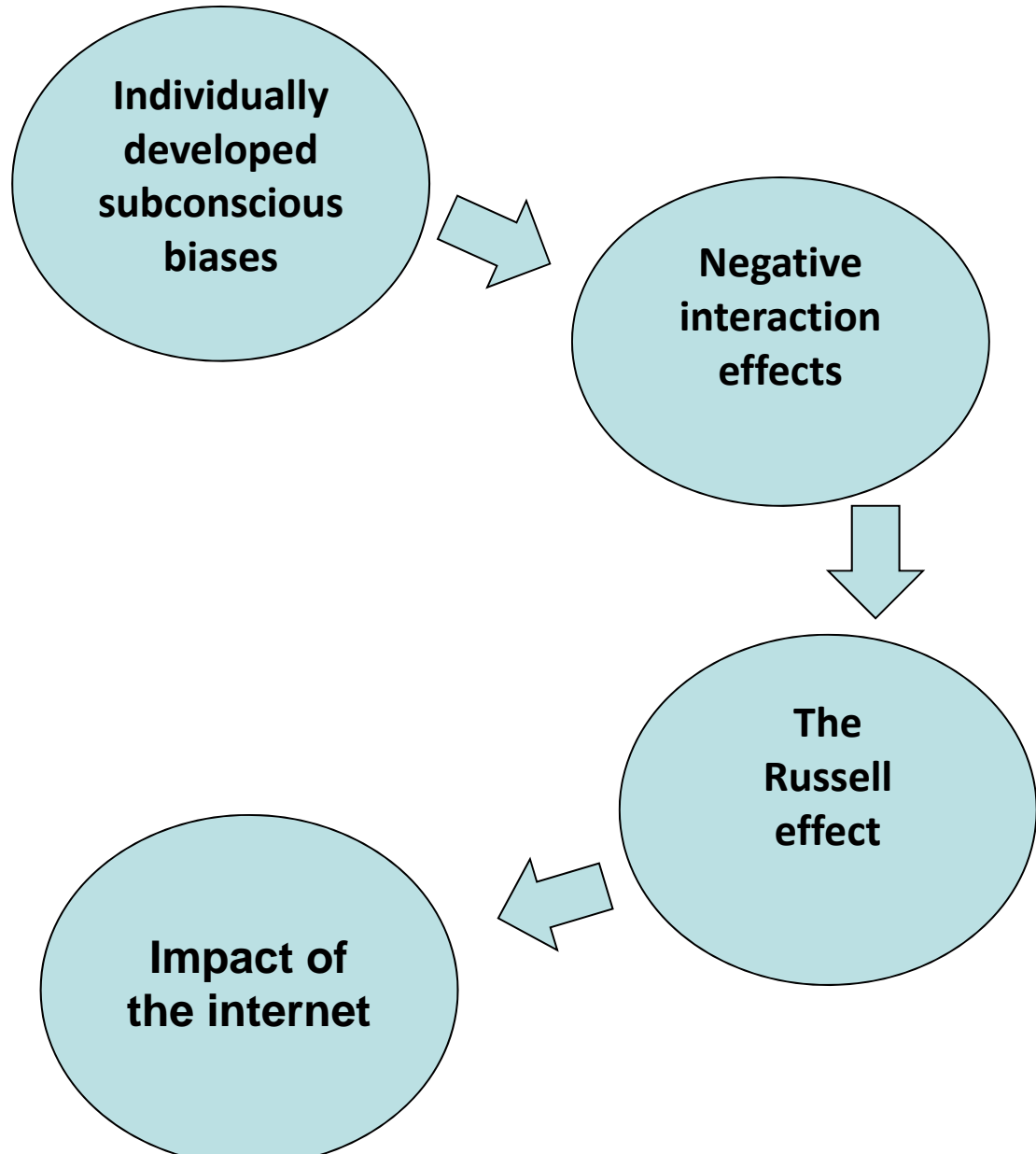The loudest, most confident, and most active voices are often the most impacted by problematic cognitive biases
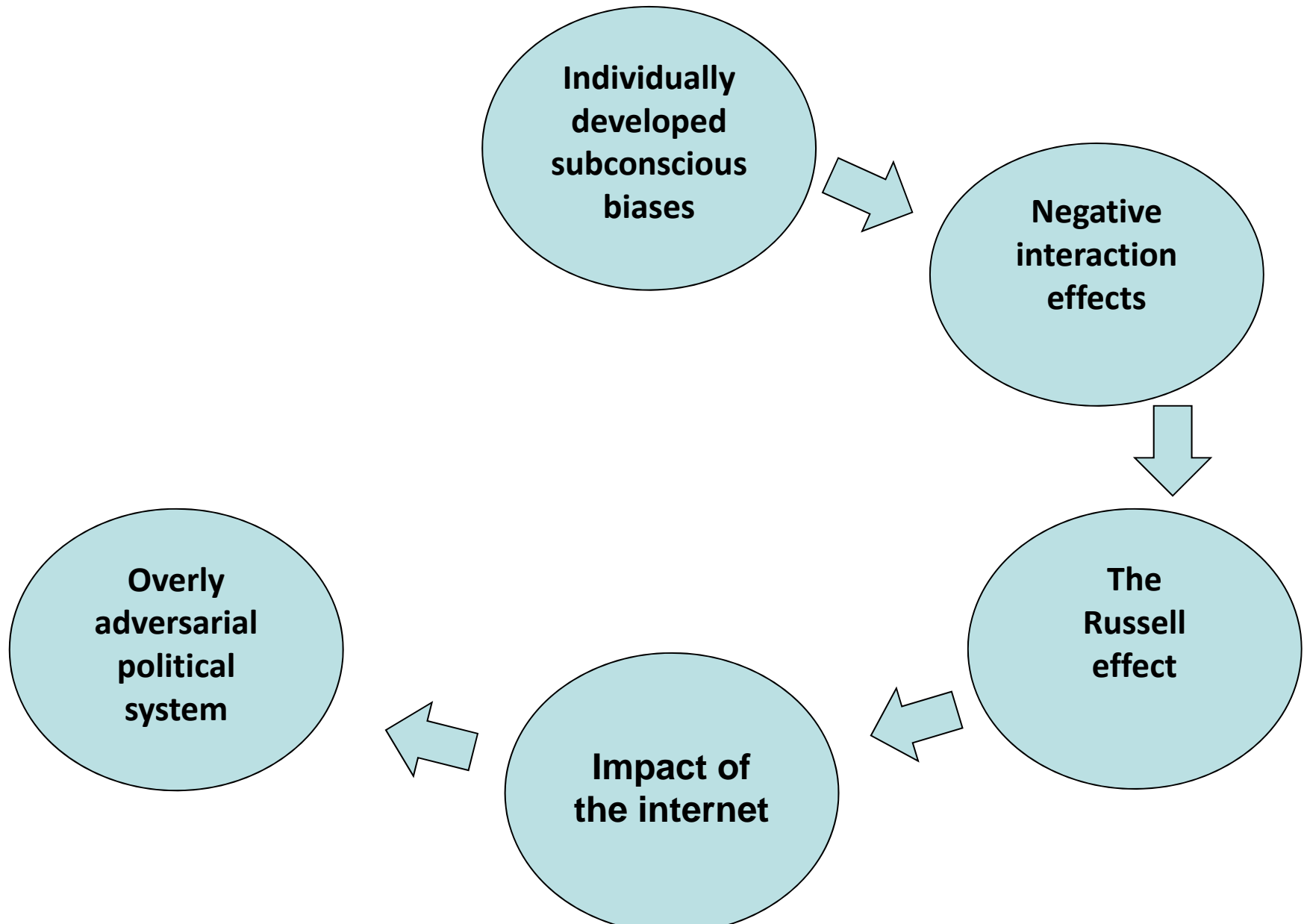
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The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

Drawbacks of an
Hyper-Partisan Political System

- Plays into flaws of human nature

- Primarily attracts/privileges organized, entrenched voices

- 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)

- Negative side effects like polarization, cynicism, and apathy (which then cause even worse communication)

- Assumes a narrow role for citizens (citizens as simply voters, consumers, or spectators)

Consider our Typical Public Processes

- *Our two-party system*

- *Campaigns, referenda, and "winner take all" elections*

- *"Town halls" (large groups with one microphone)*

- *Interest groups and lobbyists*

- *Political debates*

- *Congressional deliberations and legislative debate*

- *Social media political engagement*

- *Citizen comment and public hearings*

- *Expert panels*

- *Letters to the editors*

- *Emails and email campaigns to policymakers*

Consider our Typical Public Processes

- *Engage too late in the process*
- *Often framed as yes/no issues*
- *Primarily provide opportunities for individual expression*
- *Caters to entrenched and organized voices*
- *Little to no effective interaction or learning/refinement of opinion*

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

Individually developed subconscious biases

Media focus on conflict

Negative interaction effects

Implications of hyper-polarization:
- **"Anecdote wars" / Gotcha politics**
- **Meanspiritedness / contempt**

Overly adversarial political system

The Russell effect

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

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Negative interaction effects

The Russell effect

Impact of the internet

Overly adversarial political system

Media focus on conflict

Implications of hyper-polarization:
- "Anecdote wars" / Gotcha politics
- Meanspiritedness / contempt
- Assumption of negative motives
- Conspiracy theories
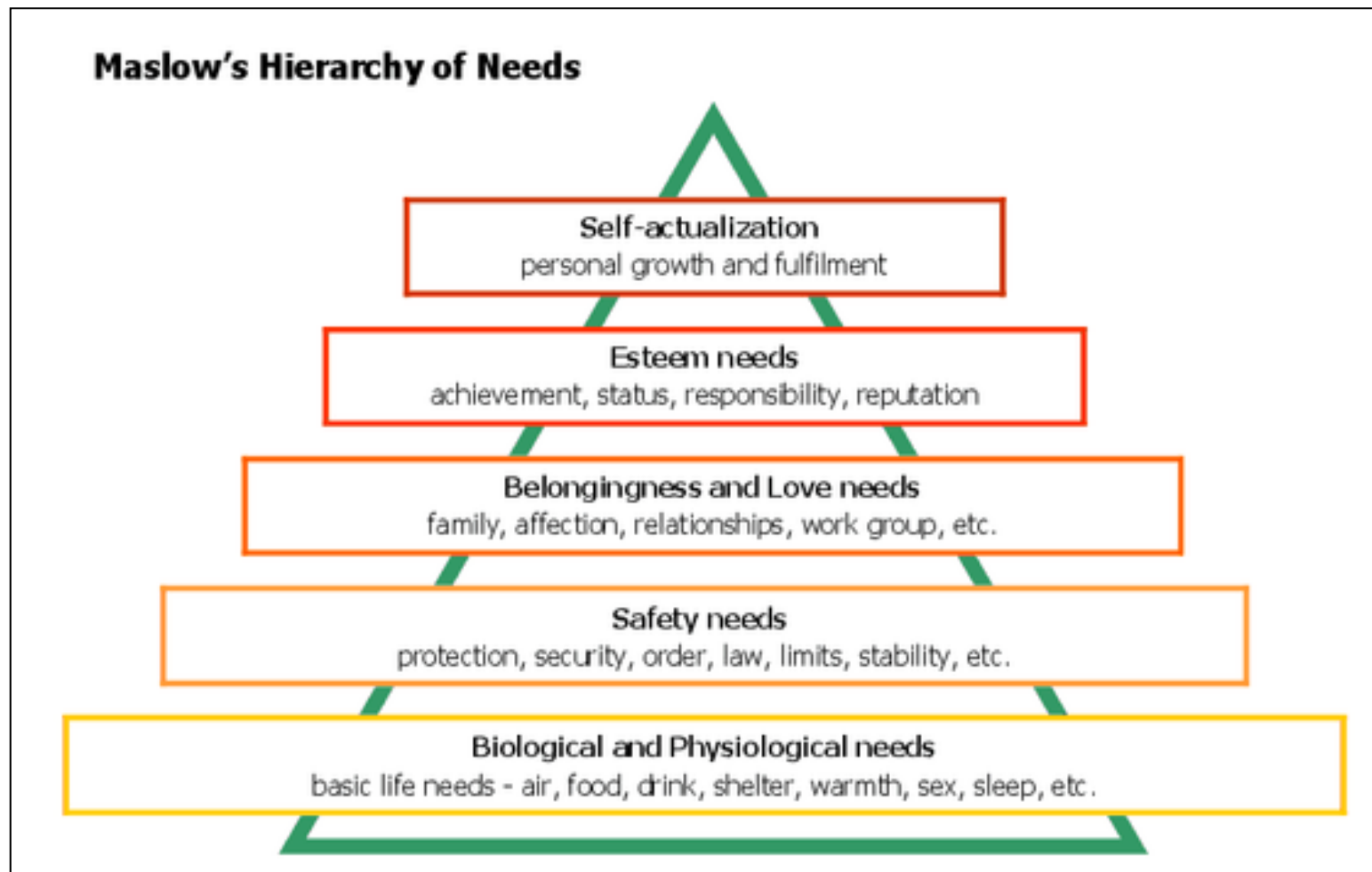- Drowning out of legitimate concerns

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What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and Brain Science

The Good

We are inherently social and seek purpose and community

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- **Self-actualization**
  personal growth and fulfilment
- **Esteem needs**
  achievement, status, responsibility, reputation
- **Belongingness and Love needs**
  family, affection, relationships, work group, etc.
- **Safety needs**
  protection, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc.
- **Biological and Physiological needs**
  basic life needs - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, etc.

What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and 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

What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and Brain Science

Bottom line: The most powerful thing to help people overcome their biases and tackle wicked problems well is **genuine conversation with people they respect**.
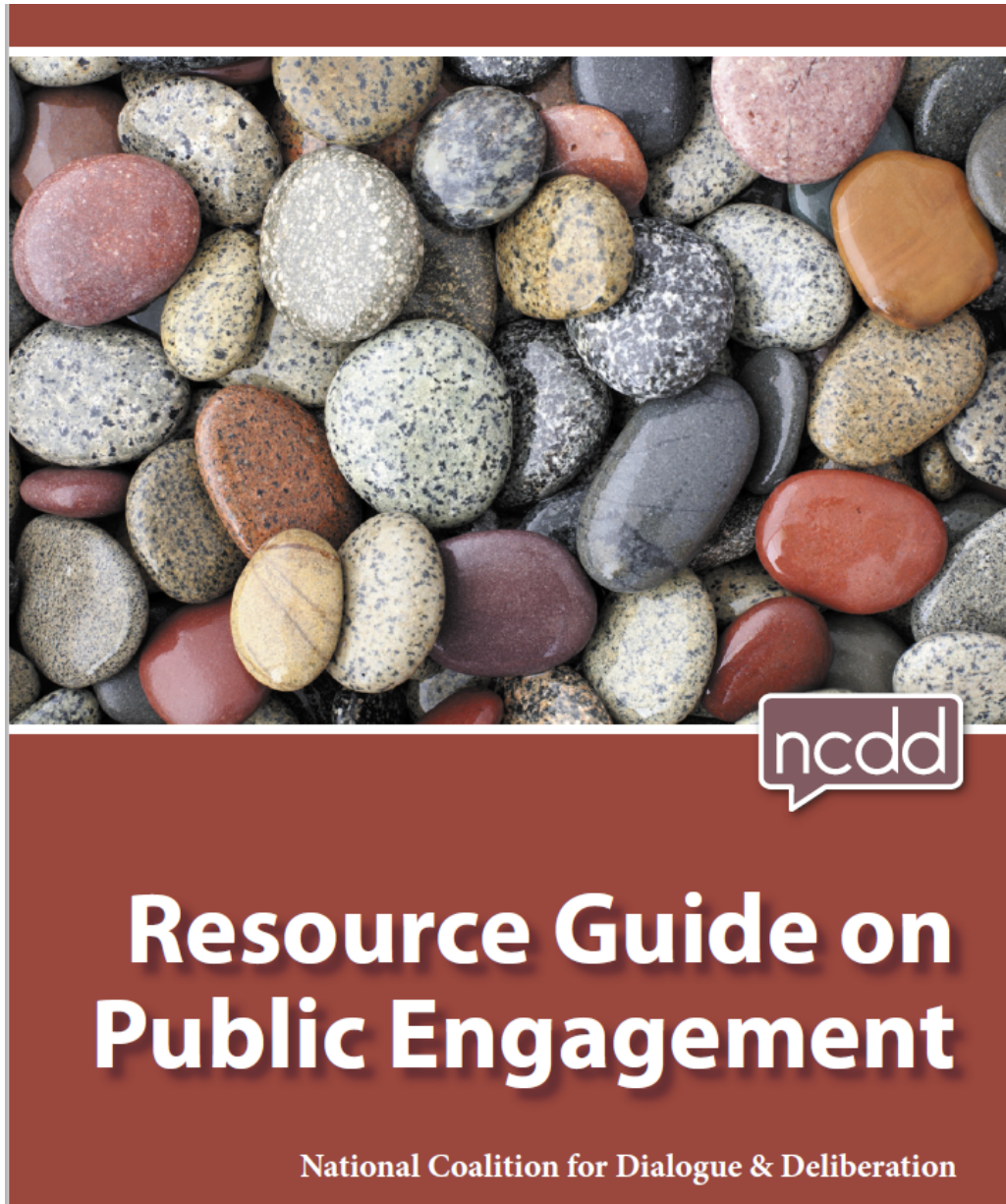
The Problem We Face

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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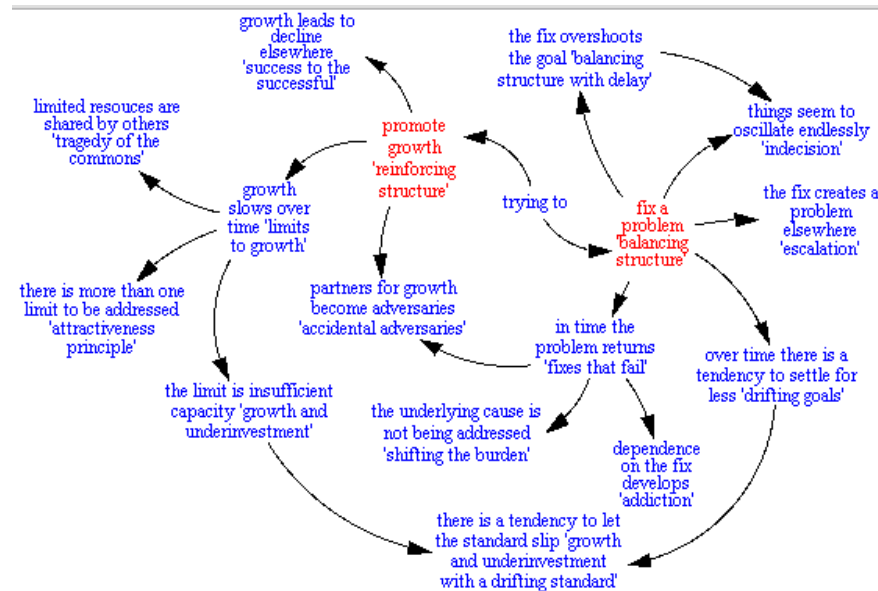4. **The promise of deliberative engagement**

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation
www.ncdd.org

Key Components of Deliberative Engagement

- Overall deliberative framing
  - Wicked problem, multiple approaches, broad range of actors, starting discussion "upstream" (before polarization)

Wicked problems inherently involve **competing underlying values**, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that **cannot be resolved** by science. They call for ongoing high quality **communication**, **creativity**, and broad **collaborative action** to manage well.

The Wicked Problems Mindset

- Presume wicked problems not wicked people

- Be more comfortable with uncertainty

- Focus on improving the conversation not winning the argument

- Put your energy toward identifying, engaging, and negotiating inherent tensions

- Emphasize the ongoing conversation and creative learning process

(VISIT THE "WICKED PROBLEMS MINDSET" FACEBOOK PAGE FOR MORE DETAILS)

Key Components of Deliberative Engagement

- Overall deliberative framing
  - Wicked problem, multiple approaches, broad range of actors, starting discussion "upstream" (before polarization)
- Discussion guides/backgrounder
  - Base of information, something to react to, framed for deliberation, not persuasion

Great sources for discussion guide examples:

www.nifi.org   www.publicagenda.org
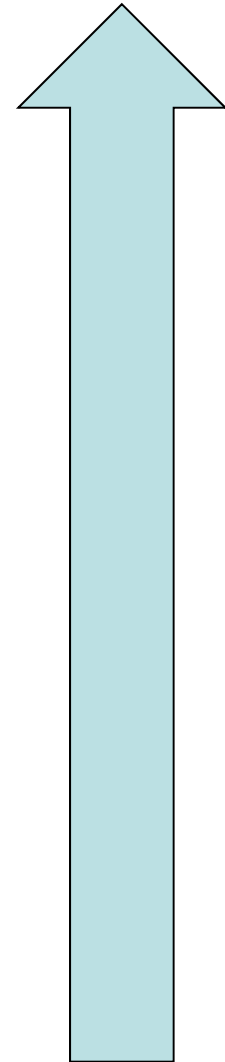
www.everyday-democracy.org

Key Components of Deliberative Engagement

- Overall deliberative framing
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- Discussion guides/backgrounder
  - Base of information, something to react to, framed for deliberation, not persuasion
- Small, diverse, representative groups
- Deliberative facilitators
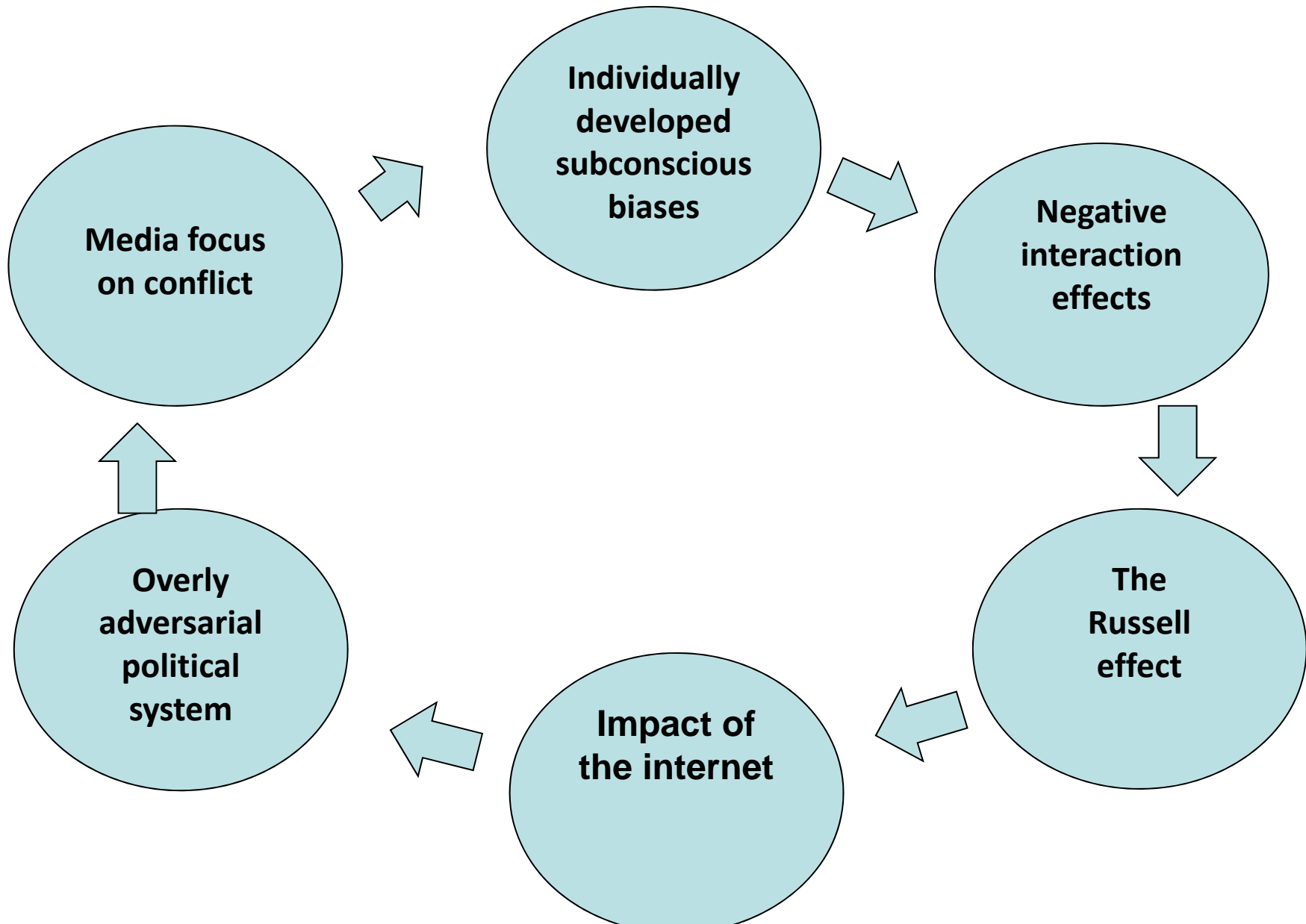- Time (to talk, but also for results to matter)

What we need public process to do

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

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

- Individually developed subconscious biases
- Negative interaction effects
- The Russell effect
- Impact of the internet
- Overly adversarial political system
- Media focus on conflict

The Virtuous Cycle of Authentic Engagement