

Can “Listening to Understand” Make our Water Talk More Productive?

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**CENTER FOR
PUBLIC DELIBERATION
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**

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

Overview

- The Bad News about our Brains
- The Bad News about our Interactions and Processes
- The Good News about Authentic Engagement

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



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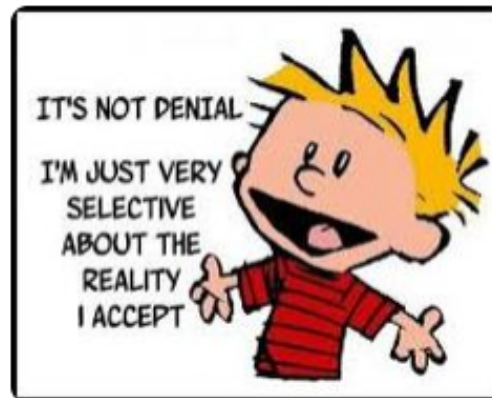
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We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views



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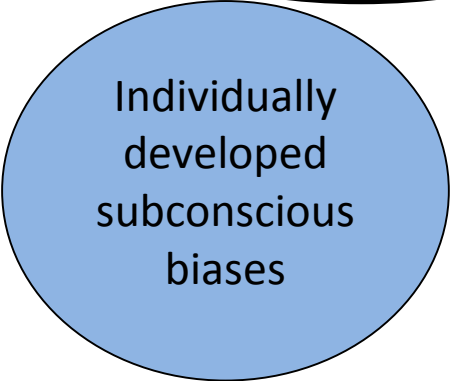
Stages of motivated reasoning

What and who we expose ourselves to	<i>selective exposure /echo chambers</i>
How we interpret new evidence	<i>confirmation bias</i>
How we make attributions and tell stories	<i>egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias</i>
How we make decisions	<i>heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof</i>
What we remember	<i>availability bias</i>

Overview

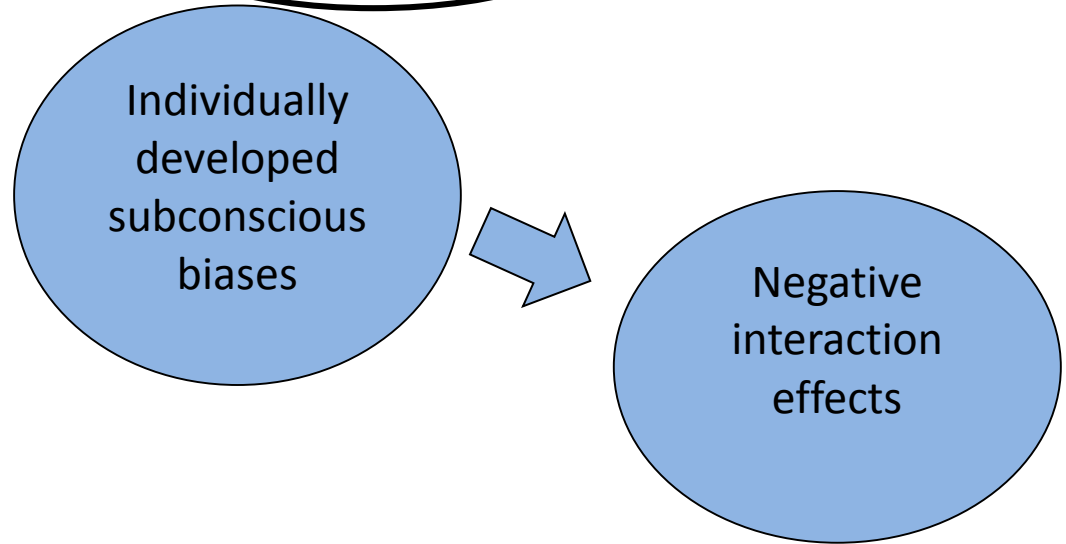
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The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization



Individually
developed
subconscious
biases

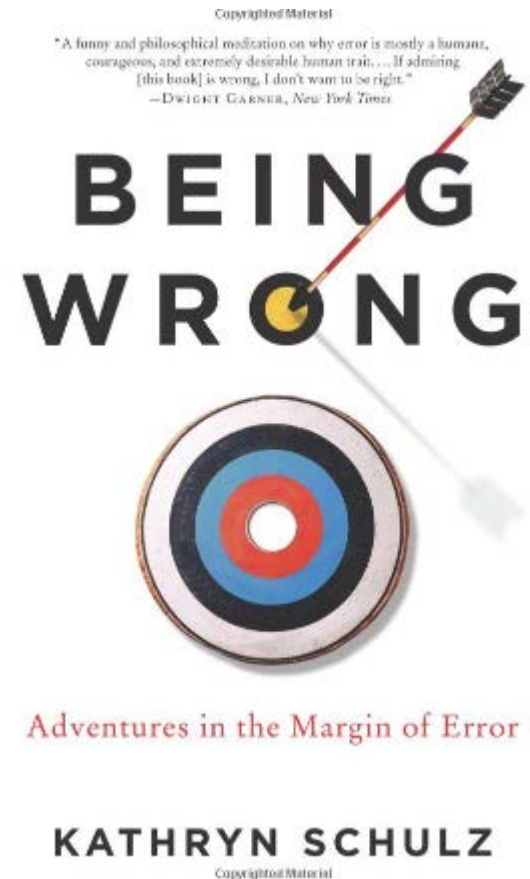
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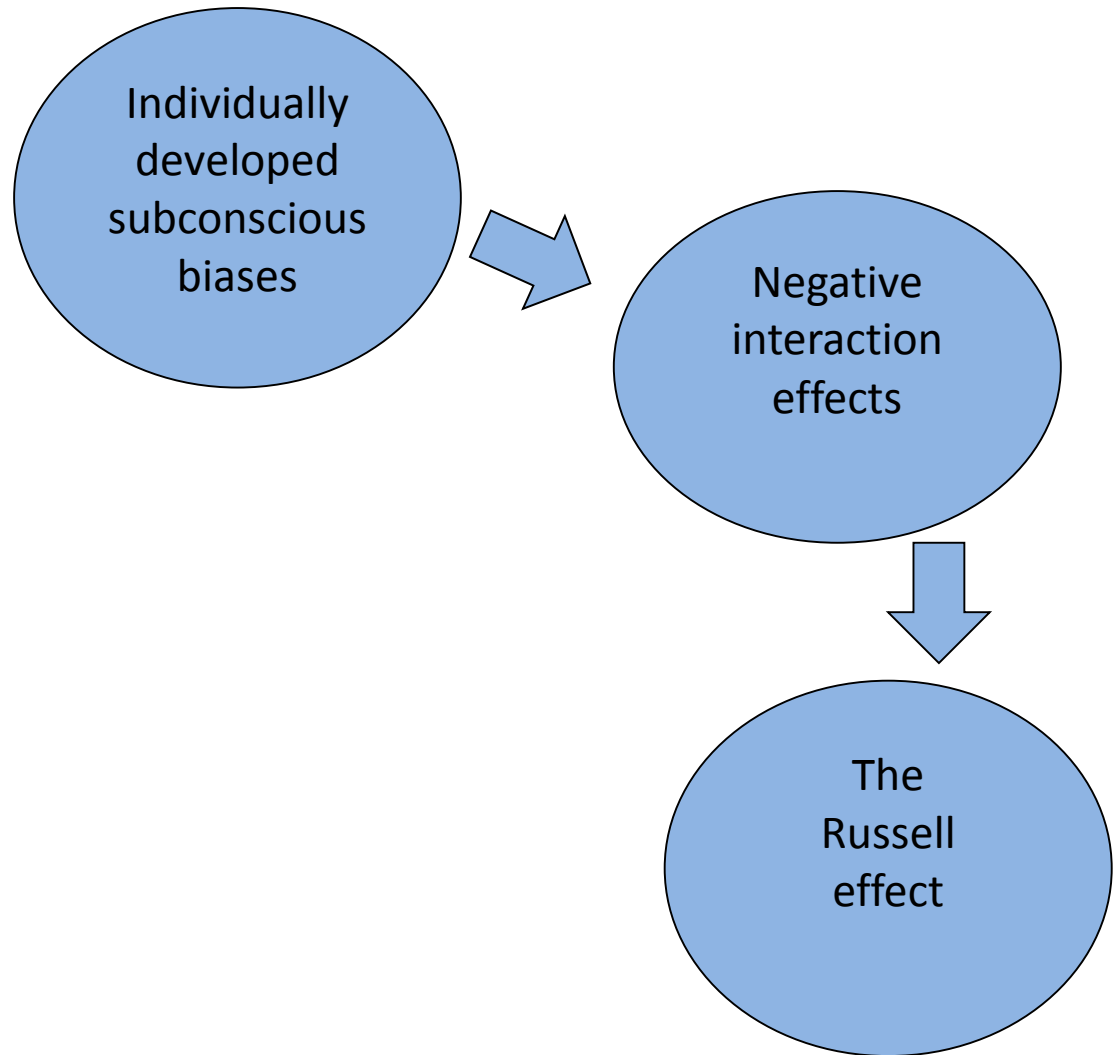
Negative Interaction Effects

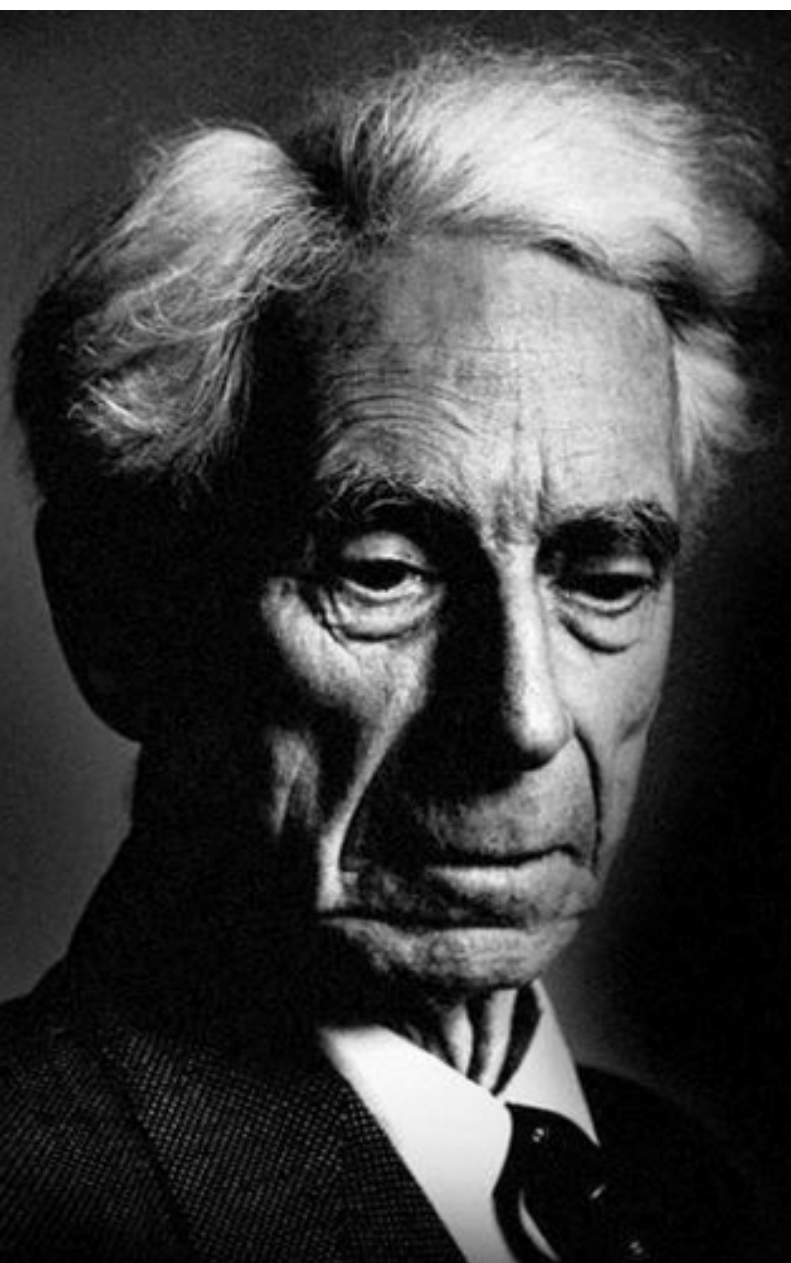
Kathryn Shultz – *Being Wrong*

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



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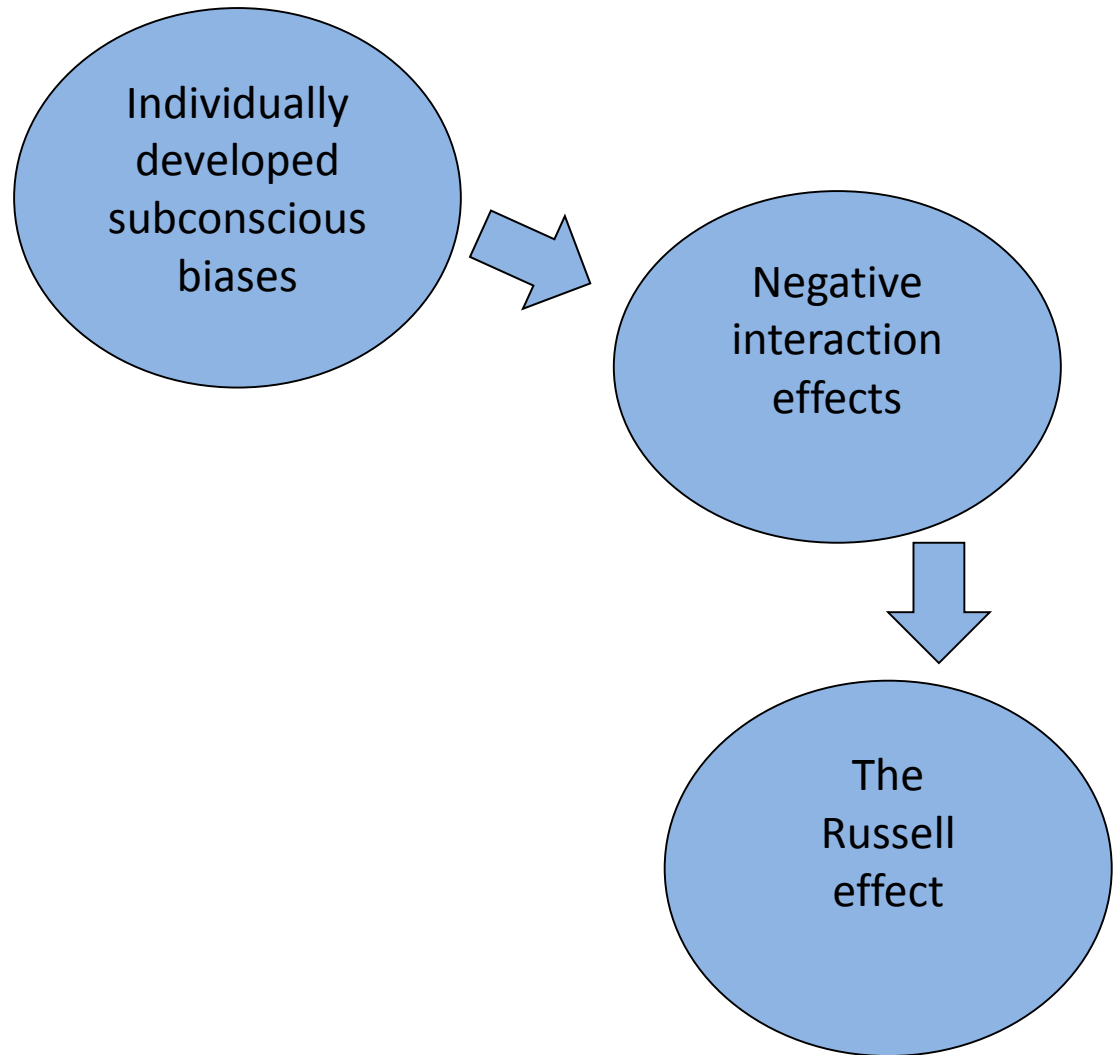




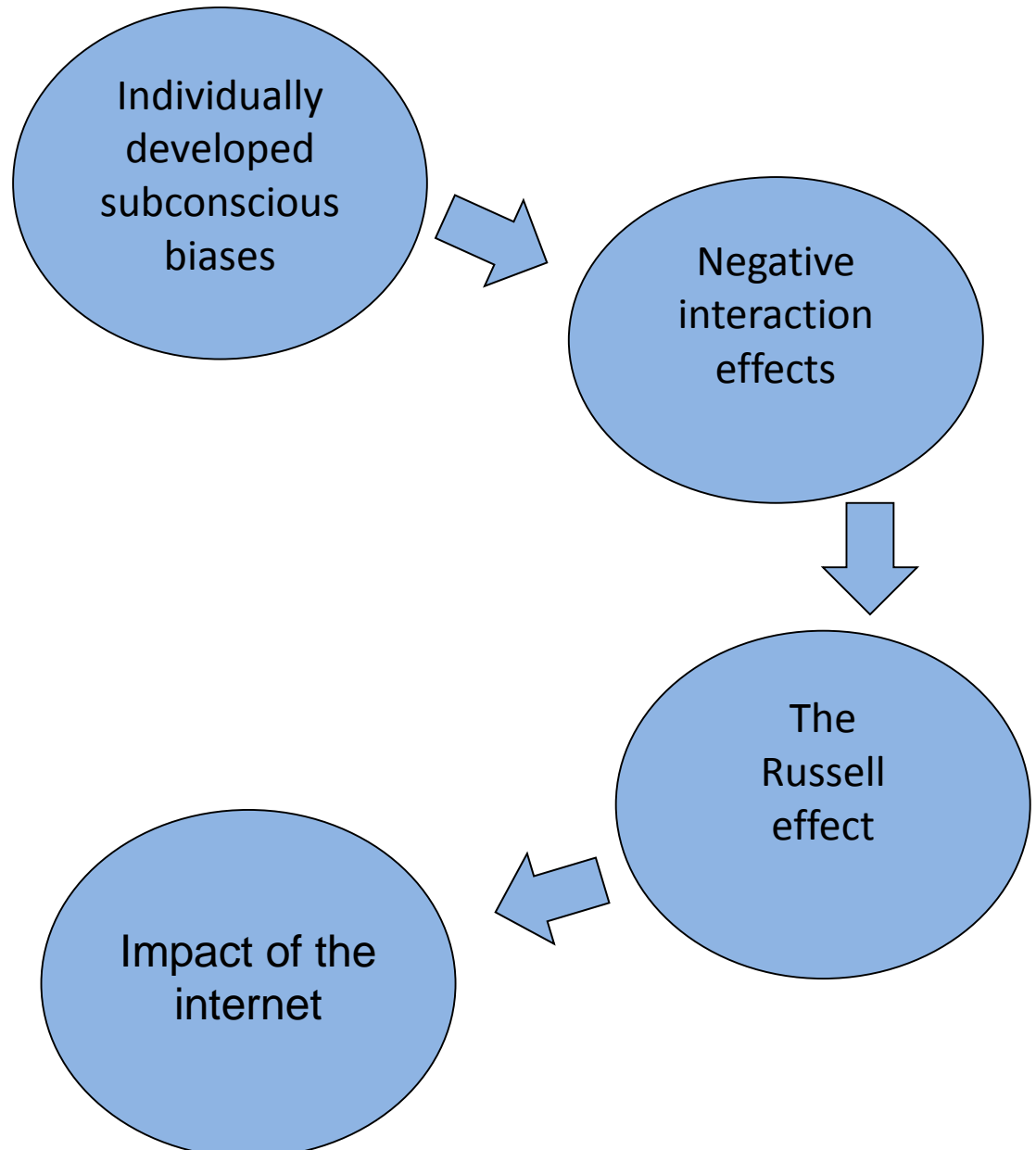
The whole problem with the world is that fools
and fanatics are always so certain of themselves,
and wiser people so full of doubts.

-Bertrand Russell

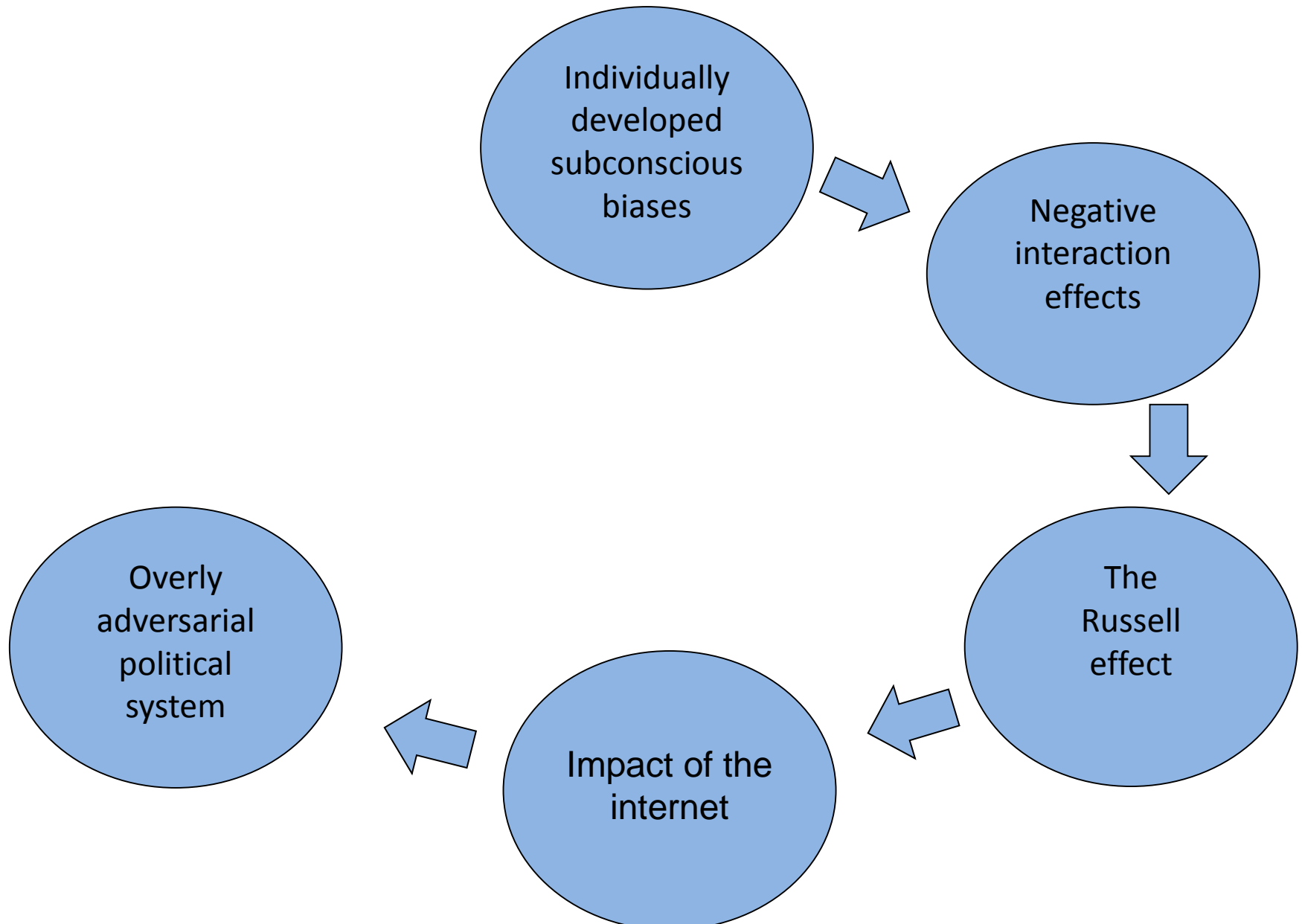
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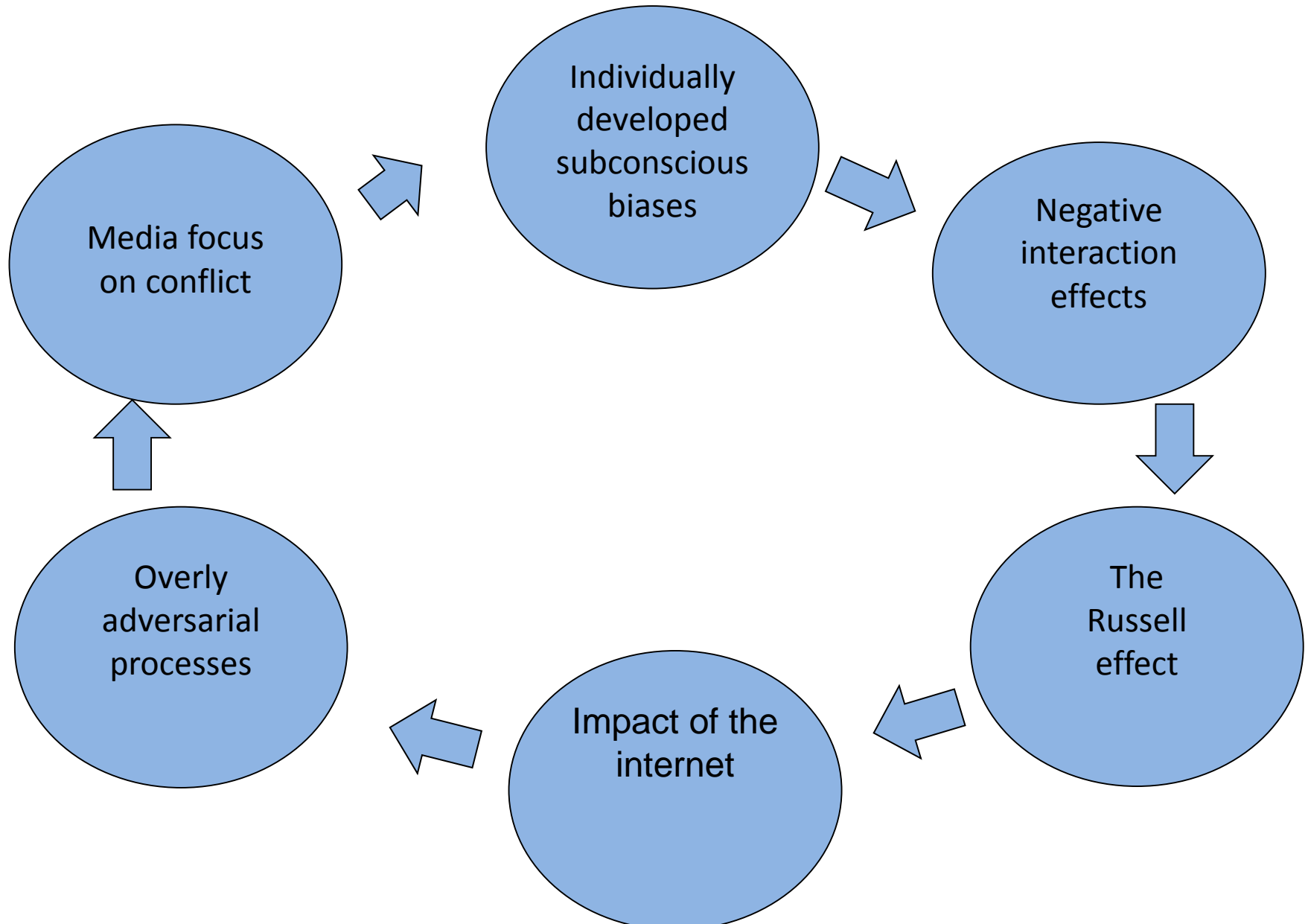
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Overview

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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

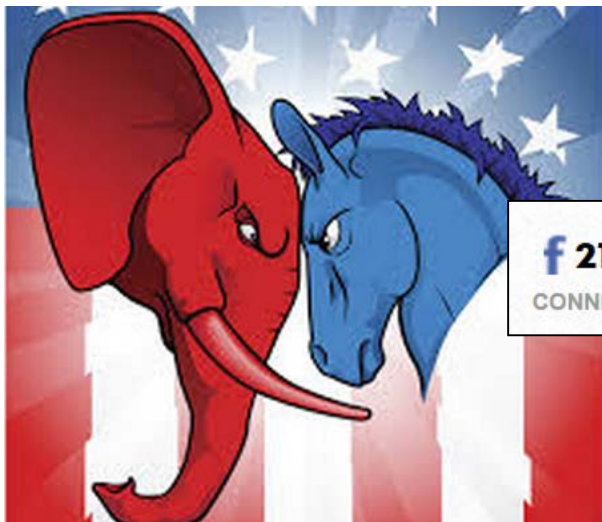
We are inherently pragmatic and creative

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 most negative aspects of human nature, and rarely tap into or nurture the positive.



What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Bottom line: The most powerful thing to help people overcome their biases, refine their opinion, and build community is **genuine conversation with people they respect.**



A Venn diagram consisting of three overlapping circles. The top circle is labeled 'DELIBERATION'. The bottom-left circle is labeled 'DEBATE'. The bottom-right circle is labeled 'DIALOGUE'. The circles overlap in various combinations, but no text is present in the intersection areas.

DELIBERATION

Purpose is to make tough decisions together

DEBATE

Purpose is to evaluate quality of arguments
through clash and/or expertise

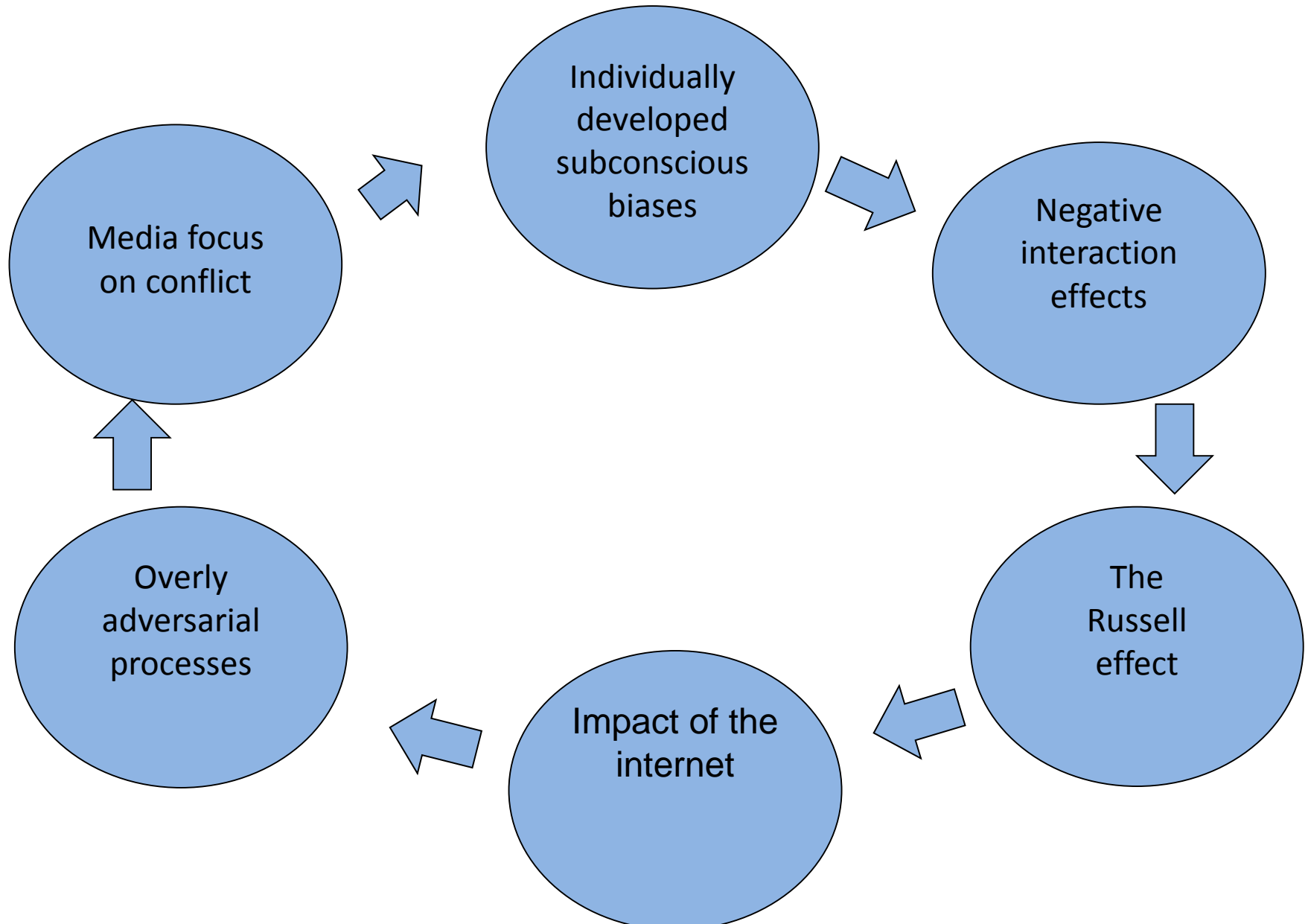
DIALOGUE

Purpose is to foster understanding and
respect through listening, storytelling,
and conversation

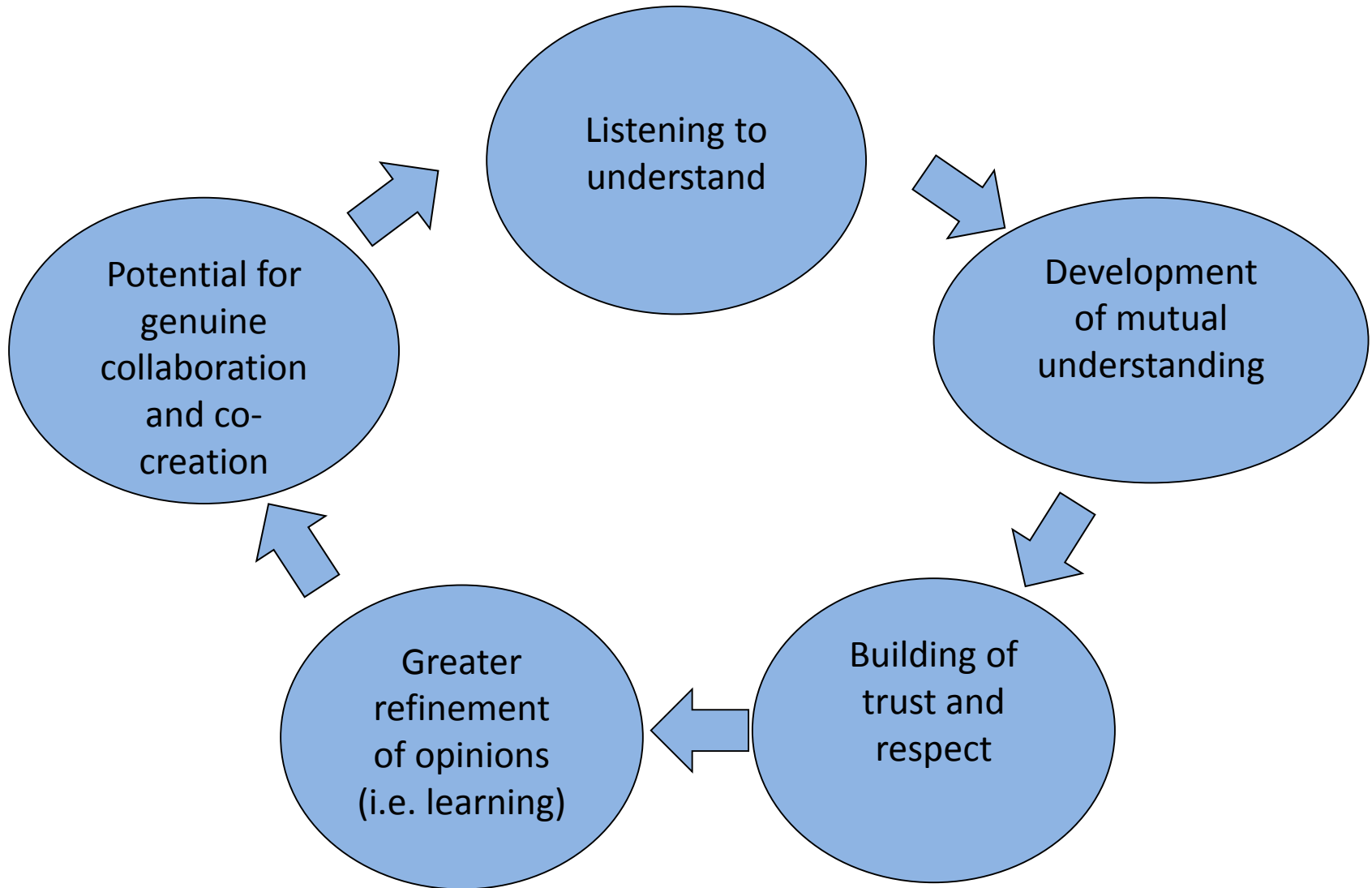
Four Key Shifts

- From wicked people → to wicked problems
- From inciting the worst of human nature → to bringing out the best of human nature
- From facts as cherry picked ammunition → to facts as tools for solving problems
- From adversaries → to collaborators

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization



The Virtuous Cycle of Authentic Engagement



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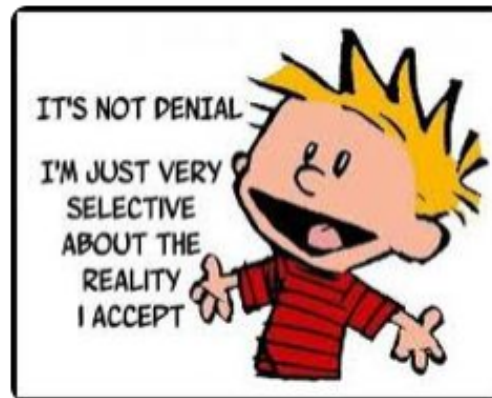
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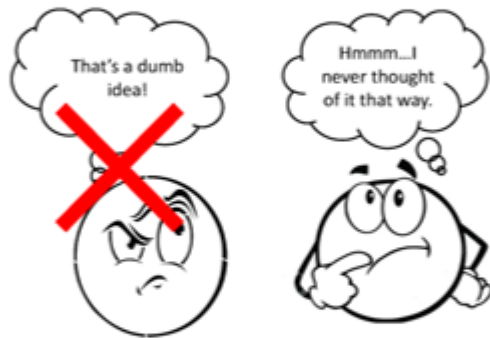
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Poudre River Forum
Island Grove Events Center, Greeley Colorado
February 2, 2018

Can “Listening to Understand” Make our Water Talk More Productive?

As you listen today—to our presenters as well as to those you interact with at breaks—practice “listening to understand” instead of focusing on defending your opinion or winning an argument.



Throughout the day, fill in below, as you wish. Then, at 3pm, you will have the opportunity to share something you wrote with folks at your table. As you discuss, listen to what your tablemates have to say and ask questions that help you better understand their point of view—without responding with your own point of view. Everyone at the table will have a chance to share something they have written.

Something I heard today that encouraged me:

Something I heard today that discouraged me:
