



Finding the Right Frame

Building Public Understanding of Adolescent Substance Use

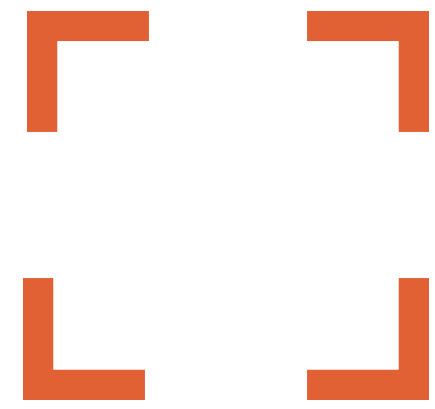
DBHR Learning Community

May 29, 2019

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Today's agenda

- What is framing?
- Why does framing matter?
- How can we start to reframe substance use, prevention and wellbeing?
- Q&A



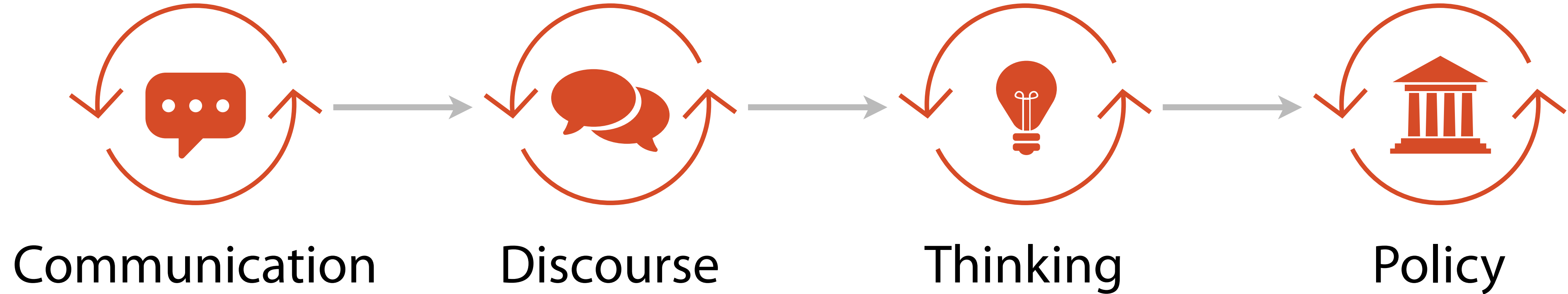
FrameWorks is on a mission...

to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity
to frame the public discourse on social problems.

FrameWorks investigates the communication aspects of social issues

- **Harvard University Center on the Developing Child** – how to translate science of early childhood brain and biological development
- **Alberta Family Wellness Initiative** – how to talk about the science of addiction; training researchers, practitioners and policymakers to use frames to close the research/practice gap
- **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** – how to help the UK public understand the social causes of poverty and build support for more effective policies and systemic solutions
- **National Human Services Assembly** – how to make a powerful case for supporting human services work
- **Ford Foundation and Charles Hamilton Houston Institute** – how to shift public understanding of crime and public safety to increase support for criminal justice reform

Our Theory of Change





What is framing?

What is a Frame?

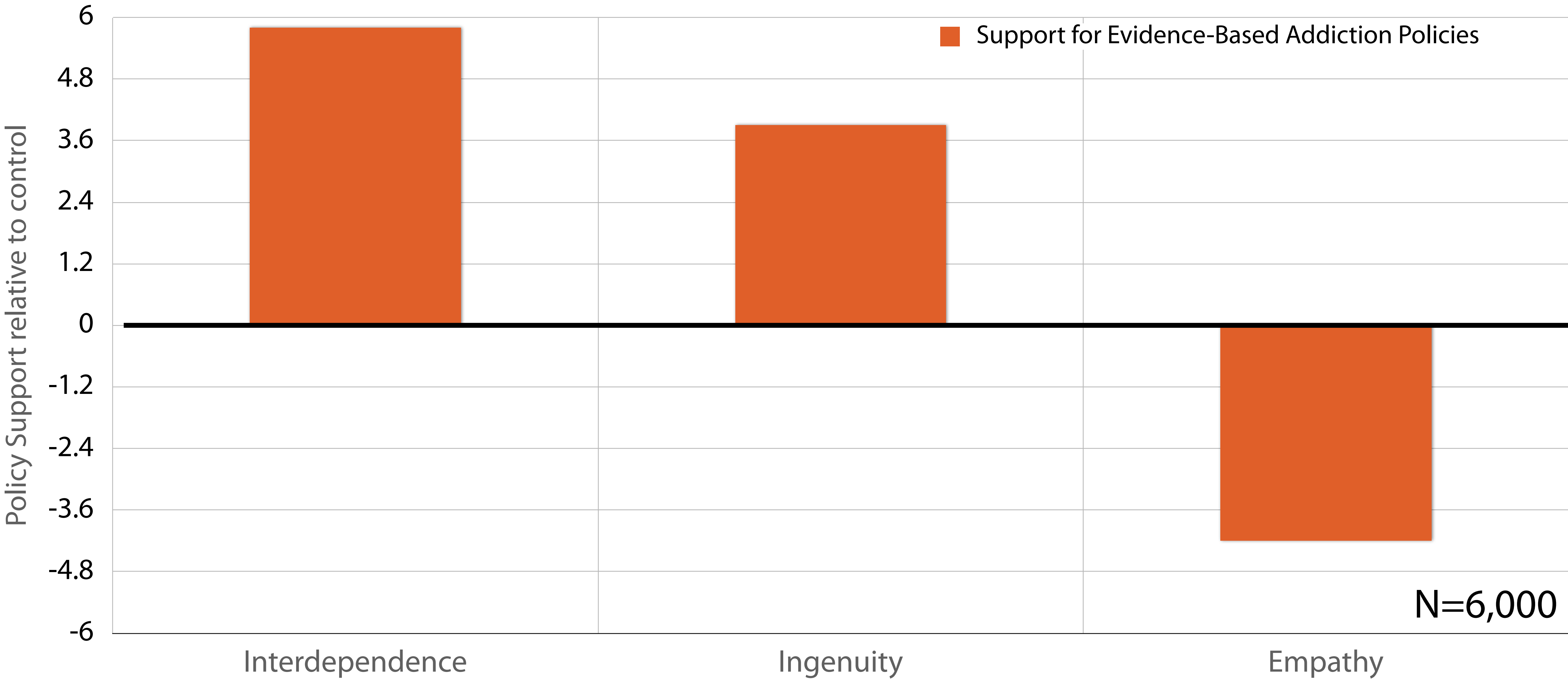
Frames are sets of choices about how information is presented:

- ▶ What to emphasize
- ▶ How to explain it
- ▶ What to leave unsaid

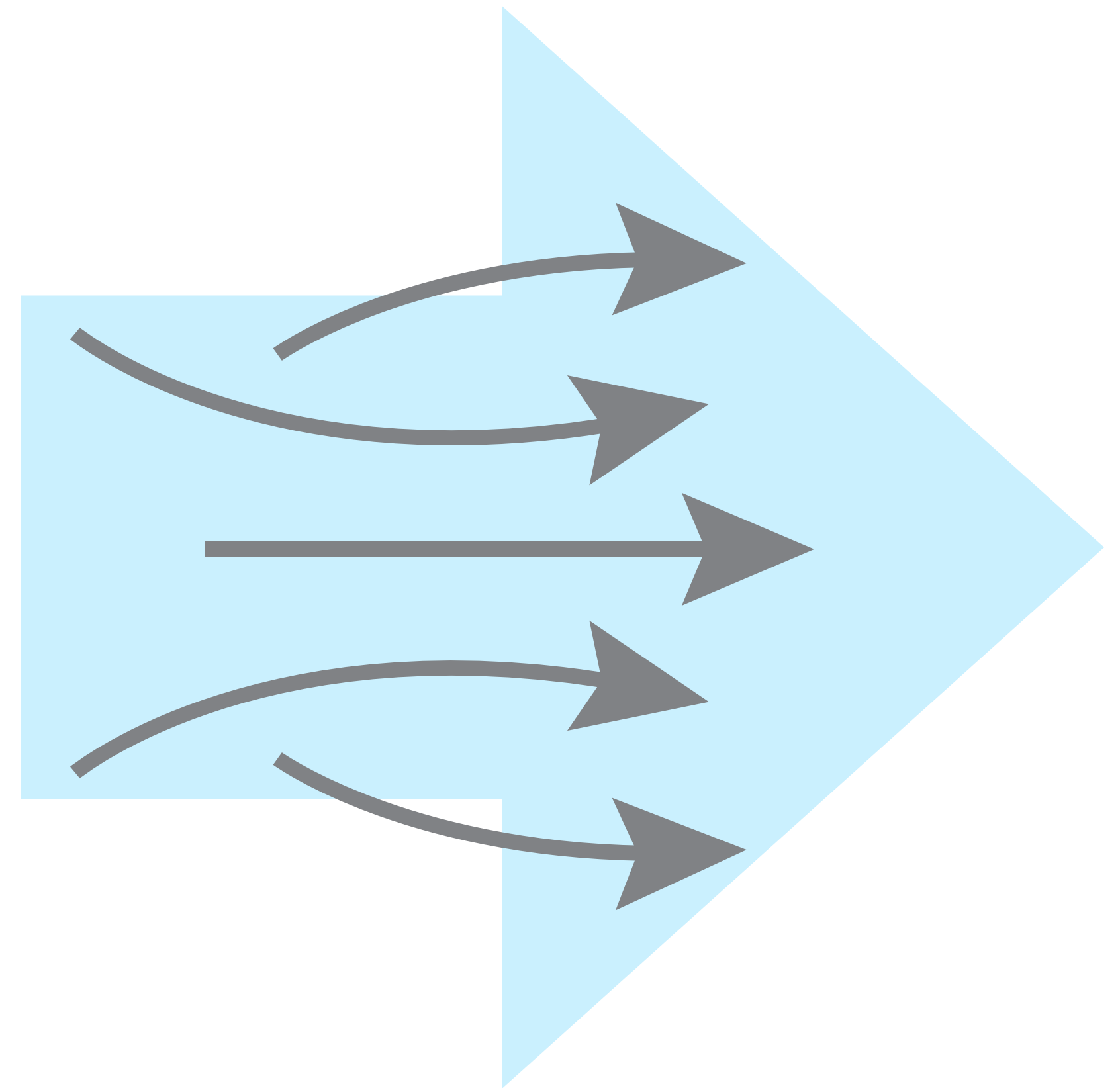
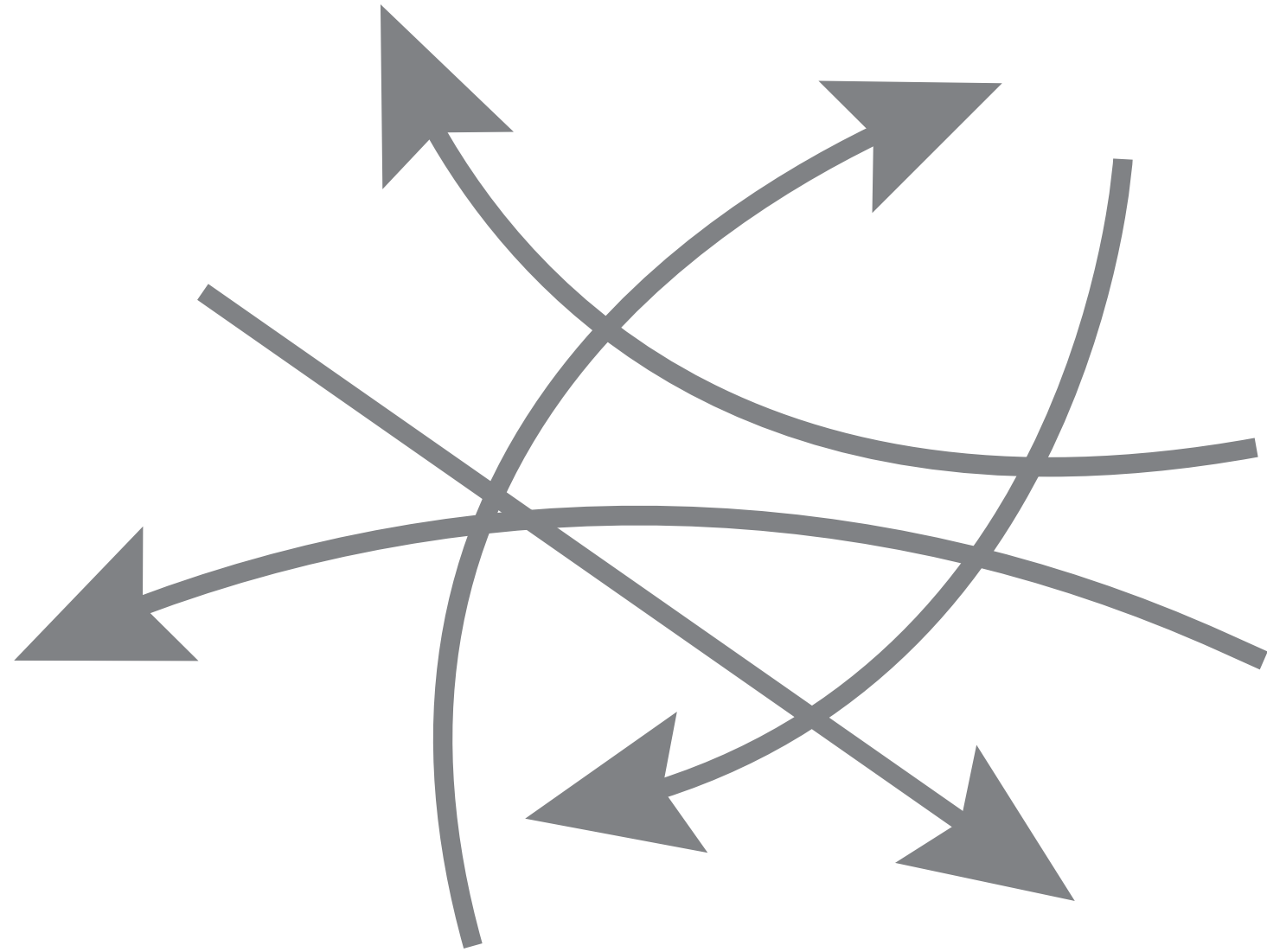
Why frames are critical to communication

- 1 Frames are choices that communicators make about how information is presented
- 2 Frames determine how audiences interpret information
- 3 Using evidence-based frames helps the public think differently about an issue

Framing is an empirical process



A shared framing strategy offers a field
a shared language





**How can we start to frame
effectively?**



1. Know the Story You Are Up
Against

AAA *You have a problem when:* **BBB**
You Say ... They Think



Expert/Advocate



Public

You Say ... They Think

“Preventing early use of drugs or alcohol may go a long way in reducing the risk of addiction and other serious problems in adolescents.”



The Field

“Sure. If they start experimenting a little earlier, they won’t have problems when they are older.”



The Public



Cultural Models Help us “Think Fast”

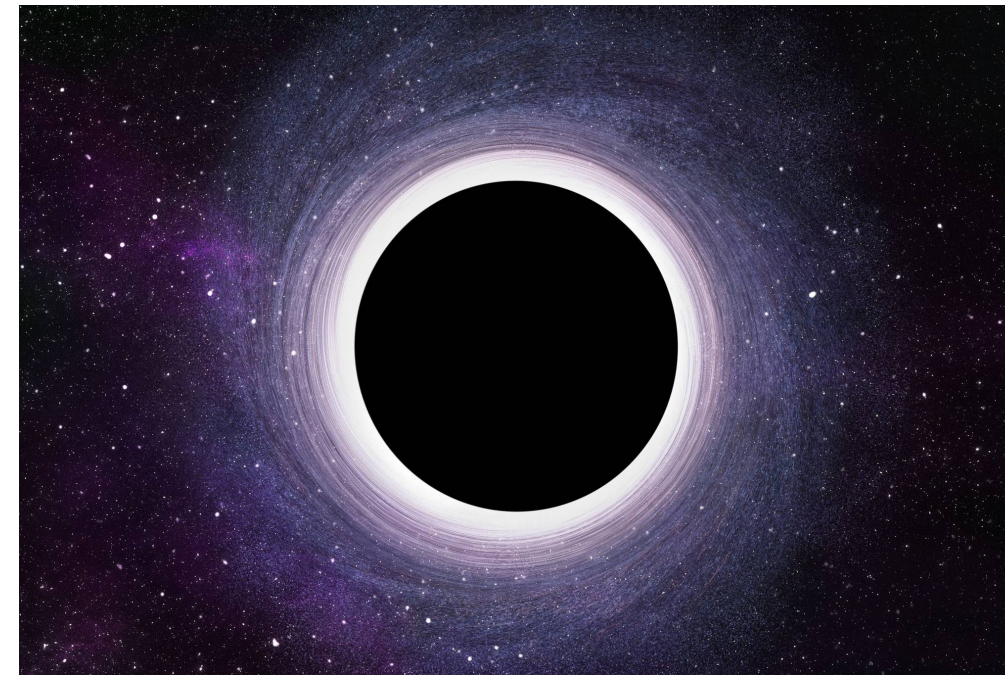


- Cultural models are taken-for-granted and largely automatic assumptions.
- They are cognitive short cuts created through years of experience and expectation.
- People rely on cultural models to interpret, organize and make meaning out of all sorts of stimuli, including experiences, feelings, thoughts ... and your communications.

Some cultural models the public uses to reason about *your* work



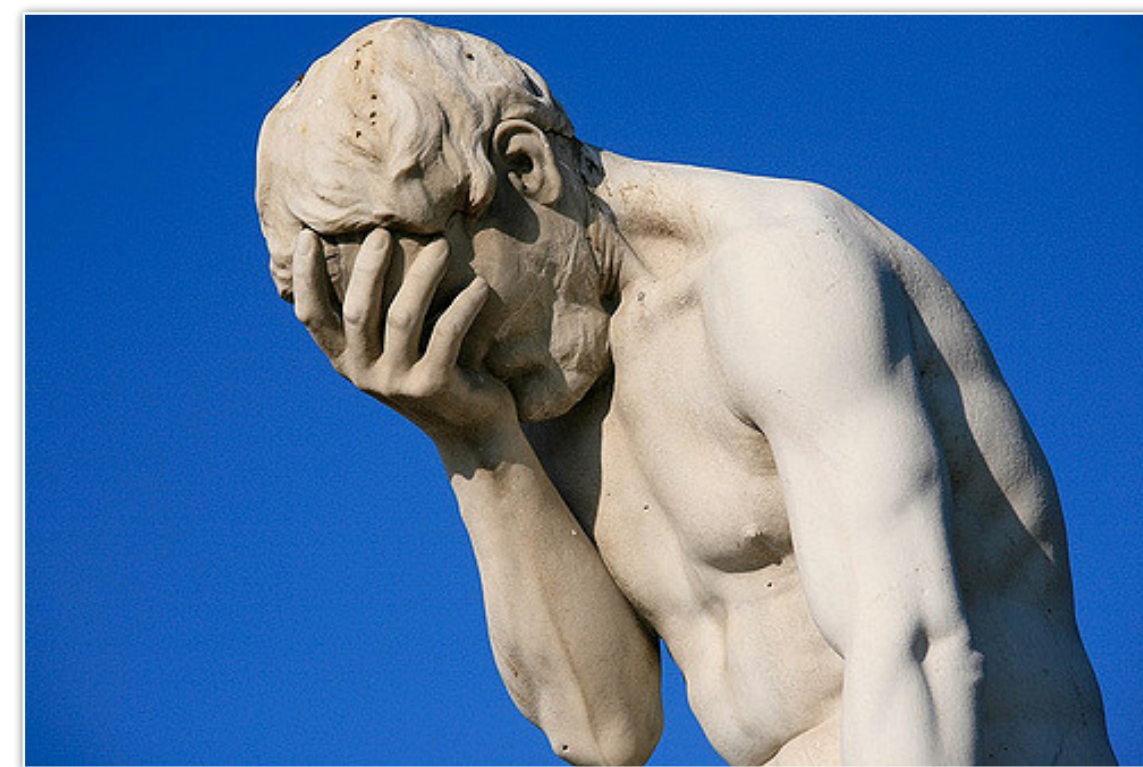
Bootstrapping/
individualism



Cognitive hole



Family bubble



Fatalism



Experimentation is
natural

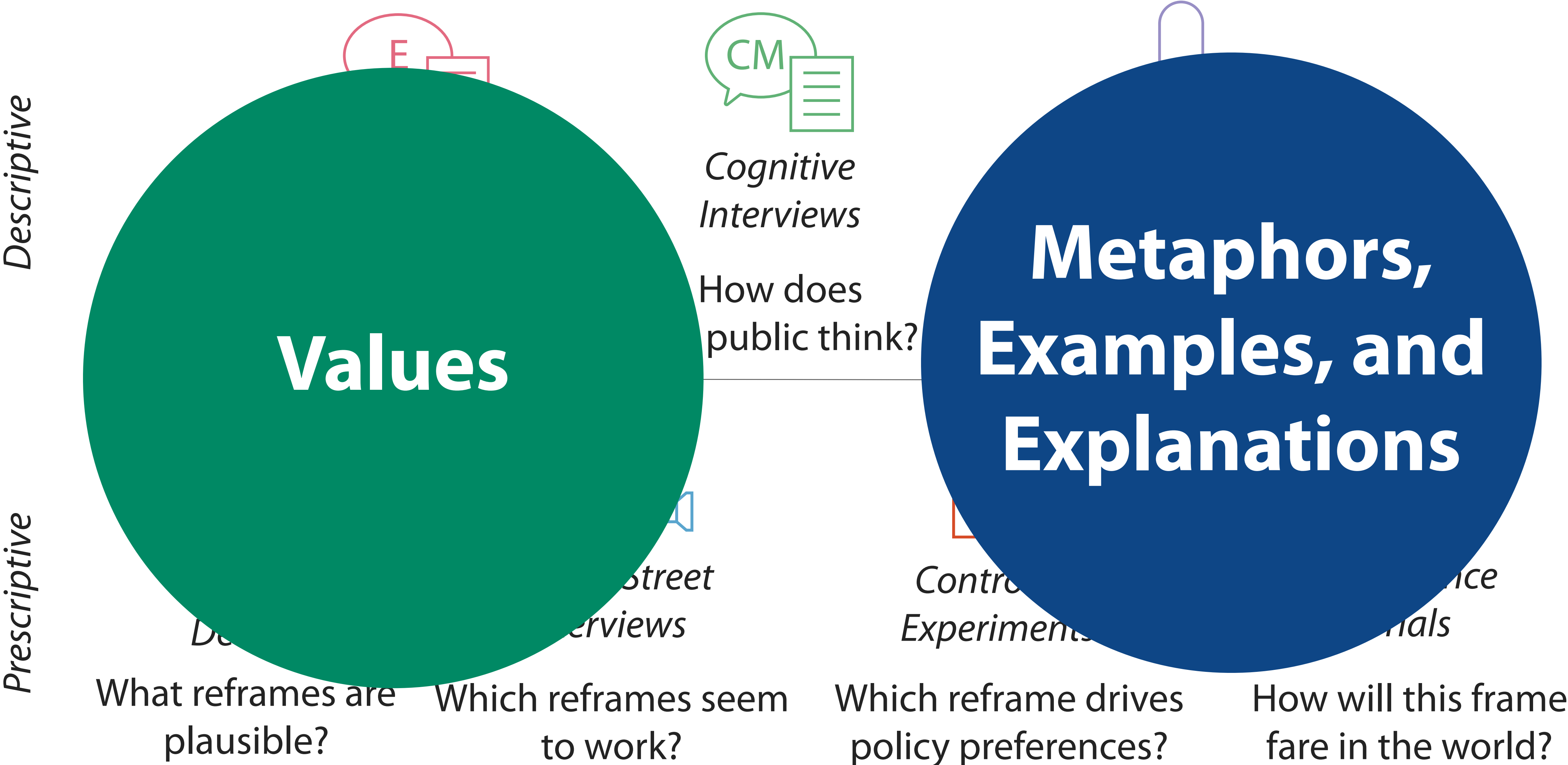
A few framing challenges for prevention

- Overcoming the perception that “some problems are too big to solve” or that “experimentation is natural”
- Bringing visibility to the array of professionals, especially medical practitioners, who play a role in prevention
- Helping the public identify concrete examples of prevention activities and successes



2. Use Tested Framing Strategies

FrameWorks' multi-method research tests which frames work



Values

A broad category of cherished cultural ideals: enduring beliefs that orient individuals' attitudes and behaviors.

Values help to establish why an issue matters and what is at stake.

As a frame element, values do the work of:

- Priming people to take a collective approach
- Tapping emotions that work for policy thinking: curiosity, concern, and can-do

ME

vs.



Strengths and limitations of *Prevention* as a value

- Focuses attention on early intervention
- Highlights the role of families, at the expense of other supports, including health care professionals and medical settings.
- Prevention as a value does not counteract assumptions that substance use is natural or inevitable

Framing Challenges:

Individualism; Wellbeing = Financial Stability + Physical Health

Solution: *Human Potential*

A tested value



When we support wellbeing, we make sure that everyone can reach their potential and fully contribute to our communities.

Explanatory Metaphors Help Direct Thinking

- Our brains already think in metaphor all the time
- Metaphors use the power of analogy to channel attention to certain features – and redirect attention away from others
- Metaphors are memory tools: They help people remember important points
- Metaphors are sticky: They pass easily from person to person, which amplifies the reach of your message



Framing Challenges:

Addiction is inevitable and incurable; Willpower determines addiction

Solution: Reward Dial *

*** A metaphor for the brain's dopamine risk-reward system and its role in addiction; tested in Canada**



We all have a reward dial in our brains. The dial controls the pleasure we get from our experiences. In an addicted brain, the dial has become uncalibrated. It can be recalibrated, but it takes time and technical expertise, and is it is easier to do the sooner it is addressed.

Framing Challenges:


Fatalism, Experimentation is Natural

Solution: *Boiling Over*

A metaphor for how environmental changes prevent and adolescent substance use and its risks.



By creating environments that “turn down the temperature” for adolescents, we can prevent early substance use entirely or keep it from boiling over into a more serious problem.



3. Check Your Framing

How do we assess framing in communications?



- What *values* are used? What is at stake?
- What assumptions or *cultural models* are cued up?
- Are the explanations sufficient? Does it make assumptions about a level of knowledge?
- Are solutions presented?
- Who is responsibility for the problem assigned to?

Next steps



- Workshop in June with Mackenzie Price
- Technical Assistance and Advice for upcoming campaign

A talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change.

Richard Rorty



Thank you!

www.frameworksinstitute.org/adolescent-substance-use.html



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