



Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency

Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience



WEBINAR SERIES

Resilience Matters



Acknowledgement of Country

AIDR acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which you all join us from today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this event.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters across Australia.





Housekeeping

- You will remain muted and your camera will not be activated for the duration of today's event.
- Today's event will be recorded and made available after the event.
- Please enter questions for our speakers in the Q&A function, not the chat box.
- Please use the chat box to share any thoughts or reflections during the presentation
- Please be respectful to each other when posting your comments or questions.



Welcome

Dr Mayeda Rashid

Manager Capability Development and Engagement

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR)



Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency



Speaker Introduction

Dr Mark Crossweller

Director

Ethical Intelligence Pty Ltd

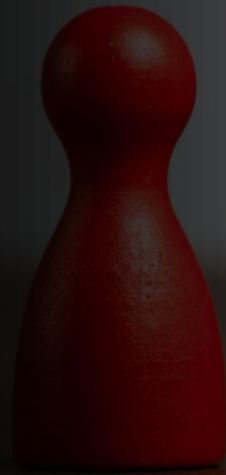


Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency



Vulnerability, Resilience and Ethics

Dr Mark Crosweller AFSM





Vulnerability

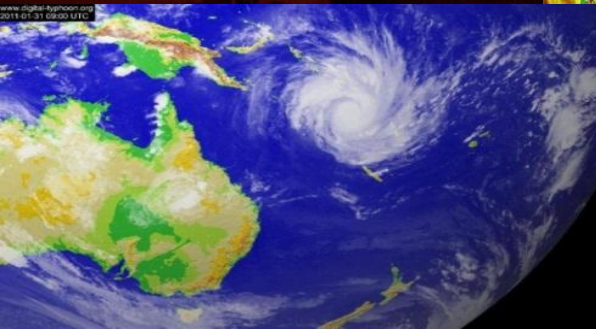
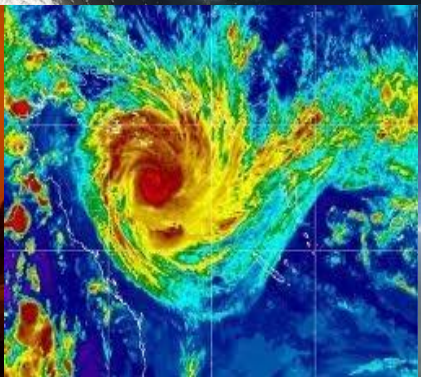
“When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up, we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability... To be alive is to be vulnerable.”

~ Madeleine L'Engle



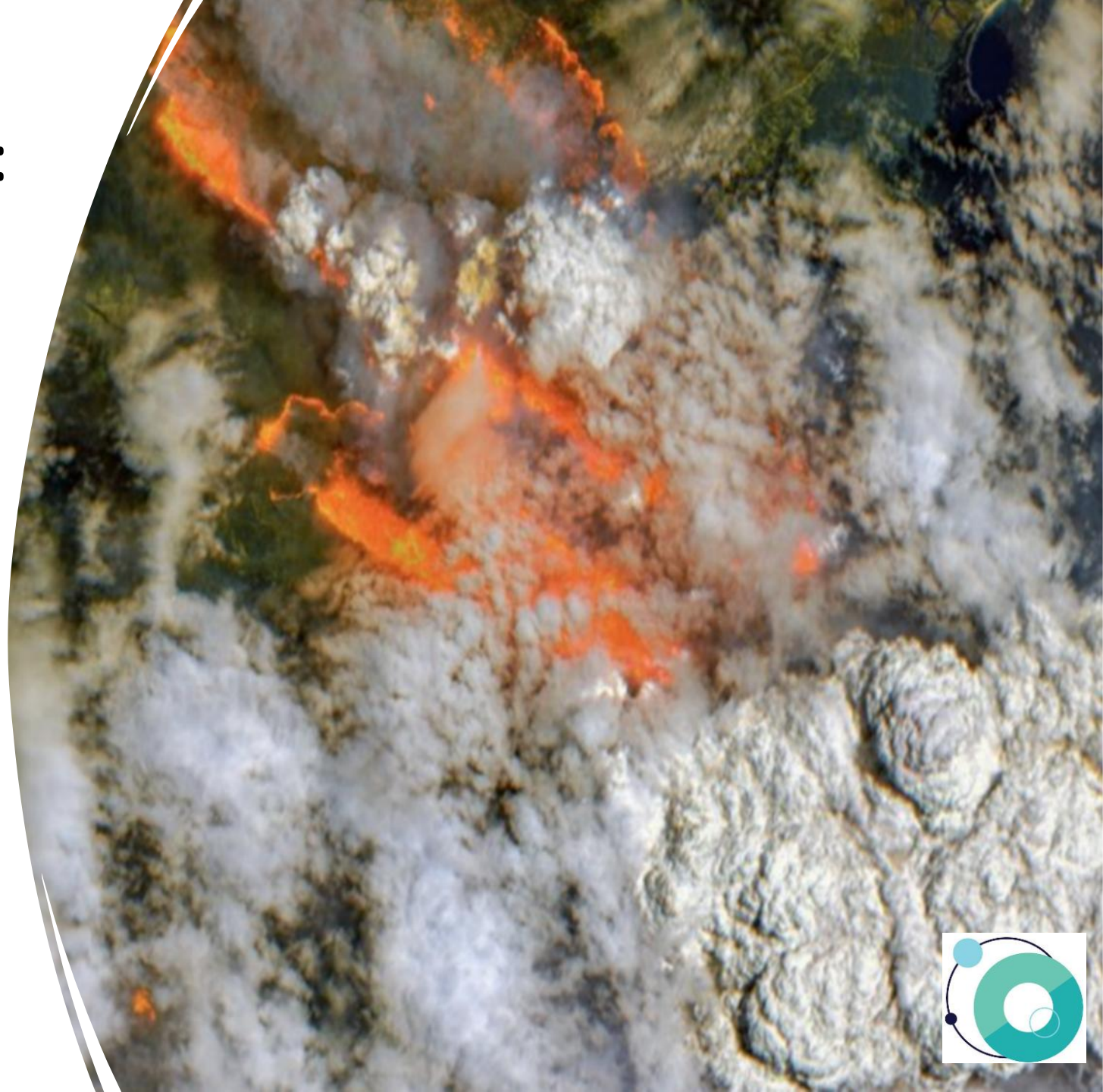
Societal and Institutional Vulnerability





2019-20 Bushfire Season: Key Messages Coming From Governments

- Governments could do no more
- Citizen safety could not be guaranteed
- Losses would inevitably occur
- Communities should prepare for catastrophic impacts
- Inevitability of deaths
- Follow instructions and abandon localities



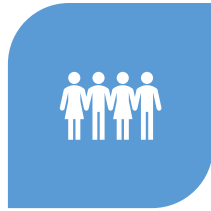
6 Unprecedented (not surprising) Antecedent Conditions shaping our future



**NATURAL HAZARDS ARE
MORE FREQUENT AND
INTENSE**



**THE INTERCONNECTED
AND INTERDEPENDENT
NATURE OF ESSENTIAL
SERVICES AND THEIR
RELATIONSHIP WITH
HUMAN VALUES**



**PEOPLE AND ASSETS ARE
MORE EXPOSED AND
VULNERABLE**



**DISASTER IMPACTS ARE
MORE LONG TERM AND
COMPLEX**



**COSTS OF DISASTERS ARE
GROWING**



**MOMENTUM TO ADDRESS
FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF A
CHANGING CLIMATE IS
GROWING**



Changing how we think about disasters



Severe to catastrophic events are inevitable

We do not need to know where or when events will manifest in order to be better prepared nationally



In most instances, disasters are not 'natural'

We need to inquire 'why' and 'how' do naturally occurring events lead to devastating suffering and loss.

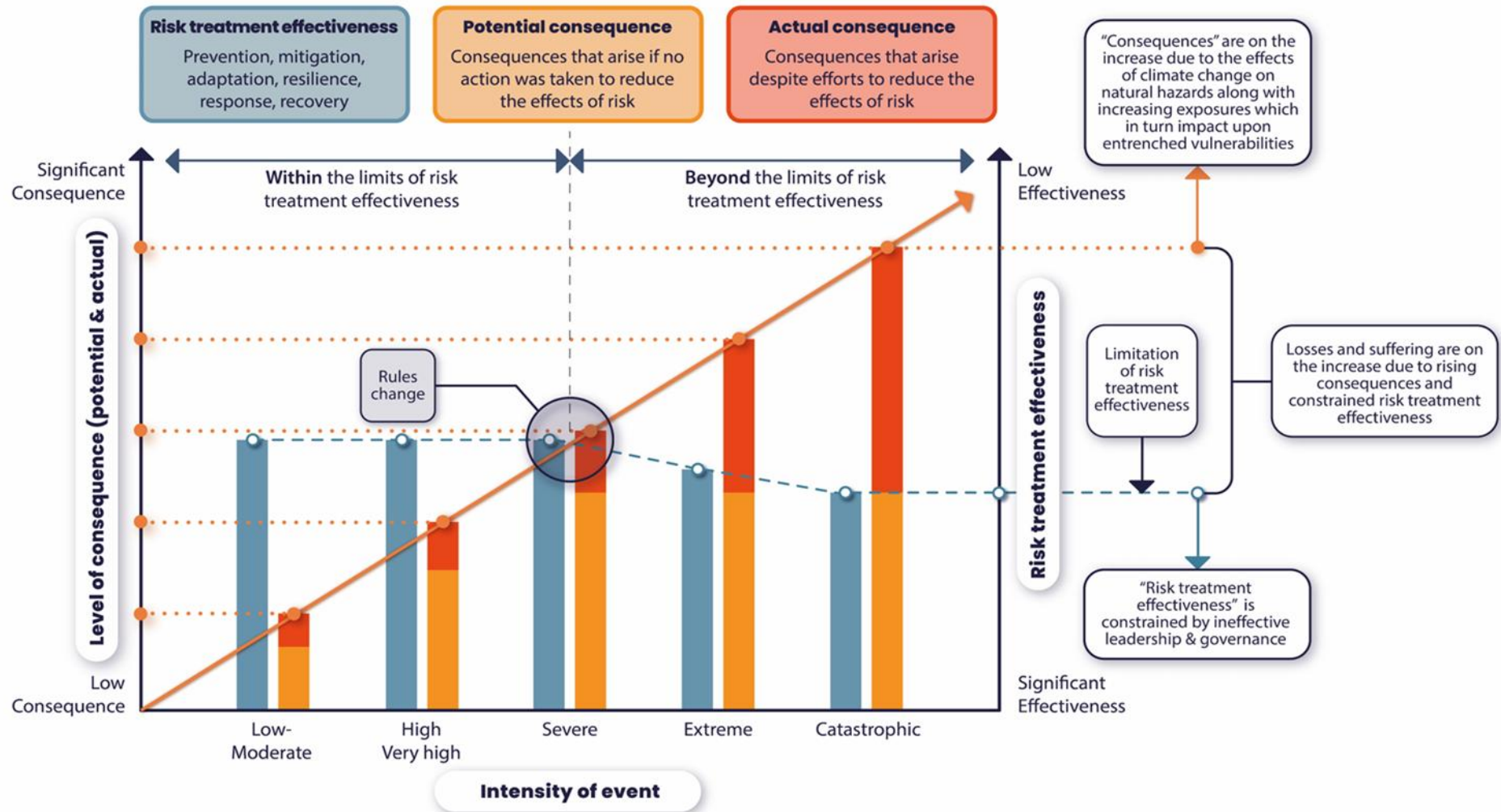


Understanding disaster risk is more than understanding hazards

Vulnerability is the least understood dimension of disaster risk.



Where we find ourselves during times of catastrophe

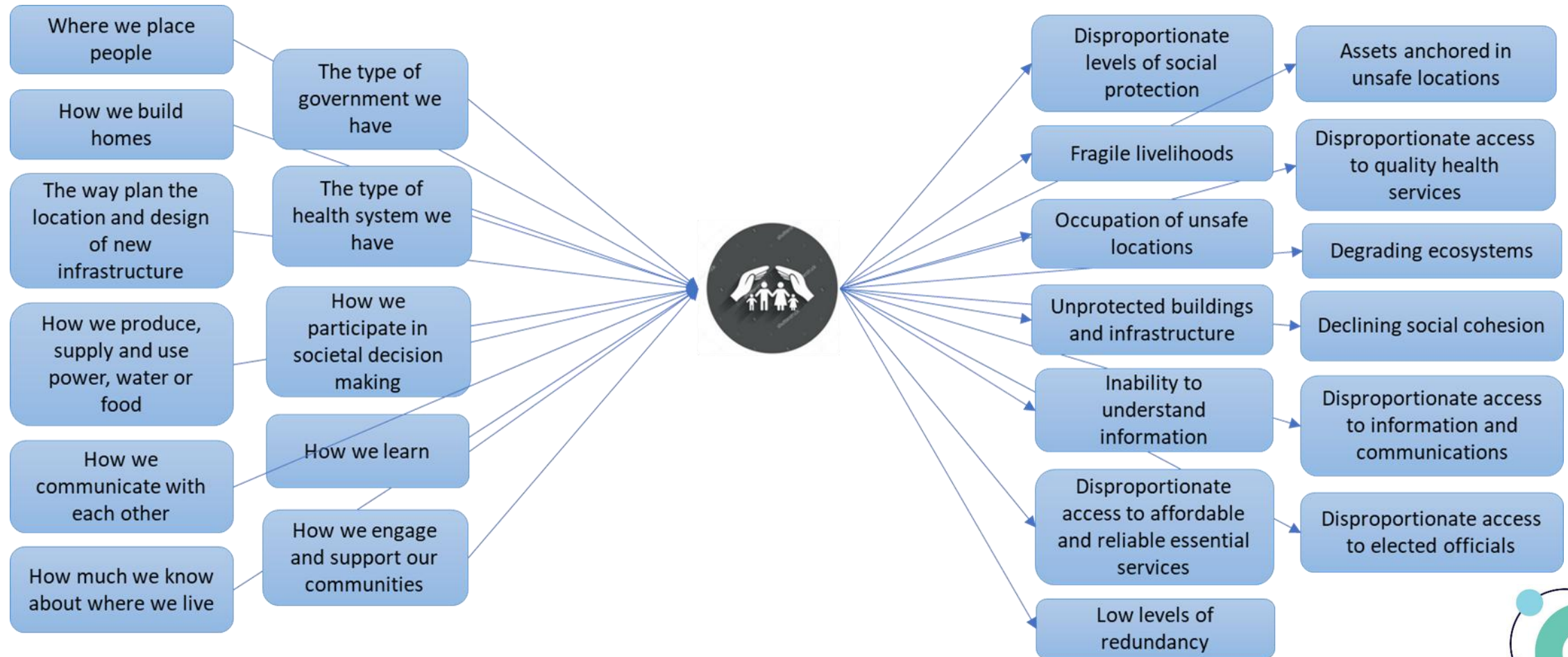


What We Know about Vulnerability

- Vulnerability can be defined as both the susceptibility to harm (suffering) along with the inability to cope and adapt AND as the basis of relatedness and relationships.
- Failing to recognise the vulnerability in and of oneself necessarily results in failing to see the vulnerability in and of Others.
- Recognising vulnerability as fundamental and unavoidable to being human requires us to be more responsible for and responsive to Others who are especially vulnerable.
- Such responsibility and responsiveness is elicited through our lived experiences of being vulnerable and through a process of reconciling with our own vulnerability.
- Social-cultural influences that shape perceptions of vulnerability (and resilience) also shape a leader's perspective, their role as leaders, and their worldview.
- These perspectives help shape how they give policy advice and make decisions to protect Others.



What makes us vulnerable?



Brisbane
Floods
February
2022 –
Carrara
Gold Coast



Utopia vs Reality

There are limits to the ability of individuals and communities to reduce their vulnerability

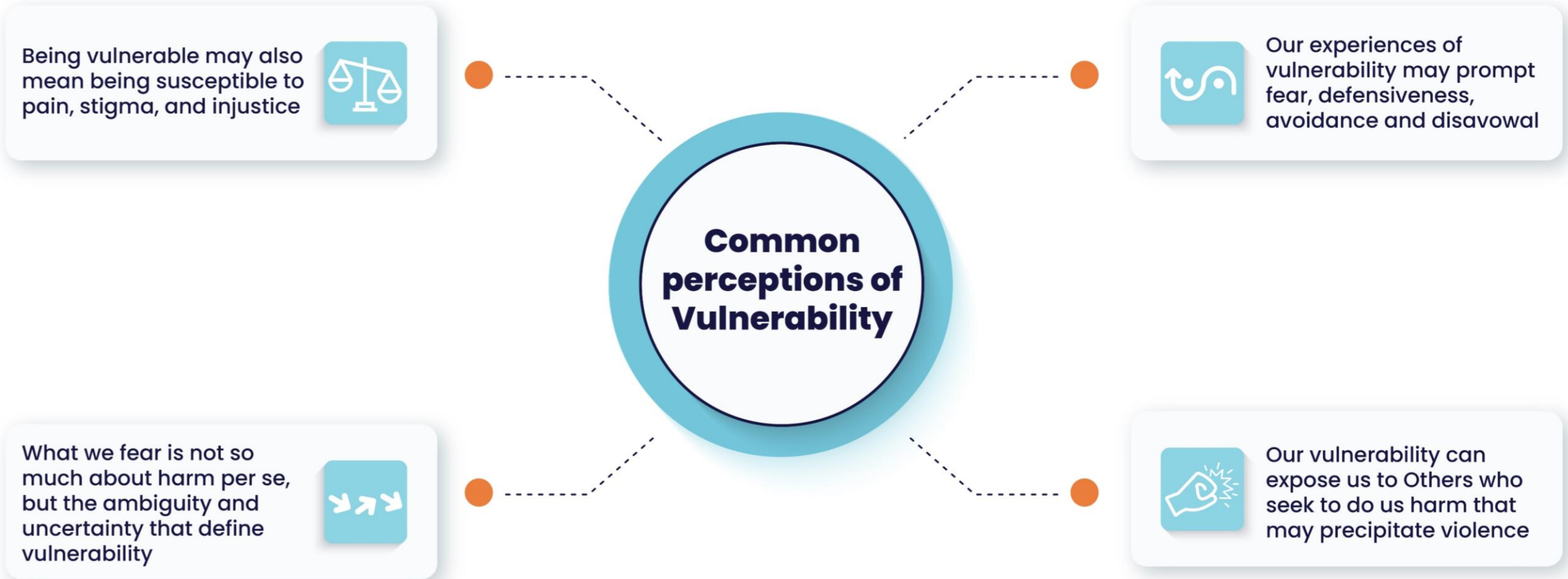
Some groups in society have disproportionate power to increase or reduce vulnerability, while others are disproportionately vulnerable

Understanding the cycles and points where our individual and collective capacity to cope reach its limits, can provide clues for points of intervention.



Vulnerability and Leadership





(Gilson, 2011, 2014; Butler, 2005)



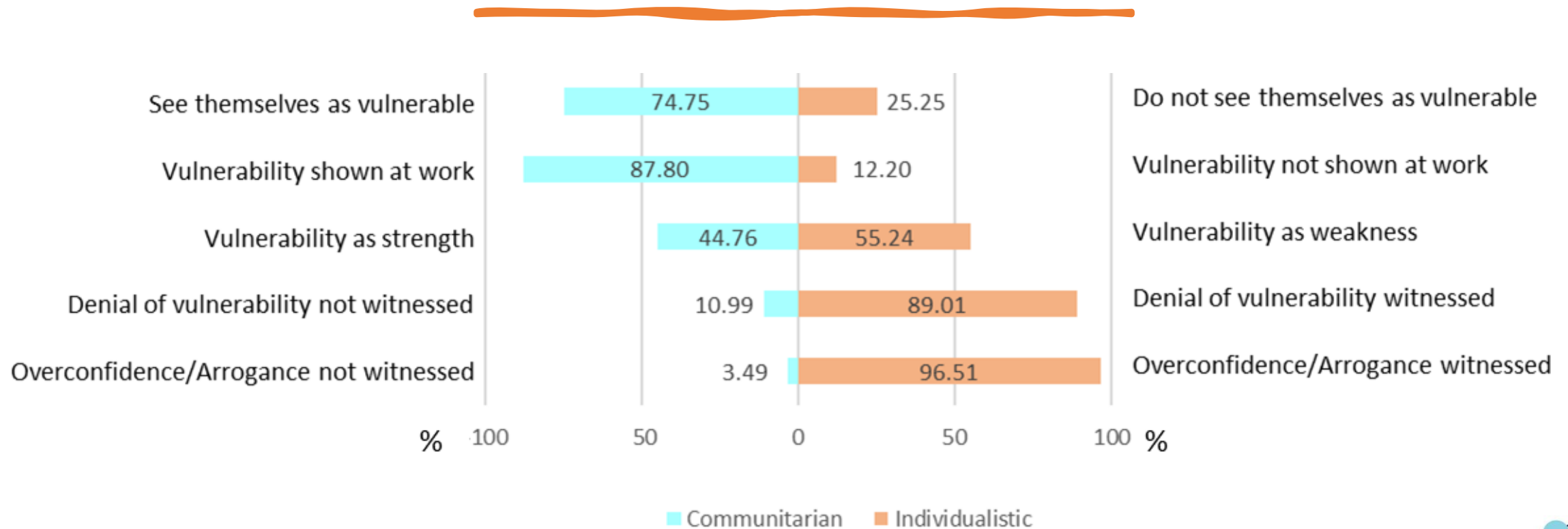


(Gilson, 2011, 2014; Butler, 2005)



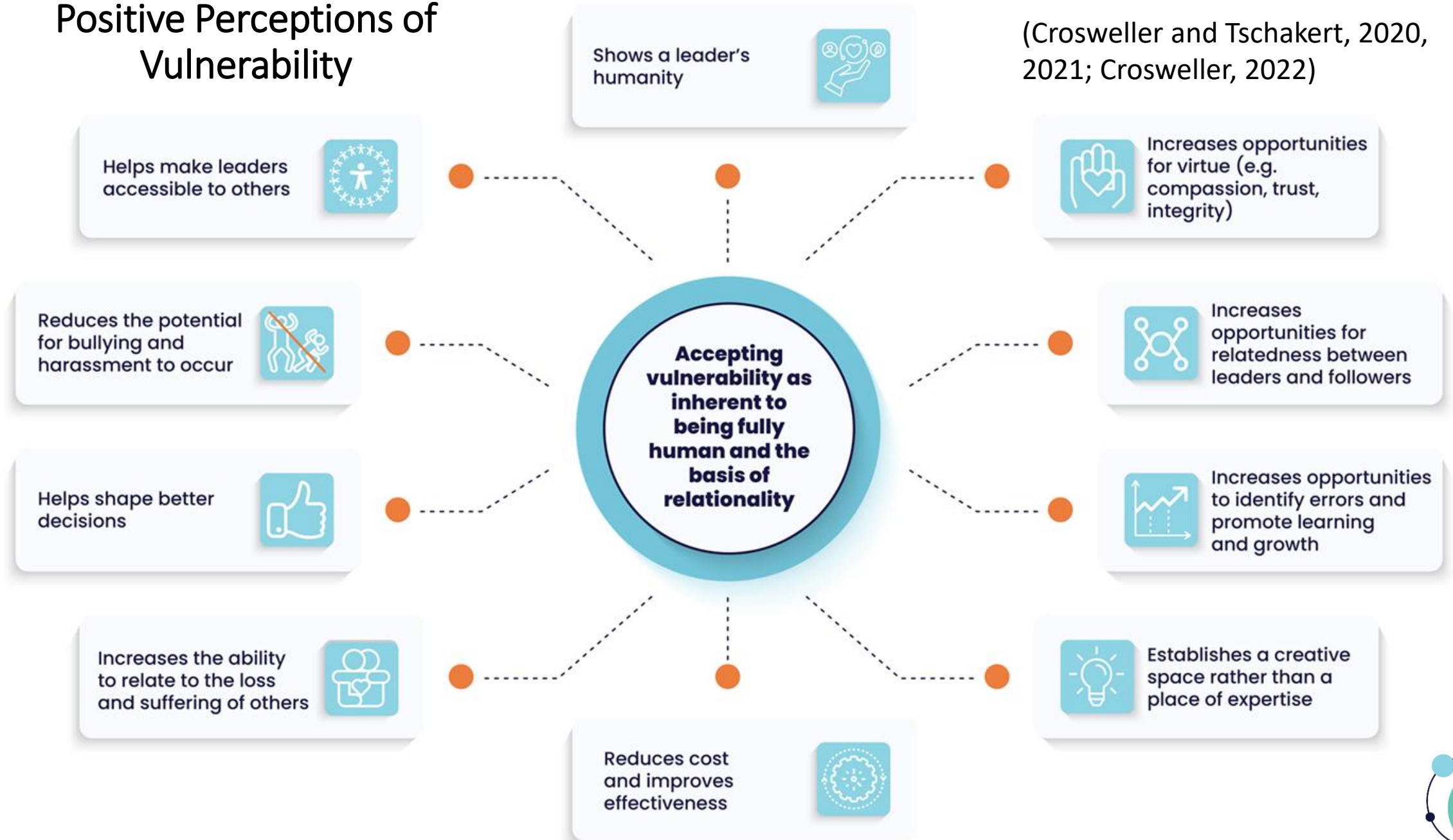
How Leaders Conceptualize Vulnerability

(Crosweller and Tschakert, 2020)



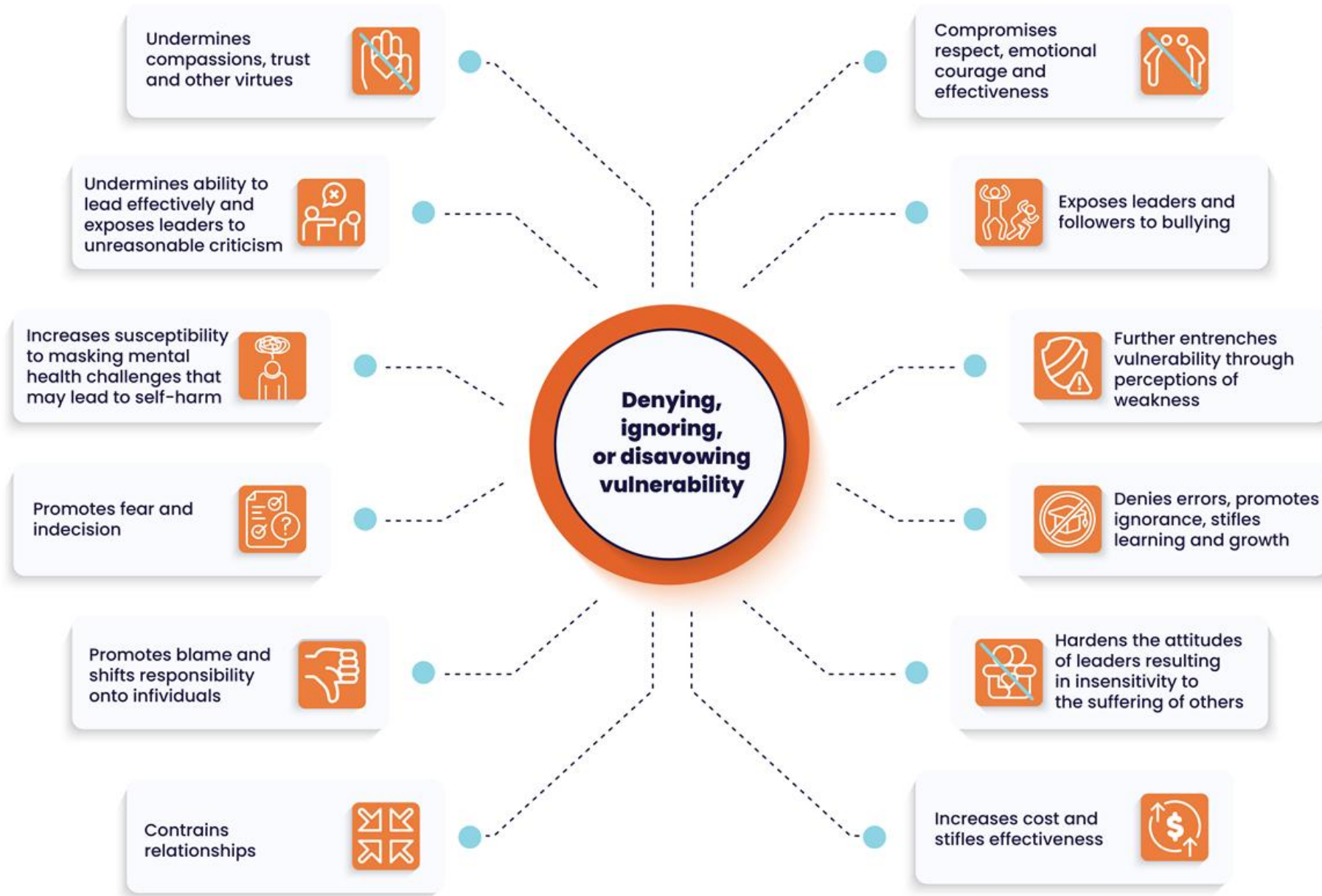
Positive Perceptions of Vulnerability

(Crosweller and Tschakert, 2020, 2021; Crosweller, 2022)



Negative Perceptions of Vulnerability

(Crosweller and Tschakert, 2020, 2021; Crosweller, 2022)



Vulnerability with Wisdom



Vulnerability between two or more people requires practice – it is not an automatic given but must be cultivated



Vulnerability requires that we set boundaries as to what we will and will not accept, be clear about intentions towards Others, and proceed sensibly toward relatedness



The experience of vulnerability presents us with the reality of our fallibility, mutability, unpredictability, and uncontrollability



It is only by being vulnerable can we extend ourselves beyond Self and towards Others



Understanding vulnerability is not achieved through knowledge, but rather through experience: undergoing, seeing, sensing, feeling



We do not need to embrace vulnerability without qualification, but we do need to renounce our habitual denial of its existence

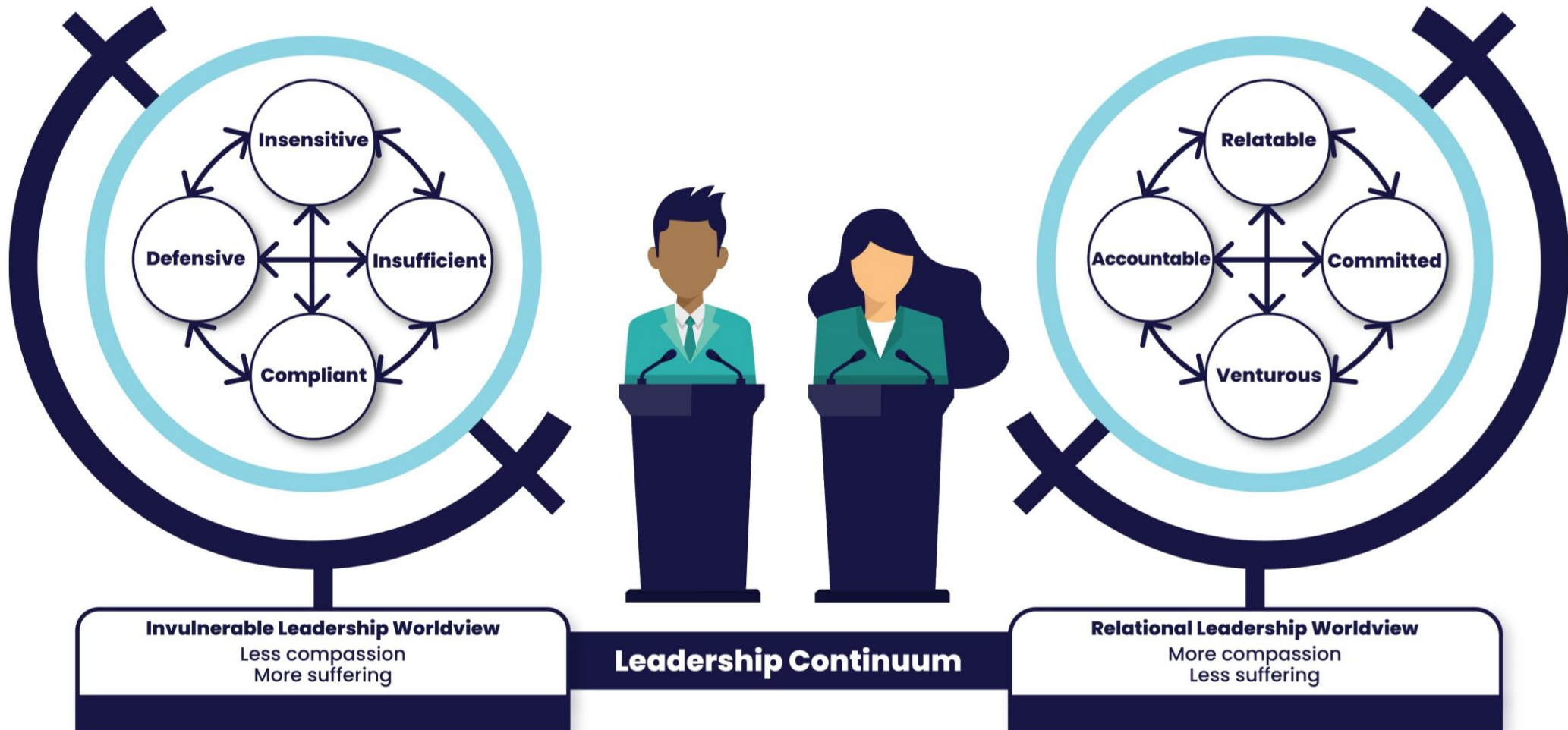


Openness to vulnerability allows us to move forward, change, experience something new, and move from being to becoming

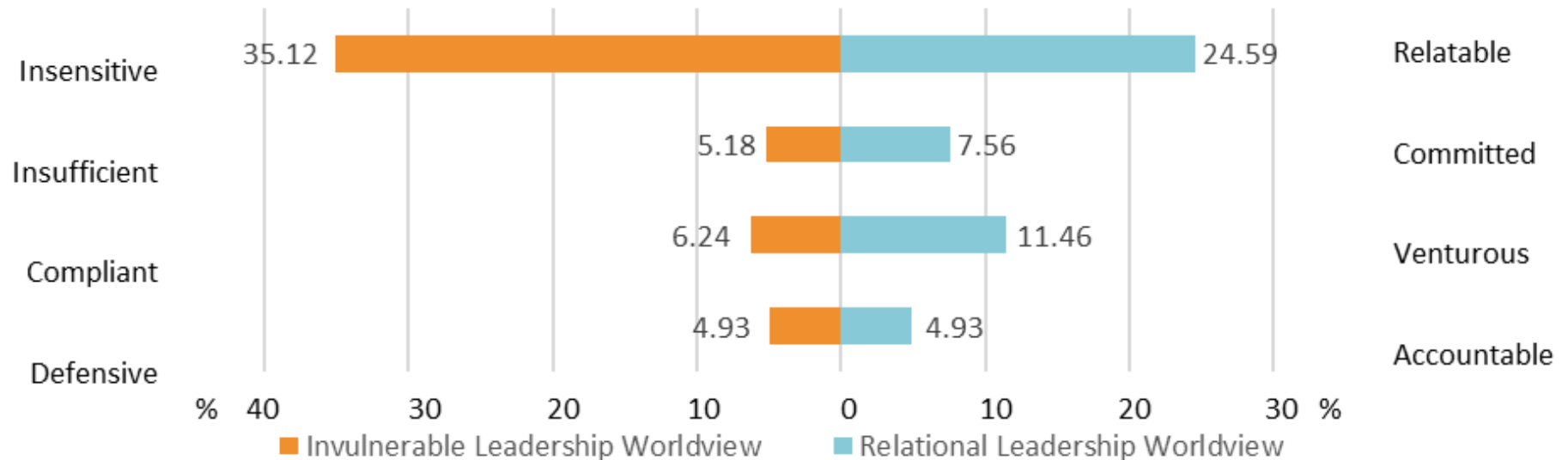
(Gilson, 2014)



The Invulnerable – Relational Leadership Continuum

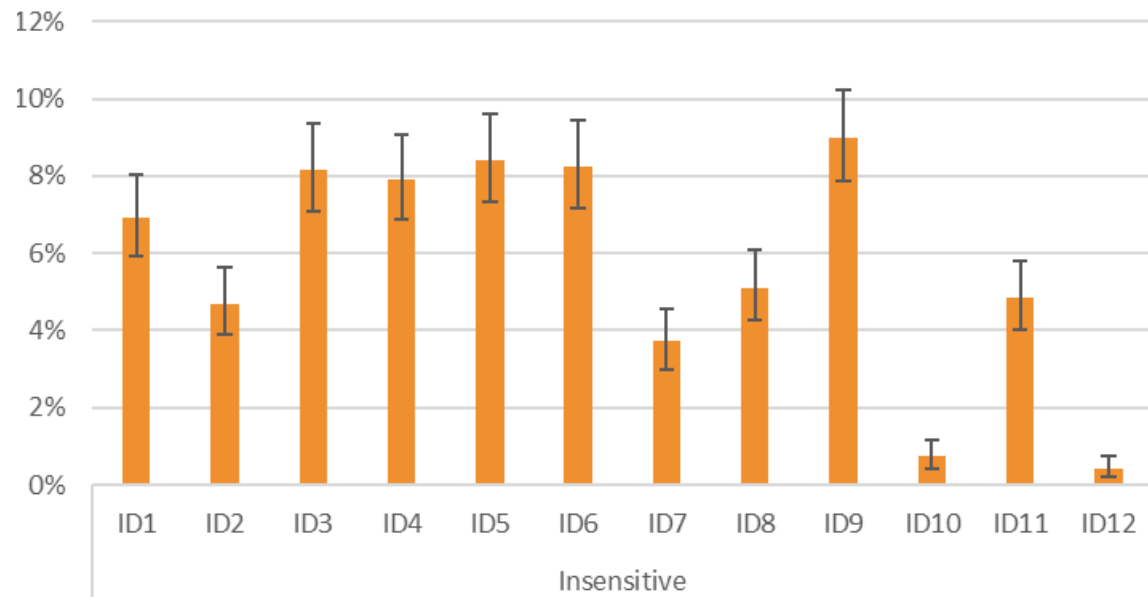


Leadership Continuum



Insensitivity

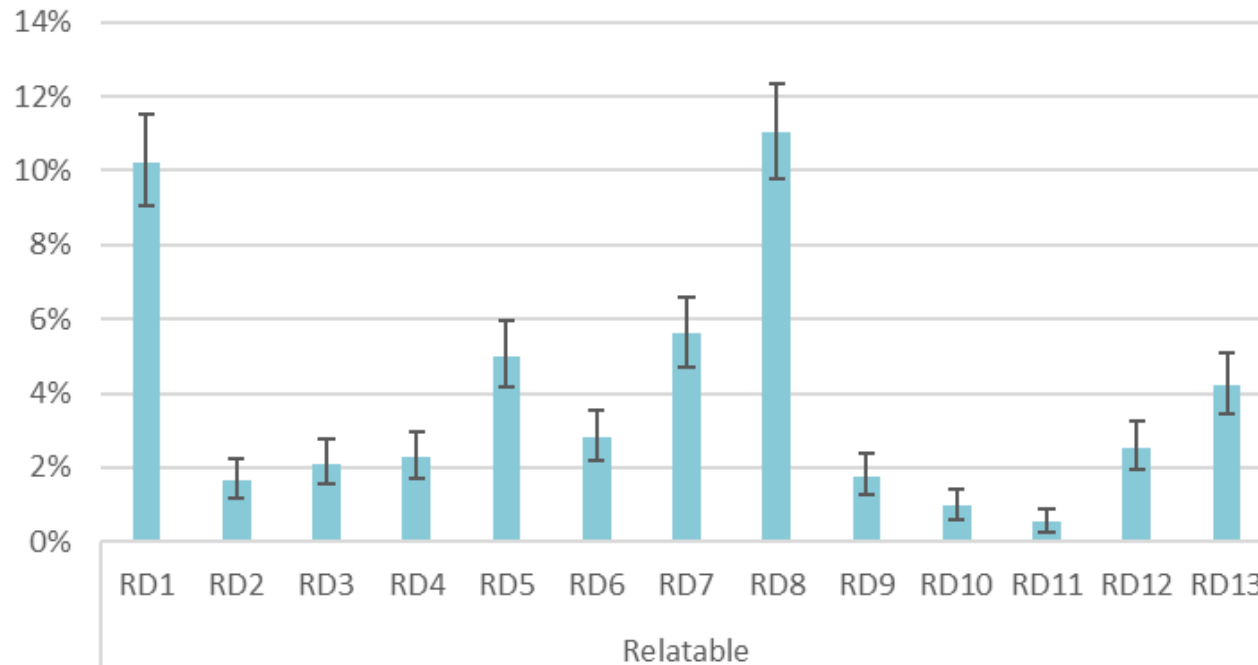
Insensitive



ID1	Others are vulnerable/in need of paternalistic intervention
ID2	Denial (I do not suffer/I am not vulnerable/suffering does not exist)
ID3	Choosing not to know (Partial - Wilful ignorance)
ID4	Privileged positioning
ID5	Overconfidence
ID6	Devaluation (understating the value or vulnerability of Other)
ID7	Indifference/choosing or appearing not to care
ID8	Reason only based norms and assumptions/emotional dissonance
ID9	Fear of being vulnerable or exposed
ID10	Judgmental
ID11	Fails to see the suffering of another
ID12	Ambitious



Relatability



RD1	Openness to affectivity / emotional engagement
RD2	Openness to change
RD3	Openness to not knowing
RD4	Openness to tolerance
RD5	Openness to being wrong
RD6	Openness to changing oneself
RD7	Suffering is recognised
RD8	Leader shows emotional resonance / fellow feeling / walk in the shoes of another
RD9	Distress tolerance
RD10	Common humanity / everyone suffers
RD11	Non-judgment
RD12	Vulnerability is recognised in others
RD13	Personal experiences of loss & suffering inform leadership



Six things to Remember about Vulnerability

Six things to remember about vulnerability

Vulnerability is a fact of the human condition, and our shared experiences form the basis of ethical obligations that can compel ethical responses to others



Denying, ignoring or disavowing vulnerability leads to increases in harm and suffering

Vulnerability can be perceived as negative: something to be managed and minimised or denied, ignored, disavowed.



Vulnerability can be perceived as positive: a universally shared space of affectivity, openness, trust, compassion, and community and the basis for relatedness and relationship

Managing and minimising vulnerability leads to decreases in harm and suffering



Viewing vulnerability as both negative (denied, ignored, or disavowed) and positive sets up a tension that can lead to very different outcomes in response to the potential for harm and suffering





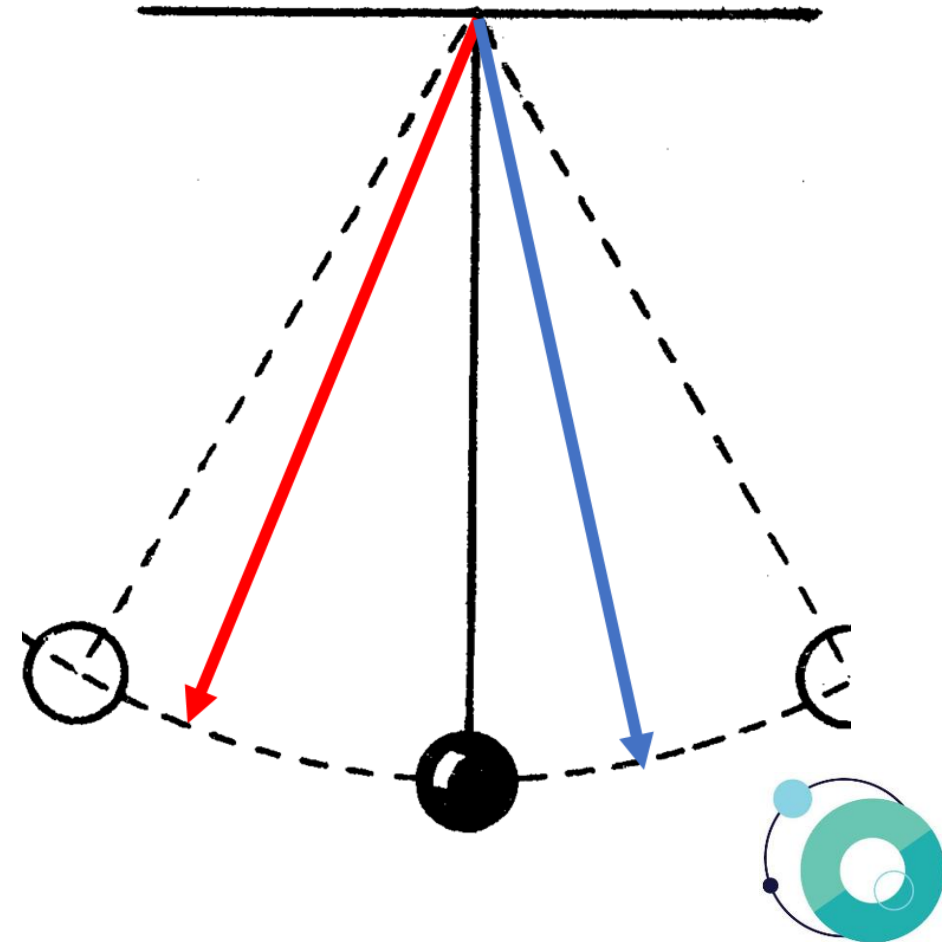
Resilience



Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

"Unprecedented is not a reason to be unprepared. We need to be prepared for the future" (p.7)

"Implementing our recommendations calls for a cohesive and unified national effort. National natural disaster arrangements are a shared responsibility. Failure by governments to act on our recommendations will shift risk to others" (p.33)



Resilience: Intention vs Reality

Definition: The capacity of social, economic, and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity, and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation (IPCC, 2014).

Intention: Adaptability, anticipatory learning, and innovation are key ingredients for reducing vulnerability and increasing adaptive capacity.

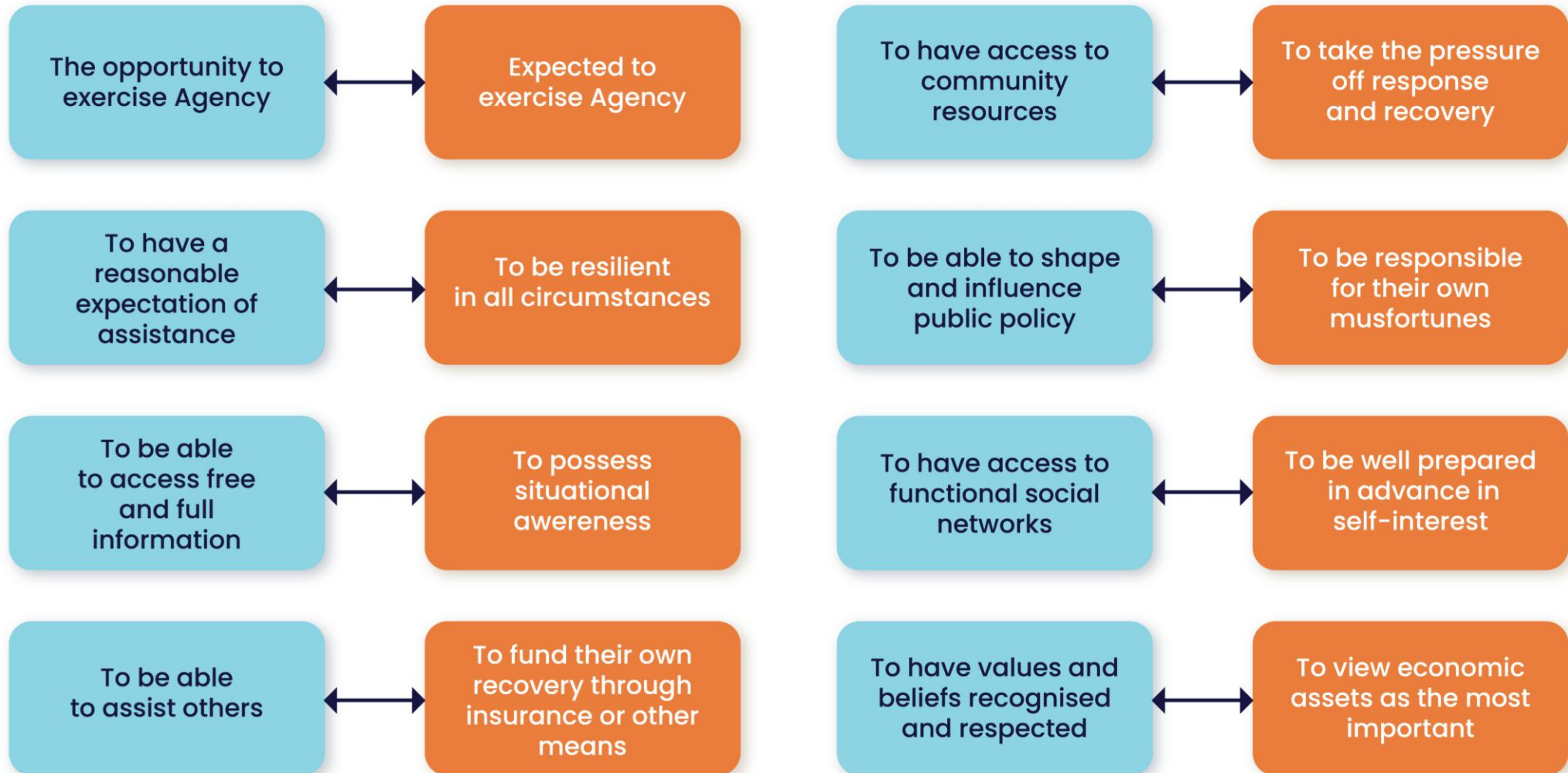
Likewise, policy actions such as poverty and inequality reduction as well as improvements to water and food security and health conditions help to reduce vulnerability (IPCC, 2018).

Reality: Individualistic (neoliberal) approaches aim to de-couple reduction in vulnerability and increases in adaptive capacity and instead foreground self-managed individual resilience as the means to address climate risk (Mikulewicz, 2019; Taylor and Bhasme, 2020).



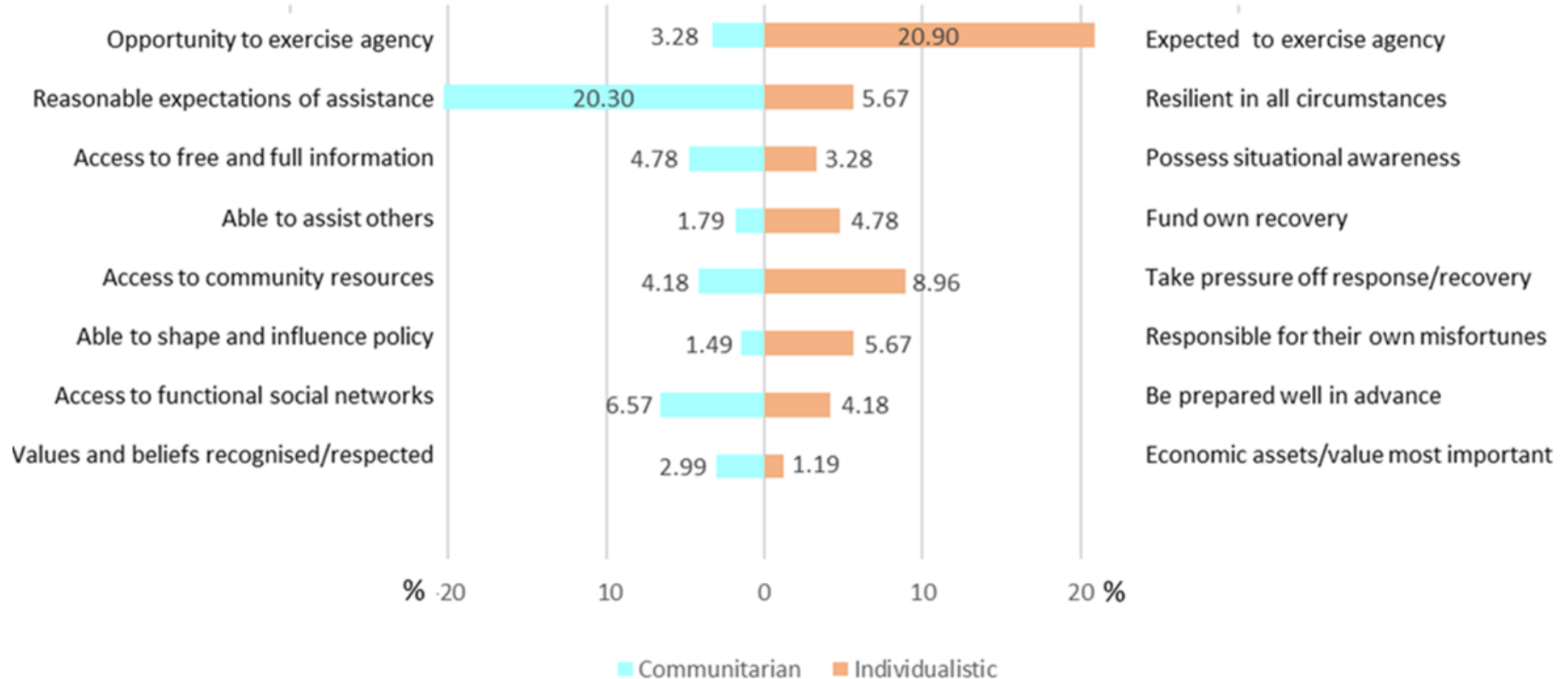
Resilience Policy Challenges – Individualistic vs Communitarian

(Crosweller and Tschakert, 2020)



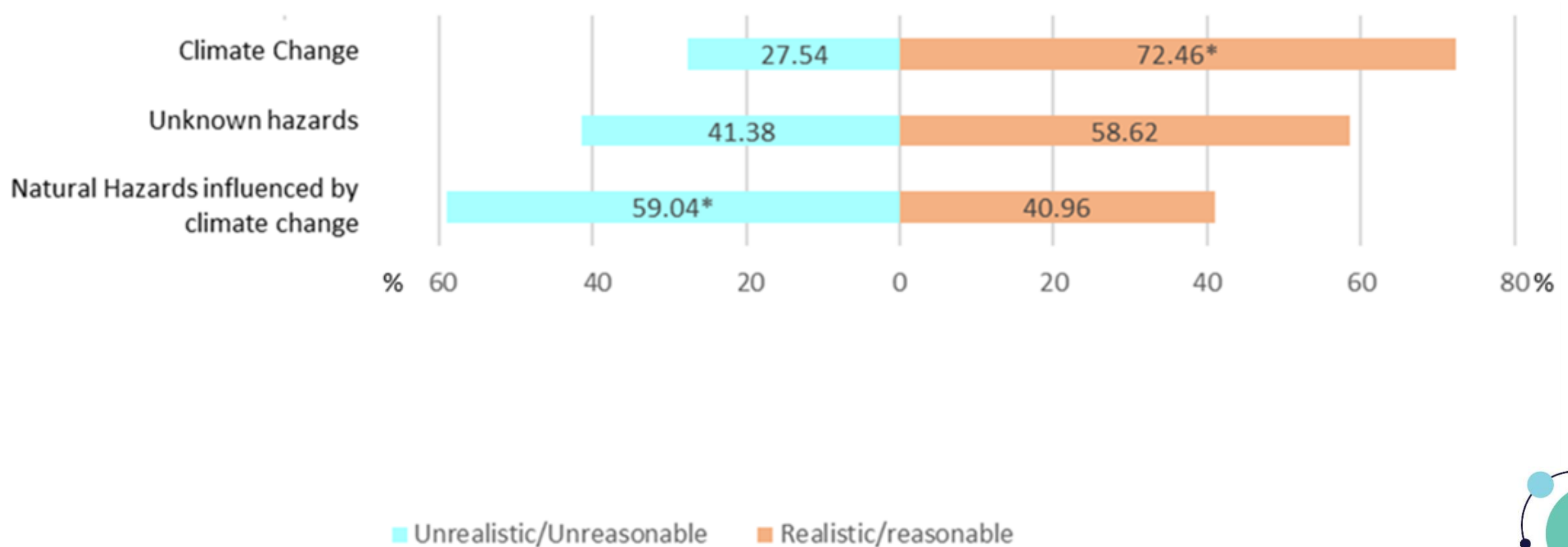
Transcript Analysis

(Crosweller and Tschakert, 2020)



Reasonable or Unreasonable to Expect Citizens to be Resilient

(Crosweller and Tschakert, 2020)



What to contemplate in achieving successful Resilience (a)

- The potential for conflation of severe to catastrophic threats/hazards/perils and their capacity to impact societal systems has never been greater
- *Expert systems* and *professional expertise* establish the basis of the ontological security of individuals living in modern societies and is the basis of trust between individuals and institutions. Increasingly, Individuals are relying on their own knowledge and beliefs whilst increasingly mistrusting institutional expertise and advice.
- Access to *free and full information* is fundamental to resilience decision making. This is a significant challenge when dealing in the "grey zone"
- For most people, risk is not about likelihood vs consequence, but rather, about what is "valuable or of value" that is at risk of being harmed, lost, or damaged. Processes for determining value are highly complex.



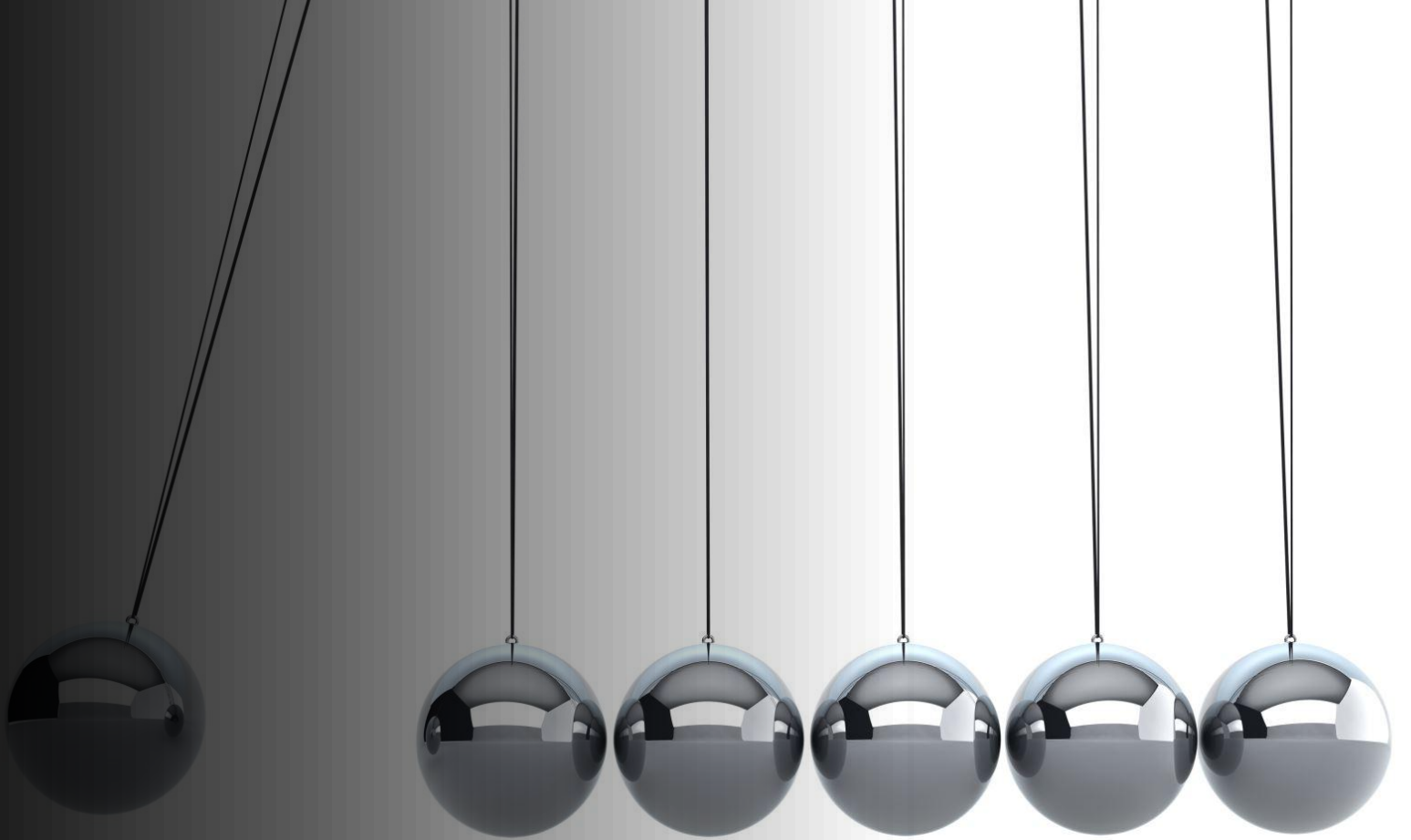
What to contemplate in achieving successful Resilience (b)

- Whilst the reduction/disruption of threat/hazard/peril and exposure is critical in Risk Management, the key to successful resilience is the reduction of vulnerability in tandem with the increase in adaptive capacity (of societal systems) to *prevent, anticipate, repel, persist, adapt, transform, learn, and innovate*. Institutional investment needs to target both.
- Anticipatory capacity, including *anticipated futures* AND anticipated histories, are essential to successful resilience.
- Concept of recovery (after impact/consequence) is better viewed as renewal, regeneration and re-organisation after disturbance rather than a return to previous state
- Modern resilience discourses often ignore the reduction of vulnerability and increase in adaptive capacity as key objectives and instead default to significant emphasis on individual self-reliance, self-responsibility, and self-governance without obligating the state – this is not a recipe for success!





Ethics



The Ethics of Success in Disaster Management



The greatest measure of success is the upholding
of public **trust** and confidence



The greatest mission is the reduction of human
and non-human suffering (**Compassion**)



The most important ethics of EM Leaders



Trust



Truthfulness



Compassion



Integrity



Courage



Humility



Key Ethical Questions

- How do we recognise suffering as a universal experience?
- How can we have compassion for many people?
- How do we avoid exploitation when showing compassion towards others?
- How do we trust our moral intuition?
- How do we remain grounded when thinking, speaking and acting ethically?
- How do we show self compassion?
- How can we exert influence if we are in the middle of the institutional system?
- And many other questions!



Thank you!



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Q&A

Moderated by:

Katelyn Samson

Deputy Director, Resilience and Risk Reduction,
Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR)



Event concludes

Thank you for attending today's webinar.

Next event:

2025 Resilient Australia National Awards
Ceremony Livestream

Monday 24 November 2025,
12.15pm-2.00pm AEDT



Register now.



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