

Leadership through Collaborative Learning

Tom Flanagan

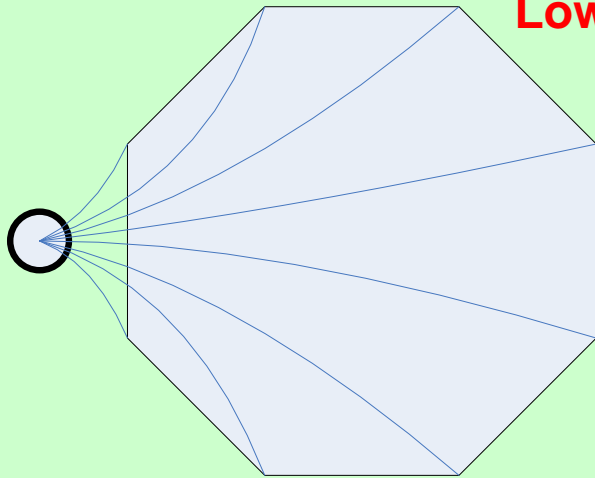
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Sustainability is not simply about changing practices but more centrally about agreeing to change practices together

Leadership shapes and sustains effective group action even under conditions of tremendous ***complexity***

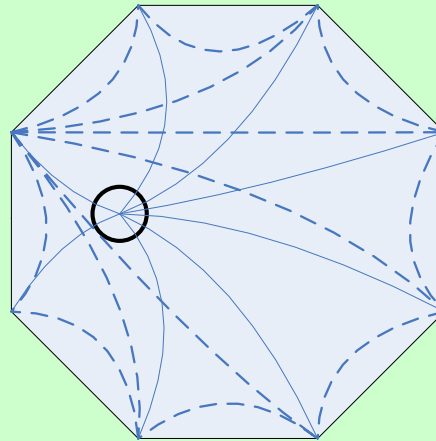
Low complexity → High complexity



Directed Learning

Teacher Delivers
New Information

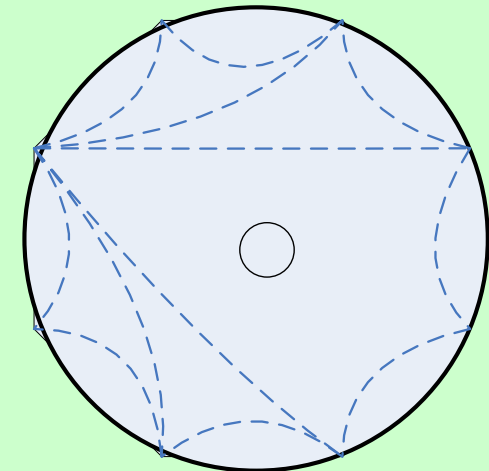
Instructor is
the Expert



Directed Group Learning

Teacher Moderates
Review Discussions

Group is
the Expert



Collaborative Learning

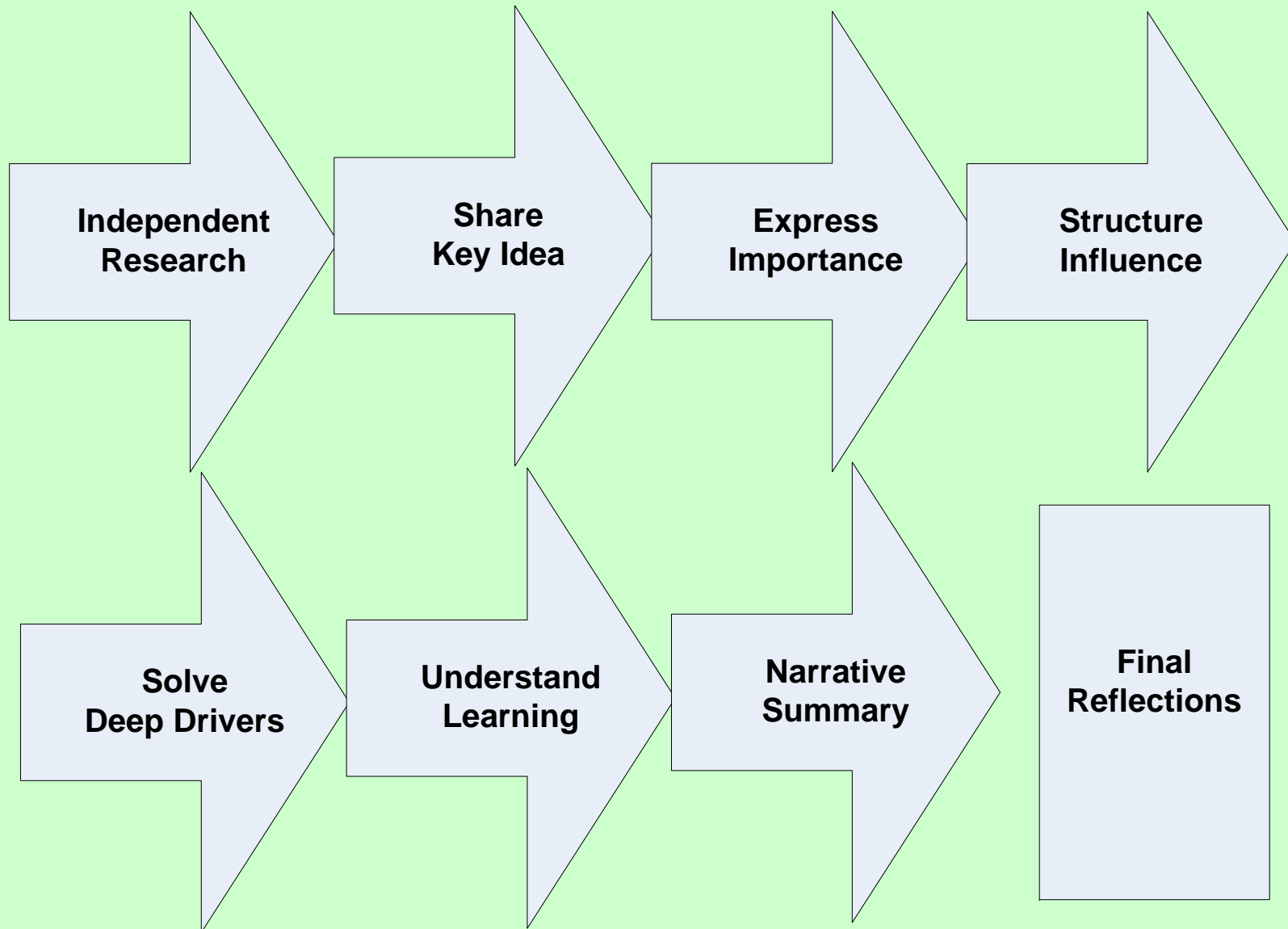
Group Discovers
New Information

*Sustainably
Communities
Teach and Learn
from Each Other*

A Brief Collaborative Learning **Module** Useful in any Sustainability Class

- The need for expert perspectives through **ASSIGNED ROLES**
 - Historic re-enactment of consideration of 49 “continuous critical problems” from the Predicament of Humanity
- The need for a turn-key **GROUP LEARNING APPROACH**
 - Construct an “influence map” through collaborative systems thinking
 - Avoid “debate” while fostering deliberative inquiry
 - Assure that the learning is recognizable as an authentic group product
- The need for **MEASURABLE PERFORMANCE**
 - Individual research: Brief reports / Concise summaries
 - Participatory dialogue: Inquiry for meaning / Clarification of meaning
 - Individual reflection: Narrative summaries / Process reflections

Workflow in the 4 week Module



Partial List of Critical Problems (after voting)

2 (43 votes) Widespread poverty throughout the world

#41 (27 votes) Inadequate participation of people at large in public decisions

#12 (25 votes) Affluence and its unknown consequences

#18 (24 votes) Growing irrelevance of traditional values and continuing failure to evolve new value systems

#22 (20 votes) Environmental pollution

#24 (18 votes) Major disturbances of the world's physical ecology

Mapping a Systems View of Influence

If we are able to address the problem of

#41 (27 votes) Inadequate participation of people at large in public decisions

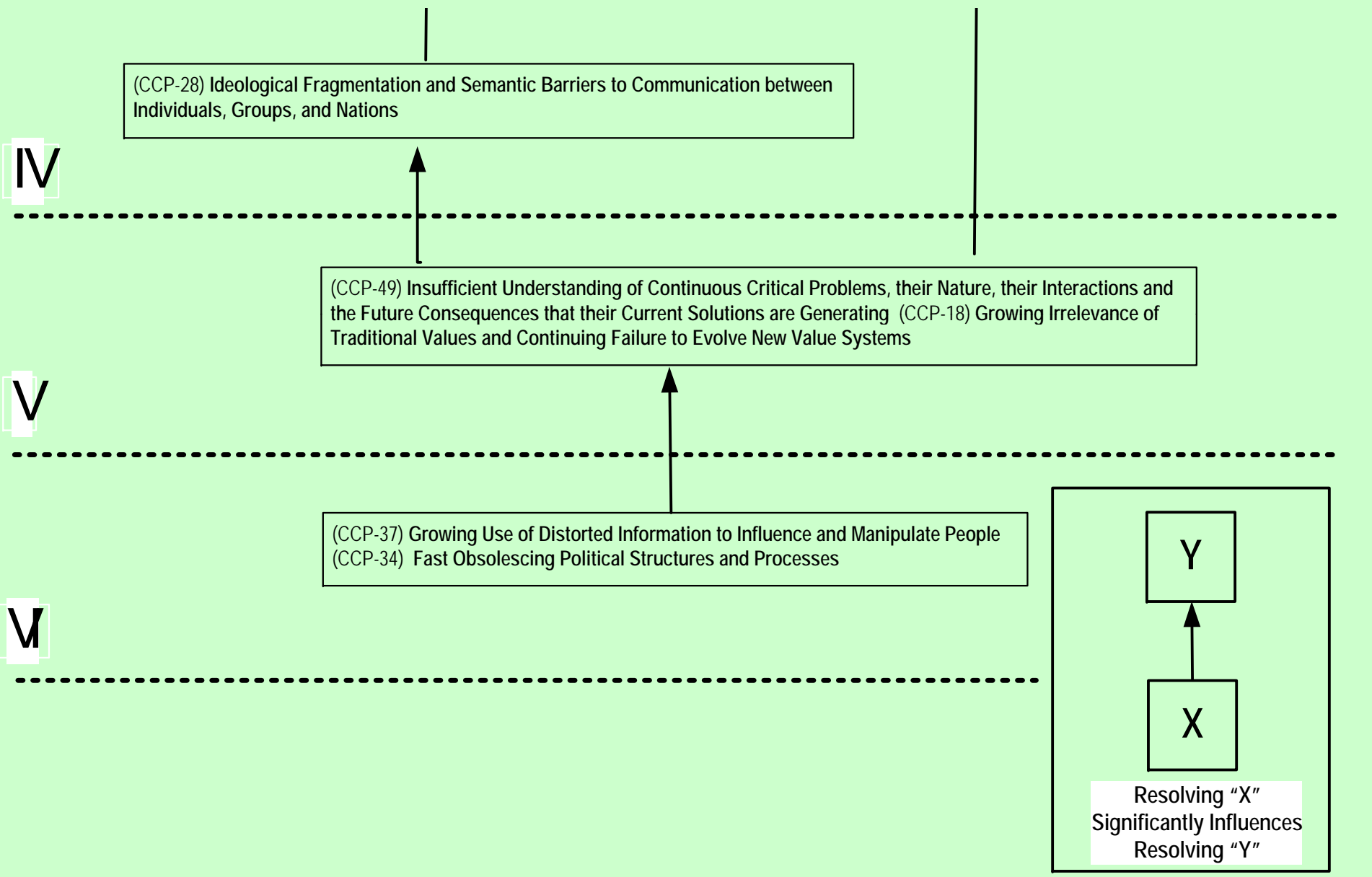
will this SIGNIFICANTLY help to address the problem of

#18 (24 votes) Growing irrelevance of traditional values and continuing failure to evolve new value systems

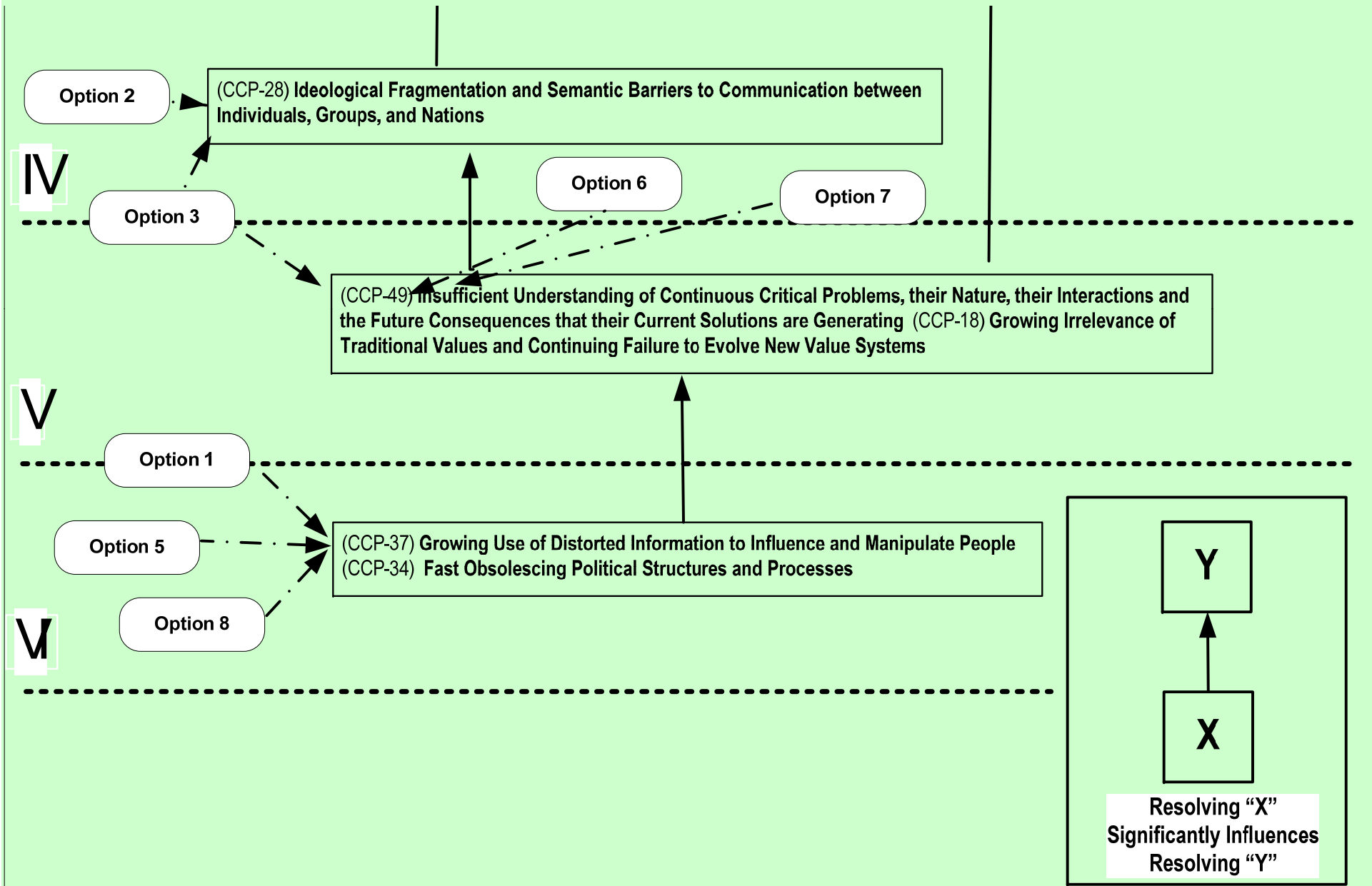
in achieving a sustainable future for the world?

TO MAKE THIS PROCESS MANAGABLE ... you can download a tool to prompt and track decisions made by the participants in the group

Portion of an Influence Map

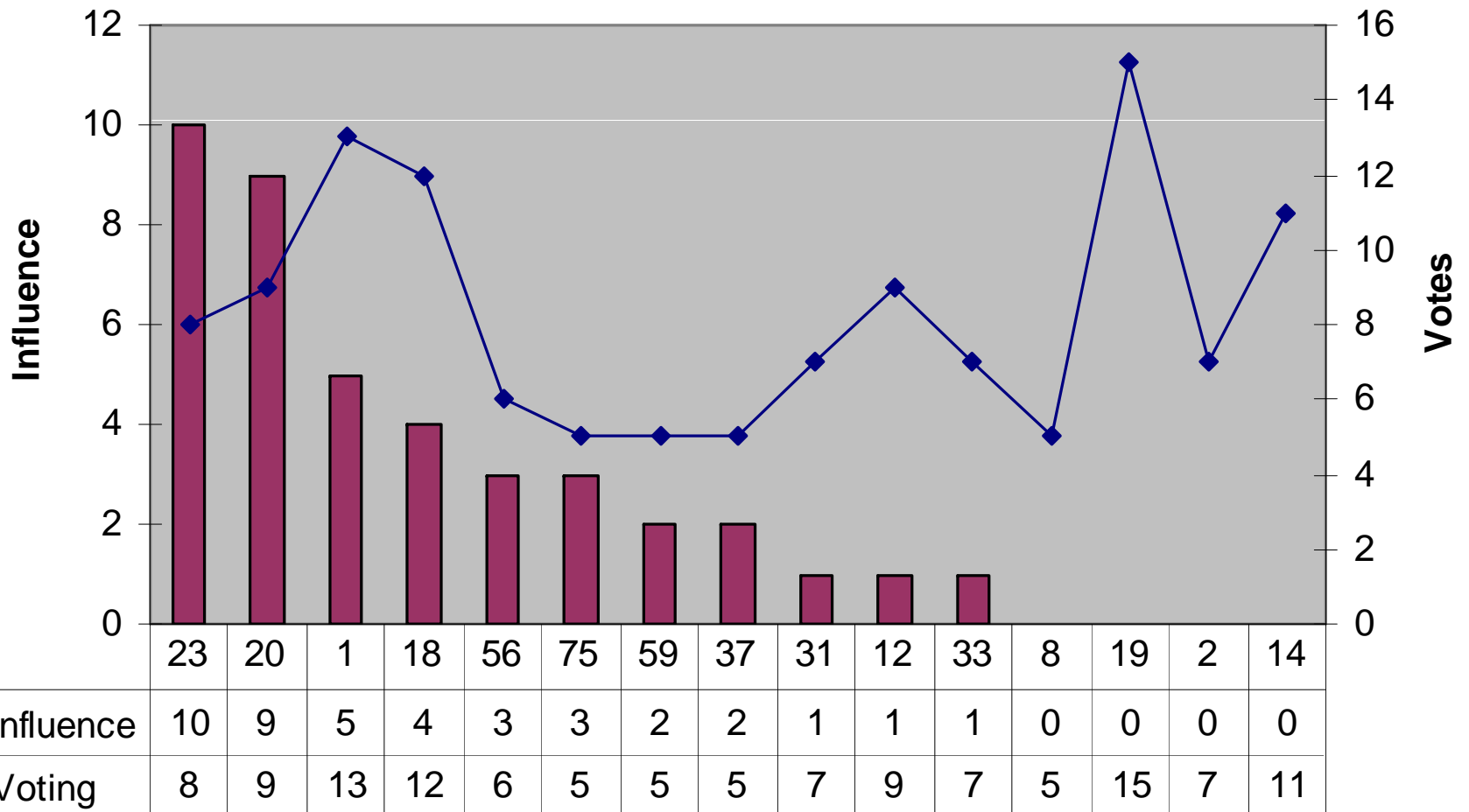


Action Options on Influence Map



Importance versus Influence

popular votes as bars
influence in the map as dots



Take Home Message

- Students Learn that “they can **understand complex situations** as a group”
- Students Learn that **important ideas have different influence** in a complex system
- Students Learn that “**erroneous priorities**” are easy to generate and they can waste resources and cause systemic short falls
- Students Learn that groups can be guided to focus their efforts to find ways that they can **solve big problems together**
- Students Learn that **group decision making is a powerful and realistic alternative** to decision making by contentious debate and by backroom advocacy
- Students Learn that **capacity in group learning** requires experiences in group learning

A Systems Approach for Engaging Groups in Global Complexity: Capacity Building Through an Online Course. **Systems Practice and Action Research, 2011**

Tom Flanagan • Janet McIntyre-Mills • Tony Made • Kelly Mackenzie • Charles Morse • Gayle Underwood • Ken Bausch

Abstract: Sustainability is not simply about changing practices but more centrally about agreeing to change practices together. To achieve such an end, groups need to improve processes for making complex decisions together. An online course was designed and tested linking students in the United States and in Australia. Students engaged in a re-enactment of deliberations based on Hasan Ozbekhan's "Predicament of Mankind," which was constructed originally under assignment from the founders of the **Club of Rome** in 1970. This re-enactment included contemporary research for examples of a set of **49 continuous critical problems** of mankind, asynchronous clarification of these problems using a wiki, pair-wise construction of a systems view of problems assessed to be of highest priority by the class, narrative analysis of the structure, and creative suggestions for resolving the systems problem based on resources available today. This report comments on the strengths and challenges identified in an initial application of an approach for building collaborative and systems thinking skills through an online course in a general education curriculum. Findings are particularly meaningful for contemporary policy makers as well as online educators.