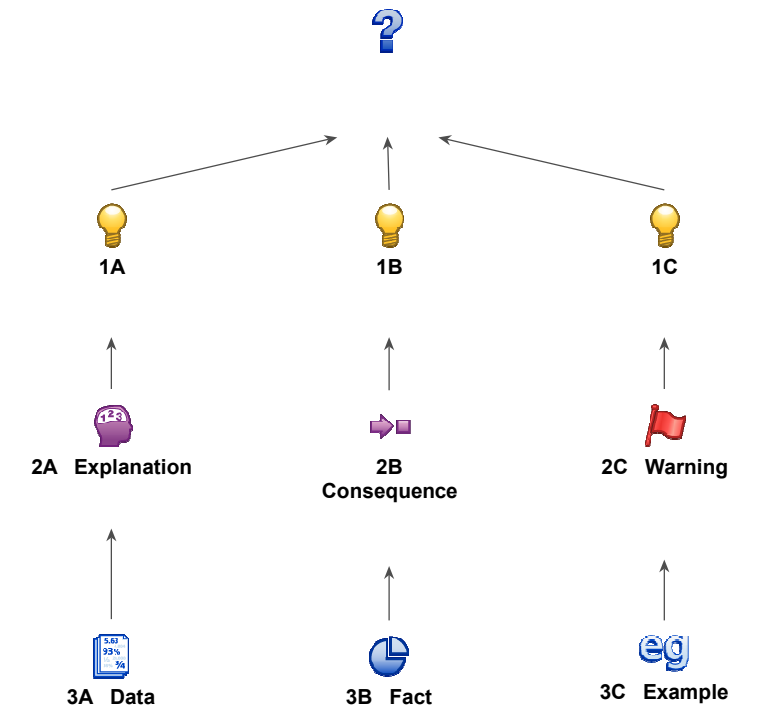


Resilience and Transformation

A dialogue capture of the Australia 21 forum of 28 October 2010

Observations, summary and recommendations



Council of Australian Governments

ATTACHMENT C NATIONAL DISASTER RESILIENCE STATEMENT

Securing Our Natural Future | A white paper for land and biodiversity at a time of climate change

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCE STRATEGY

Ecosystem Resilience

Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

RMIA
Realising Opportunity

Home > Emotional foundations for learning > Resilience
Supporting Best Practice
About resilience

Media release
RMIA releases resilience white paper

CONTENTS

Preliminary observations: on public forums	1
Figures 1-3: Schemas for mapping deliberation	2-3
The key presentations at the A21 forum	4
Figures 4-12: Maps of the key presentations	5-13
Some remarks about the dialogue maps	14, 16
Like a game of conceptual blind man's bluff	15
Figure 14: Capturing the Question & Answer Session	17
An implicit argument structure	18
Figures 15A—E: A draft integrated map	19-23
Conclusion	24

PREFATORY NOTE

This report was prepared for Australia 21 by agreement with Austhink Consulting. It is an analysis of the proceedings at an afternoon forum organized by Australia 21 and held at the Australian National University's Crawford School of Economics on 28 October 2010.

The purpose of the forum, following on from a conference on the subject convened by Australia 21 earlier this year, was to examine some of the key issues raised in the book *Resilience and Transformation*, published this year by Australia 21, through presentations by a number of the chapter authors, so that attendees could get something of a head start in understanding the challenges with which the book is concerned.

There were contributions from a variety of disciplines with a view to triggering a wider shared understanding of the subject on an inter-disciplinary basis. This report is an application of Austhink Consulting's techniques for capturing discussion and laying out the nature of debates. These techniques involve the use of methods and software for the visualization of deliberative processes. The report features nineteen such visual diagrams, including three which display the various conventions of the approach.

The report also includes a general commentary on the nature of standard approaches to deliberation and on the gains in efficiency and effectiveness that are available through the techniques of visualization, especially if used in a workshop run by a skilled facilitator. The forum was not designed as an inter-active workshop; only as a preliminary to further work on the complex and daunting subject matter is dealt with. The commentary is intended to offer suggestions as to how that further work might proceed. But it is hoped that it will also interest a wider audience as regards in the general topic of deliberative judgment and decision procedures.

The immediate subject under discussion—resilience and transformation in Australian society in the early 21st century—is or ought to be of very wide interest. Much of it touched on matters of considerable and even pressing importance. It is, surely, all the more important that the best possible techniques be used to generate shared clarity as regards those matters. We at Austhink Consulting have offered it as a contribution to achieving such clarity—both in the present case and in public debate more generally.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS: ON PUBLIC FORUMS

Ideally, when a significant public meeting, conference or workshop is held, often at considerable expense to those who host it and even to participants, the gathering will produce some **clear and shared increase** in understanding and an agenda for ongoing inquiry, joint or separate. This is an iterative process, of course. The question is: How can we most effectively make progress?

Participants in many such conferences or forums come away with **different and partial impressions** of what has taken place and how much value it was. This problem is exacerbated by the widespread tendency to include as many presentations as possible in the available time, with speakers having as little as ten or fifteen minutes to speak, often from **power point slides**; followed by discussion sessions that consist of **a scattershot of random questions**, which are inevitably given responses that are necessarily brief and too often inconclusive.

Surely this is, in general, **undesirably inefficient**. How do we close the gap, in terms of iterations, between the presentation of “information” and the emergence of a shared understanding of it? If you are a government official seeking enlightenment from the point of view of practical and constrained policy, **how does this help you?** If you are a researcher seeking feedback from others, **how effective is such a process** from your point of view? More generally, if you are a stakeholder in the matter

under discussion, **how can this produce an outcome that is satisfactory?**

This is true across a broad spectrum of public debate, both in academia and the media, but also in business and government. The **inefficiency of deliberative processes** is a drain on the energy and time of both professionals and the citizenry. When, as in the Australia 21 forum, those involved are actively concerned about complexity, governance and how to think our way collectively through looming challenges, it would surely help to be able to improve on this state of affairs..

We believe that there are a number of ways in which **deliberative processes in general can be improved**, from the point of view of both efficiency and effectiveness. Our own contribution has been to develop new techniques and software tools for the **visualization of complex deliberation**. Numerous visual tools are already in use, of course; not least among them Power Point. But we suggest that there is a need to be able to:

1. see the evidential and inferential **relationships** between claims; and
2. See these things **in common**

Almost no existing tools make it easy to do these things. Yet if they can be done, deliberative processes can much more readily **develop, share, revise and agree upon what is going**

on in discussions about concerns and ideas, judgments about matters of truth and falsehood, decisions about options and the evaluation of competing hypotheses.

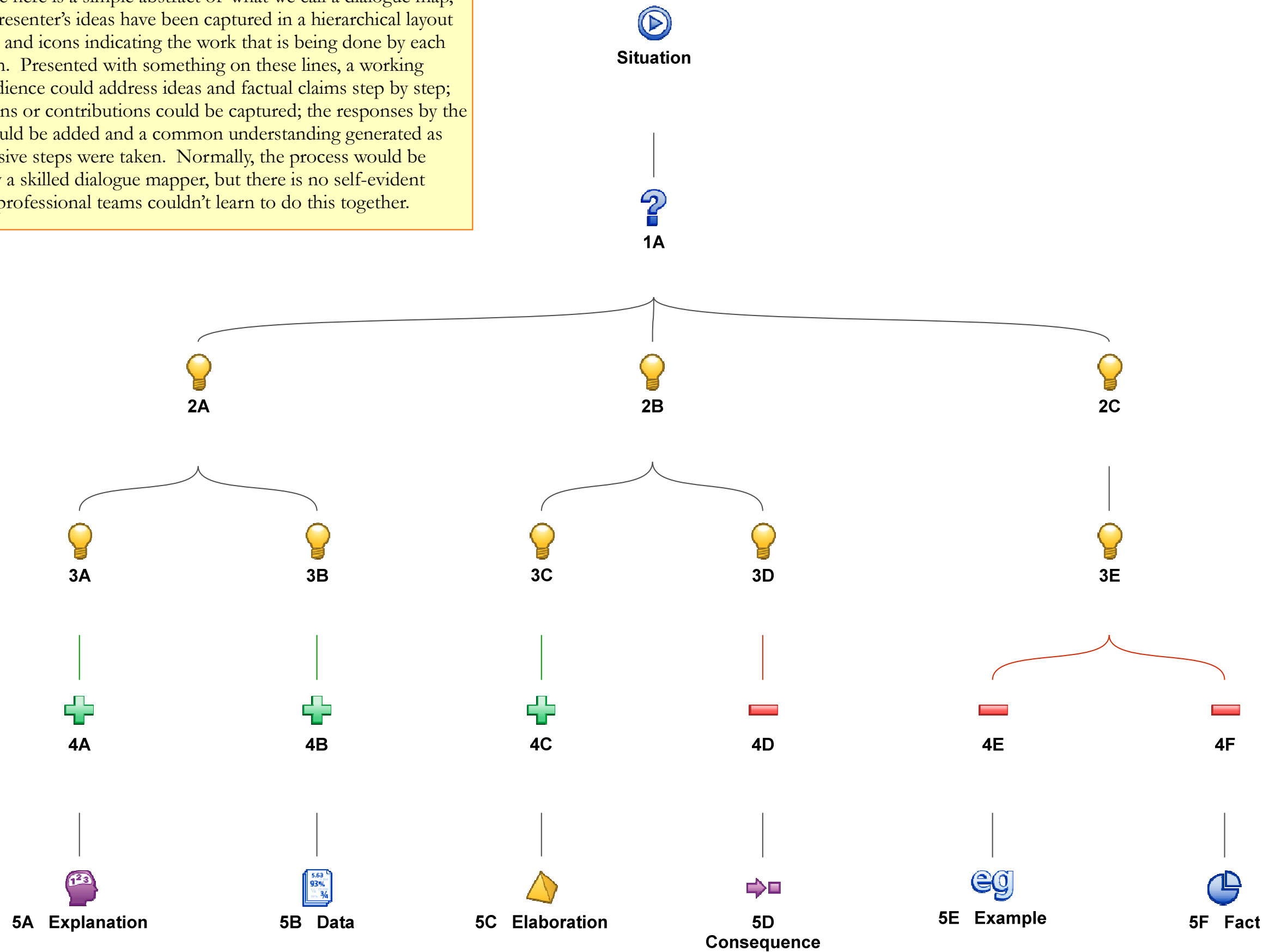
For some years, we at Austhink have been developing **tools for facilitating these things**. We offered to have a principal consultant attend the Resilience and Transformation forum on 28 October 2010 and to advise on how greater shared clarity could be generated regarding the issues that were to be deliberated upon in the forum. The consultant did not engage in facilitation or otherwise participate in the forum. He simply captured what he could of the proceedings, using a software tool called bCisive. What follows is based on that capture, or what we call “dialogue mapping”.

The final set of diagrams, Figures 15A-E, on pp. 19-23, offer an attempt at an integrated representation of the overall debate that the forum was about. They are, together, what we call an “implicit argument structure”, on the basis of which the numerous lines of inquiry raised in the forum might be pursued from the starting point of a shared orientation.

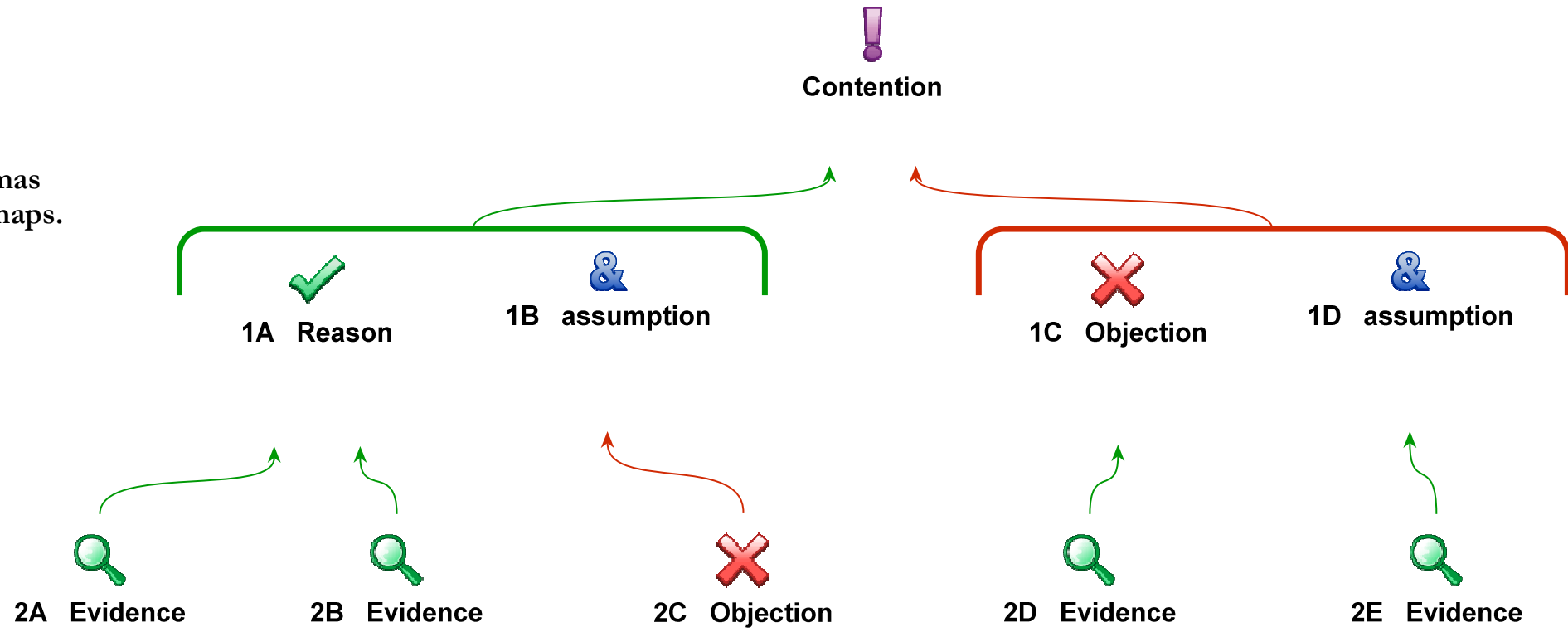
DIALOGUE MAPPING

What you see here is a simple abstract of what we call a dialogue map, in which a presenter's ideas have been captured in a hierarchical layout with colours and icons indicating the work that is being done by each item or claim. Presented with something on these lines, a working group or audience could address ideas and factual claims step by step; their questions or contributions could be captured; the responses by the presenter could be added and a common understanding generated as these successive steps were taken. Normally, the process would be facilitated by a skilled dialogue mapper, but there is no self-evident reason why professional teams couldn't learn to do this together.

Figure 1. Schema for a dialogue map

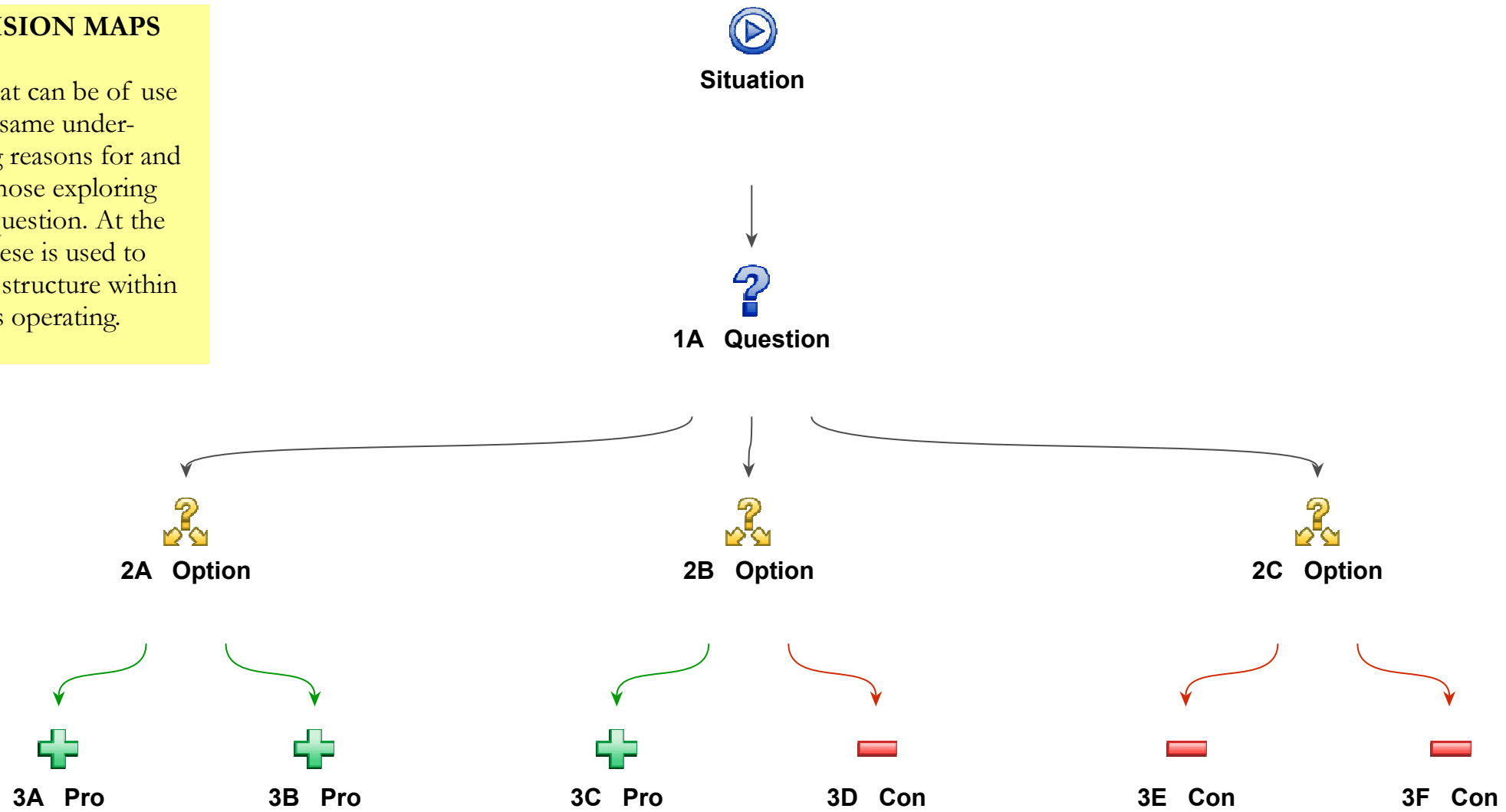


Figures 2 and 3: Basic schemas for argument and decision maps.



ARGUMENT AND DECISION MAPS

Other kinds of visual diagram that can be of use in deliberative processes, for the same underlying reasons, are those capturing reasons for and against a given contention; and those exploring options for addressing an open question. At the end of this report, the first of these is used to sketch out the implicit argument structure within which the 28 October forum was operating.



THE KEY PRESENTATIONS AT THE FORUM

There were nine presentations at the Resilience and Transformation forum, following the opening remarks by Lynne Reeder, Executive Director of Australia 21. These were followed by a thirty minute question and answer session conducted by Steve Cork. The nine presenters, as listed in the running sheet, were as follows:

Adam Graycar, Dean of the Australian National Institute of Public Policy (ANIPP) at A.N.U.

Steve Cork, A21 Fellow, ecologist and futurist, with 26 years at CSIRO

Richard Eckersley, Research Fellow, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH), A.N.U.

Rita Parker, Chief Executive ISSR, formerly a senior policy advisor at PM&C's Office of Security and Intelligence Coordination

Bob Douglas, medical epidemiologist, former director of NCEPH

Theresia Citraningtrya, general practitioner, One Stop Crisis Centre, Jakarta, PhD candidate in psychological medicine, A.N.U.

Nicky Grigg, research scientist, CSIRO

Paul Barratt, former Secretary of the Federal Departments of Primary Industries & Energy and Defence and former Executive Director of the Business Council of Australia

Susan Nichols, adjunct professor Australian Institute for Sustainable Communities, University of Canberra.

The challenge for those present was to **absorb** what the presenters were saying and then possibly **ask one or two questions** during a half hour discussion at the end of the afternoon. There was a great deal to absorb and it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that this is what happens at all such gatherings, some of which go for days. The challenge is formidable and, while there is much to be said for gathering to air and discuss ideas, the crucial question is, perhaps: **How much of what is “aired” is, in fact absorbed?**

How much did those present at the forum absorb? We have no way of knowing. What did they learn as individuals? We have no way of knowing. What consensus emerged within the group as a consequence of the presentations and discussion? We have no way of knowing. What were the most important and sensitive issues raised in the course of the afternoon? We were left with only a very rough idea of this and, almost certainly, different members of the audience went away with widely varying ideas in this regard. This is not unusual; it is pretty much what always happens on such occasions.

The consultant's task was to try to **capture graphically**, as best he could, what was presented, as an aid to digesting the significance of the proceedings. He did not have a mandate to intervene, request a pause for clarification, engage in evaluation of the ideas presented, or suggest any questions or follow up discussion. Everyone in the room had to try to capture the proceedings in their own way. But what is offered here—dialogue maps and then an argument map—should aid both recall and development better than other methods for doing these things.

The maps are **an imperfect capture** of what was presented, because they are based wholly on what could

be captured on the fly at the time. The question they should prompt is: What would it take to arrange for all participants in such forums to be able to take away with them a “perfect” - that is to say a **developed and agreed—dialogue map on this model** of the exchanges at such a gathering?

The chief graphical point of comparison will, naturally, be **the power point slides** used by the presenters and forwarded afterwards to participants. There will be two key differences between the dialogue maps and the power point slides. **First**, the dialogue maps—like the audience members—will have missed some of what the power point slides included, perhaps even important parts of them. But **second**, what *was* captured in the dialogue maps should be **easier to grasp** and much **easier to further evolve**. This is because of the nature of the layout. The pieces of the “picture” are arranged hierarchically by **order of generality**, presented graphically in terms of **colour**; and identified specifically by means of **icons**.

For the implicit argument under discussion at the forum to emerge as something understood and shared across the whole group, would require that the dialogue mapping process be taken **several steps further**, incorporating not only all the points made by the presenters, but a systematic set of questions and answers, by means of which a shared understanding might have been generated and the key points on which there had been agreement or disagreement highlighted.

Developing such a shared understanding to that level was not, perhaps, the purpose of the forum; but it was surely implicit in the holding of such a forum. Hopefully, the forum will help to nudge things in the direction of such a shared understanding emerging.

Figure 4: Adam Graycar and Steve Cork set the scene and lay out the key issues.

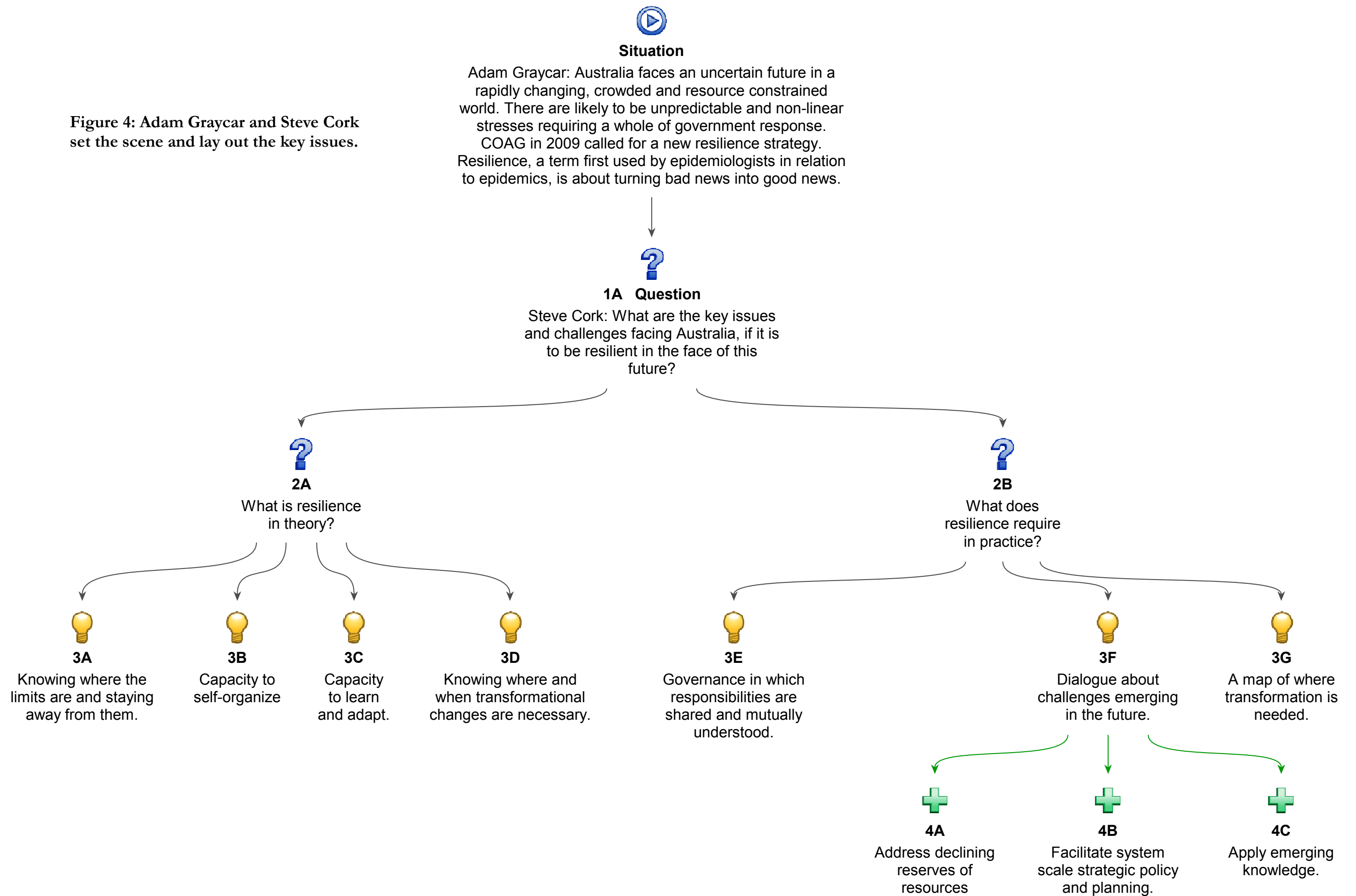


Figure 5: The questions later put to Steve Cork about resilience.

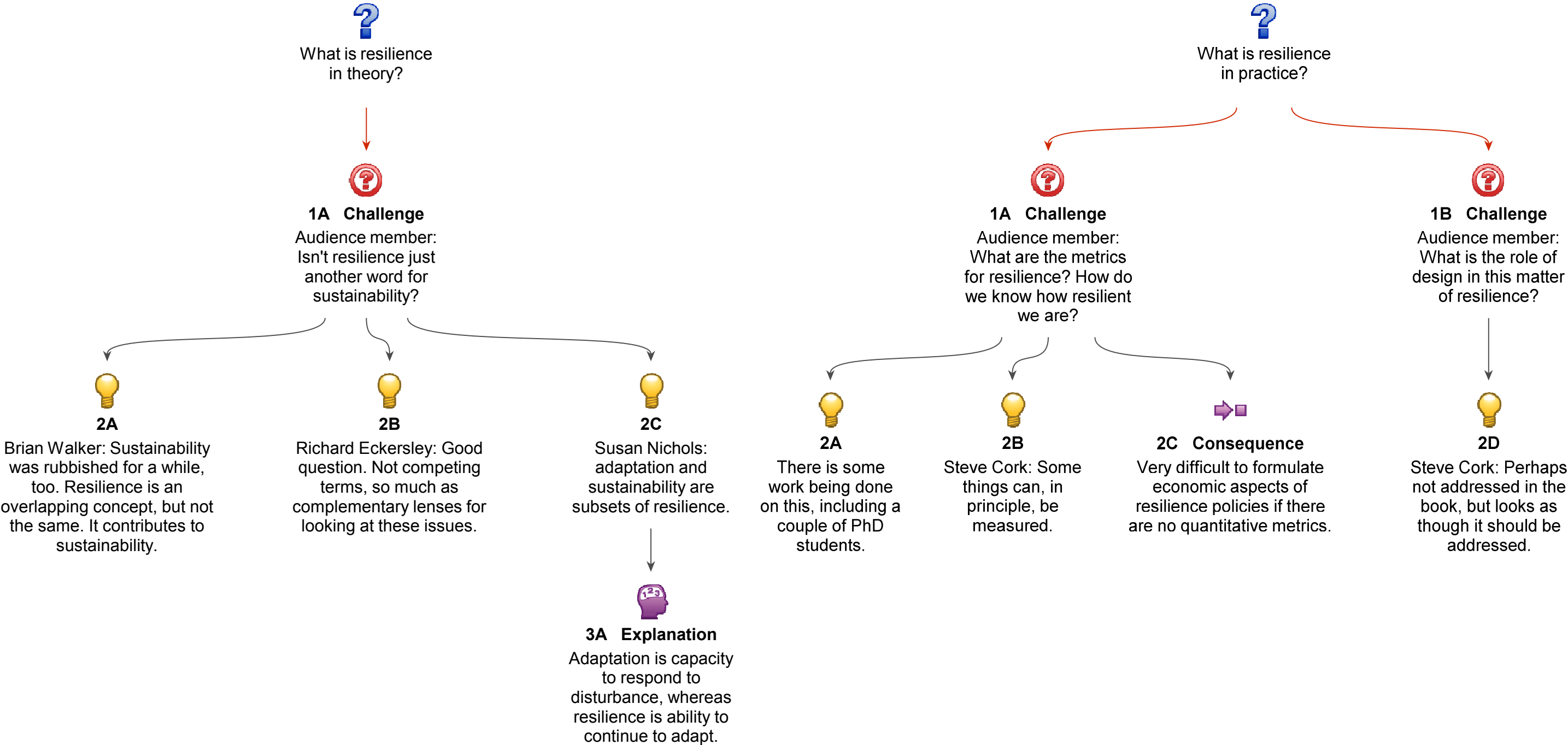


Figure 6: A snapshot of Richard Eckersley's presentation.

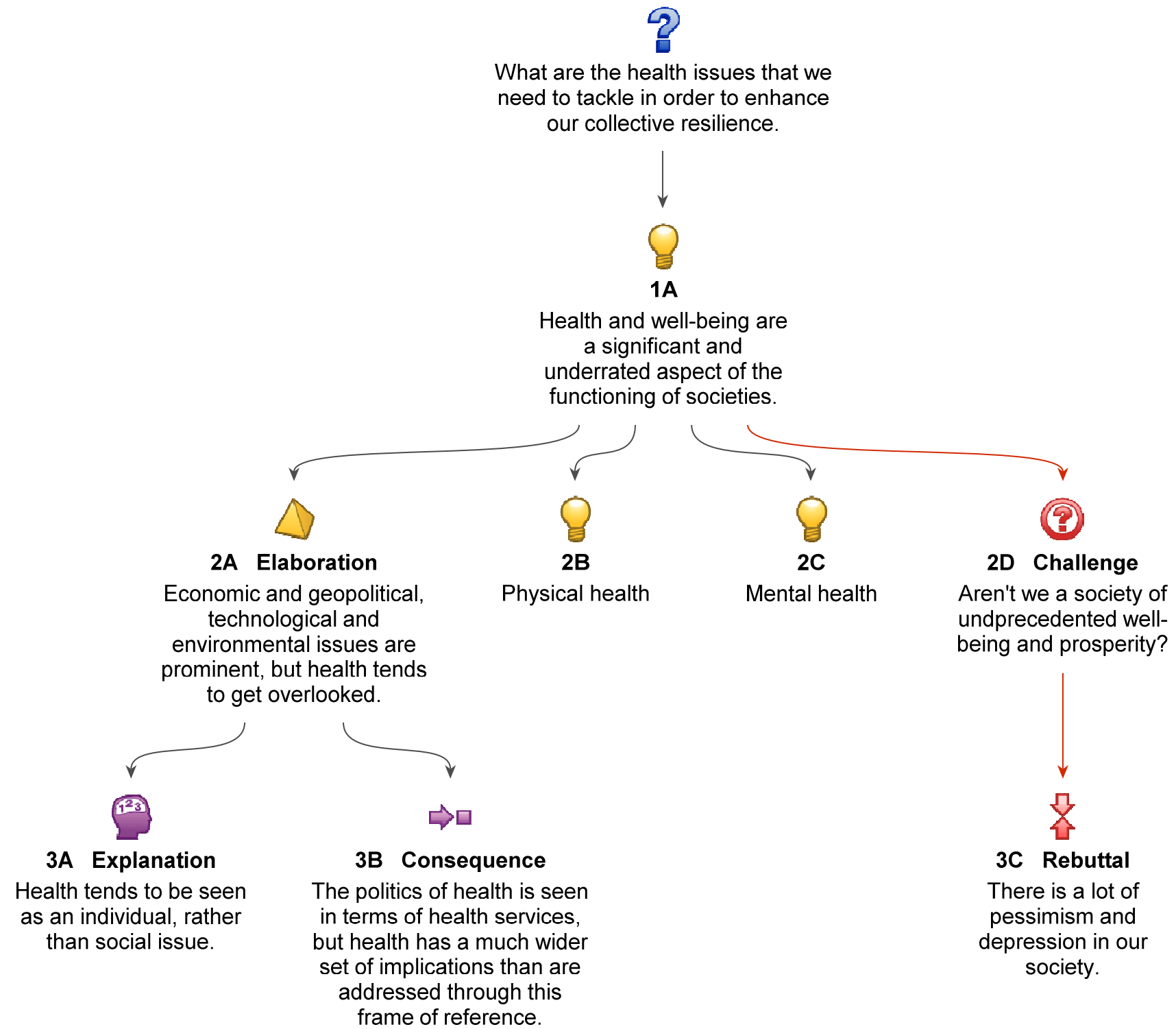


Figure 7: Rita Parker reflects on resilience in institutions.

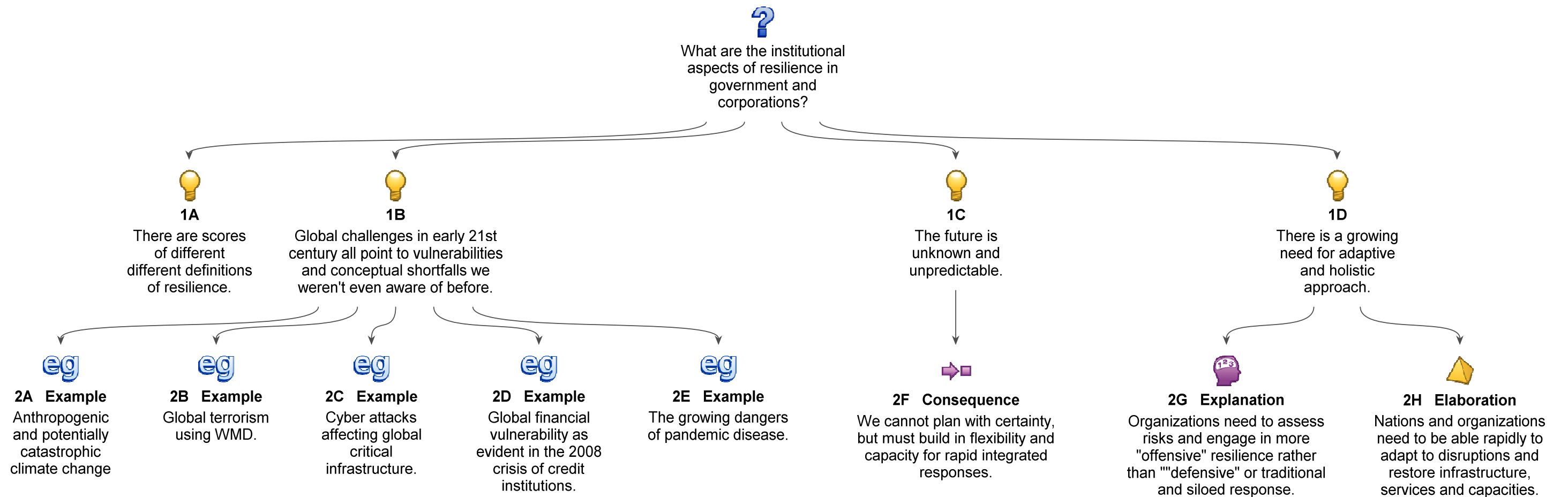


Figure 8: Bob Douglas on active control and new dreams vs learned helplessness.

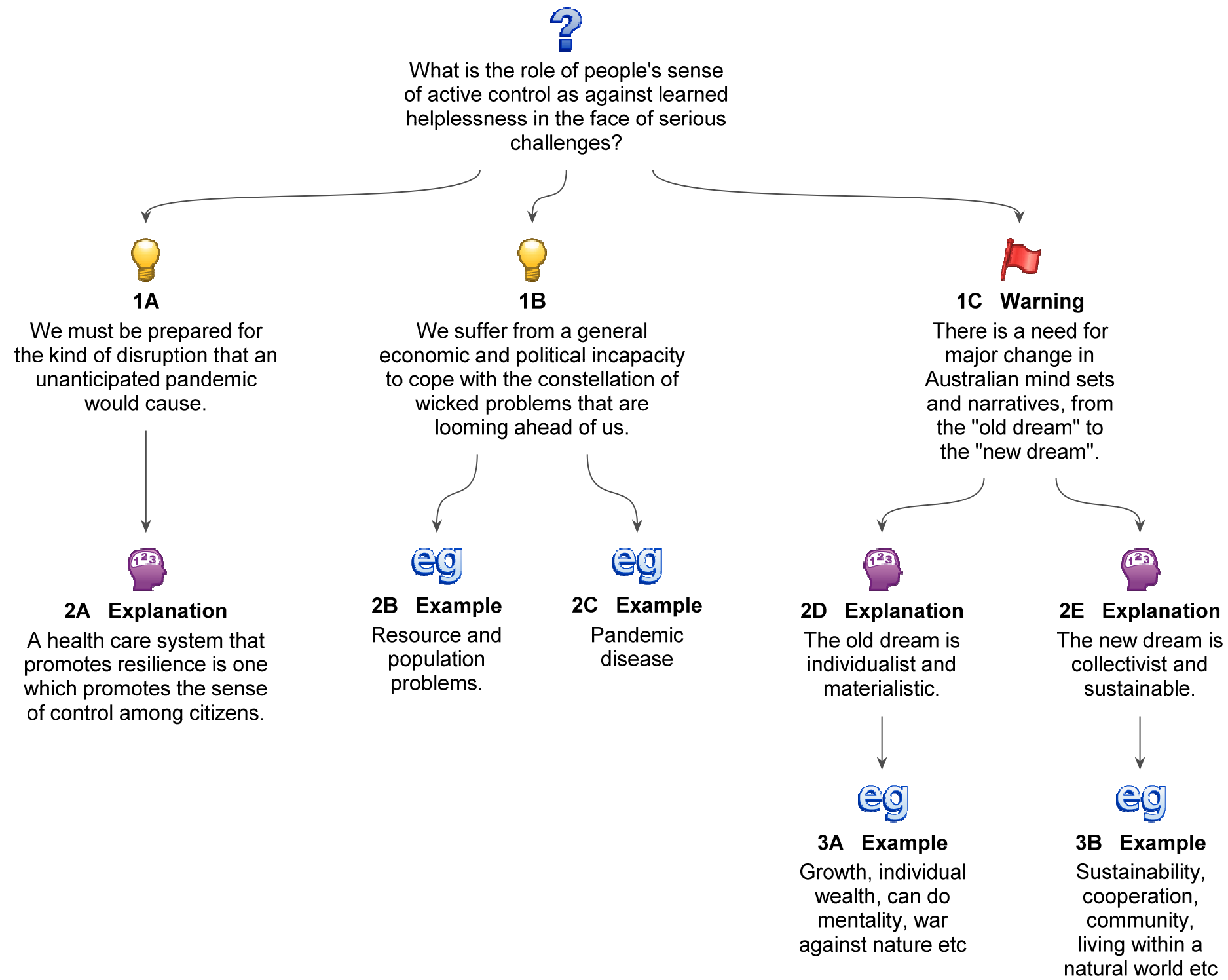


Figure 9: Theresa Citraningtrya on psychology and response to disasters.

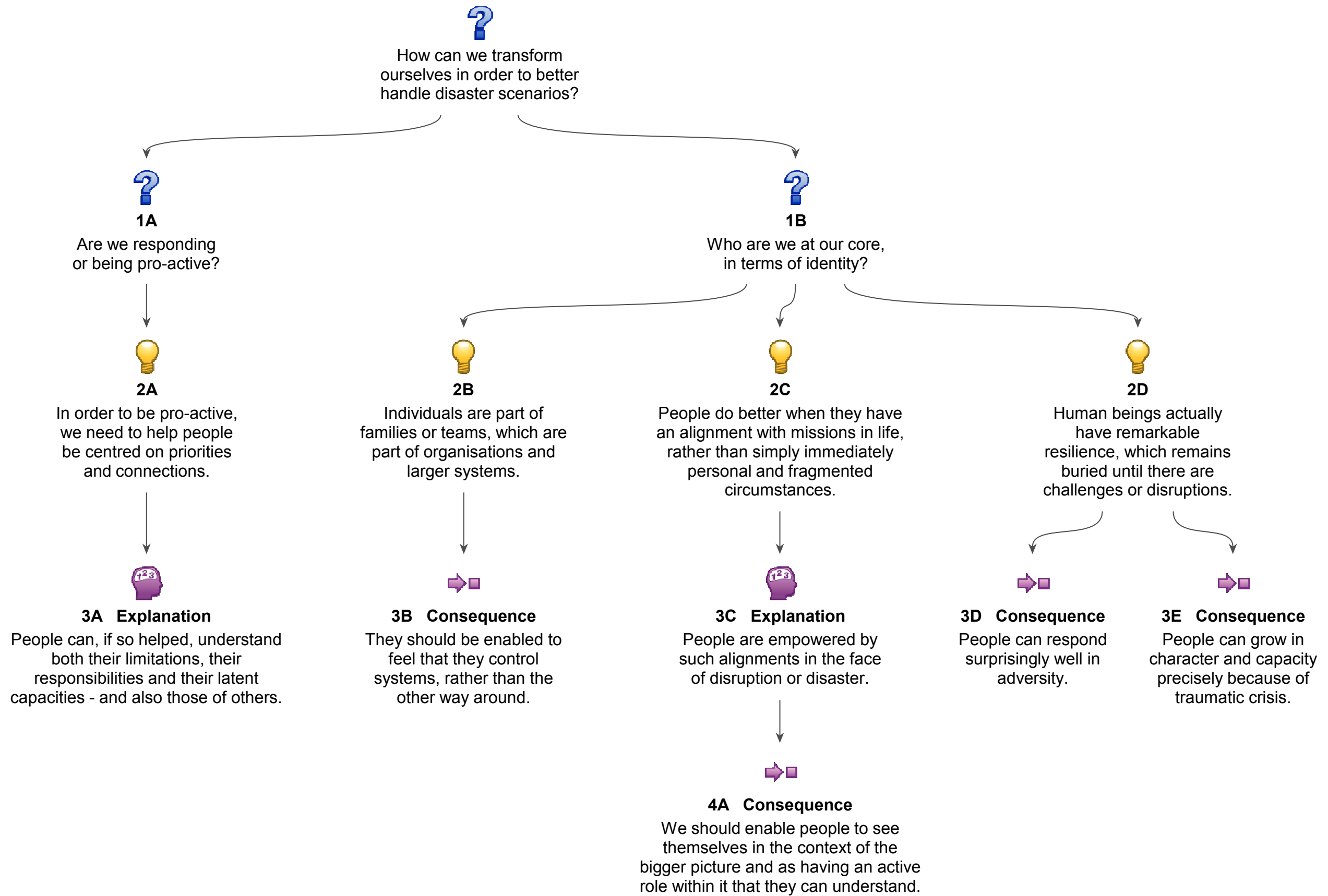


Figure 10: Nicky Grigg on the alarming big picture and the problem with efficiency as a solution.

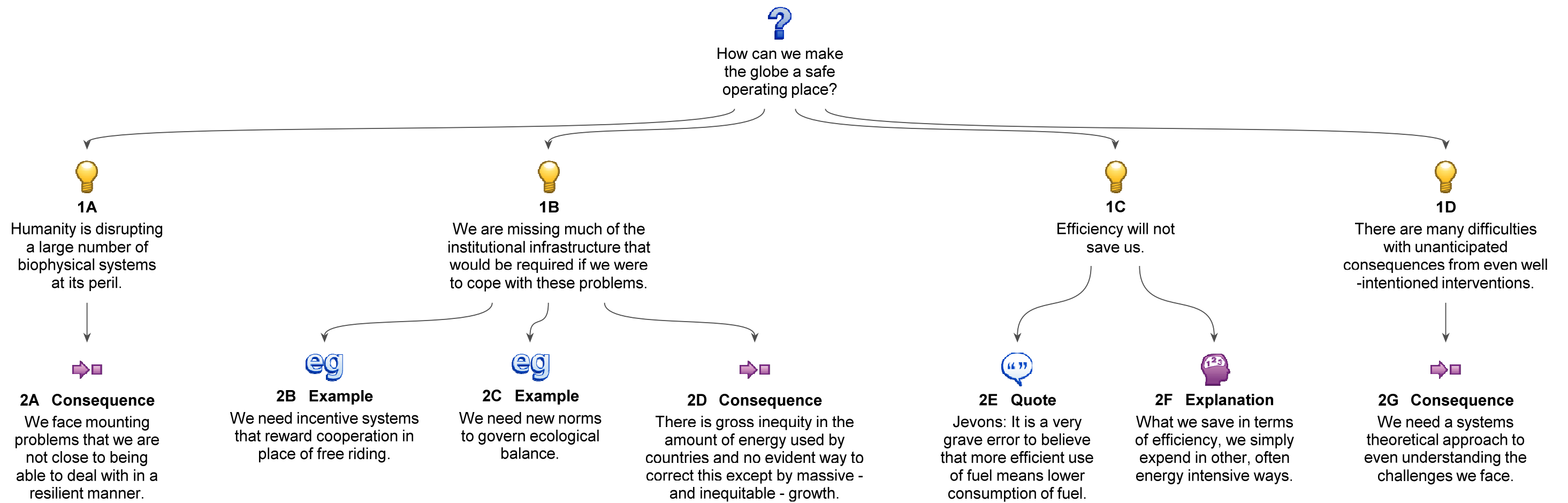


Figure 11: Paul Barratt on systems and sound management.

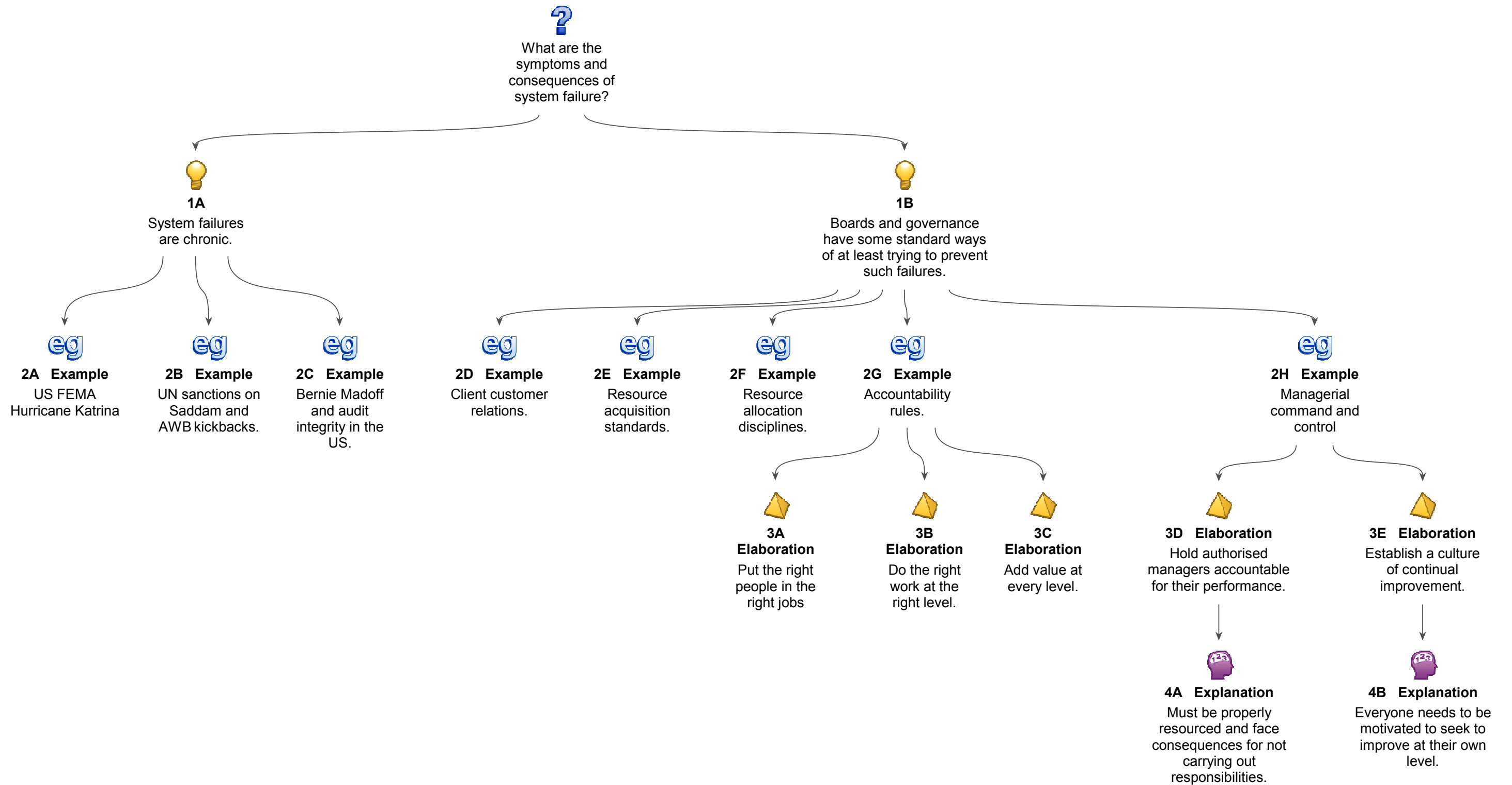
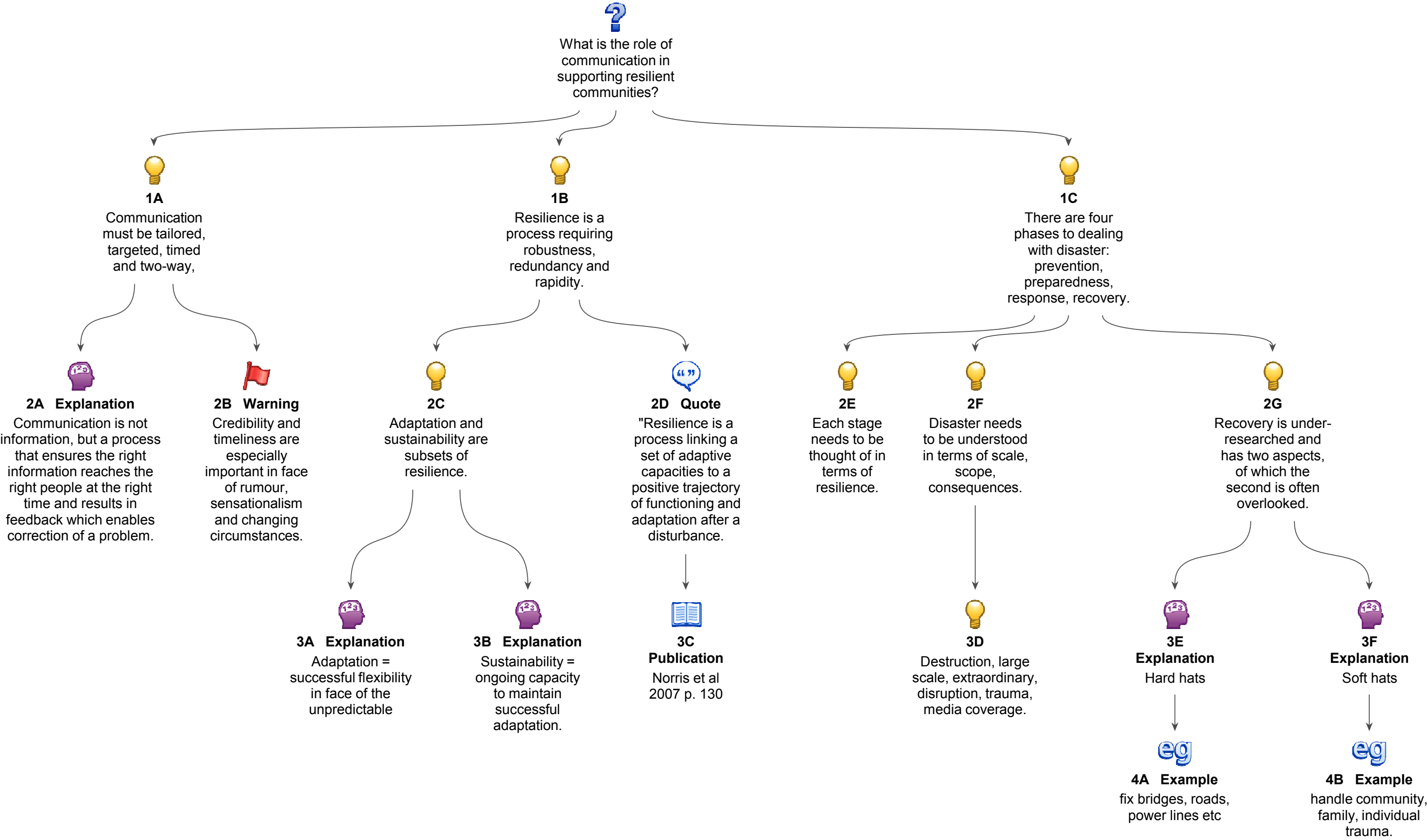


Figure 12: Susan Nichols on communication in emergency situations.



SOME REMARKS ON THE KEY DIALOGUE MAPS

The first thing that will occur to participants in the forum looking over these dialogue maps is that they vary significantly in the **extent to which they fully capture** what was said by the different presenters. But we would suggest that the better **question** would be: How do they compare to the sense of what was said that members of the audience were able to **hold in their heads that afternoon** or scribble down in notes as the forum progressed? Or rather, how do the maps compare to the **collective impression left** by the presentations.

But isn't this collective or shared representation **the whole point of the exercise** in such forums; since, without it, most of what takes place is either simply dissipated (forgotten) or actually leaves conflicting, confused or radically incomplete shared understandings in place. A dialogue map, in other words, is a **process of developing such a shared understanding**, whereas a set of power point slides is simply a list of claims, the relationships between which are often not easy to grasp.

The second thing that these dialogue maps suggest is the **discontinuity between the successive presentations**. There are, of course, broad thematic similarities, but the presentations enter the field from

different directions and, because of the way in which such forums proceed, they and the audience end up mingling in some confusion in the middle of the field, as if playing a kind of **game of conceptual blind man's bluff**. We are so accustomed to this, of course, that perhaps it does not readily occur to us to see things in these terms. But think about the analogy.

In the opening presentation, the questions were asked: What *is* resilience in theory and what does it *require* in practice? Various presenters made remarks circling around these questions and several audience members asked for clarification, but **nowhere did the various ideas get brought together, digested and agreed upon**. An exit poll, as it were, might have gleaned interesting findings, had participants been asked:

1. "After attending this forum, how would you define resilience?"
2. "Is it different from sustainability?"
3. "What are the three highest priority things we need to do in order to increase our resilience in Australia?"

Or again, there were, plainly, overlaps between Richard Eckersley's concerns and those of Theresa Citraningtrya, but these weren't deliberately brought

together. The question and answer session didn't produce a discussion of such an **overlap**. This is not to say that the session was unusually deficient. On the contrary, it was conducted pretty much in the standard manner. We simply suggest that there could be real value in attempting to do these things in a new way.

There were various remarks about **complexity theory and feedback and education**, but no integration of these with the general remarks about **communication and resilience** made by Susan Nichols. One audience member, who happened to work for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, protested that too much of what was being said seemed so full of complication and uncertainty that it was very difficult to see how it could be turned into policy proposals. It was suggested that government needed to tackle complexity, But as to how was left up in the air.

One possible response might have been to integrate some of the concerns about looming challenges and feedback or learning deficiencies with Paul Barratt's basic chart of standards for corporate or administrative governance. Given that Australia 21 plans further work in this regard, perhaps this can be put on the agenda among next steps.

Figure 13: A game of conceptual blind man's bluff

- the way we end behaving if we don't develop shared understanding by means of structured, graphical processes.



SOME REMARKS ON THE KEY DIALOGUE MAPS

Figure 14 opposite is an attempt to capture **the ideas that came up in the question and answer session**. It will be immediately apparent that they are a scattering of ideas that happened to occur to participants on the fly and do not constitute deliberation on a set of clearly identified key issues raised at the forum, or a summary of provisional judgments or an agenda for research or other action.

Given that the forum was **only a single afternoon**, it might be objected that these things could not have been done and that the simple airing of a reasonably wide range of informed and concerned points of view was a useful exercise. In fact, the stated purpose of the forum was to simply provide a set of briefings across a number of disciplines. Perhaps, therefore, among the next steps might be more systematic **deliberation** on:

1. What resilience is,
2. Why it should be a subject of concern to Australians at this point in time,
3. What the most important concerns are and why;
4. What kinds of things it might be most desirable to try to do to address these concerns; and, finally,
5. Which of these might be most

immediately feasible.

Since the book, *Resilience and Transformation*, has already been written, it should now be possible to draw upon its central findings to frame a discussion and direct it at capturing a consensus at least within the Australia 21 network regarding these five questions.

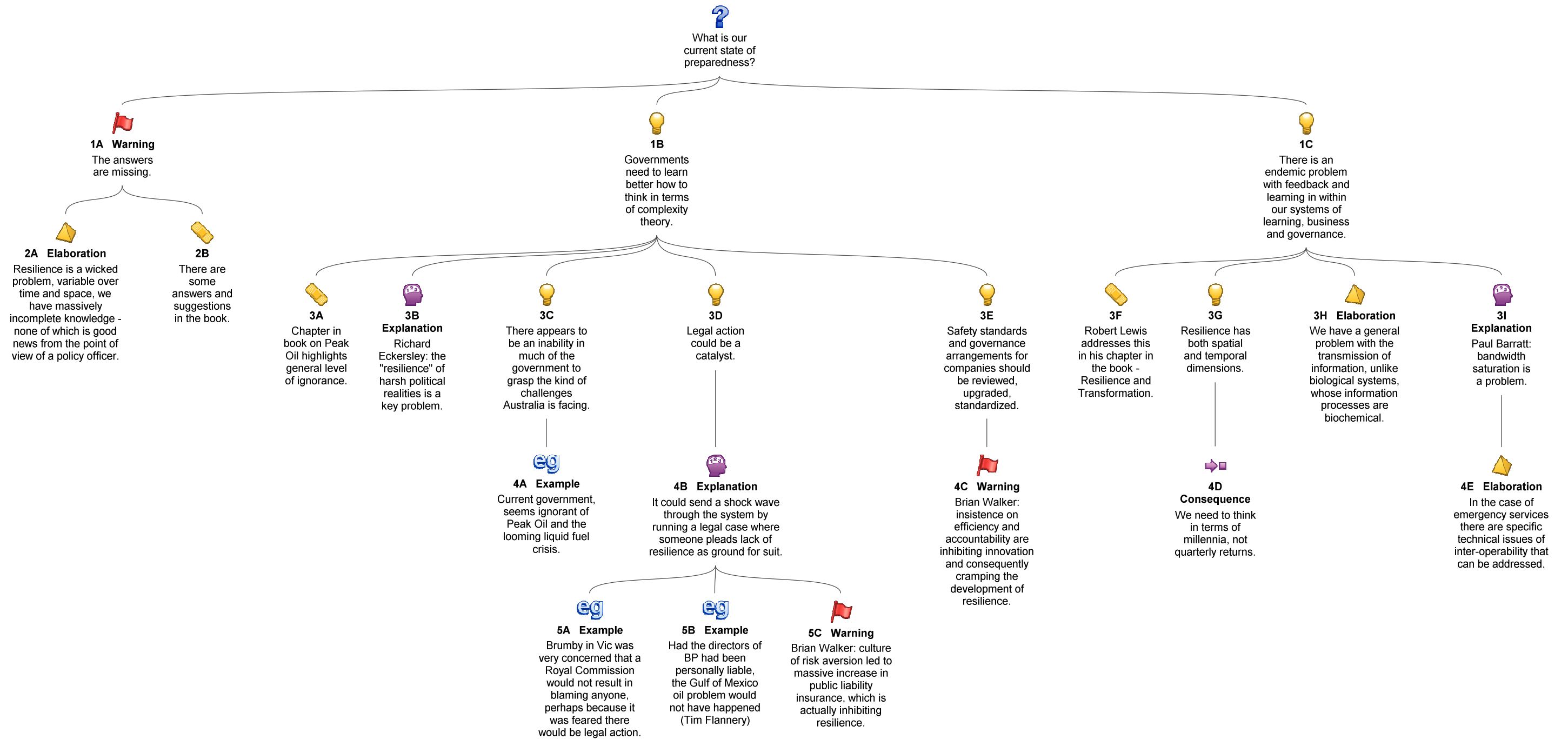
In chairing the question and answer session, Steve Cork asked “**What is missing?**” and the response was “**The answers**”, which prompts the question, “Answers to what, precisely?” It might, therefore, be useful to now attempt a collaborative process to ascertain the key questions are and which of them have answers, which did not; as well as which answers seem clear and which ones contentious or unknown. Beyond that, it becomes easier to inquire as to:

1. Who is best equipped to address the gaps in our knowledge?
2. What things does it make most sense to do next?
3. How can we build a wider coalition for doing these things?

One suggestion that was raised, out of left field, during the question and answer session, was that **legal action** should be used to put pressure on companies and governments to build

greater resilience into the systems and projects. As the dialogue map shows, this was raised within the broad discussion about “What is missing?” and fetched a number of responses, some of them **illustrative** of the wariness of both governments (such as the Victorian government in the case of the Black Saturday bushfires) and companies (such as BP in regard to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico); some of them **ambivalent** about the consequences, intended or otherwise, of going down this path.

Figure 14: Capturing the Question and Answer session at the end of the forum.



We need to step back from the details to see what the most general claims are, so that we can see where the details belong and where they matter.

AN IMPLICIT ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

Following on from this forum, the formidable challenge is to foster constructive deliberation and the formulation of effective public policy. Here, the visualization of deliberation processes could be of considerable help. The **single most basic problem** with standard deliberation is that it suffers from chronic “level violations” - **the general gets mixed up with the particular** and the precise relationship of claims to one another rapidly becomes confused. Even a very good chair person or facilitator has to work hard to steer debates and discussions away from these reefs and shoals.

This problem is, of course, exacerbated in circumstances where **more than one topic** is on the table. Deliberation tends by default to slide all over the place in terms not only of topic, but of levels within and between topics. While this has a feeling of “free and open discussion” about it, the diffuse nature of the exchanges makes progressing the debate all but impossible, except at the margin.

In the present case, the forum was only ever intended to be an intensive and preliminary briefing process, not an inter-active workshop. All the same, those briefings were feeding into **a very large tacit debate** or set of concerns. The challenge in trying to capture that debate and where the briefings impinged on it necessitated separating the general from the particular in what was said, then endeavouring to integrate the various

claims into a common structure. What follows (Figures 15A-E) is a single structure, broken down by its component parts, starting with the highest levels and then proceeding from left to right by branches.

This is what seems to be the **implicit argument structure** of the forum. It shows how the different presentations fit into a common frame of reference. The general (upper level) claims are “abstractions” from the detailed discussion, which provide the super-structure on which the details hang. The key claims made by the presenters are then entered at lower levels, chiefly with the red Warning icon to convey the sense that the presenter in question was issuing a warning of some kind.

As can be seen, most of the presenters were in what might be described as the lower **right hand quadrant of the argument map**—elaborating on why major institutional reforms will be necessary if Australia is to be transformed into a more resilient society. The **left hand side** of the implicit argument structure is sparsely populated, because the presenters appear to have taken as read and agree that the possible crises set out there are indeed looming. No appreciable time was devoted by trying to demonstrate this.

To move from this implicit argument structure to a **discursively agreed, explicit and evaluated argument structure**, or what we would call an argument map would be an

iterative procedure requiring careful work. A tacit form of such a procedure is what has to happen in the case of any serious academic work, public policy formulation or business decision. Over the coming months, Australia 21 will be taking a series of steps in this direction.

The implicit argument structure should have the advantage of being a shared template which could, in principle, allow anyone participating in those next steps to **very quickly get their bearings**, check for completeness, zero in on a topic or claim of interest and develop it in clear relation to the larger architecture of discussion. The top contention could, of course, be modified. The first level would then need to be modified accordingly. There might be a fundamental objection at that level. The set of claims at the second level might be revised; and so on.

In drawing up this diagram, the consultant had no more to go on than the presentations and discussion at the forum. There was no attempt to add to these things, or to evaluate them as claims. Nor was there an effort to place every detail in the argument structure; only to show how this is done. **The process, not its final form, is the point of the exercise.** What emerges, therefore, is a framework for discursive exploration and further development of the forum’s work.

Figure 15A: An attempt to bring together the key observations made by the presenters and

KEY

This is the very top levels of an argument map showing what might be considered the highest level claims implicit in the discussion at the forum. Figures 15B, C, D and E on following pages show the way in which the various detailed observations map onto these high level claims. The map is, of course, a draft representation, not a finished or agreed representation of the opinions of all those in the forum, much less of others who are stakeholders in the matters under discussion.

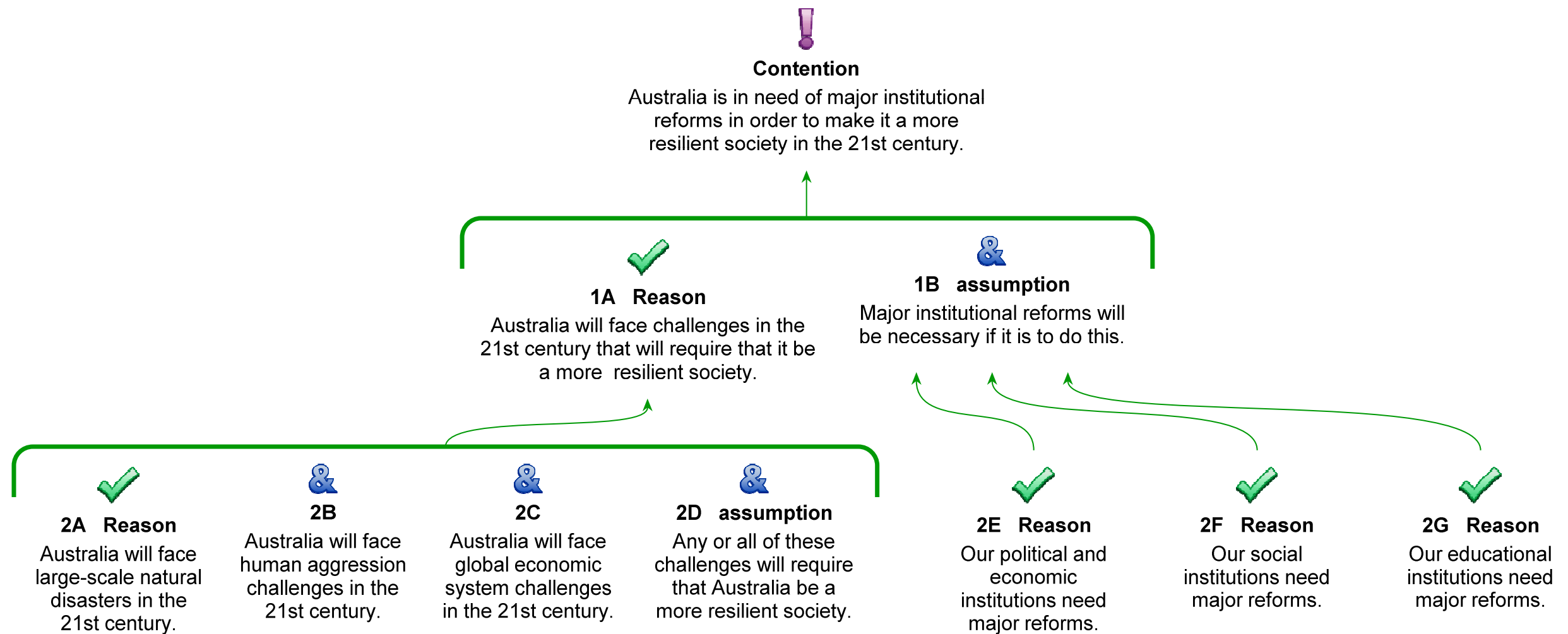


Figure 15B: Large scale natural disasters or human aggression

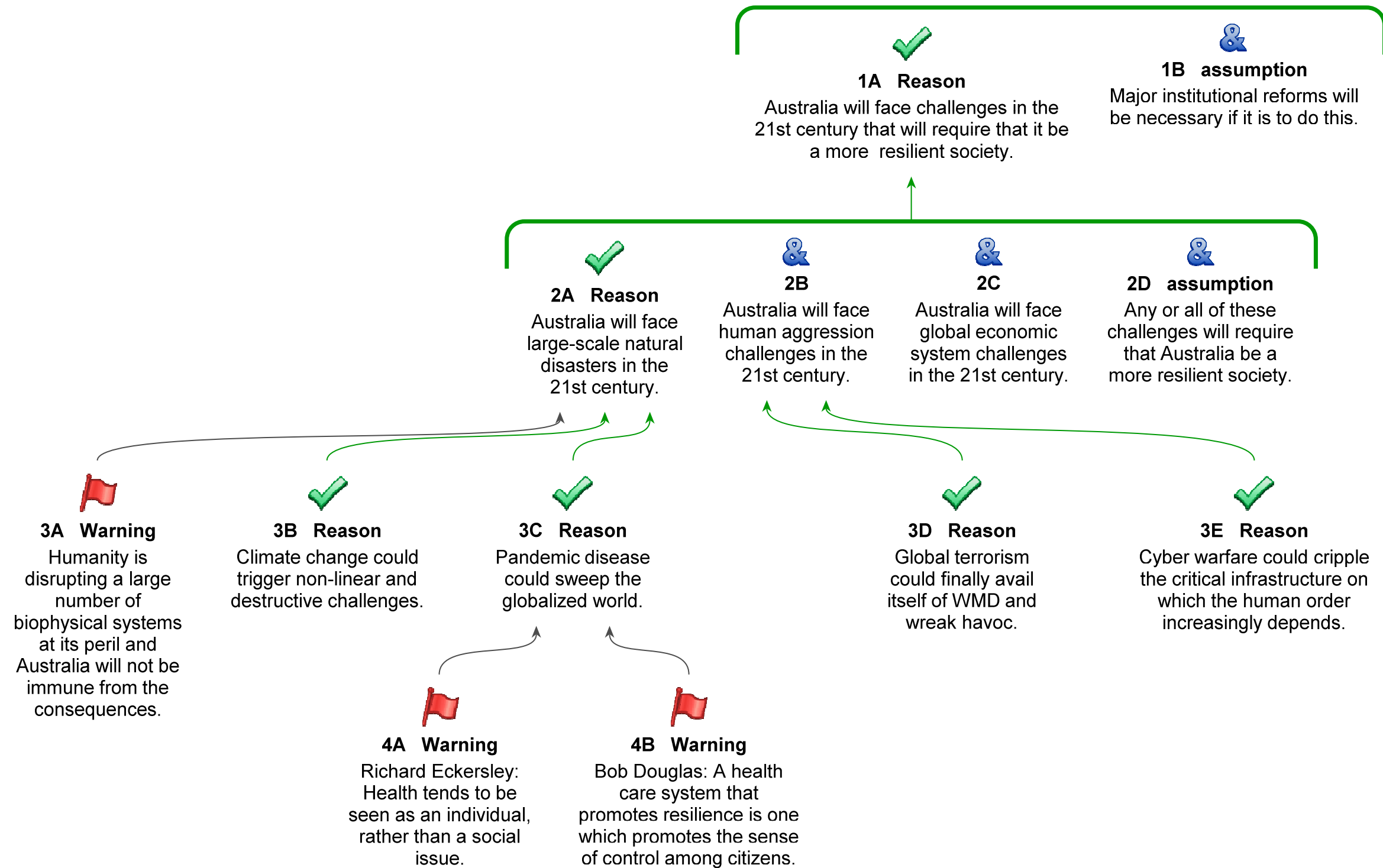


Figure 15C: Global economic system challenges and the need for resilience..

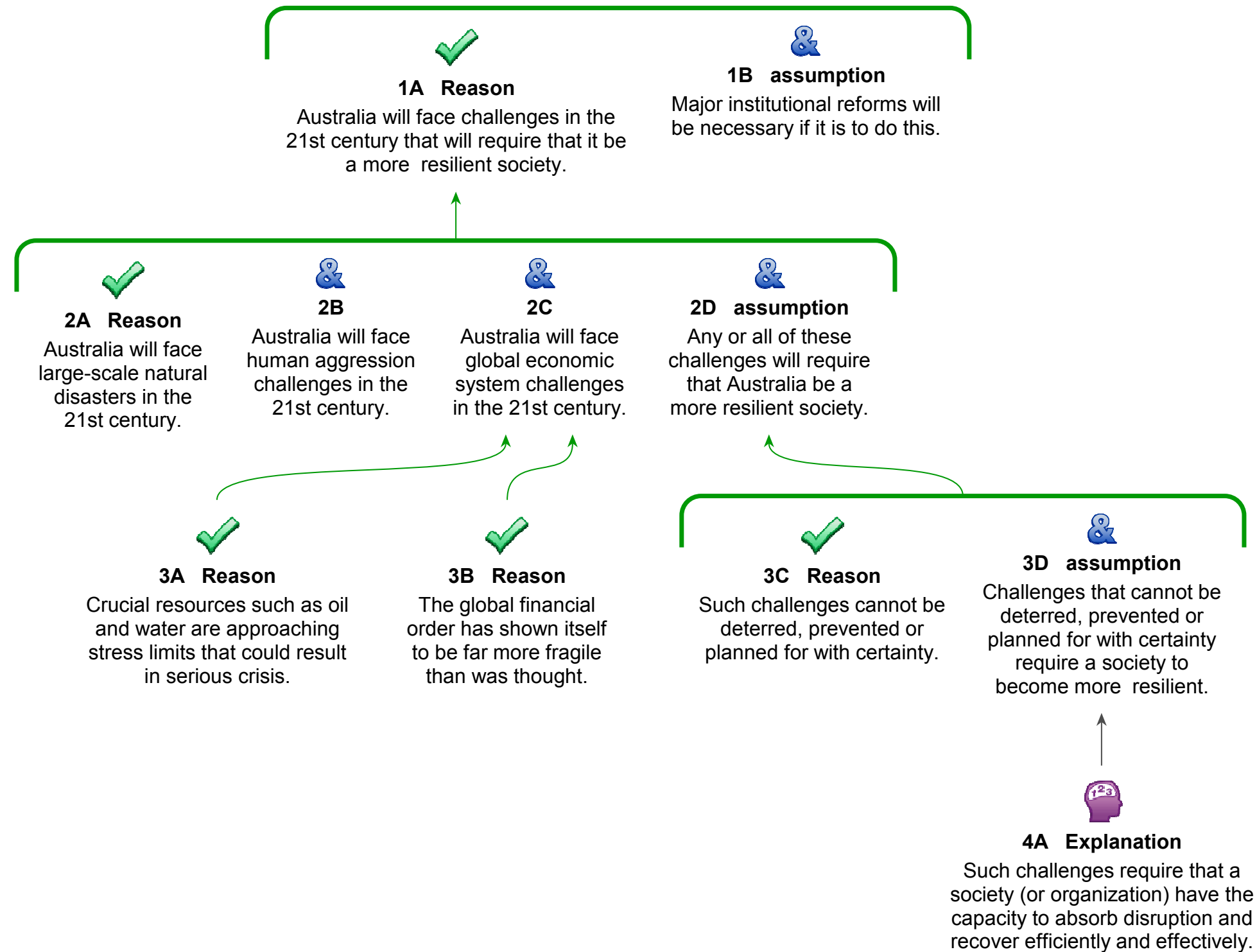


Figure 15D: The need for major institutional reforms—political and economic.

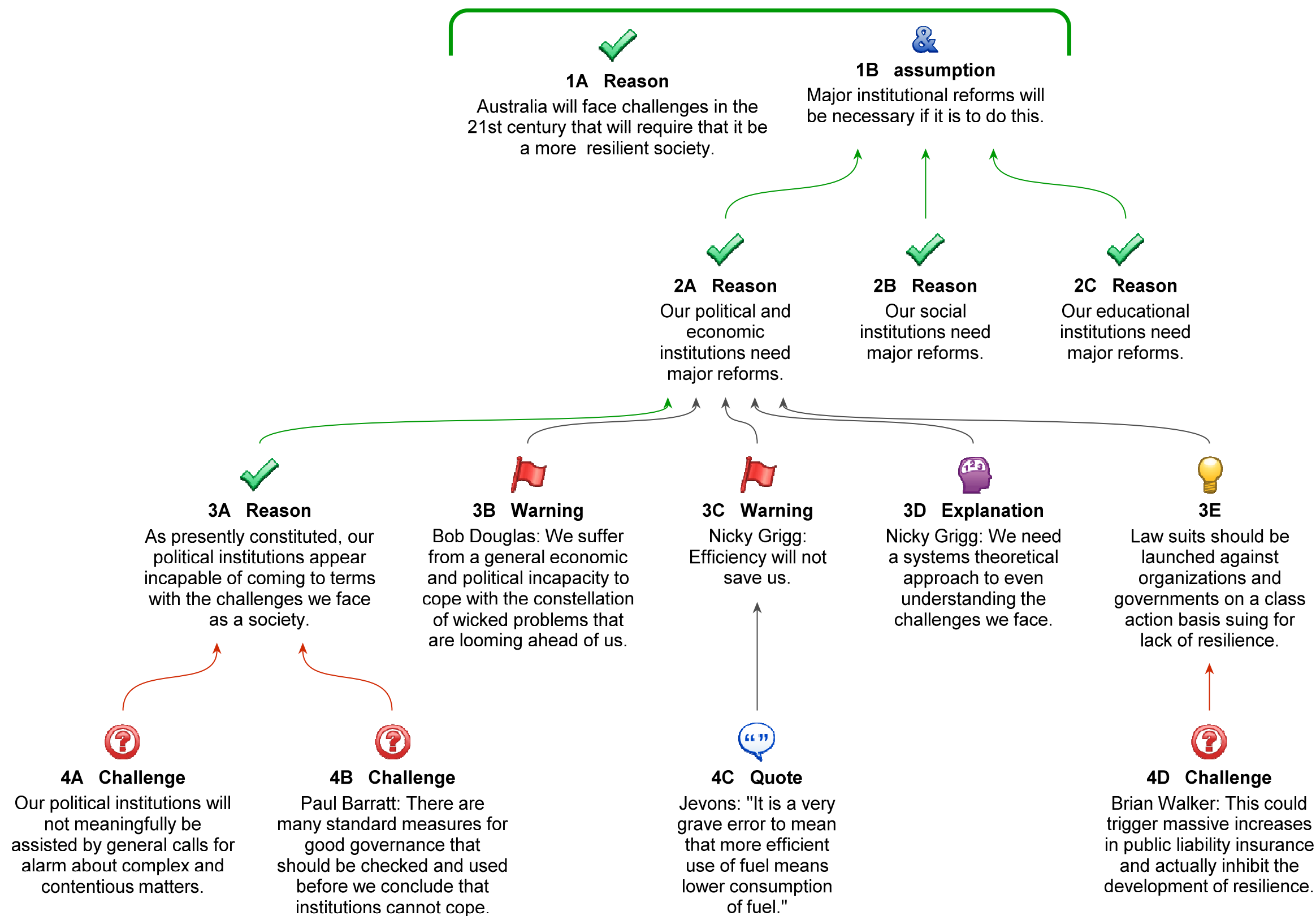
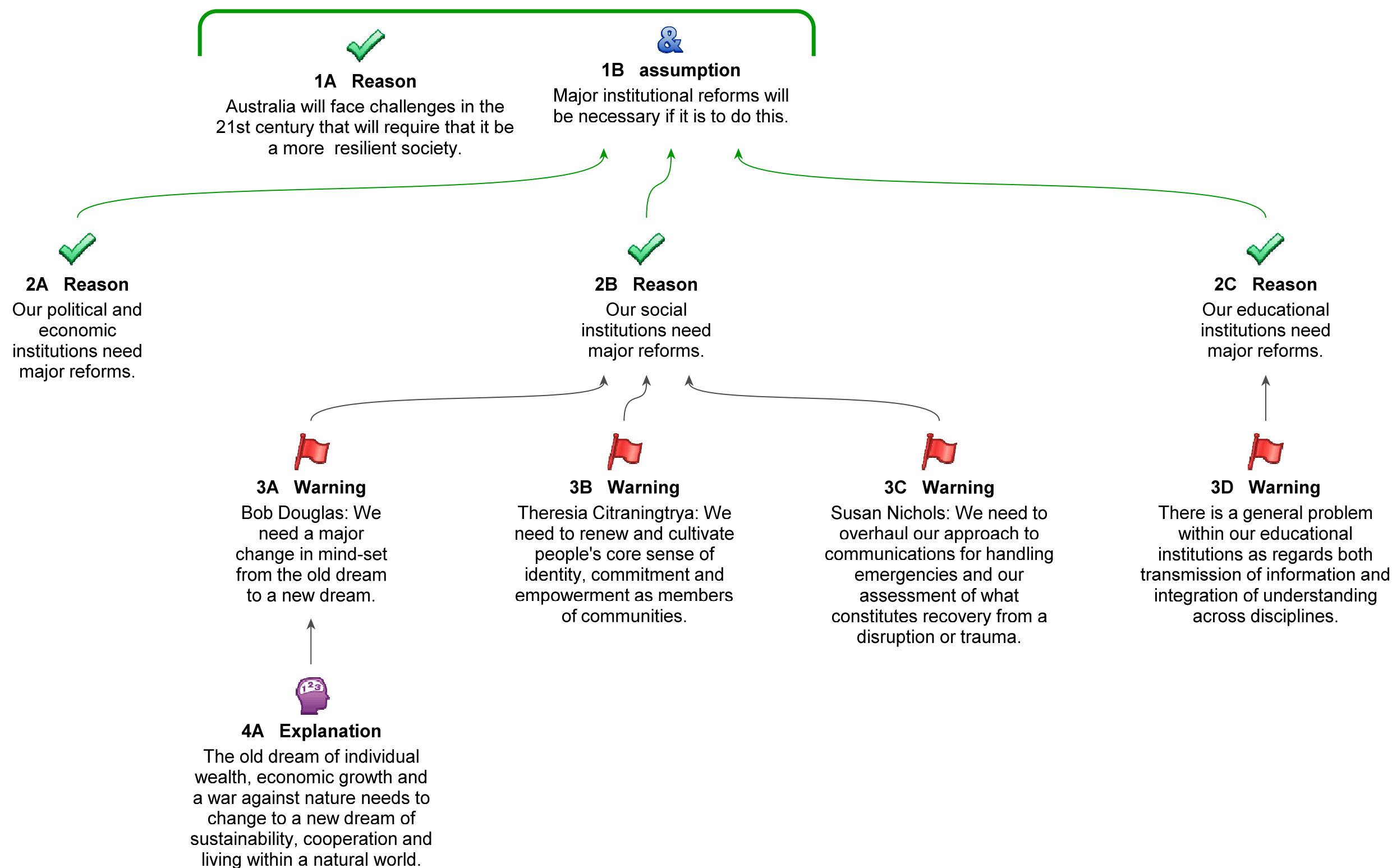


Figure 15E: The need for major institutional reforms—social and educational.



CONCLUSION

These Figures (15A to E) are simply an attempt to take the key ideas that appear to have been advanced at the forum and to place them in an argument structure that would readily admit of systematic development and evaluation. It clearly **does not include every detail**, but it indicates where various lines of thinking belong in relation to one another and positions at least some of the chief claims and challenges that emerged in the course of the discussion. This means that anyone undertaking to “complete” it would be able quickly to identify gaps and, after a little thought, plug in the missing pieces.

Crucial to the exercise is the fact that the argument map **does not at this point provide any evaluation** of the validity of the case, or any of its component parts. It quite simply displays the various claims that are in play, the work they are trying to do and their place in the architecture of the discussion. What this shows is the way in which the mapping process is **similar to active listening**: it entails getting an argument clear and as complete as possible before leaping to conclusions or guillotining the

discussion. The first necessity is to **get everyone on the same page**. Then and only then is it possible to **seek clarity systematically** by checking for completeness of evidence and claims, checking inferences and then evaluating the overall probity of the parts—and finally the whole—of the argument.

It will be **immediately apparent** that there is a very great deal of work to be done in this case. Just by scanning the maps anyone can begin to see where such work might begin, what forms it might take and what needs to be weighed up in the process. **Of course**, it is hard to believe that anyone attending the forum would not have come away with the opinion that there is a great deal of work to be done; but it is also very hard to believe that any two of them would have had a clear and shared understanding of **precisely what work, why and how it would bear upon the central claim** or claims that were being made. Indeed, there may not even have been very much shared clarity as to what central claim or claims were in fact being made.

The work of the mind is to achieve

this kind of clarity. The work of forums and conferences, surely, is to collectively do so. This small exercise has been conceived out of sympathy for the concerns which motivated the convening of the forum and which drive the research efforts of the presenters. We, at Austhink, hope that it will help to point the way to the refinement and enhancement of shared understanding both among the Australia 21 team and its network, as well as among others who face similar challenges—distilling clarity from complexity and consensus from contention.

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03 November 2010