SOCIAL COGNITION

How we think about the world?

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AGENDA

- What Is Social Cognition?
- Autopilot/Automatic thinking : Low Effort Thinking
- Heuristics And Schemas
- Controlled Thinking
- How Culture Impacts Our Thinking?
- Conclusions on Automatic vs Controlled Thinking

SOCIAL COGNITION

TWO ASPECTS:

HOW PEOPLE (OR WAYS IN WHICH) THINK ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THE SOCIAL WORLD.

HOW PEOPLE SELECT, INTERPRET, REMEMBER AND USE SOCIAL INFORMATION TO MAKE DECISIONS IN THEIR OWN LIFE

ONE MINUTE GRATITUDE

OUR BRAIN HAS UNLIMITED STORAGE SPACE AND 24X7 PROCESSING ABILITY

IT WORKS SO PERFECTLY TO PROTECT US FROM ANY SOURCE OF HARM

WHILE DESIGNED IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE- IT DOES PRODUCE ERRORS AND PEOPLE AREN'T REALLY PERFECT SOCIAL THINKERS

AUTOMATIC THINKING

- **AUTOMATIC THINKING**: THINKING THAT IS NONCONSCIOUS, UNINTENTIONAL, INVOLUNTARY, AND EFFORTLESS
- HOW DO WE USE AUTOMATIC THINKING: WE RELY ON BRAIN'S MEMORY FUNCTION
- MORE PRECISELY, WE USE **SCHEMAS :** MENTAL STRUCTURES PEOPLE USE TO ORGANIZE THEIR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE SOCIAL WORLD AROUND THEMES OR SUBJECTS.

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Schemas: Mental Frameworks

What happens when we reach an airport to catch a flight?

Schemas: Mental Frameworks

Schemas ALSO help us organize social information, guide our actions and process information relevant to a particular context. Since, many experiences can be same for many people (e.g., process of getting on a plane), we tend to share many thoughts/schemas with people.

Schemas: Mental Frameworks

Schemas affect the attention, encoding and retrieval processes.

Something that is inconsistent with our existing schema is bound to get more attention

If the information is consistent with our schema, we are more likely to “update” our schema, and also when it is inconsistent, we tend to label it as a “unique” experience

We tend to retrieve information that is consistent to our existing schema

Schemas: Mental Frameworks

Schemas ALSO help us in making sense of ambigious situations. The more the ambiguity, the more we rely on schemas

Schemas: Mental Frameworks

So, how do we use schemas in ambiguous situations?

One way is **Accessibility :** the extent to which schemas are at the forefront of our mind and therefore likely to be used (we donot like to work too much- remember?!).

Sometimes our **recent experiences** increase this accessibility! This is called **priming.** Therefore, the more you are exposed to a particular schema, the more likely you are to use it.

Schemas: Mental Frameworks

"You're the average of the five people you spend the most time with"

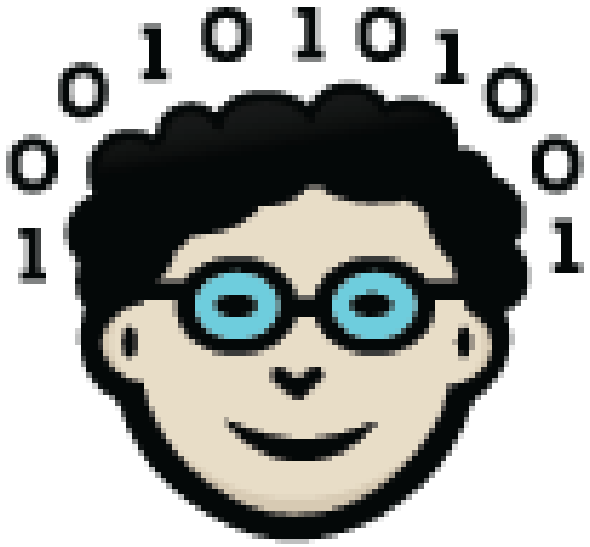
- JIM ROHN

Heuristics- Because time is a luxury !

We all are **cognitive misers** (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). The concept describes the ability and tendency of the human brain to problem solve in the most simple and straight-forward ways rather than utilizing more sophisticated and effort-intensive ways. By doing this the brain conserves energy.

We are constantly in a state of information overload, hence it is necessary for all of us to use Heuristics (mental short cuts in decision making)

Heuristics are also the reason why most of our decisions are based on "automatic" processing rather than careful, systematic processing of facts

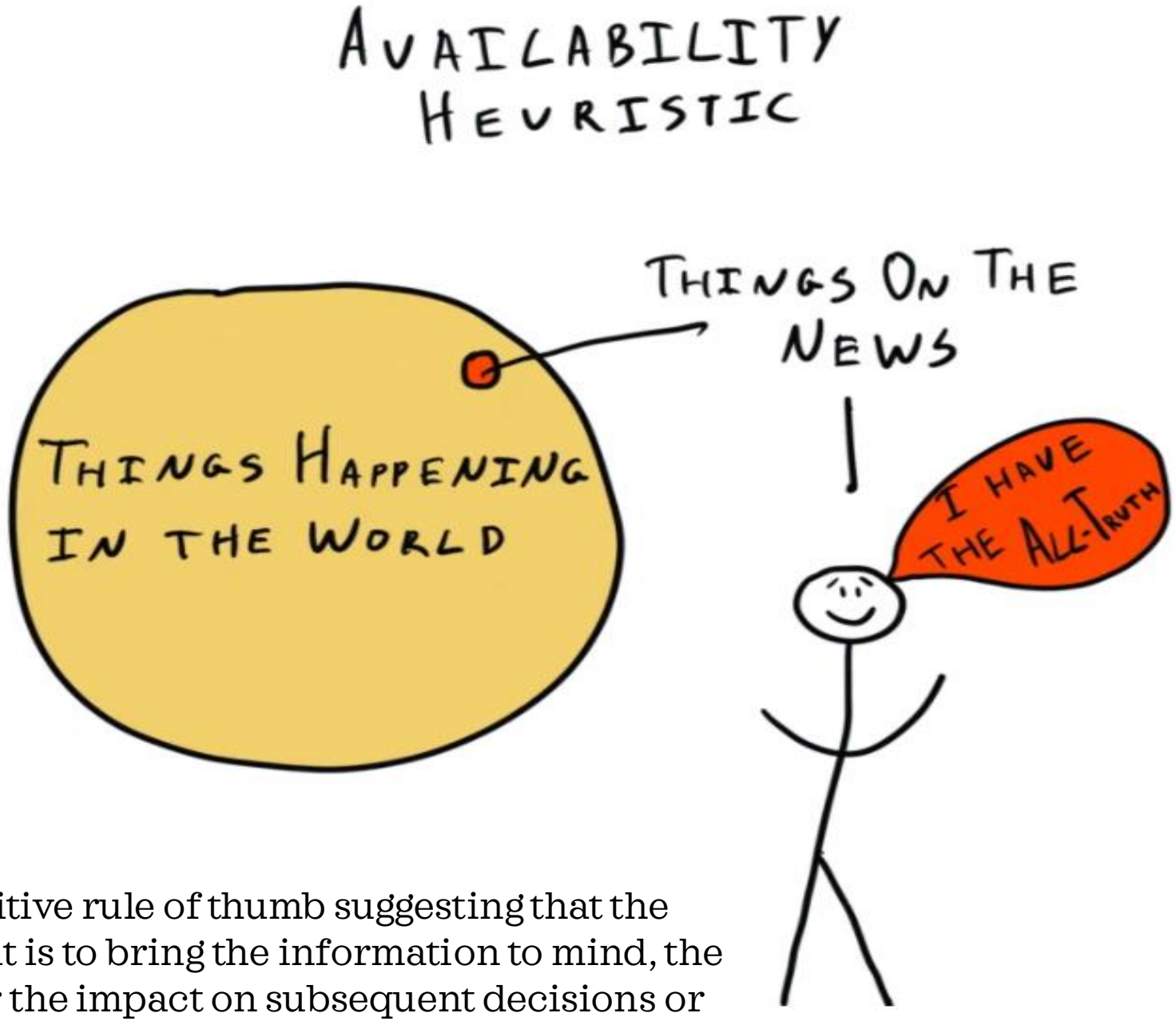


ComputerGeek

Representativeness Heuristics: A cognitive rule of thumb that suggests that we make decisions based on similarities we notice.

HOW WE THINK ABOUT THE WORLD?

HOW THINK ABOUT THE WORLD?



A cognitive rule of thumb suggesting that the easier it is to bring the information to mind, the greater the impact on subsequent decisions or judgements

HOW WE THINK ABOUT THE WORLD?

"The Portion Size Effect": A Matter of Anchoring and Inadequate Adjustment

When people are presented with small portions of food, they estimate and eat less than when presented with large portions. The large portion serves as a high anchor that we typically fail to adjust downward, contributing to the obesity epidemic in Western countries.

Anchoring and Adjustment Heuristics: Is a heuristics that suggests a tendency to deal with uncertainty in many situations by using something we do know as a starting point and then making adjustments to it.

HOW WE THINK ABOUT THE WORLD?

Status-quo Heuristics: A heuristics suggesting our tendency to believe that things are good as they are currently.

Schemas: Mental Frameworks: Because it doesn't stop just here.

Not all schemas are equally developed – because we have more or less information about a particular issue

However, when we have more information (in terms of experiences, how long that experience continued, and how it affected us)- we can develop very strong schemas

What does that lead to?

Schemas: Mental Frameworks

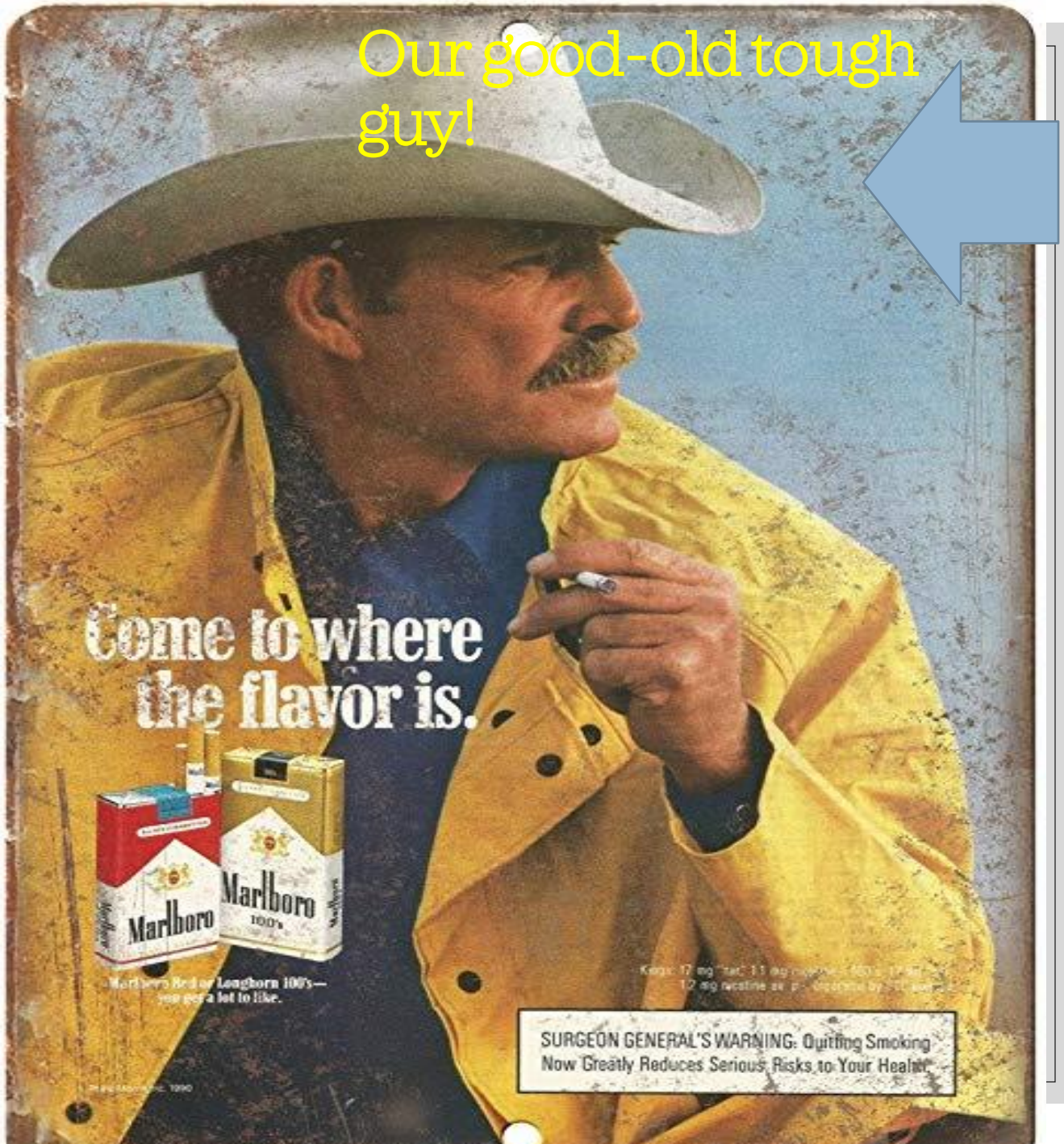
Schemas can be activated temporarily- this is called **Priming** (yes, same thing in a different form!)

Schemas : Mental Frameworks

There are schemas that develop because of our own unique experiences but there are also collective schemas - have you noticed why so many of us might have the same point of view/thinking/behaviour about the same thing?

Our good-old Damsel in Distress- Cinderella !

Our good-old tough guy!



To the "empowered" woman

(powered by lucky strike of course !)

Perseverance Effect: When schemas are strong, and they remain unchanged even in the face of contradictory information

They also have a self-fulfilling effect such that they influence our responses to our social world in ways that make our expectations come true, consistent with our schemas.

One Final Fact

Once a schema is strongly activated, people act in ways **consistent** with their schemas , even if they do not intend to do so, and also people tend to be **unaware** that they are acting in this manner. Implications?

Automatic vs Controlled Processing

- Social thought can occur in two distinct ways

- Automatic Processing: Fast, relatively effortless
- Controlled Processing: slow and effortful

Many times we use both simultaneously

But, which processing is better? What do you think?

Controlled Processing- Drawbacks!

- While we might think we have “carefully” processed our thoughts (OR carefully evaluated a situation that is impacting us), we actually may be unable to take into account all relevant information

- Research studies actually proved that people might be more satisfied with their decisions on automatic than when they had a chance to think about it

- Example : Have you ever acted on just a “thought” or “idea” and done it- and felt so much better about it?

Controlled Processing-Drawbacks!

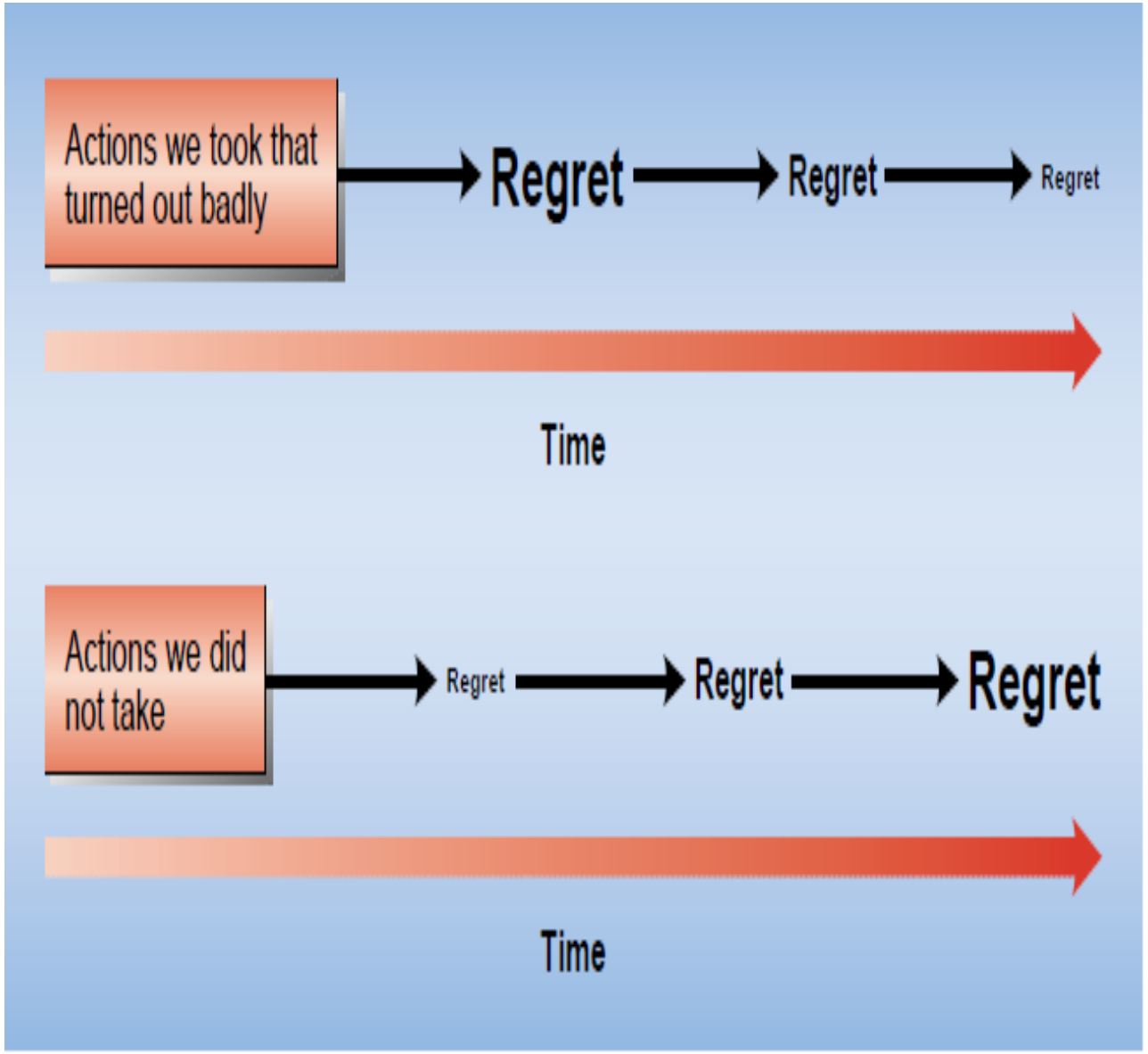
We are far from accurate even after controlled processing because:

- **Optimism Bias:** A powerful predisposition to overlook risks and expect things to turn out well

- **Over-confidence Bias:** We often have greater confidence in our beliefs or judgements than is justified

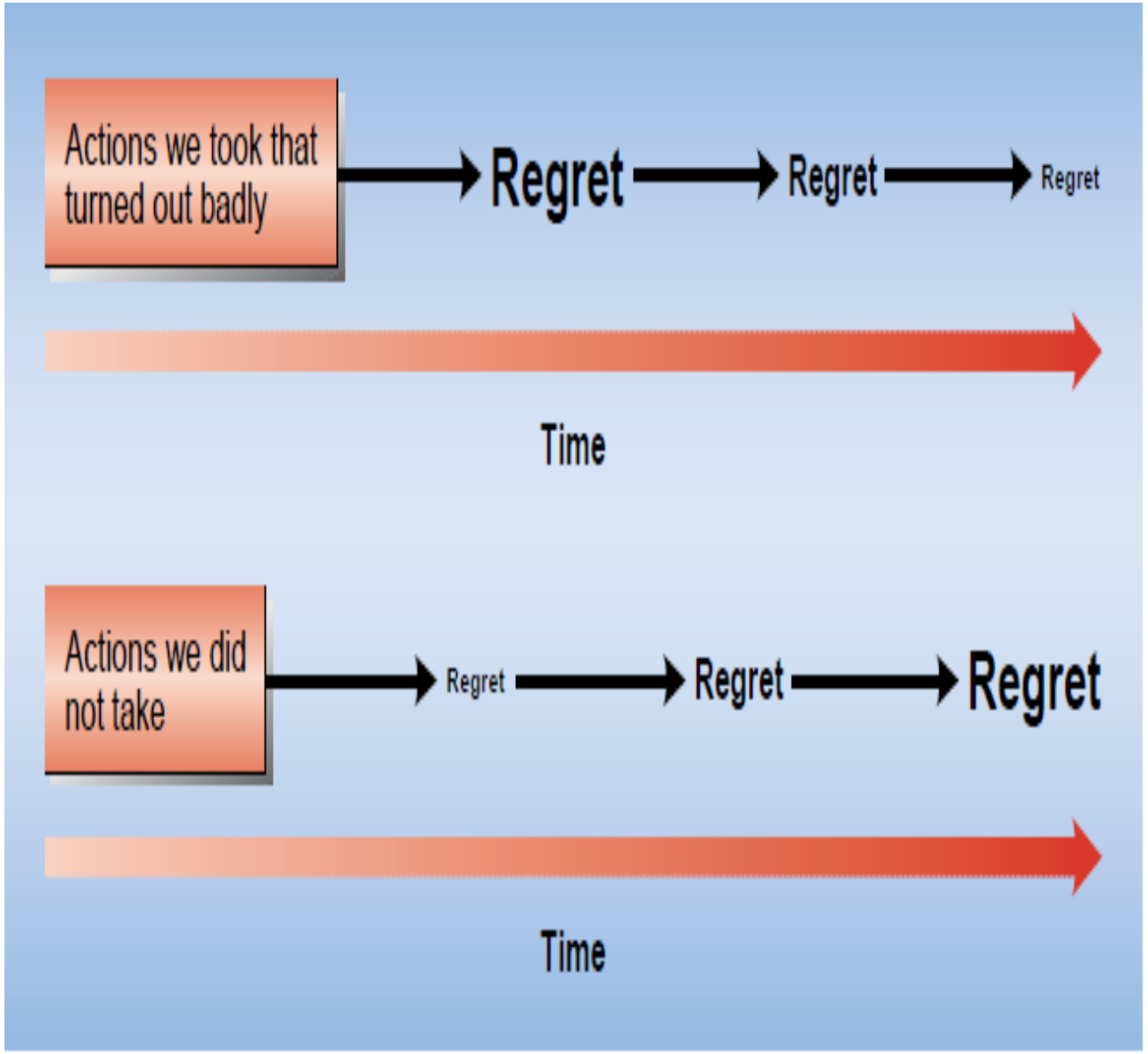
Controlled Processing- Drawbacks!

Optimism and Over-confidence bias has been proved in studies on planning fallacy- a tendency to believe that we can get more done in a given period of time than we actually can



Counterfactual Thinking

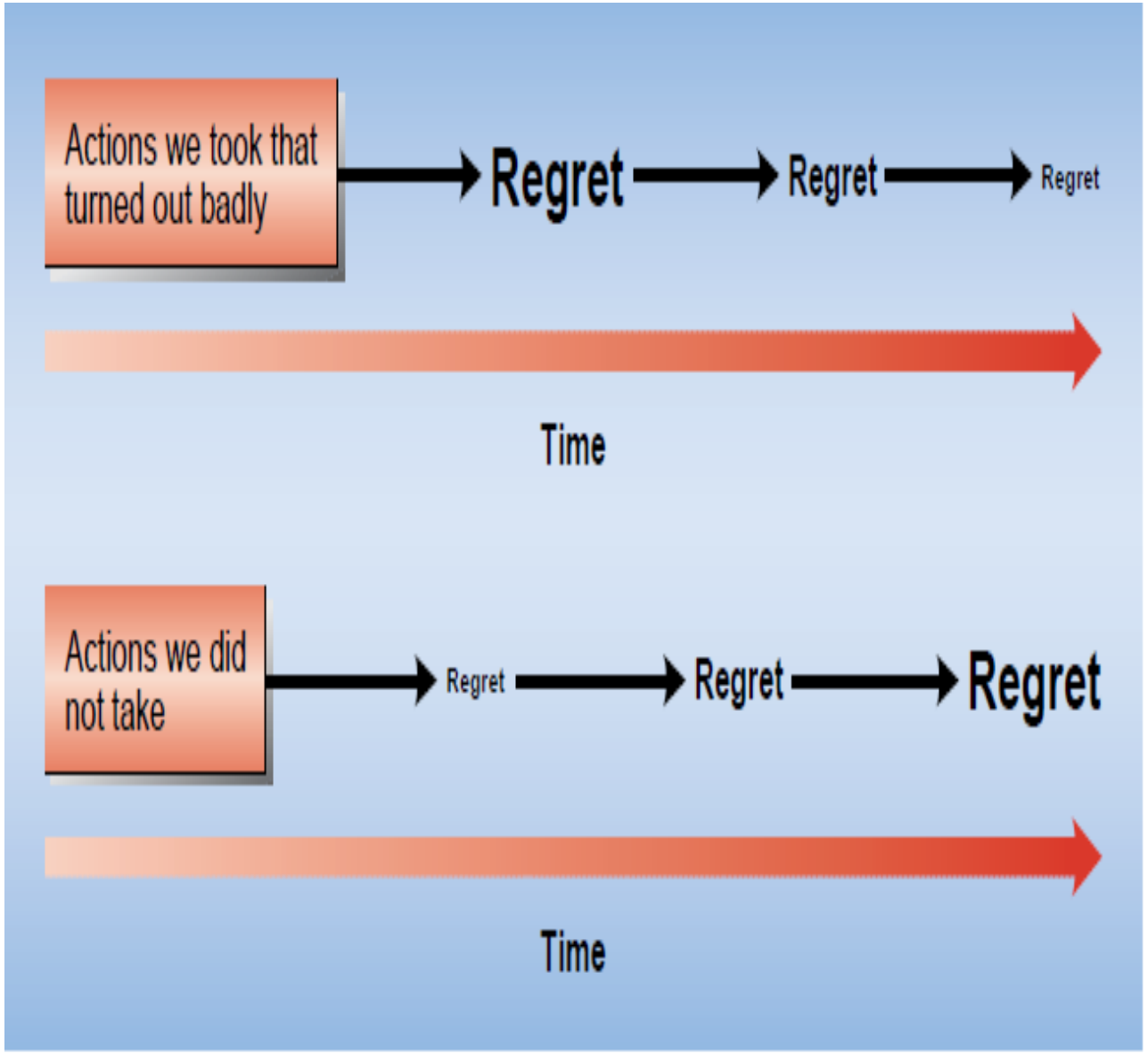
- We are more likely to engage in counter-factual thinking where we experience negative outcomes. By engaging in counterfactual thinking at such junctures, we think of avoiding such errors in the future, and this can be comforting.
- In turn, this can strongly influence our judgements about these events or situations, or current moods, and our plans for the future.



Counterfactual Thinking

- This in other words is also thinking " what might have happened"

- People who had strong beliefs that they have the power to act differently (i.e. free will) engage in more counterfactual thinking- and hence may come up with improved strategies of performances.



Counterfactual Thinking

- At the points of disappointments, it depends if we engage in an upward counterfactual or a downward one

- Upward counterfactual – I could have done better than this- thinking
- Downward- It could have been worse – more positive reaction

Upward-Downward Counterfactual

Where do you find yourself at when you face some disappointment (think about your tendency or default behaviour- don't say "it depends")

What are the pros and cons of each counter-factual? What should we be doing instead?

Magical Thinking

Human beings are quite susceptible to magical thinking- such thinking makes assumptions that do not hold up to rational scrutiny.

Was proved by these facts:

- **Contagion:** The notion holds that when two objects touch, they pass on properties to one another, and that the effects of contact may last well beyond the termination of such contact. Example : think about how hypervigilant can we get if we touch a blood sample of an AIDS patient, or an object that it theirs

Magical Thinking

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Similarity Effect : Things that resemble one another share fundamental properties.

Culture and Social Cognition

- Although everyone uses schemas to understand the world, the ***content*** of schemas is influenced by the culture in which we live.

- *Holistic vs Analytical Thinking:* Western cultures tend to have an ***analytic thinking style,*** a type of thinking in which people focus on their properties of objects without considering their surrounding context.

- People in East Asian cultures tend to have a ***holistic thinking style***, a type of thinking in which people focus on the overall context, particularly the ways in which objects relate to each other

Culture and Social Cognition

Perception and Attention

- **Analytic Thinkers:**
  - Focus on specific details and isolate objects from their environment.
  - Example: Spot a single tree in a forest and analyze its individual characteristics (e.g., height, type).
- **Holistic Thinkers:**
  - Consider the broader environment and relational patterns.
  - Example: Focus on the interaction between the forest and the tree, noticing how they influence each other.

Culture and Social Cognition

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

- **Analytic Thinking:**
  - Relies on logic, rules, and step-by-step problem-solving.
  - Implication: Best suited for structured problems (e.g., solving a math problem, legal reasoning).
- **Holistic Thinking:**
  - Considers multiple perspectives, interdependencies (dialectical thinking*).
  - Implication: Effective for complex, unstructured problems (e.g., conflict resolution, systems thinking).

*a cognitive process that involves examining and reconciling opposing ideas, perspectives, or contradictions to arrive at a more integrated or nuanced understanding. Two seemingly opposite truths (e.g., "I'm doing my best" and "I need to improve") can coexist.

Culture and Social Cognition

Some implications of these differences are manifested in how we communicate and relate:

- **Analytic Thinkers:** Prefer explicit, direct communication.
- Example: Clearly stating one's argument and separating points for clarity.
- **Holistic Thinkers:** Use implicit, indirect communication, relying on context and shared understanding.
- Example: Leaving room for interpretation and considering non-verbal cues.

Culture and Social Cognition

Some implications of these differences are manifested in conflict resolution:

- **Saving Face:** Preserving one's dignity, honor, and social harmony in the eyes of others. It focuses on minimizing embarrassment, avoiding public conflict, and maintaining interpersonal or group cohesion. Example behaviours: calling out on wrong behaviours privately with an aim to preserve long term partnership or maintain harmony
- **Direct Confrontation:** Openly addressing issues, disagreements, or conflicts in a straightforward and explicit manner. It prioritizes honesty, clarity, and resolution over preserving social harmony. Example behaviours: calling out inappropriate behaviours in a group setting with an aim for immediate resolution or truth

To Summarize

Automatic Thinking : Role of biases, heuristics and schemas

Controlled Thinking: Role of personality factors (eg., optimism/pessimism bias) or controlled thinking

Questions

What do you make out of “human thinking” and the flaws that come along.

Can we improve human thinking?

Wrap up!

- Controlled thinking provides checks and balances for automatic thinking. This doesn't mean that one is superior to the other- these two a different pathways of thinking.
- You cannot get through ambiguous social situations without automatic thinking and you cannot make most out of our social world without using controlled thinking
- Overconfidence barrier- the fact that people have too much confidence on their judgements (can we also focus on under confidence?)- how do you think you can improve this?
- Lot of research to prove that if we work on improving our reasoning (eg., taking a statistics course or practicing reasoning problems)- our reasoning ability can improve.

Wrap up!

- Similarly, a lot of research proves that we also can get better at processing emotions. Such as research on :

- Emotional Intelligence or emotional regulation skills

- Emotional regulation skills include: labelling emotions, reappraising emotions, cognitive reframing

- Both **cognitive reframing** and **emotional reappraisal** are psychological strategies aimed at changing how we perceive and respond to **emotionally charged situations.**

Wrap up!

Aspect	Cognitive Reframing	Emotional Reappraisal
Focus	Modifies thoughts and beliefs.	Changes emotional interpretations.
Goal	Develops constructive thinking.	Manages or reduces emotional intensity.