

# Sociocracy

*A brief introduction.*

# Opening *(Option 1)*

*(Select the option that best suits the audience)*

- ▶ **What brought you here and what is your biggest need for your organization?**
  - Facilitate a round where each participant shares their name, motivation and need in 2-3 sentences

# Opening *(Option 2)*

*(Select the option that best suits the audience)*

- ▶ **Names round**
- ▶ **Collect a list of organizational challenges you have experienced**
  - *(This activity will be followed up in the closing-activities)*

# Opening *(Option 3a)*

*(Select the option that best suits the audience)*

## ▶ **Think about...**

- ...what you long for in organization
- ...the one gift you cannot give or share
- ...the one thing you would change if you could

# Opening *(Option 3b)*

*(Select the option that best suits the audience)*

- ▶ **Now share in a round:  
What stands in the way?**

# Sociocracy...

*a.k.a. dynamic governance in the US*

- ▶ ...is an elegant *whole system approach* for development and evolution of *harmonious, adaptable organizations*
- ▶ ...is a governance method with an *inclusive decision making process* and feedback loops
- ▶ ...involves people in forming policies that guide their creative flow

# Sociocracy...

*a.k.a. dynamic governance in the US*

- ▶ ...draws on the *collective intelligence* of the group
- ▶ ...facilitates the development of policies that are “*good enough for now*” and “*safe enough to try*”
- ▶ ...fosters accountability and sense of ownership

# A Few Terms...

*...which will be helpful down the line*



# What's in a word

## ▶ **socio**

- from Latin *socius* - companion, friend

## ▶ **-cracy**

- from Ancient Greek κράτος (*krátos*, "power, rule")

## ▶ **different to the rule of the *demos***

- the general mass of people with voting privileges

# Vision, Mission, Aims and Values

## ▶ Vision

- *why*: the desired future

## ▶ Mission:

- *how*: the big picture

## ▶ Aims

- *what*: products, services, experiences, transformation, raw materials

## ▶ Values

- define the culture

# Organizations

- ▶ In an organization people collaborate to realize common objectives
- ▶ Sociocratic organizations align around shared vision

# Governance

- ▶ from Latin *gubernare* - to steer a vessel
- ▶ Sociocratic processes relate to governance, not operations
  - operational processes can be defined using sociocratic methods

# Policies

- ▶ **To govern, we create policies**
- ▶ **Policies guide our day-to-day tasks**
  - like banks of the river, guide the creative flow
- ▶ **Policies are created to resolve issues arising in relation to achieving aim/s**
- ▶ **Minimum Viable Policy**
  - good enough for now
  - safe enough to try

# A Brief History of Sociocracy

*From 1851 to today*

# A Brief History...

## ▶ 1851 – Auguste Comte

- Scientific method applied to society
- Sociocracy is “*the social order of the future*” - not yet achievable but inevitable

## ▶ 1881 – Lester Frank Ward

- redefined the term Sociocracy to describe the rule of the people with relationships with each other

# A Brief History...

## ▶ 1926 -1954 – Kees Boeke

- Established the first sociocracy in his residential school (based on Quaker consensus principles)
- Book “Sociocracy: Democracy as it might be” (1945)

## ▶ 1970's – Gerard Edenburg

- Student in Kees Boeke's school
- Integrated principles from Engineering and Cybernetics
- Evolved the “*Sociocratic Circle-Organization Method*” in his company Endenburg Electrotechniek



# A Brief History...

- ▶ **1978 – Sociocratisch Centrum Utrecht**
  - created to promote Sociocracy
- ▶ **1994 – New law in the Netherlands**
  - Sociocratic organizations are no longer required to have a worker's council

# A Brief History...

- ▶ **2007 – *We the People***
  - John Buck / Sharon Villines make Sociocracy accessible to the English-speaking world
- ▶ **since then – emergence of a wide-spread grassroots movement**

**How does it work?**

# 3 Influences

*Sociocracy builds on what is already working (common sense)*

## ▶ Quaker Meeting Practice

- active listening / facilitation / norms / synergy / group ownership

## ▶ Science

- Cybernetics, Systems Thinking / Complexity Theory

## ▶ Nature

- Consent, transformation, evolution

# 3 Core Principles

## ▶ **Equivalence**

- Everyone has a voice in decisions that affect them

## ▶ **Effectiveness**

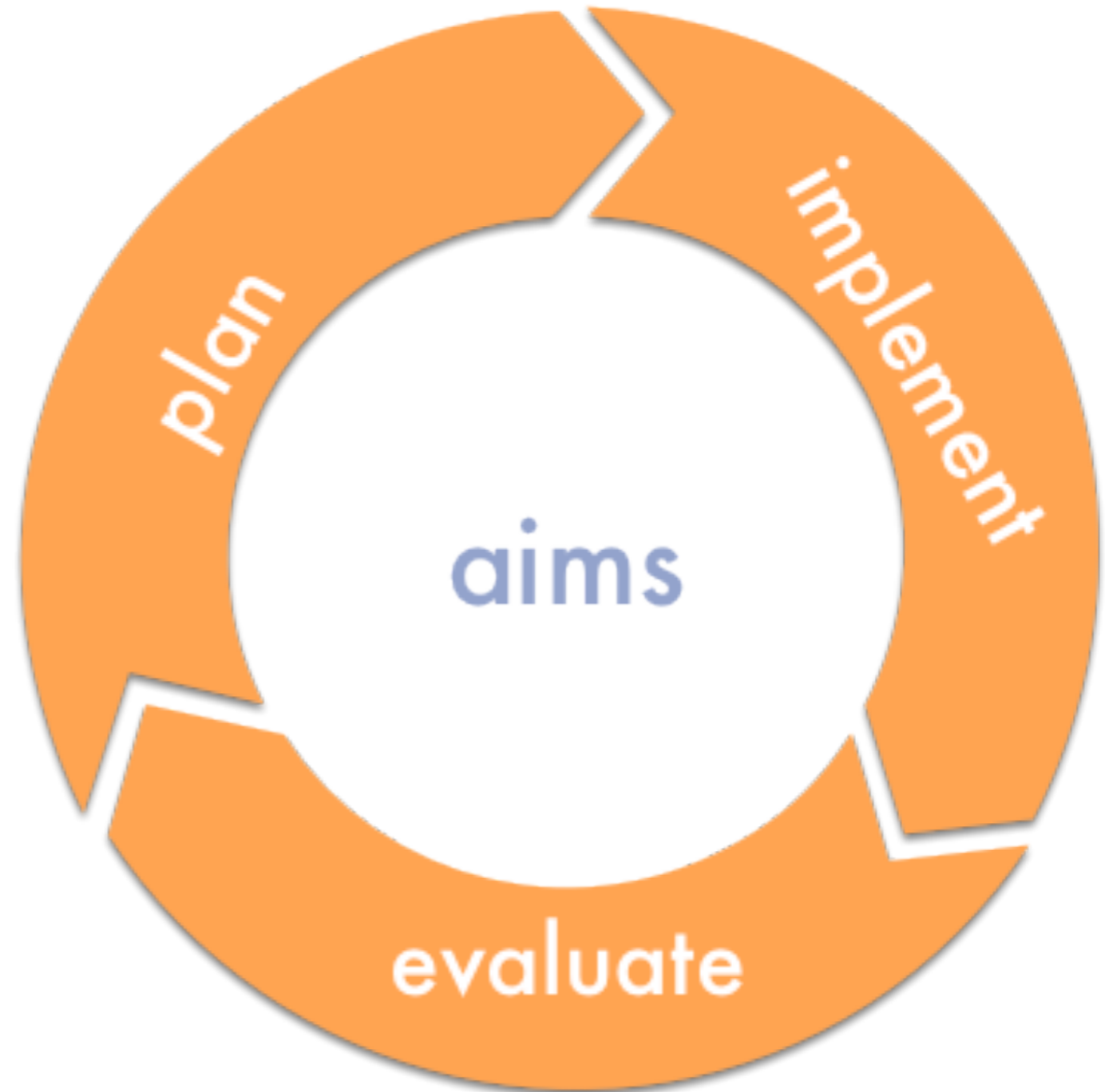
- are we effective in achieving our aims, respecting people and resources, being responsive to change

## ▶ **Transparency**

- All information is up-to-date and accessible to all.  
Consent to secrets / confidentiality when necessary.

# Feedback Loops

- ▶ **Feedback and reflection enables continuous evolution and improvement of policies in service of aims**



# Consent

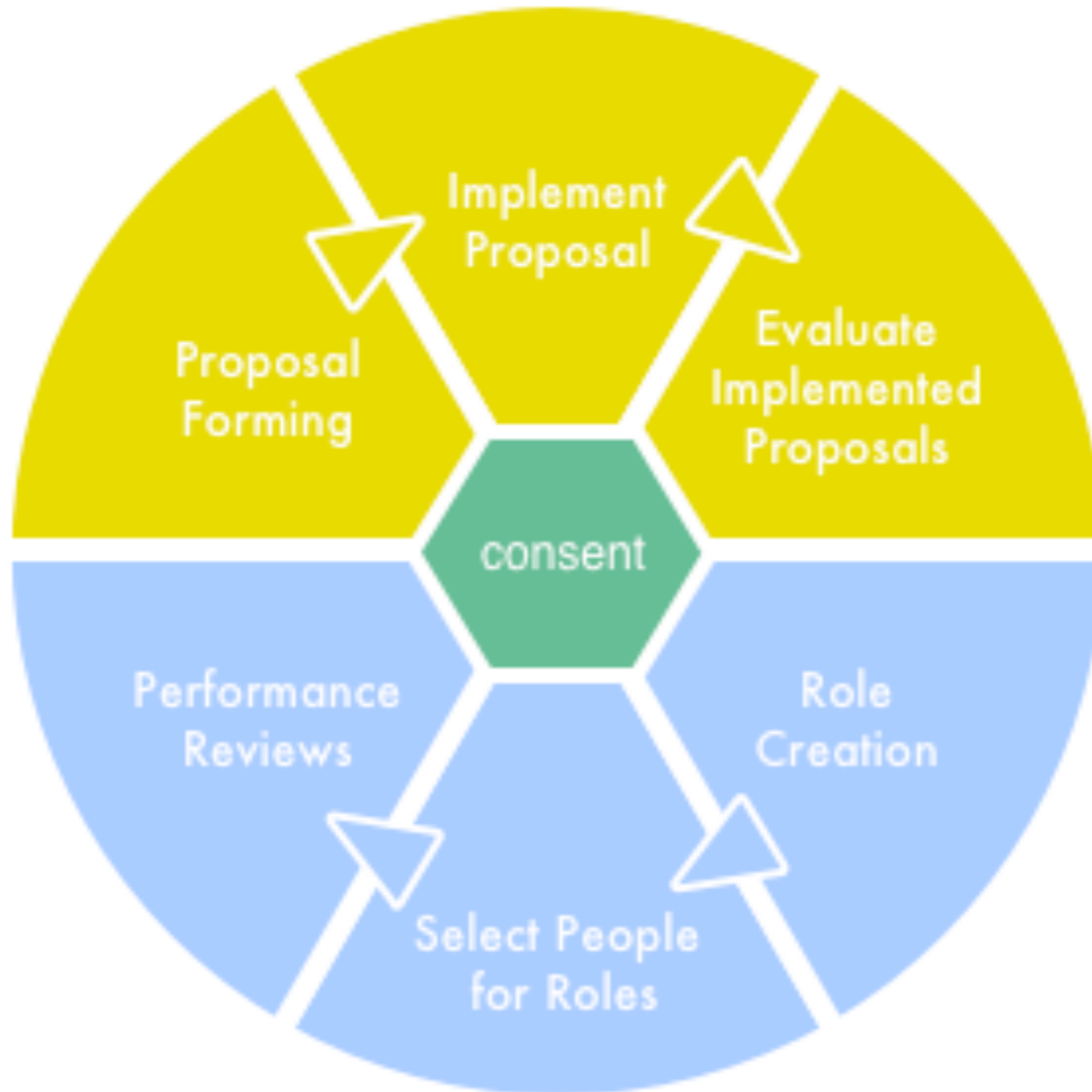
- ▶ **Consent is the absence of objections**
  - i.e. everyone can “live with it”
  - Consent is not consensus with unanimity

# Objections...

- ▶ ... are gifts
- ▶ ... contain emergent wisdom seeking expression into the consciousness of a circle
- ▶ ... relate to a circle's aims
- ▶ ... belong to the whole circle
- ▶ we ♥ objections in sociocracy



# 6 Consent-Based Meeting Processes



# Governance Meetings

## ▶ Opening Round

- Attune to one another and to aims

## ▶ Administrative Matters

- consent to last minutes, dates, consent to agenda

## ▶ Agenda Items

## ▶ Closing rounds

- evaluation of meeting and results, future agenda items

# Governance Meetings

## ▶ Agenda Items

- Short Reports
- Review of Policies
- Select People for Roles
- Consent to Proposals
- Raising Issues
- Proposal Forming
- Performance Review

# Consent Decision Making

*Harvesting objections to capture emergent wisdom*

# Consent Decision Making

*We need to consciously balance equivalence and effectiveness*



equivalence

effectiveness

# Consent Decision Making

- ▶ **Objections stop proposals becoming policy**
- ▶ **Withholding objections could harm the aims of a group or organization**
- ▶ **Being able to raise objections at any time means that proposals only need to be *good enough for now, safe enough to try***

# Consent Decision Making

- ▶ We deliberately harvest objections
- ▶ Every policy has a review date
- ▶ Experienced groups can move quickly through the stages of Consent Decision Making

# Concerns...

- ▶ ...are not objections
- ▶ ...don't stop proposals becoming policy
- ▶ ...often contain wisdom
- ▶ ...can be recorded in the logbook...
  - ...to further evolve policies
  - ...to set evaluation criteria (including review date)



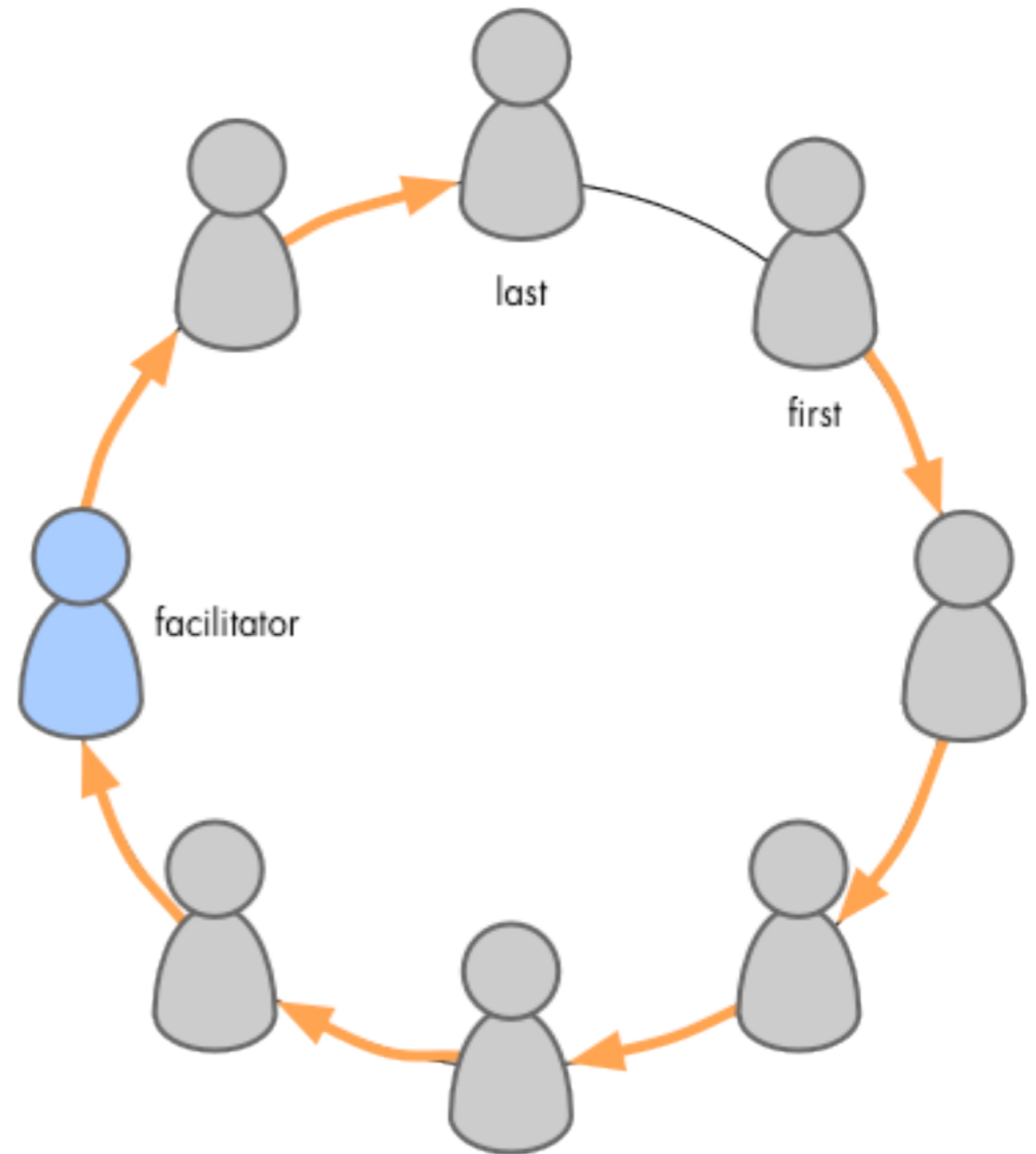
# Rounds

*A group facilitation technique to maintain equivalence.*

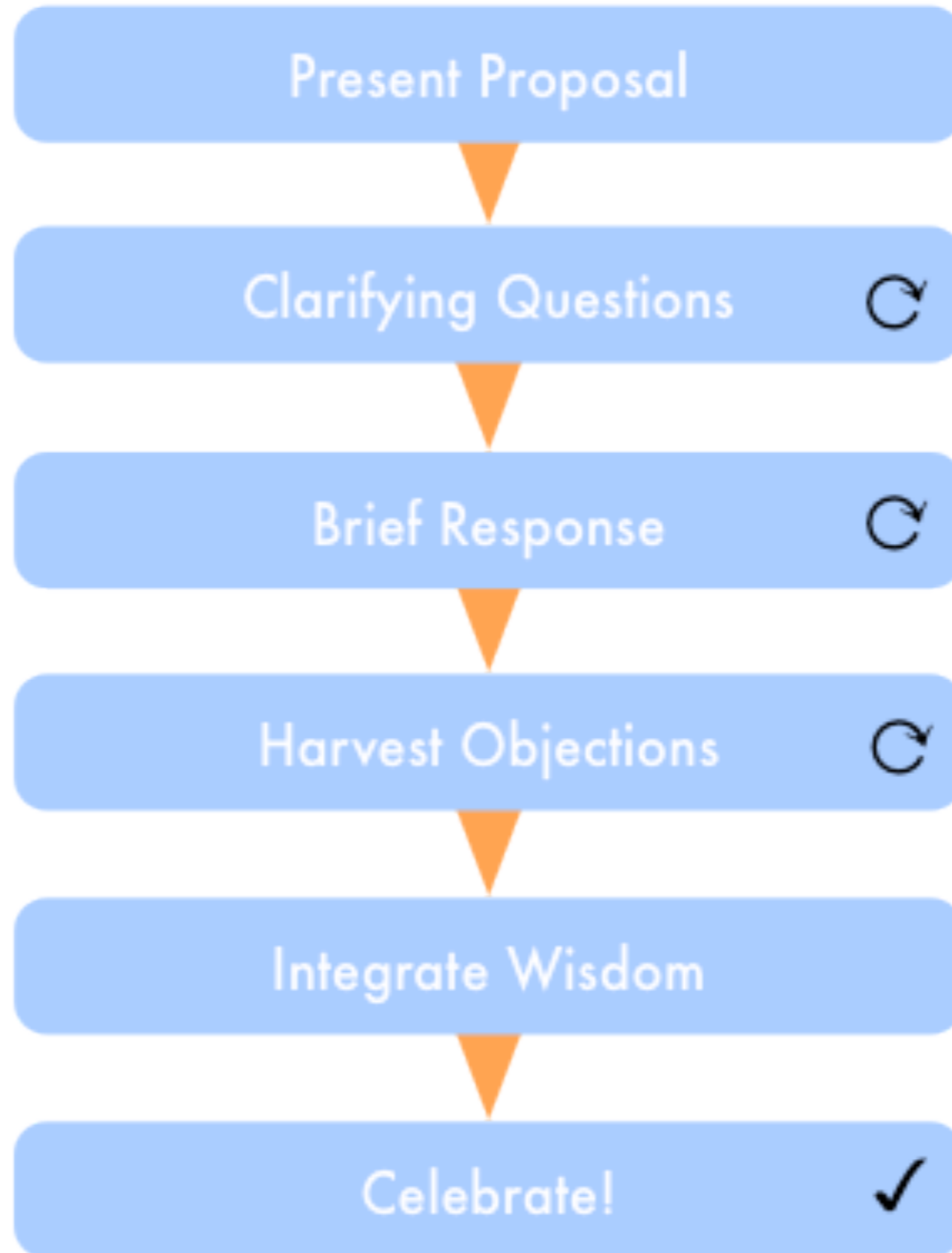
## 1. Pick a random person to start

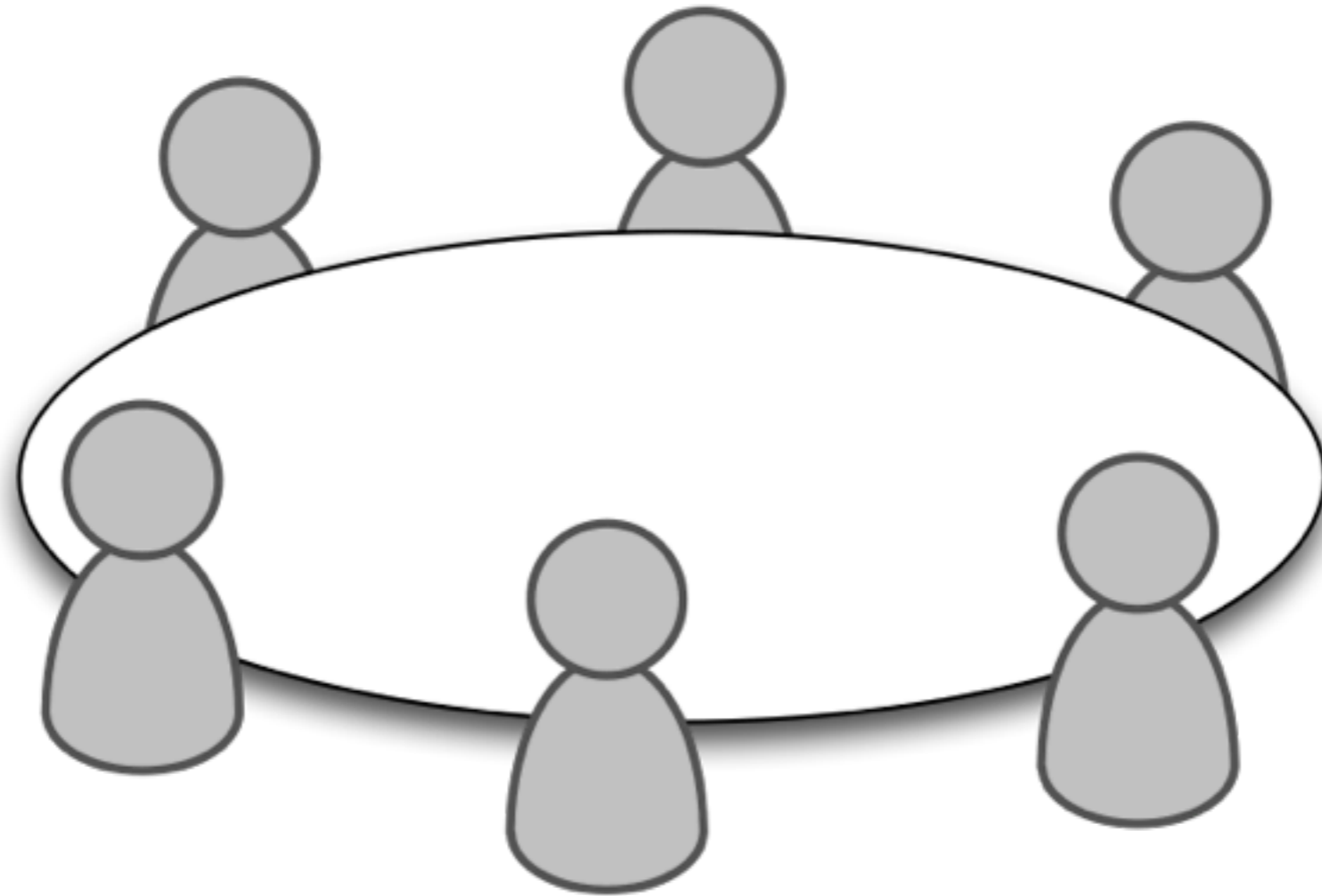
- begin with a different person each time to maintain equivalence

## 2. Go around the circle, give everyone the chance to speak



# Consent Decision Making

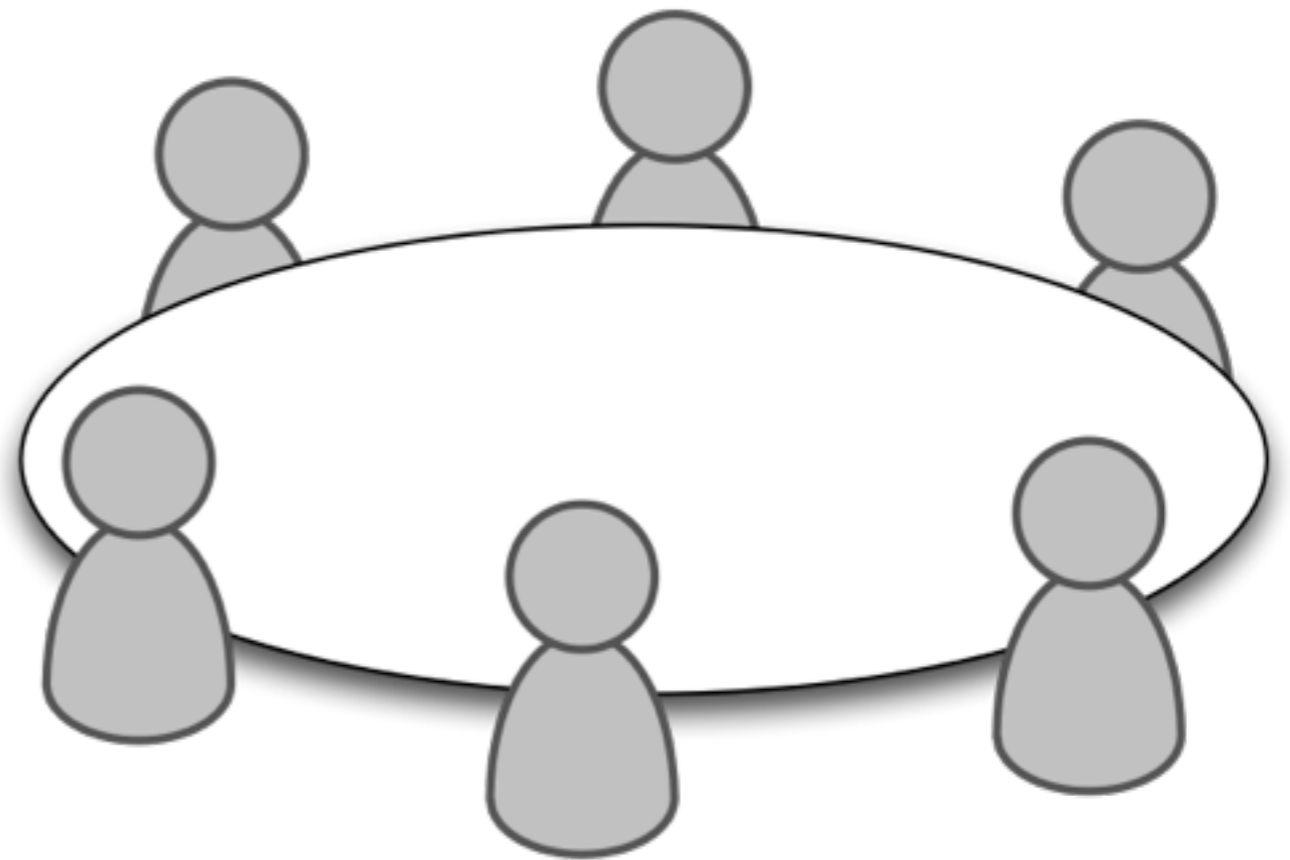




# Circle Structure and Double Linking

# Circles

- ▶ A circle is a group of people gathered around a shared aim
- ▶ Circles are semi-autonomous
- ▶ Circles can be purely operational or self-governing



# The Birth of a Circle

- ▶ An existing circle identifies a function that is beyond the scope of a role
- ▶ A new circle is formed
- ▶ The founding circle provides initial policies and creates roles for the new circle
- ▶ If and when effective, the new circle becomes self-governing
  - Regardless, members of new circles can raise issues and object to policies affecting them

# Circle Structure

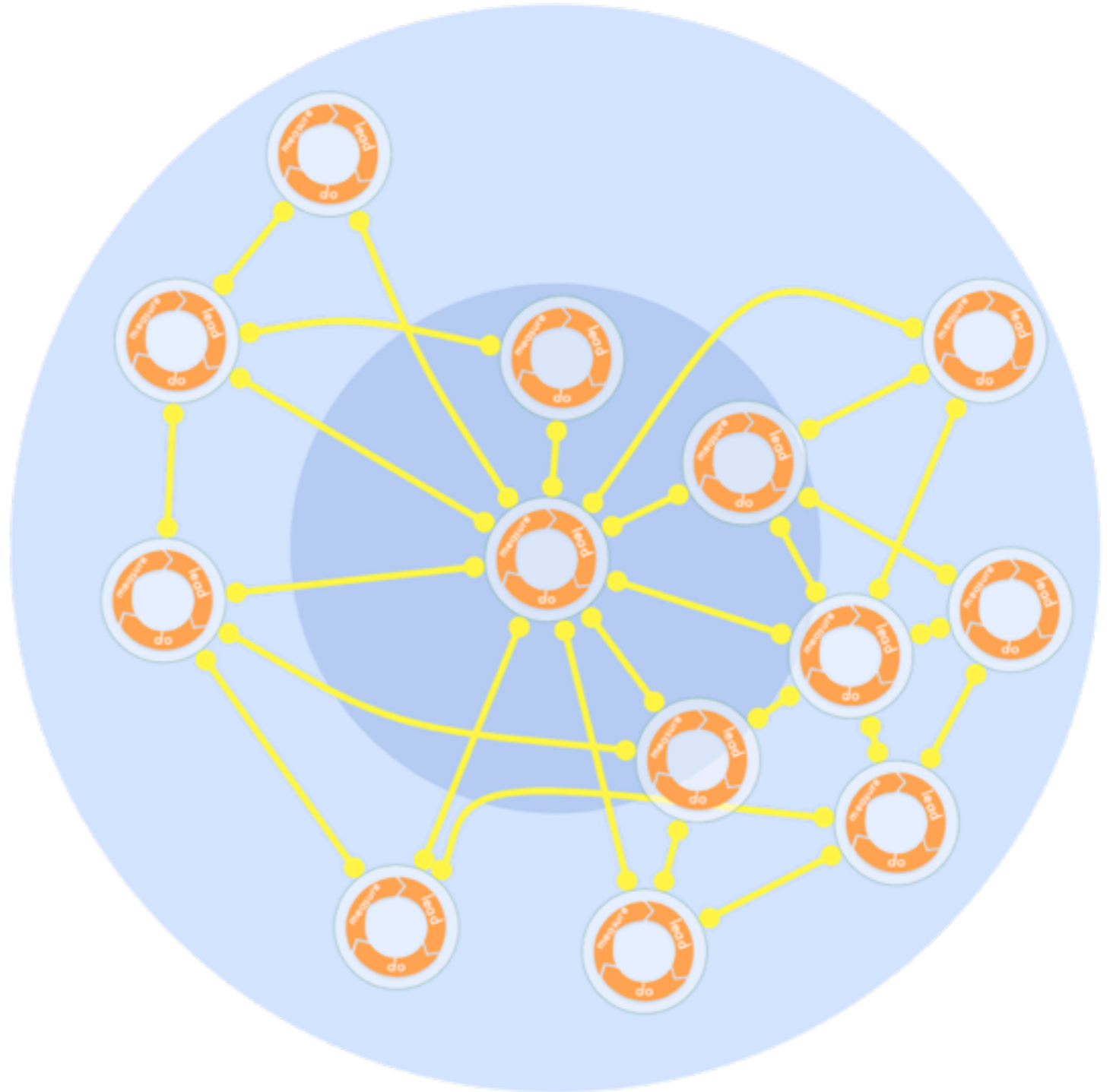
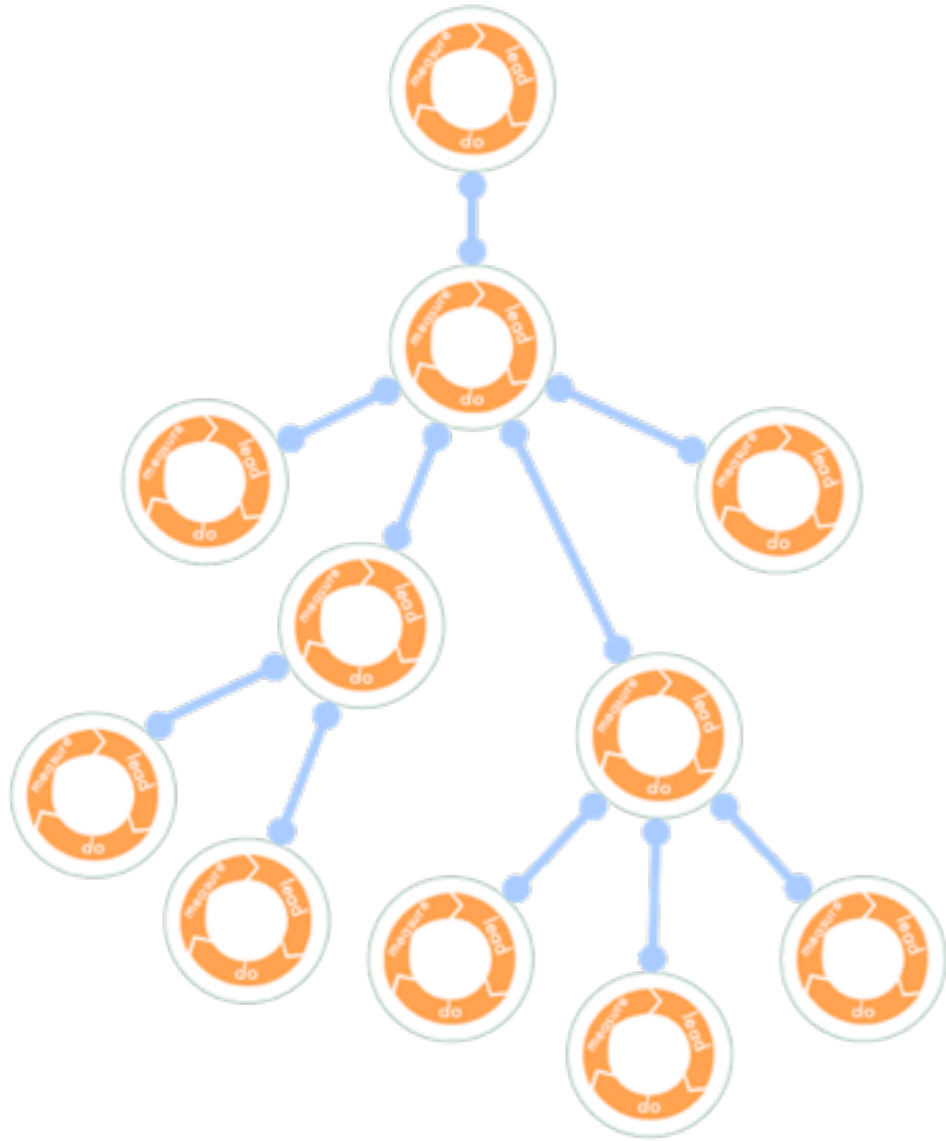
- ▶ **Circles already exist in every organization**
  - Look at people gathered around aims
- ▶ **Preserve functional hierarchy if useful**
  - More abstract/long-term vs. more concrete/short-term
- ▶ **Establish functional leadership**
  - Assign governance to the whole circle to establish equivalence

# Double Linking

*Resolving the tensions of middle-management - complementing hierarchy with bottom-archy*

- ▶ **Interdependent circles elect representatives to participate as full members in both circles' governance meetings**
- ▶ **Representatives**
  - ...stand for the interests of the circle that elected them
  - ...raise items for agenda
  - ...object to policy proposals
  - ...can be elected to other roles

# Examples of Circle Structures



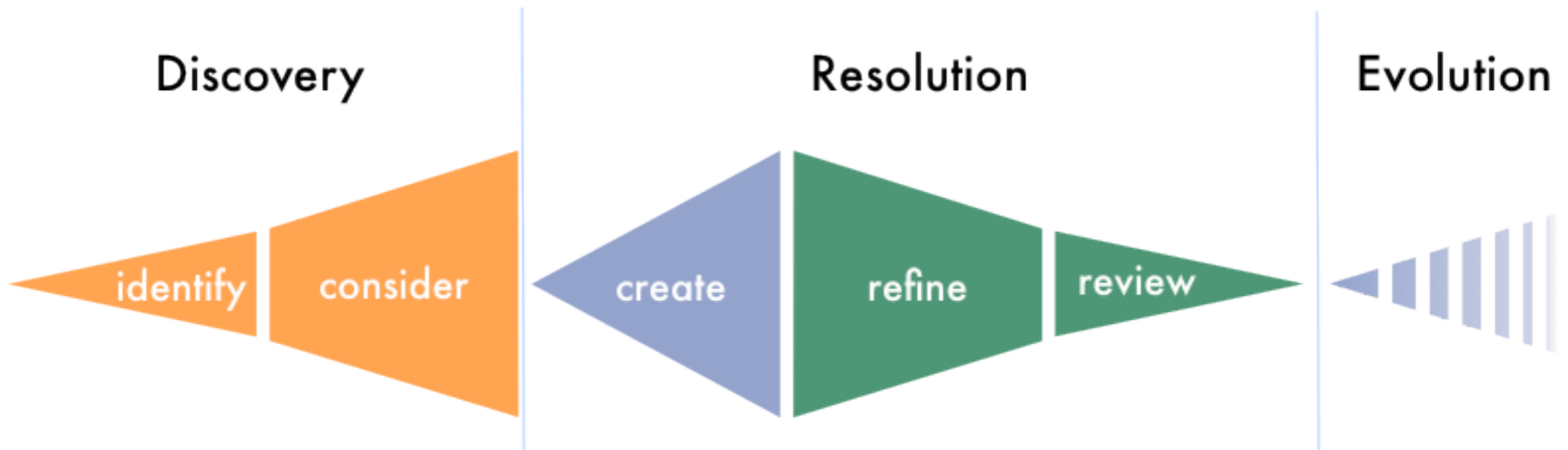


# Circle Functions

- ▶ **Facilitation**
- ▶ **Logbook keeping**
- ▶ **Meeting management**
- ▶ **Representation (double linking)**
- ▶ **Operations coordination**

# Proposal Forming Process

*Co-creating strategies that resolve tension*



# Proposal Forming

## 1. Identify the issue

## 2. Consider

- ▶ Collect considerations as questions that reveal the scope

## 3. Create

- ▶ Gather ingredients / ideas for solutions

## 4. Refine: prepare a sample dish

- ▶ design a proposal

## 5. Review (process with consent decision making)

# Proposal Forming...

- ▶ ...taps the collective intelligence of the group
- ▶ ...involves people in forming policies that guide their creative flow
- ▶ ...fosters accountability and a sense of ownership

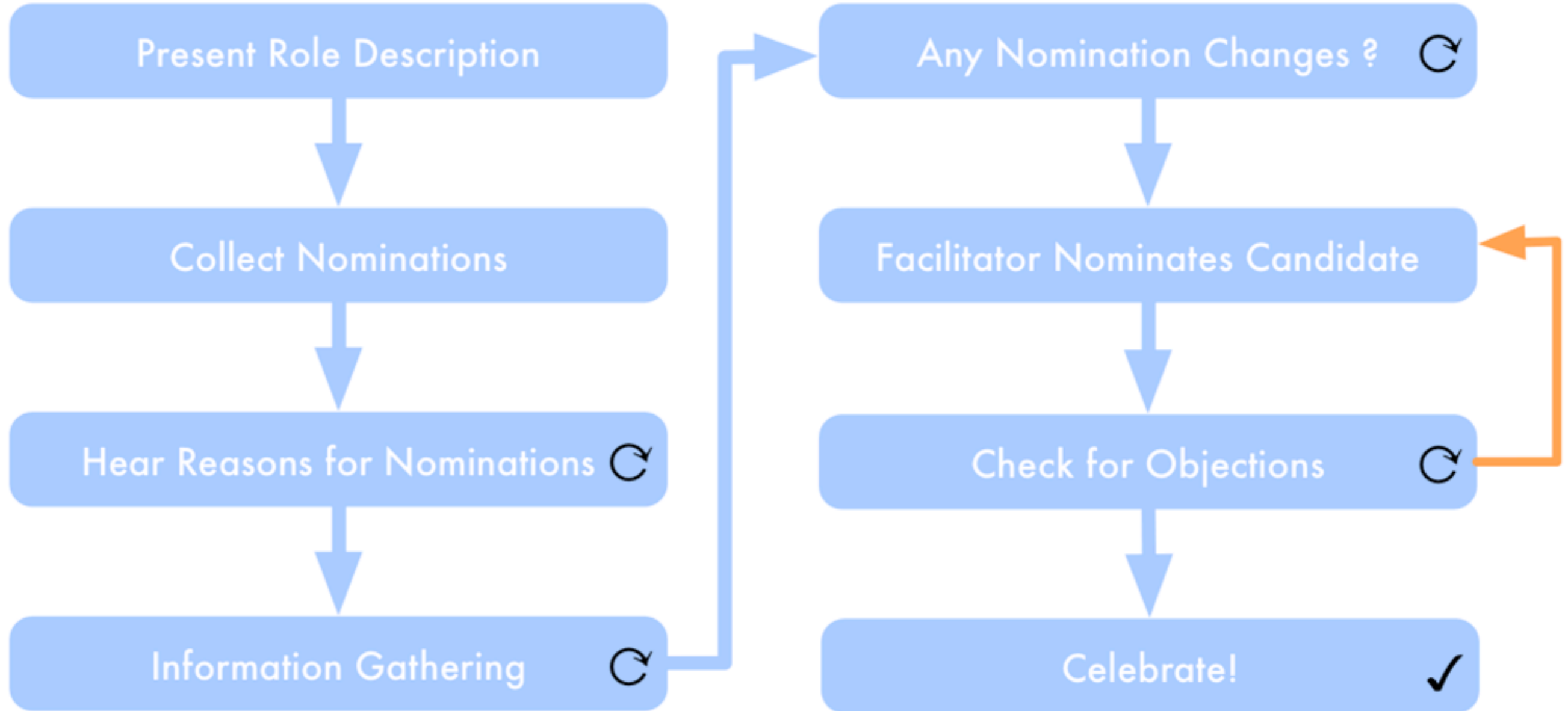
# Roles and Elections

*Circles elect people for functions*

# Roles

- ▶ **Role descriptions can be created using proposal forming**
- ▶ **Minimal role descriptions contain...**
  - ...term
  - ...responsibilities
  - ...desired experience, skills and qualities
  - ...regular performance review dates
- ▶ **People avoid expressing interest before elections**

# Election by Consent



# Elections

- ▶ **Nominations are made on the strength of the reason**
  - not according to the majority
- ▶ **You can nominate yourself or pass**
- ▶ **When harvesting objections, ask the candidate last**
- ▶ **Objections may be resolved by amending the role description**
  - e.g. the length of the term



# Performance Review

- ▶ A feel-good process that allows people to harvest appreciations and opportunities to improve
- ▶ The individual holding the role initiates the process and begins each step

# Performance Review Process

**1. Invite people with various perspectives to contribute to the performance review**

- someone you collaborate with, someone you lead, someone who leads you, and a facilitator

**2. Collect appreciations**

**3. Identify areas for improvement**

**4. Co-create and consent to improvement plan**

**5. Full circle consents to improvement plan**

**6. Act on the plan!**

# Evolution of Decision Making

	Autocracy	Democracy	Consensus	Sociocracy
supremacy	leader	majority	individual	reason
equivalence	no	limited	high	high
trust required	high	high	high	low
cost for decision	low	medium	high	low

# Evolution of Decision Making

	Autocracy	Democracy	Consensus	Sociocracy
addresses complexity	no (single-minded)	rarely (lobbying)	maybe (groupthink)	yes (synergy)
quality of decisions	depends on leader	depends on proposal	depends on proposal	depends on group wisdom
adaptability of decisions	depends on leader	depends on culture	depends on culture	dynamic / built-in

# Sociocracy...

- ▶ **...can be implemented in full or partially**
  - whole-system implementation requires organization wide consent, including Board and Management!
  - partial implementation is limited by your area of influence
  - harvest objections relating to a proposal to implement sociocracy
- ▶ **...is a transformational mechanism for both individuals and the whole organization**

# Sociocracy may be applied within...

- ▶ ...startups
- ▶ ...small and medium businesses
- ▶ ...families
- ▶ ...investor-funded organizations
- ▶ ...communities
- ▶ ...huge networked organizations with the scope of a nation state

# Closing Activities

*(Pick the ones you fancy)*

# Review Organizational Problems

*Follow-up to the optional opening activity*

- ▶ **Do you see a way forward with the problems you collected in the beginning?**



# Questions

*(optional)*

# Key Insights

*(optional)*

- ▶ **Facilitate a round where everyone shares their most important insights**
  - in a brief statement of 1-2 sentences

# Closing Round

*(optional)*

- ▶ **What do you take away with you?**

# Appreciations and Improvements

*(optional)*

- ▶ **Facilitate a round where everyone shares appreciations and improvements on the presentation**
  - in a brief statement of 1-2 sentences

For more Sociocracy 3.0  
learning materials visit  
<http://sociocracy30.org>

## James Priest

...is an interdependent consultant, facilitator and trainer specializing in holistic organizational development, distributed leadership implementation and complex systems optimization.

<http://jamespriest.org>

[jamespriest@thriveincommunity.co.uk](mailto:jamespriest@thriveincommunity.co.uk)

## Bernhard Bockelbrink

...is an agile coach supporting organizations on their way towards a culture of leadership and close collaboration that allows them to sustainably grow great products and services with happy people.

<http://enhanced-reality.net>

[bernhard.bockelbrink@gmx.de](mailto:bernhard.bockelbrink@gmx.de)