



# An introduction to Sociocracy

AAEV 15<sup>th</sup> June 2008

*"Sociocracy vests power in the group of people who interact regularly around a common aim"*

# Why Sociocracy?



Sociocratic organisations report:

- î Clearer decisions
- î Greater ability to delegate
- î Increased ownership
- î Commitment to difficult decisions
- î Reduction in meeting time
- î Higher quality meetings
- î Better communication flow through organisation
- î Less tension
- î Greater innovation

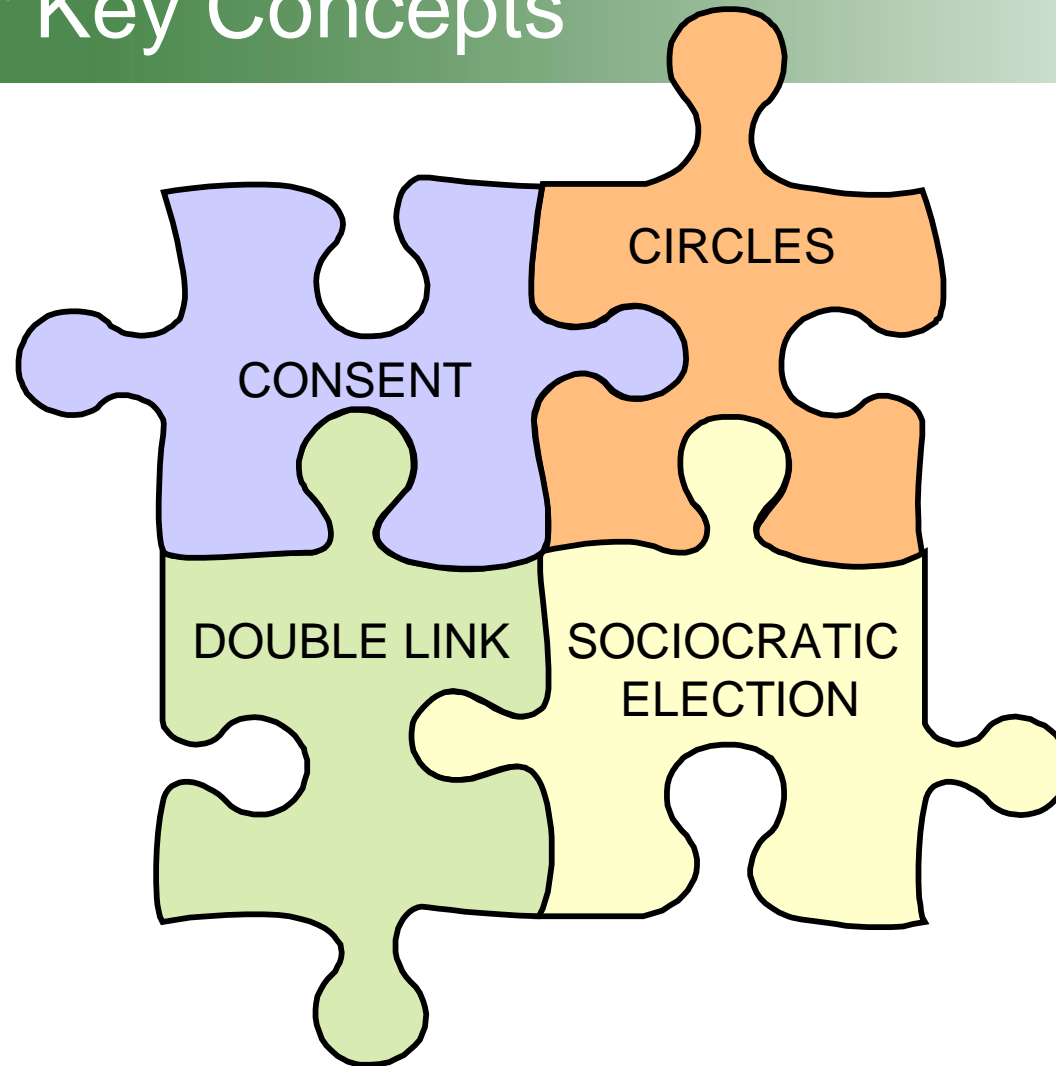
**Ultimately the reason to adopt Sociocracy is to help realise the organisation's vision, mission and aim.**

# Background



- î Sociocracy is a decision-making and governance method that allows an organisation to manage itself as a dynamic entity
- î Sociocracy literally means 'rule by the people who have a social relationship with each other'. Sociocracy derives its name from the Latin *socius*, meaning "associates" or "companions".
- î Kees Boeke, a Dutch educational reformer, Quaker and management scientist experimented with sociocratic ideas at his school during WWII
- î One of his pupils, Gerard Endenburg used his knowledge of systems theory and steering to develop sociocracy in the late 1960s
- î Many organisations in Europe (particularly in The Netherlands), The US and Latin America operate sociocratically
- î In the Netherlands, in divisions of *Shell*, *Heineken*, *Mars* and *Pfizer* it has demonstrated that it is more productive
- î Several Dutch University business schools now teach it

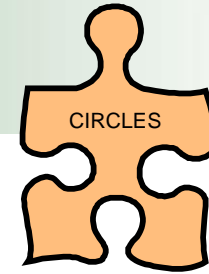
# The Four Key Concepts



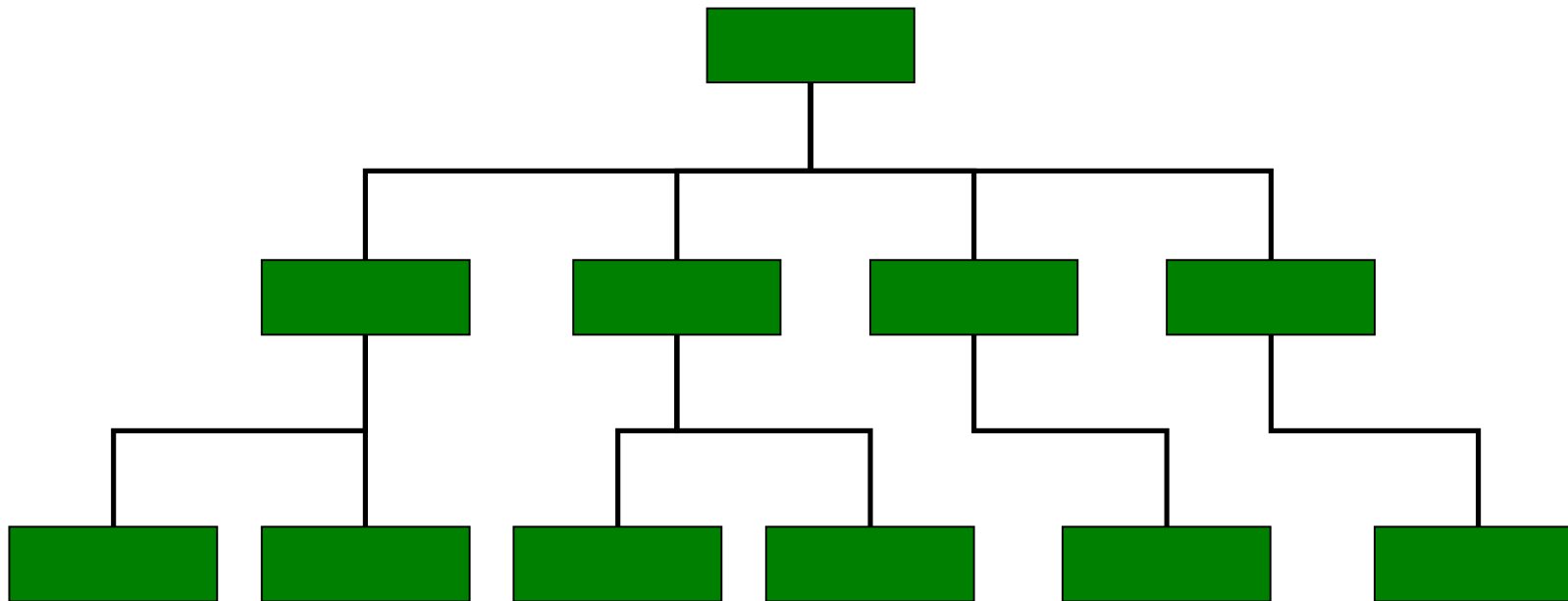
People must *consent* to work together in pursuit of the shared vision.

Therefore *consent* is the underlying principle of governance

# 1. Introducing circles

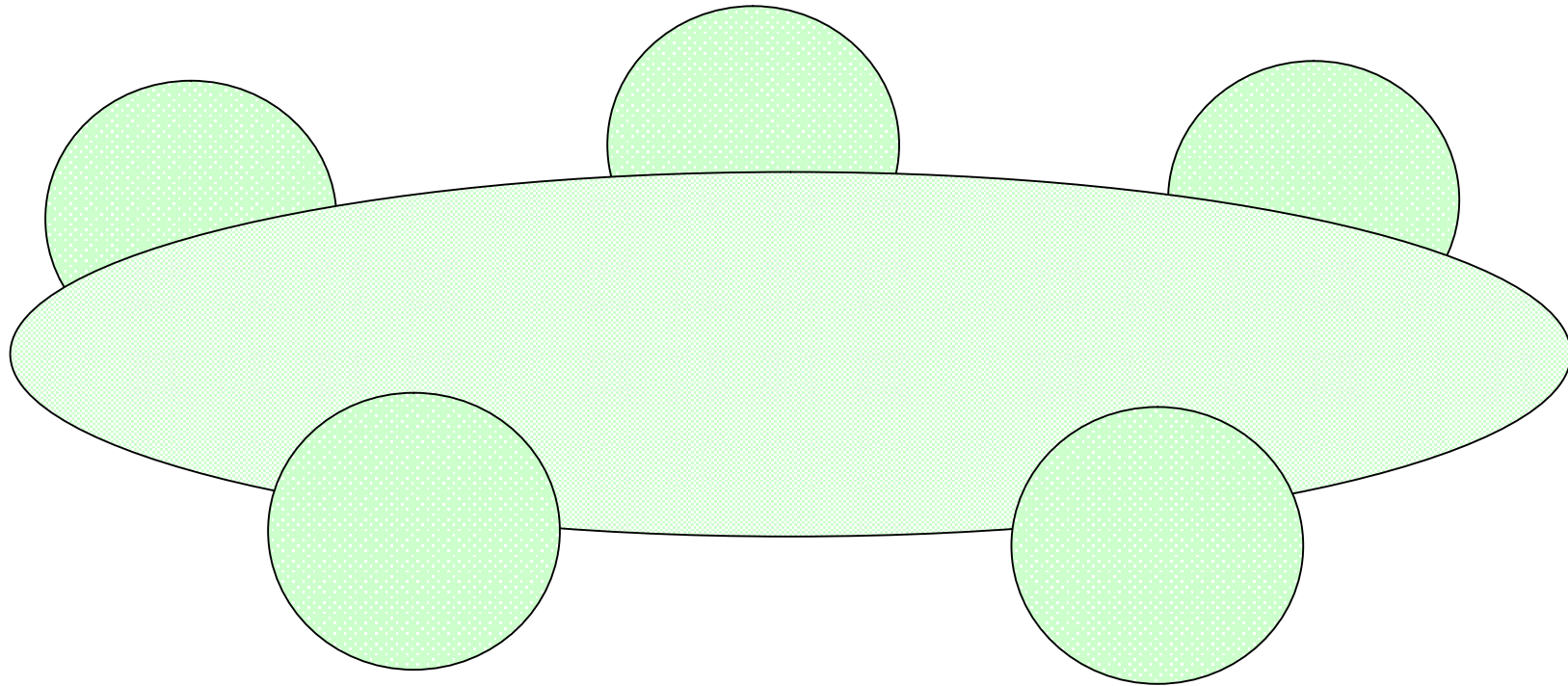


Traditional organisational structure



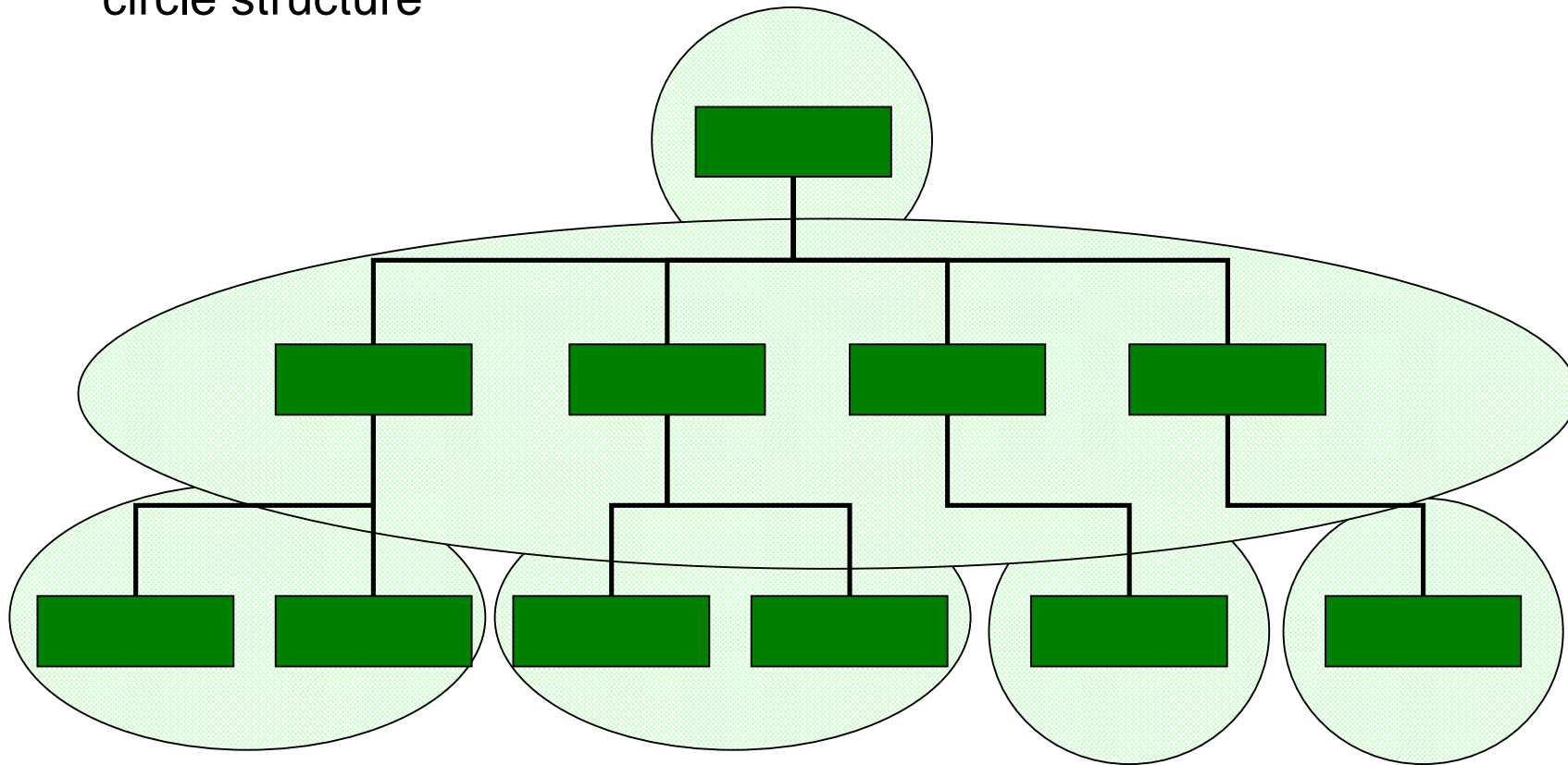
# Why the circle structure?

Informal discussion



# Why the circle structure?

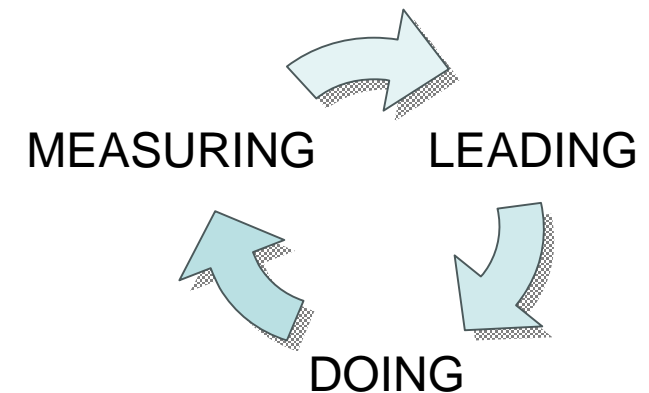
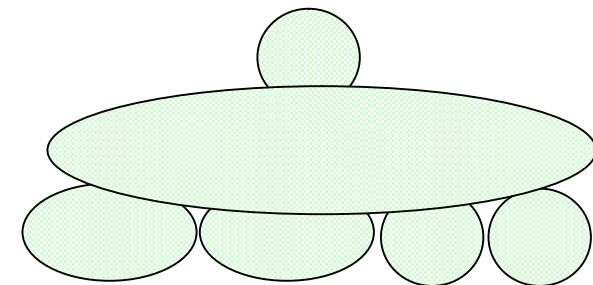
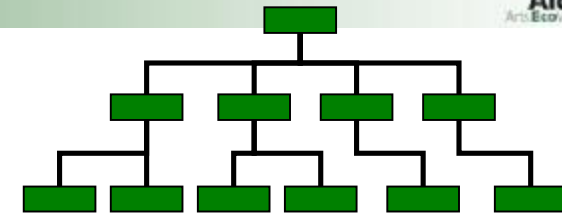
Integration of the traditional organisational structure with the social circle structure



In a sociocratic organisation the structure is of *work*, not *power*.  
The power is shared by everyone.

# Circle structure

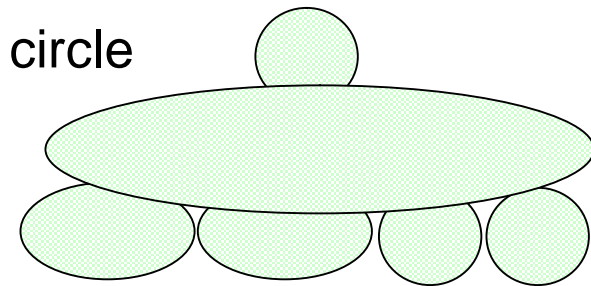
- î Getting things done efficiently requires a clear structure for directing work and accountability
- î However policy making and evaluating are most innovative when looked at from many perspectives
- î Circles = policy making & planning (leading)
- î Traditional hierarchy = implementation (doing)
- î Circles = evaluating (measuring)



# Scope of circle

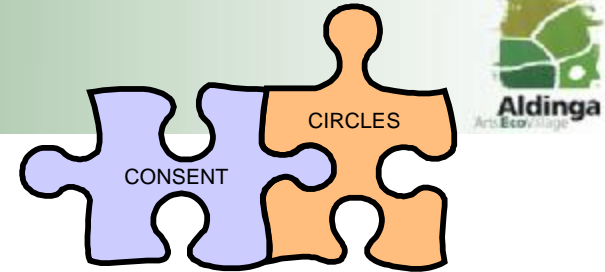


- î Each circle is organised around their common aim, eg: *farm* circle, *neighbourhood group* circle
- î Each circle must have single shared mission
- î For efficiency a circle should be up to 12 people
- î Each circle is responsible for setting policy within its own domain
- î Each circle needs a facilitator and a secretary
- î Consent decision making occurs within each circle
- î Sociocratic elections occur within each circle
- î Circles are double linked to *higher* circle



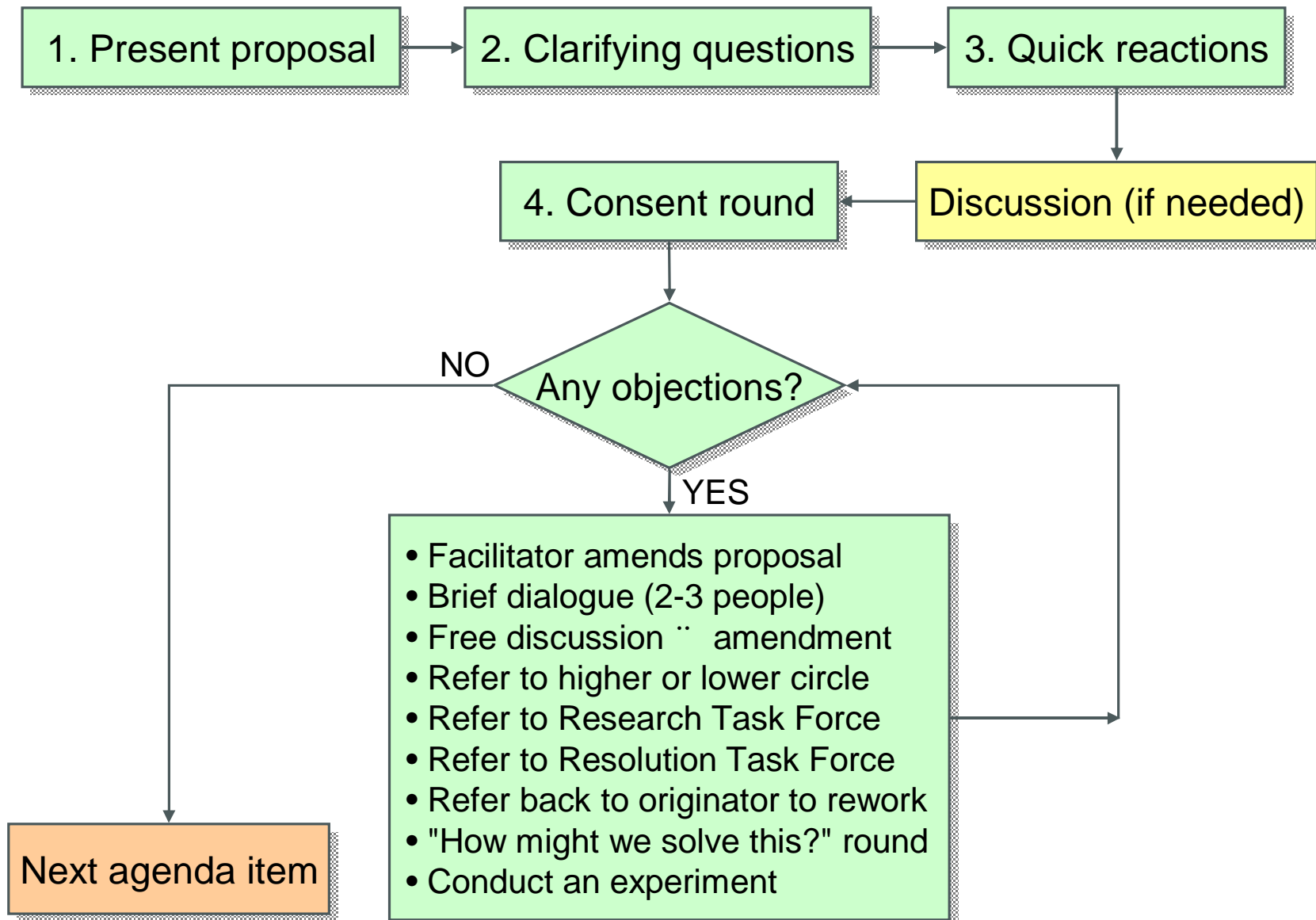
î A sociocratic circle is a roundtable for making decisions as peers

## 2. Consent decision making



- î The people's consent is the foundation for all other decisions – leadership is impossible without a clear mandate to lead
- î For *policy* decisions the circle would use consent decision making
- î Many forms of decision making, each useful in different circumstances
- î For everyday *operational* decisions the circle can choose [by consent] which to use:
  - î Autocratic
  - î Majority vote
  - î Consensus, etc
- î Consent decisions are made around specific proposals from a circle or an individual
- î Consent is different to consensus
- î Consensus is unanimous and requires everyone to agree with the proposal
- î Consent requires the proposal only to be something everyone can live with, even though you may not agree

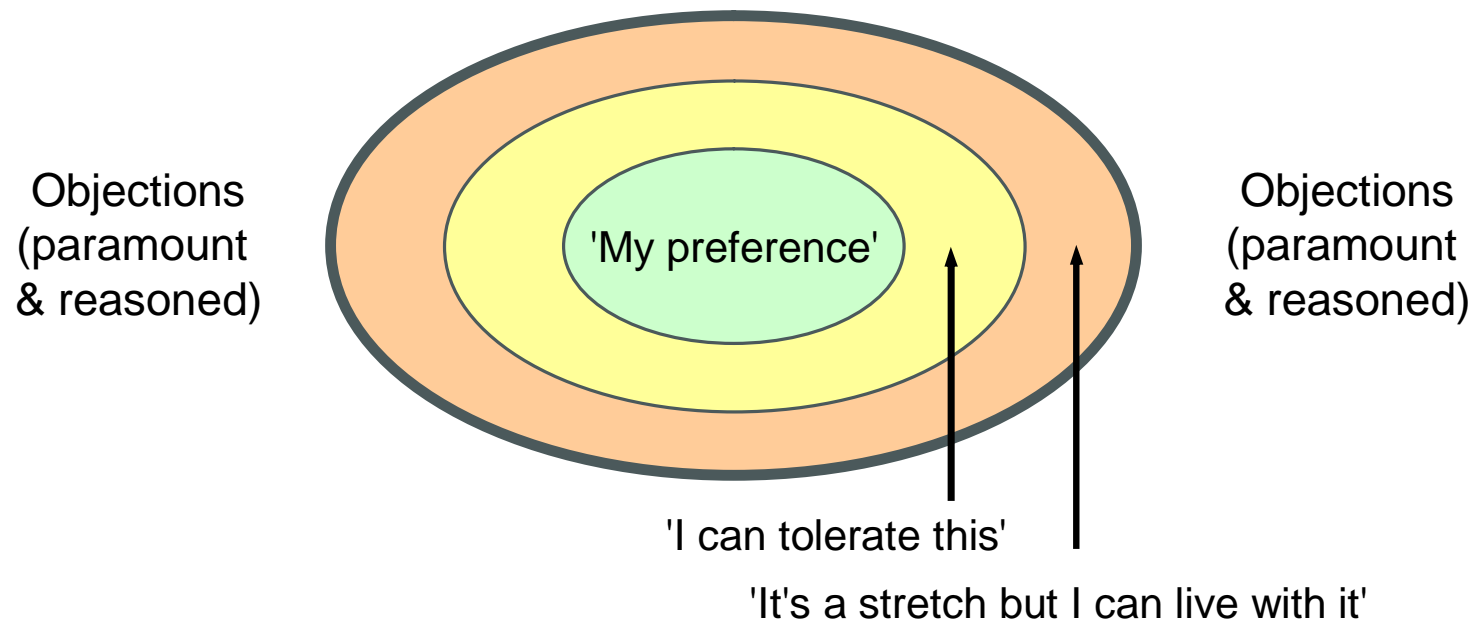
# Consent decision process



# Range of tolerance

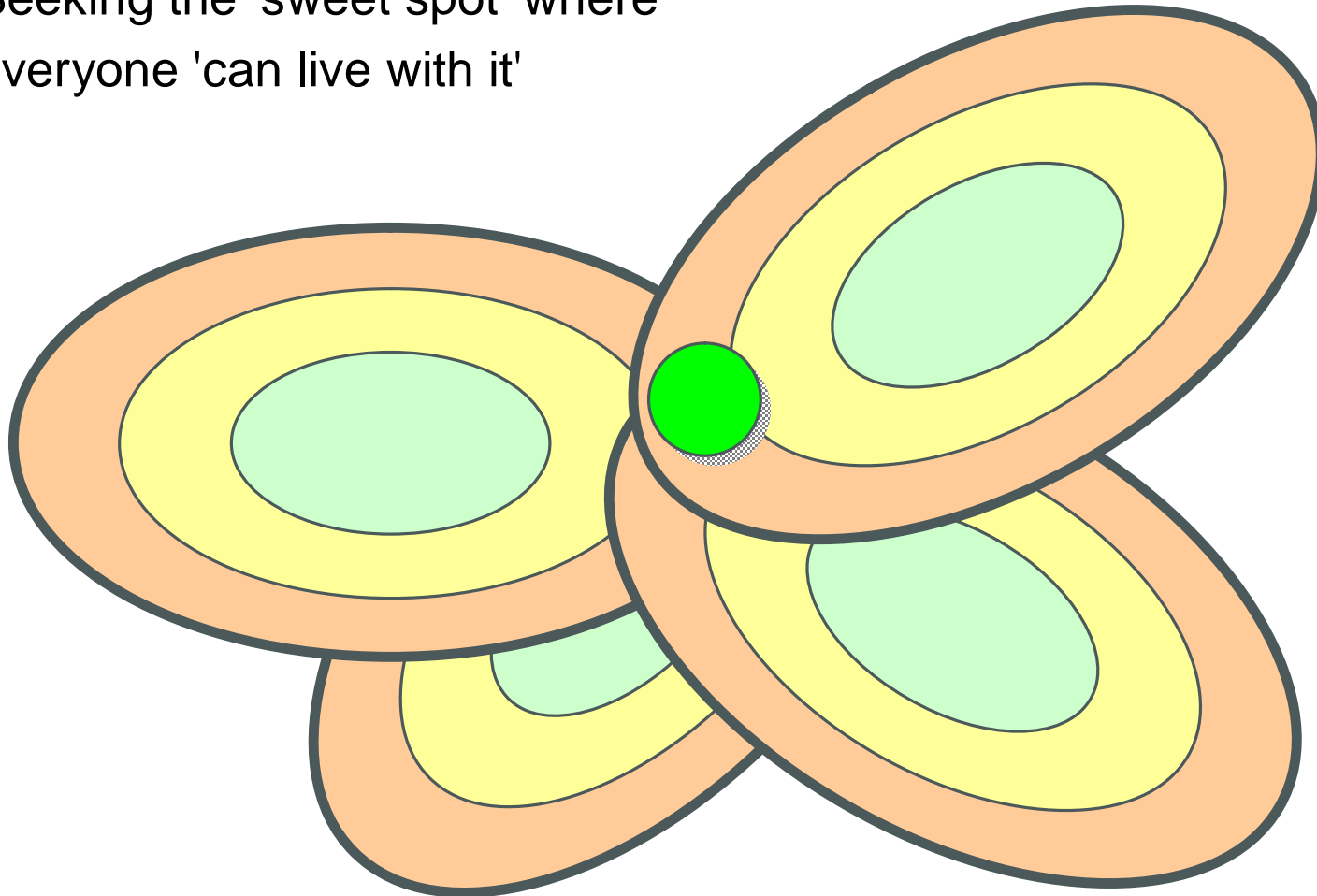
- î 'Is this proposal within my range of tolerance?'
- î 'Is it good for the community as a whole?' (organisational)
- î 'It might not be my preference – but can I live with it?' (personal)

î My *personal* range of tolerance **INFORMS** but does not **DEFINE** my range of tolerance for *organisational* decisions



# Seeking common ground

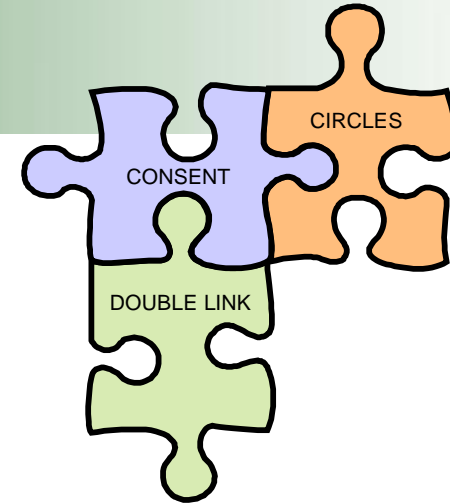
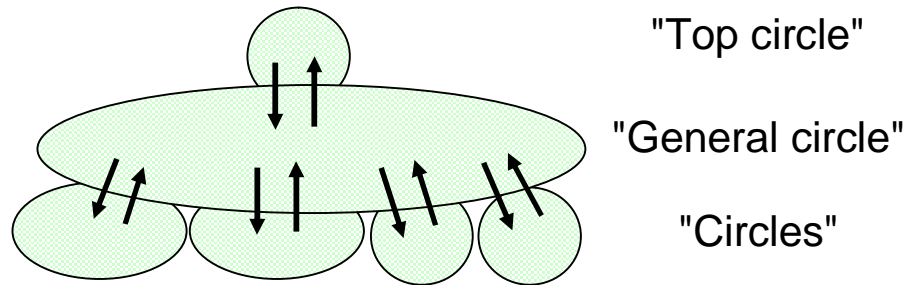
- î Common ground exists where our ranges of tolerance overlap
- î Seeking the 'sweet spot' where everyone 'can live with it'



# 3. Double linking



• Double linking means having two people participate in the next higher circle:



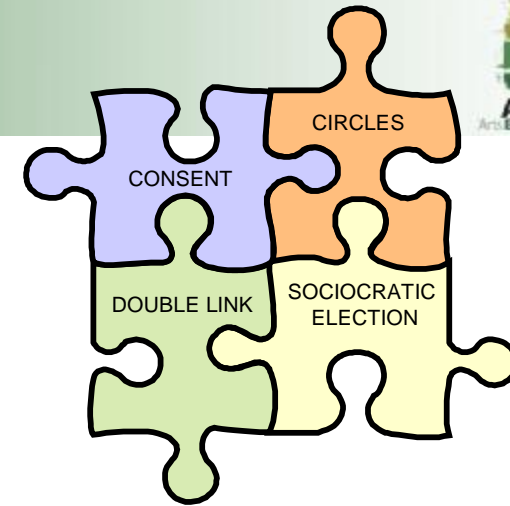
• **Downlink** - The coordinator of each circle is appointed by the higher circle

• **Uplink** - Representatives are elected by the circle to sit on the next higher circle

• Double linking ensures better communication flow

• If general circle consists of 12 people = 6 double linked circles

## 4. Sociocratic elections



- î Elections are Sociocracy at it's best!
- î Election process:
  - î **Review role & term of office**
  - î **Submit ballots** – everyone writes their name and the person they're nominating on a piece of paper
  - î **State reasons** – everyone in turn briefly explains why they chose their candidate
  - î **Make changes** – election leader asks for any changes
  - î **Open discussion** – only if needed
  - î **Propose candidate** – numeric majority and weight of reasons used to propose candidate with strongest support
  - î **Consent round** – for proposed candidate. Proposed candidate asked for no objection last

# Consistency & transparency



- î Build trust between villagers and committees
- î Committees are most commonly criticised for a lack of:
  - î Consistency
  - î Transparency
  - î Documentation
- î Create standard processes, document and publish them
- î Gift to the village by Dutch company Mavim of 'Rules 2008'
- î Train 5 villagers and start using software to manage all village processes
- î Each circle would have a place on the website to publish their mission, minutes, plans, processes, etc
- î Central online store for all village information

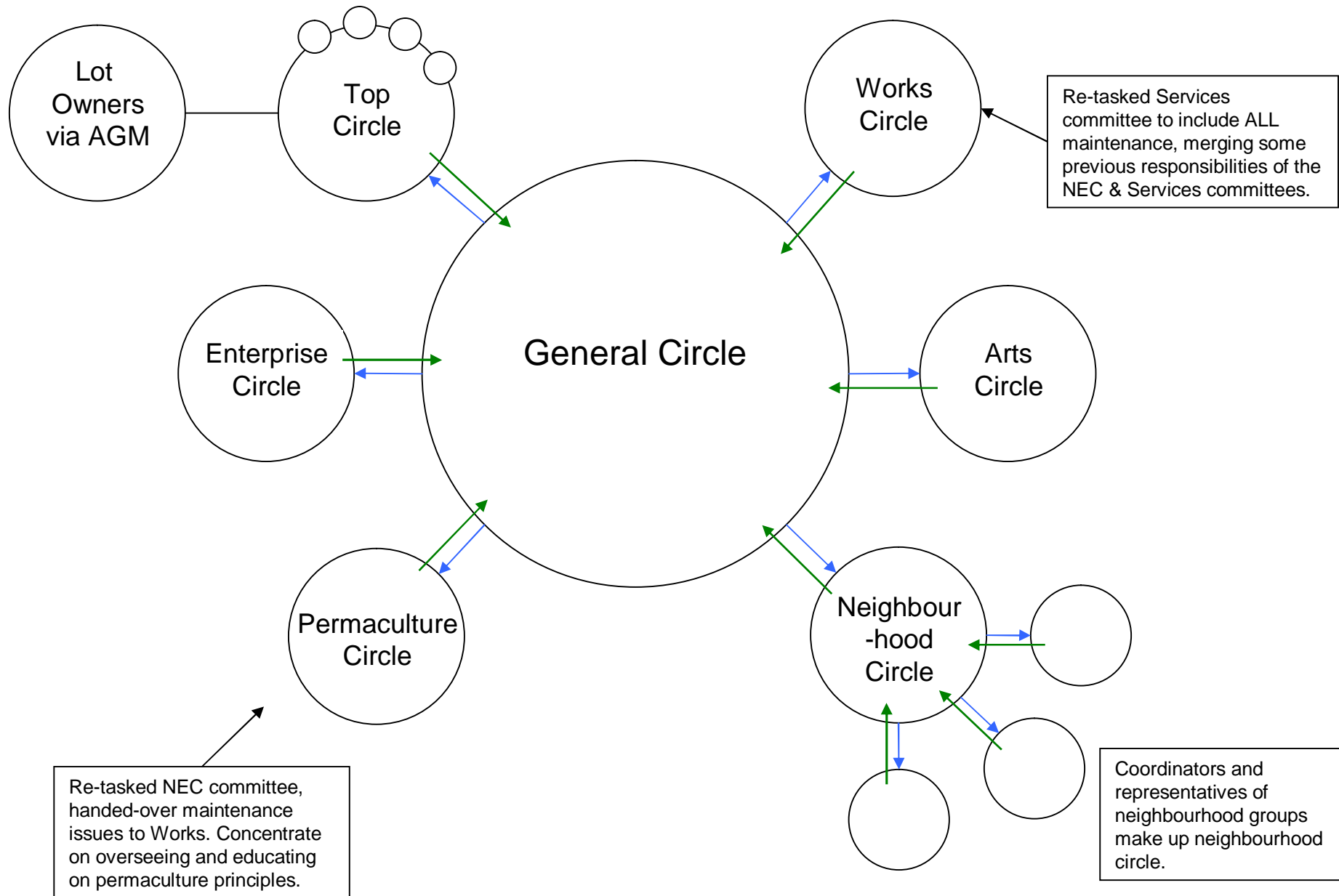


# Next steps



- î Two more information sessions
- î Mavim training session on 1<sup>st</sup> July
- î Resolution to the AGM to adopt this model:
  - î community wide
  - î everyone has to commit to using the method
- î Training by certified Sociocracy trainer – funding?
- î Form first two circles: top circle and implementation circle
- î Create circle structure something like:

# Working concept



## **Key expected outcomes:**

- î Sociocracy will make the process of conducting village business more pleasurable
- î It will reduce tension and increase consistency and transparency
- î Ultimately the reason to adopt Sociocracy is to help realise the village's vision, mission and aims

## **Key elements:**

- î A sociocratic circle is a roundtable for making decisions as peers
- î Sociocracy is an empty vessel – waiting for us to fill it and make it ours
- î 'Can I live with it?' Is it within my range of tolerance?
- î Sociocracy can only work if everyone shares a common vision
- î Set of easy to use tools and guides for everyone – even the kids!!



Our attendance at the sociocracy workshop was supported by the  
Onkaparinga Council

This presentation draws on materials by:

The Sociocratisch Centrum, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Tena Meadows O'Rea

"We The People. Consenting to a Deeper Democracy"  
by John Buck and Sharon Villines