



# **Sociocratic Organization of Birth Care Sector in The Netherlands**

**Seeing both the whole and the parts**

**Designing a decision making structure  
that brings positive change**

**by Pieter van der Meché**



In 2010 the Dutch government decided that the birth care sector had to improve its cooperation

Partners were independent midwives, obstetricians, home care organizations, pediatrics and hospital(s)

Midwives and obstetricians share a long history of quarrels and power fights



## **Aims**

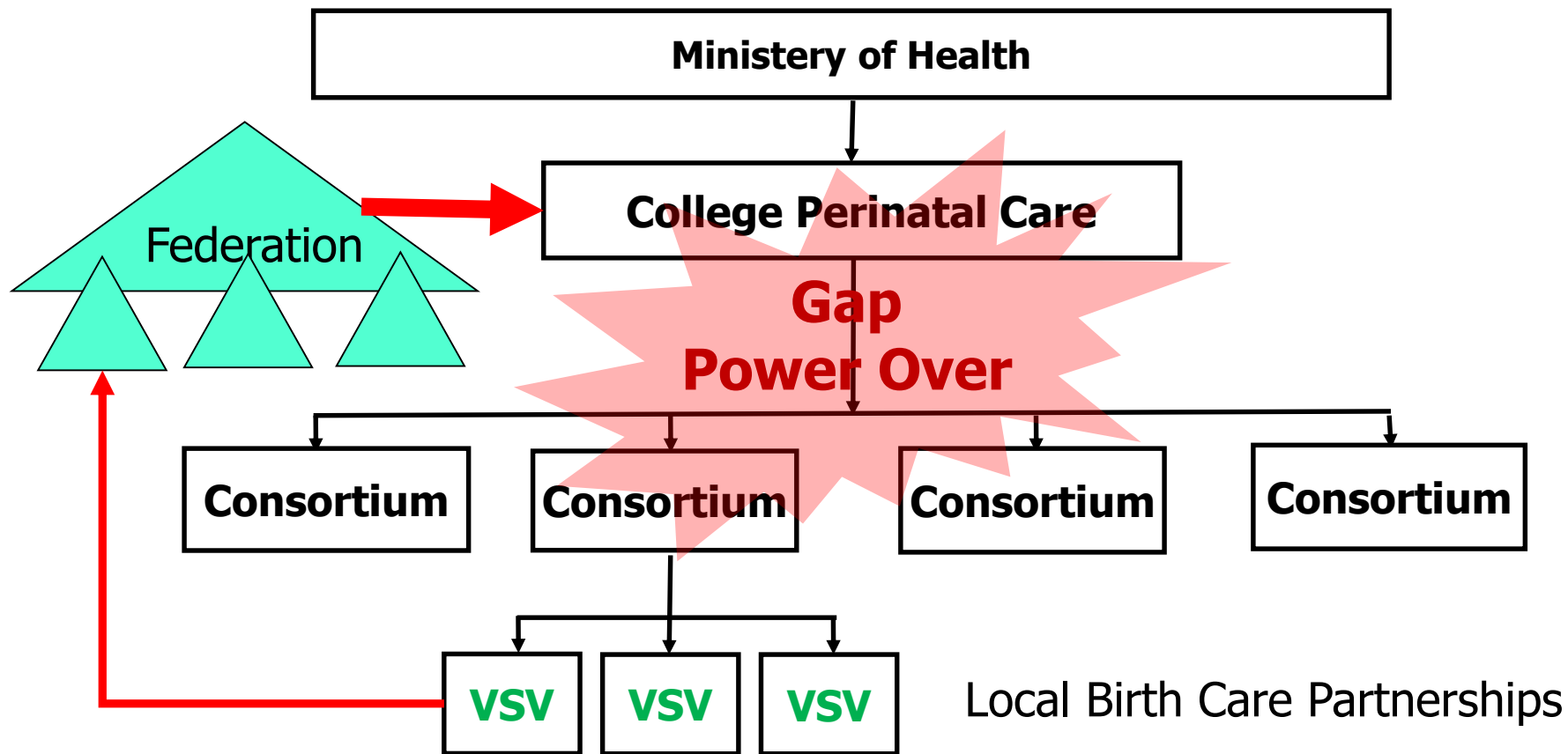
Improved alignment between professions to improve the process and the quality

Make the value chain more cost efficient

## **Means**

Local partnerships around one or more hospitals were envisioned with up to 80 members/40 partner organizations

## Organization of integral Birth Care





[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUNlTmt\\_o7c&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUNlTmt_o7c&feature=youtu.be)



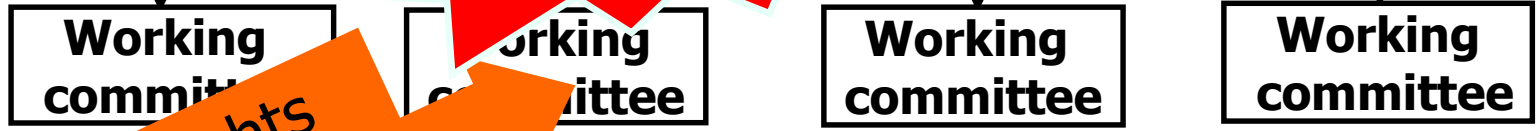
## Organization of local Birth Care Partnership

- Power fights
- Overruling
- No show
- Lack of commitment

General Assembly of Members

- Power fights
- Lack of authority
- Low trust

**Stagnation**



- Power fights
- Small number of participants



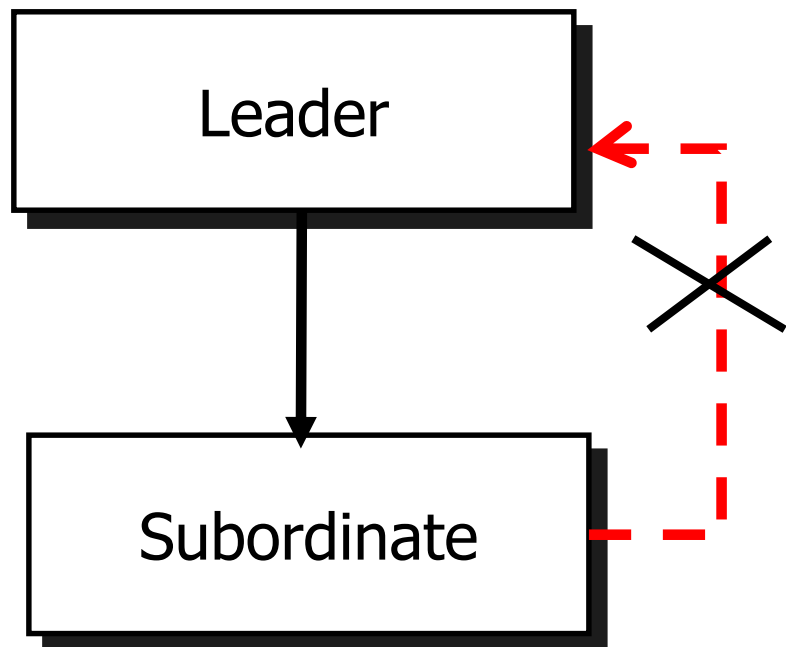
## The 80 partnerships in The Netherlands face similar challenges:

- Strong tensions amongst partners
- Struggle with decision making
- Lack of commitment and participation of the larger group
- Lack of authority



## Linear decision making does not secure alignment

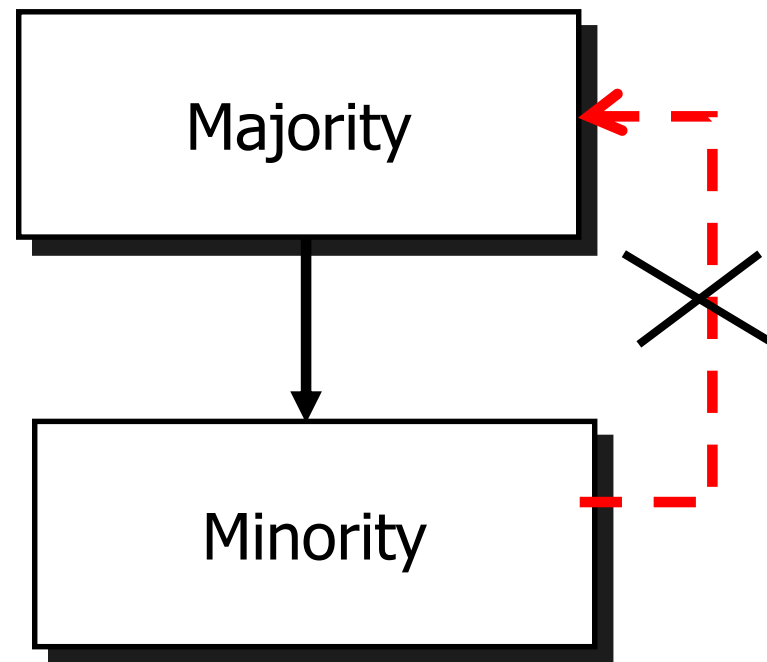
### Autocratic



**+ Fast**

**- Lack of commitment**

### Democratic



**+ Participative**

**- Polarization**



**Goal realization  
needs a secured  
circle process**



Leading

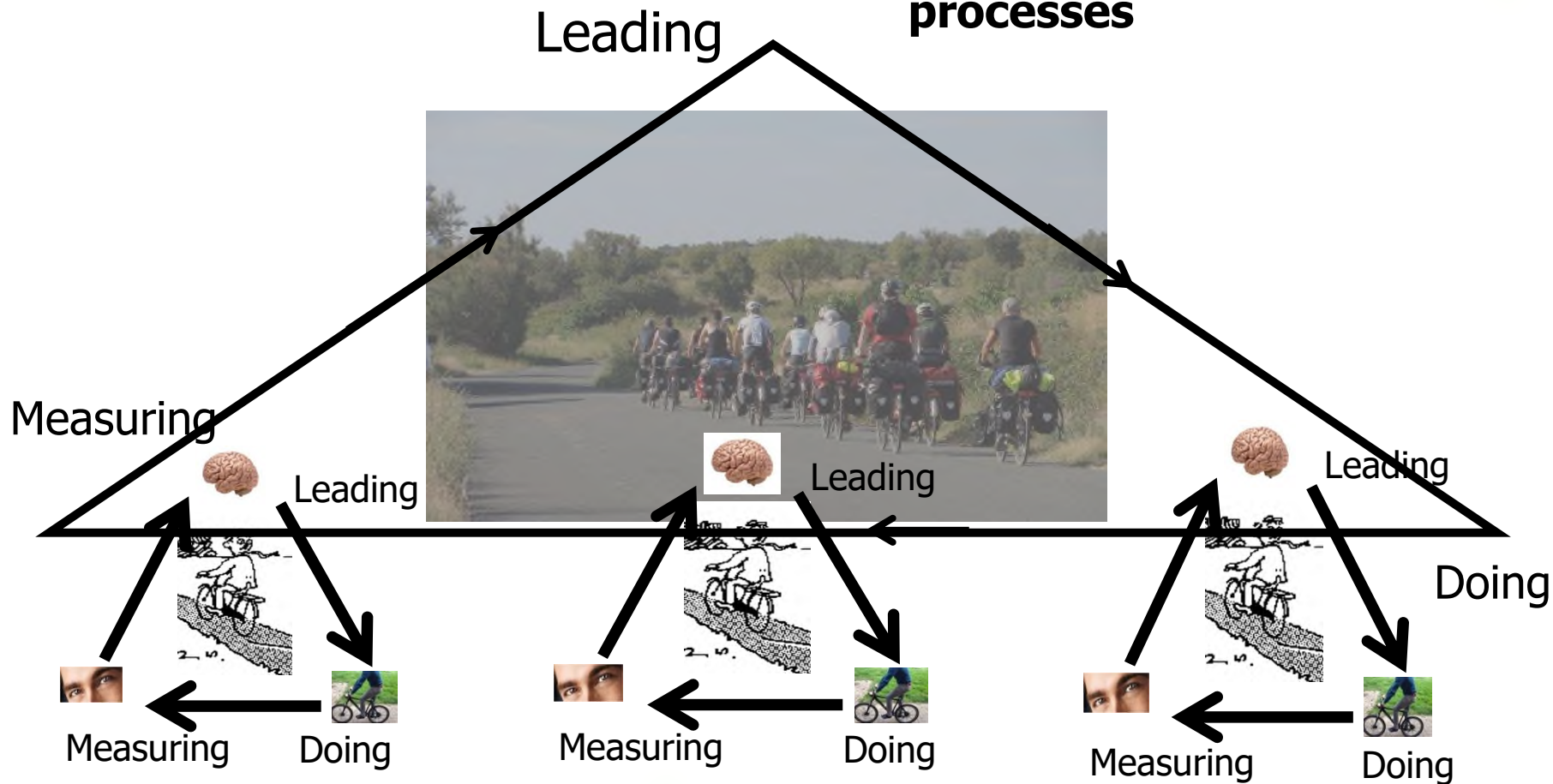


Measuring

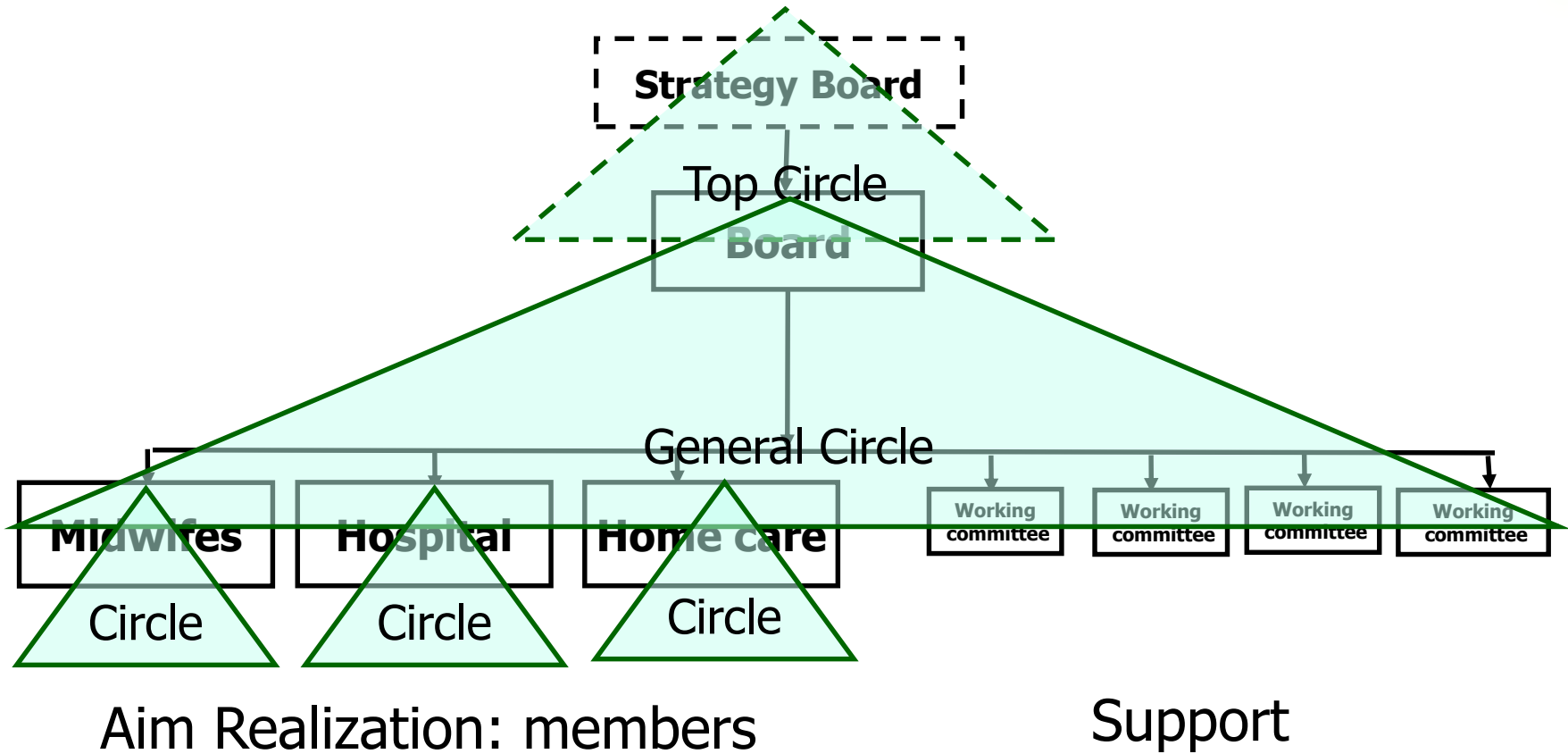


Doing

# Cooperation needs a hierarchy of circle processes



## Our Solution: adding a Sociocratic Circle Organization





## **Four Design Rules of the Sociocratic Circle organization Method (SCM)**

1. Consent Principle
2. Circle-Organization
3. Double Linked Hierarchy
4. Open Election

An 'empty' method for organization design

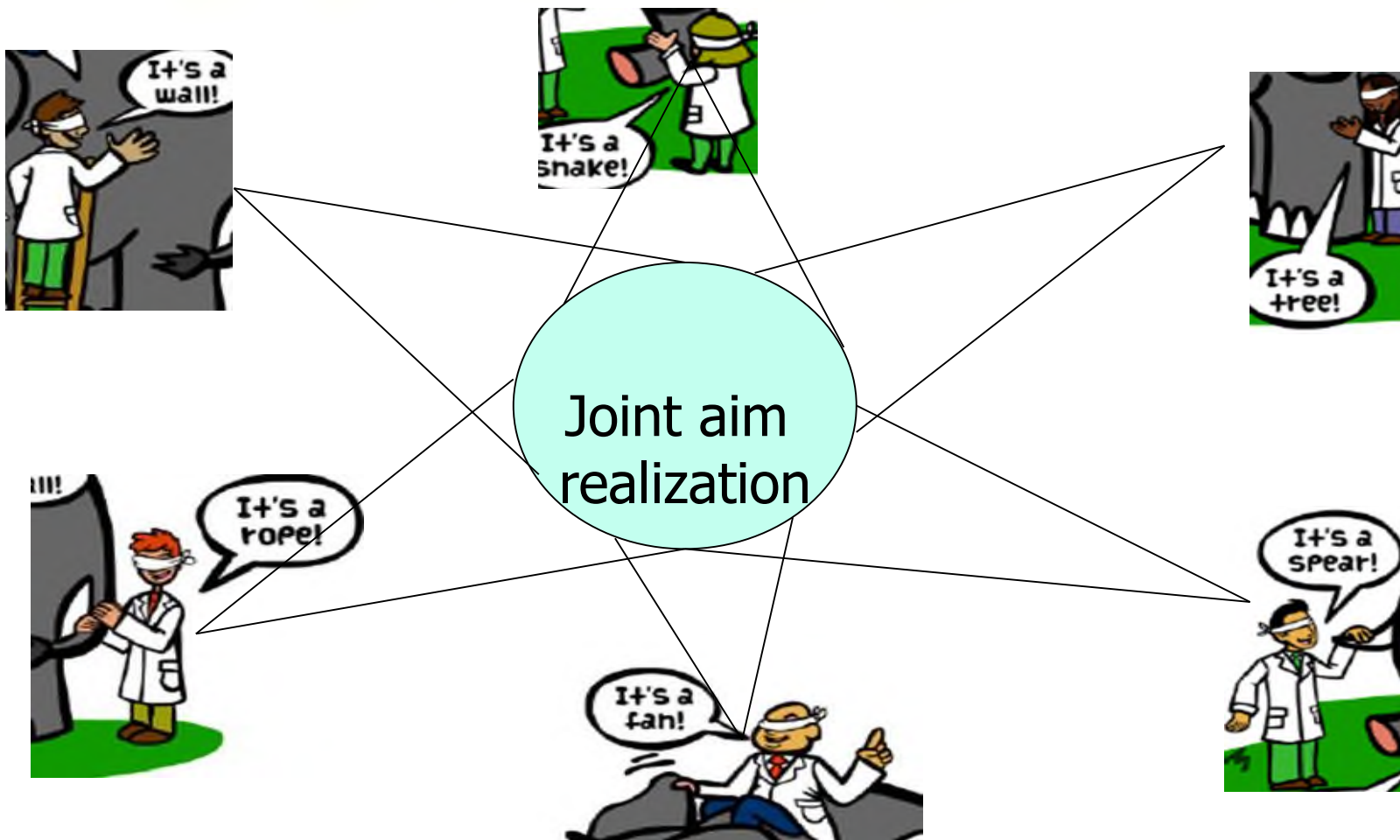


## **Consent principle = no argued paramount objection, governs decision making**

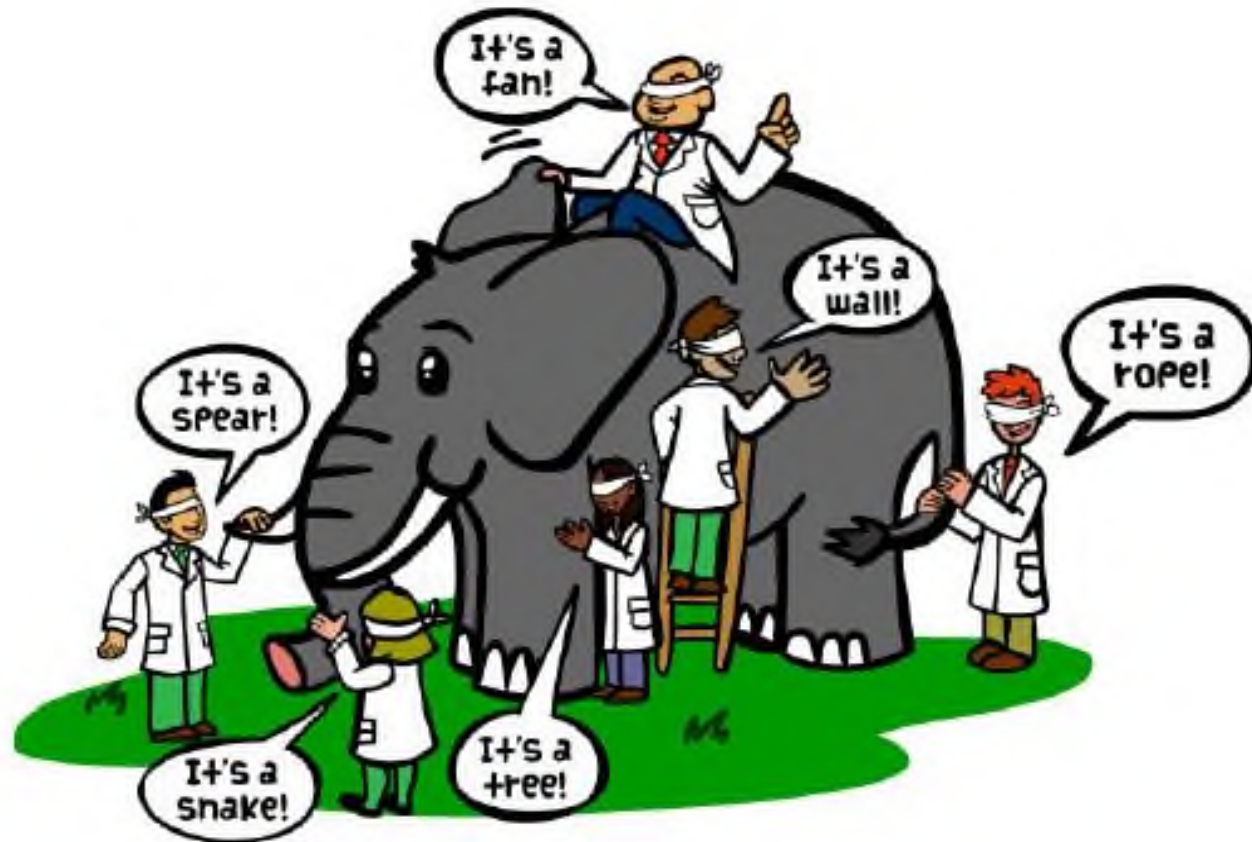
- No consensus = 100% yes
- No veto
- Not without obligation
- No abstinence
- Leaves room for other ways of decision making



## Consent stimulates that different perspectives ...



**... do align to reach the common goal!**

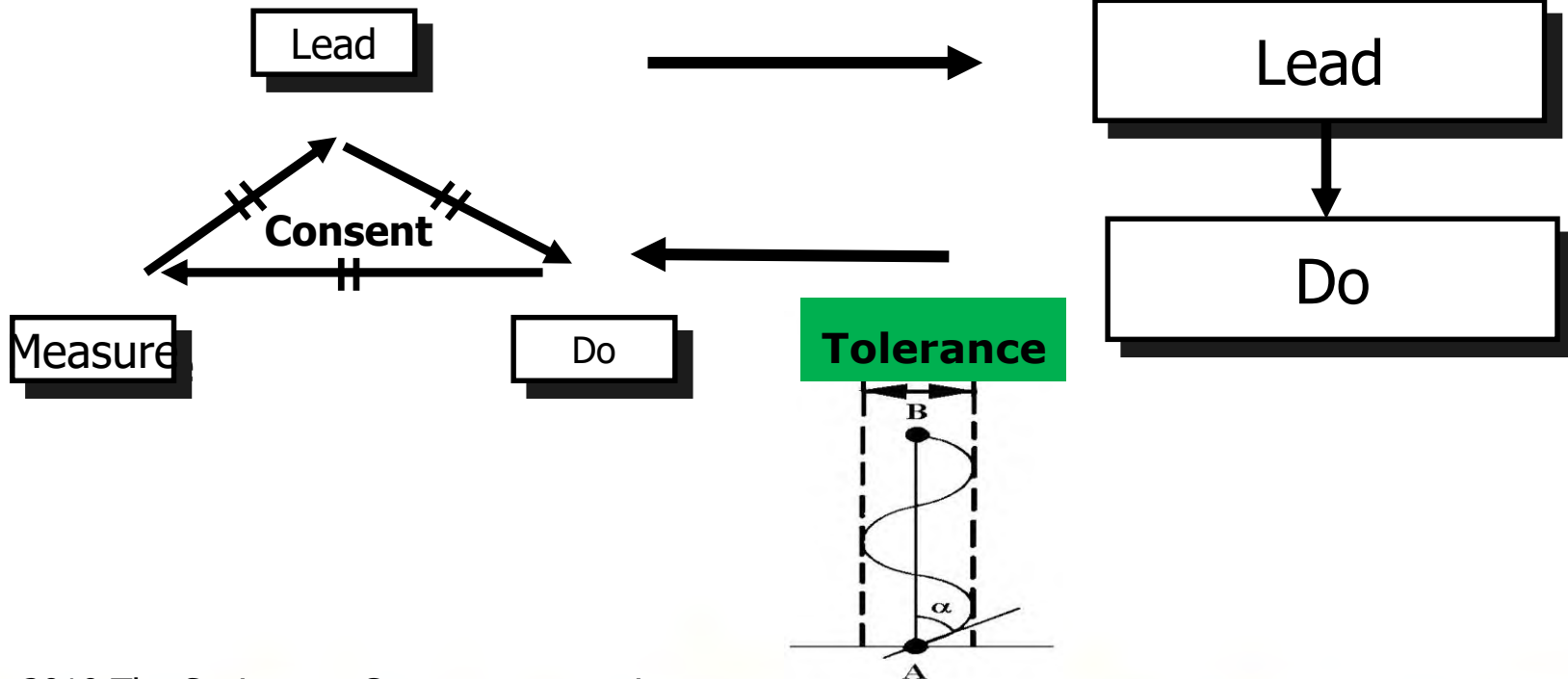




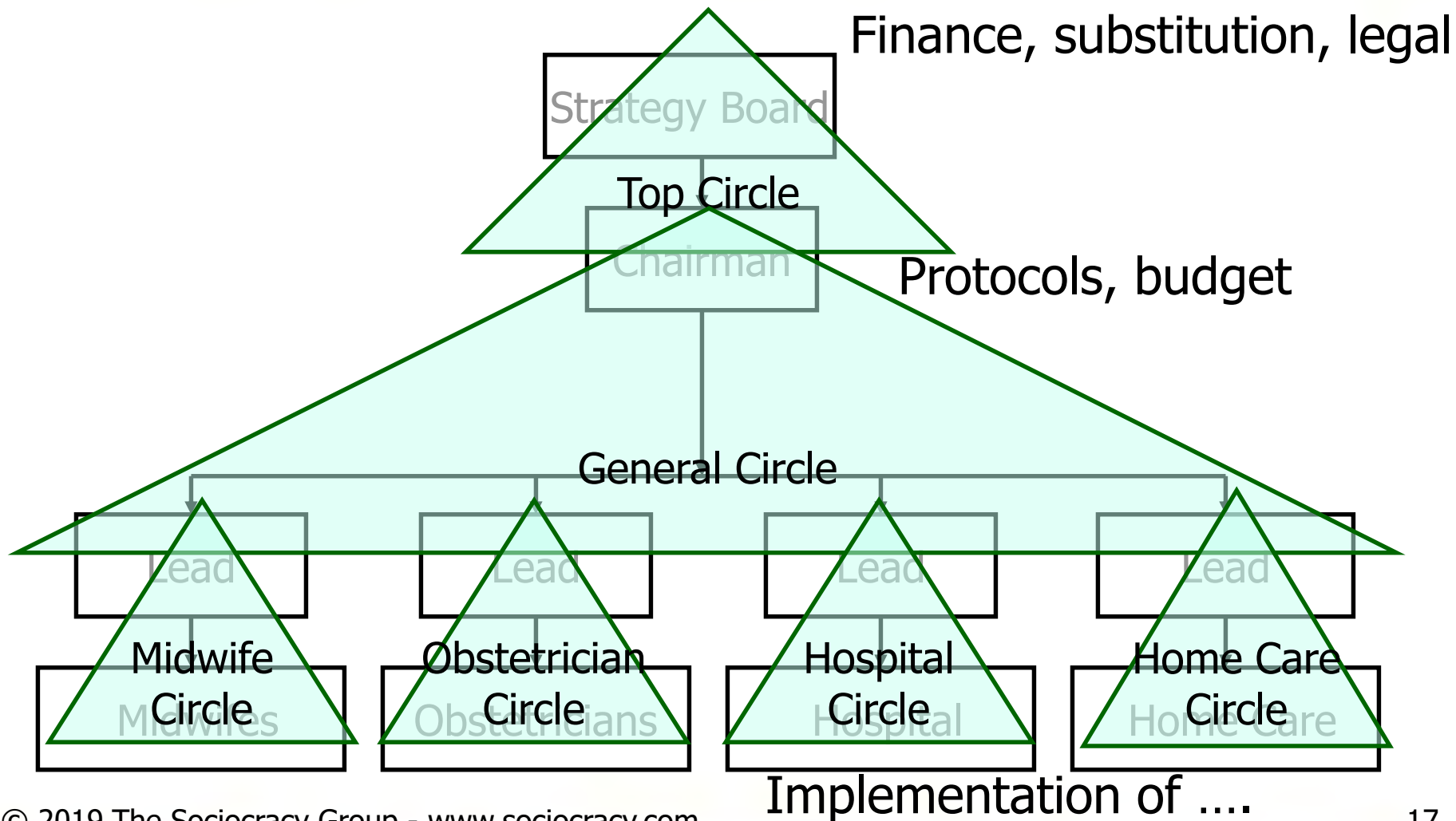
## Best of both worlds

High quality and commitment  
for policy

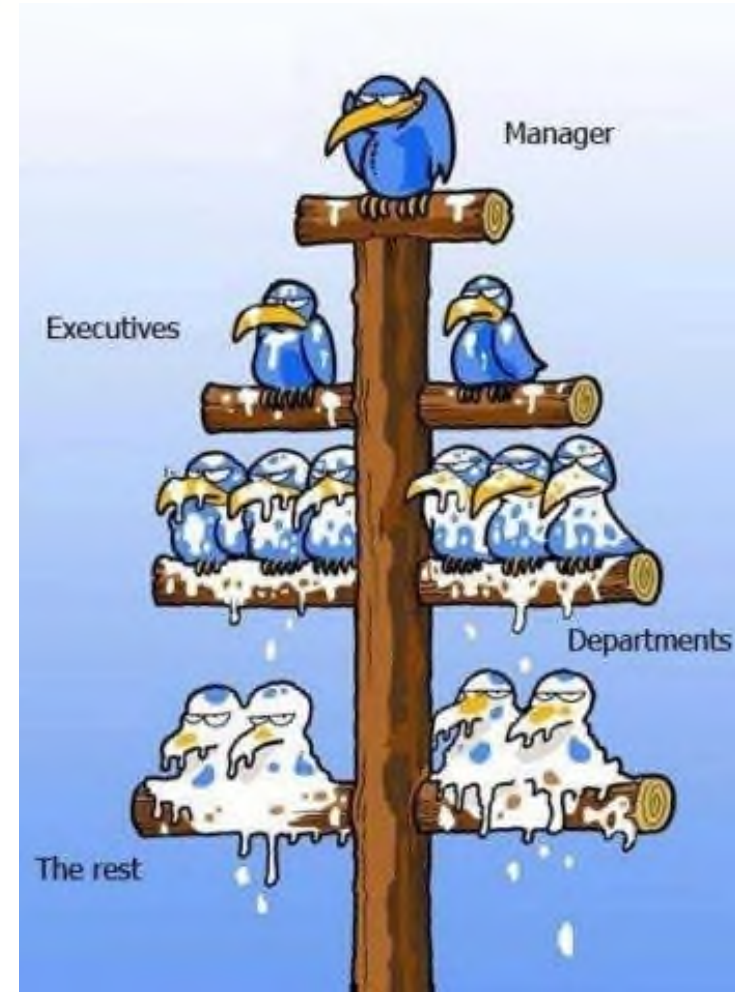
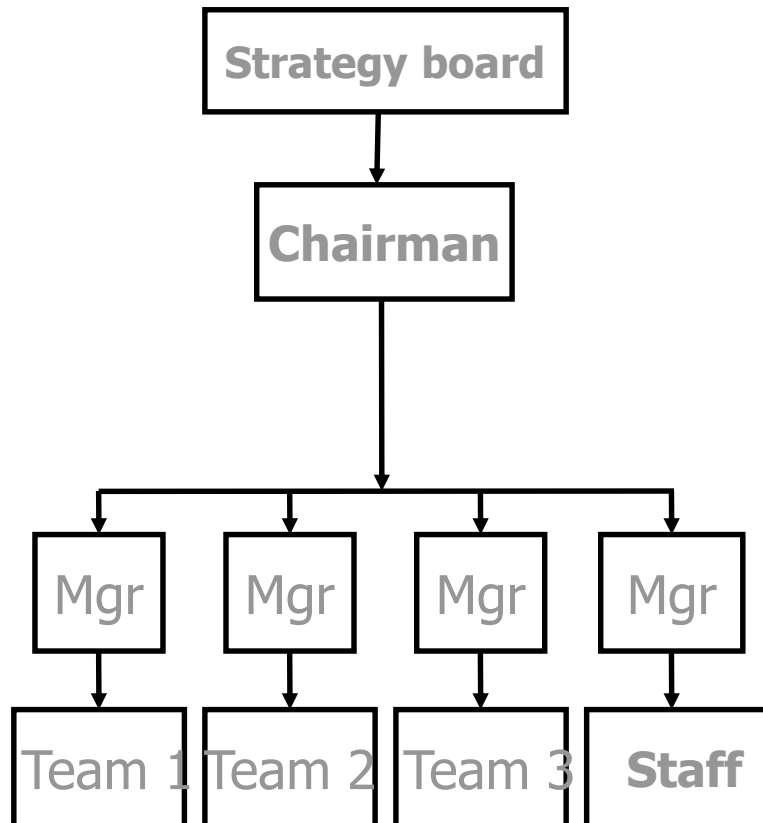
Fast for execution



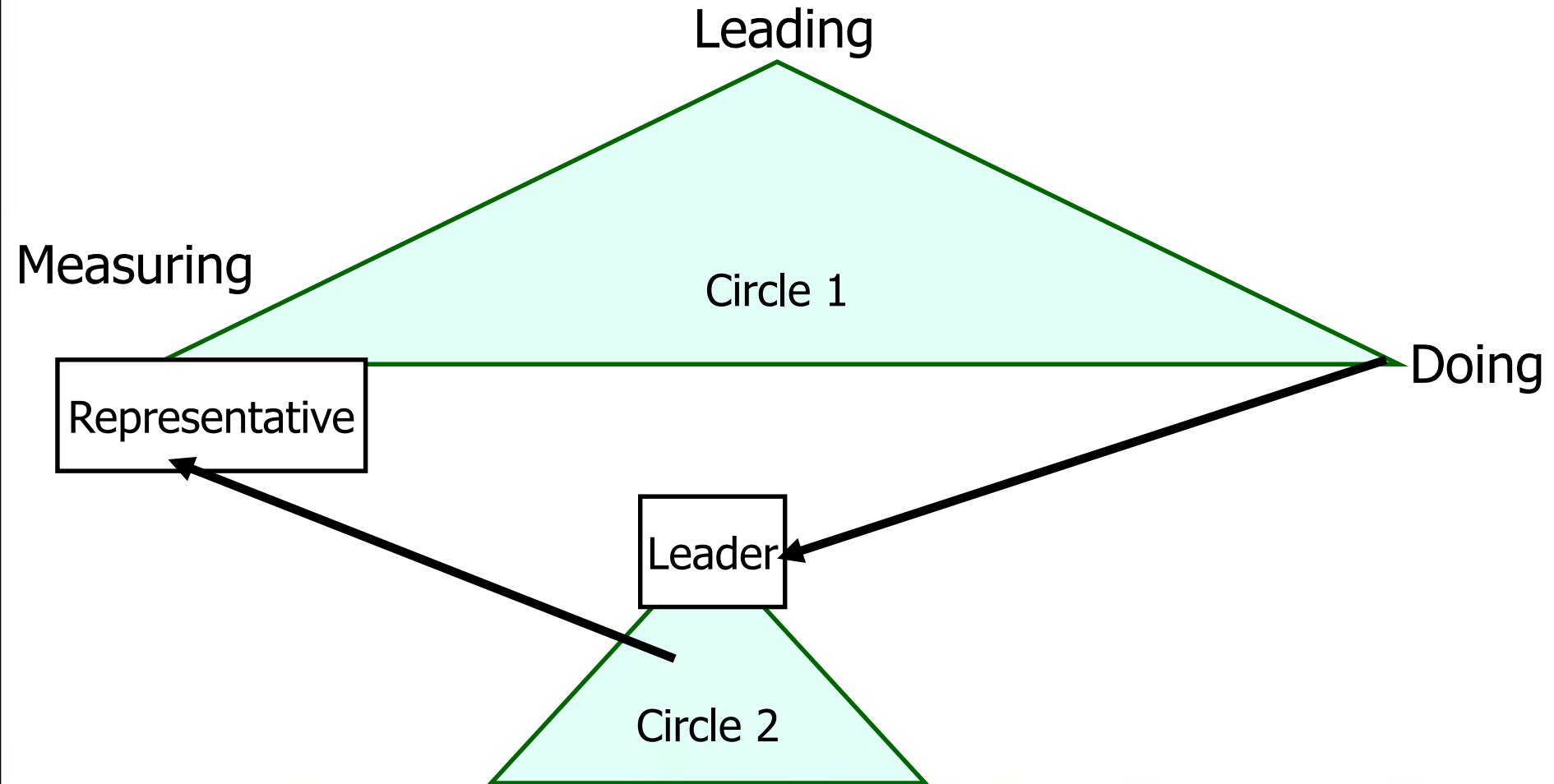
## Hierarchy of circles for policy making



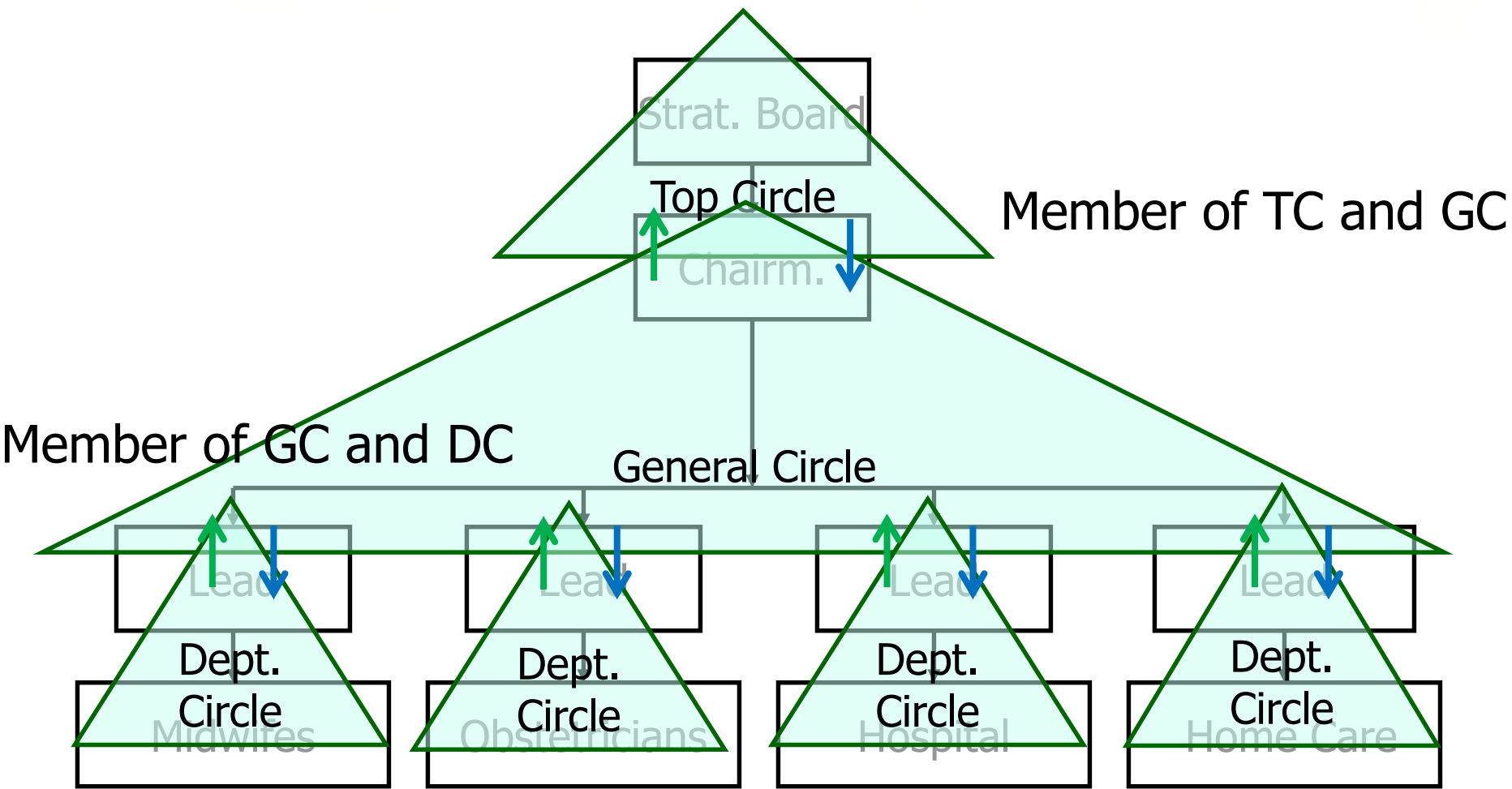
## The problem with linear hierarchy



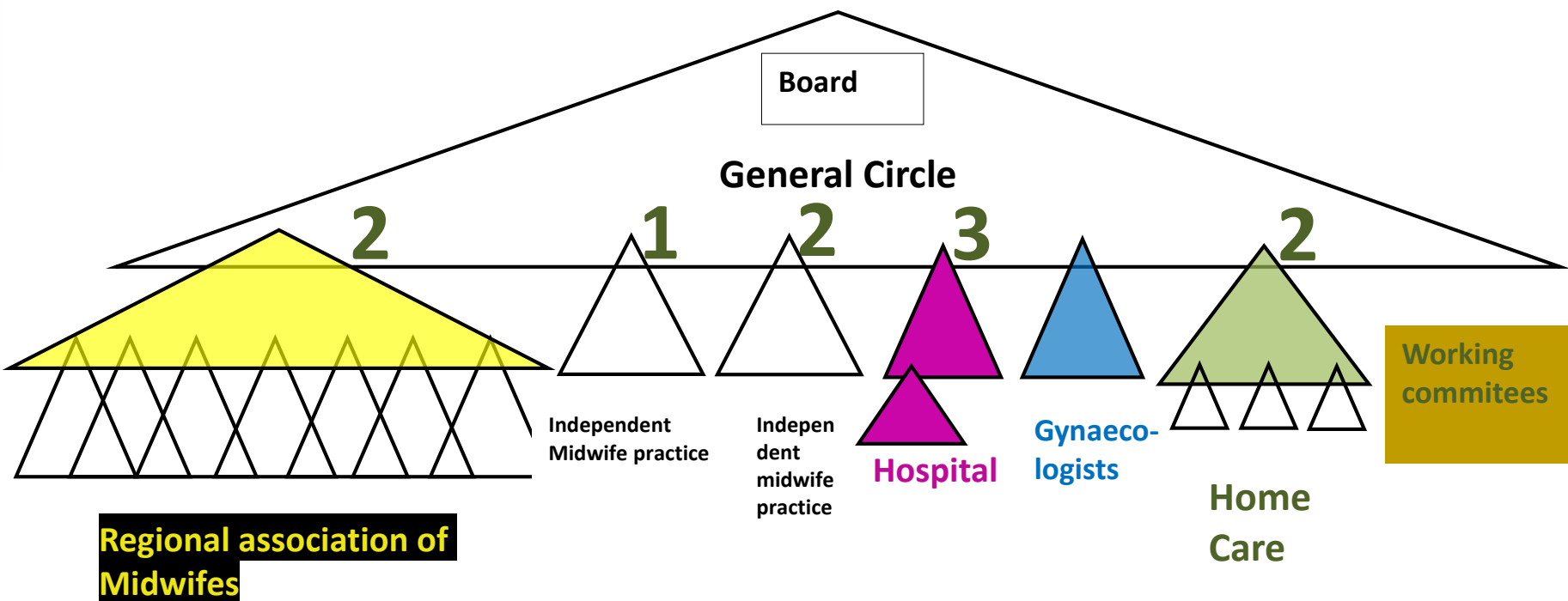
## The solution: the double link, a circular hierarchy



## A circular hierarchy based on equivalence between levels



## Real life example





## Open Election

- Delegation of functions and tasks after open argumentation with consent
- For a limited time period
- Correction possible at any circle meeting





## Cooperations organized with SCM

- 2013 VSV In Zwang (Gouda)
- 2015 VSV Zaanstreek (Zaandam)
- 2016 VSV Uniek (Utrecht-South)  
SEVZ, midwife association Rotterdam South
- 2017 VSV Rotterdam South  
VSV De Eendracht (Utrecht-Center)
- 2018 VSV Alliant (Utrecht-Academic)  
VSV Twente (Enschede, Hengelo)  
VSV Dordrecht
- 2019 VSV Amsterdam West  
Midwife association LEO (Leiden)



## Results

- **Higher problem solving capacity**
- **High commitment to decisions**
- **Effective meetings**
- **Better steering of implementation**



## **Learnings**

- **Training is essential**
- **Especially trained facilitators**
- **Good quality circle meetings for the different constituencies are needed**
- **Maintenance: measurement and permanent education**



**People are willing to change  
but not to be changed**

**with a circular governance structure  
real change is possible**

**[www.sociocracy.com](http://www.sociocracy.com)**

**[www.sociocratie.nl](http://www.sociocratie.nl)**