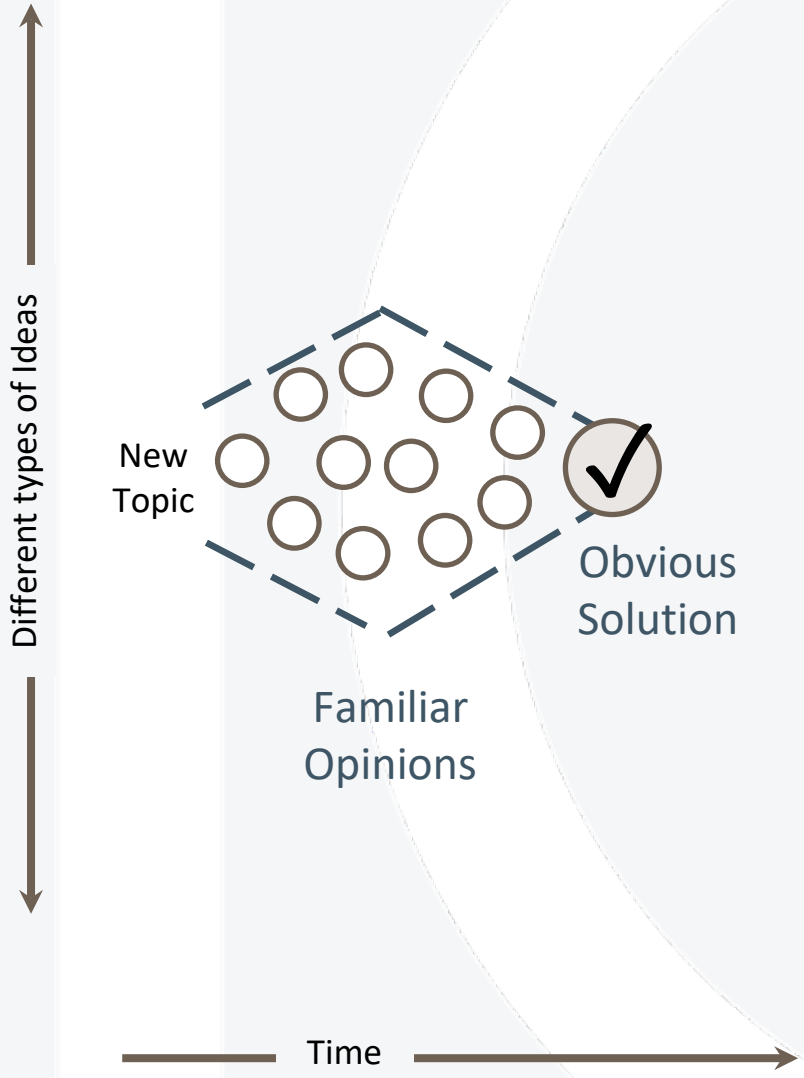
Participatory Decision Making

ICA GROUP

Group Decisions Are Easy… if the solution is obvious

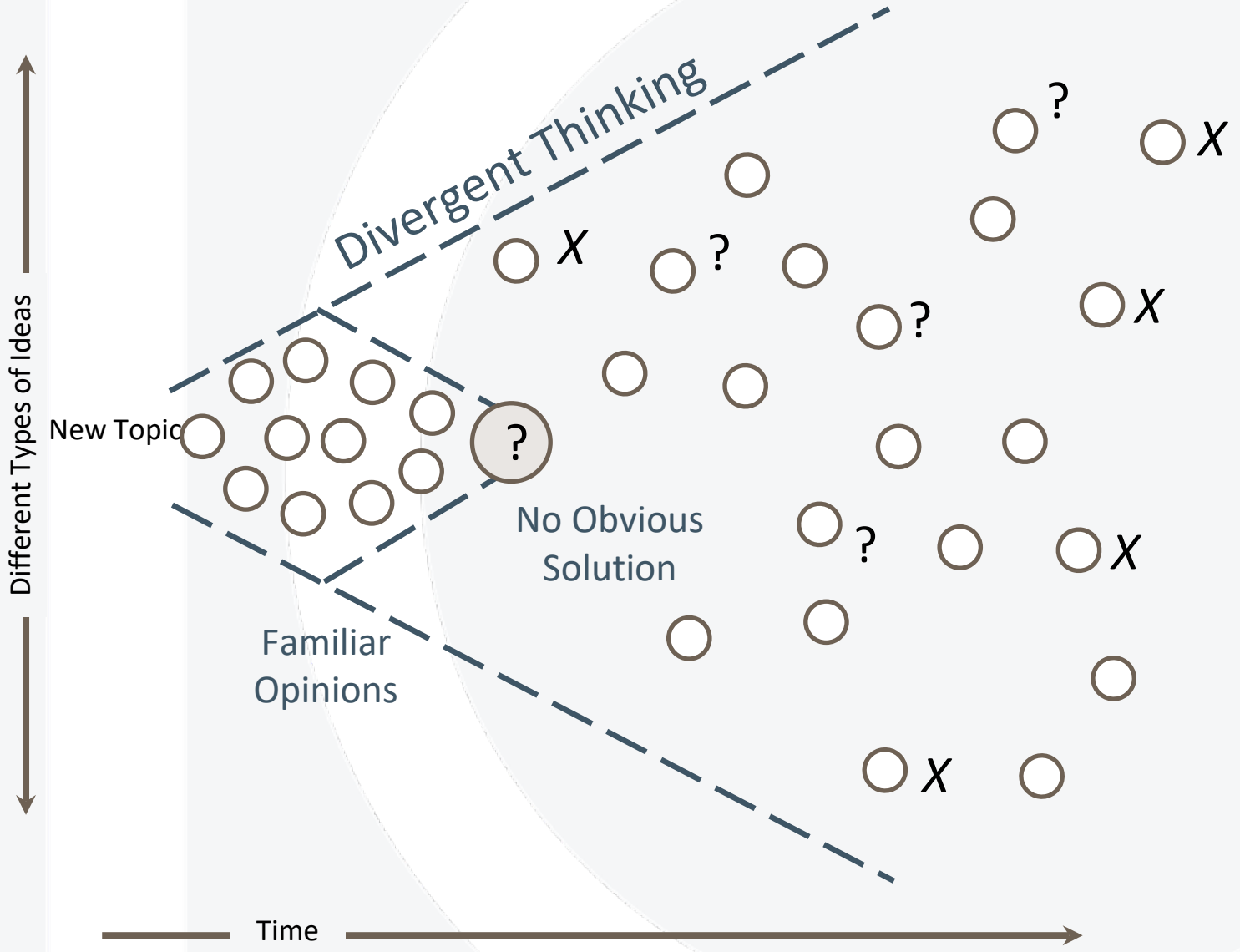


Initial discussions address safe, familiar territory. The first ideas we express are the ones that are easiest to think about. With an obvious solution, it is easy and wise to close discussion quickly and move on.

This doesn't work for every discussion, and it is a mistake to try to force it.

Credit: Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making by Sam Kaner

Where Group Decision Making Gets Frustrating



Difficult decisions can only be solved if we explore a wide range of possibilities. Groups can be hesitant to explore unfamiliar or unpopular opinions.

Sincere efforts to resolve difficult problems can lead to confusion, frustration and a sense that the group is dysfunctional.

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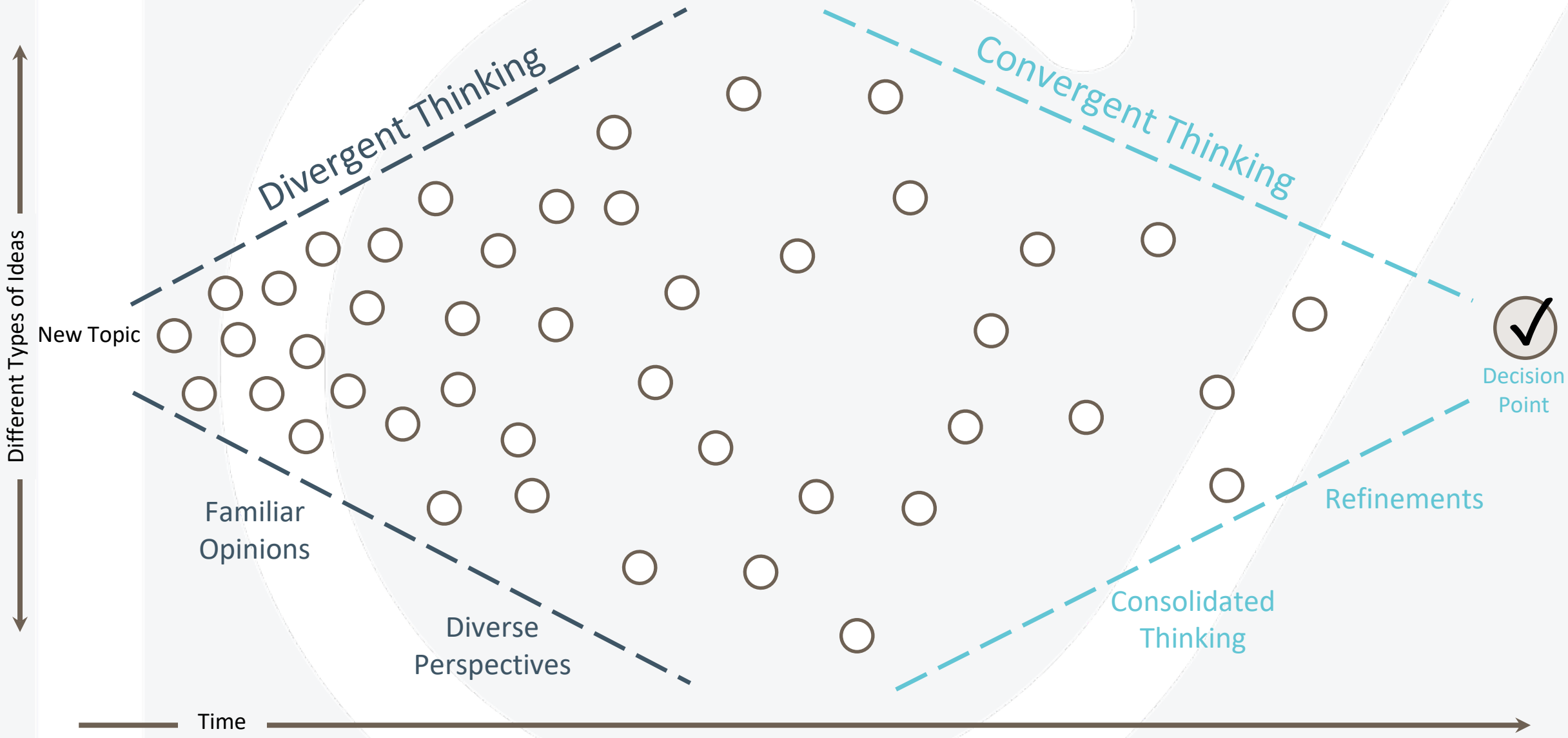
Group Decision Making – Idealized Process



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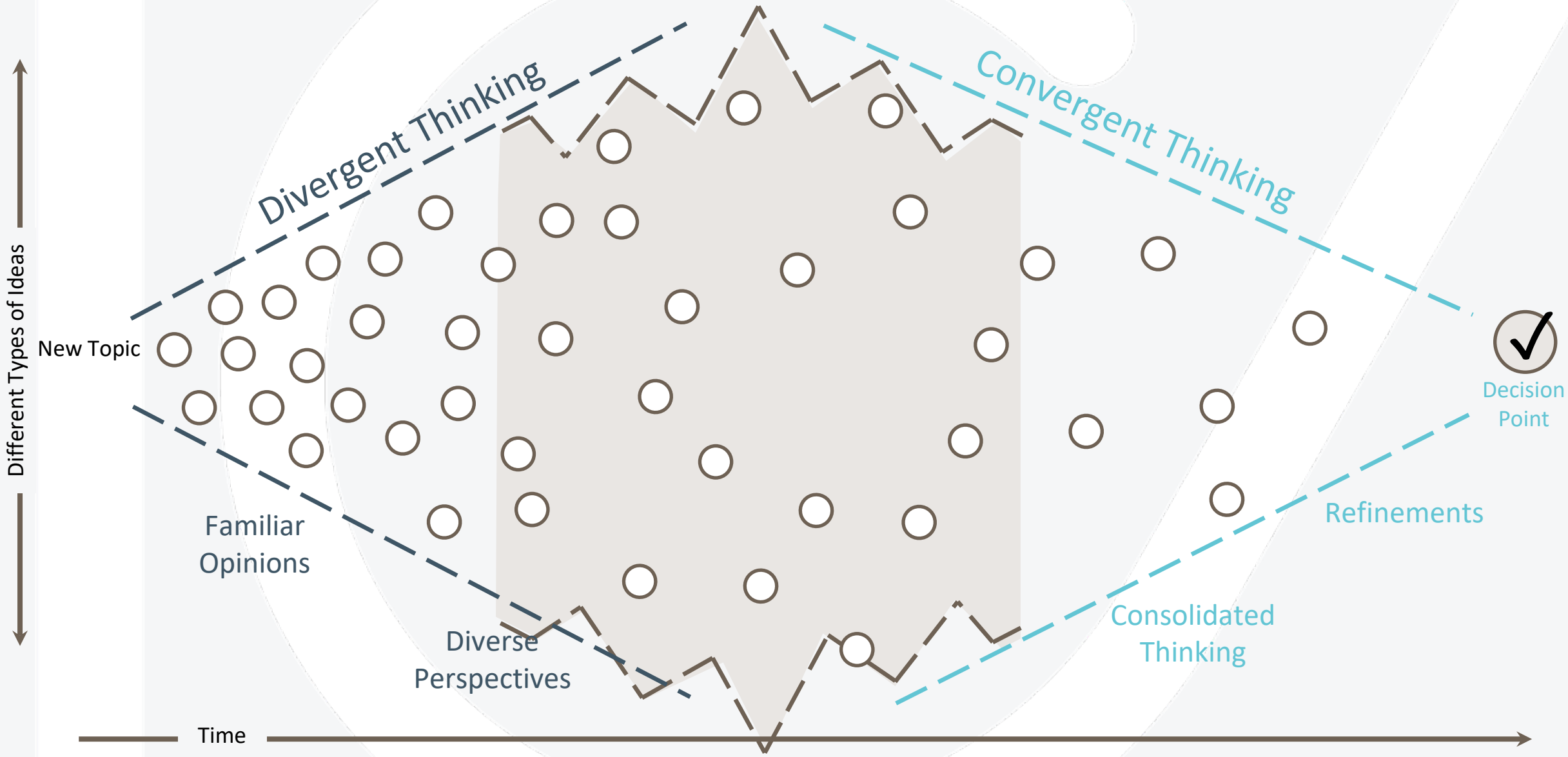
Divergent Thinking		Convergent Thinking
✓ Generating alternatives	vs.	✓ Evaluating alternatives
✓ Free flowing discussion	vs.	✓ Summarizing key points
✓ Gathering diverse viewpoints	vs.	✓ Sorting ideas into categories
✓ Suspending judgement	vs.	✓ Exercising judgement

Group Decision Making – What's Missing?



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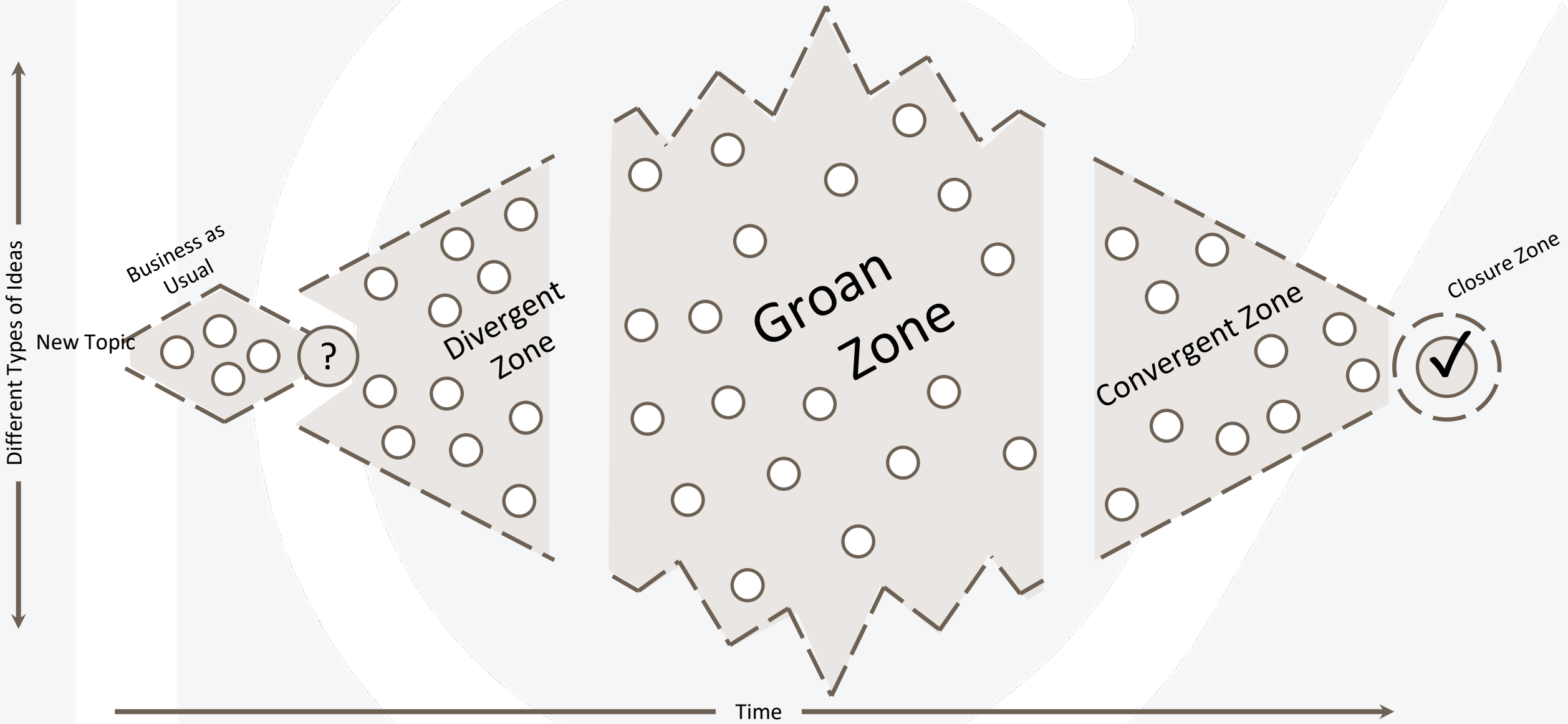
Group Decision Making – Facilitated Process



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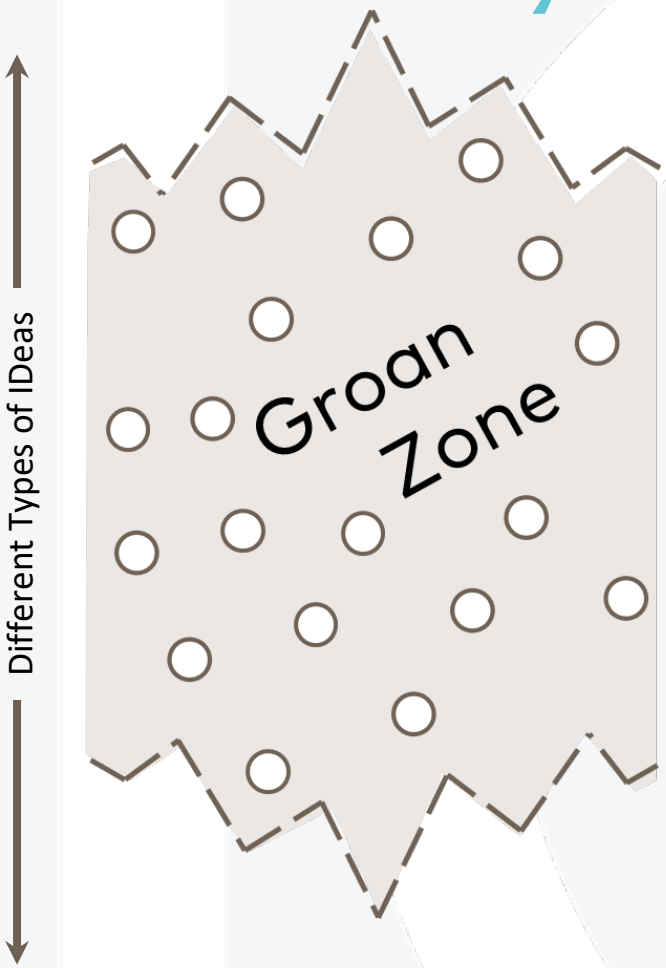
Dynamics of Group Decision Making



- ✓ Discomfort ≠ Dysfunction
- ✓ Misunderstanding and miscommunication are normal aspects of participatory decision-making.
- ✓ Challenges are an inevitable consequence of the diversity that exists in any group.

Working through these misunderstandings is what builds the foundation for sustainable agreements. Without shared understanding, meaningful collaboration is impossible.

Credit: Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making by Sam Kaner

Role of Facilitator

- ✓ Encourage full participation – get people to think in public.
- ✓ Promote Mutual Understanding – get people to think from each other's point of view and move through misunderstanding.
- ✓ Foster Inclusive Solutions – encourage divergent thinking, survive the groan zone, weave together different perspectives, complete deliberations.
- ✓ Look out for and interrupt oppressive behaviors
- ✓ Cultivate Shared Responsibility – break the cycle of passivity & deference to authority that undermines participation in the creative process.

Every Meeting Needs an Objective… And Not All Objective Can be dealt with the same way

Some Common Objectives

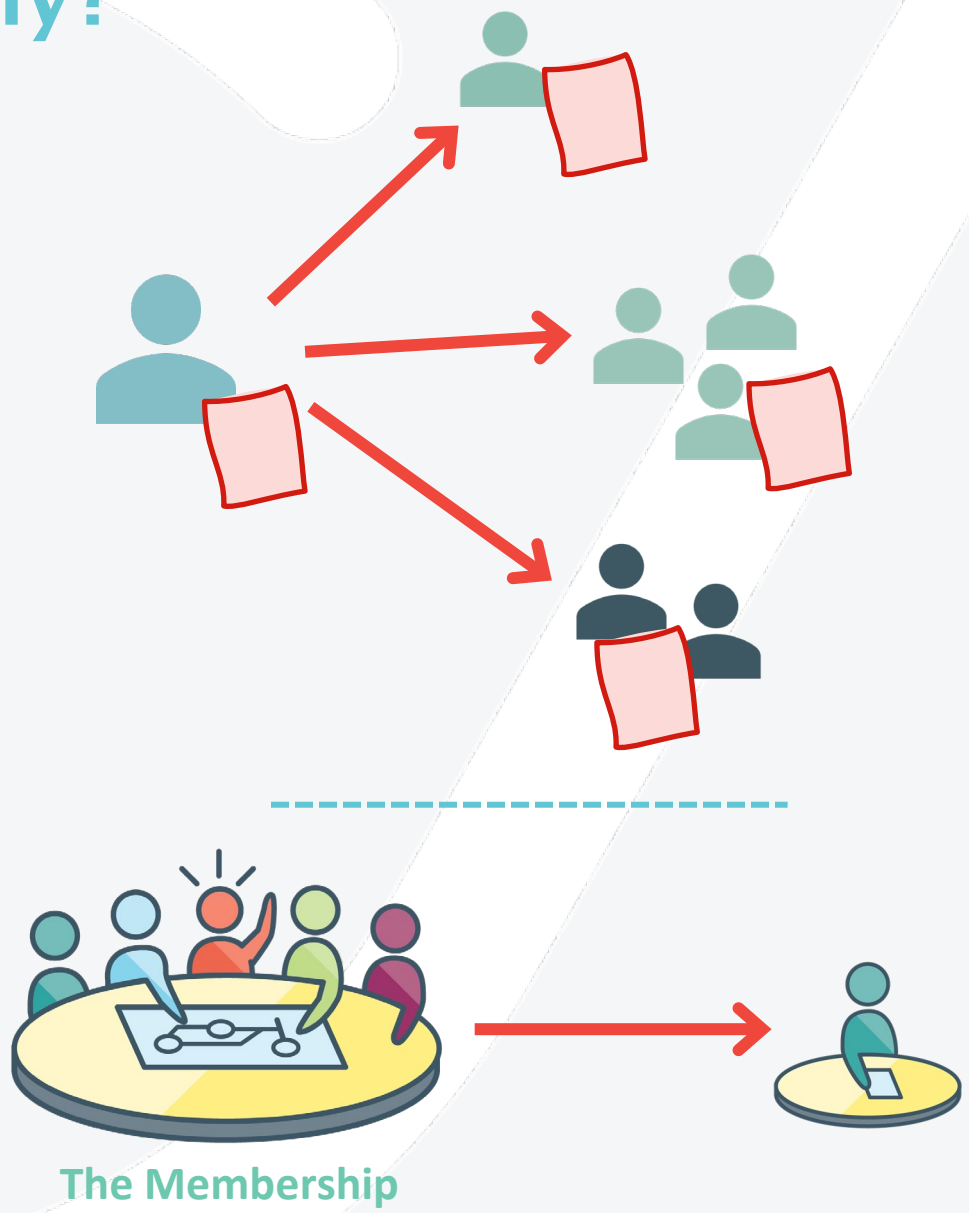
Different objectives require different processes, different ways to facilitate, and different amounts of time.

Decision Making: Mechanics

Delegation: Dressed up Tyranny?

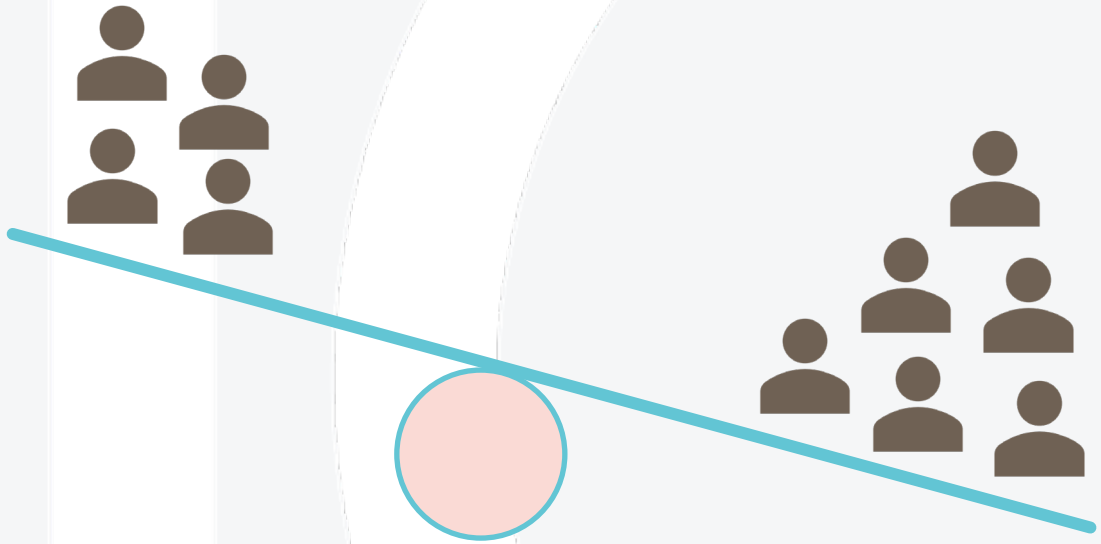
Giving someone or a group explicit authority over a decision, often with some guardrails. Distributes authority, a positive and necessary element of participatory management systems.

BUT a key question is who is ‘giving’ the authority?

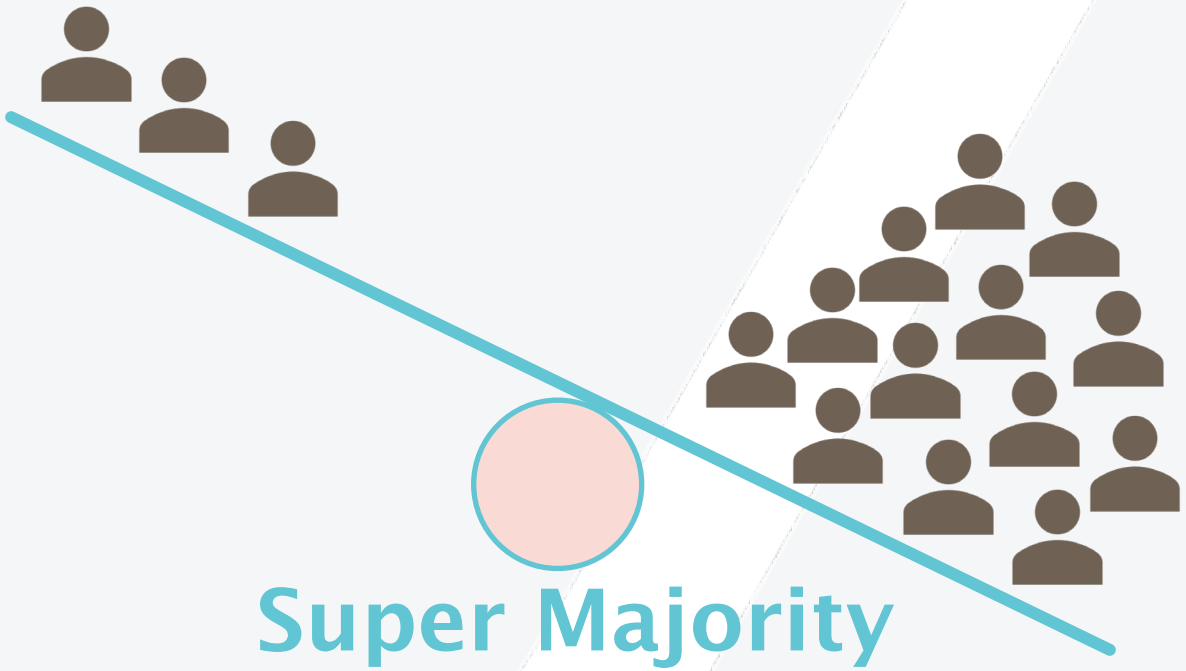


Majority Rule: Tyranny of the Faction?

This is what many think of when it comes to democracy. If more than a certain percentage of the participants agree, a decision can be made.



Majority



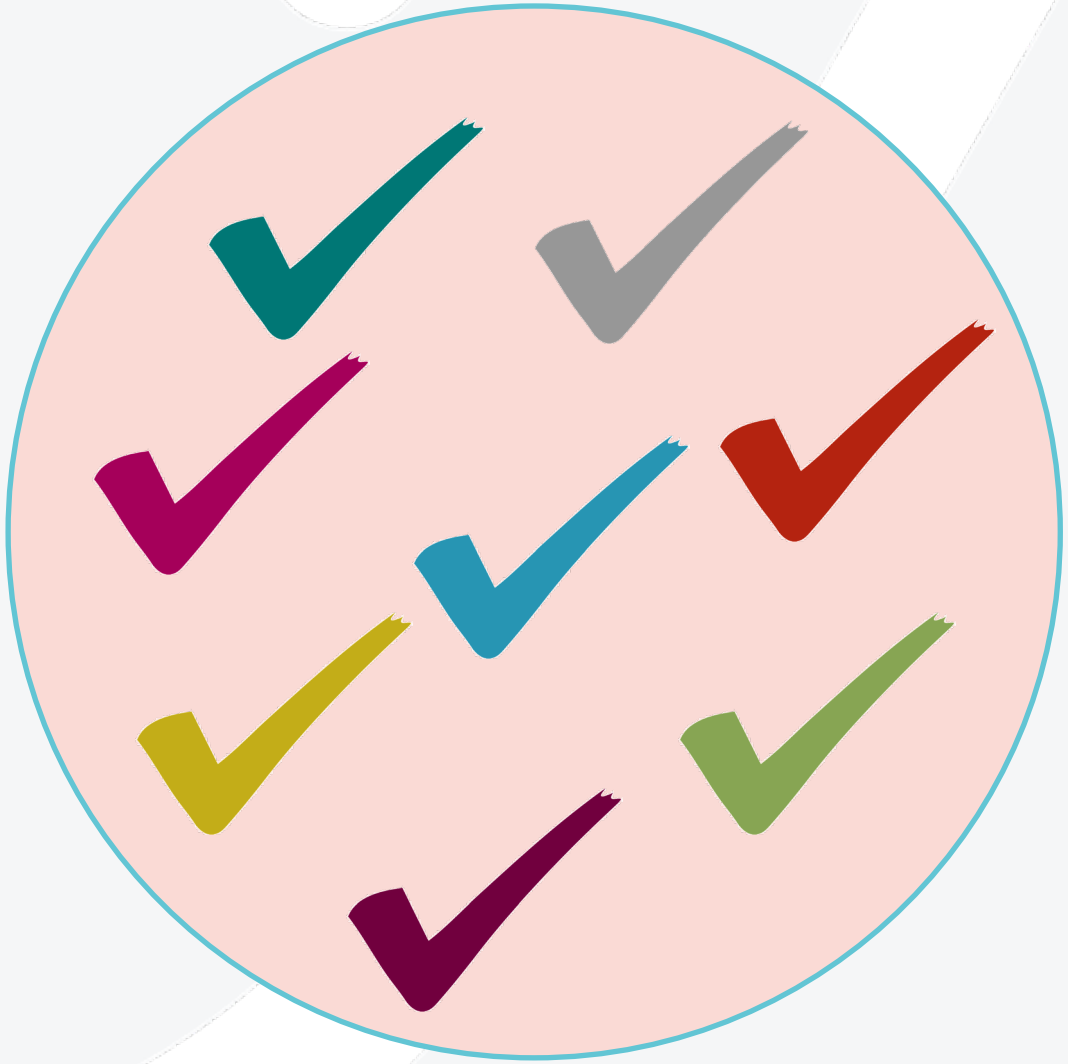
Super Majority

"If we really wish to see the whole population united… in which the members care for each other's welfare as much as for their own, we must set aside the quantitative principle of the right of the greatest number and find another way of organizing ourselves."

- *Kees Boeke Dutch Educator & Democratic Theorist.*

Consensus: Tyranny of the Individual?

Every person involved in the decision fully agrees and supports it. This requires negotiation around precise details to move forward. Consensus leads to a high level of buy in. BUT it can be time consuming and it's possible that it leads to the lowest common denominator type decisions.



Consent

Consent is where a decision is made when no one objects. It can include things that folks enthusiastically support and things that just work for someone. An objection results from a concern that a team, group, etc. will not be able to carry out its work and achieve its goals or aims.

Credit: Many Voices, One Song by Ted Rau & Jerry Koch-Gonzalez

Consent: Shifting Power Dynamics

With consent, authority shifts from any specific individual or group, to reasoned arguments that reveal the potential for undesirable consequences that would better be avoided or worthwhile ways to improve.

For more: patterns.sociocracy30.org/

Consent

Preferences

The outcome one prefers

Range of Tolerance

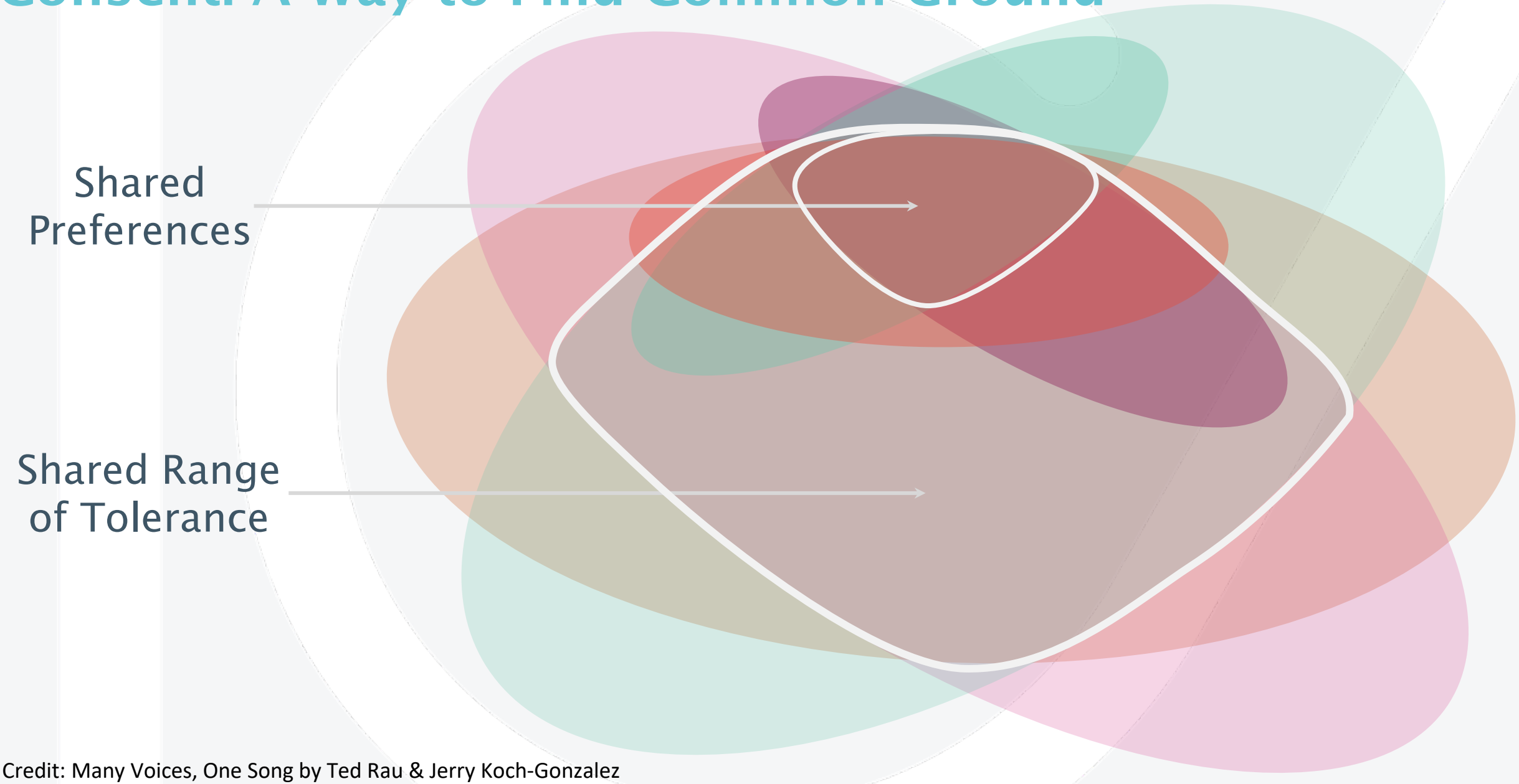
Everything that someone can work with, including their preference

Objection

Outside a person's range of tolerance.

- ✓ Are reasoned
- ✓ Valuable info
- ✓ Help us focus
- ✓ A beginning

Consent: A Way to Find Common Ground



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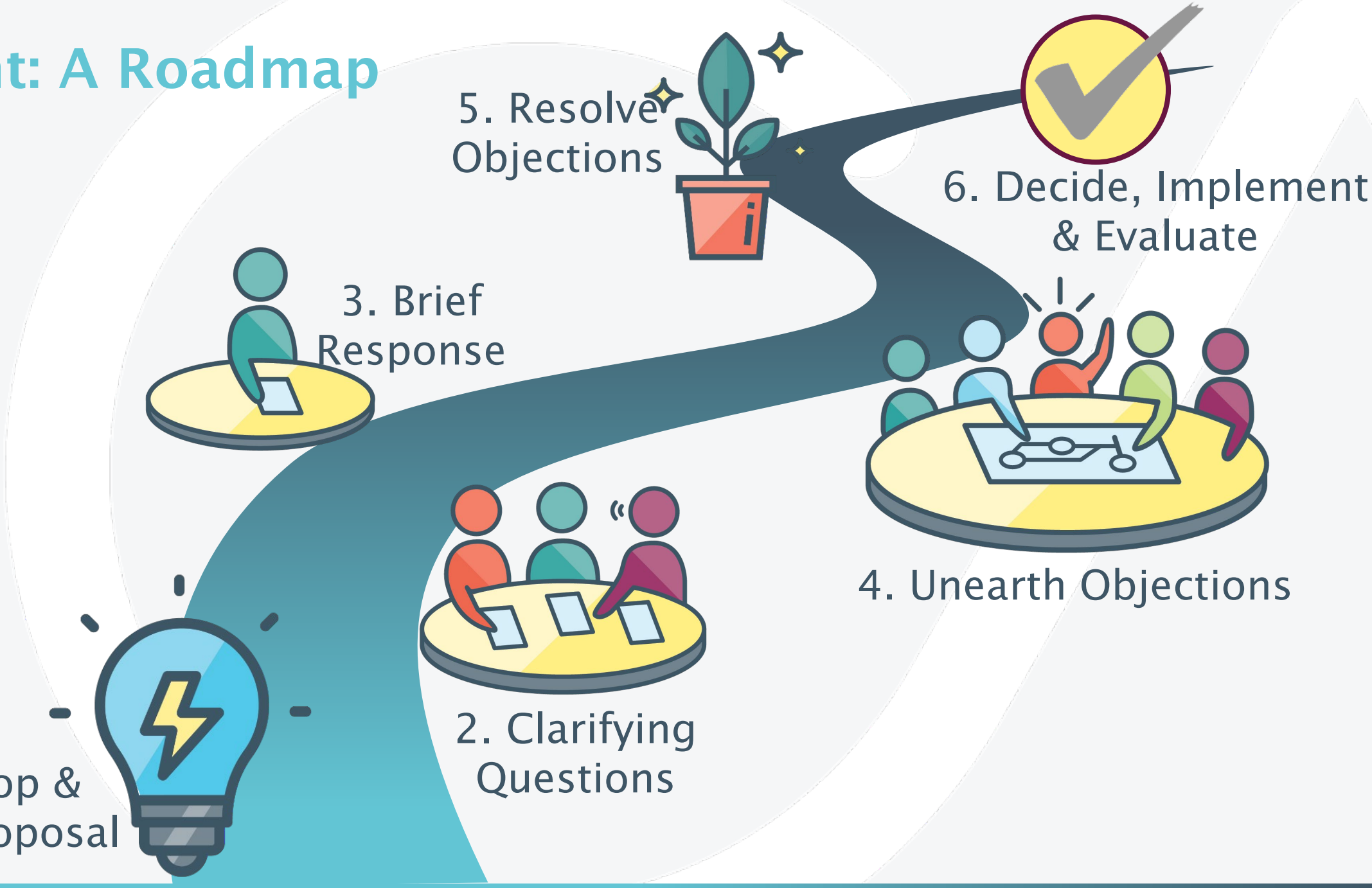
Consent: A Roadmap



Rounds: Supporting Equal Voice & Participation

Clarifying Questions

The time where we make sure we understand a proposal

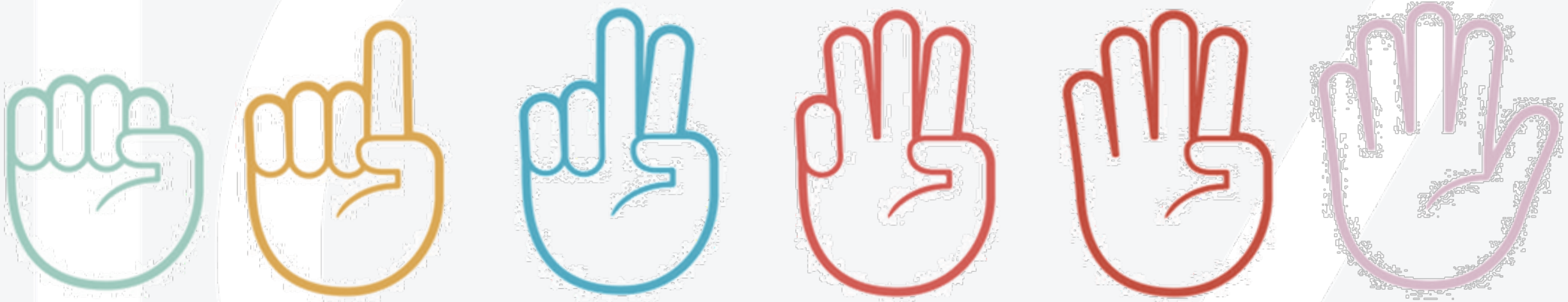
Reaction Round

Get a feel for where the group is and gather input.

Consent Round

Where people assert whether they have an objection.

Fist to Five: A Quick Way to Get Feedback



Block with Major Objections

Major Issues that need to be resolved

Minor Issues that must be resolved now

Minor Issues that can be resolved later

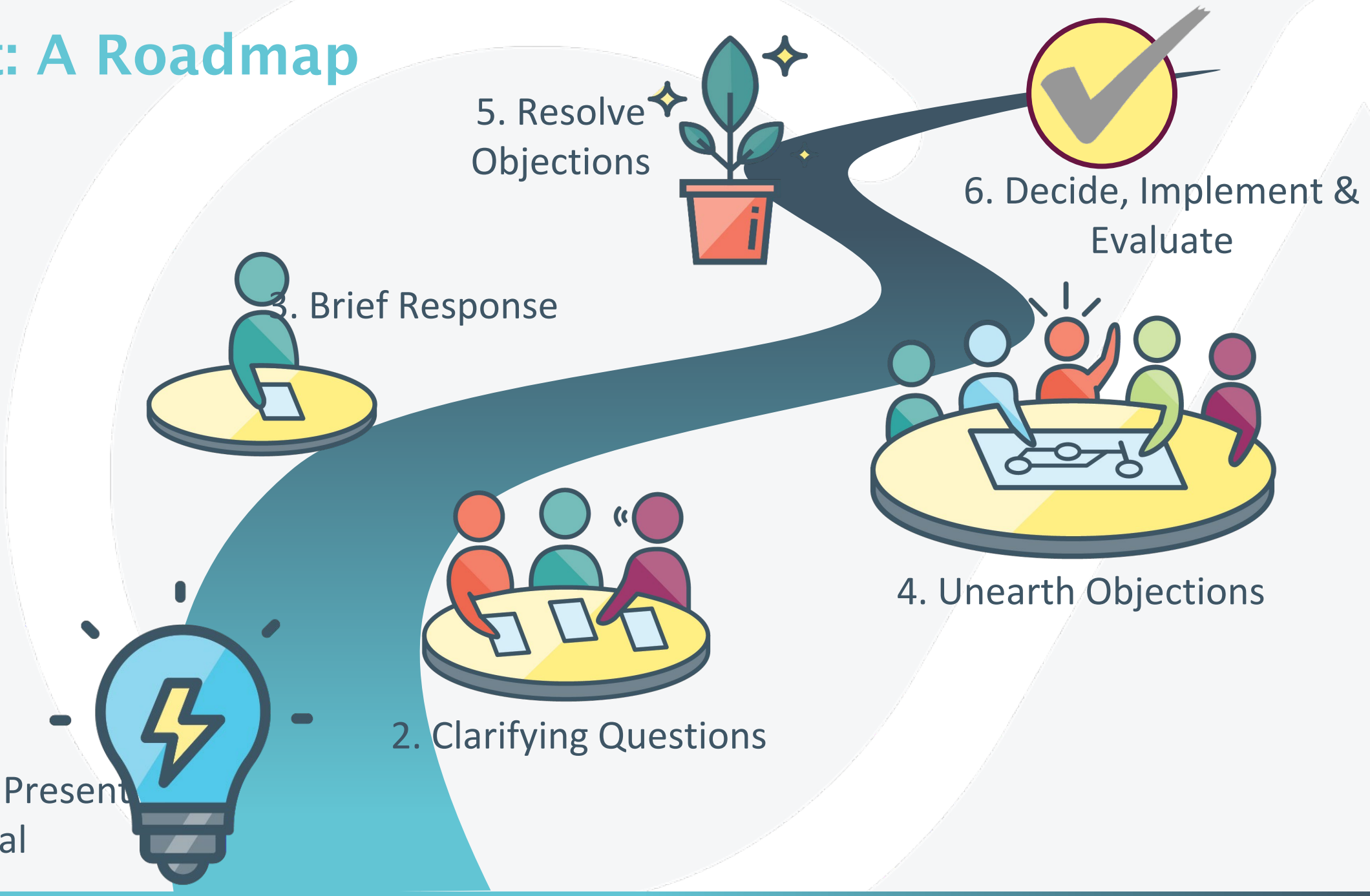
Support with no objections

Support and Will Champion

No Agreement: No Consensus

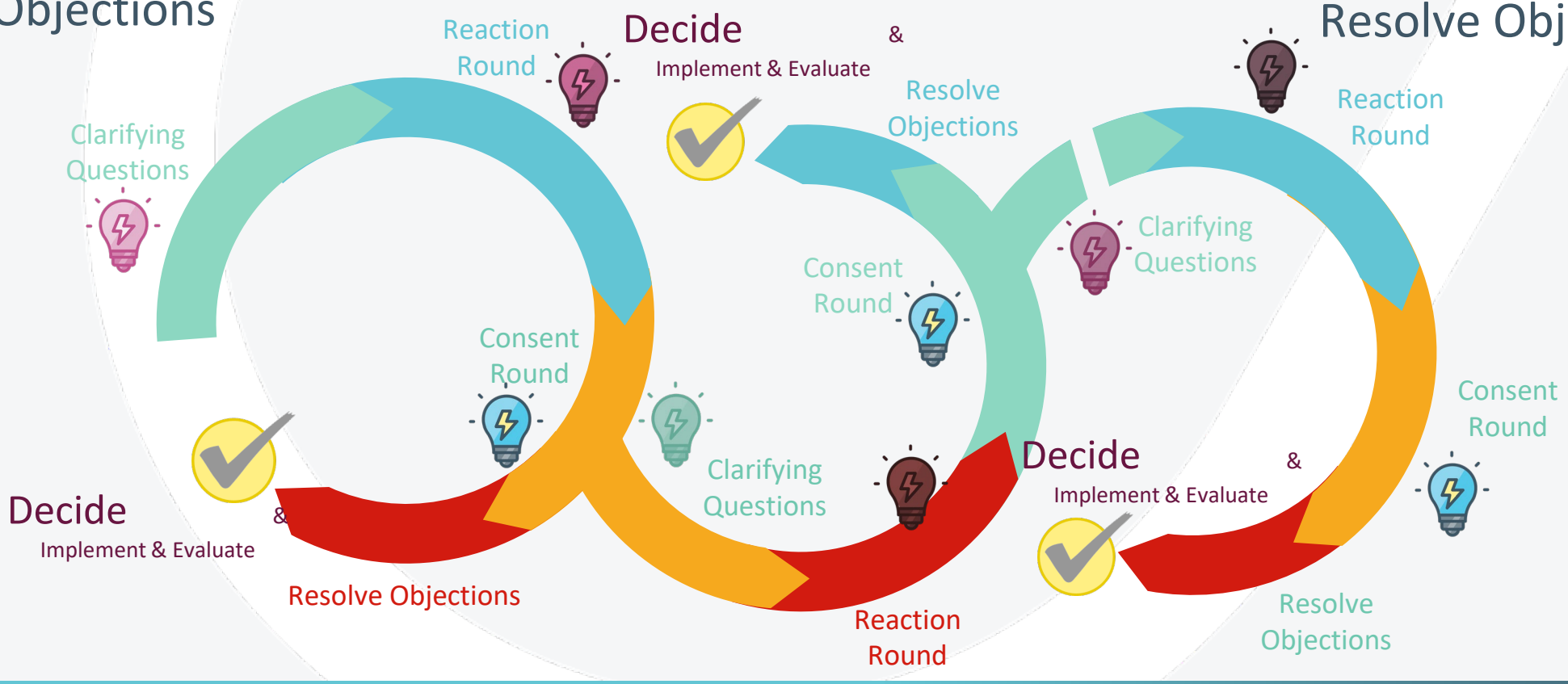
Agreement: Consent or Consensus

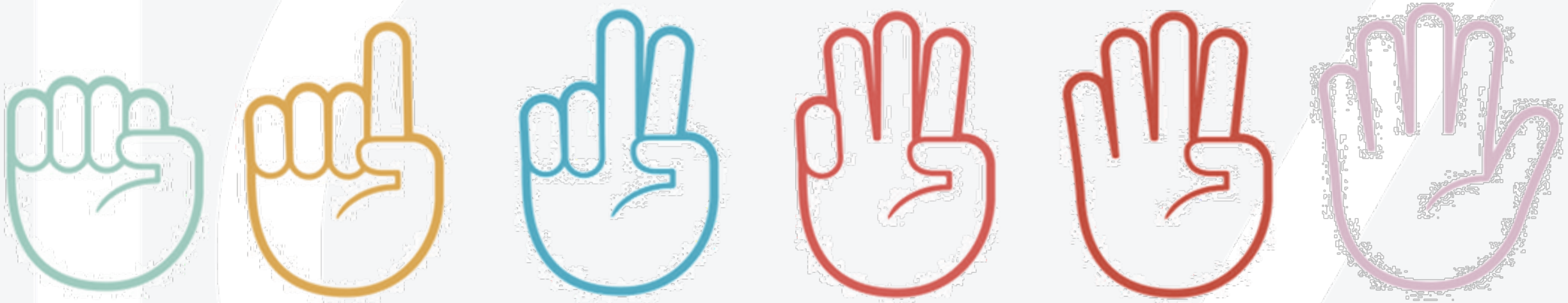
Consent: A Roadmap



Unearth Objections

Resolve Objections





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