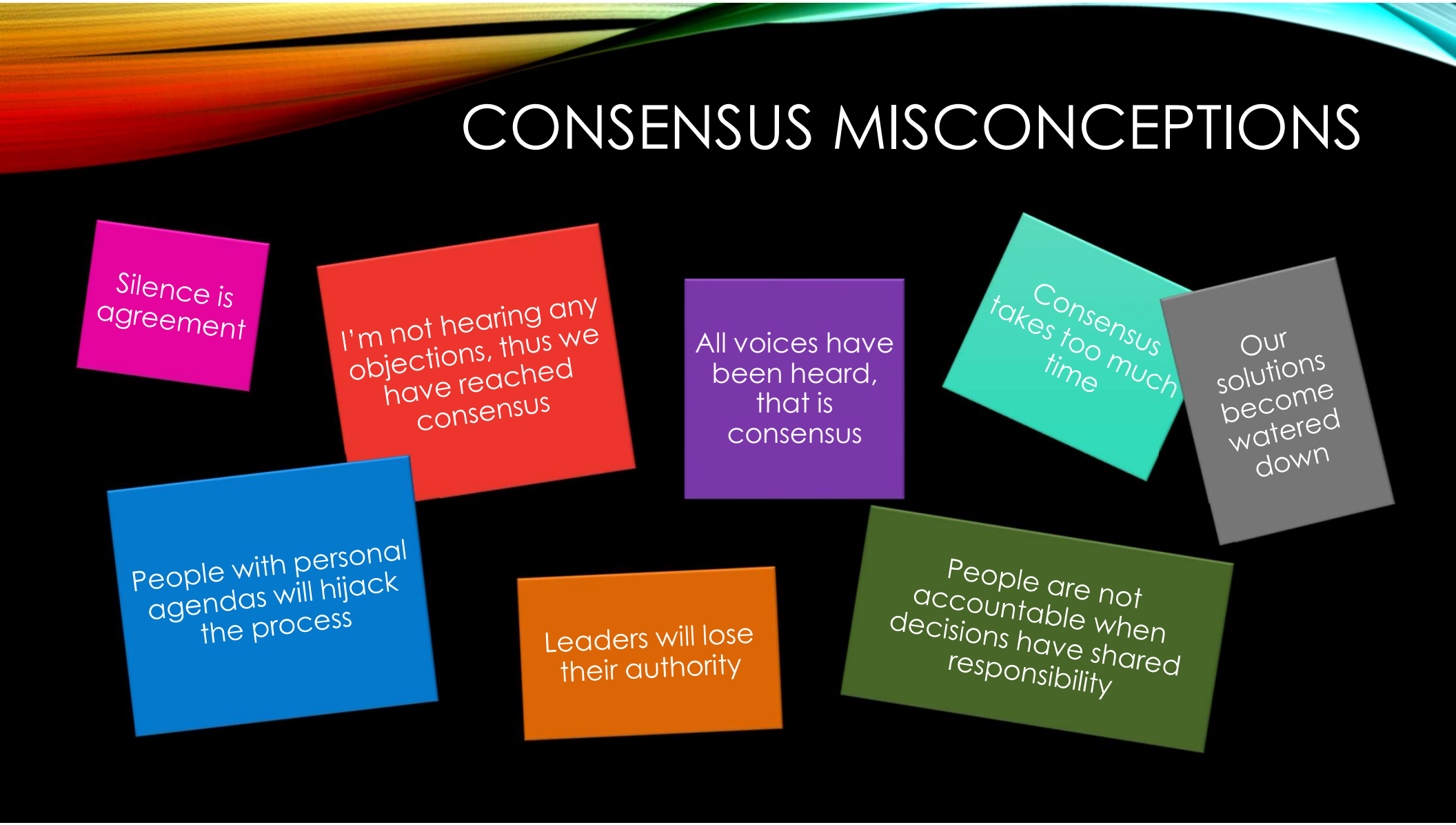
GROUP DECISION-MAKING & GETTING TO CONSENSUS

Quarterly Coordinator/Staffer Training

February 3, 2022

CONSENSUS MISCONCEPTIONS



CONSENTIRE = "TO THINK AND FEEL TOGETHER."

- A **process** of securing support of the whole group for a decision.
- Everyone can live with and will support the decision, allowing everyone to acknowledge that even though the decision may not be perfect, **it is acceptable, and we can move on**.
- Used to work collaboratively to develop a solution that **satisfies all parties**.
- A solution is negotiated and thus all parties **agree upon the threshold for consensus**.
- Unanimity is when everyone agrees. Consensus is **when no one disagrees**.

FACILITATING GROUP DECISION MAKING

SUPPORTS EVERYONE TO DO THEIR BEST THINKING

INSTILLS CORE VALUES INTO THEIR MEETINGS

HELPS THE GROUP UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS AND VALUES OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

BUILDS AND SUSTAINS A RESPECTFUL AND SUPPORTIVE ATMOSPHERE

STAYS OUT OF THE CONTENT AND MANAGES THE PROCESS

TEACHES THE GROUP NEW THINKING SKILLS AS THE PROCESS UNFOLDS TO BUILD ON COLLABORATION

CORE VALUES

Full Participation: All members are encouraged to speak up and say what is on their minds. Members are more adept at raising difficult issues, sharing "first draft" ideas, discovering and acknowledging diversity of opinions and backgrounds.

Mutual Understanding: Members understand and accept one another's needs and goals. This allows us to think from each other's point of view, which is a catalyst for innovated ideas that serve the interests of all parties.

Inclusive Solutions: We integrate everybody's perspectives and needs.

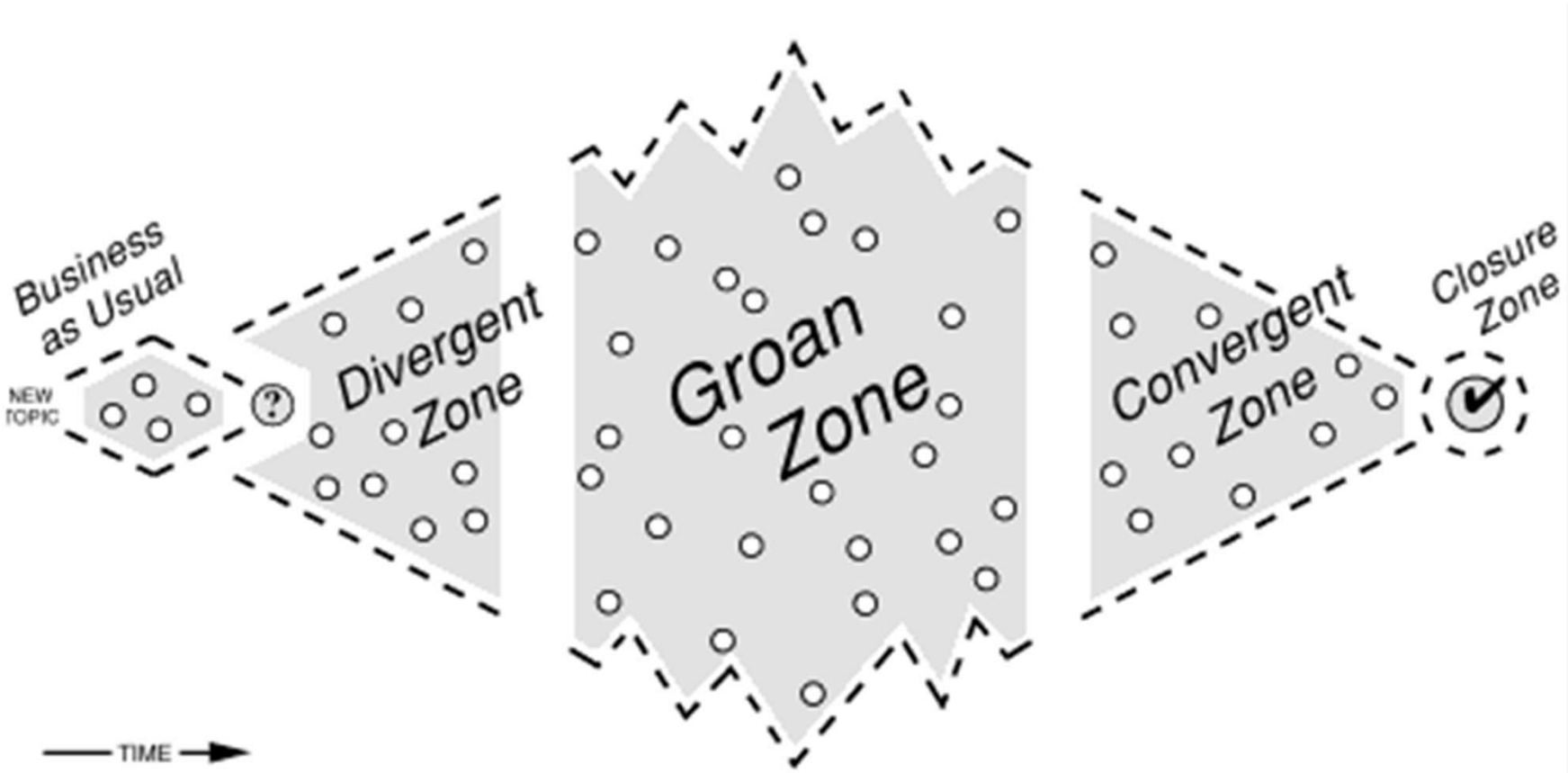
Shared Responsibility: Members are willing and able to implement the proposals they endorse and make every effort to give and receive input before final decisions are made. They assume responsibility for designing and managing the thinking process that will result in a good decision.

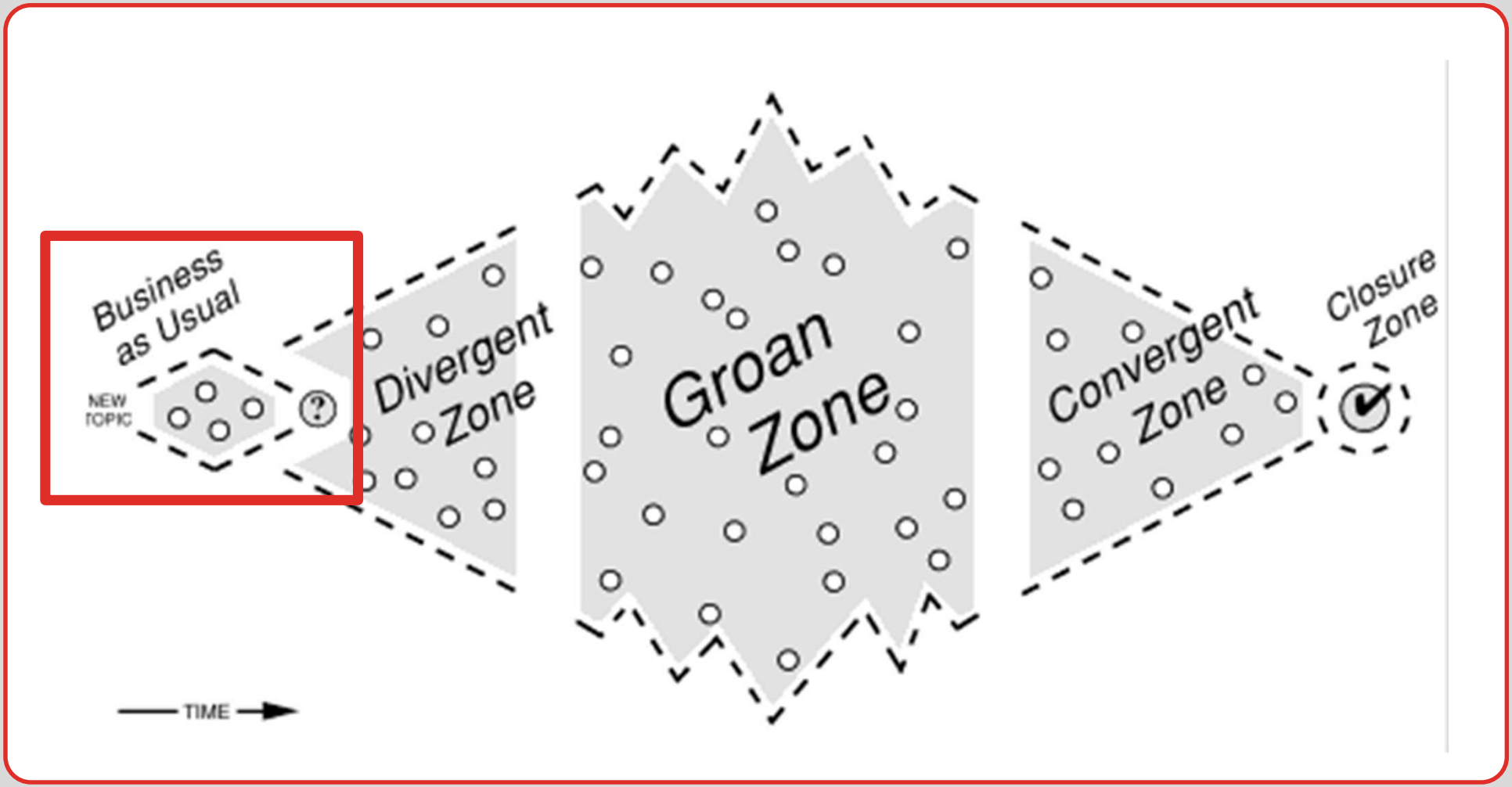
FACILITATING SUSTAINABLE AGREEMENTS

- Stage 1: Gathering diverse points of view
- Stage 2: Building a shared framework of understanding
- Stage 3: Developing inclusive solutions
- Stage 4: Reaching Closure

DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION MAKING

- We go on tangents
- We lose track of the central themes of discussion
- We get attached to our ideas
- We are individuals with diverging points of view
- When there is discomfort in the midst of the meeting process, we view it as dysfunctional and our impatience increases


Business as Usual
NEW TOPIC
Divergent Zone
Groan Zone
Convergent Zone
Closure Zone
TIME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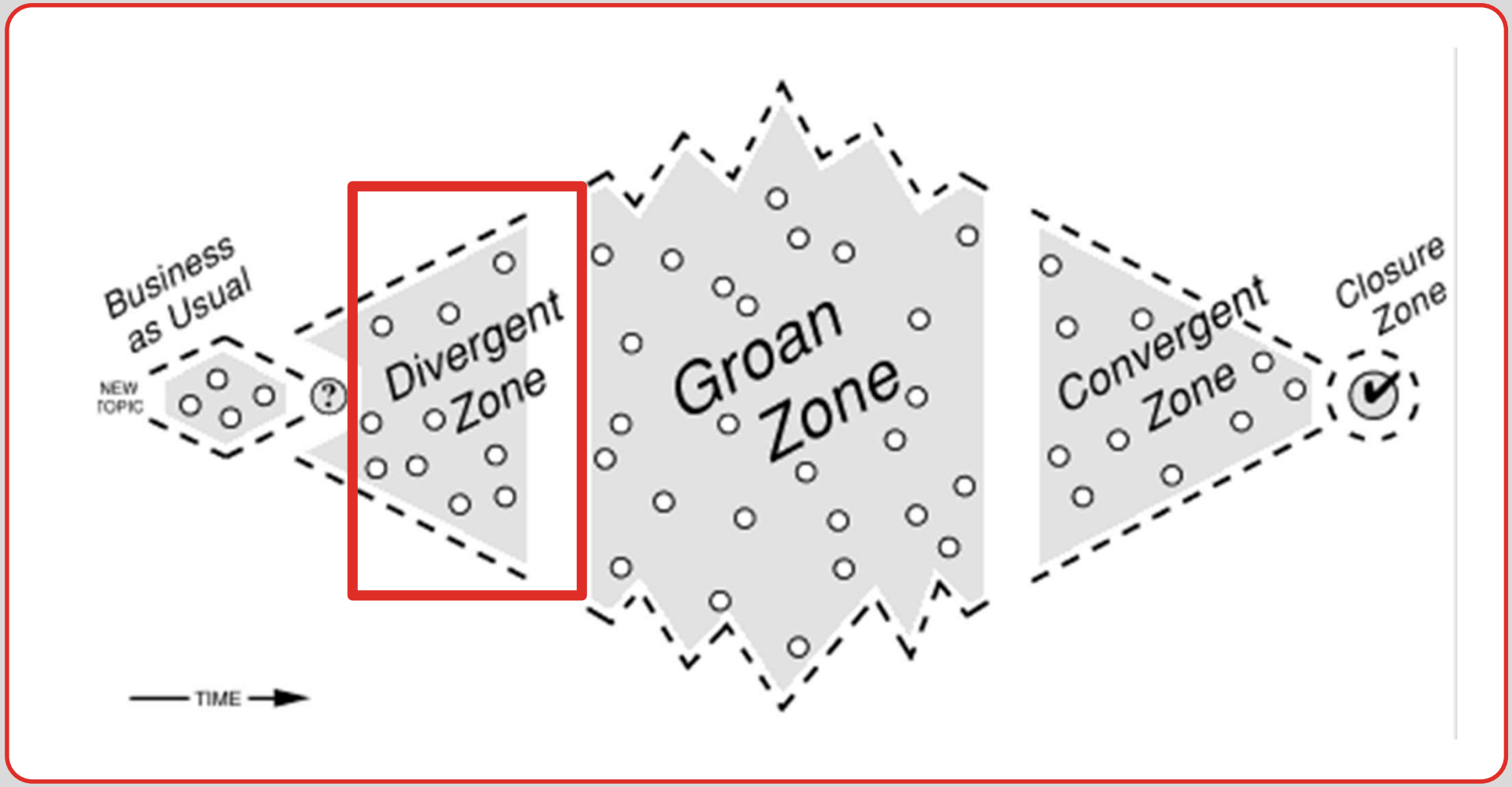
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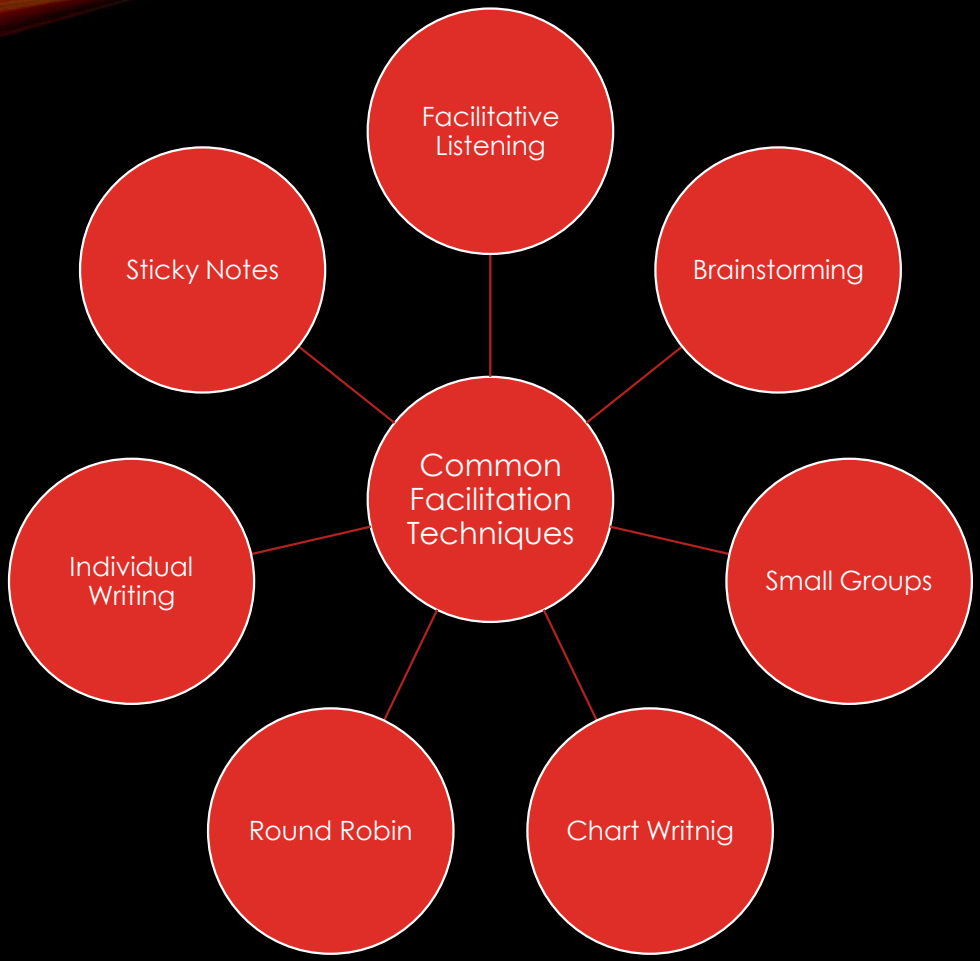
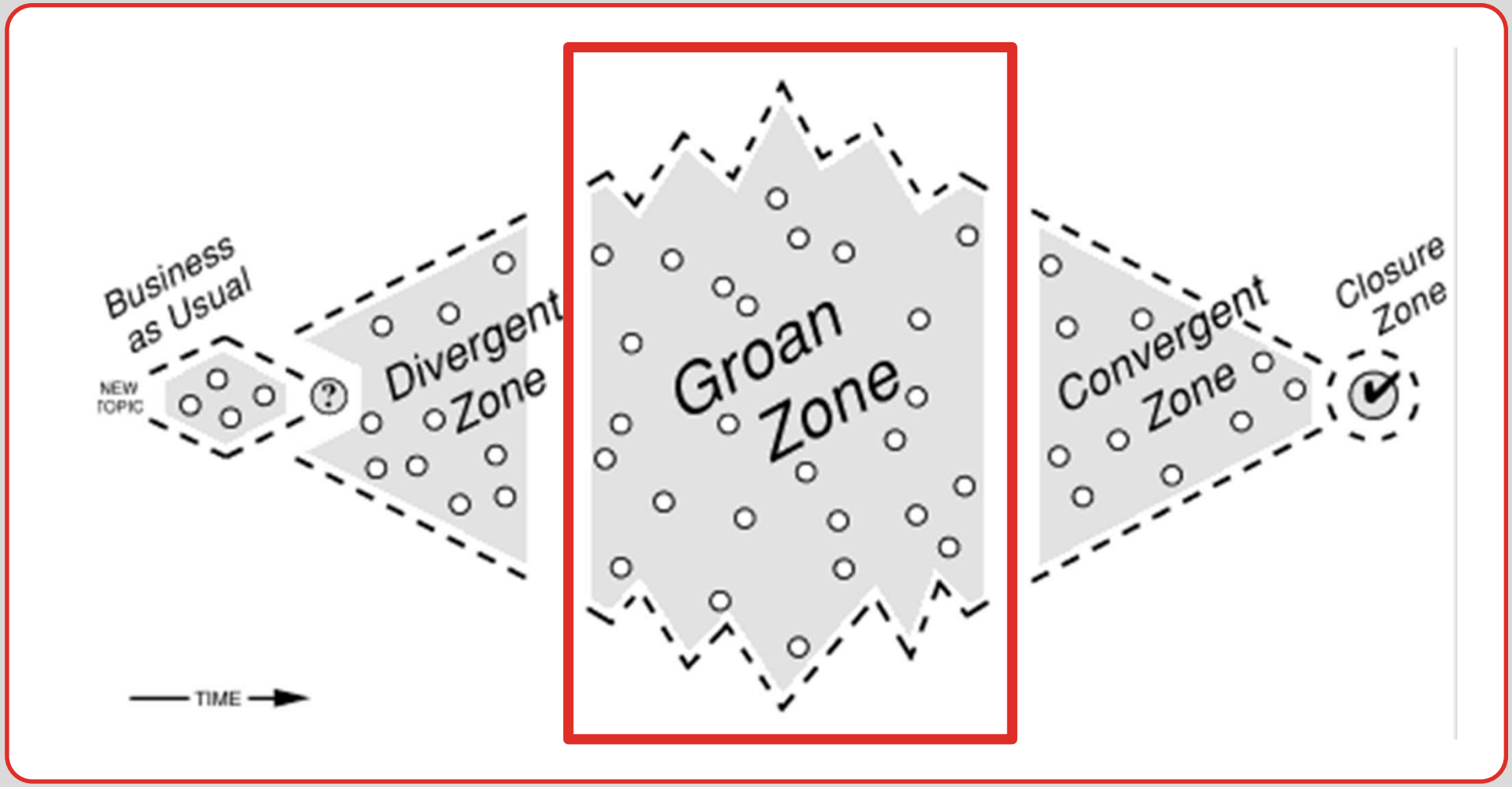
FACILITATING IN THE DIVERGENT ZONE

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CHAOS CAN BE A GOOD THING!

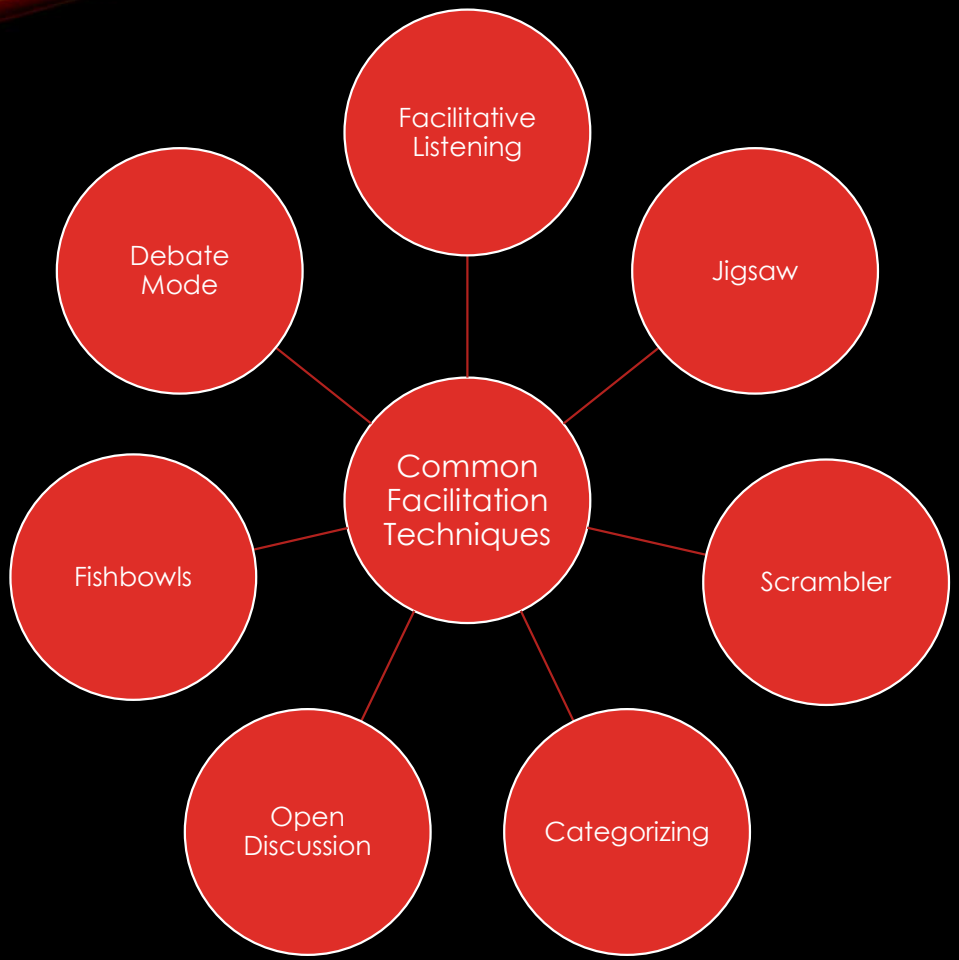
Sometimes what appears as chaos is actually a prelude to creativity.

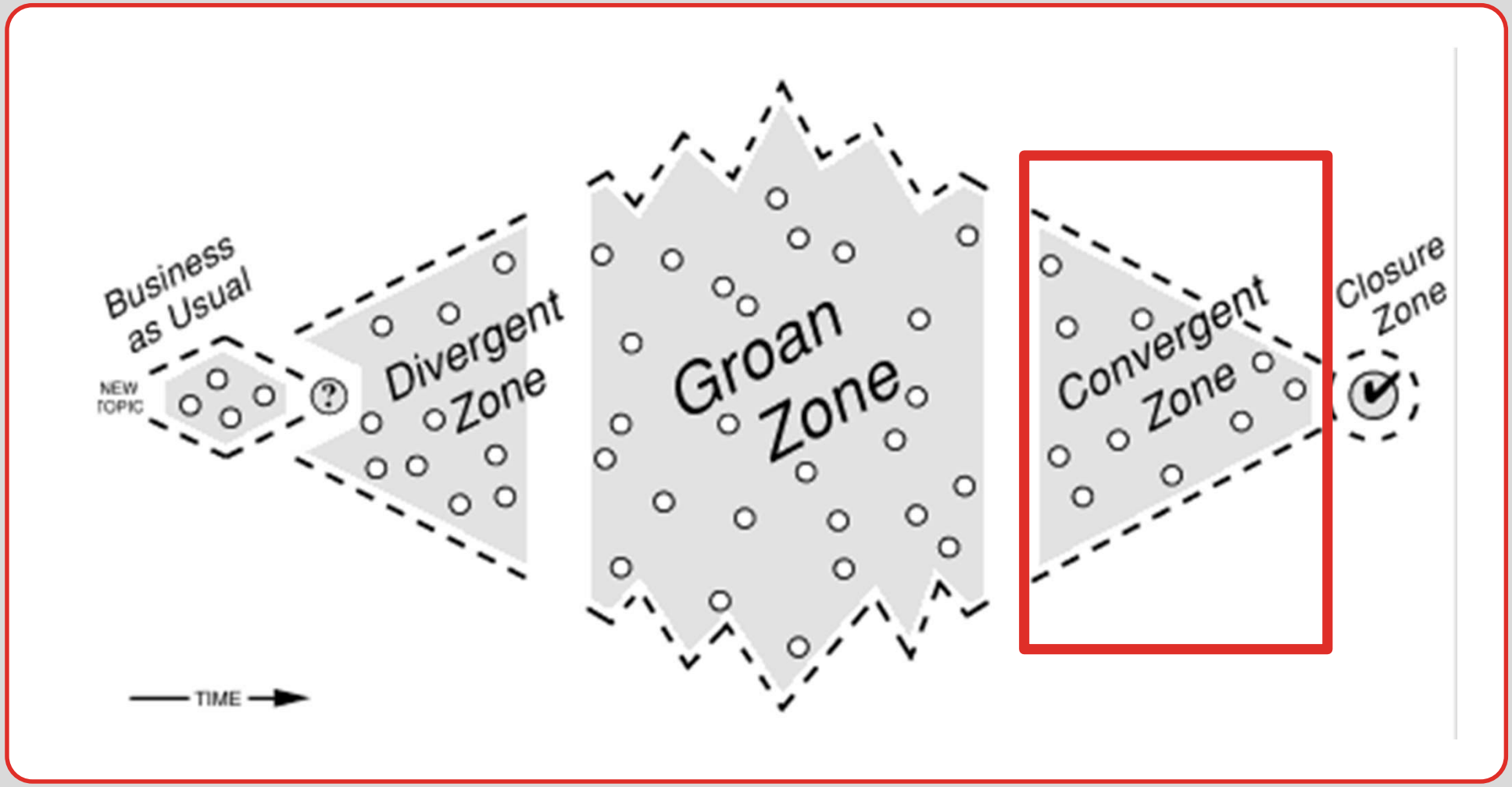
A period of confusion, frustration, misunderstanding and miscommunication is a natural part of group decision-making

Members have to struggle in order to integrate new and different ways of thinking with their own

The act of working through misunderstandings is what builds the foundation for sustainable agreements. Shared understanding leads to meaningful collaboration.

FACILITATING IN THE GROAN ZONE

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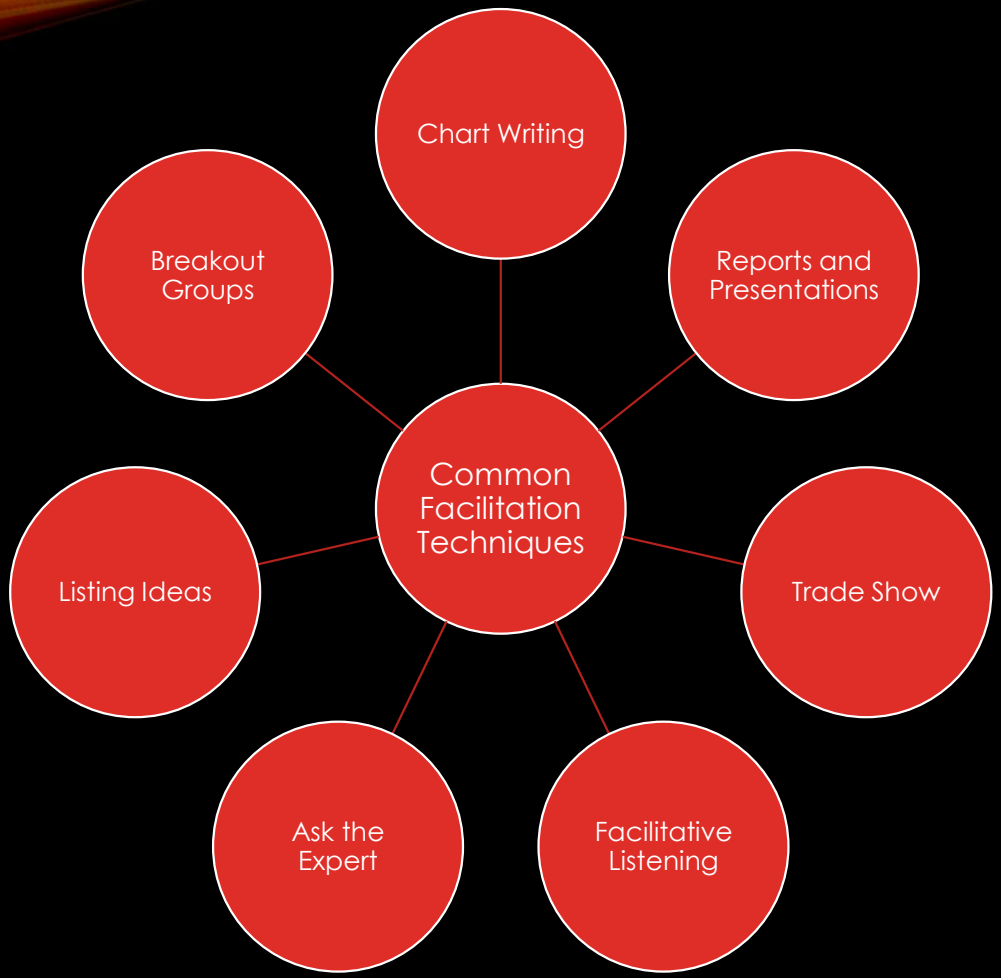
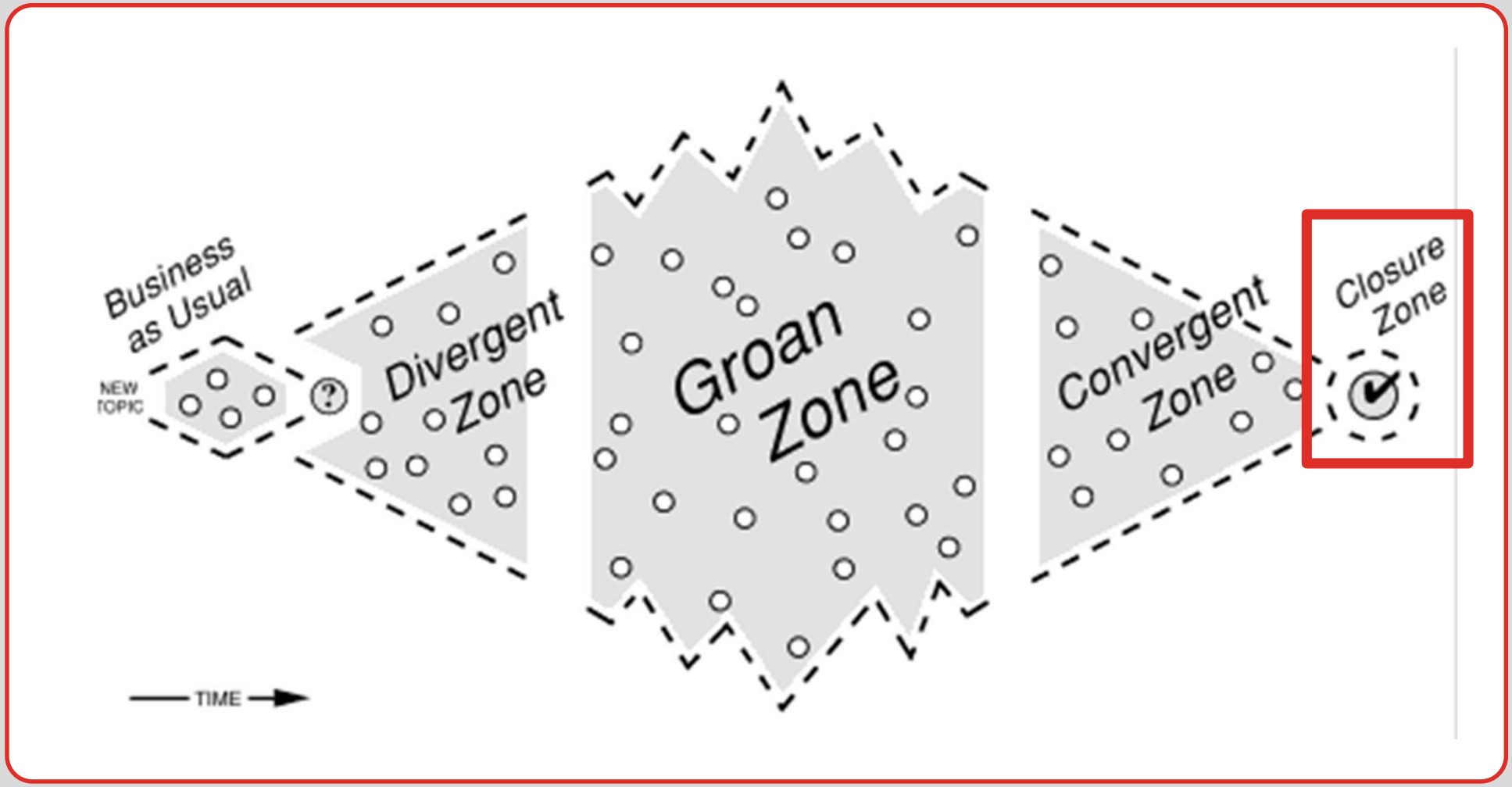
FACILITATING IN THE CONVERGENT ZONE

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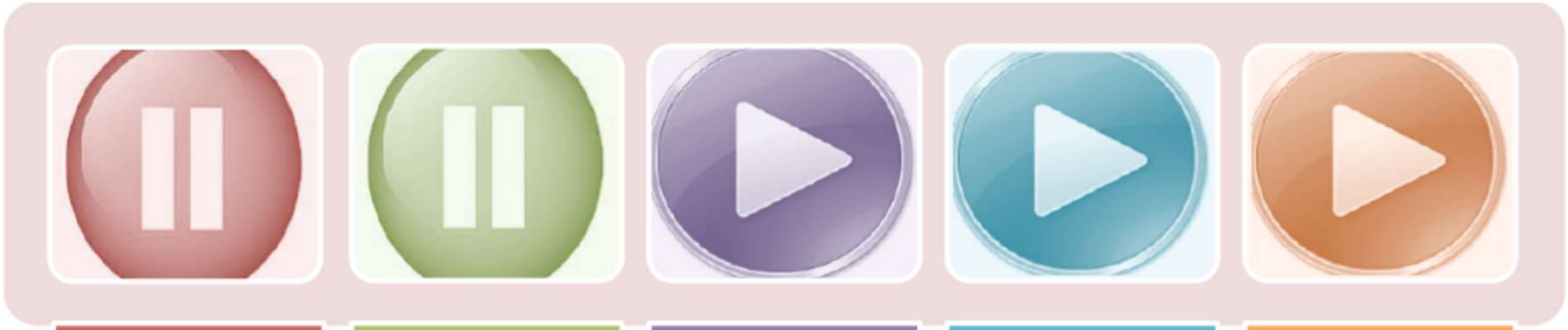
COMMON DECISION RULES

- Unanimous Agreement
- Majority Vote
- Person-in-Charge Decides after Discussion
- Delegation
- Person-in-Charge Decides without Discussion
- “Flip a Coin” (or any arbitrary, random method to make a decision)



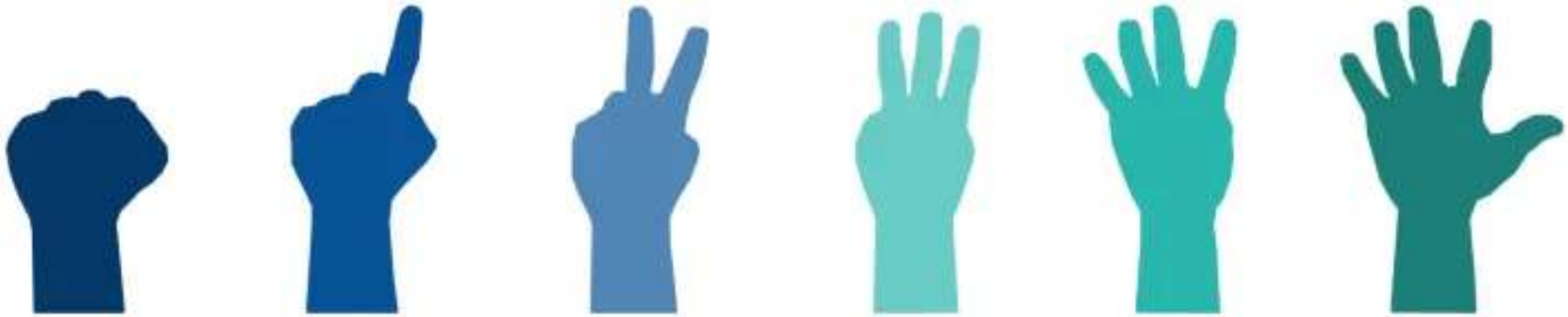
Stop	Hold	Stand Aside	Agreement with Reservations	Endorsement
"I do not agree and feel the need to stand in the way of this decision"	"I believe more work is needed before we make a decision"	"I trust the group and will not block this decision but need to register my disagreement"	"I can live with it"	"I like it"

WHAT LEVEL OF SUPPORT IS OPTIMAL?

Enthusiastic support is necessary ⟷ **Lukewarm support is good enough**

High Stakes	Overall Importance	Low Stakes
Long-term Impact	Duration of Impact	Short-term Only
Tough Problem	Difficulty of the Problem	Simple Problem
High Investment	Stakeholder Buy-In	Low Investment
High Autonomy	Empowerment of Group Members	Low Autonomy

Which best describes your level of agreement?



No way!

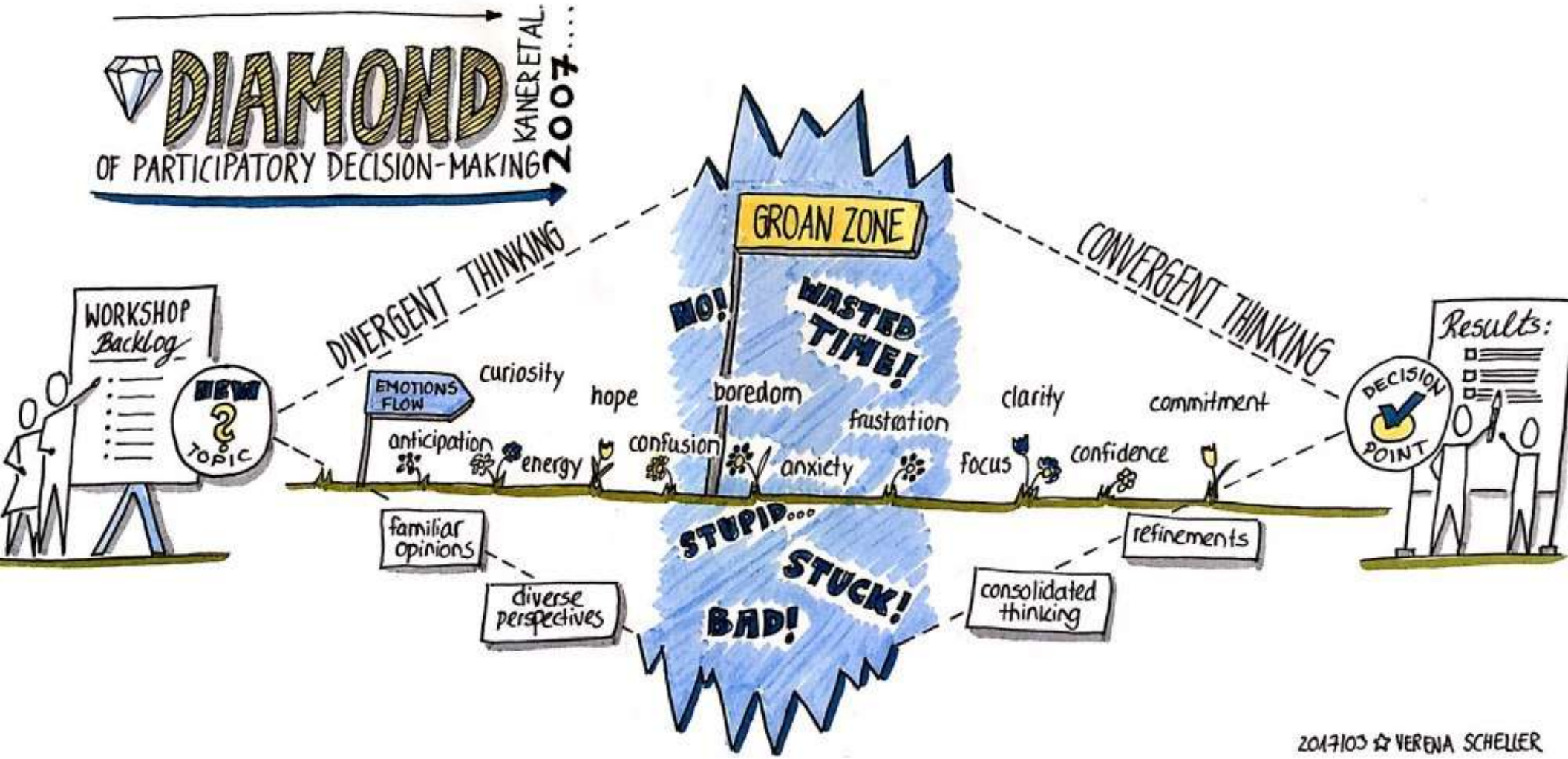
Hold on, we need to talk about this.

I have reservations, but I could be convinced.

I guess I'm okay with it.

Sounds good.

Love it!


DIAMOND
OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING
KANER ET AL. 2007....
DIVERGENT THINKING
CONVERGENT THINKING
GROAN ZONE
NO!
WASTED TIME!
WORKSHOP
Backlog
NEW
TOPIC
EMOTIONS FLOW
curiosity
hope
boredom
clarity
commitment
anticipation
energy
confusion
anxiety
frustration
focus
confidence
DECISION POINT
Results:
familiar opinions
diverse perspectives
STUPID...
STUCK!
BAD!
consolidated thinking
refinements
2017|03 ☆ VERENA SCHELLER

CORE VALUES

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RESOURCES

- EPA, "Public Participation Guide - Tools for Consensus Building and Agreement-Seeking": https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-tools-consensus-building-and-agreement-seeking
- CBI, "Collaborative Approaches to Environmental Decision Making - A State Agency's Guide": https://www.cbi.org/report/collaborative-approaches-to-environmental-decision-making-state-agency-s-guide-to-effective-dialogue-and-stakeholder-engagement/
- The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement by The Consensus Building Institute
- Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making, Sam Kaner