

WEARING TWO HATS

Accountability and Governance Solutions in Worker Co-op

Supporting resources
November 20, 2025



WHAT YOU'LL GET

From our workshop

01

Understanding your responsibilities as a worker and an owner and their unique differences

02

Gain practical tools to understand how to define your roles and governance practices

03

How to use democracy can be built on a foundation of diversity and justice to strengthen your governance practices



When you think of power what words come to mind?



When you think of power in Co-ops what words come to mind?



What is power?

“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”
~ Frederick Douglass

The Sheila McKechnie Foundation defines power as

- **The ability to create** - or resist - change
- **Systemic** and all around us
- **Dynamic** - contextual and intersectional
- **Not finite, but it is accumulative** - Not a zero-sum game - if someone has more power, it does not mean that someone else must have less. Access to more power can generate more access to more power. More effort to shift a power dynamic than to maintain it
- **Structural and cultural** - Formalized through social structures. Upheld by dominant assumptions
- **Personal and interpersonal** - role-based, knowledge based, relationship based or unexpected



EXPRESSIONS OF POWER

Adapted from Batiwala, Srilatha, *All About Power - Understanding Social Power & Power Structures*, CREA, 2000

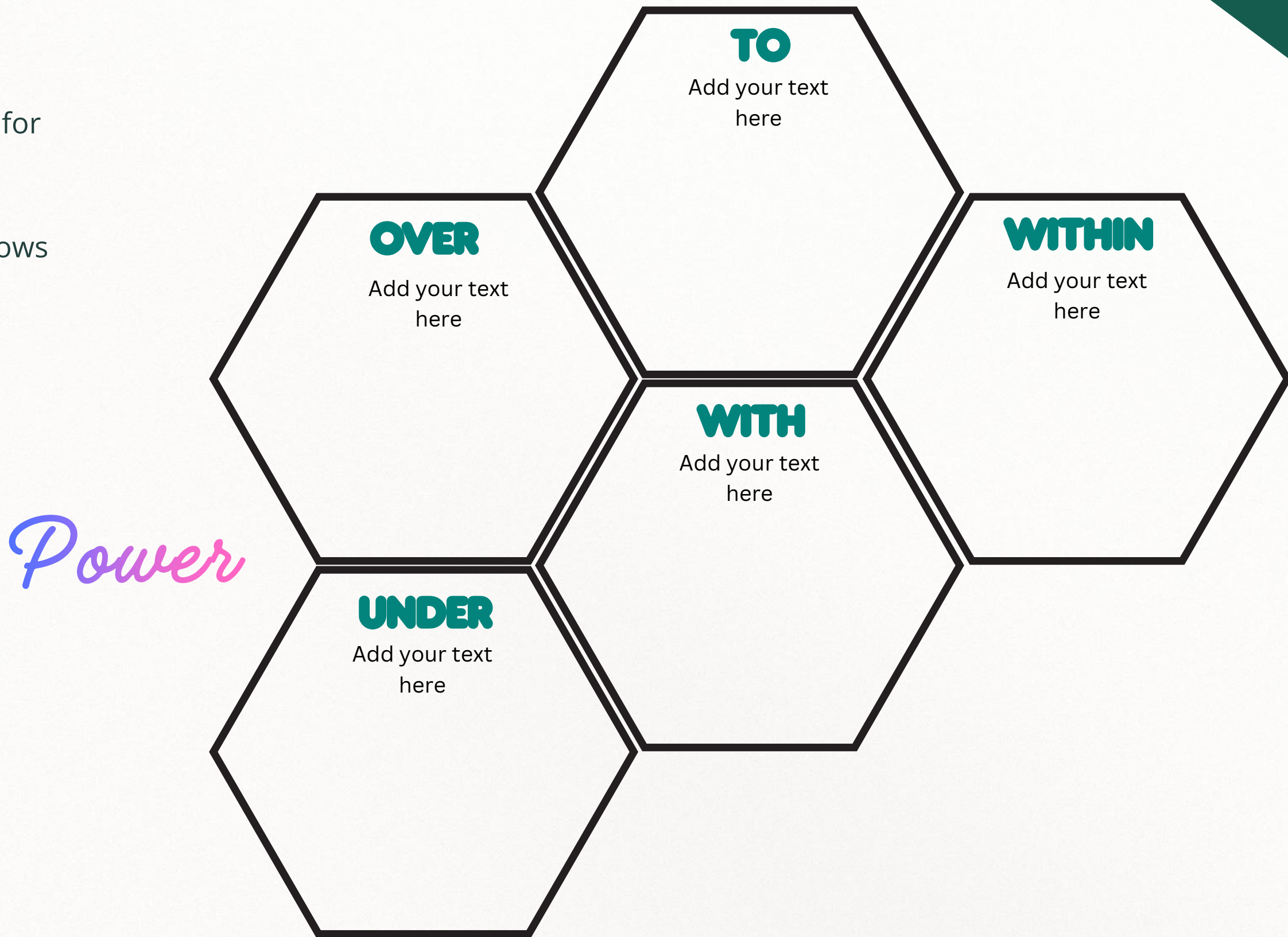
Power **OVER**
Power **TO**
Power **WITHIN**
Power **WITH**
Power **UNDER**

- Power Over** Who decides what? Who has direct or indirect control over others
- Power To** Our capacity to act for ourselves or for others towards goals . Agency.
- Power Within** The self as a source of power. Connect with through reflection and empowerment.
- Power With** Collective Power. Has been used for good and evil.
- Power Under** Who decides what? Who has direct or indirect control over others

What Power do you and your teammates hold?

Use this tool to map out how power is showing up for you as an individual power first.

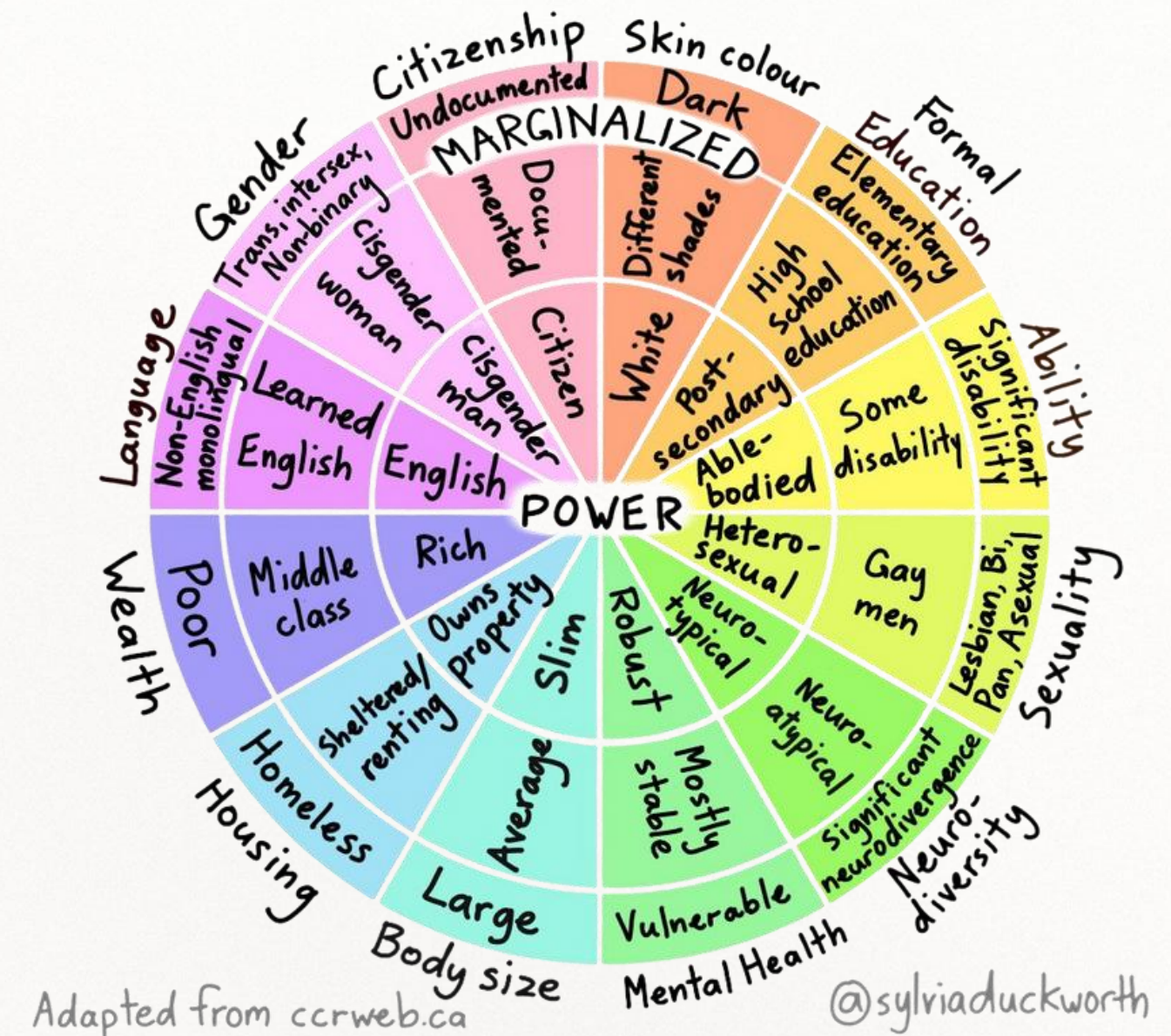
Then use this tool again to map out how power shows up for you as a group.



PRIVILEGE AND POWER

Being conscious of individual power and privilege and discussing this as a group, you gain insight into what people carry with them and how power dynamics may impact conversations in your co-op

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE

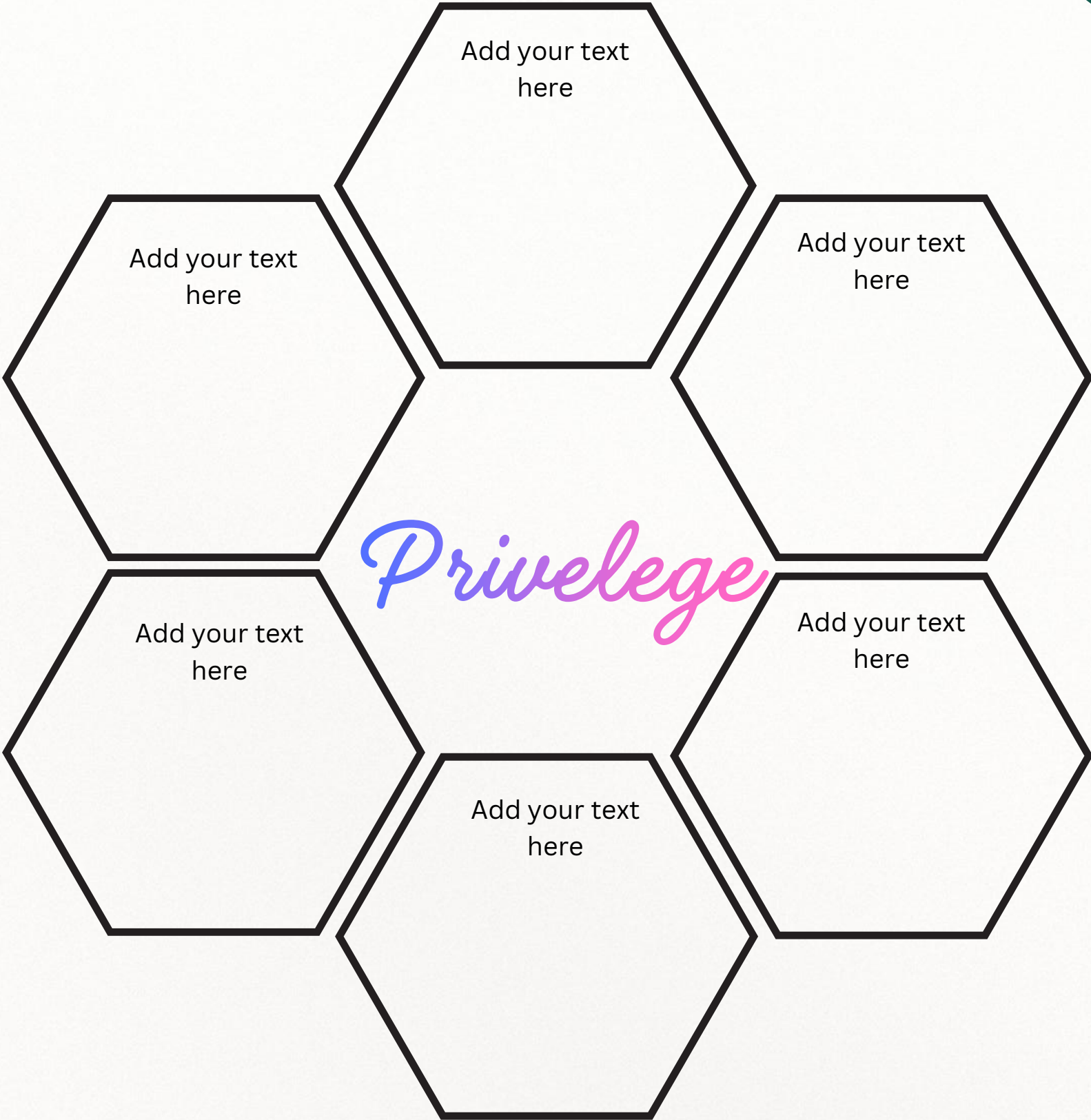


What Privelege are you bringing to the table

Using the wheel of power and privilege use this tool to identify what privilege you bring into the conversation.

Bring this as a a tool for conversation with your team.

By building awareness of where each other comes from you can better understand and build happy and healthy teams.





There are many roles with various responsibilities in a Co-operative. Which of the following are you accountable for in your Co-op?

Power mapping

On your table you will find the following

- Stack of post-its with common accountabilities
- Flip Chart broken into 2 sections - Governance and Operations

Task

As a group, work through each item and decide whether it belongs in the Governance column or the Operations column.

Assign the following roles

Notetaker - take notes

Reporter - someone to report back to the group on your discussions

Timekeeper - someone to keep time

Time

~15 minutes to sort and discuss



REFLECTIONS

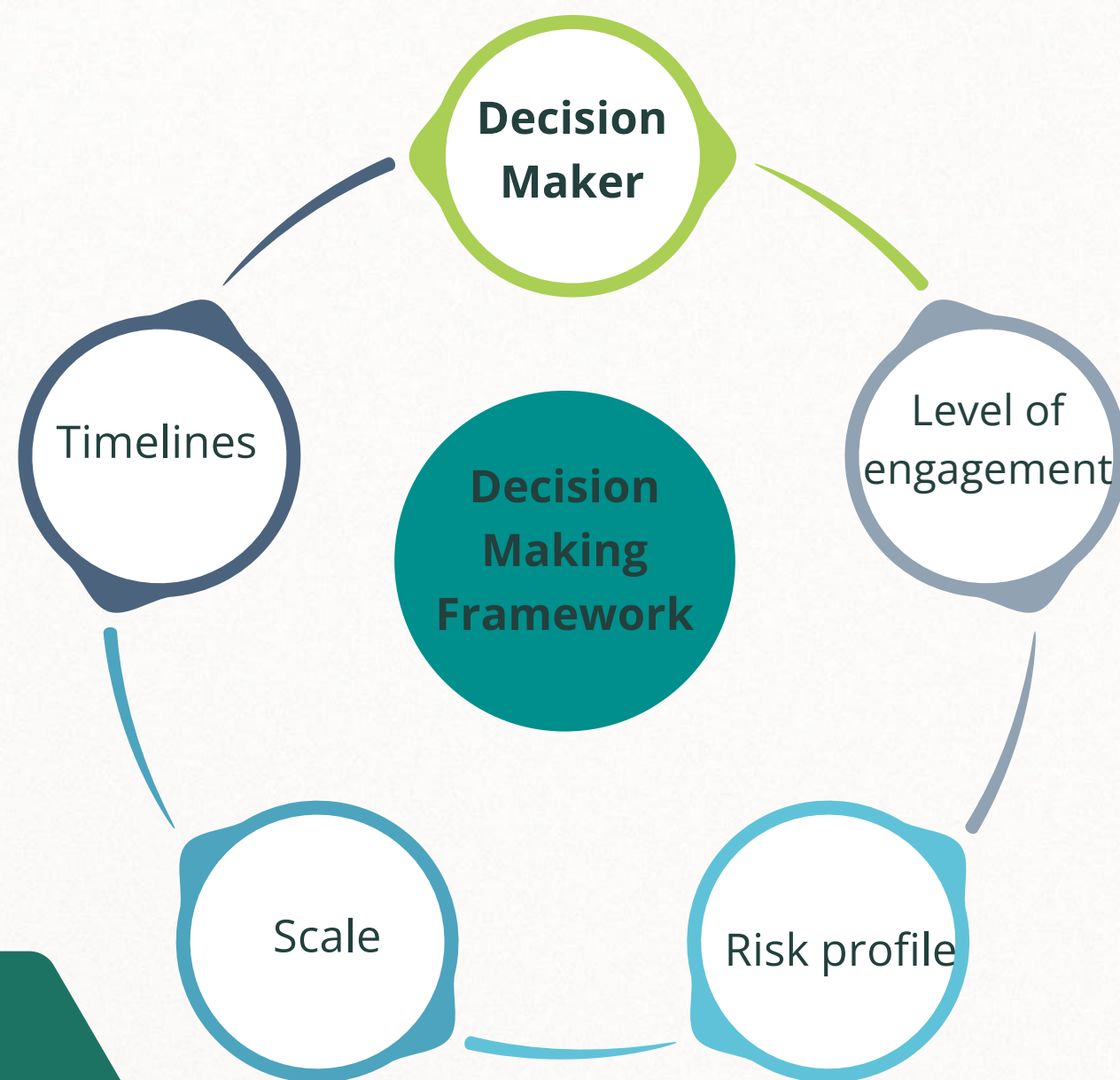
- What was obvious?
- Which ones were difficult?
- Where did you not have alignment? What was the discussion?
- How might you use this exercise in your Co-op?



What decisions do you make as a Board Member?



What decisions do you make as a Worker?



MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT MAKING DECISIONS

By having a clear understanding of who will have the final decision, it will create more clarity for your team and allow things to move more quickly. Start with documenting who the decision maker is and move from there.

Decision Maker	Who makes this decision?
Timeliness	How soon do we need this decision made?
Level of engagement	Who gets consulted? How much?
Risk Profile	What could go wrong with this decision?
Scale	How big will the impact of this decision be? (e.g. affect our revenues and expenses, effect on somebody's job)



Decision Making Template

Level of Engagement (who do we need to include?)	Risks	Scale	Decision	Decision Maker	Timeline that this needs to be made within
Full Board	• Cost • Lack of internal capacity to support regular billing	• Impacts the full organization	1.Should we hire a bookkeeper?	Finance Committee	Within the next 3 months
This is a sample of how to apply the framework. For a spreadsheet version navigate here.					

Balancing Power

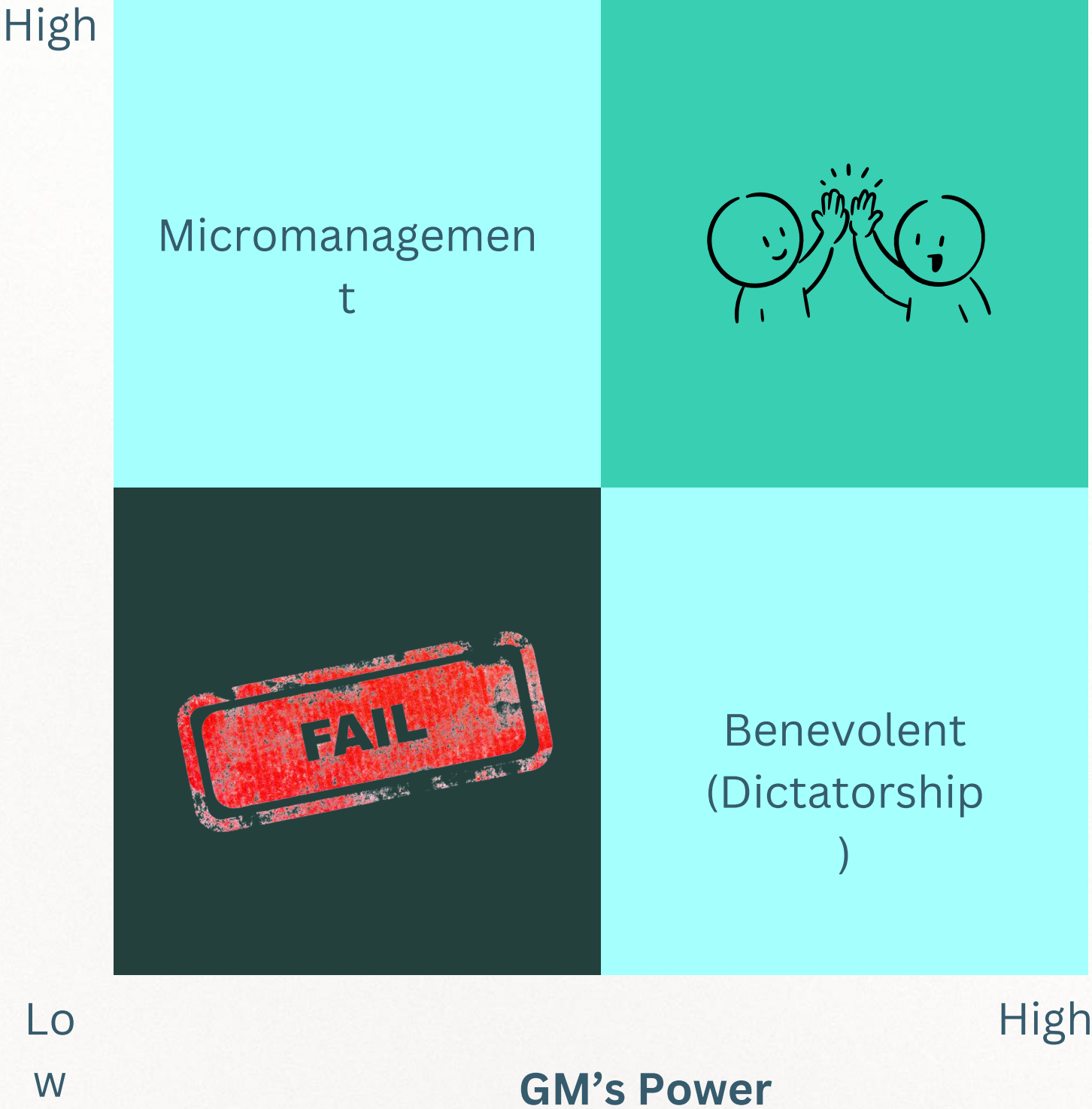
After understanding who, when and how decisions are made, it is crucial to map out the balance of power in your co-operatives.

Power should be balanced with the Board and the GM feeling empowered to make decisions.

This balance comes from outlining a clear understanding of your role and what you're accountable for.

As you plan out your work you can also use this framework as a check to ensure that power remains shared by the board and management.

Board's Power



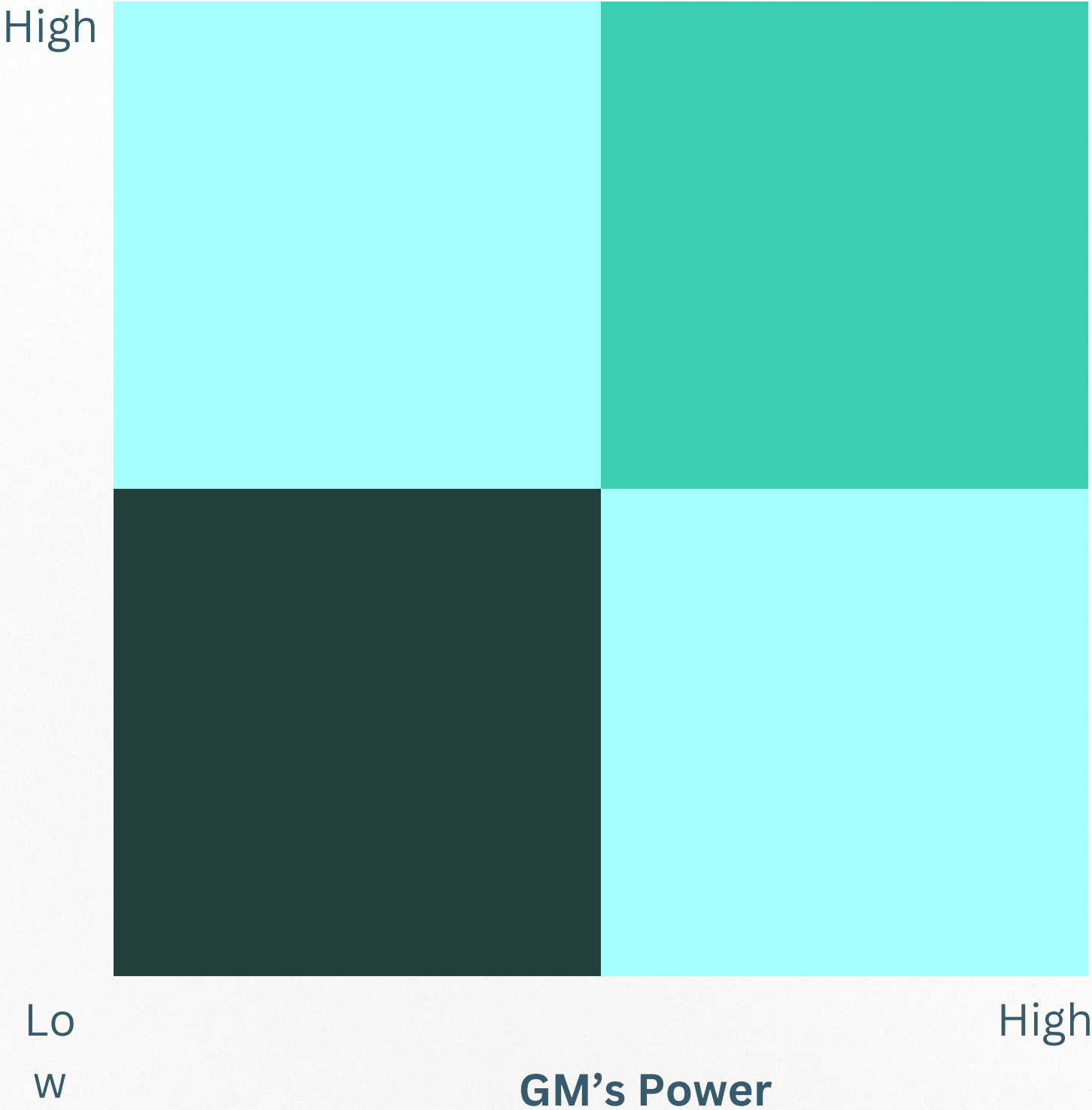
Based on work done by Art Sherwood on Cooperative Strategic Leadership and Courtney Berner Center for Cooperatives University of Wisconsin.

Balancing Power

Map the power balance. Some examples to start can be found below but use this to map your own Co-ops items

- 1.Strategic Planning
- 2.Budget Approval
- 3.Hiring and Firing of Management
- 4.Program Design and Delivery
- 5.Fundraising Strategy
- 6.Partnerships and Alliances
- 7.Policy Development
- 8.Risk Management
- 9.Performance Evaluation
- 10.Branding
- 11.Communications

Board’s Power



Based on work done by Art Sherwood on Cooperative Strategic Leadership and Courtney Berner Center for Cooperatives University of Wisconsin.

REFLECTIONS

- What was obvious?
- Which ones were difficult?
- Where did you not have alignment? What was the discussion?
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TWO HATS - POWER



Governance

- xyz
- **Power Over** - Management. This plays out as oversight of Management and the Organization that they are delivering on the strategic goals.
 - **Power To** - setting the strategic direction. Meet as a committee to ensure that the strategic goals are being delivered on.
 - **Power With** - Management to ensure the success of the organization. Building and maintaining strong relationships with Management.
 - **Power Within** - Access to information to make the right decisions, knowledge and expertise, lived experience



Operations

- xyz
- **Power Over** - in a hierarchical worker co-op staff. In a flat structure - ourselves.
 - **Power To** - make operational decisions
 - **Power With** - the board and staff to ensure the success of the organization. Building and maintaining strong relationships with Management.
 - **Power Within** - Access to information to make the right decisions, knowledge and expertise, lived experience

HOW DO YOU USE YOUR POWER



Board of Directors

- xyz
- Strategic oversight and direction
 - Financial oversight
 - Establishing operating policies
 - Oversight and support of management
 - Member Engagement



Worker Owner
Members

- xyz
- Exercise Democratic Member Control through electing the Board of Directors and voting on major changes that impact the full board membership
 - Participate in governance e.g. committees



Management

- Run day-to-day operations
- Report to the Board of Directors
- Plan and execute on the operations to achieve the strategic plan.

Employees

- Do the day-to-day work
- Take direction from management

Strategies for keeping the correct hat on

- 1.Be intentional** - set different meetings for Board vs Operational work.
- 2.Have clear roles** - understand your accountabilities in each role - keep these handy. In the beginning, print them off and have them by your workstation if possible
- 3.Communicate** - when having conversations, say “wearing my Board hat” or “wearing my operations hat”
- 4.Hold each other accountable** - check-in with each other - was this a board discussion or a management discussion?



“Power is the ability to achieve purpose”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Workshop tools
and resources



Connect with us



 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/gia-consulting-co-operative>



 [@giaconsultingcoop](https://www.instagram.com/giaconsultingcoop)

Some Additional Tools

1. Batliwala, Srilatha All about Power - Understanding Social Power & Power Structures, CREA
(https://www.creaworld.org/media/pdf/resources/publications/all-about-power_en.pdf)
2. University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives. (n.d.). Governance (How cooperatives are controlled). Retrieved November 8, 2025, from <https://uwcc.wisc.edu/resources/governance-2/>
3. School, Marilyn and Art Sherwood, Cooperative Grocer, Four Pillars of Cooperative Governance: A new model grounded in the cooperative difference" Jan-Feb 3014