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International Centre
for Co-operative
Management

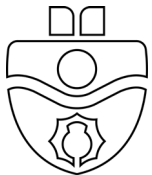
Humanistic governance in worker cooperatives: unlocking collective capacities

Cian McMahon & Sonja Novkovic
NERI Labour Market Conference
July 6, 2021

Cooperative Governance project

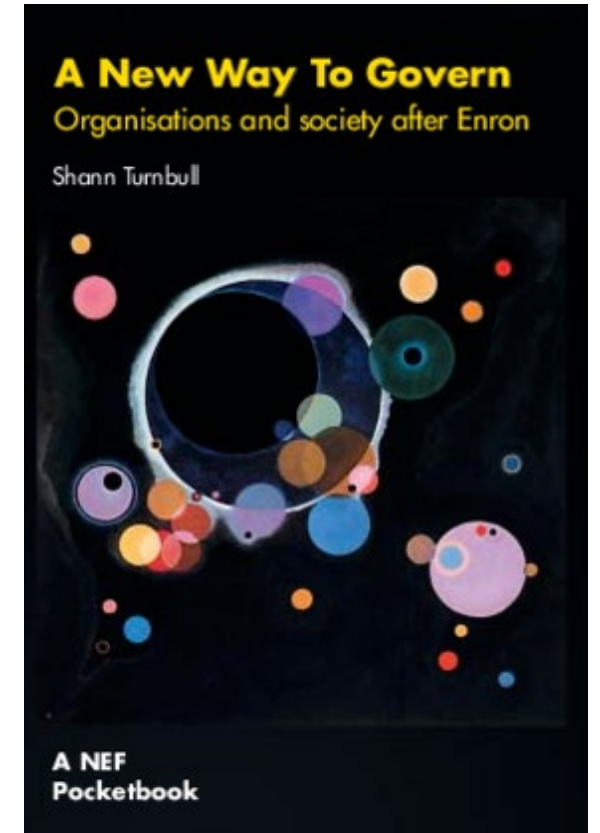
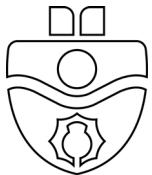
Supported by the FWO Belgium
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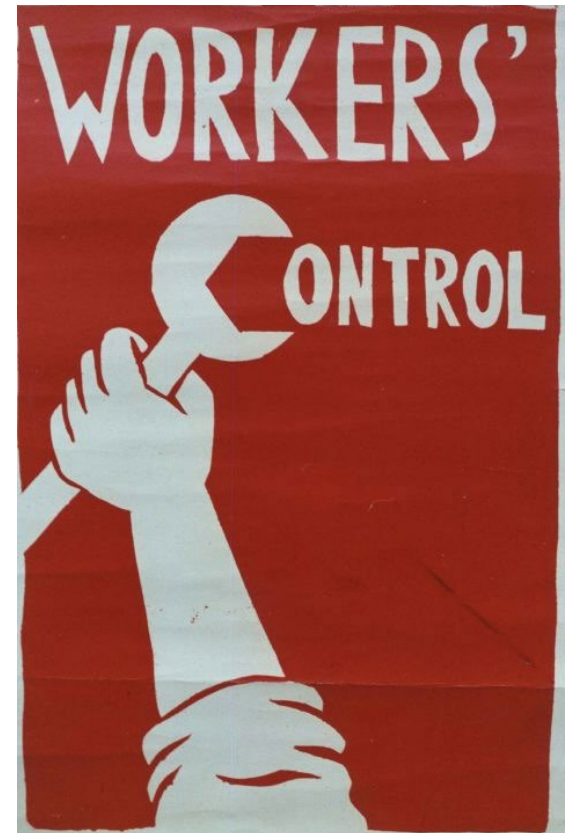
Good governance in cooperatives

- Democratic and participatory **Structures-Processes-Dynamics**
 - Humanistic economics and management lit (Lutz & Lux, 1988; Pirson & Turnbull, 2011)
 - Contingencies and contexts (Morgan, 1986; Blackstock, 2011)
- Geared to **dual economic and socio-ecological purpose** of coops (Novkovic 2012; Puusa et al., 2016)



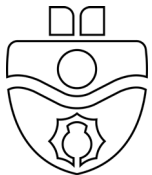
Democracy and dignity at work

- **Worker** coops particularly *well suited* to humanistic governance (Lutz, 1999; Ellerman, 2021)
 - Worker-member wears '**multiple hats**' (Mamouni Limnios et al., 2018)
 - “Labour as a **commons**” (Azzellini, 2018)



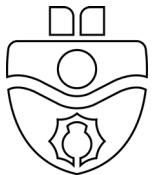
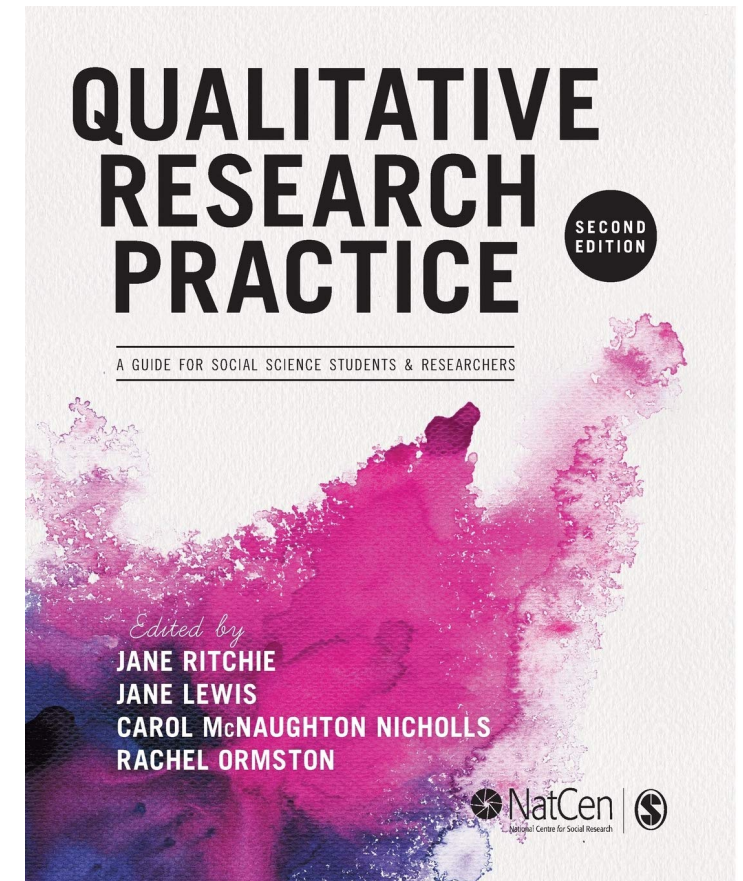
Worker cooperative case studies

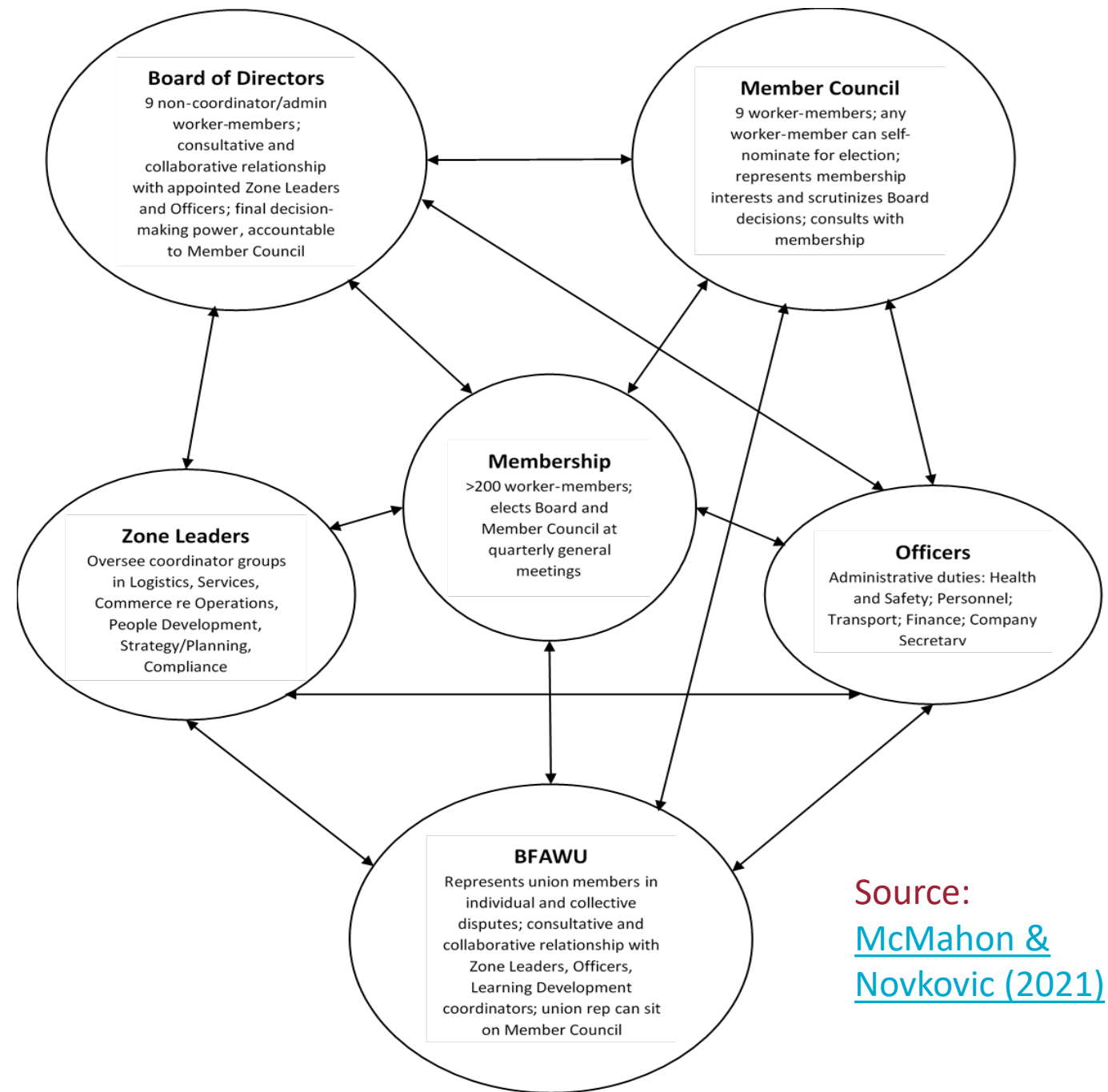
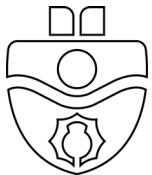
- Identified on basis of reputation for successful democratic and participatory governance
 - Longstanding history of overcoming challenges to coop identity



Methodology

- In-depth semi-structured interviews with coop-affiliated governance experts
 - Purposive and snowball sampling
 - Document analysis (public and internal)
 - Rounds of engagement
- Reconstruct theory in dialogue with empirical findings (Burawoy, 1998)

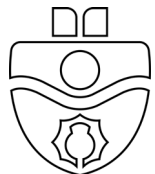
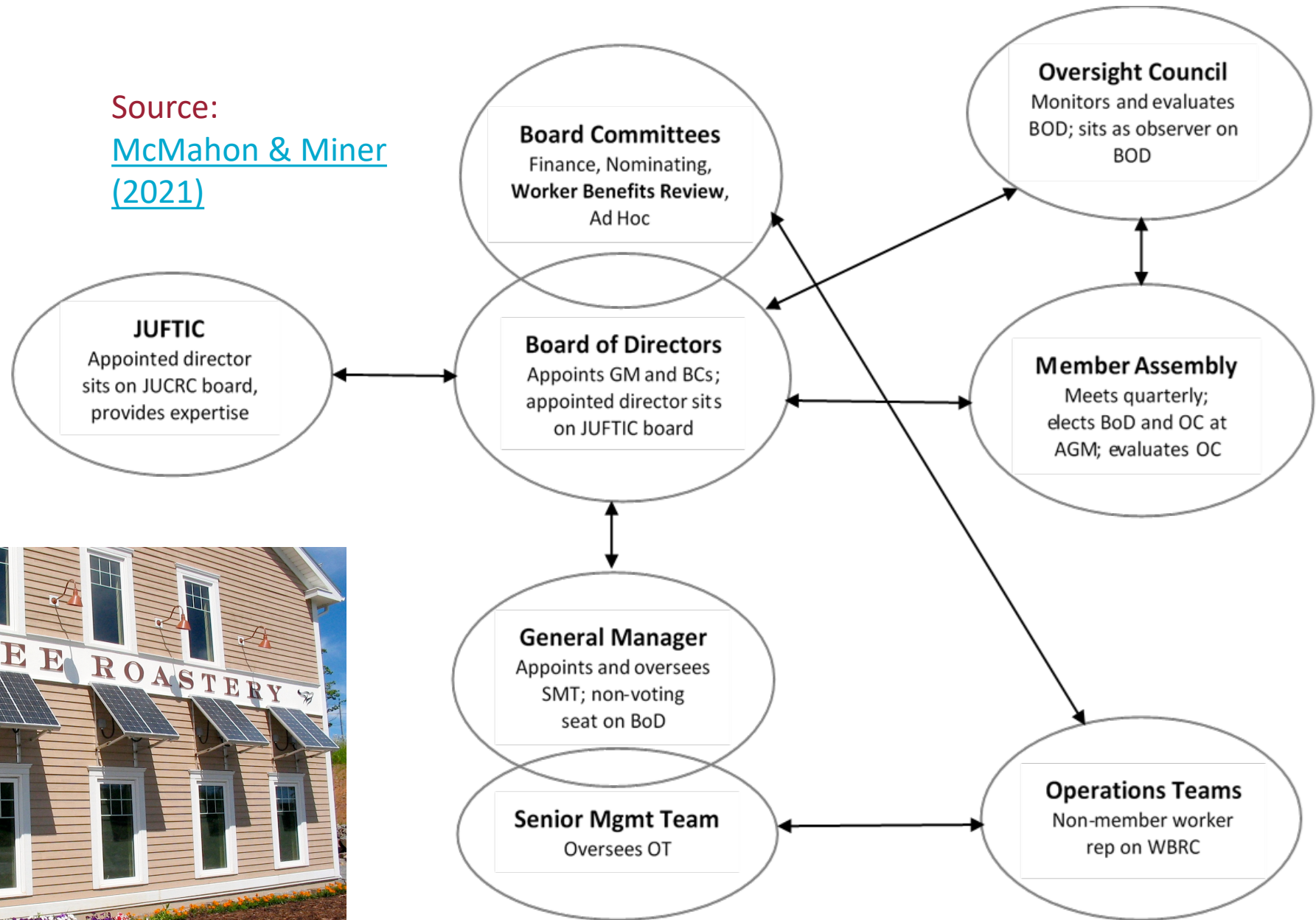




Source:
[McMahon & Novkovic \(2021\)](#)

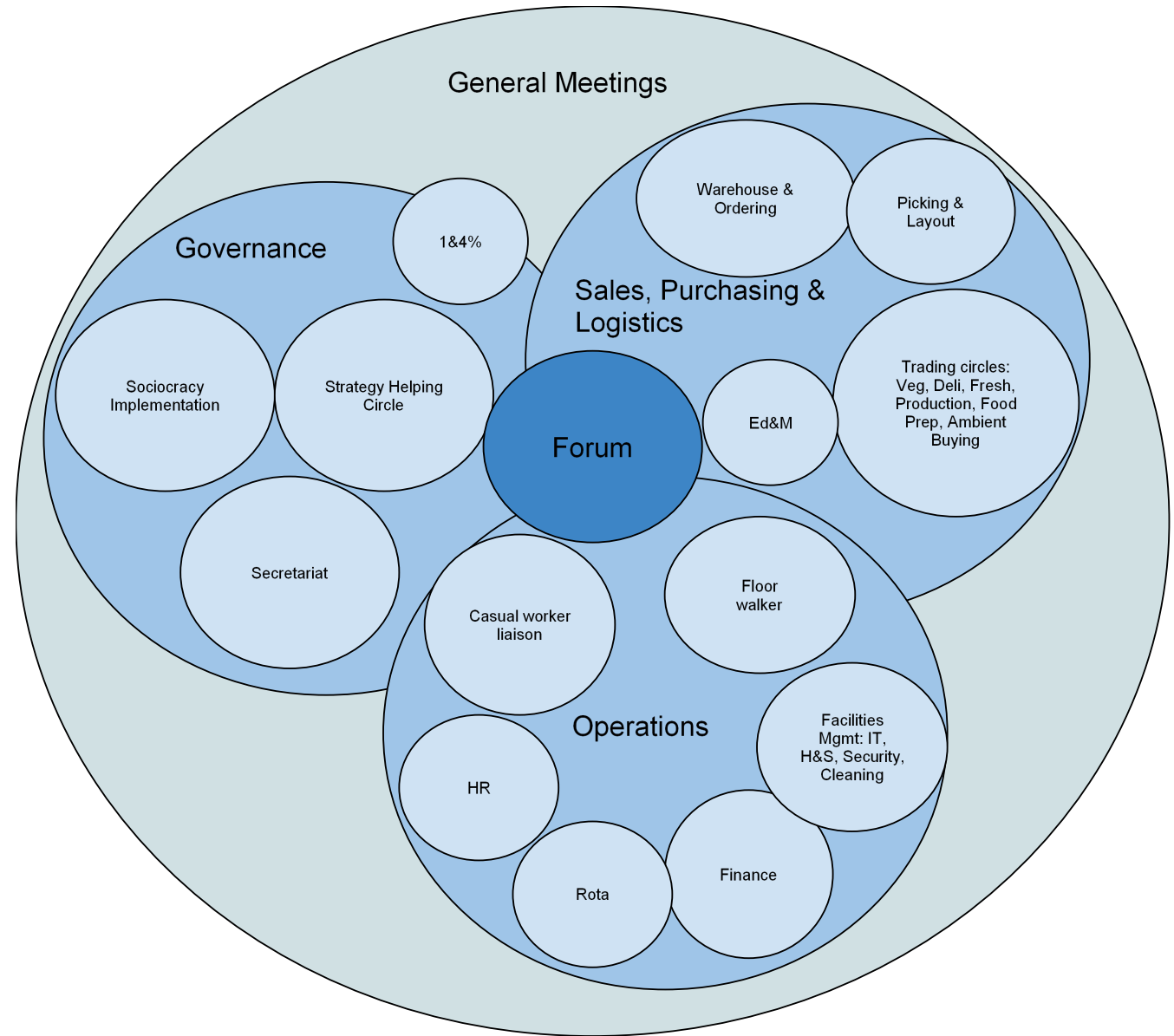


Source:
[McMahon & Miner](#)
(2021)

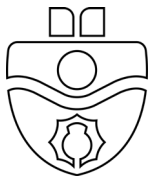


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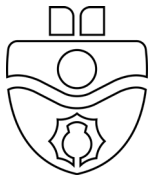


Source: Abbie Kempson (see [McMahon et al., 2021](#))



Indicative findings and future research

- ‘Best’ worker coop governance is (internally and externally) **contingent**
 - e.g. size, industry, **people**, *physical* structure, org culture, law/*regulation*, competitive/isomorphic enviro
- But **humanistic values/principles and practices** (S-P-D) adhered to in all cases studied
 - Networked/nested decision-making bodies/procedures (Cornforth, 1995)
 - Cooperativised worker-member reproduction (Stryjan, 1994)
 - Congruent isomorphic practices (Bager, 1994)
 - Intergenerational organizational stewardship ([Lund and Hancock, 2020](#))
- Ambiguous/contradictory role for trade [unions in worker coops](#)



union-cøps:uk

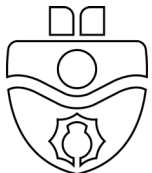
ICCM activities



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