

The Elements of Decision Alignment

Mark S. Miller
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UCI 2017

The Elements of Decision Alignment

Mark S. Miller (**cs**)
Bill Tulloh (**econ**)

UCI 2017

When one object makes a request of another object, why do we expect the second object's behavior to satisfy the first object's wishes?

Networks of entities making requests of other entities:

- Object-oriented programs
- Human organizations
- Human economies

Borrowing Ideas from Economics

“Like an economist ... we are interested in individual agents not so much for what they are internally as for what they have to offer each other

... much of object-oriented design is indeed *Design by Contract.*”

Object-Oriented Software Construction

Bertrand Meyer, 1997

Overview

Making Requests

Aligning Decisions

Making Tradeoffs

Dividing and Composing Knowledge

Making Requests

Principal *why*

Parsing

Gift for Dad

Interface *what*

Stack

Package delivery

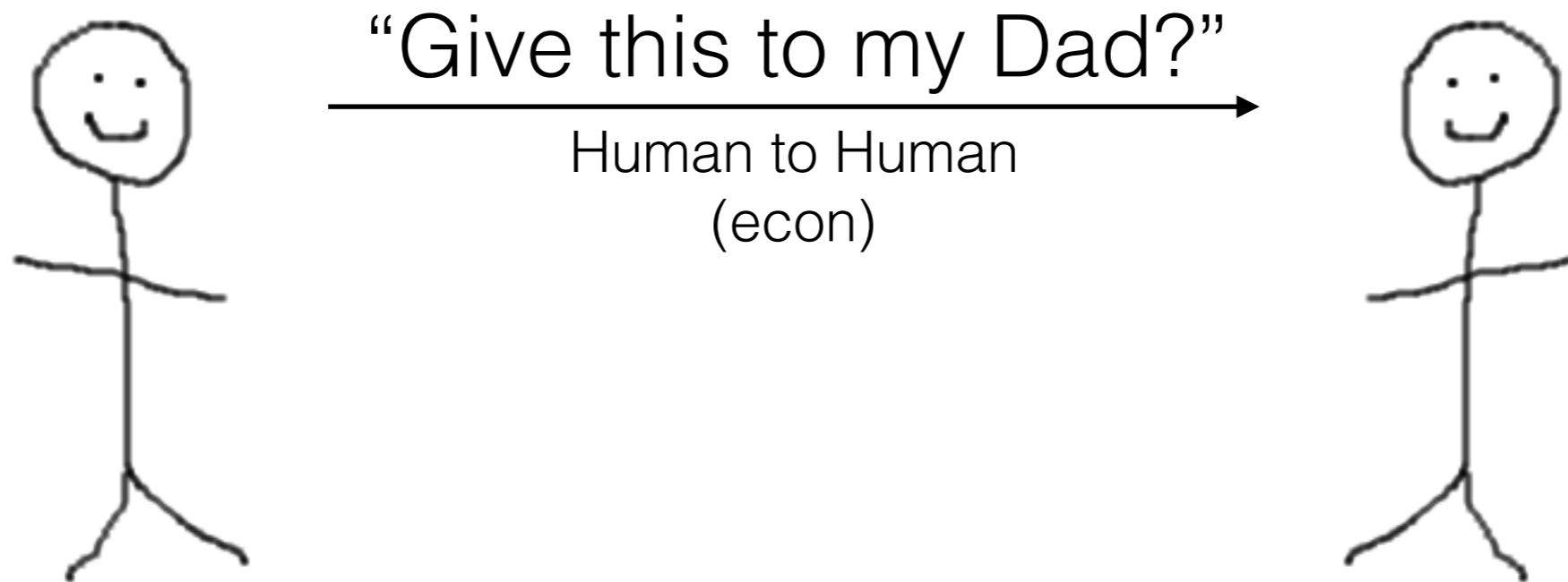
Agent *how*

Array+index

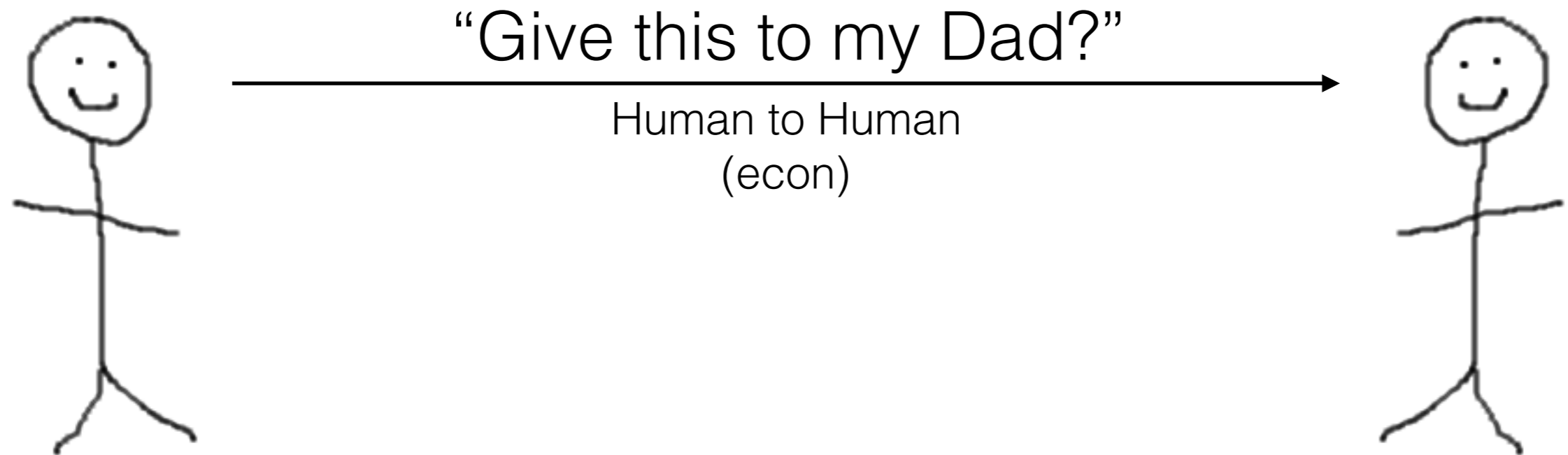
Truck



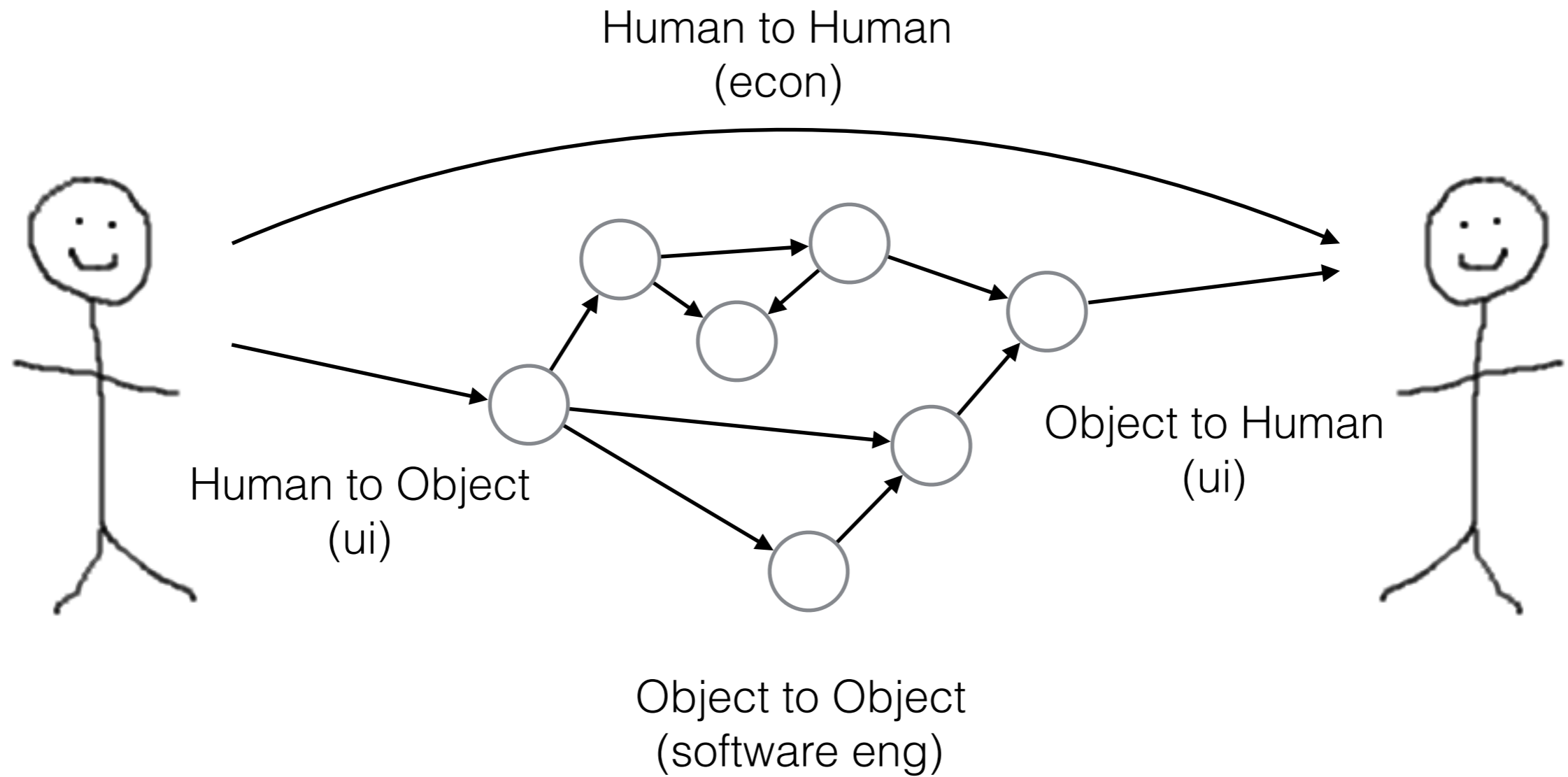
Principal-Agent relationships



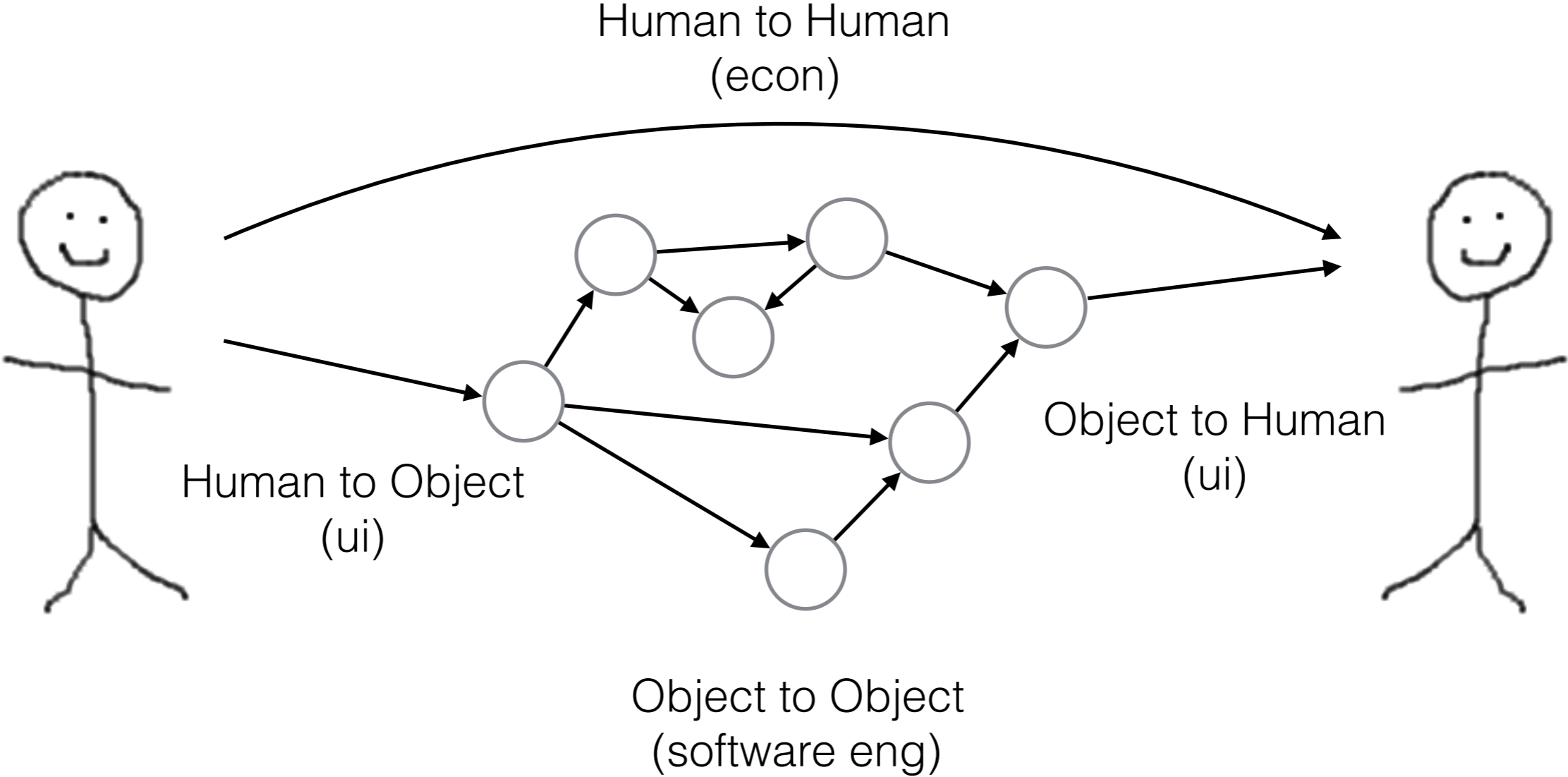
Principal-Agent relationships



Principal-Agent relationships



Principal-Agent networks



Definitions

From Econ:

A **Principal** sends a request to an **Agent**.

An **Agent** reacts to a request from a **Principal**.

Definitions

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A Principal sends a request to an Agent.

An Agent reacts to a request from a Principal.

Incentive Alignment is when a (*human*) Principal or Agent uses **incentives** to induce the other's **intentions** to align with their own.

Definitions

From Econ:

A Principal sends a request to an Agent.

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align: Compose well without interference.

Definitions

From Econ:

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align: Compose well without interference.

From us:

Decision Alignment is when a Principal or Agent uses various tools to make it more likely for the other's decisions and actions to align with their own.

Definitions

From us:

Decision Alignment is when a Principal or Agent uses *various tools* to make it more likely for the other's *decisions and actions* to align with their own.

Definitions

From us:

Decision Alignment is when a *Principal* or *Agent* uses various tools to make it more likely for the other's decisions and actions to align with their own.

This talk:

Decision Alignment is when a *Principal* uses various tools to make it more likely for the Agent's decisions and actions to align with its own.

Information Hiding Benefits

Compose specialized knowledge

Only Principal knows ***why***

Only Agent knows ***how***

Shared knowledge burden: only what's needed for request

Minimize cascading changes

Principal *why*

Parsing

Gift for Dad

Interface *what*

Stack

Package delivery

Agent *how*

Array+index

Truck



Hidden Information Hazards

The principal-agent problem

Pre: Can the agent do what I want?

Request: Will the agent try to do what I want?

Post: Is the agent doing what I want?

Principal *why*

Parsing

Gift for Dad

Interface *what*

Stack

Package delivery

Agent *how*

Array+index

Truck



The Principal-Agent Loop

Pre

Hidden characteristics

Adverse Selection

Request/Contract

Execute the request

Incentive Alignment

Post

Hidden actions

Moral Hazard

Econ: intentional misbehavior

The Principal-Agent Loop

Pre

Hidden characteristics

Request/Contract

Execute the request

Post

Hidden actions

Econ: intentional misbehavior

CS: accidental misbehavior

The Principal-Agent Loop

Pre

Hidden characteristics

Select agent.
Screening.
Agent signals.

Inspect internals.
Abilities, limits.

Request/Contract

Execute the request

Allow actions.
Scope of authority.

Explain request.
What the agent is
supposed to do.

Reward cooperation.
If agent does that.

Post

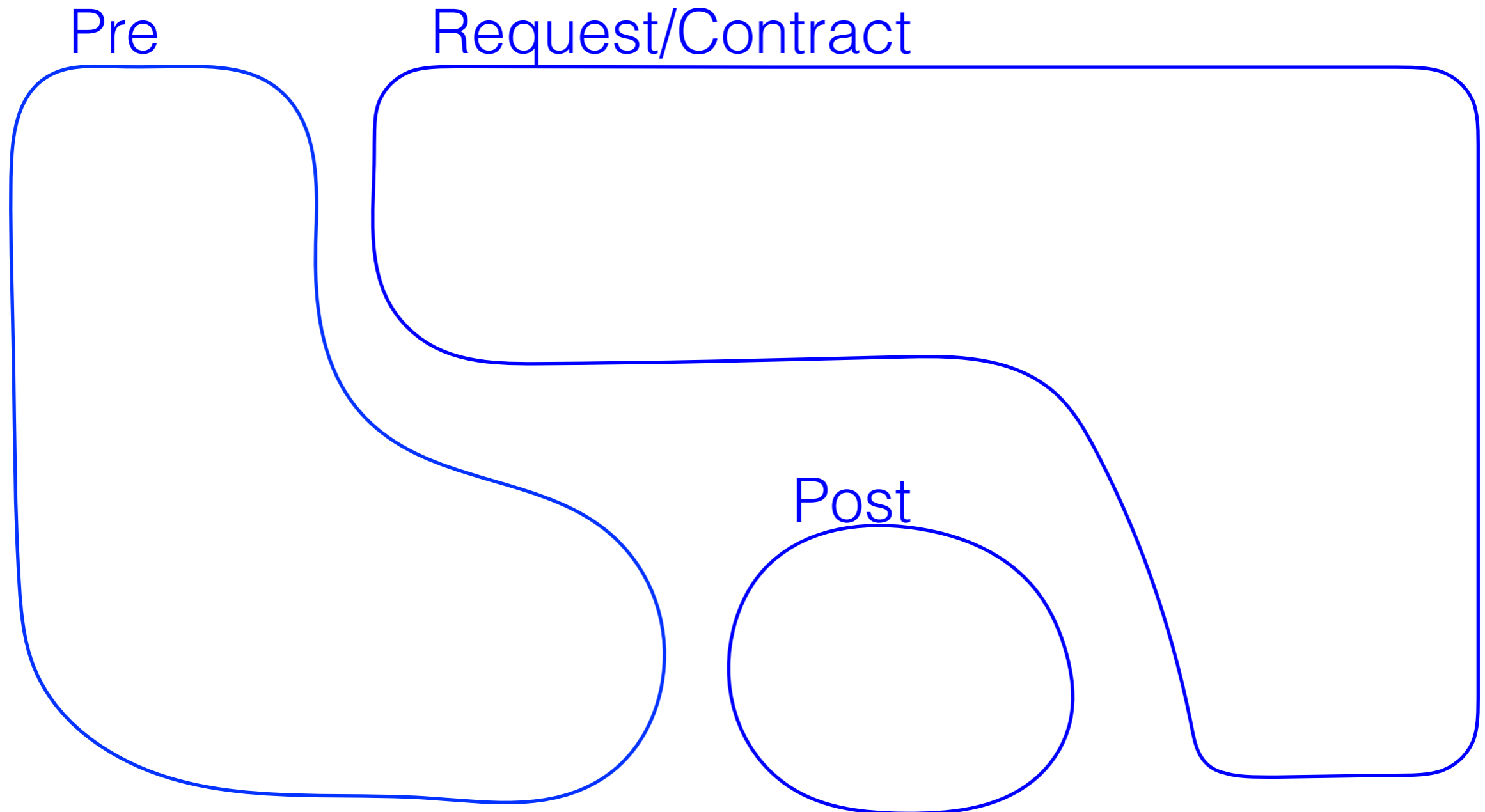
Hidden actions

Monitor effects.
What agent is
doing, or did.

Feedback to guide
future selection.

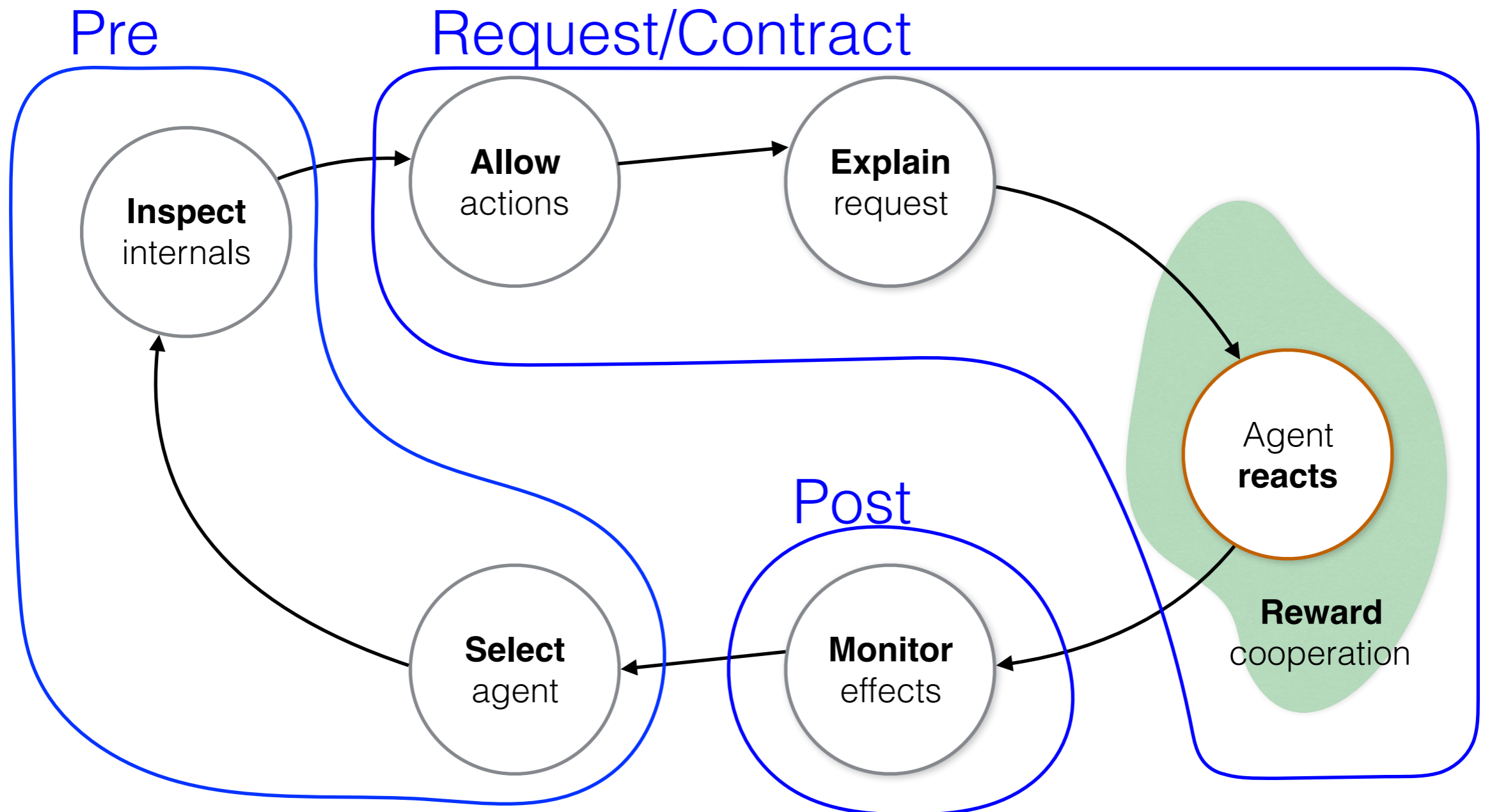
The Principal-Agent Loop

Only loosely ordered

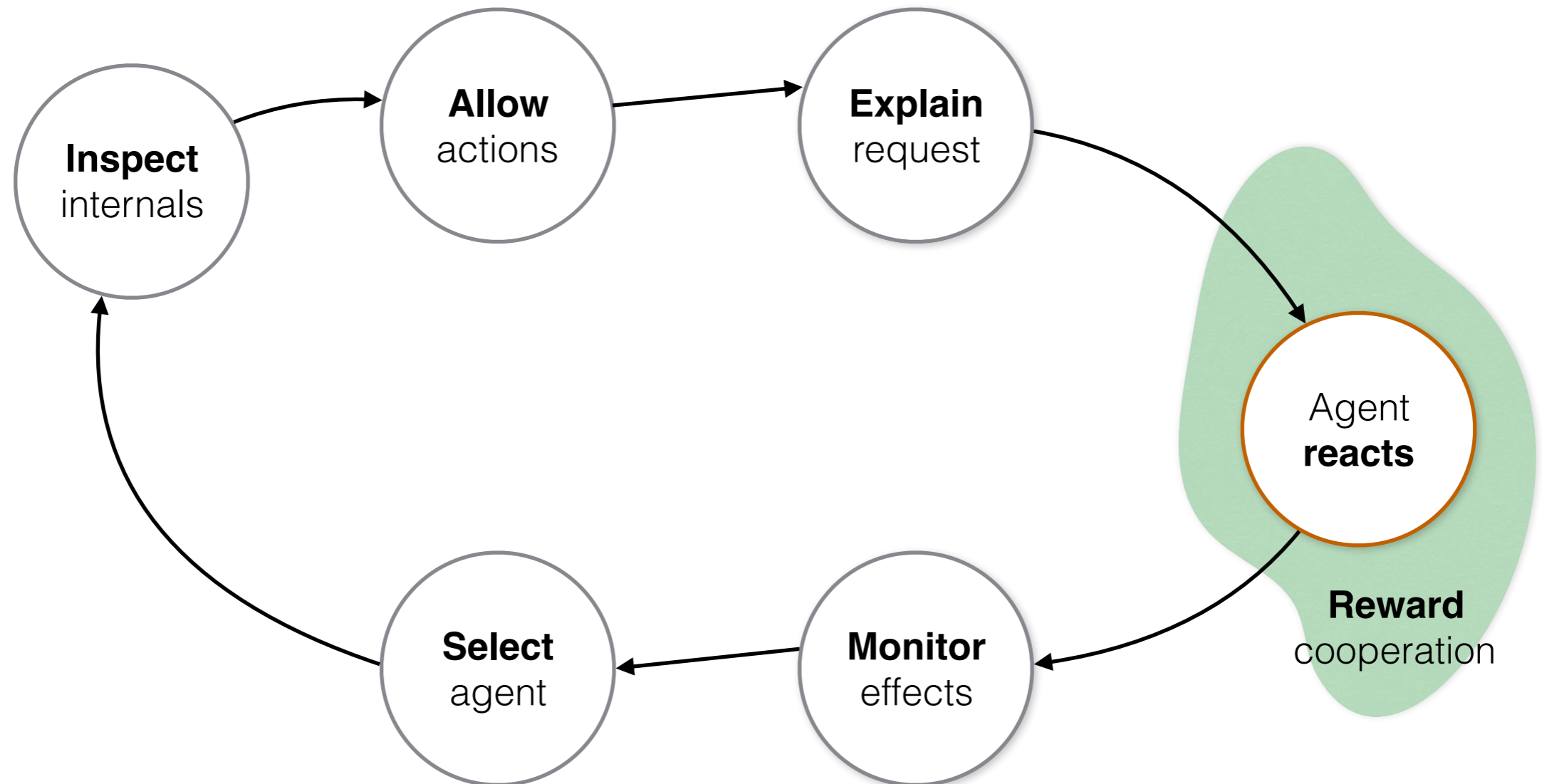


The Principal-Agent Loop

Only loosely ordered



The Principal-Agent Loop

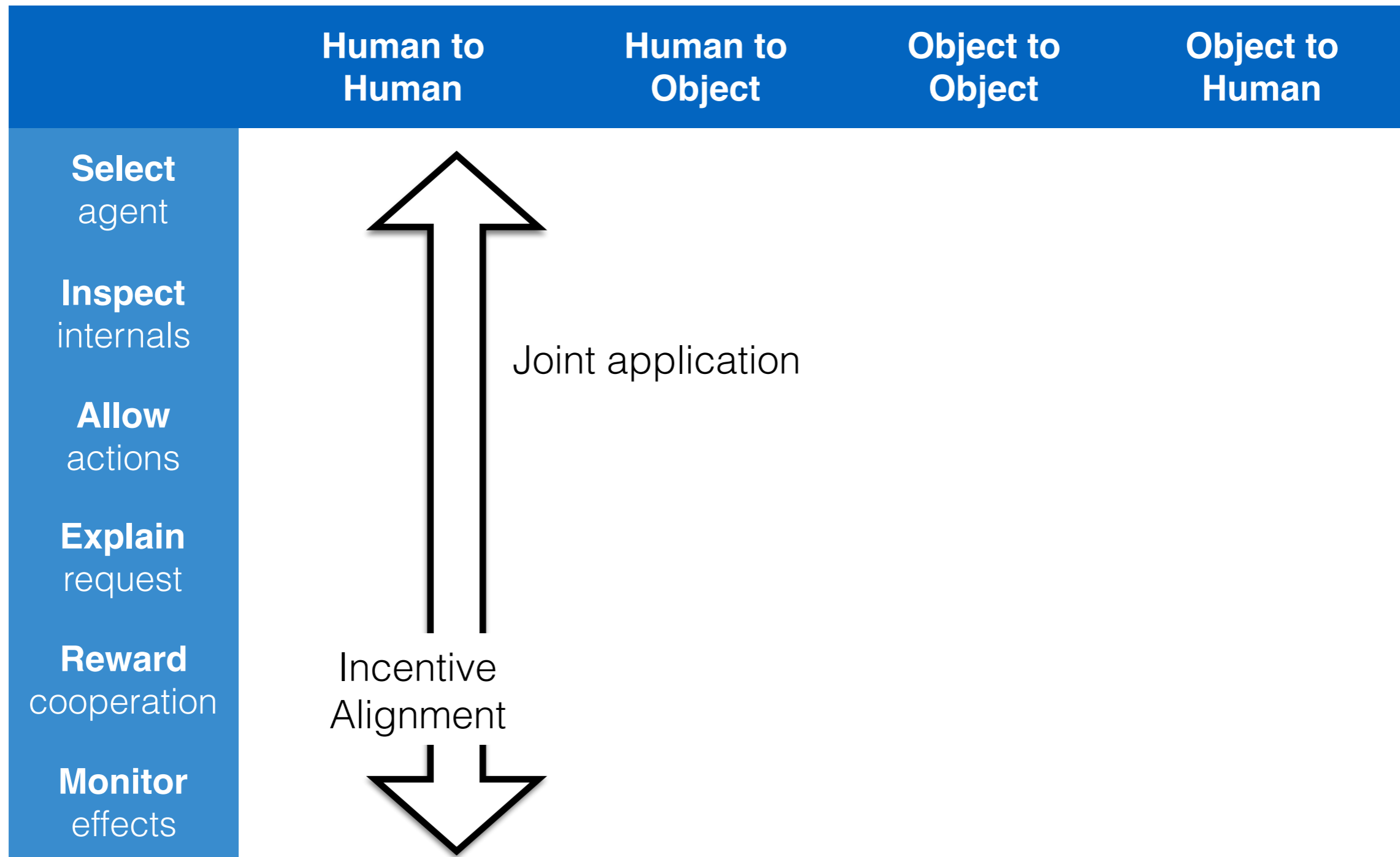


From Incentive Alignment ...

| | Human to Human | Human to Object | Object to Object | Object to Human |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Select agent | | | | |
| Inspect internals | | | | |
| Allow actions | | | | |
| Explain request | | | | |
| Reward cooperation | | Incentive Alignment | | |
| Monitor effects | | | | |

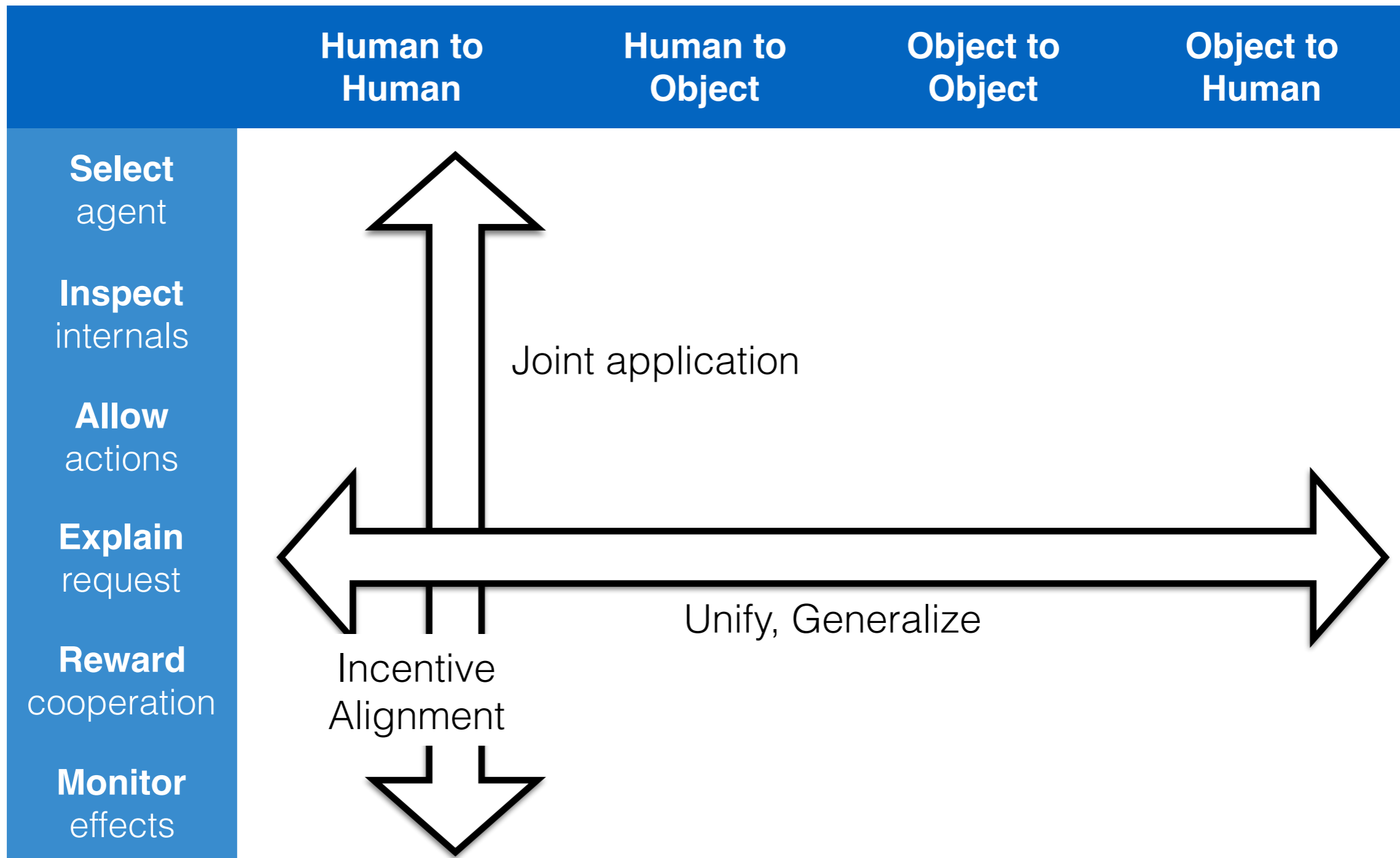
... to Principal-Agent ...

Recognize synergies



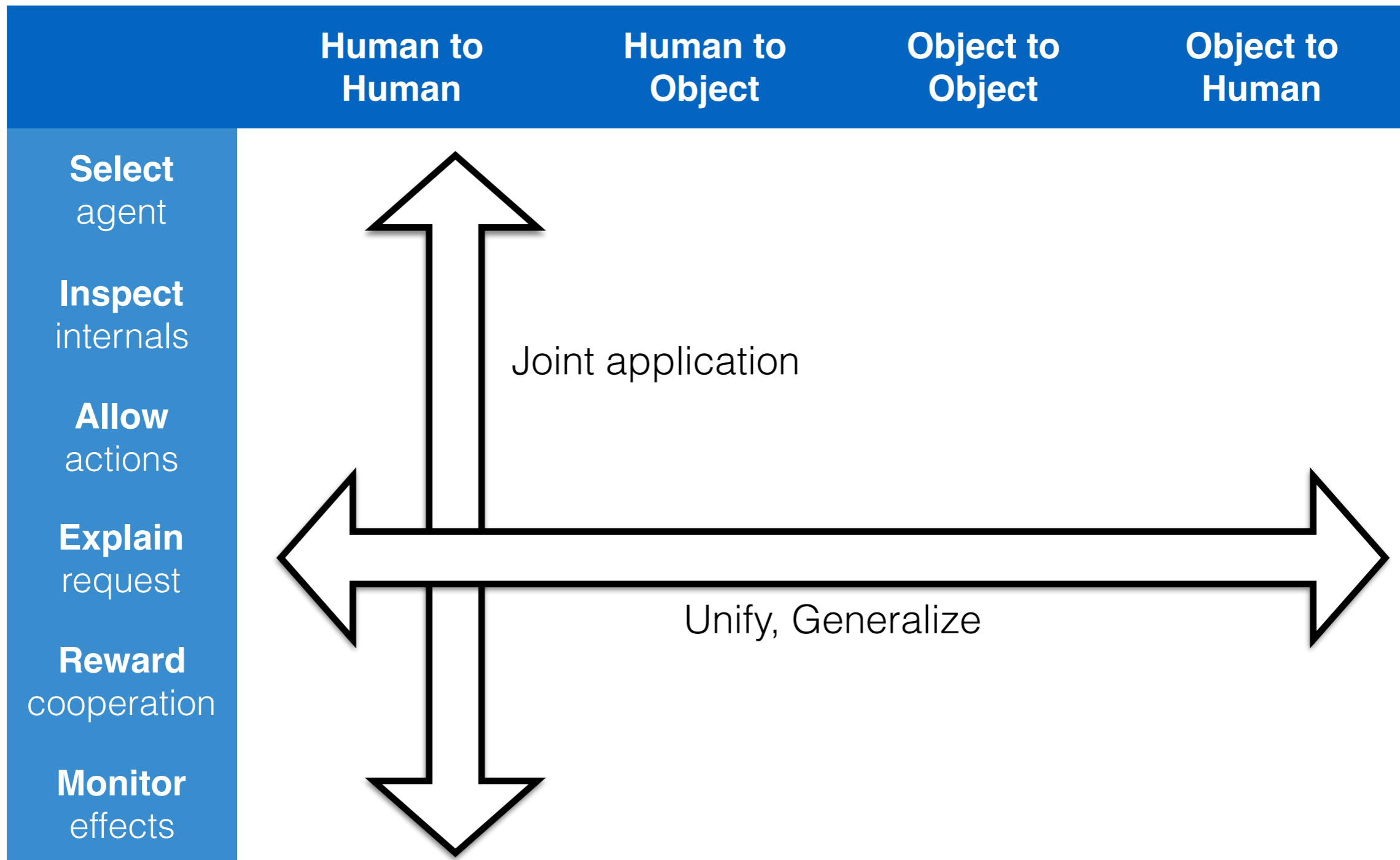
... to Decision Alignment

Recognize commonalities



... to Decision Alignment

Recognize commonalities





ups

Sincronizziamo il mondo del commercio

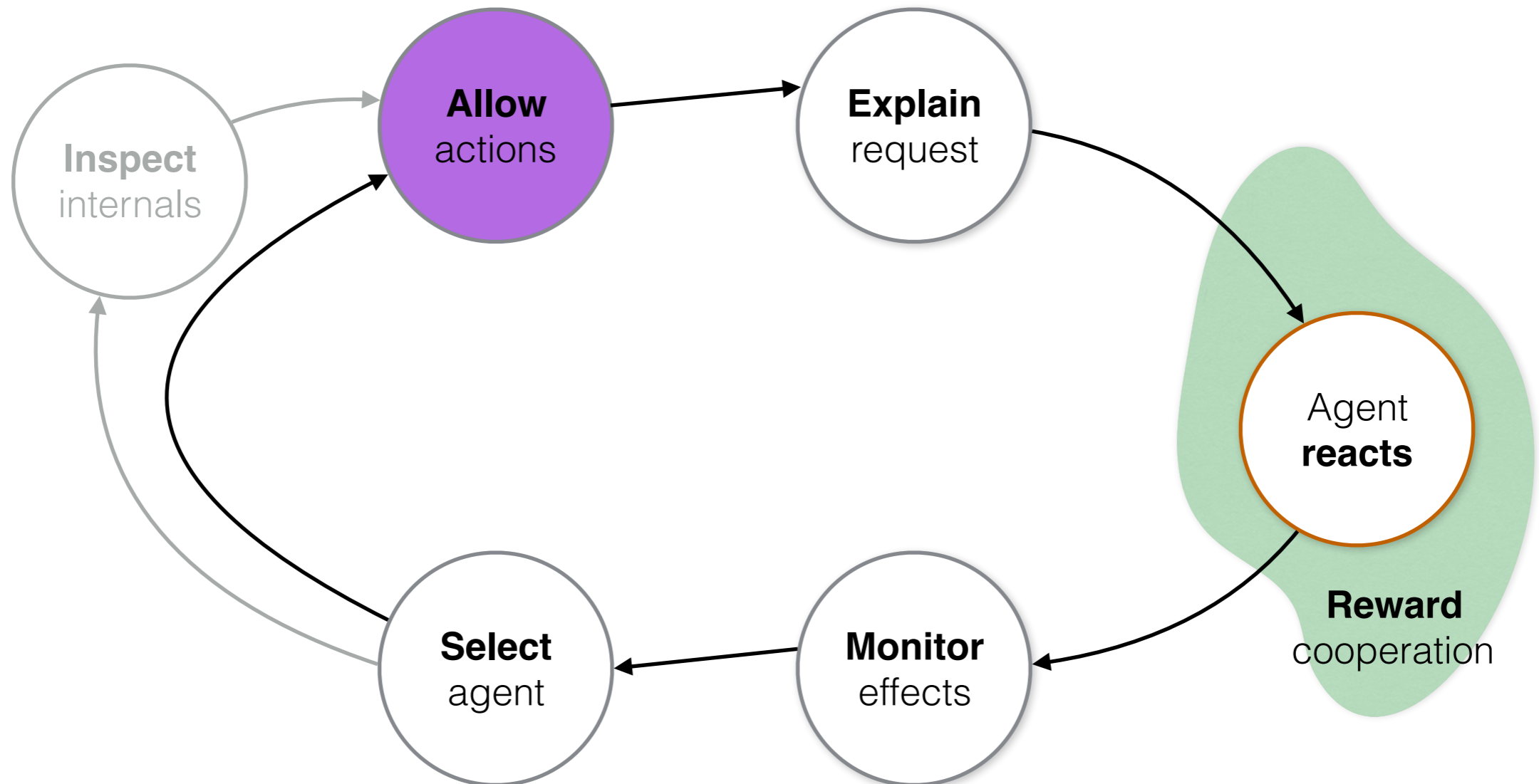
800 877 877
www.ups.com

6V. 50697

COVANCE

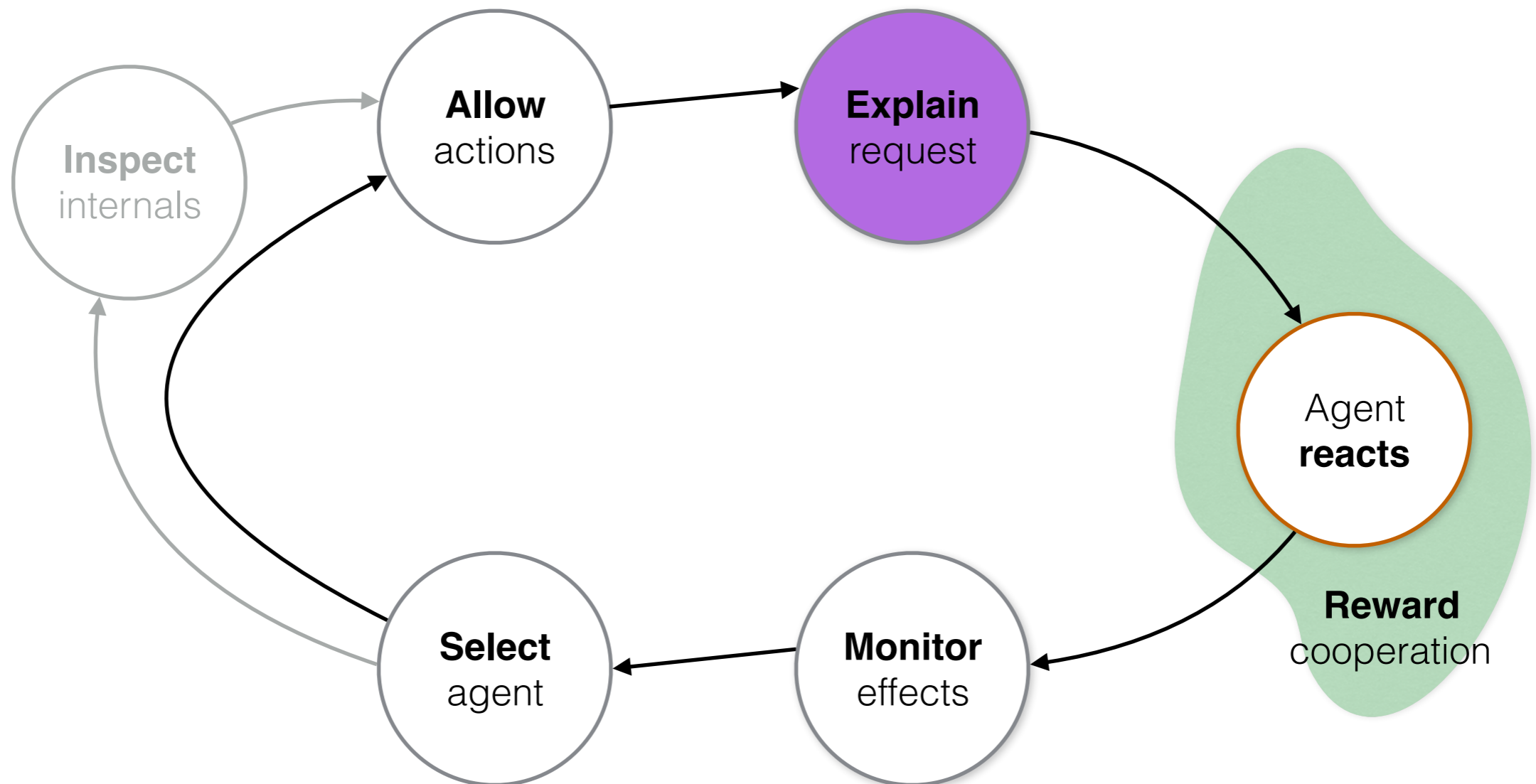
Package Delivery

Hand over the package



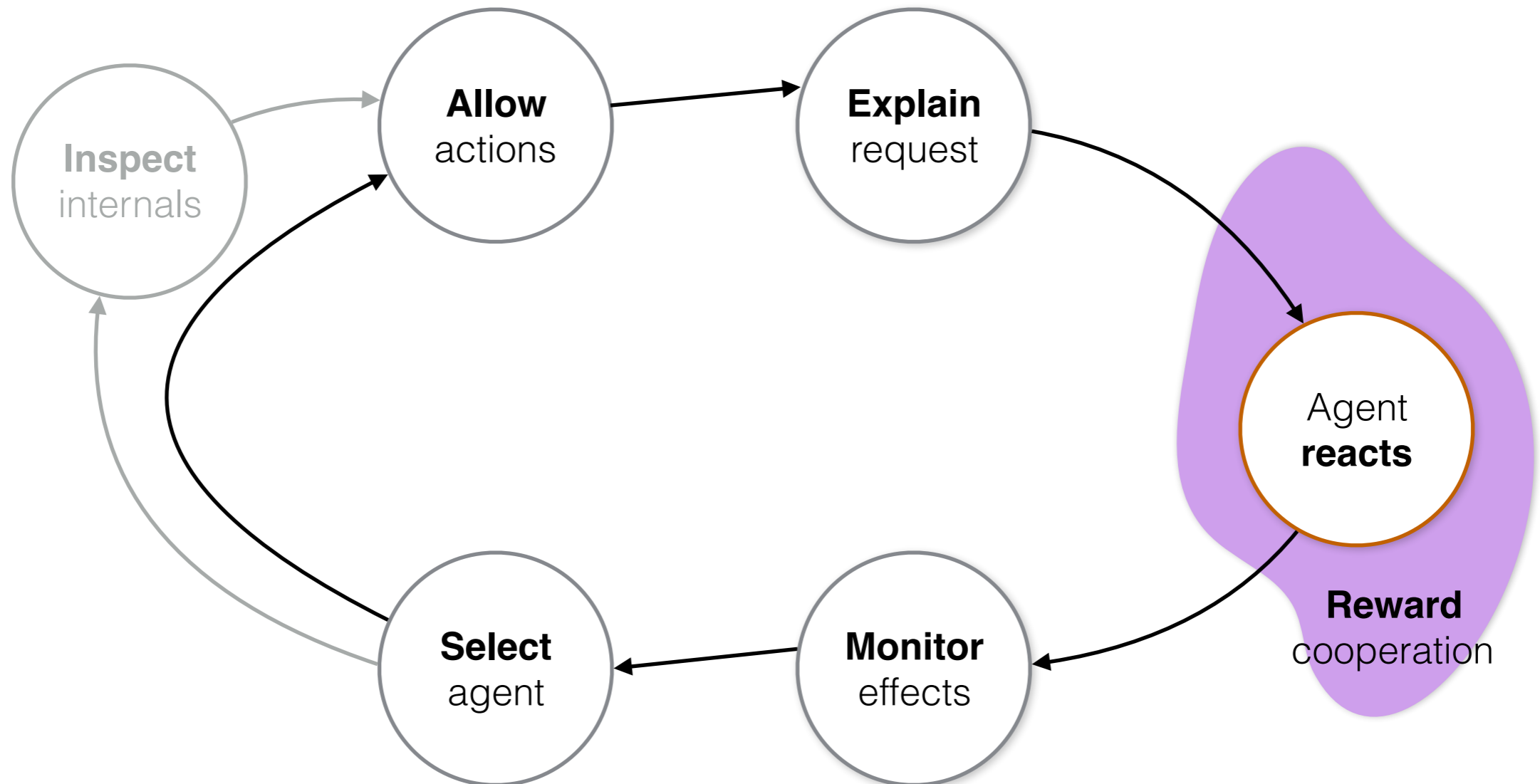
Package Delivery

Delivery address, instructions



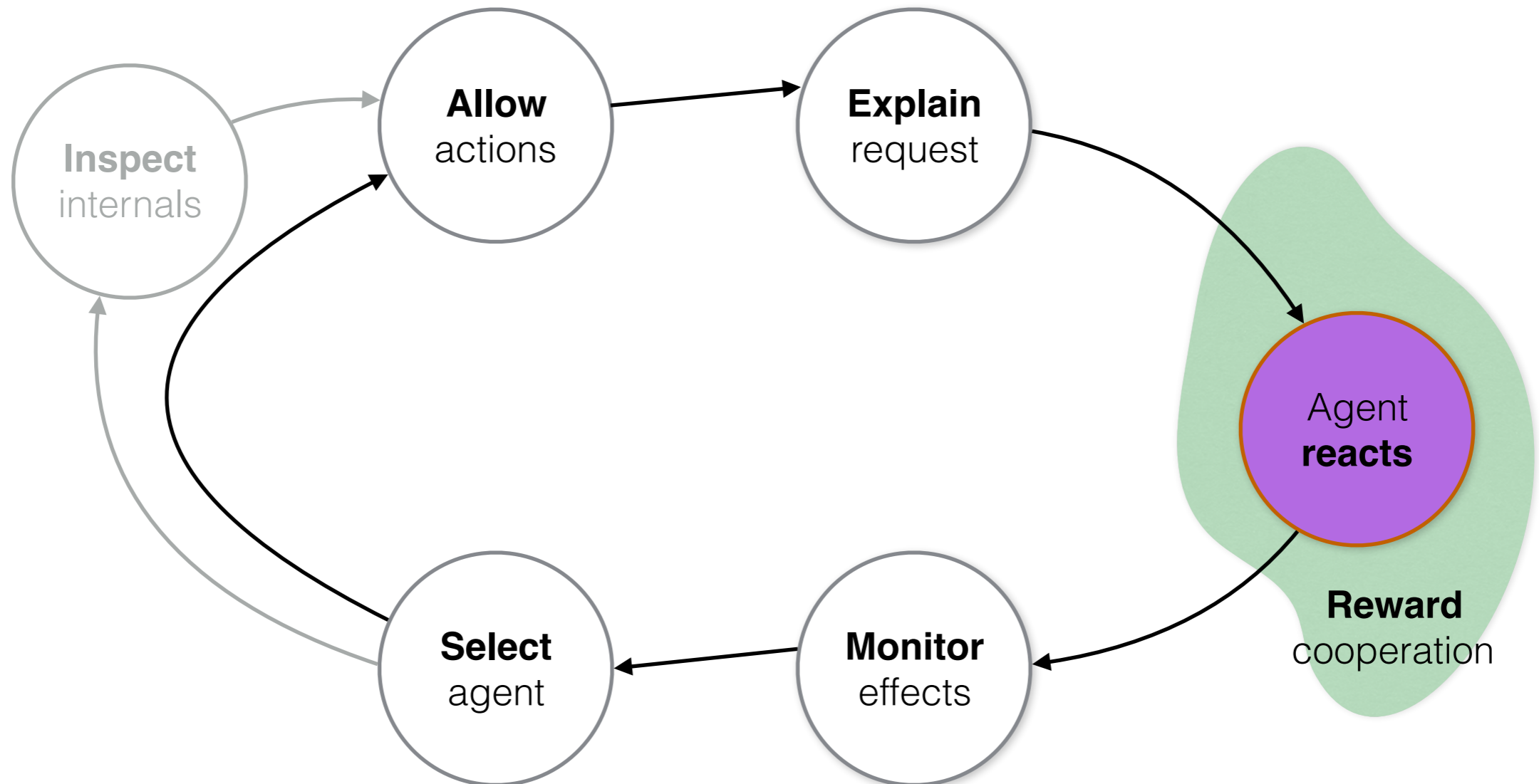
Package Delivery

Pay



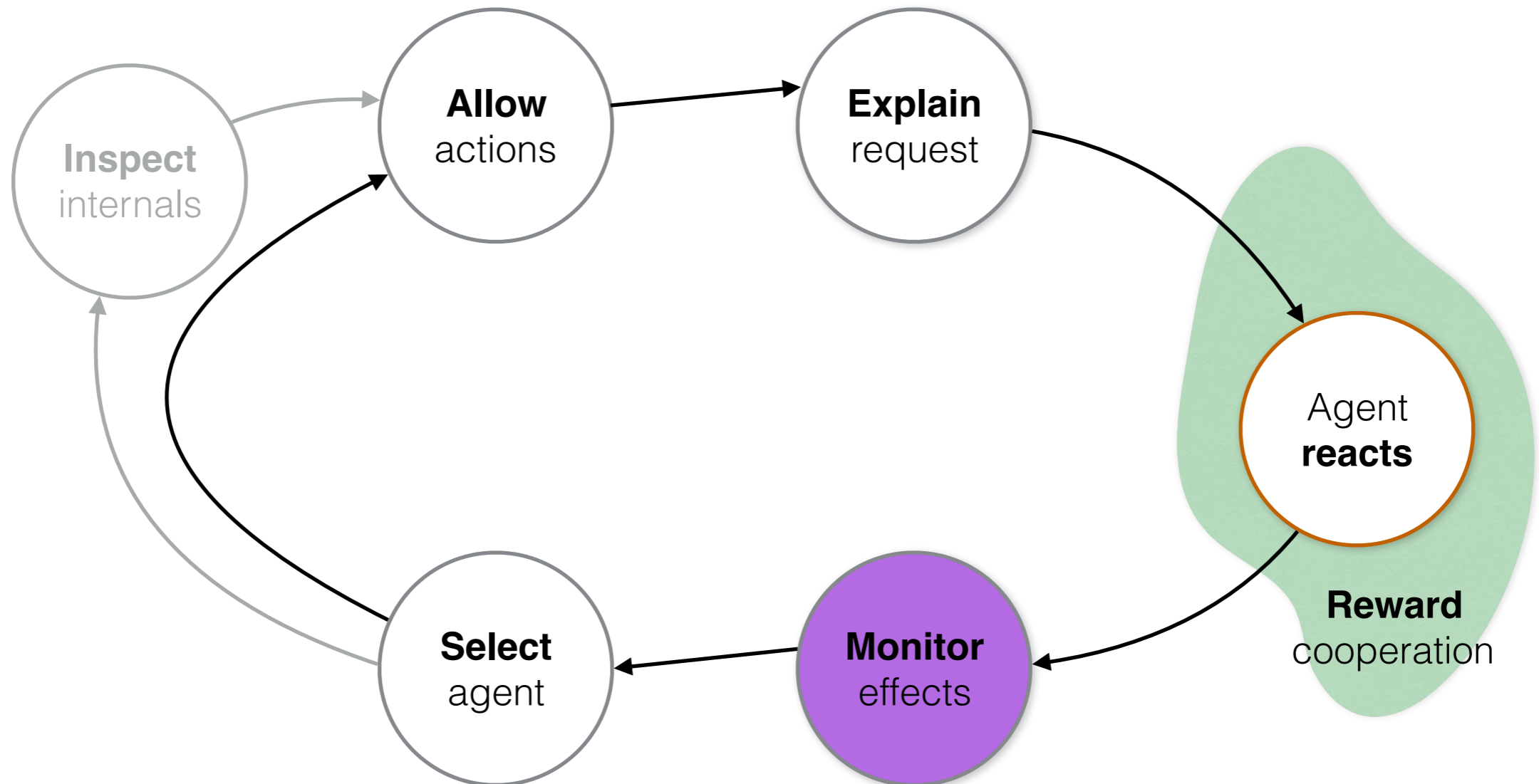
Package Delivery

Hope and pray?



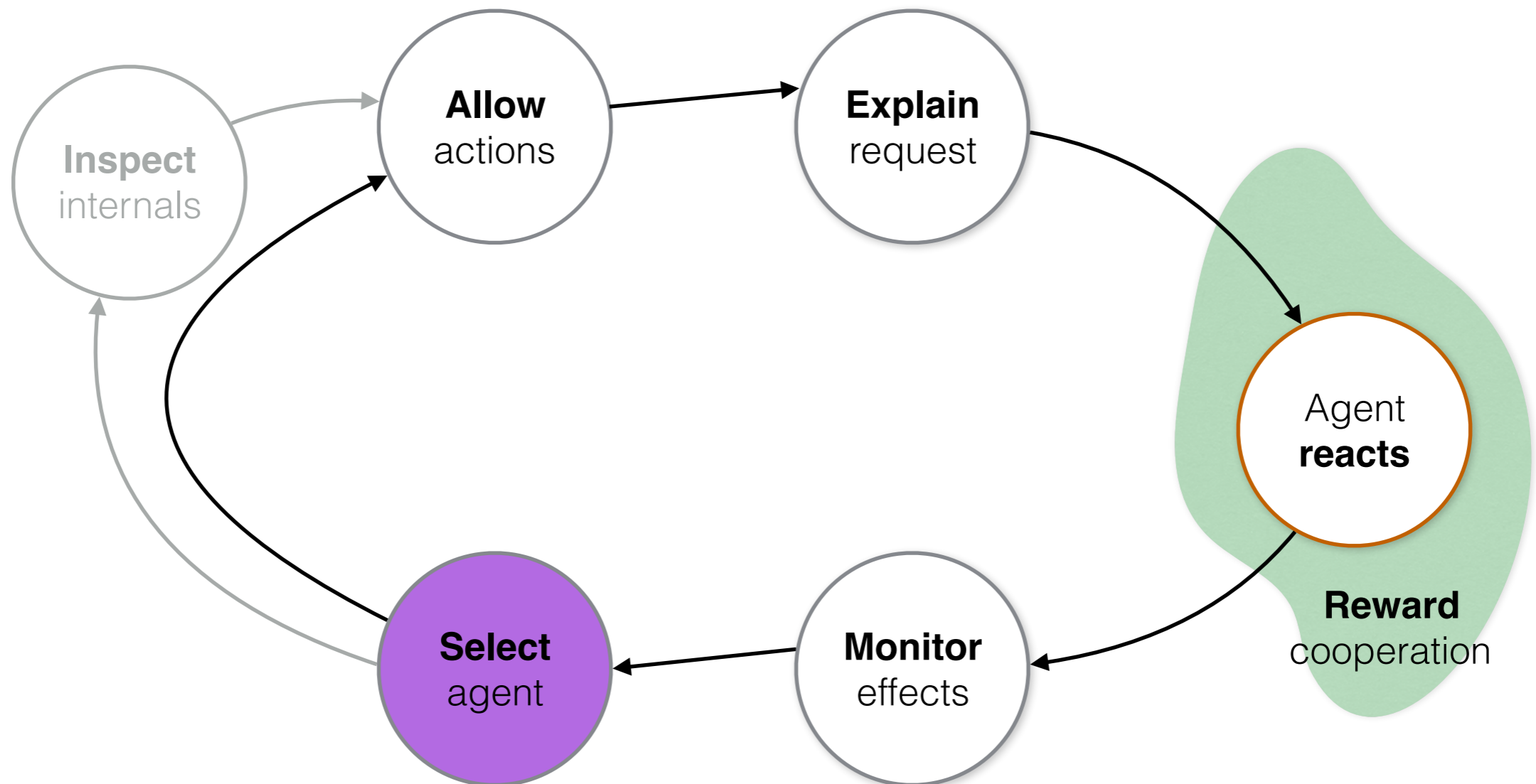
Package Delivery

Track, Return receipt



Package Delivery

Reputation feedback, Rating

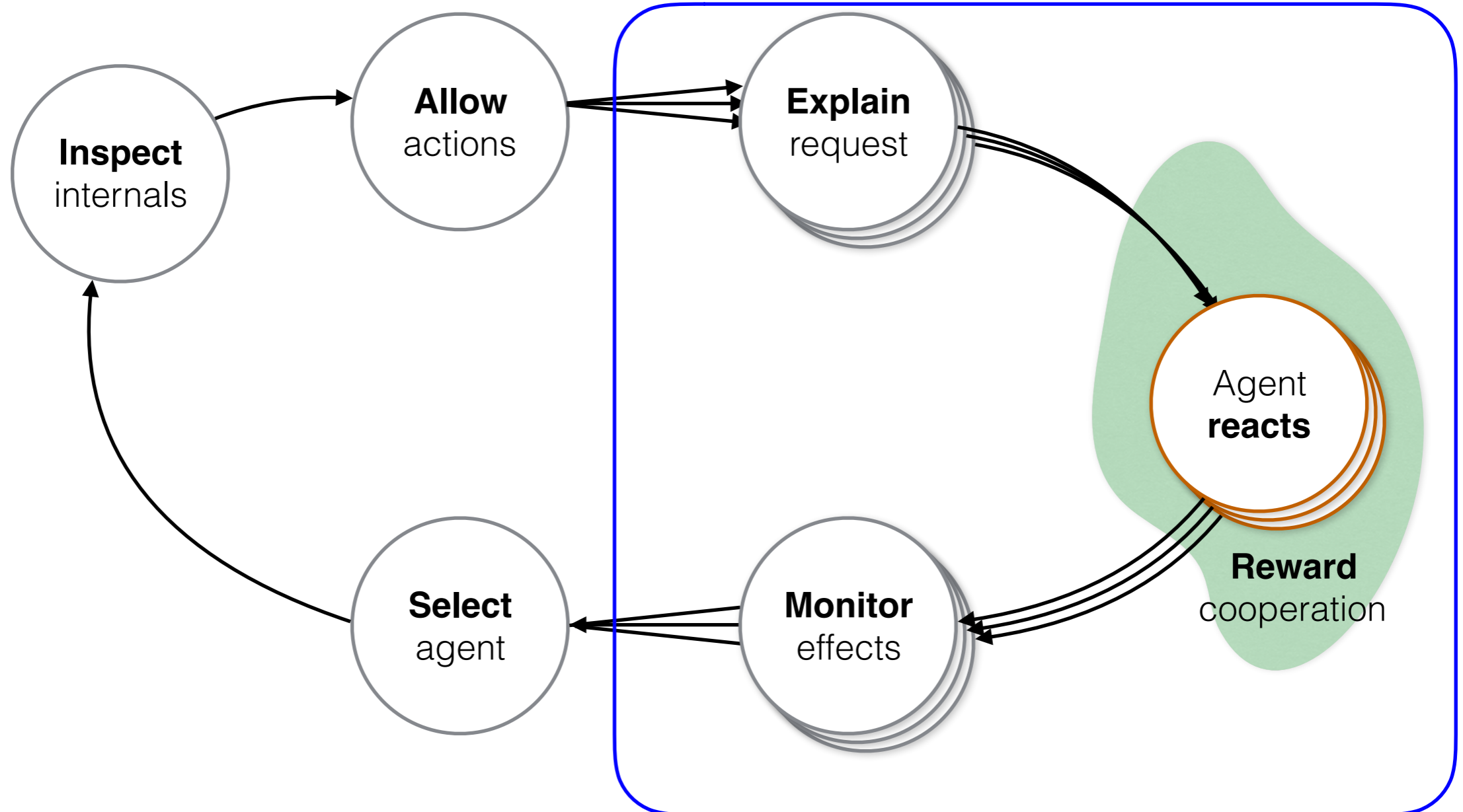


Internal Software Development

Static vs. Dynamic

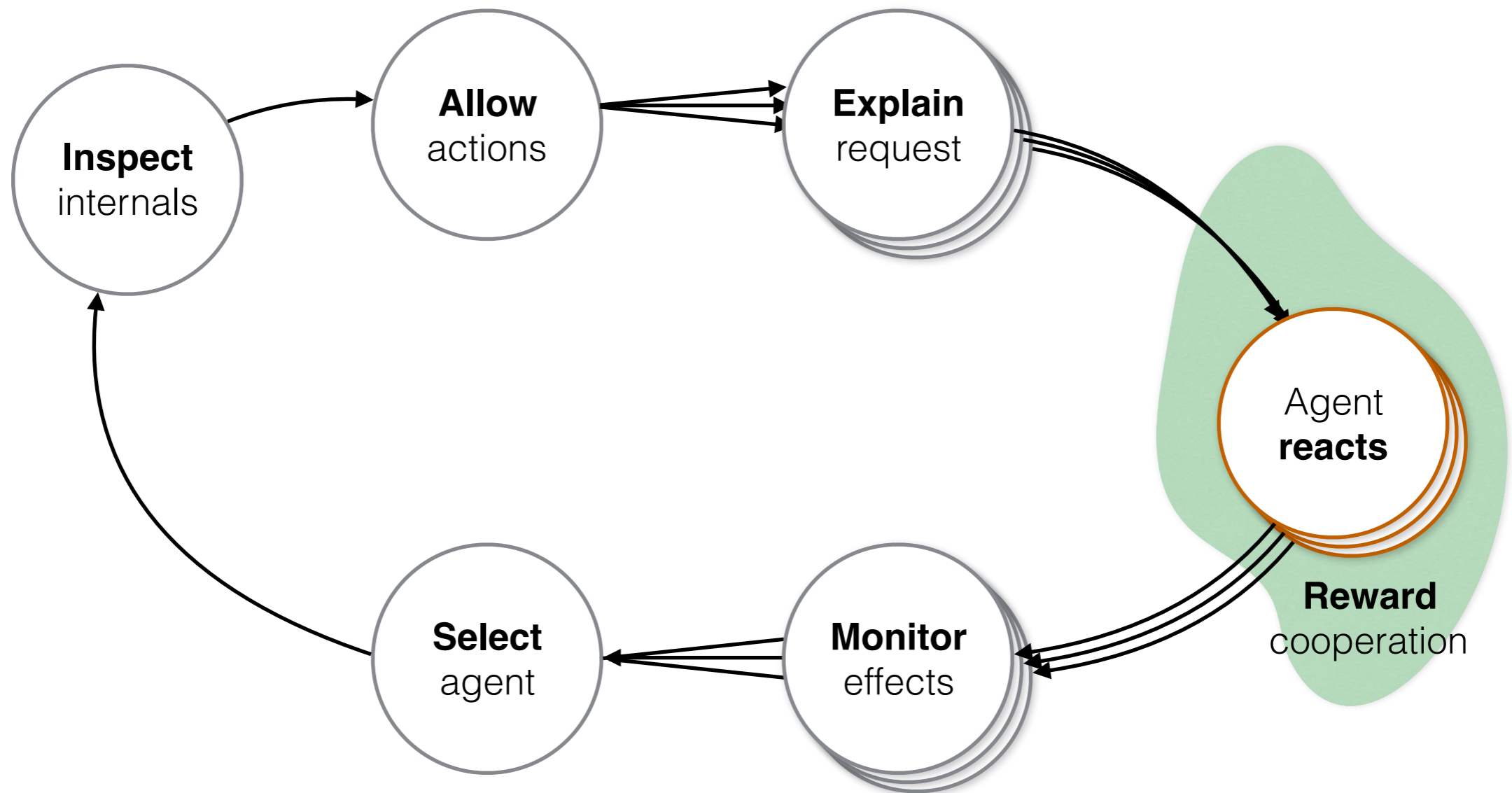
Developers & code

Object to object



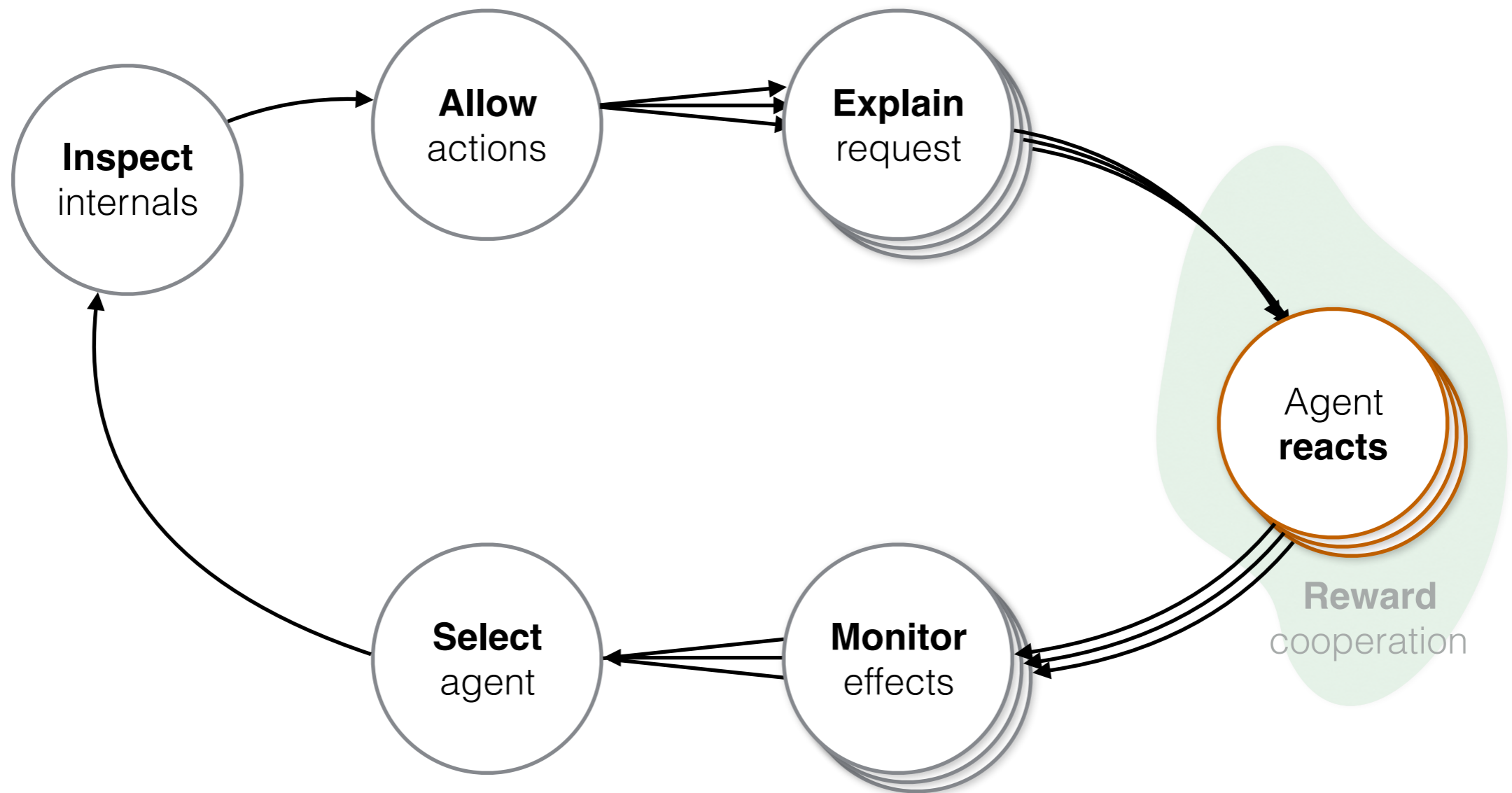
Internal Software Development

De-emphasize Rewards



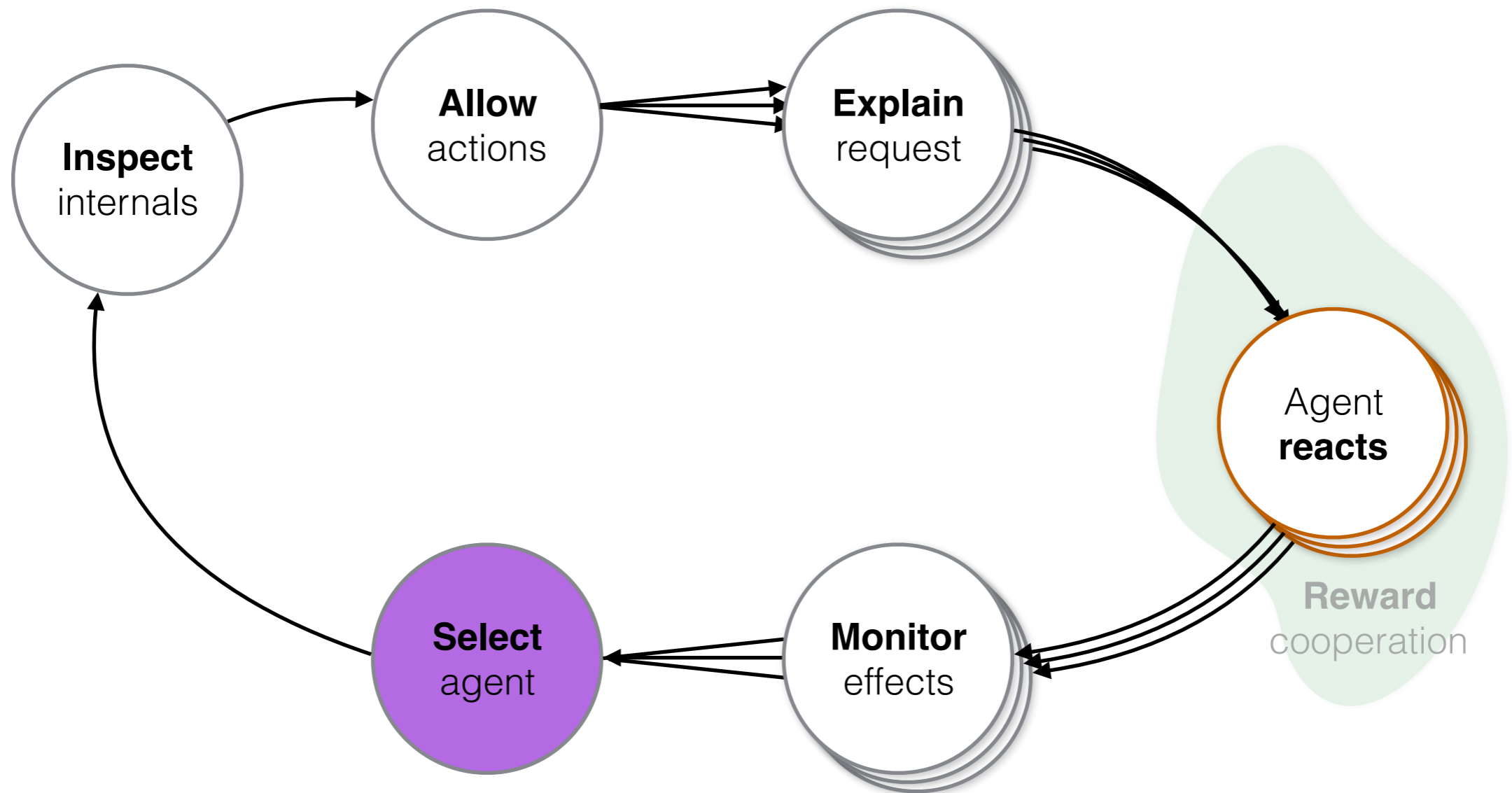
Internal Software Development

De-emphasize Rewards



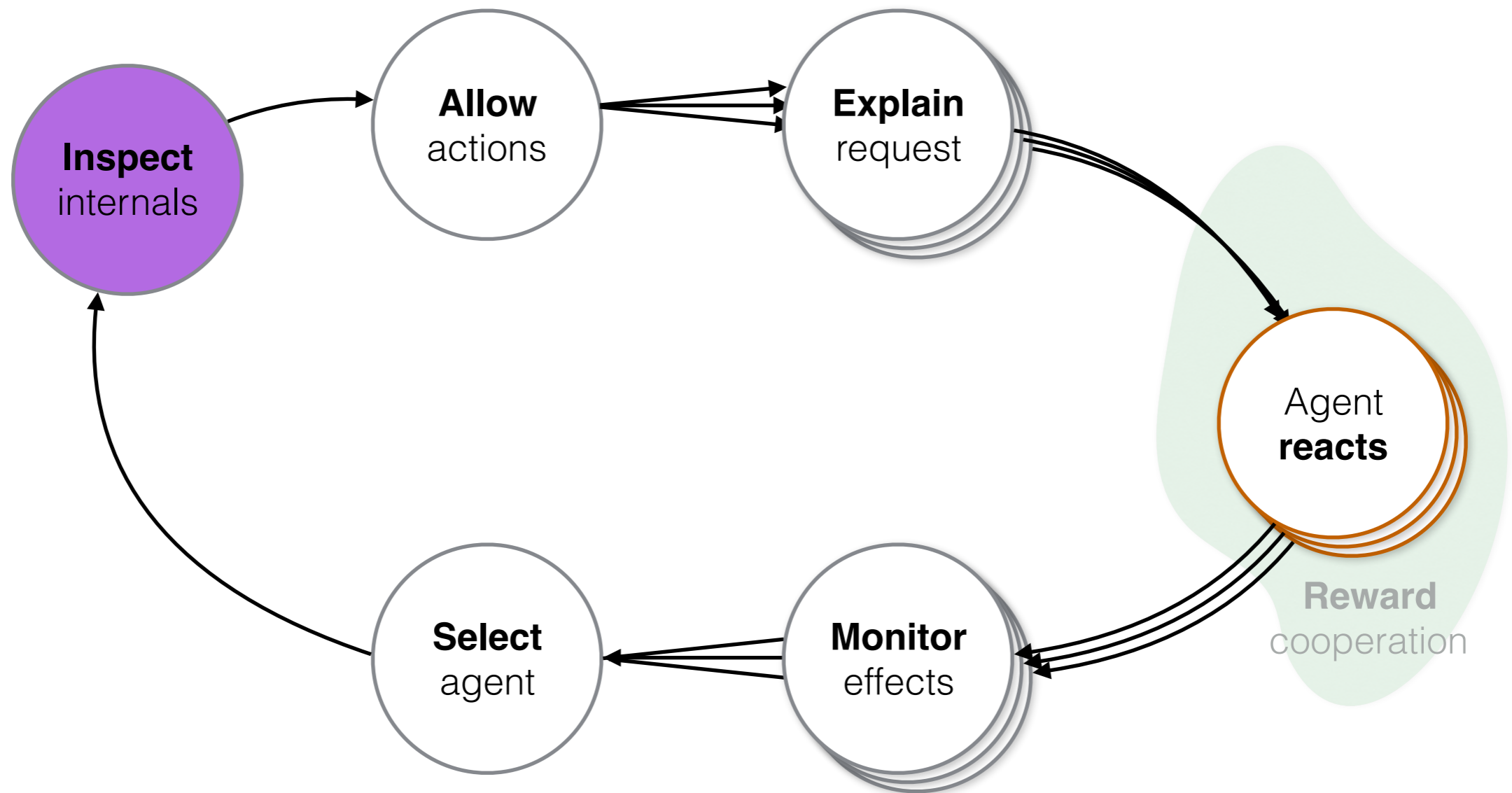
Internal Software Development

Hire the best. Find libraries.



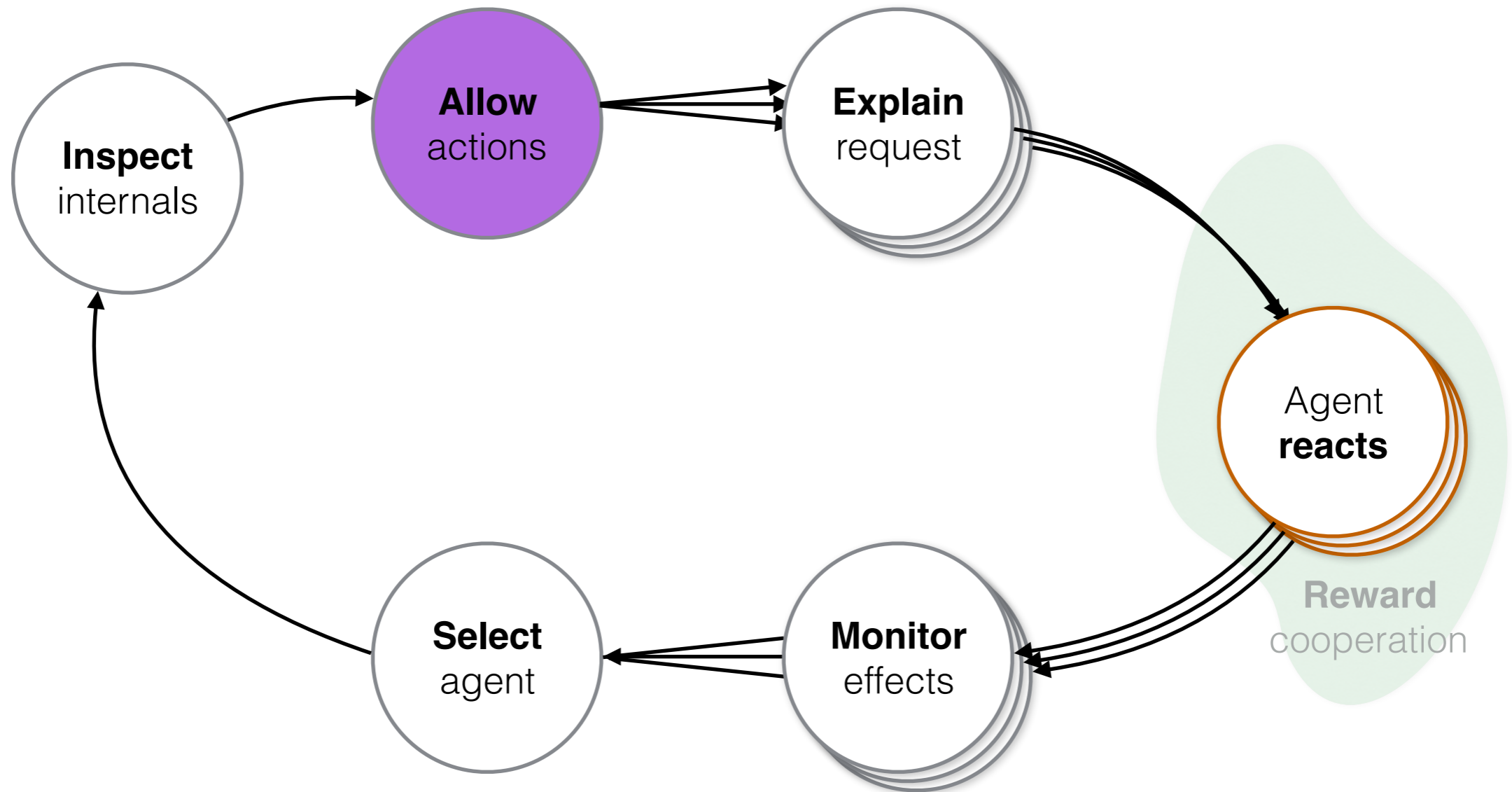
Internal Software Development

Code reviews. Some static checking.



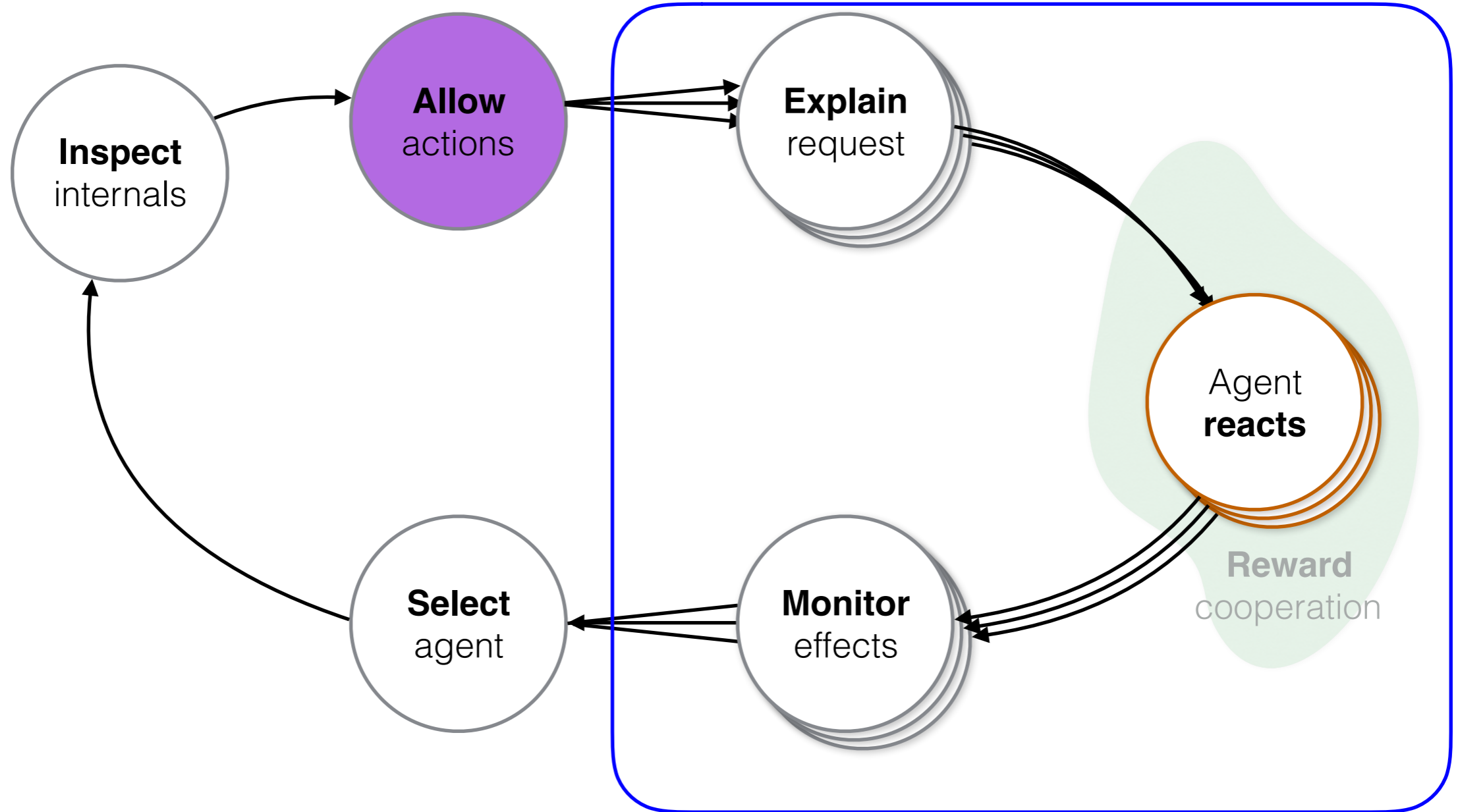
Internal Software Development

All user's authority.



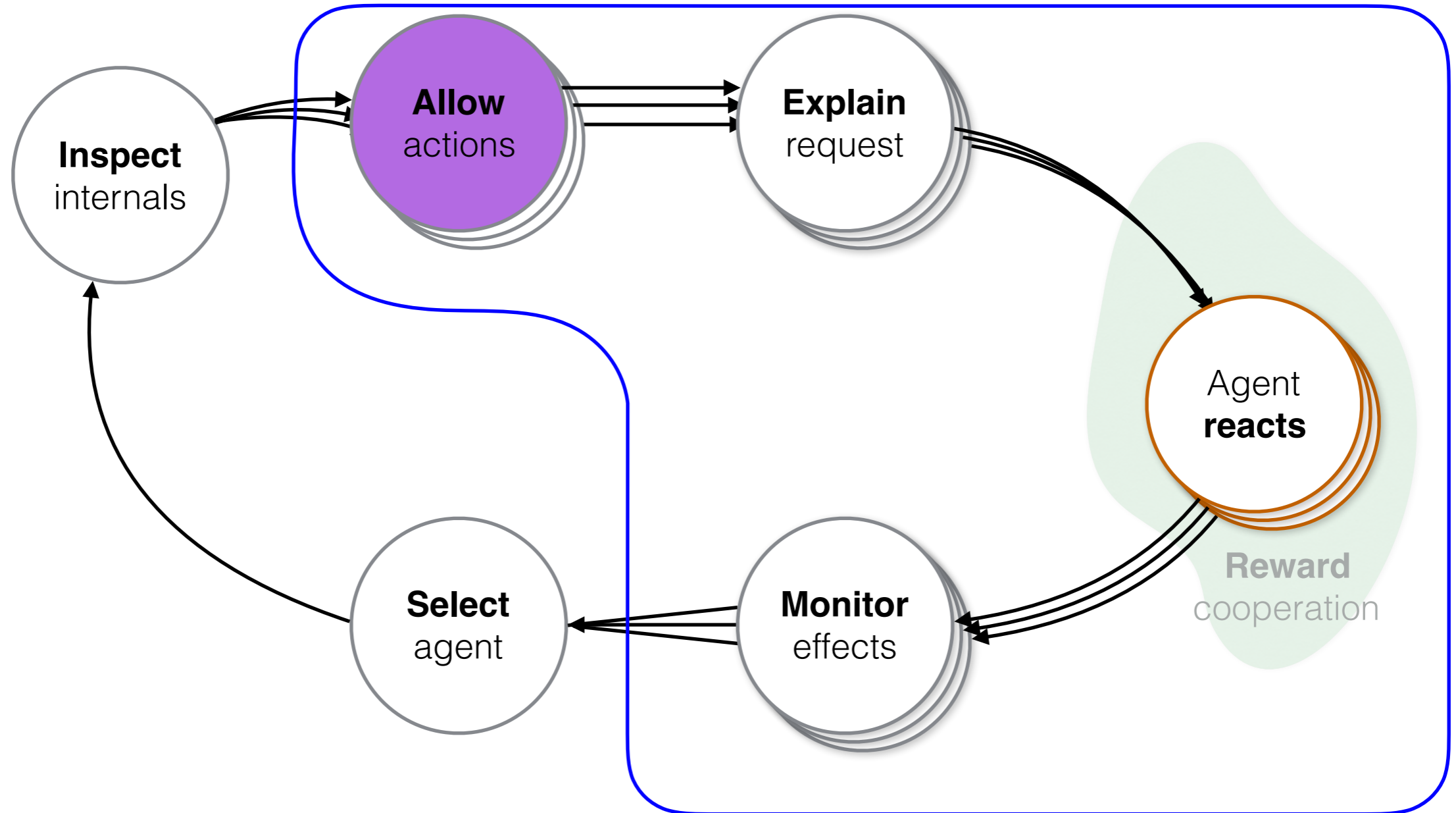
Internal Software Development

All user's authority.



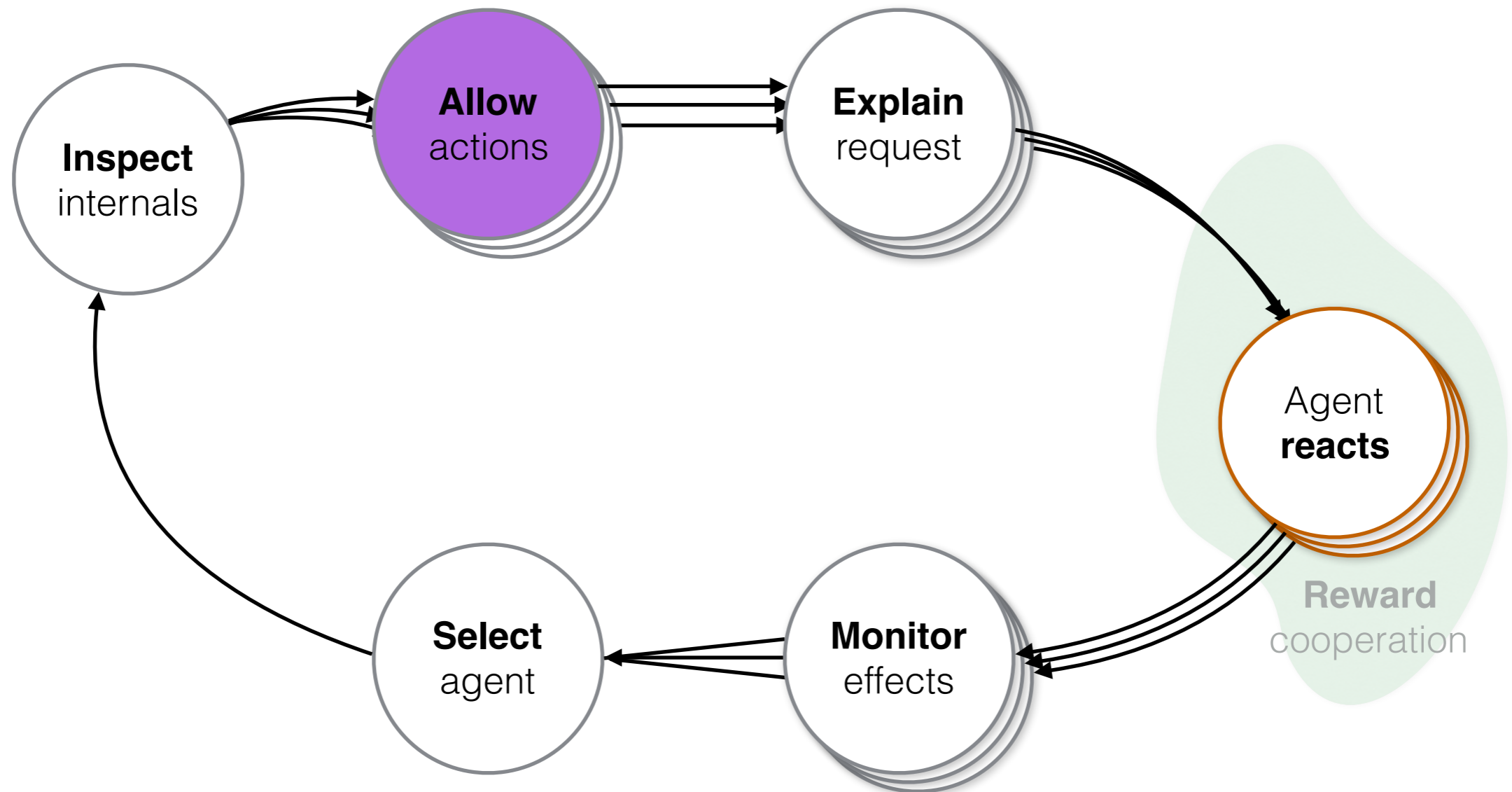
Internal Software Development

Rights per request

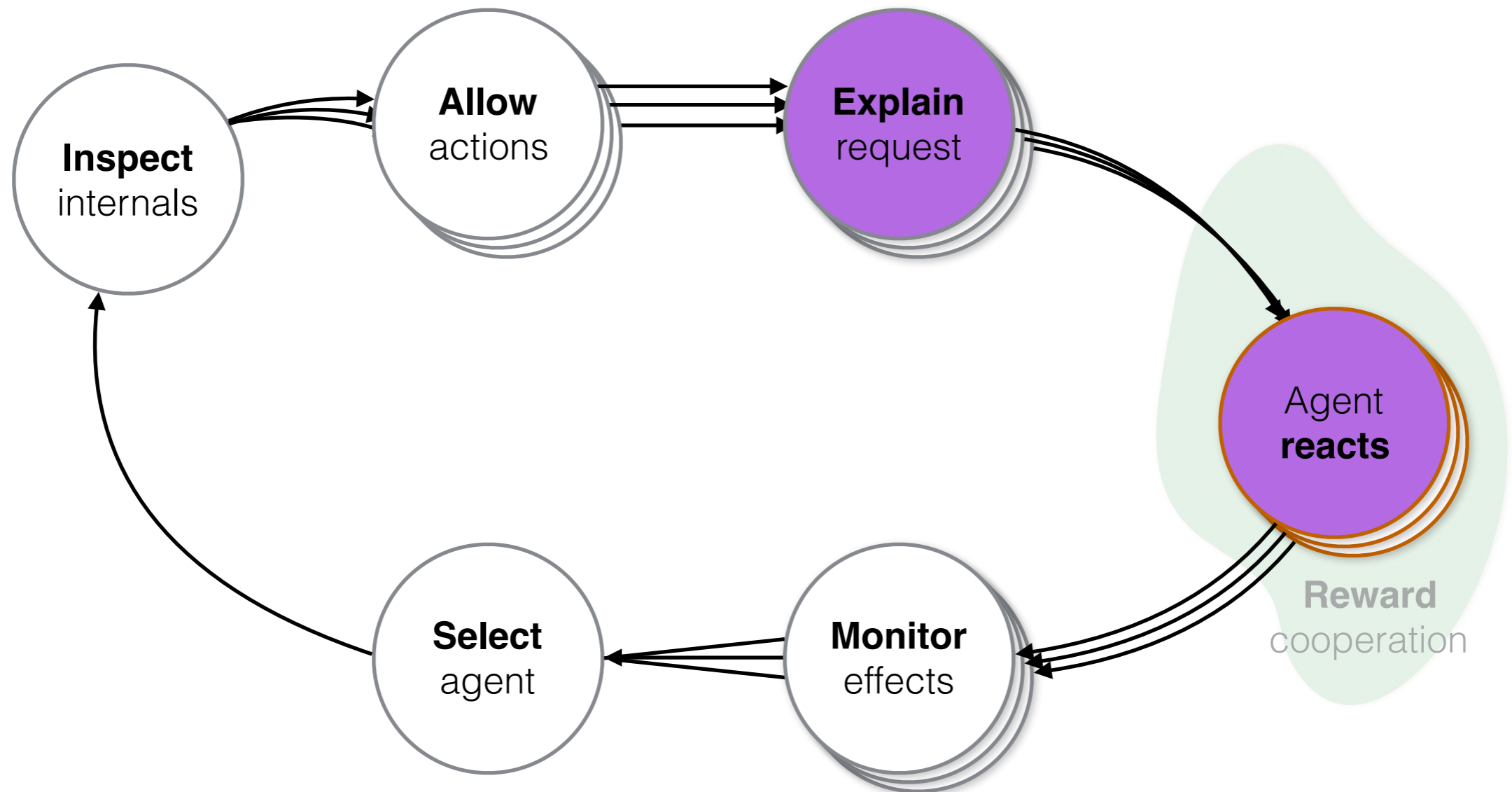


Internal Software Development

Rights per request

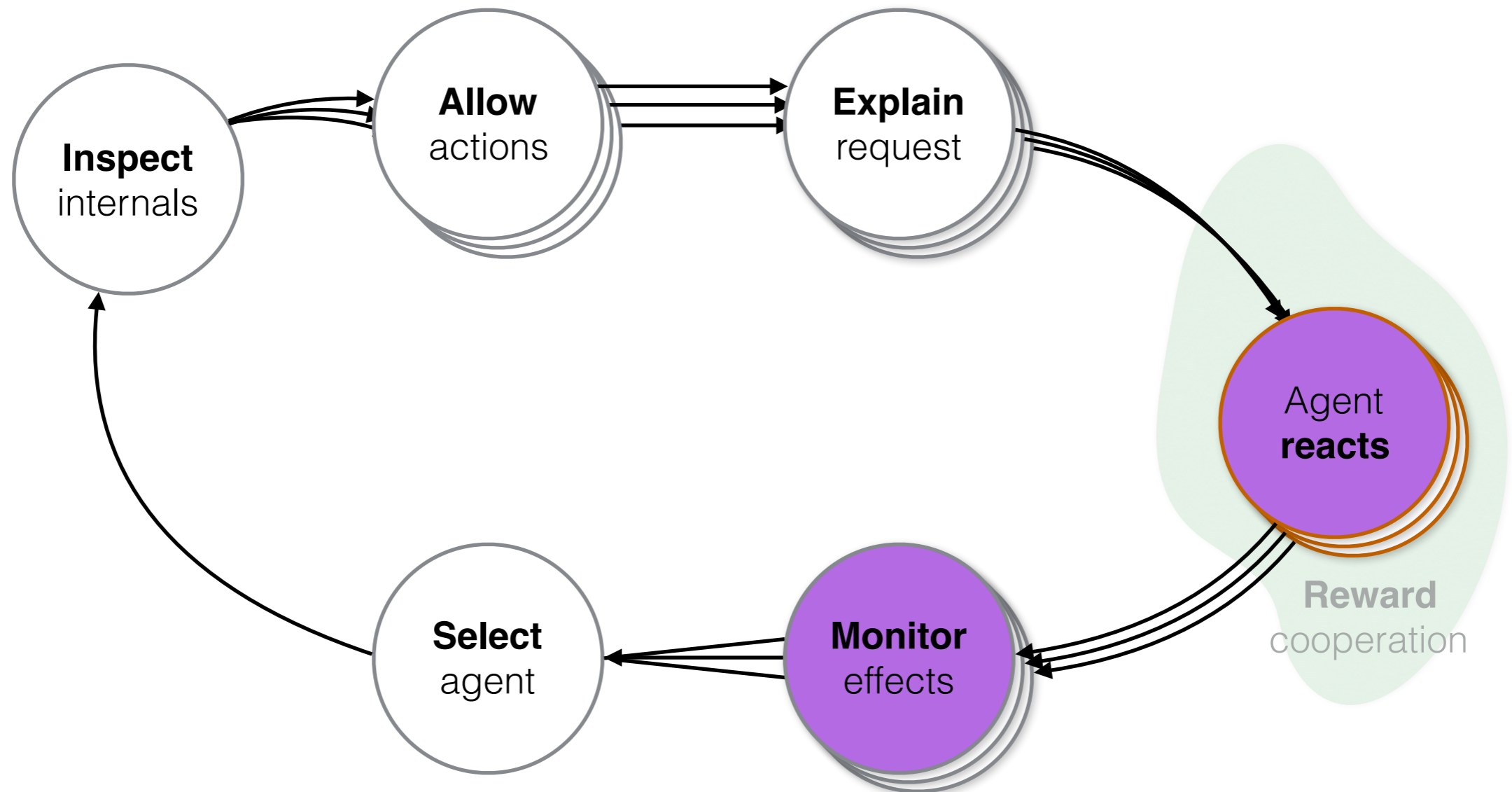


Internal Software Development API Design



Internal Software Development

Testing. Bug reports.



The Elements of Decision Alignment

| | Human to Human | Human to/from Object | Object to Object |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Select agent | Trademark Chain of custody | App stores White and black lists | Trusted developer Same origin |
| Inspect internals | Accounting controls | Trusted path URL bar | Types, Verification Open source eyeballs |
| Allow actions | Law, Contracts | App permissions Powerbox | Security Protection patterns |
| Explain request | Language | User interface | Abstraction |
| Reward cooperation | Economics Incentive Alignment | Objective functions | Machine learning Agorics |
| Monitor effects | Reviews, Complaints Word of mouth | Bug reports | Contracts, Testing Backprop |



Tuning Tradeoffs

Select
agent

Inspect
internals

Allow
actions

Explain
request

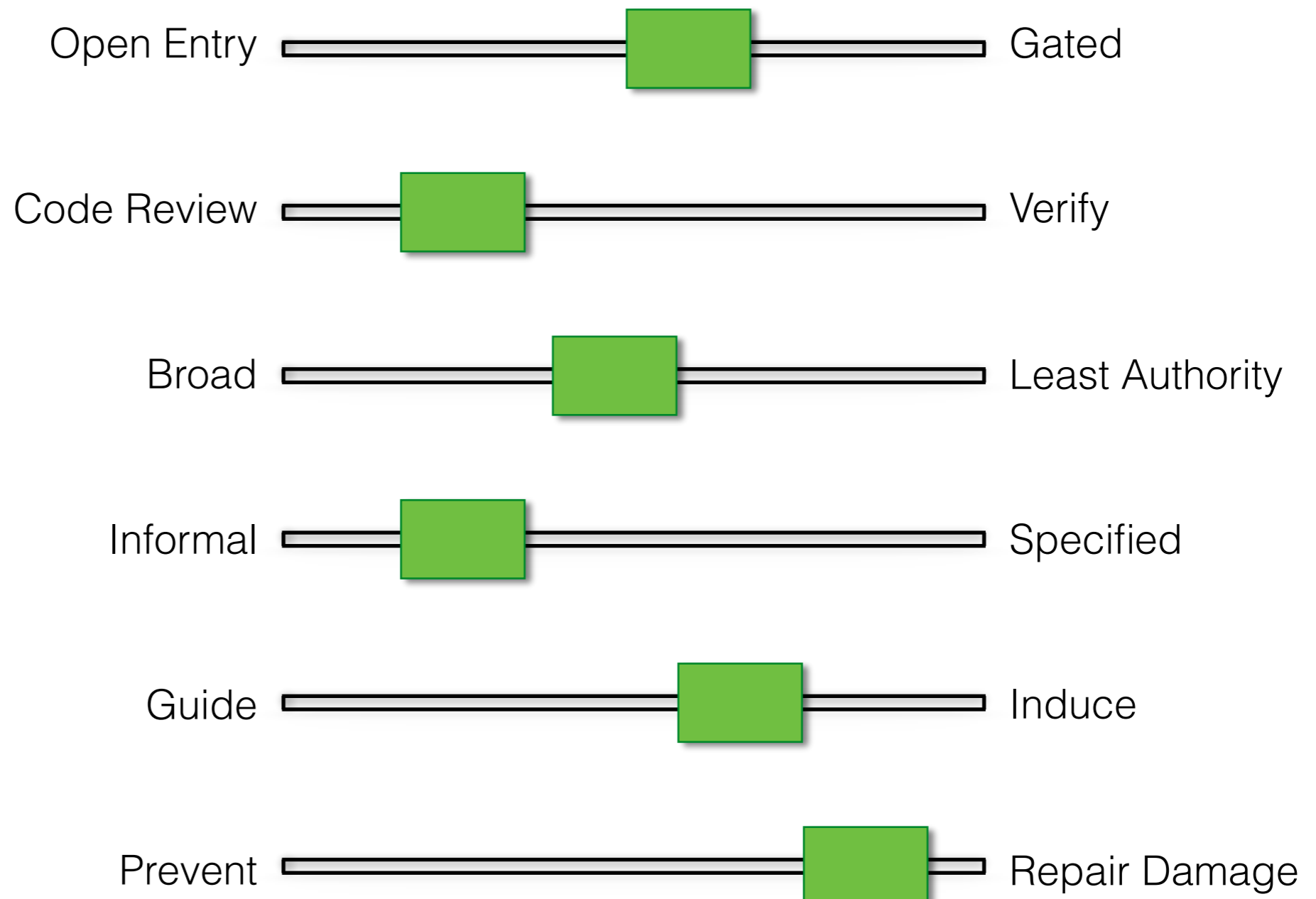
Reward
cooperation

Monitor
effects



Tuning Tradeoffs

- Select**
agent
- Inspect**
internals
- Allow**
actions
- Explain**
request
- Reward**
cooperation
- Monitor**
effects



Package Delivery Business

Select
agent

Inspect
internals

Allow
actions

Explain
request

Reward
cooperation

Monitor
effects

Open Entry  Gated

Code Review  Verify

Broad  Least Authority

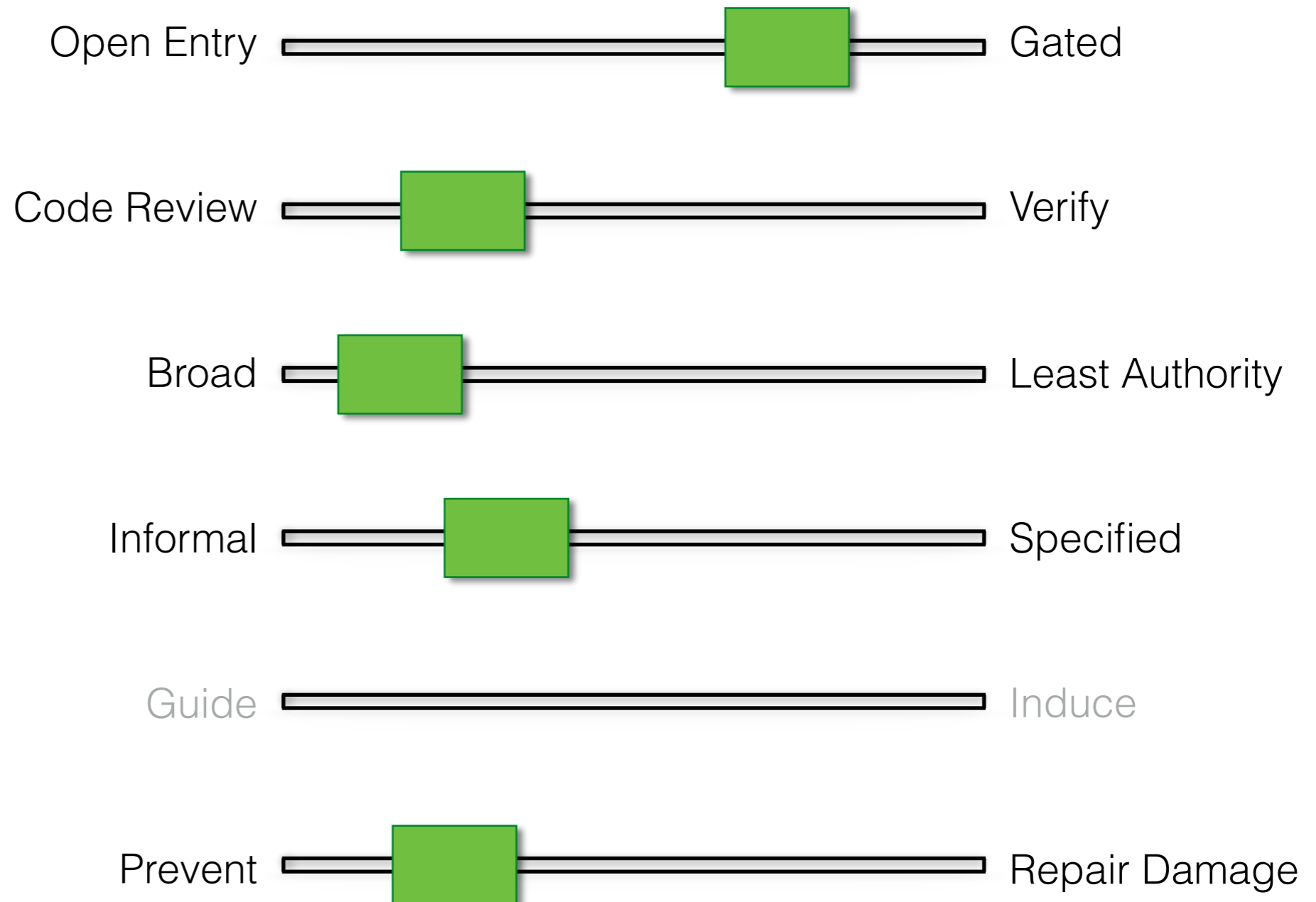
Informal  Specified

Guide  Induce

Prevent  Repair Damage

Internal Software Development

- Select agent
- Inspect internals
- Allow actions
- Explain request
- Reward cooperation
- Monitor effects



Organizational Employment

Select
agent

Inspect
internals

Allow
actions

Explain
request

Reward
cooperation

Monitor
effects

Open Entry



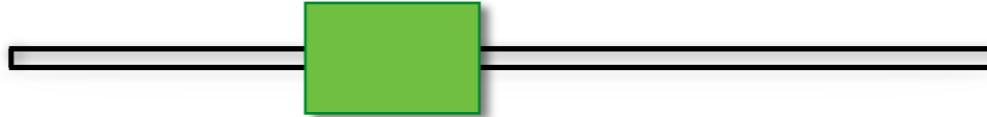
Gated

Interview



Clearance

Broad



Least Authority

Informal



Specified

Guide



Induce

Prevent



Repair Damage

Safe Plugin Boundary

Select
agent

Inspect
internals

Allow
actions

Explain
request

Reward
cooperation

Monitor
effects

Open Entry  Gated

Code Review  Verify

Broad  Least Authority

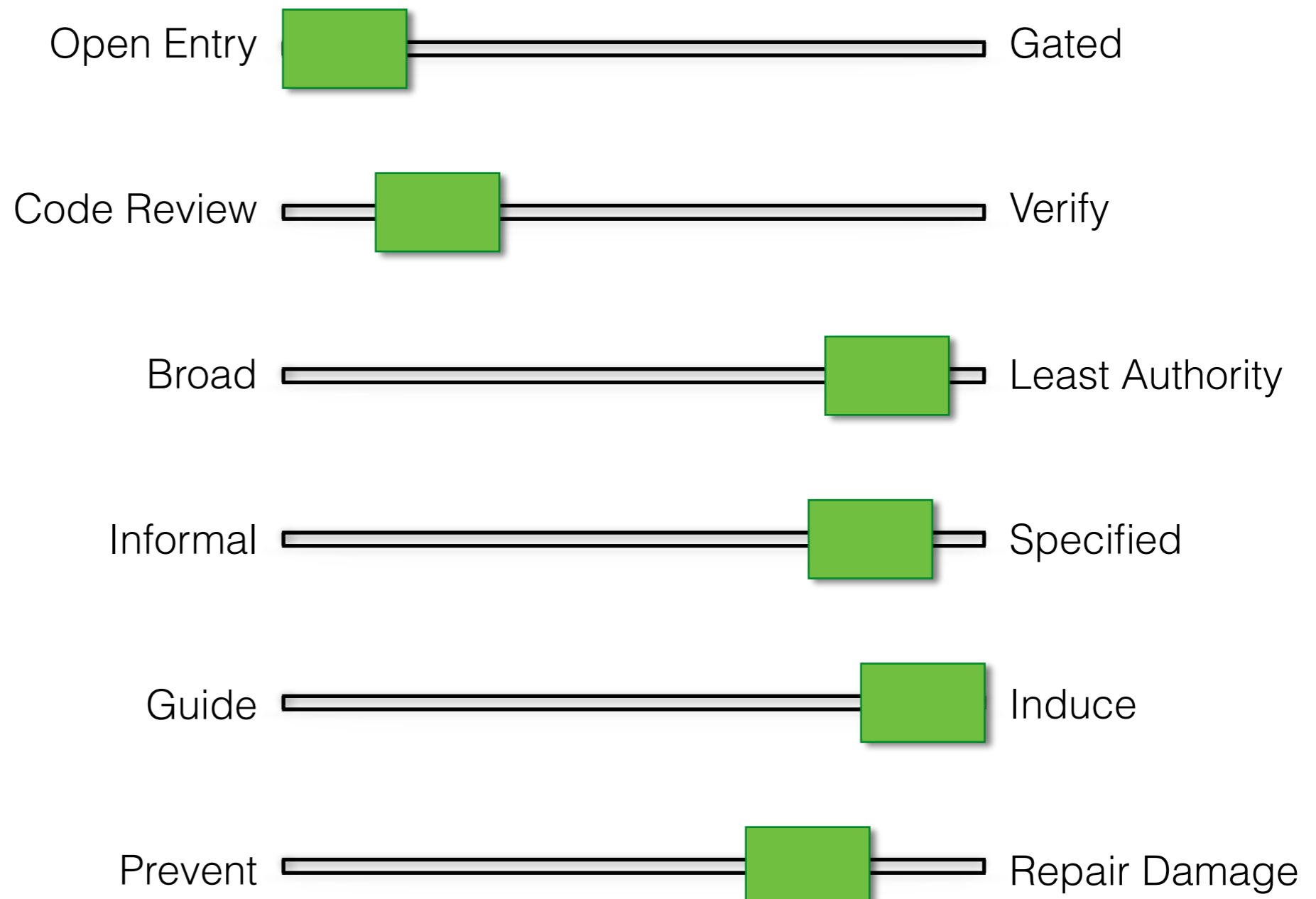
Informal  Specified

Guide  Induce

Prevent  Repair Damage

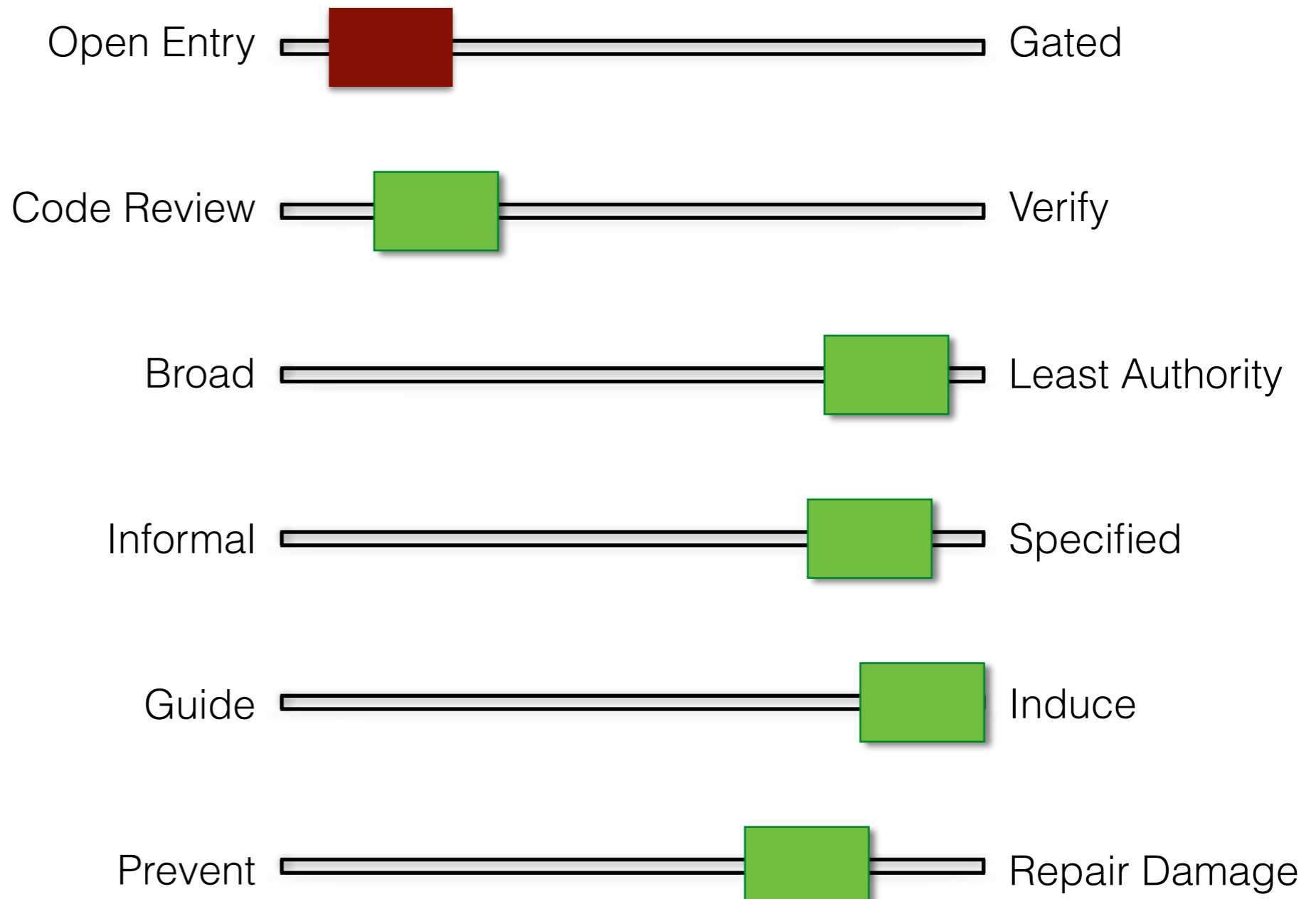
Bitcoin, Ethereum

- Select**
agent
- Inspect**
internals
- Allow**
actions
- Explain**
request
- Reward**
cooperation
- Monitor**
effects



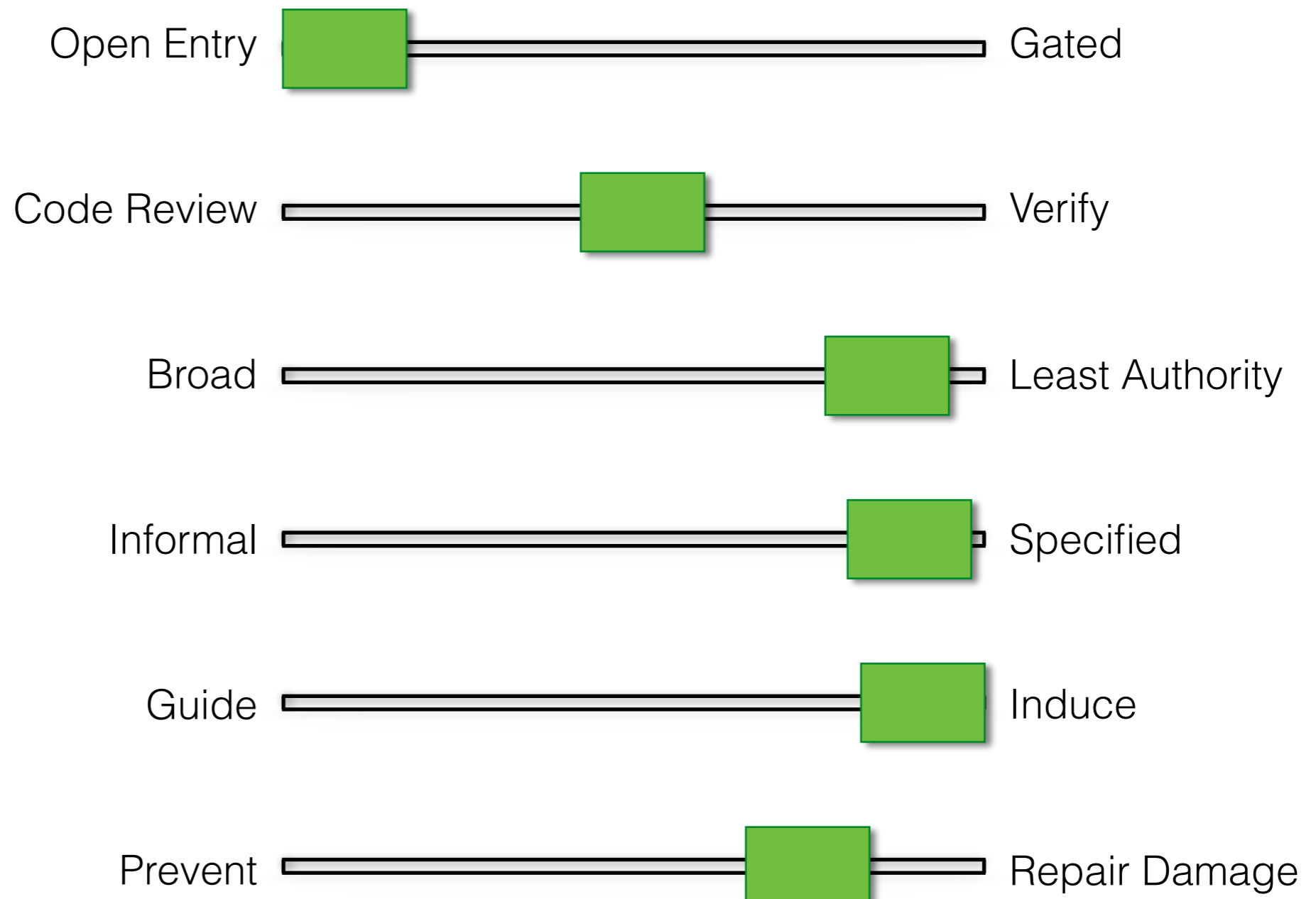
Ethereum Hard Fork

- Select**
agent
- Inspect**
internals
- Allow**
actions
- Explain**
request
- Reward**
cooperation
- Monitor**
effects



Ethereum once repaired

- Select**
agent
- Inspect**
internals
- Allow**
actions
- Explain**
request
- Reward**
cooperation
- Monitor**
effects



Building Reliable Voting Machine Software

Ka-Ping Yee, 2007 dissertation

Programmer may wish to bias the election.

Programmer and code as untrusted agent.

Building Reliable Voting Machine Software

Ka-Ping Yee, 2007 dissertation

Programmer may wish to bias the election.

Must write simple code that seems obviously correct.

400 lines of simple code in simple language.

Extensive rationale justifying each line.

Building Reliable Voting Machine Software

Ka-Ping Yee, 2007 dissertation

Programmer may wish to bias the election.

Must write simple code that seems obviously correct.

Subject to extremely intense review.

Intense review of simple code is effective
at spotting *accidental* bugs and vulnerabilities.

Building Reliable Voting Machine Software

Ka-Ping Yee, 2007 dissertation

Programmer may wish to bias the election.

Must write simple code that seems obviously correct.

Subject to extremely intense review.

I am one of the reviewers who failed to find malicious bugs.

None succeeded at finding all three bugs.

Building Reliable Voting Machine Software

Ka-Ping Yee, 2007 dissertation

Programmer may wish to bias the election.

Must write simple code that seems obviously correct.

Subject to extremely intense review.

Malicious bugs easily evade detection by review *or* testing.

Building Reliable Voting Machine Software

Ka-Ping Yee, 2007 dissertation

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Must write simple code that seems obviously correct.

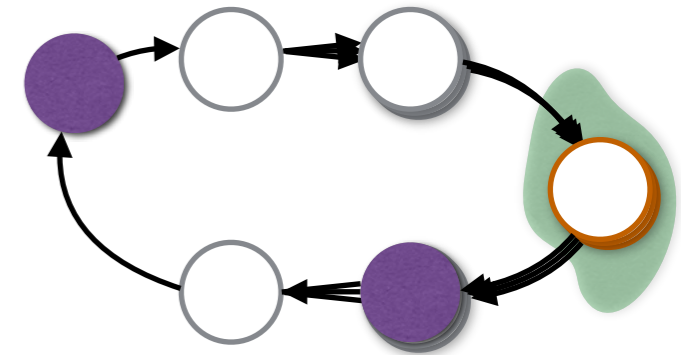
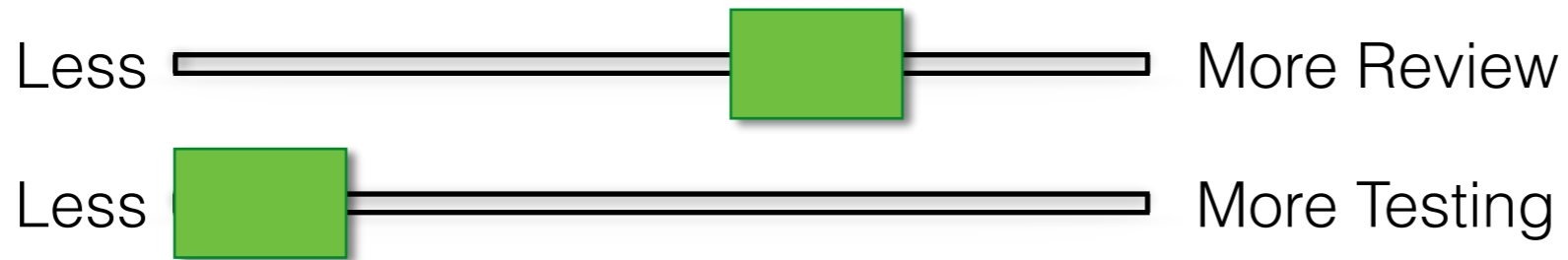
Subject to extremely intense review.

Malicious bugs easily evade detection by review *or* testing.

Harder to evade detection by review *and* testing.

Inspect + Monitor

Inspect
Monitor



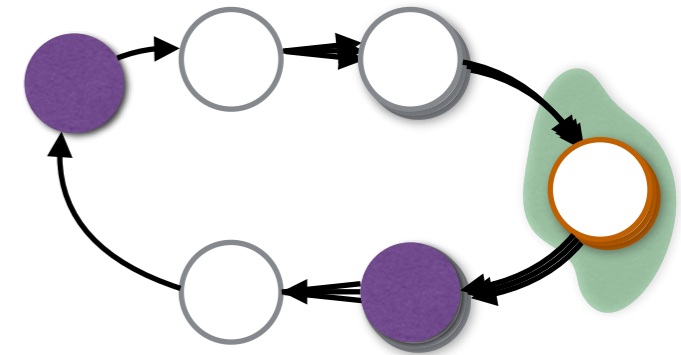
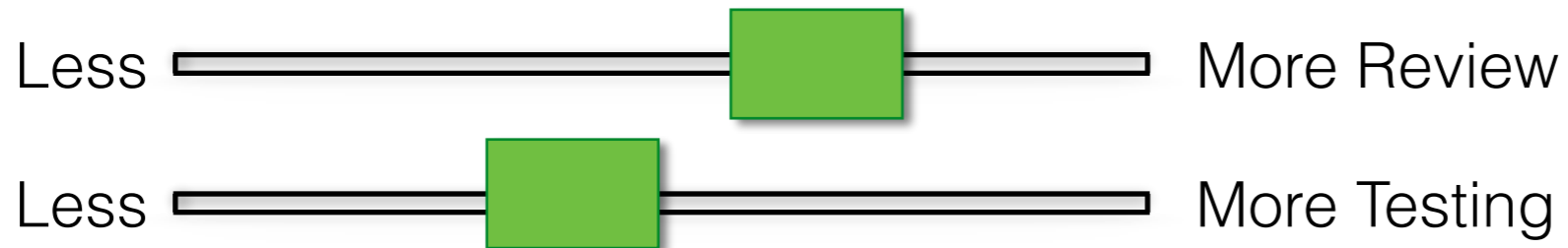
for (i = 0; i <= limit; i++)

Looks fine.

Inspect + Monitor

Inspect

Monitor

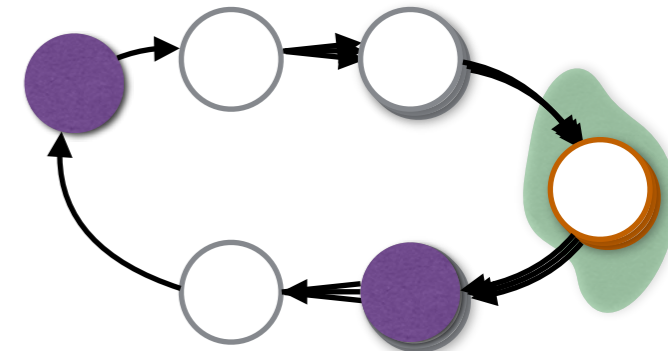


```
for (i = 0; i <= limit; i++)
```

Looks fine.

Fails on zero and one.

Inspect + Monitor



Inspect

Monitor



```
for (i = 0; i <= limit; i++)
```

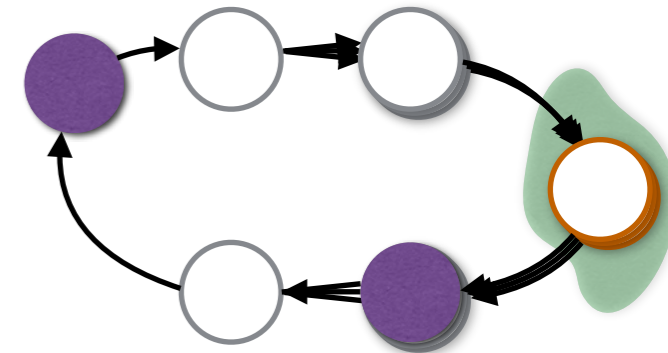
```
for (i = 0; i < limit; i++)  
  if (j === 72374928)
```

Looks fine.

Fails on zero and one.

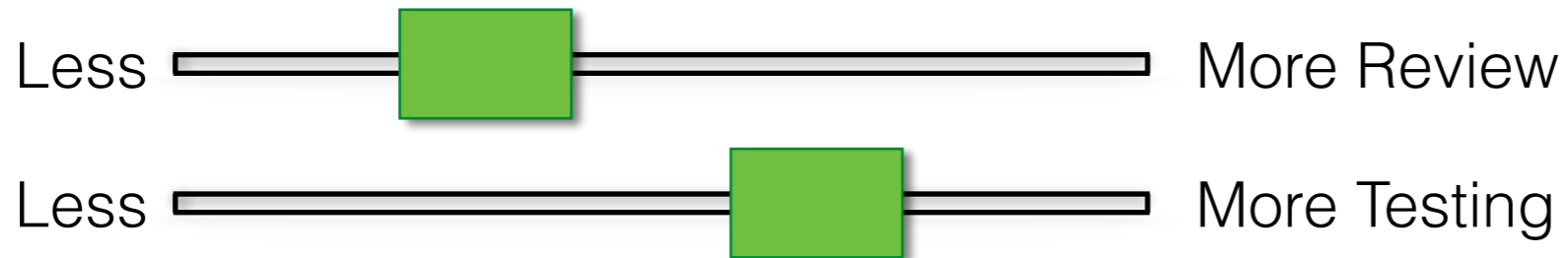
Passes all tests.

Inspect + Monitor



Inspect

Monitor



```
for (i = 0; i <= limit; i++)
```

Looks fine.

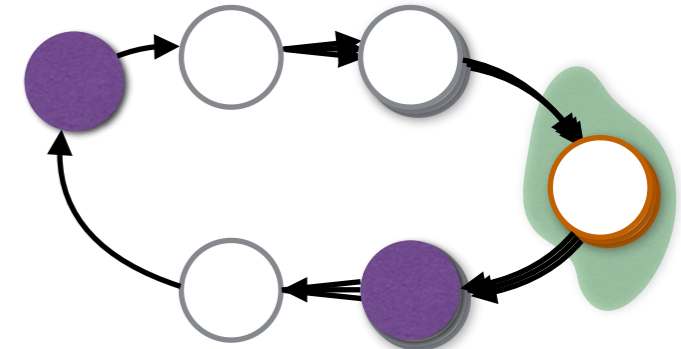
Fails on zero and one.

```
for (i = 0; i < limit; i++)  
  if (j === 72374928)
```

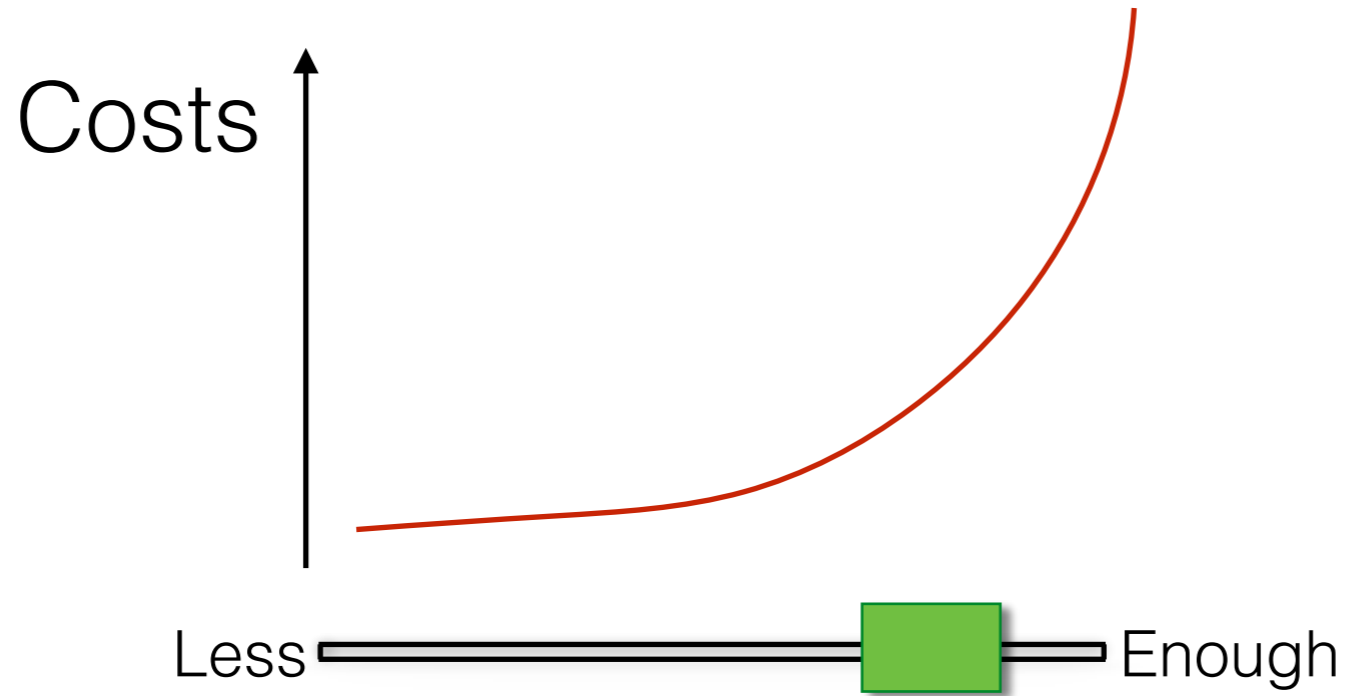
Looks weird.

Passes all tests.

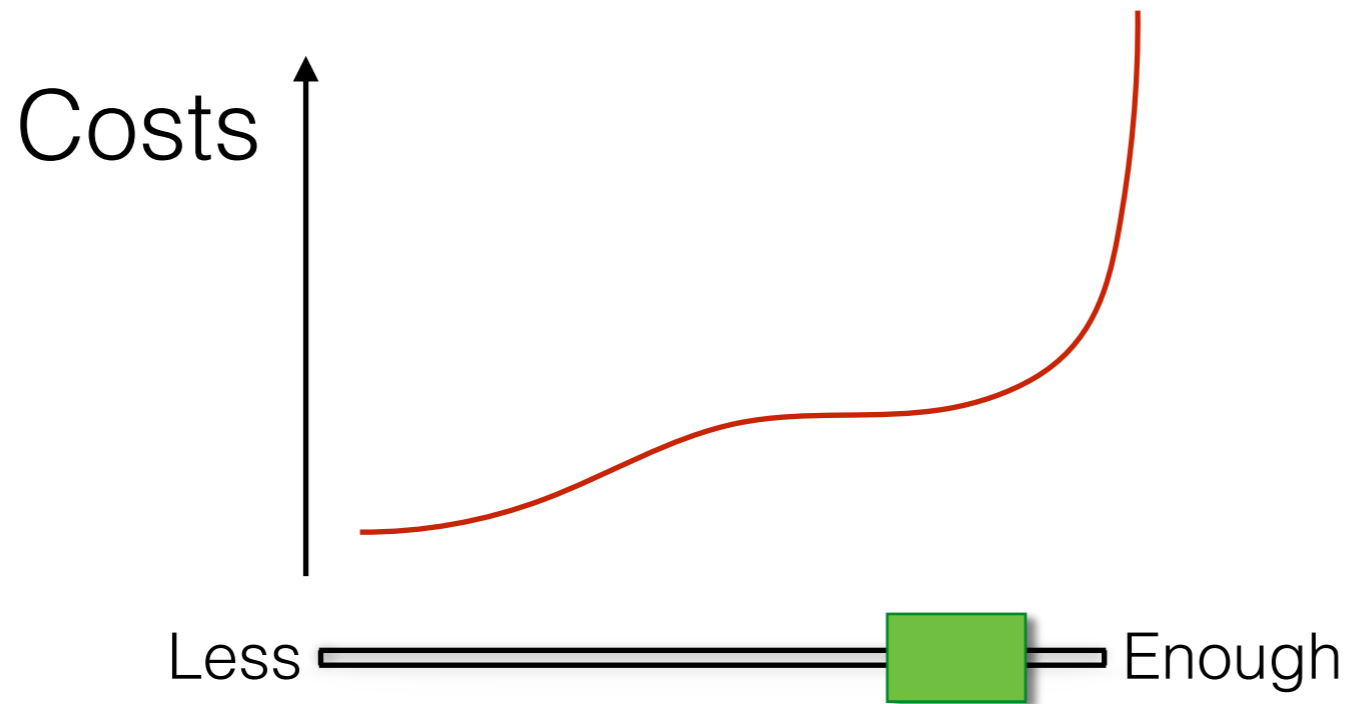
Compose Compromises



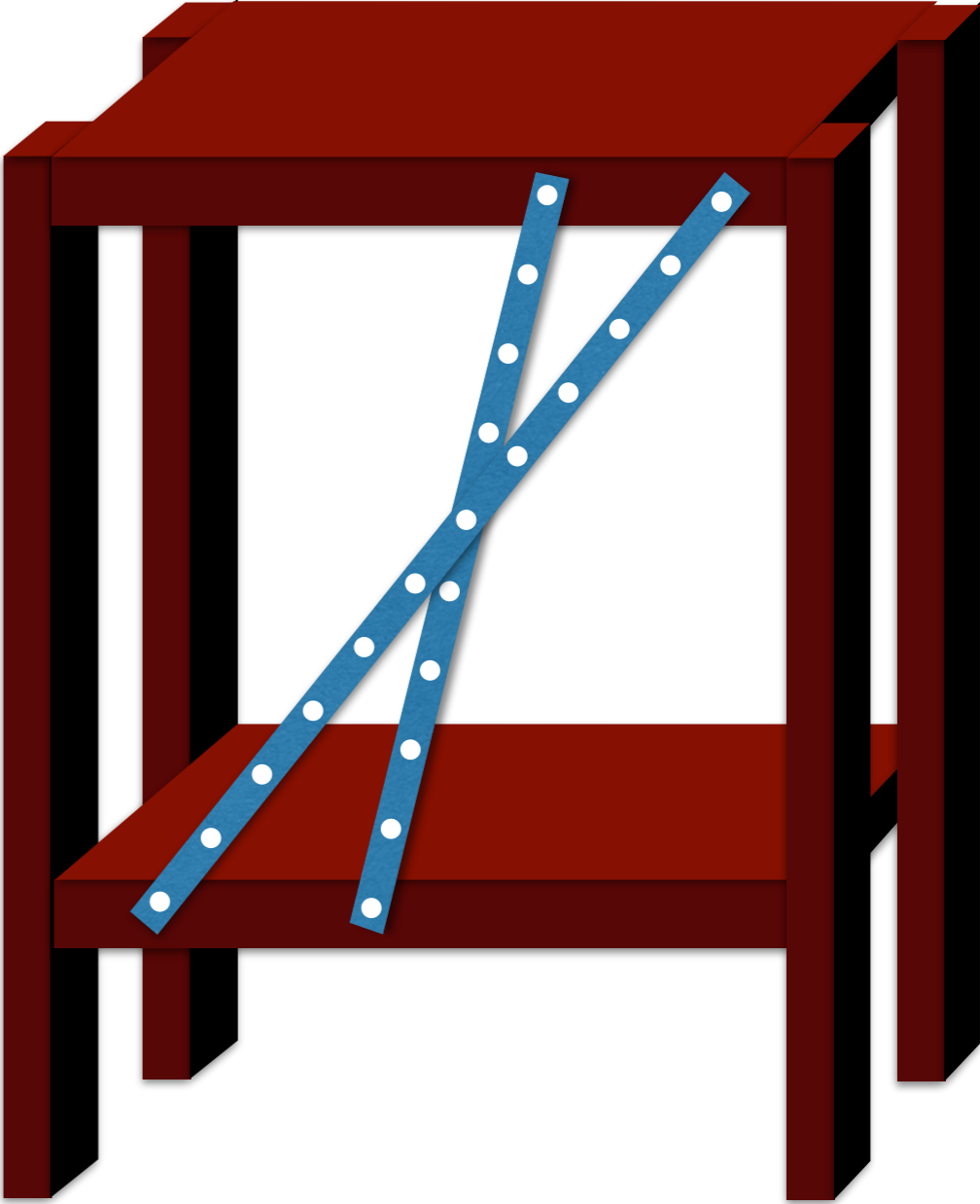
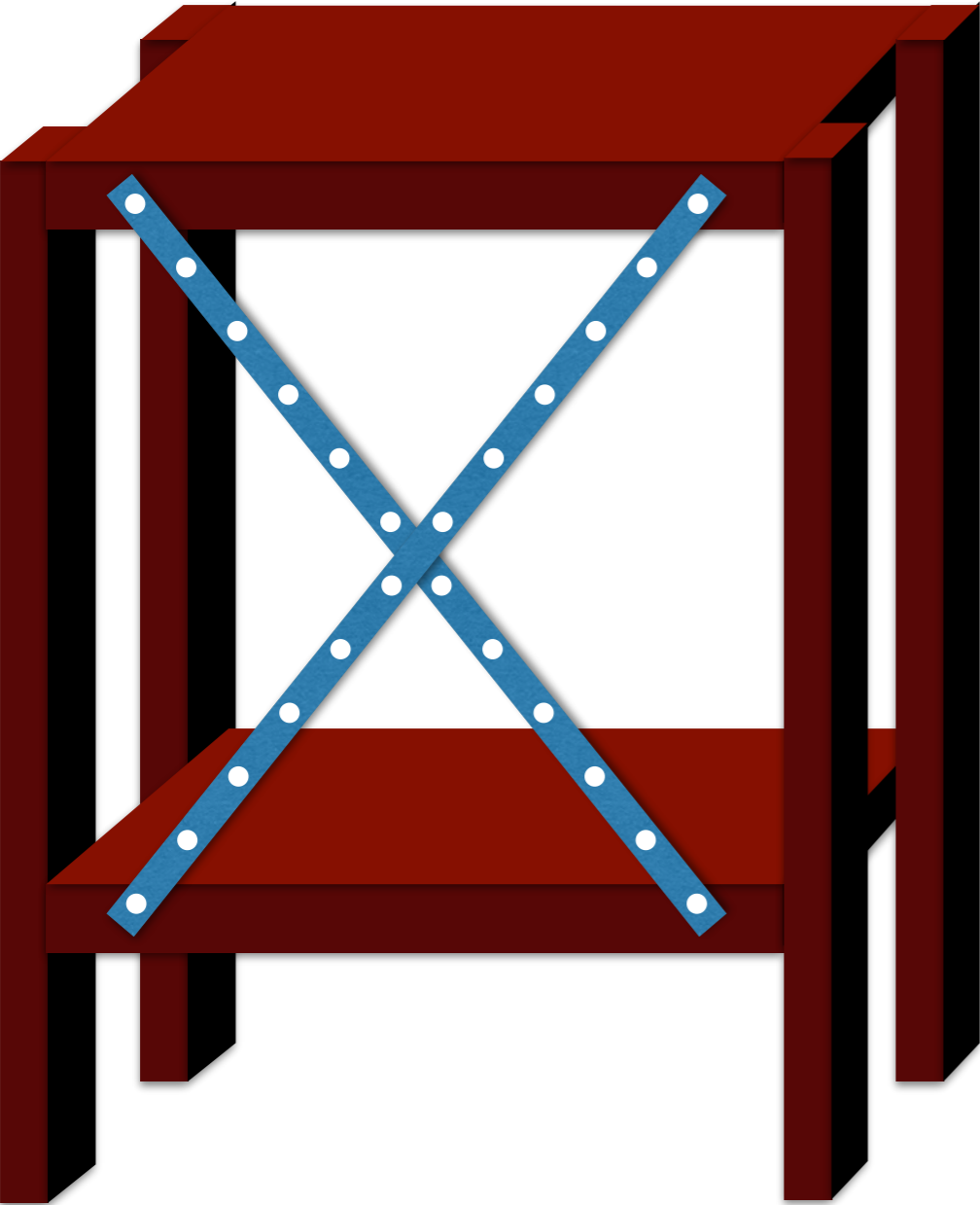
Inspect



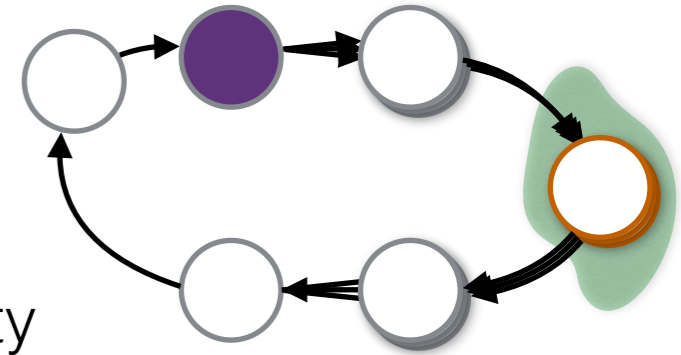
Monitor



Cross Bracing



Package Delivery



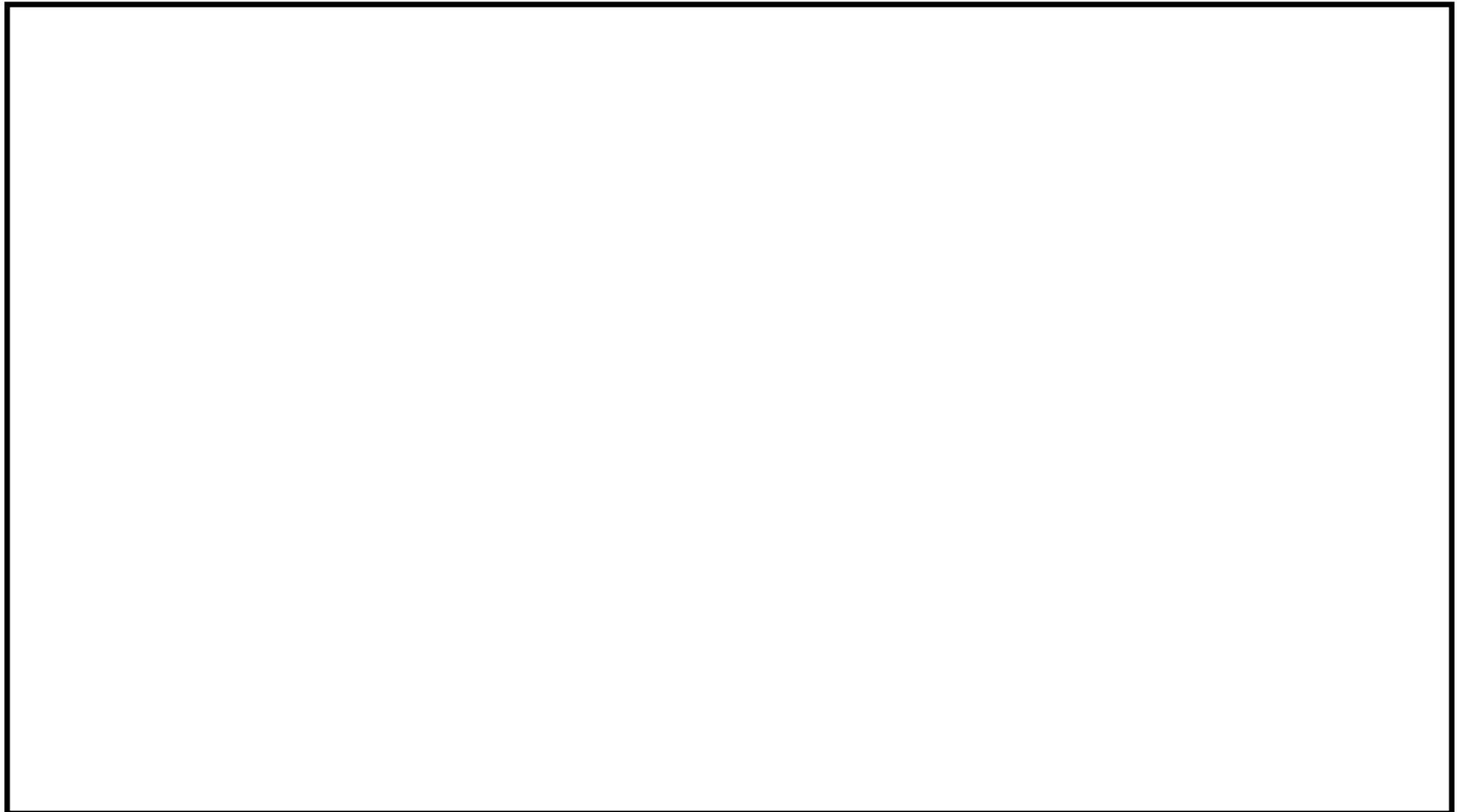
Allow

Broad

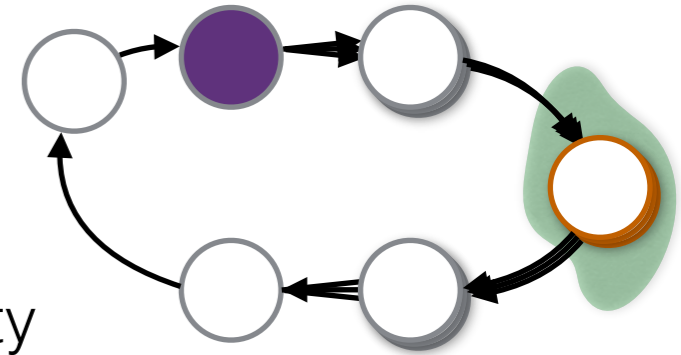


Least Authority

Broad Authority



Package Delivery



Allow

Broad

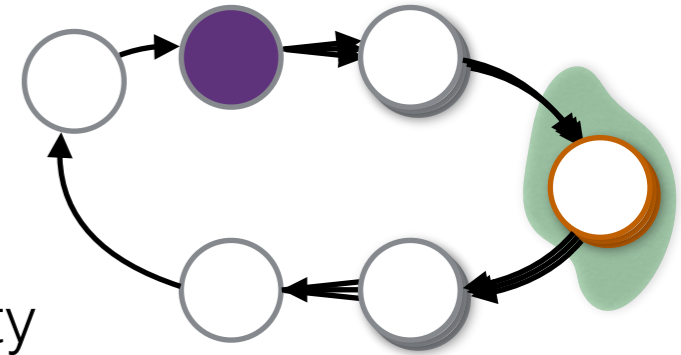


Least Authority

Broad Authority



Package Delivery



Allow

Broad



Least Authority

Broad Authority

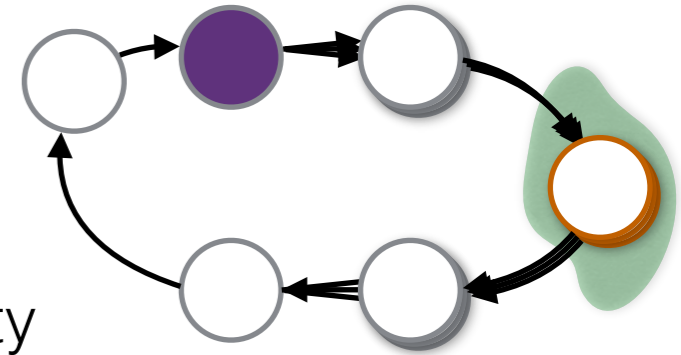
Deliver

a) principal benefit

b) agent benefit



Package Delivery



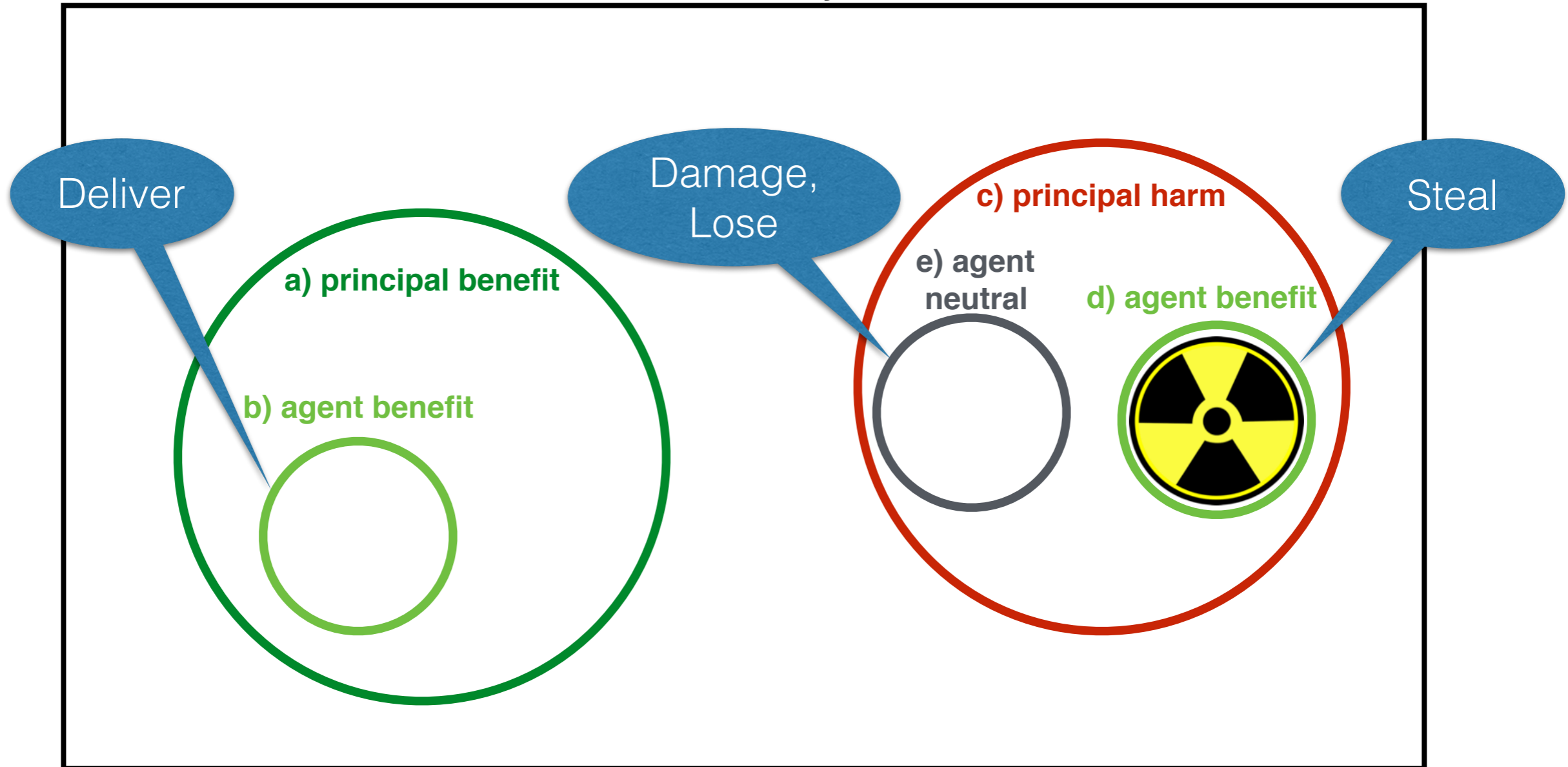
Allow

Broad



Least Authority

Broad Authority



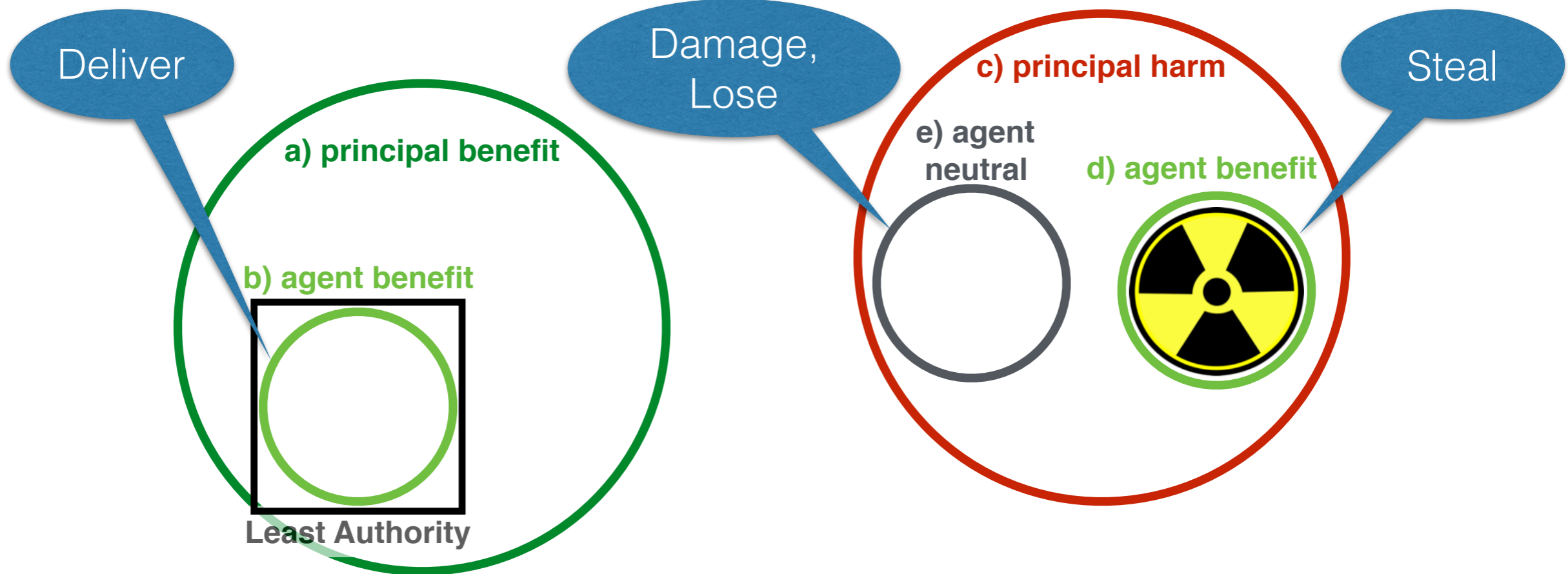
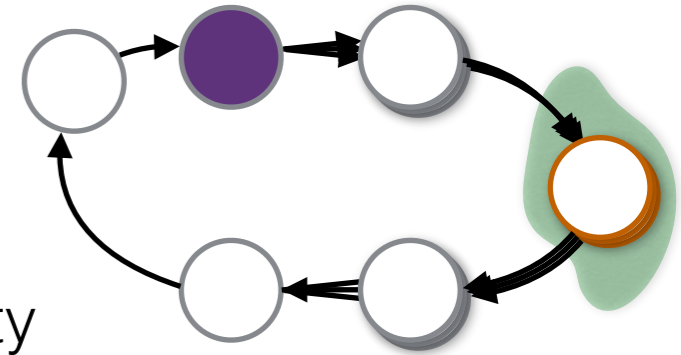
Package Delivery

Allow

Broad

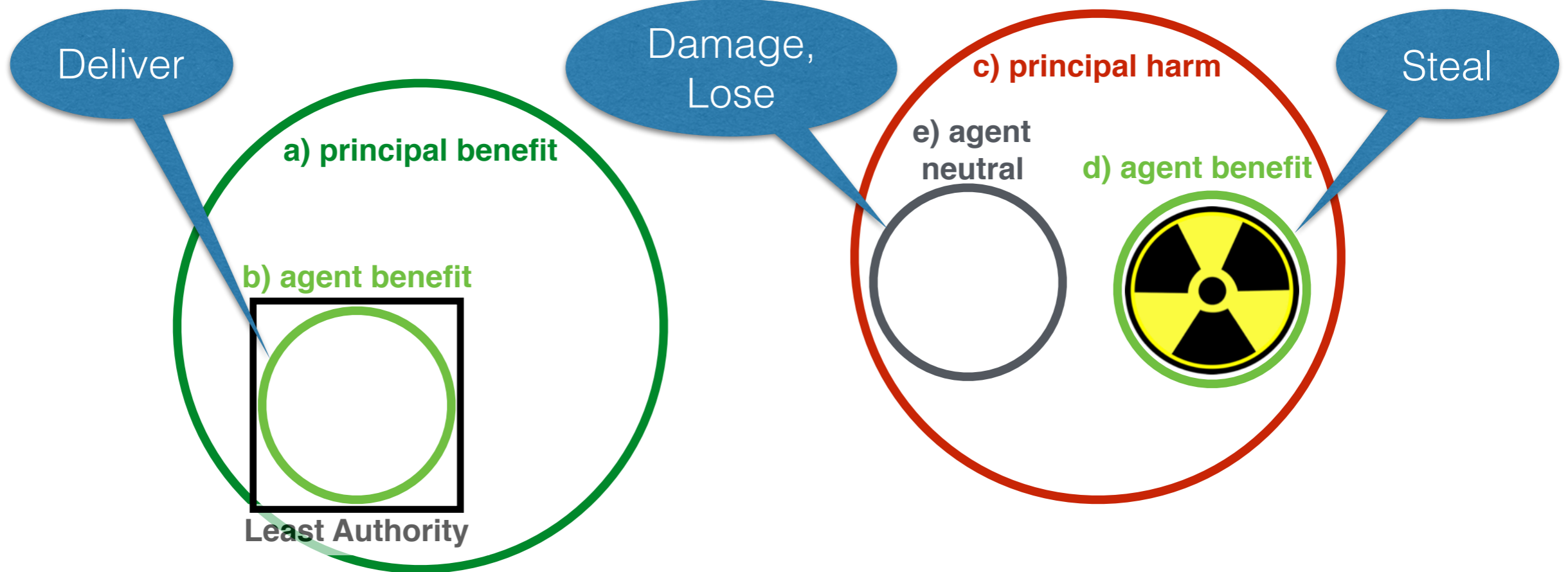
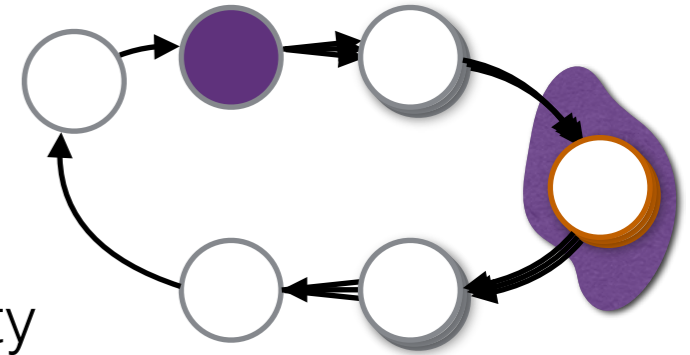
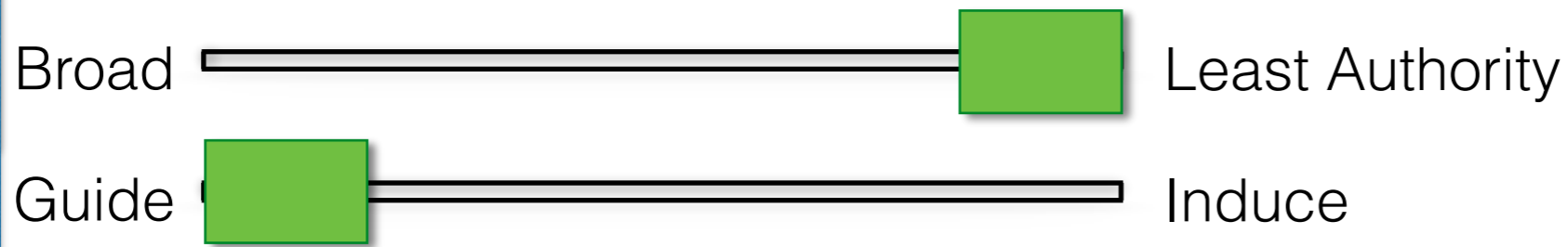


Least Authority



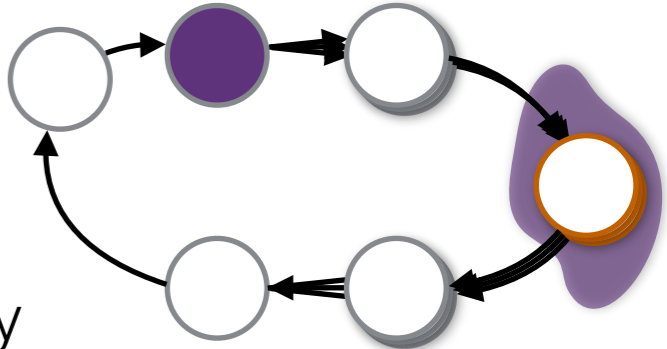
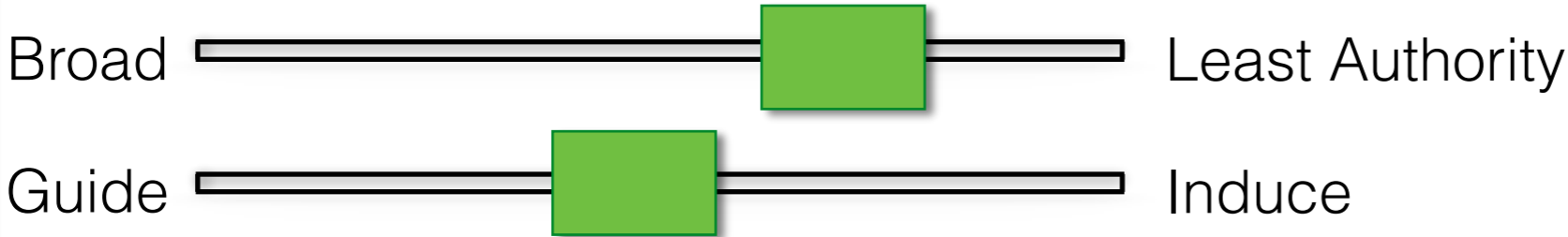
Allow + Reward

Allow
Reward

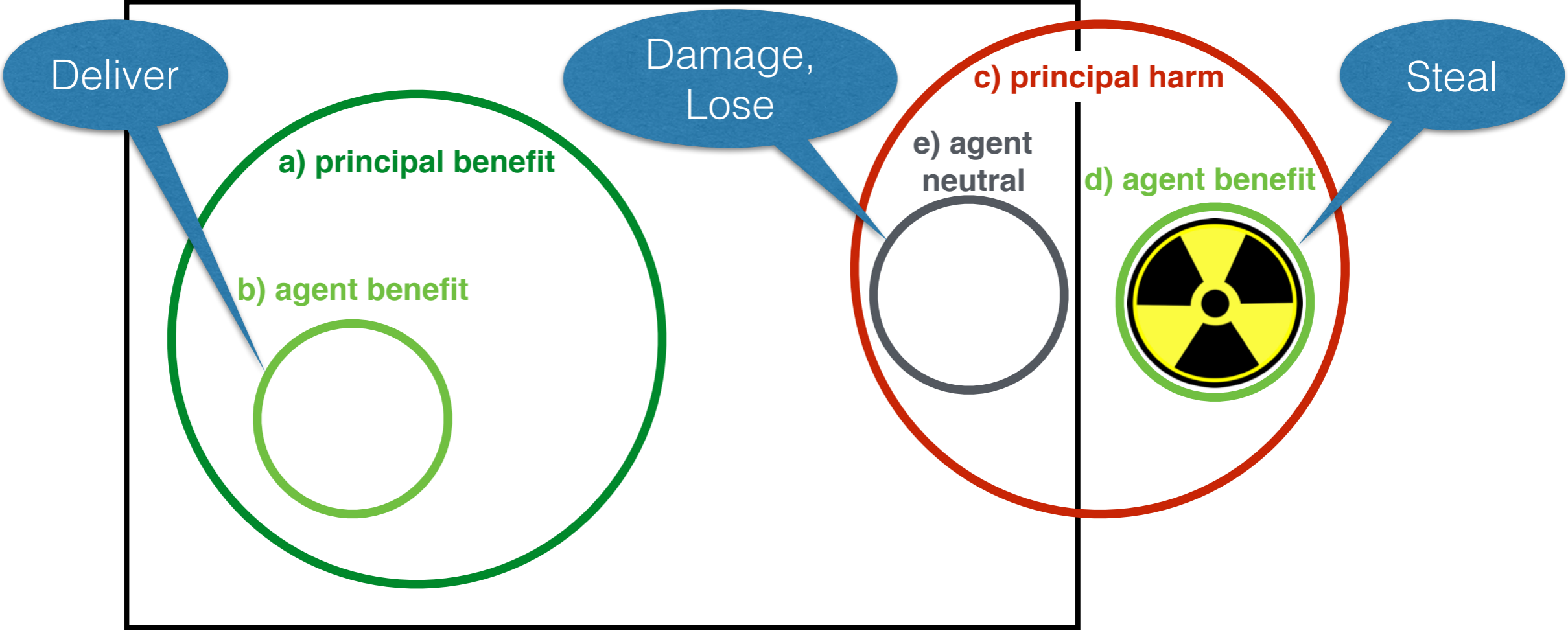


Allow + Reward

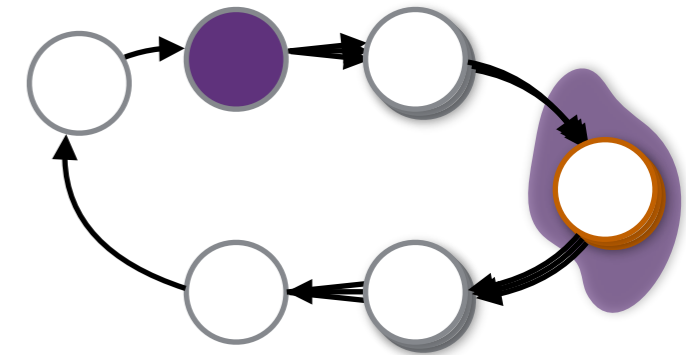
Allow
Reward



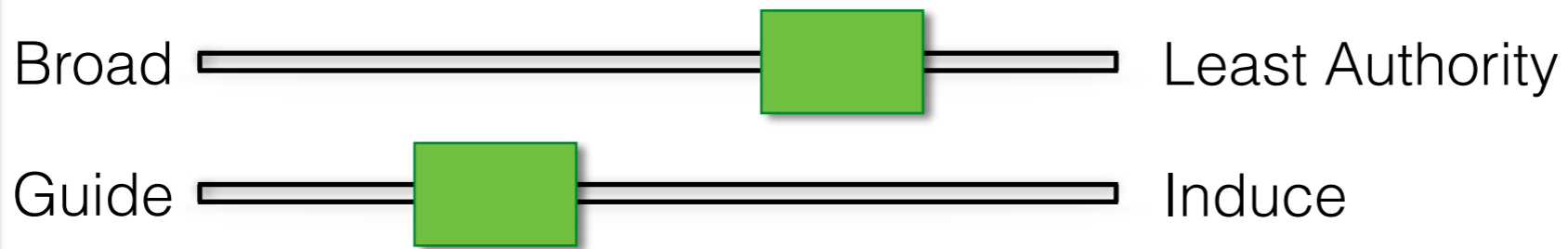
Narrow Authority



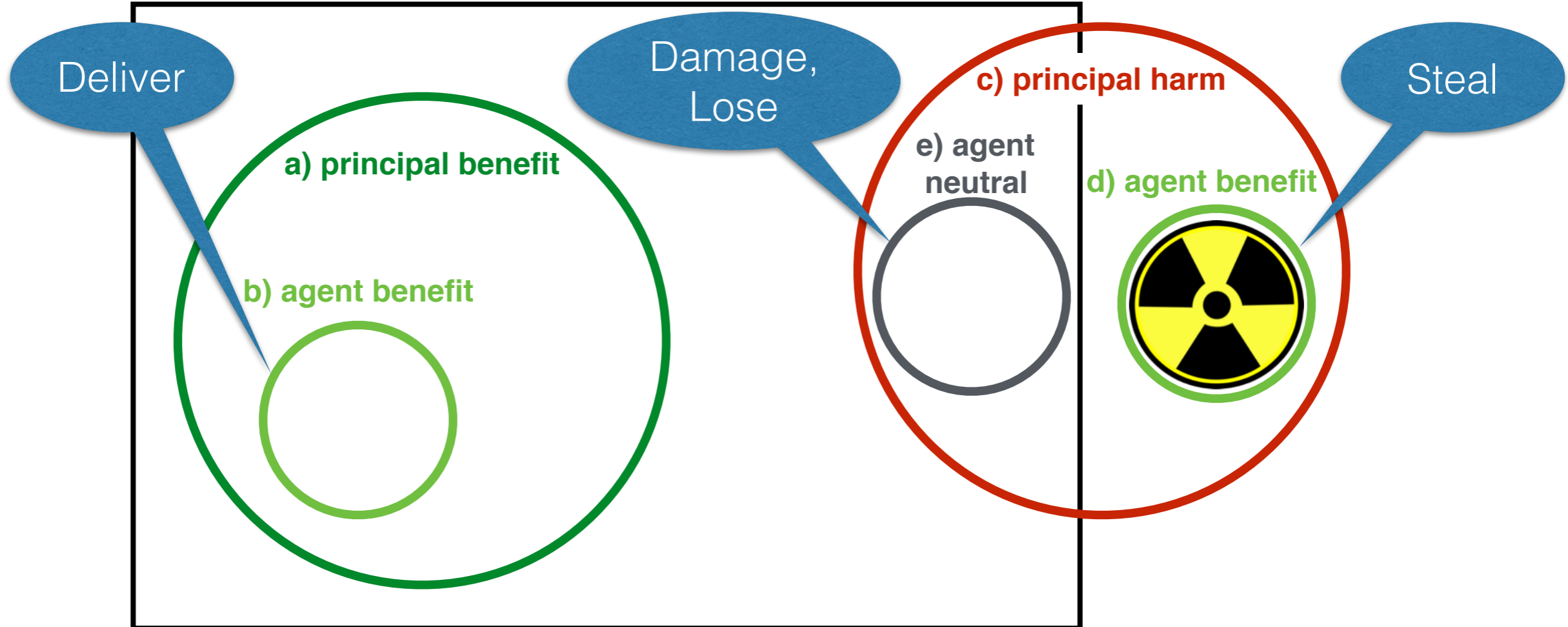
Allow + Reward



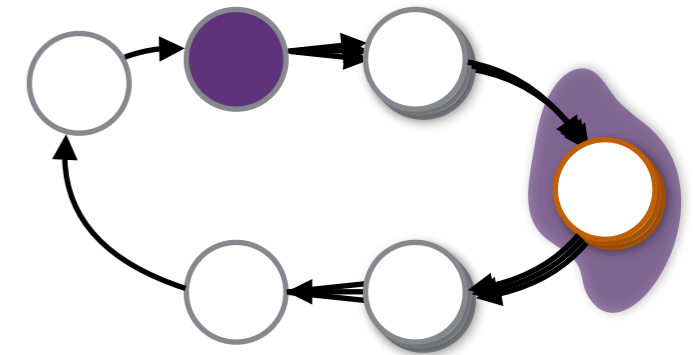
Allow
Reward



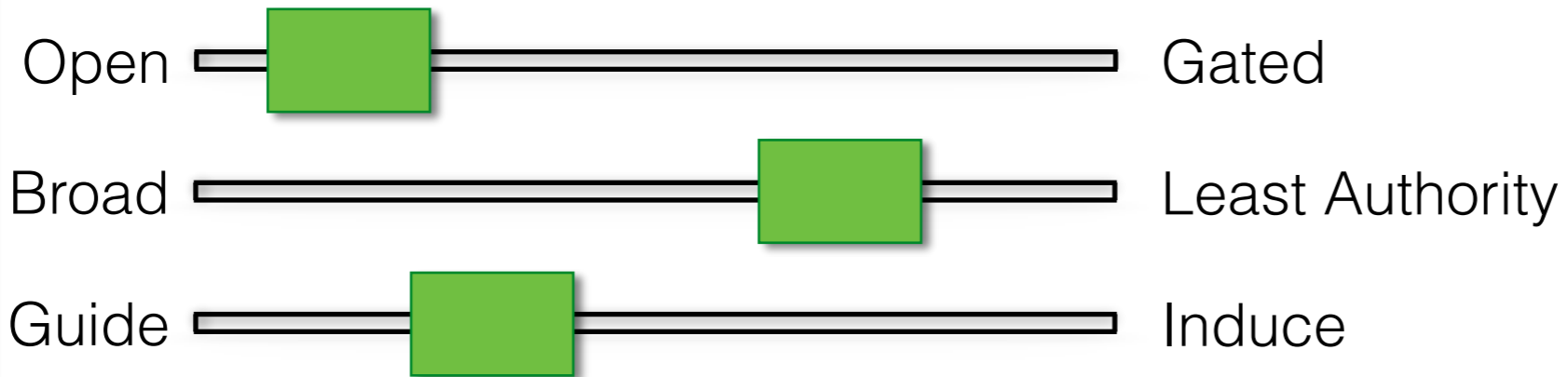
Narrow Authority



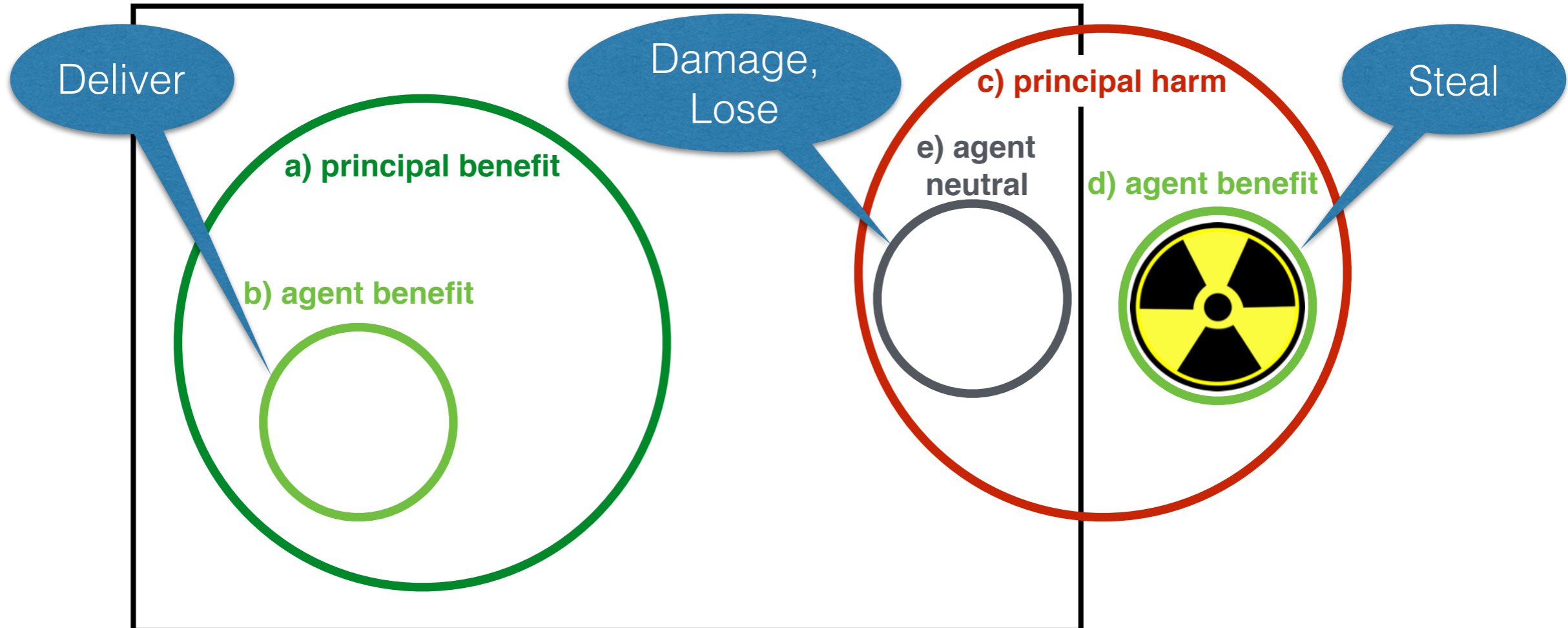
Allow + Reward + a little Select



Select
Allow
Reward

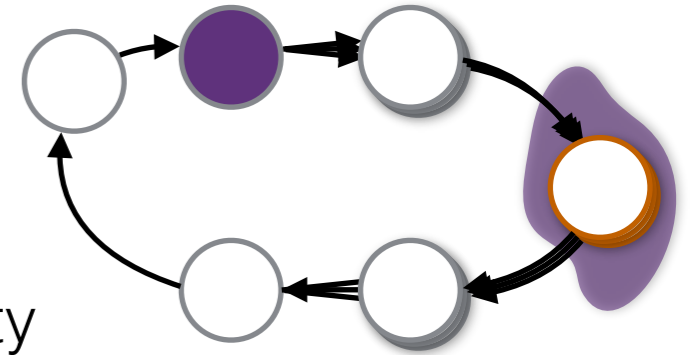
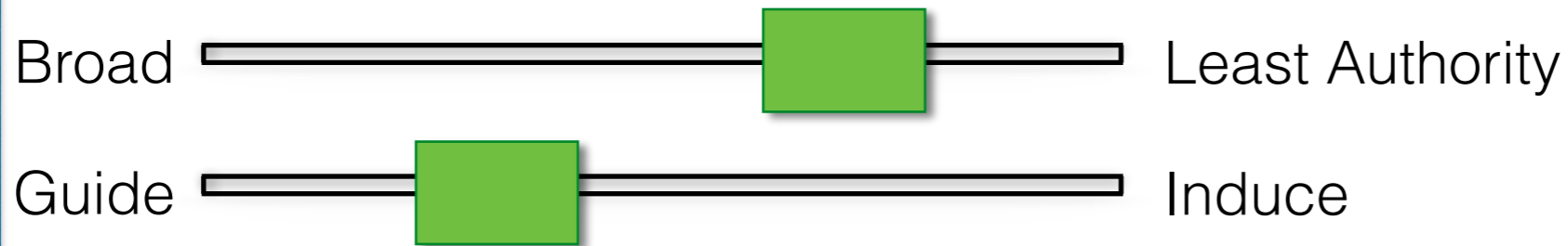


Narrow Authority

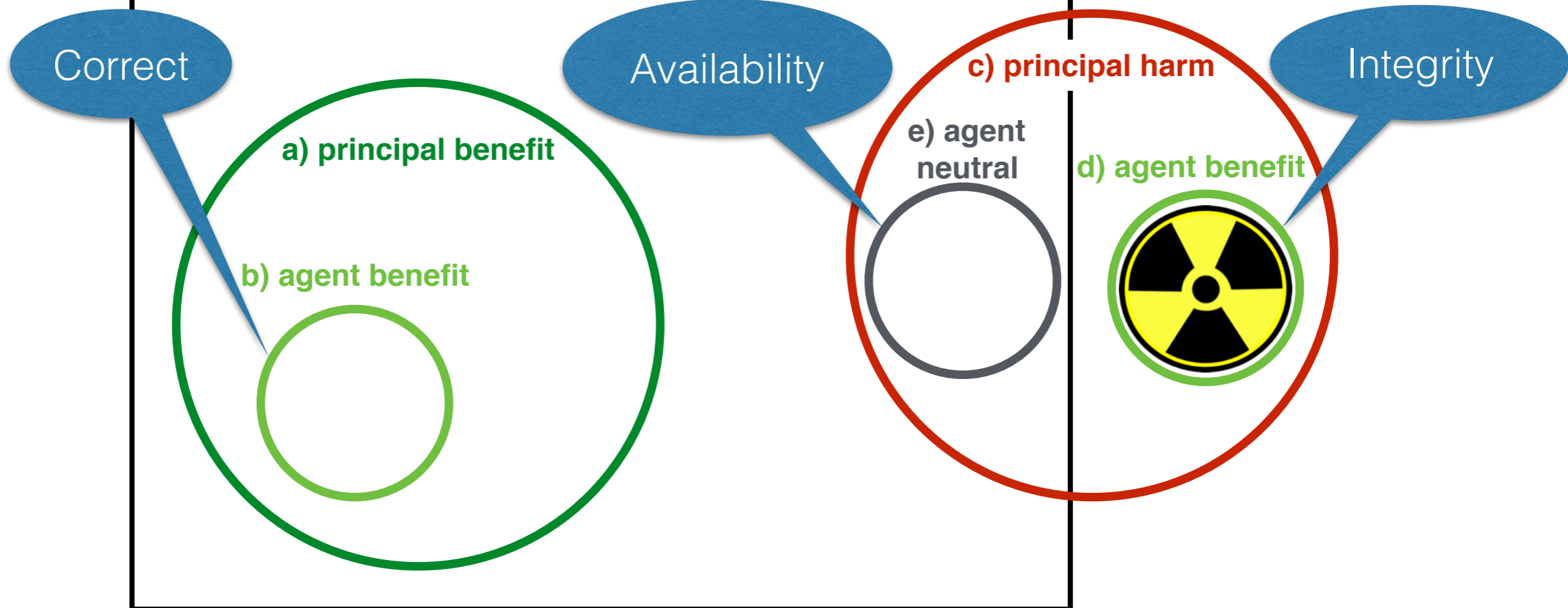


Plugin Safety

Allow
Reward

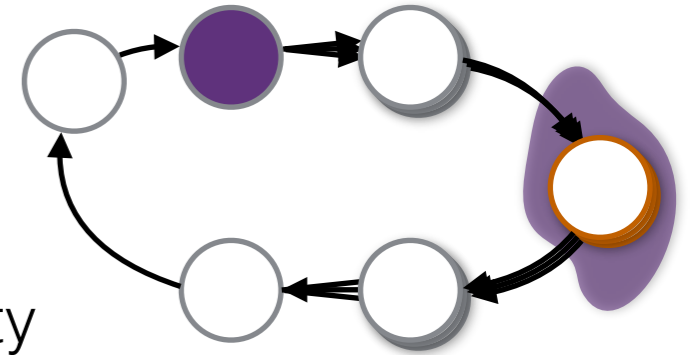
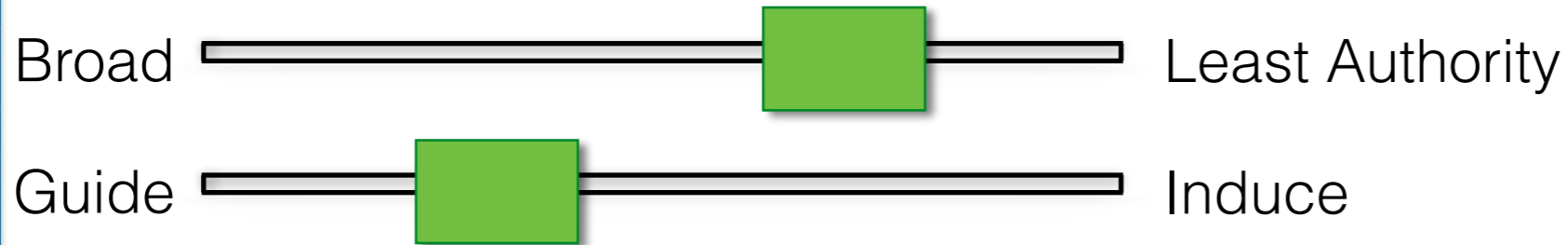


Narrow Authority

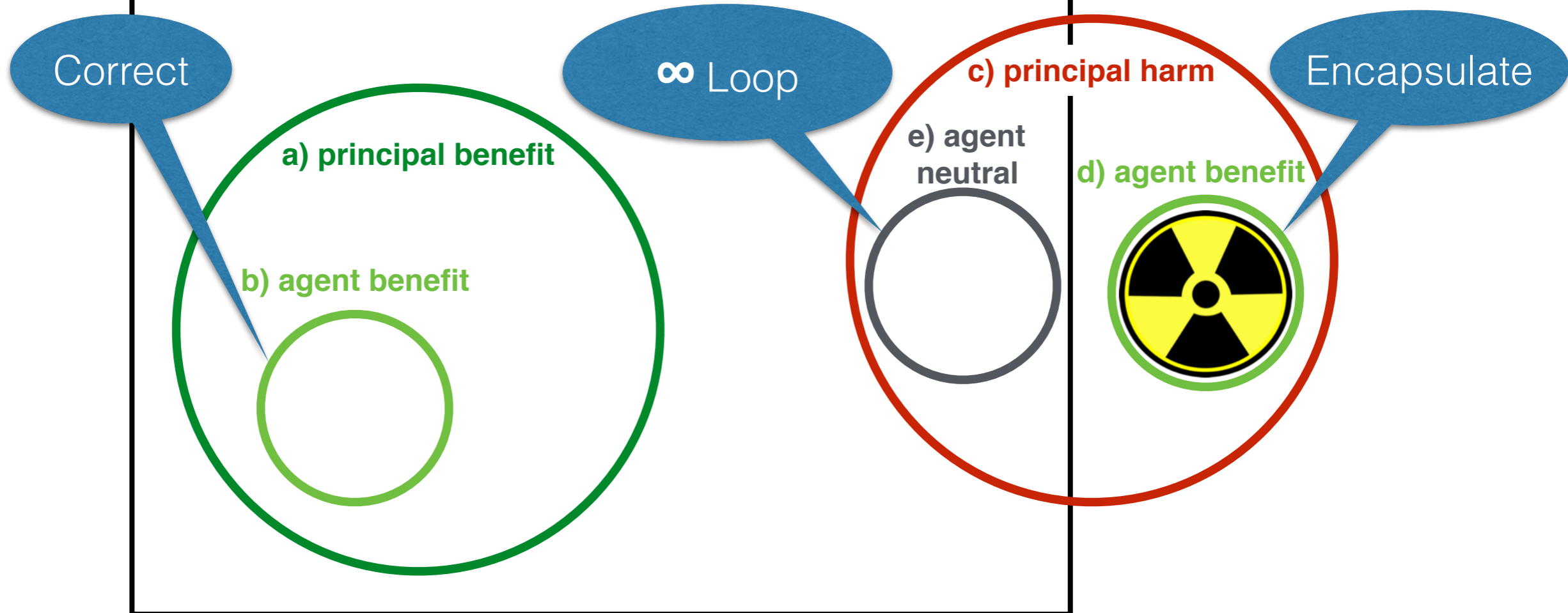


Plugin Safety

Allow
Reward

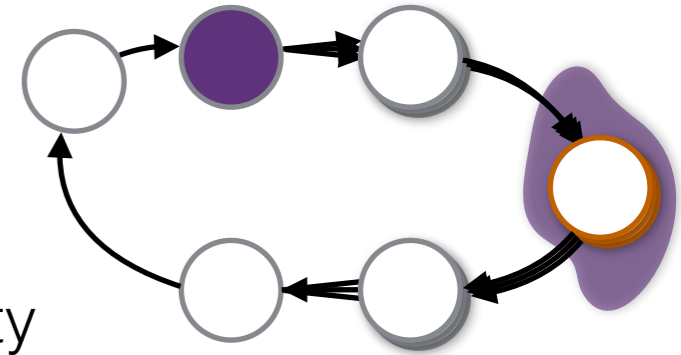
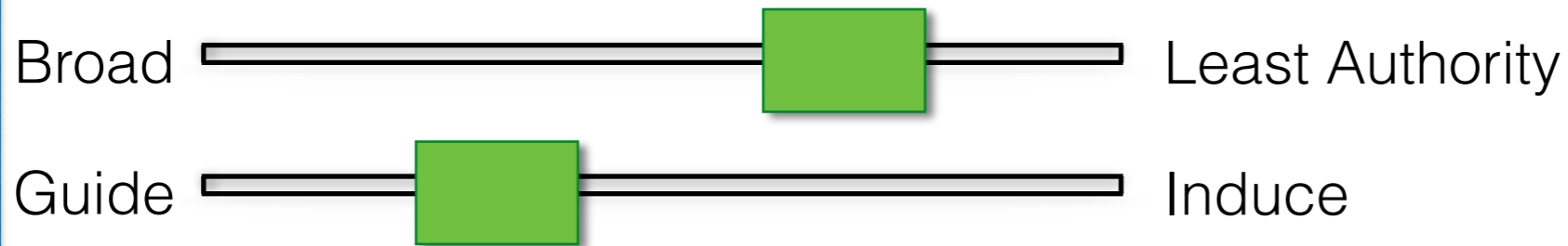


Narrow Authority

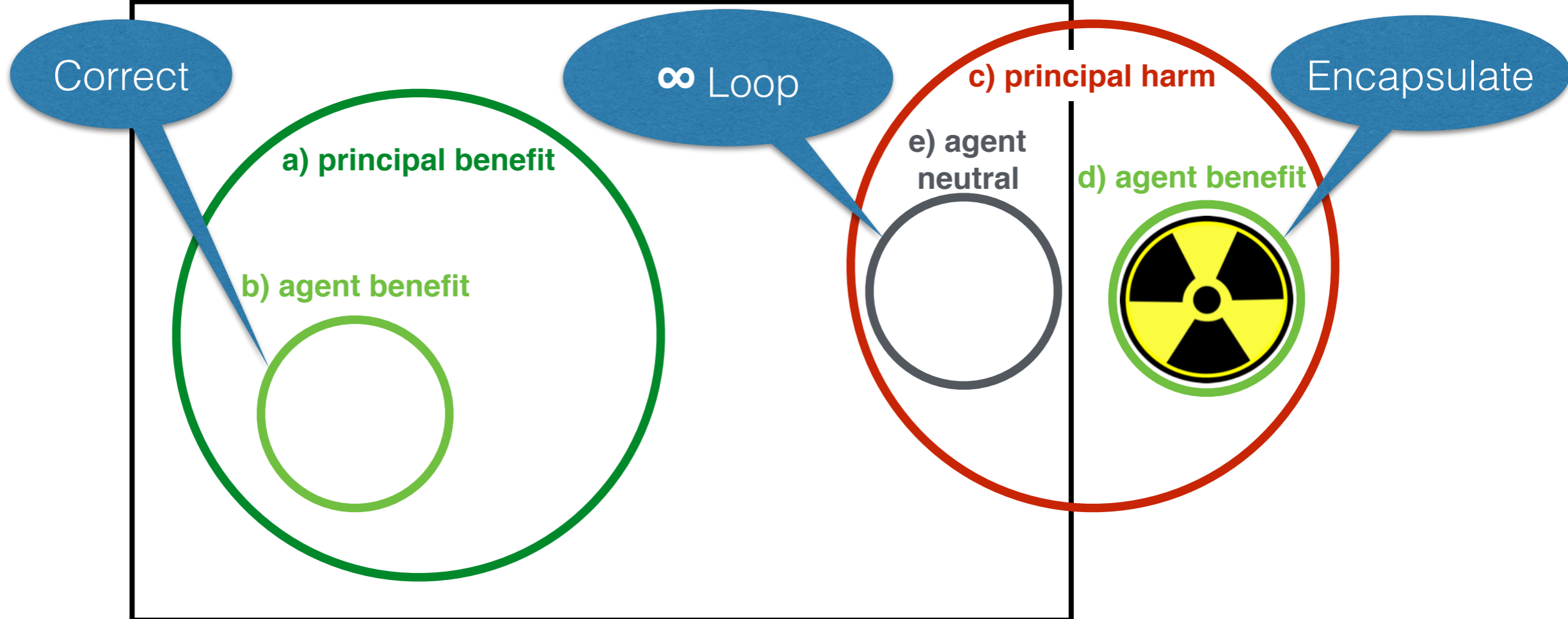


Allow + Reward

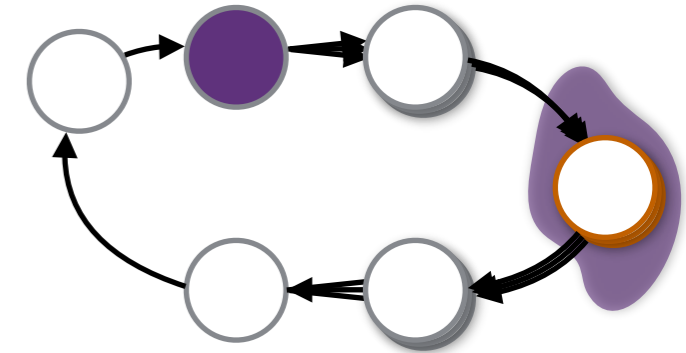
Allow
Reward



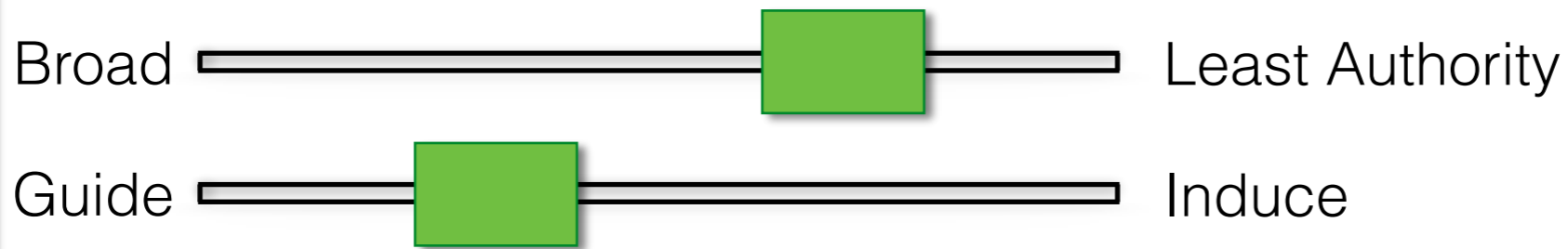
Narrow Authority



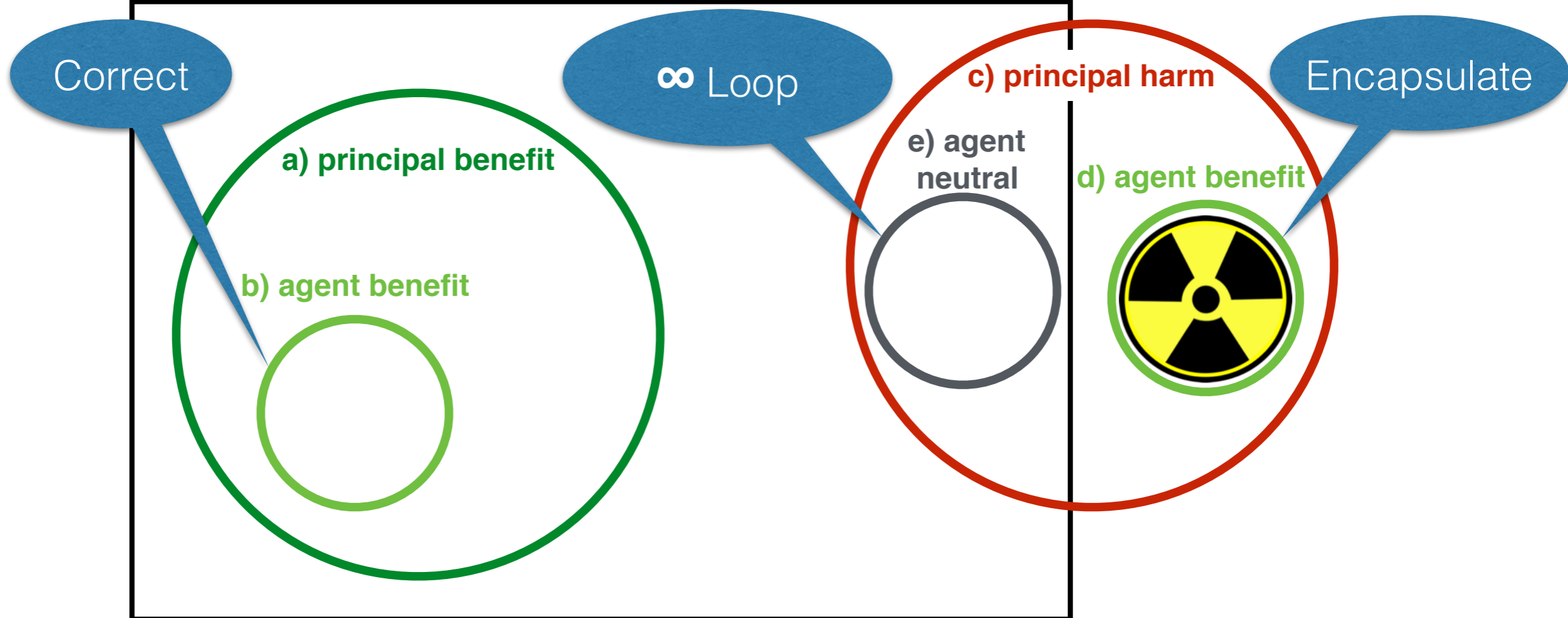
Allow + Reward



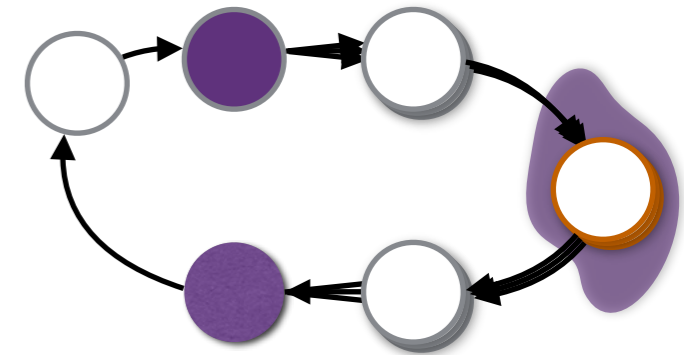
Allow
Reward



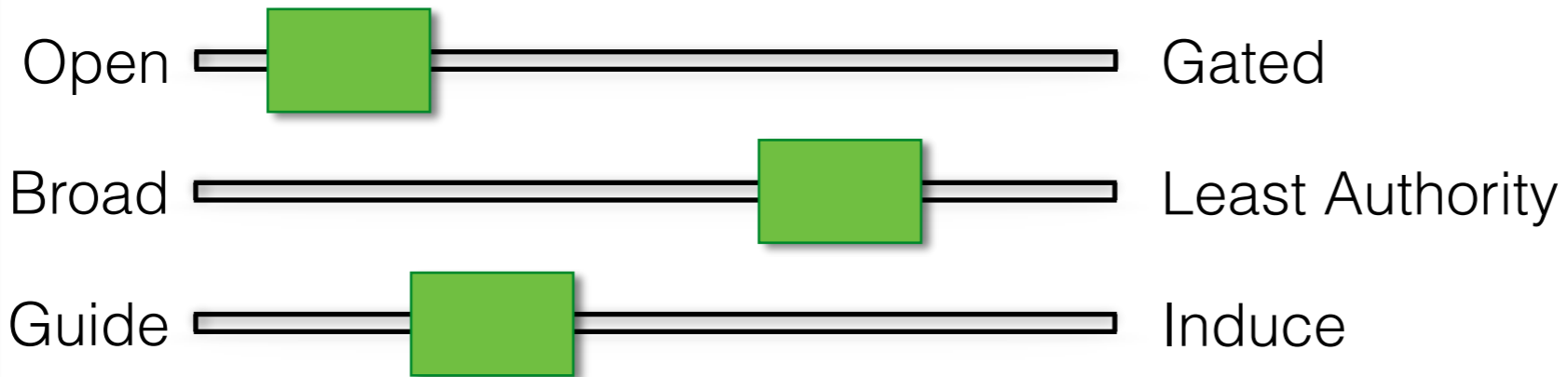
Narrow Authority



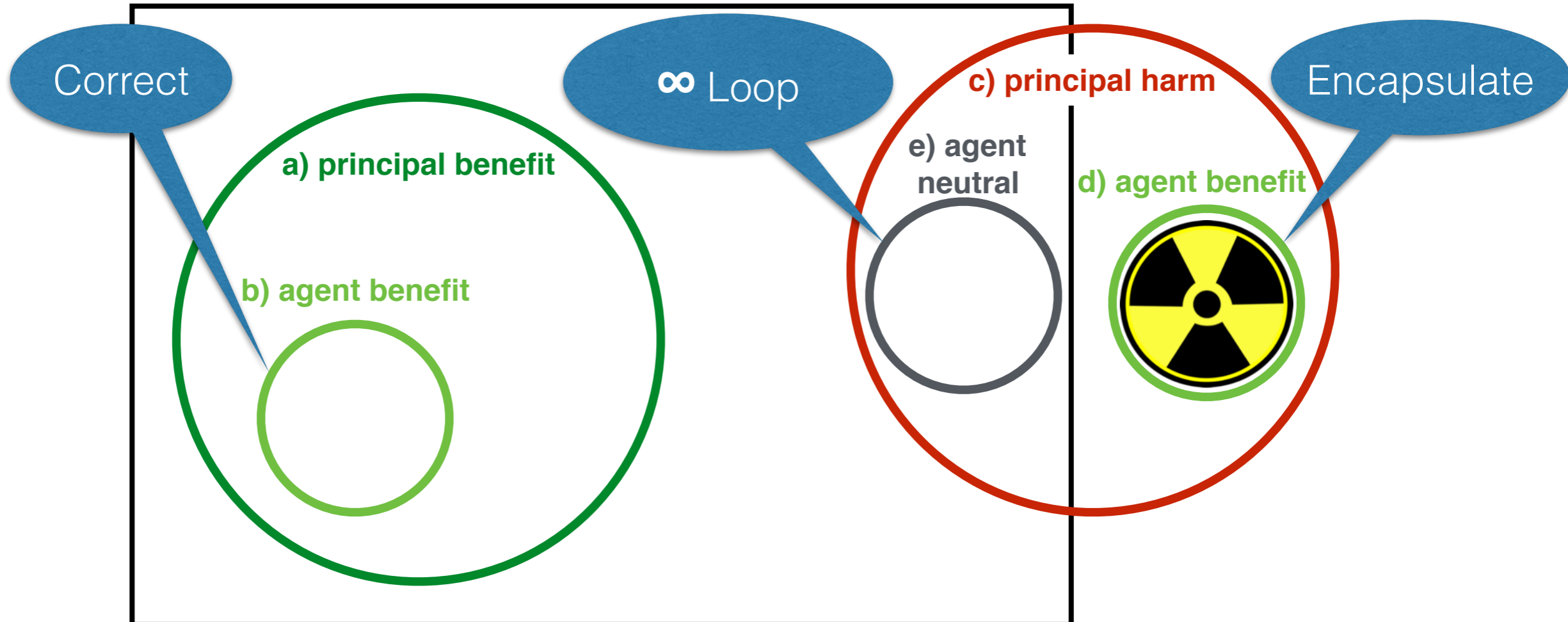
Allow + Reward + a little Select



Select
Allow
Reward



Narrow Authority



Spectrum of Allowing Effects

Isolating effects in Space

Memory-unsafe, imperative

Spectrum of Allowing Effects

Isolating effects in Space

Memory-unsafe, imperative

Purely Functional

Spectrum of Allowing Effects

Isolating effects in Space

Memory-unsafe, imperative

Memory-safe, imperative

Purely Functional

Spectrum of Allowing Effects

Isolating effects in Space

Memory-unsafe, imperative

Memory-safe, imperative

OCap

Purely Functional

Spectrum of Allowing Effects

Isolating effects in Space

Memory-unsafe, imperative

Memory-safe, imperative

OCap

Purely Functional

Isolating effects in Time

Sequential programming

Spectrum of Allowing Effects

Isolating effects in Space

Memory-unsafe, imperative

Memory-safe, imperative

OCap

Purely Functional

Isolating effects in Time

Pre-emptive multithreading

Sequential programming

Spectrum of Allowing Effects

Isolating effects in Space

Memory-unsafe, imperative

Memory-safe, imperative

OCap

Purely Functional

Isolating effects in Time

Pre-emptive multithreading

Cooperative multithreading

Sequential programming

Spectrum of Allowing Effects

Isolating effects in Space

Memory-unsafe, imperative

Memory-safe, imperative

OCap

Purely Functional

Isolating effects in Time

Pre-emptive multithreading

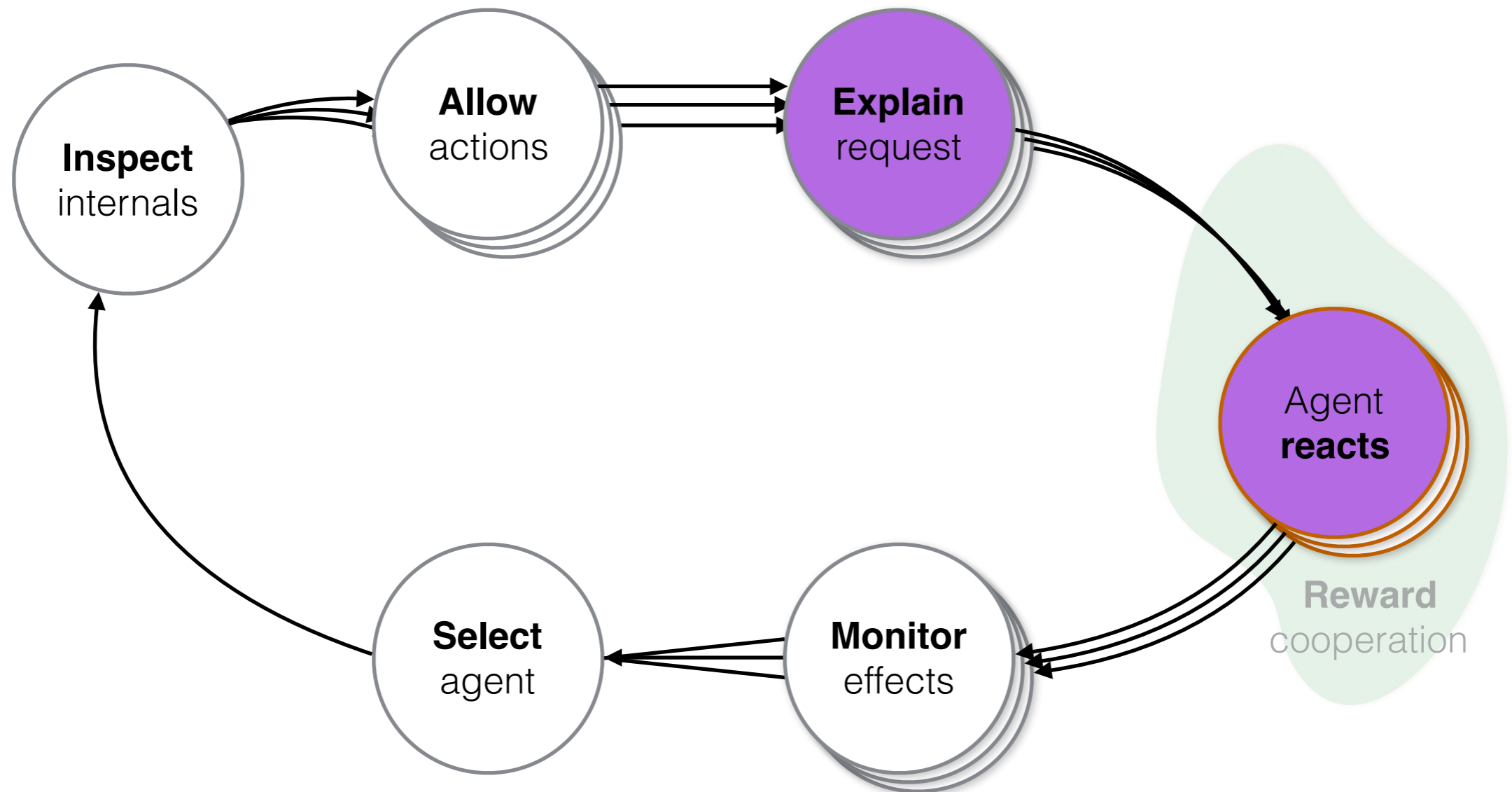
Cooperative multithreading

Communicating Event Loops

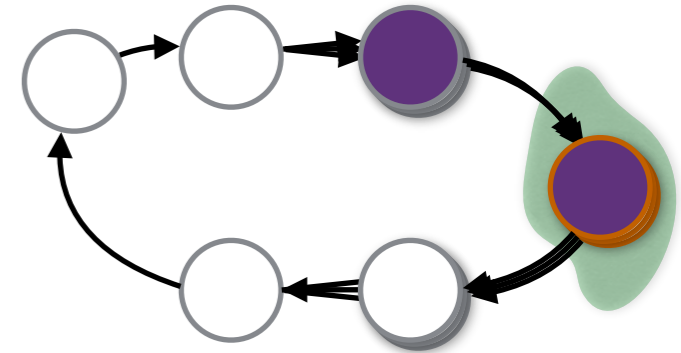
Sequential programming



Internal Software Development API Design



Explain request Shared Understandings



Principal *why*

Parsing

Gift for Dad

Interface *what*

parens[i++] = tok

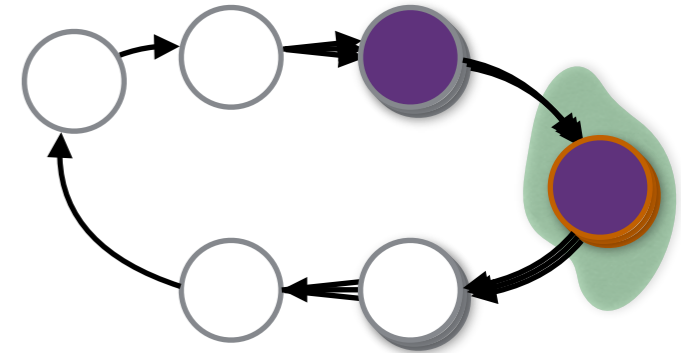
“Give this to my Dad?”

Agent *how*

Array+index

Plane

Explain request Shared Understandings



Principal *why*

Parsing

Gift for Dad

Interface *what*

Stack

Package delivery

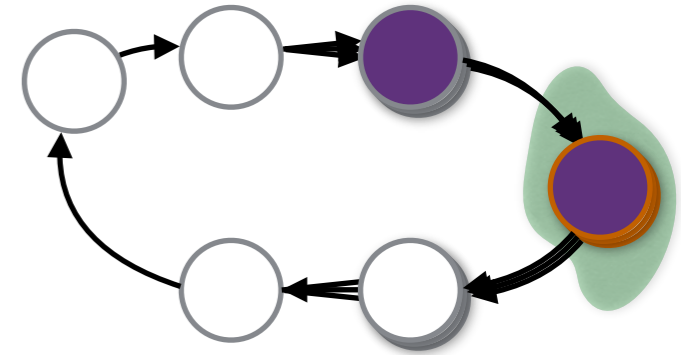
Agent *how*

Array+index

Plane

Explain request

Abstraction boundaries



Principal why
Multiple purposes

Parsing

RPN

Gift
for Dad

Send
for repair

Interface what

Stack

Package delivery

Agent how
Multiple means

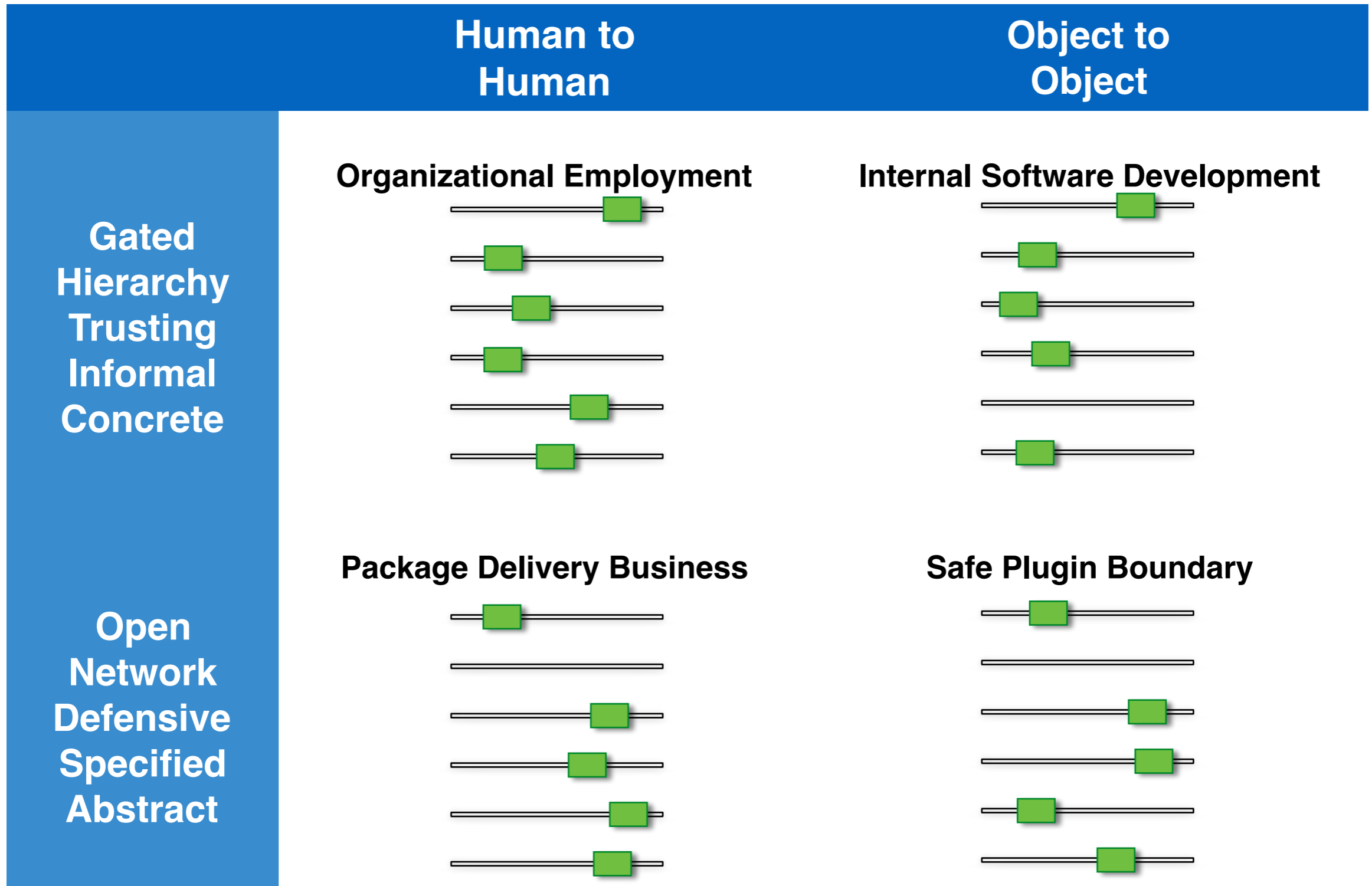
Cons List

Array+index

Plane

Truck

Structural Similarities



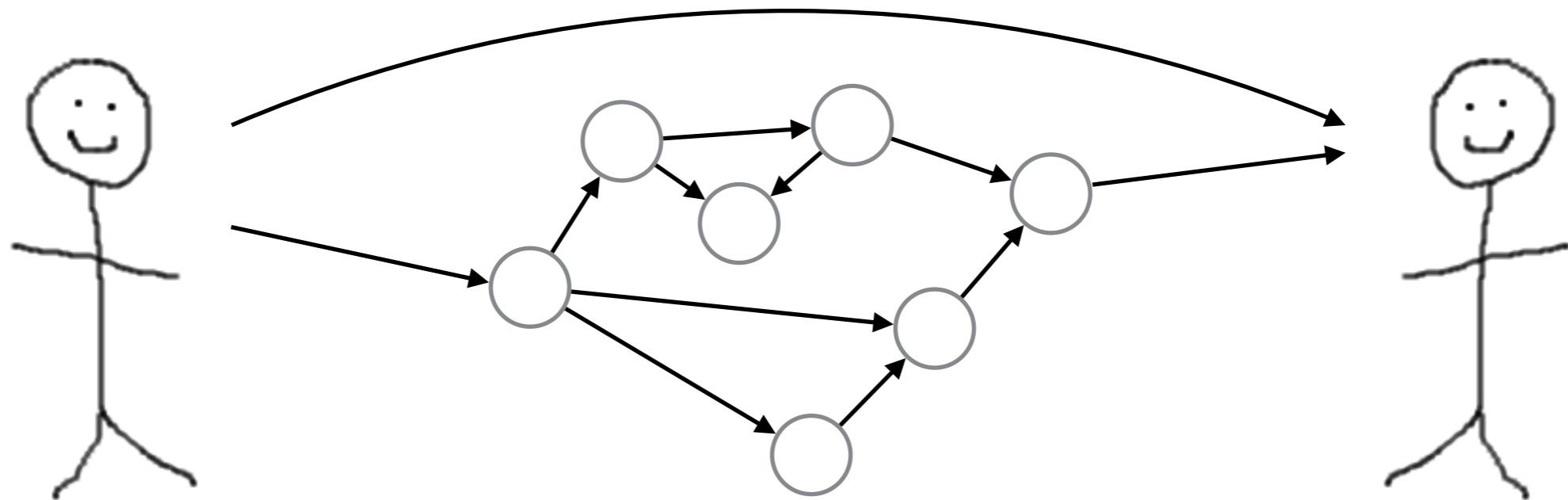
Gated
Hierarchy
Trusting
Informal
Concrete

Open
Network
Defensive
Specified
Abstract

Networks of Specialized Knowledge

Networks of Specialized Knowledge

Shifting mixtures of humans and software.



Networks of Specialized Knowledge

Shifting mixtures of humans and software.

Division of knowledge hazards

Econ: intentional misbehavior

CS: accidental misbehavior

Pre

Hidden characteristics

Request

Execute the request

Post

Hidden actions

Networks of Specialized Knowledge

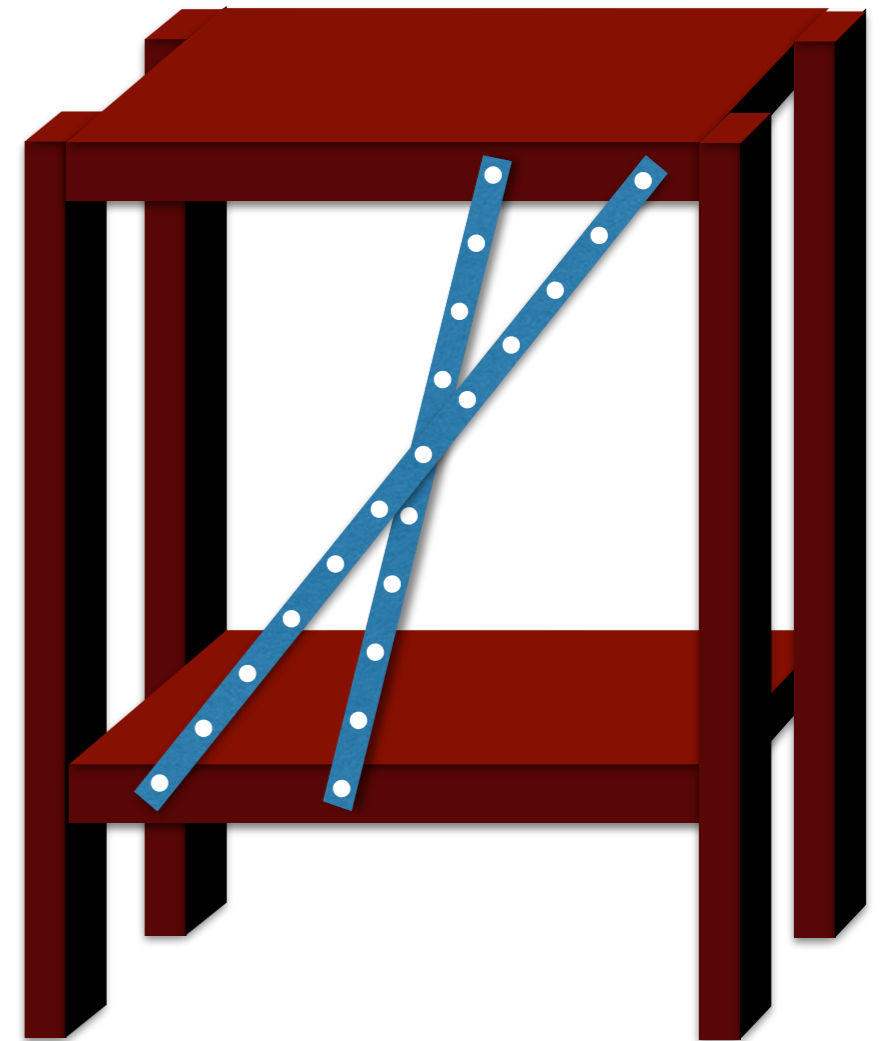
Shifting mixtures of humans and software.

Division of knowledge hazards

Econ: intentional misbehavior

CS: accidental misbehavior

Compose compromises
Study and support



Networks of Specialized Knowledge

Shifting mixtures of humans and software.

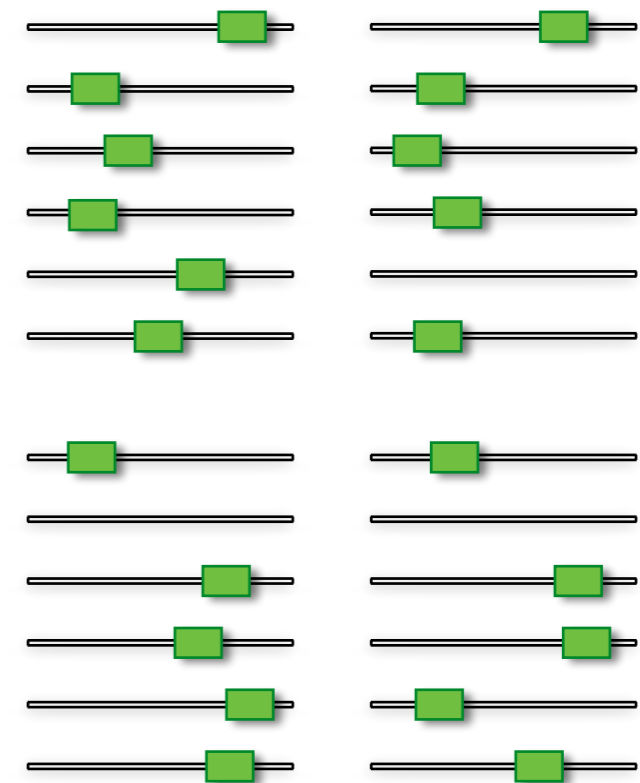
Division of knowledge hazards

Econ: intentional misbehavior

CS: accidental misbehavior

Compose compromises

Study and support



**Emergent properties when things go right
and when things go wrong.**

Questions?

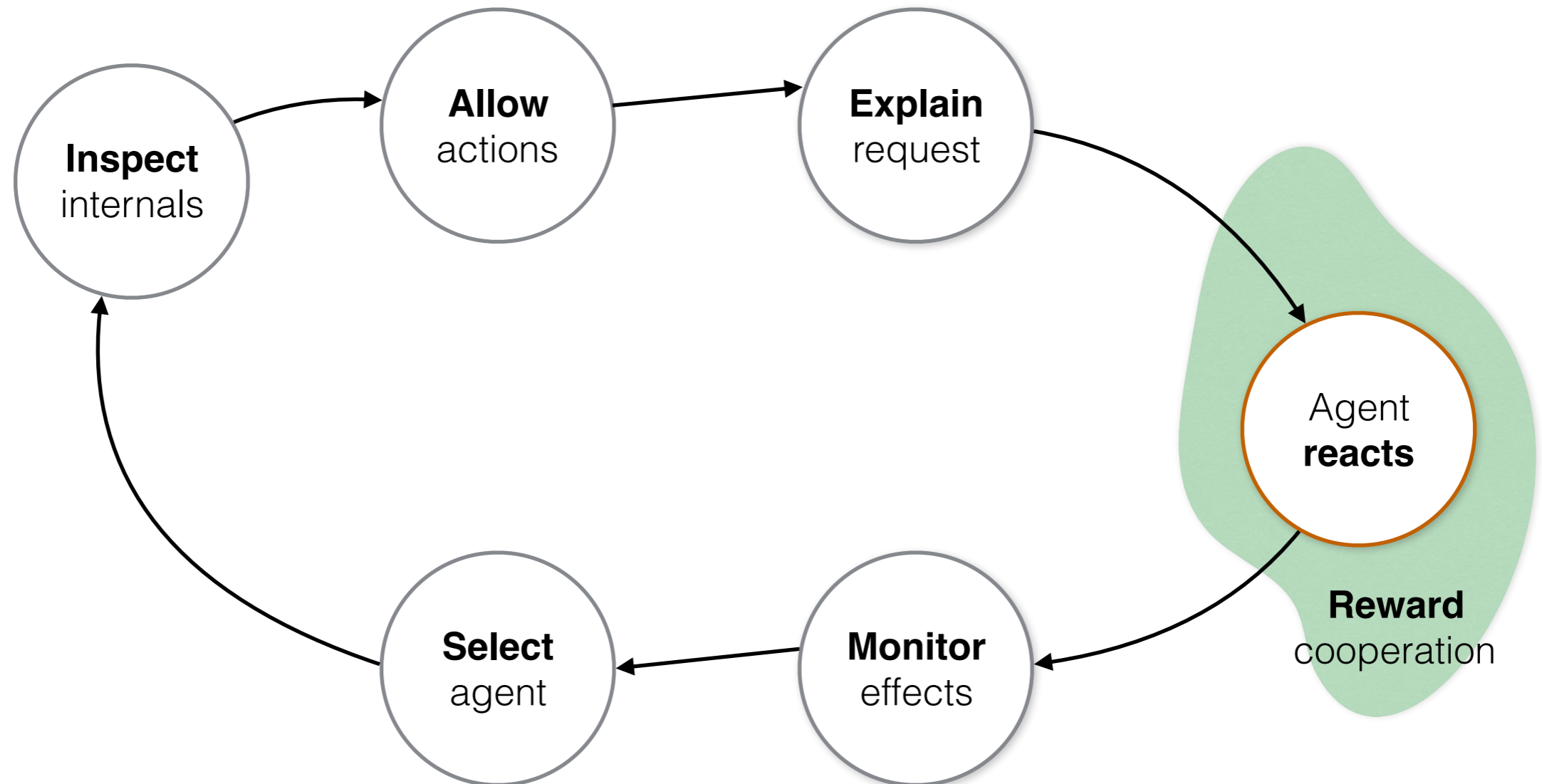


Danger

Oversimplifications

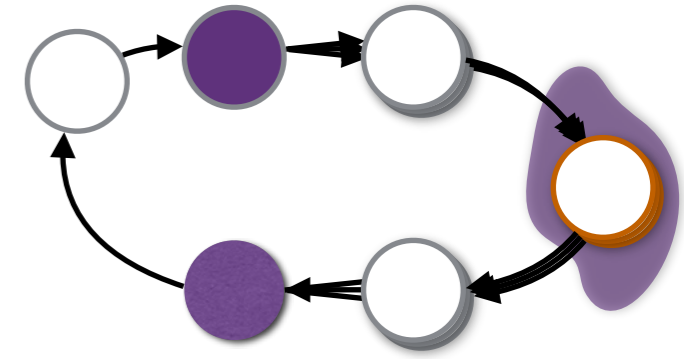
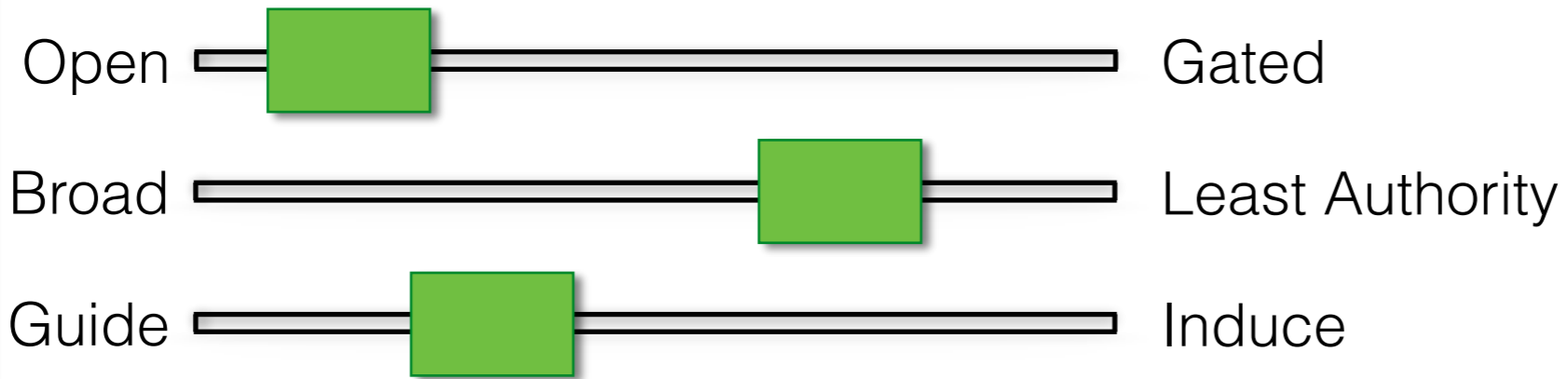
Ahead

The Principal-Agent Loop

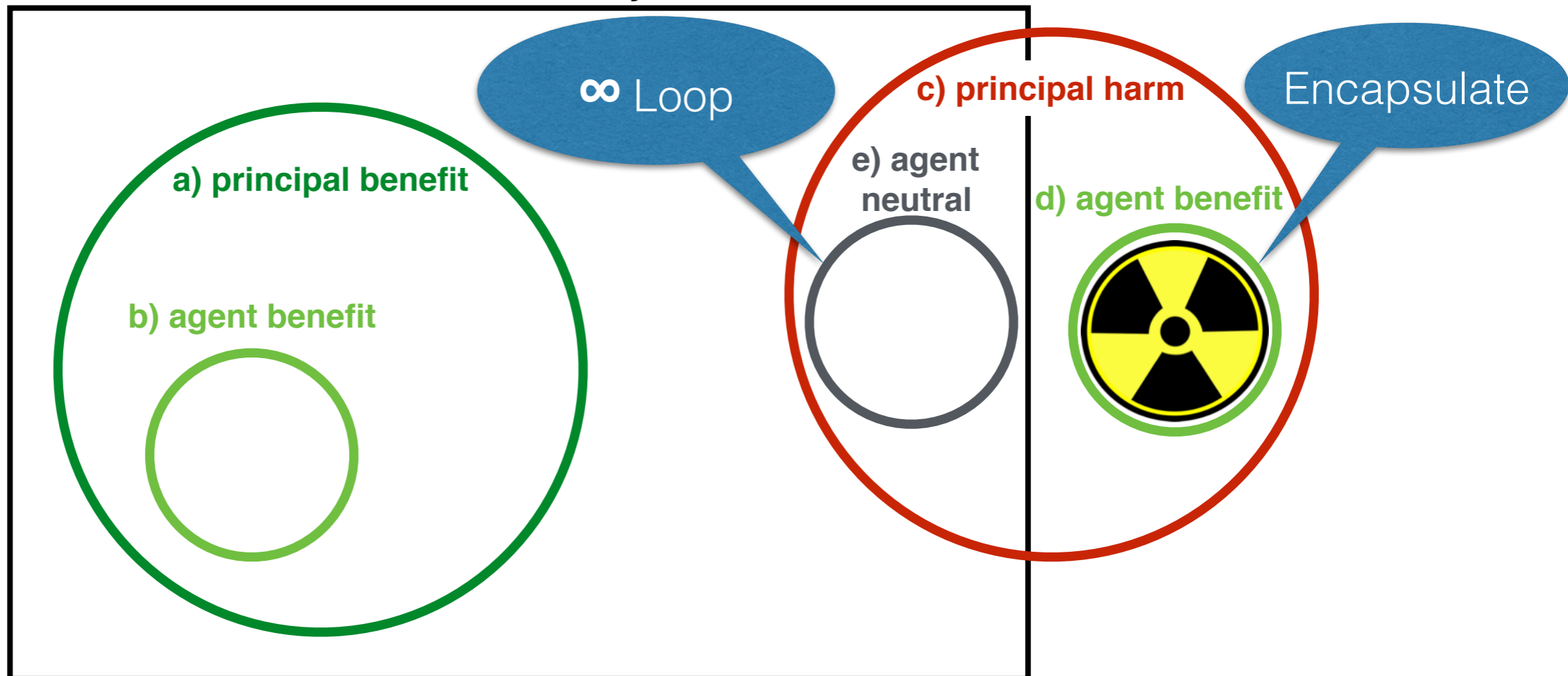


Secure Language Design

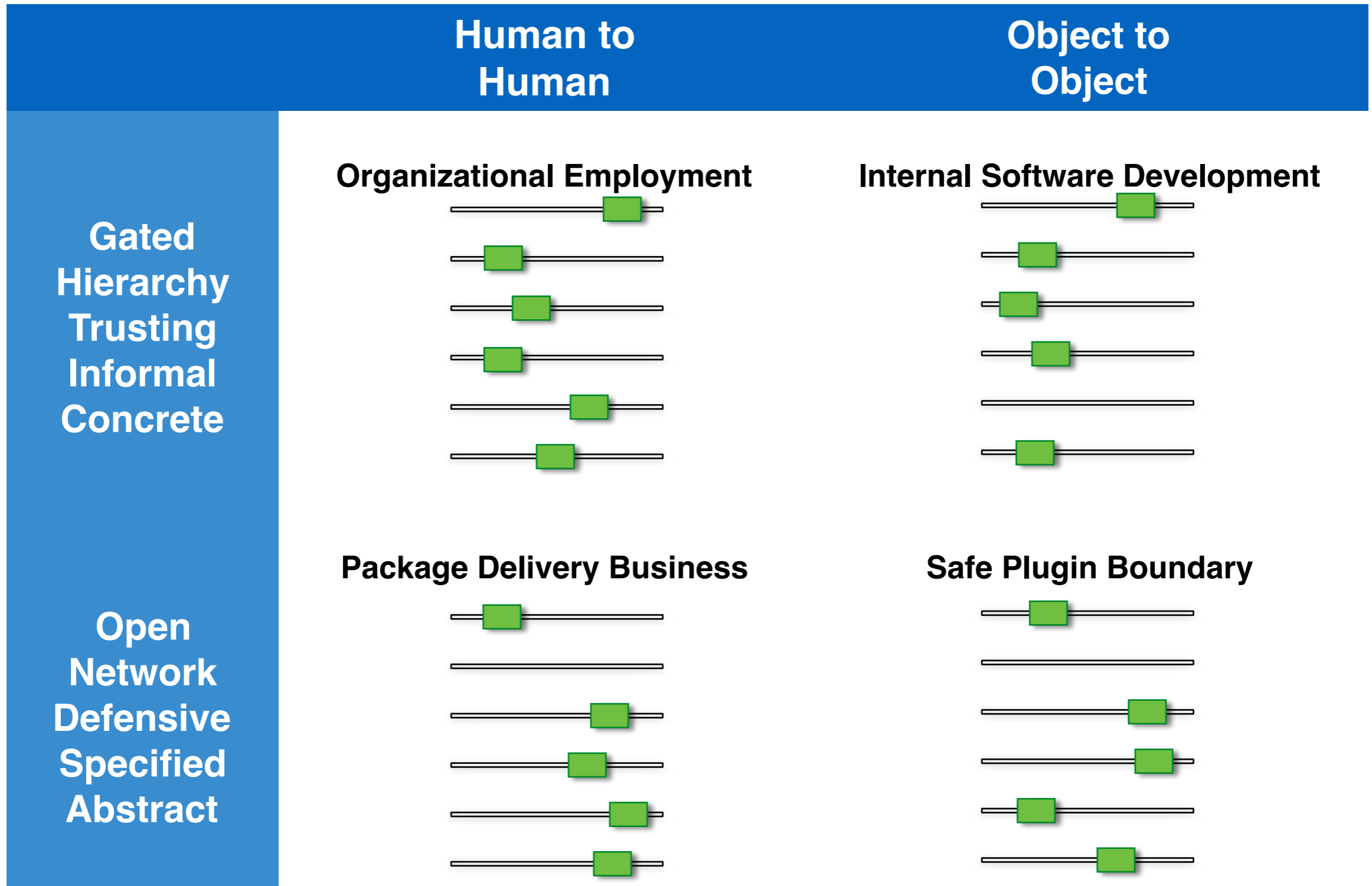
Select
Allow
Reward



Narrow Authority



Structural Similarities

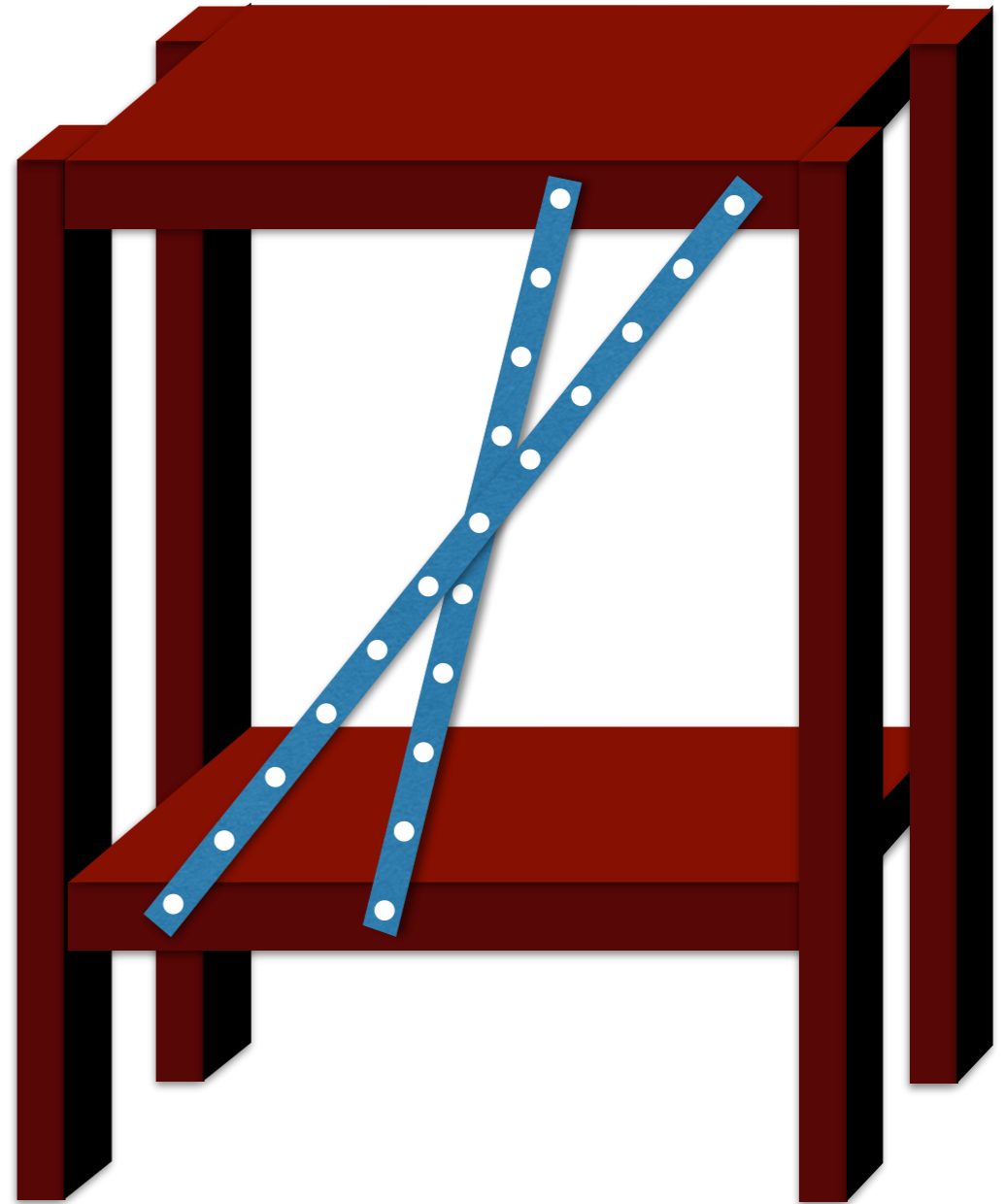
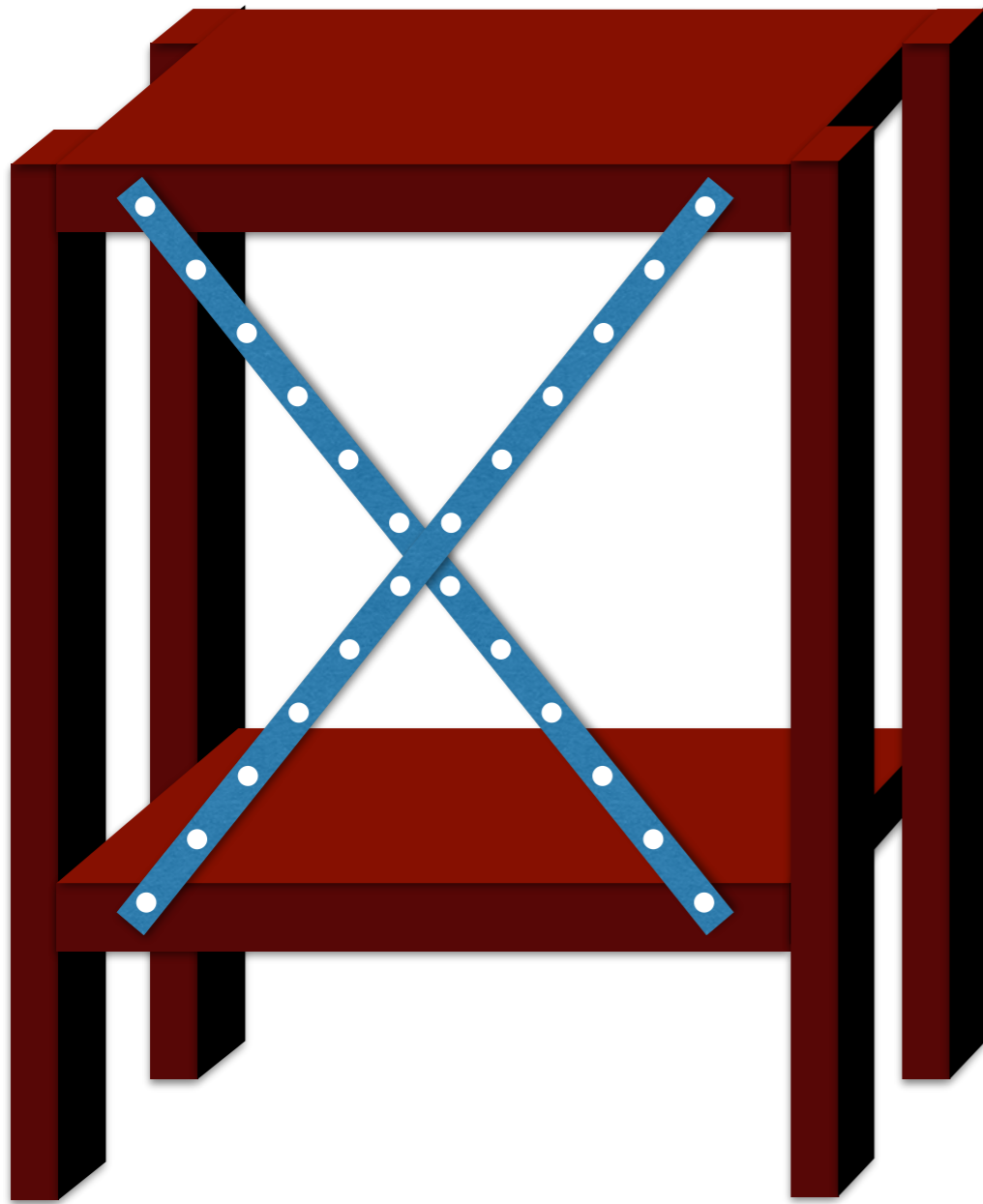


Gated
Hierarchy
Trusting
Informal
Concrete

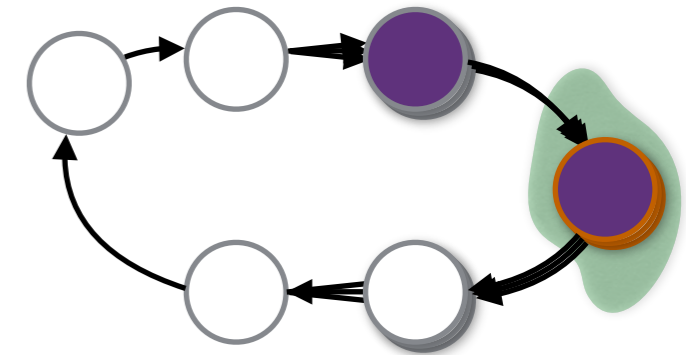
Open
Network
Defensive
Specified
Abstract

Cross Bracing

Co-design. Joint application.



Explain request Which is "Wider"?



Principal why

Multiple purposes

a ... b ... c ... d ... e ... f ... g ... h

Supertype

PD

Package Delivery

Subtype

OPD

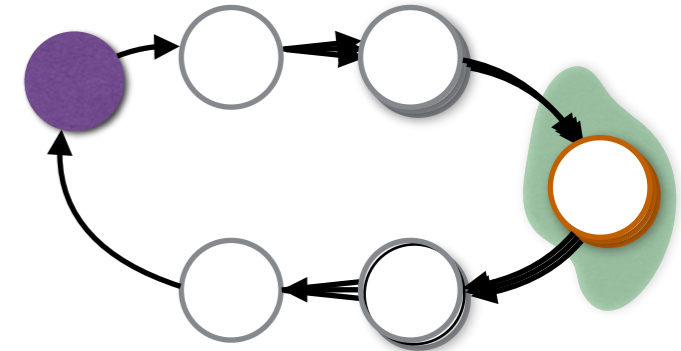
Overnight Package Delivery

Agent how

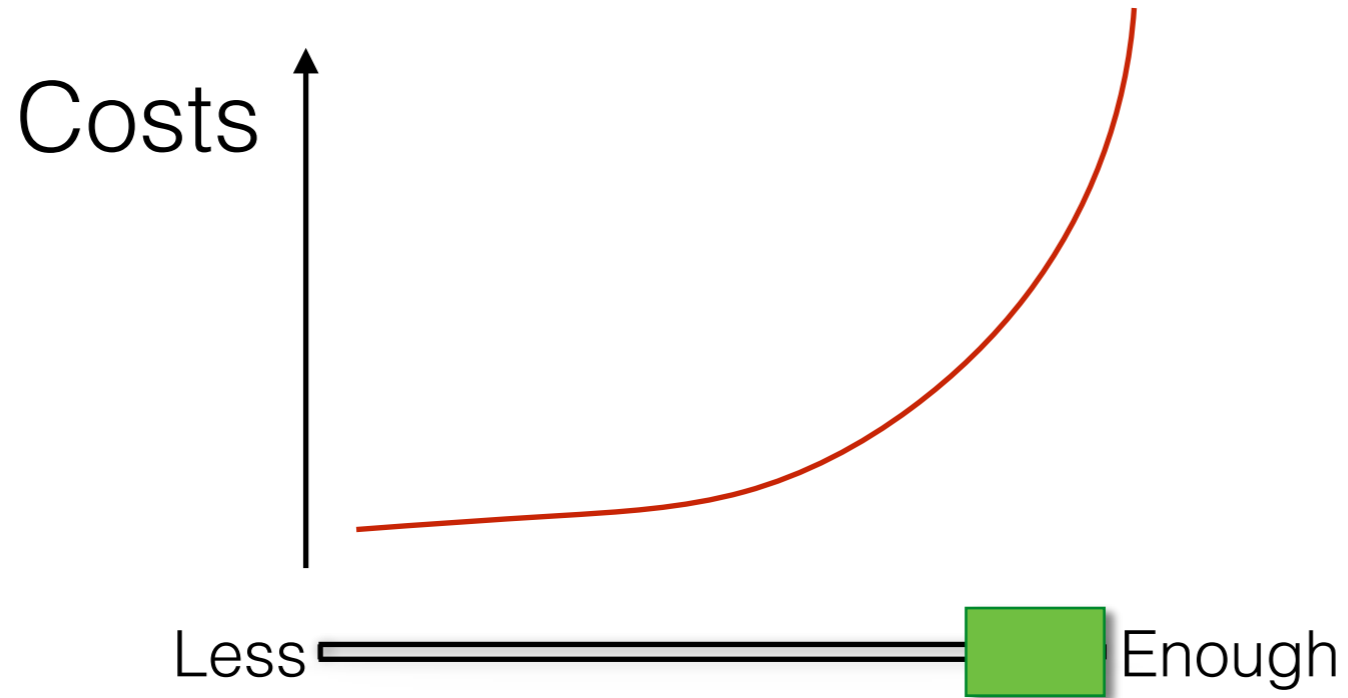
Multiple means

s ... t ... u ... v ... w ... x ... y ... z

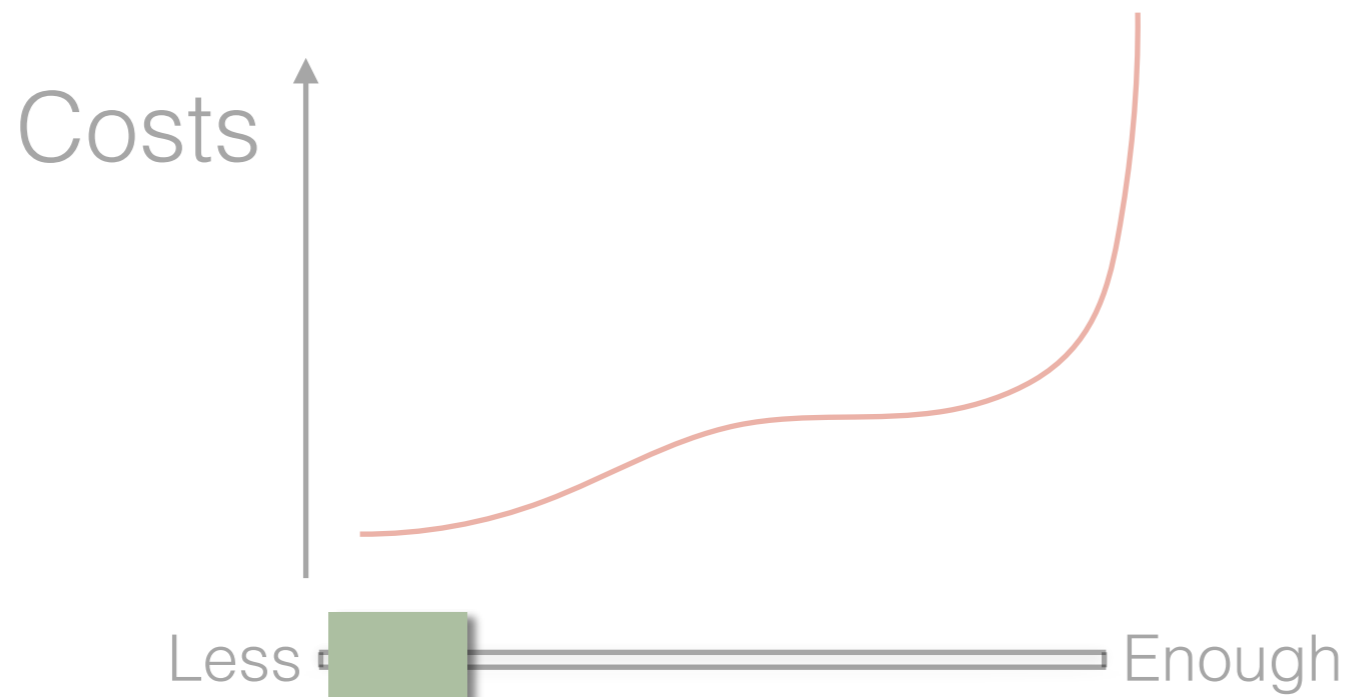
Academia vs Industry



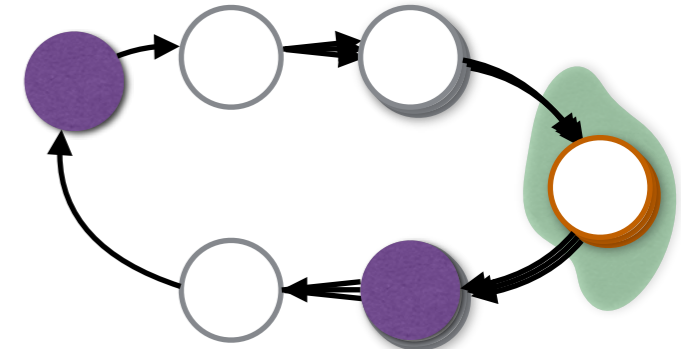
Inspect



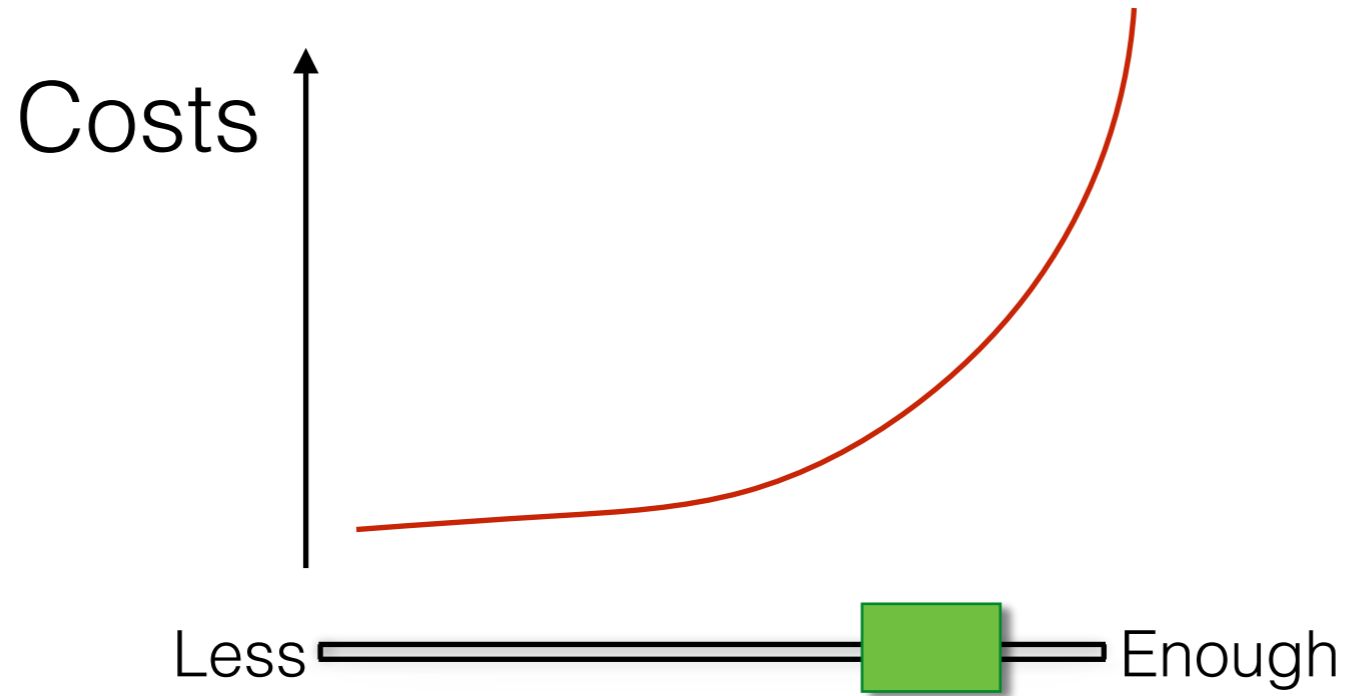
Monitor



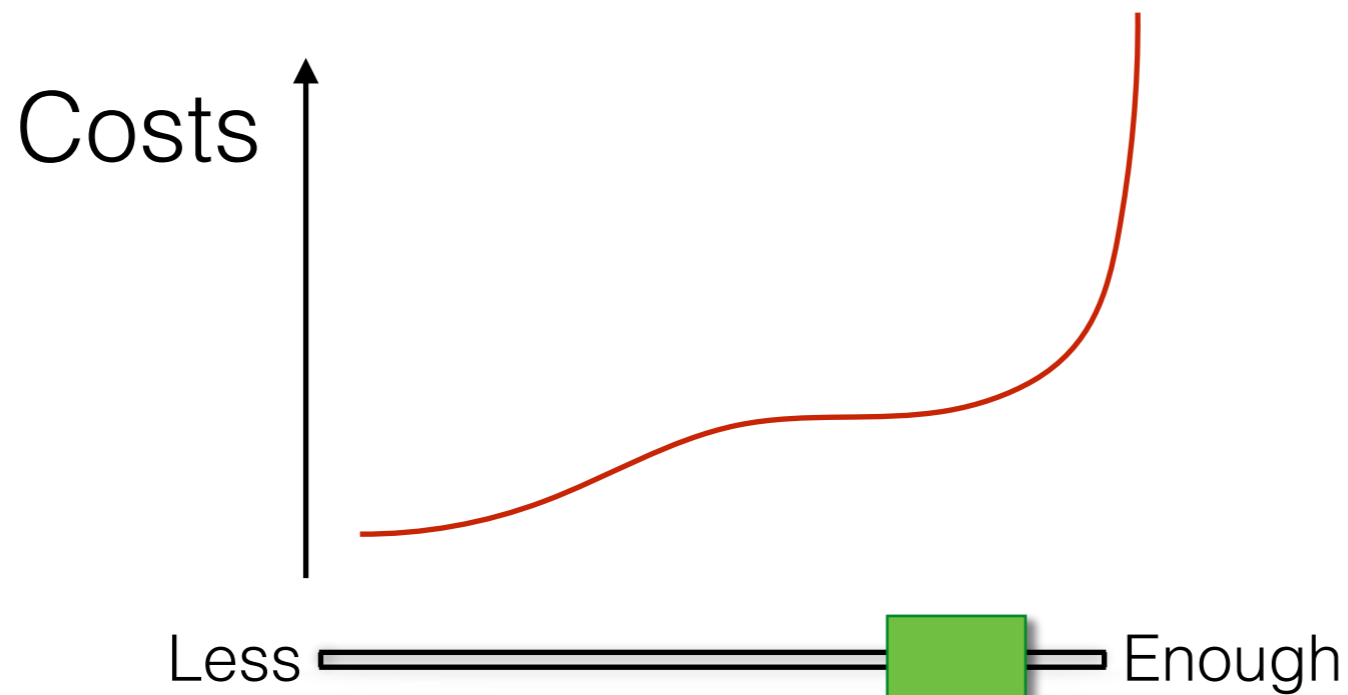
Academia vs Industry



Inspect



Monitor



Cooperation with less Vulnerability

My journey

+Cooperation

-Vulnerability

Xanadu Hypertext

Agoric Open Systems

Object-capabilities

JavaScript standards

Frozen realms

Cooperation with less Vulnerability

My journey

+Cooperation

-Vulnerability

Xanadu Hypertext

Bi-directional links

Fine-grained skepticism

Agoric Open Systems

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Prices guide tradeoffs

**Encapsulation as
property rights**

Object-capabilities

JavaScript standards

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Authority-driven design

Nothing but objects

JavaScript standards

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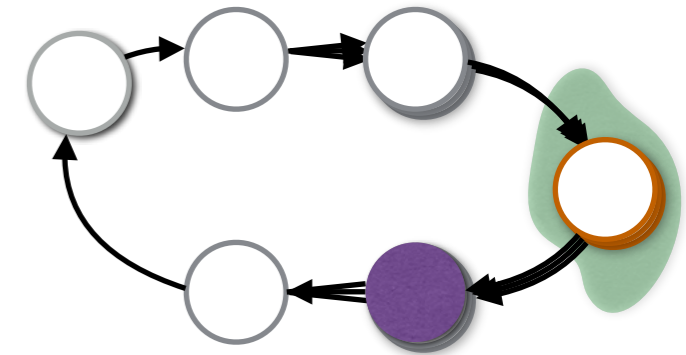
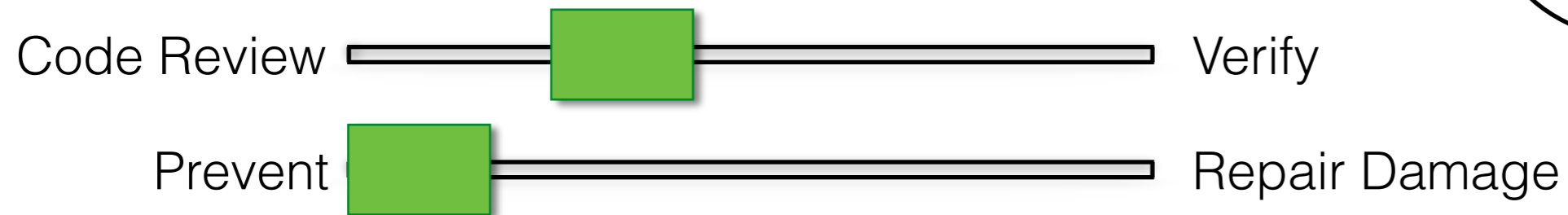
Nothing but objects

JavaScript standards
Frozen realms

Solid abstraction
mechanisms

Defend invariants

Inspect + Monitor



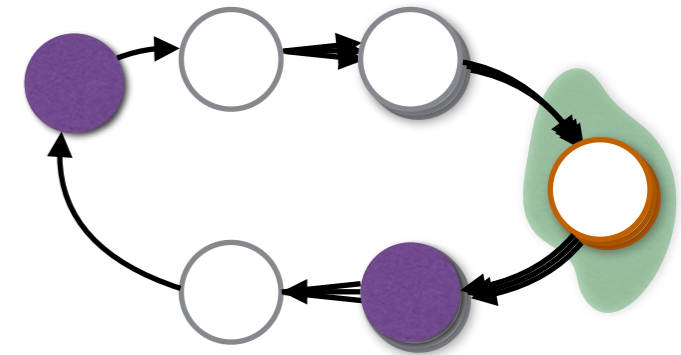
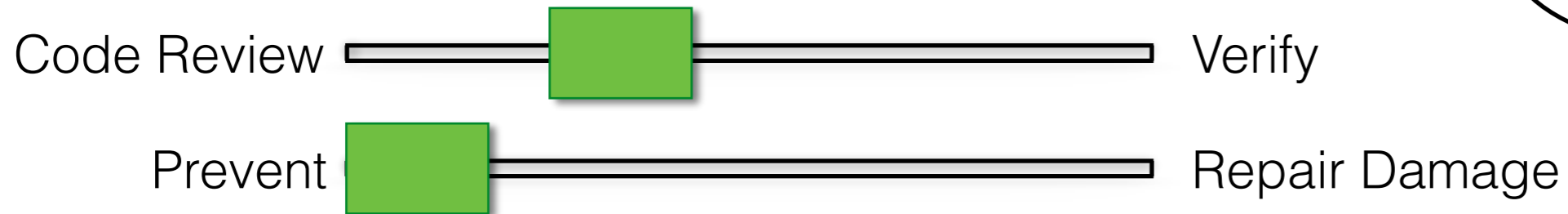
“... tested thoroughly ... written specifically to evade testing.

But such evasion is likely to require some suspicious-looking code, ...”

```
for (i = 0; i < limit; i++)  
    if (j === 72374928)
```

Passes all tests.

Inspect + Monitor



“... tested thoroughly ... written specifically to evade testing.

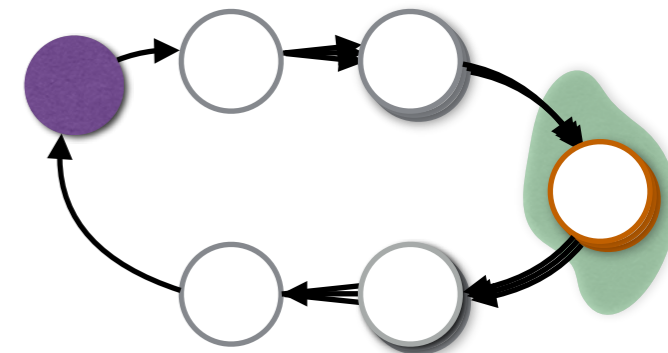
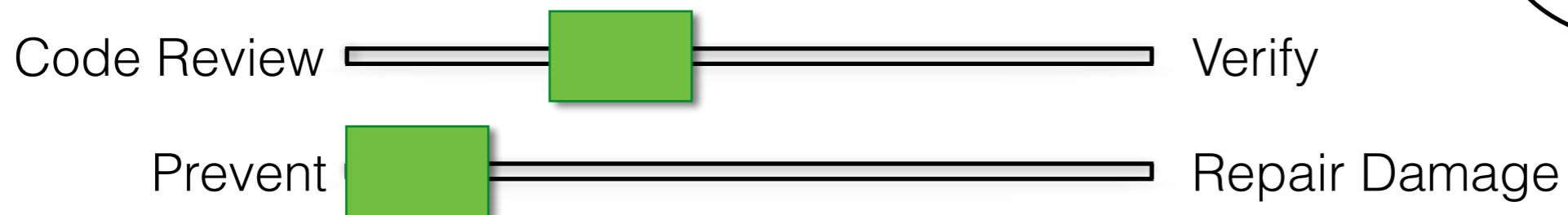
But such evasion is likely to require some suspicious-looking code, ...”

```
for (i = 0; i < limit; i++)  
    if (j === 72374928)
```

Passes all tests.
Looks weird.

Building Reliable Voting Machine Software
Ka-Ping Yee 2007 dissertation

Inspect + Monitor



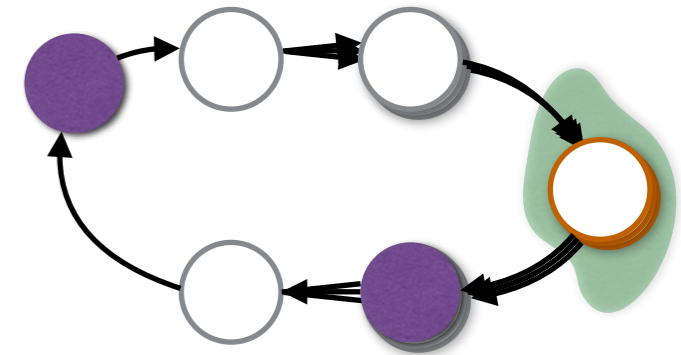
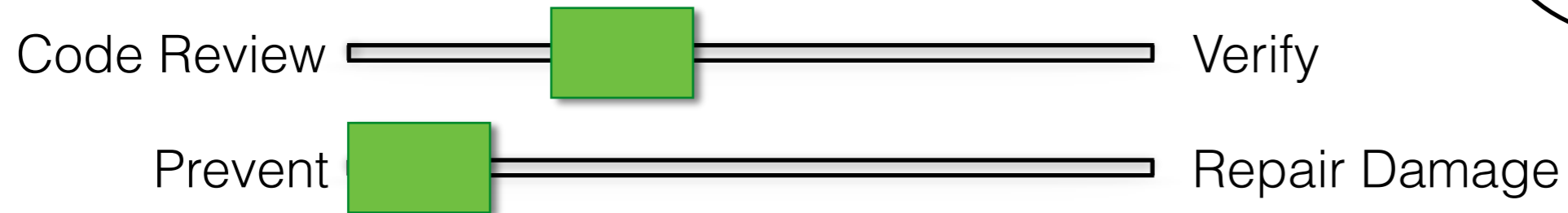
```
for (i = 0; i < limit; i++)  
  if (j === 72374928)
```

Passes all tests.
Looks weird.

```
for (i = 0; i <= limit; i++)
```

Looks fine.

Inspect + Monitor



```
for (i = 0; i < limit; i++)  
  if (j === 72374928)
```

Passes all tests.
Looks weird.

```
for (i = 0; i <= limit; i++)
```

Fails on zero and one.
Looks fine.



Need Overall Conclusions

Get past the mutual disdain

Study the composition of compromises

Identify cross-bracing opportunities

Design for...

Design languages to support...

De-emphasize human vs object

focus on cross cutting distinctions

build mixed world

Incentives for people

Constraints for software

Tradeoff Alignments

| | Concrete. Hierarchy | Abstract. Decentralized |
|--|--|---|
| Trust and Reputation | Admission controls. Aligned intentions | Open entry. Scalable |
| Static Inspection | Lint, code reviews. Find some bugs | Verify properties. Constrained behavior |
| Powers | Commons, administered. Low coordination costs | Narrow, transferable. Limit risk |
| Explanation | Informal understanding. Adaptive judgement | Explicit specification. Reuse, Competition |
| “Incentives” | Objective function. Inarticulate goals | Market prices. Aggregate tradeoffs |
| Dynamic Monitoring and Feedback | Defensive testing. Fail fast, report bugs | Intrusion detection. Repair damage |

The Elements of Decision Alignment

| | Human to Human | Human to Object | Object to Object |
|---------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Select | Trademark Chain of custody | App stores White and black lists | Trusted developer Same origin |
| Inspect | Accounting controls | Trusted path URL bar | Types, Verification Open source eyeballs |
| Allow | Law, Contracts | App permissions Powerbox | Security Protection patterns |
| Explain | Language | User interface | Abstraction |
| Reward | Economics Incentive Alignment | Objective functions | Machine learning Agorics |
| Monitor | Reviews, Complaints Word of mouth | Bug reports | Contracts, Testing Backprop |

Yee Voting Machine

- Select**
agent
- Inspect**
internals
- Allow**
actions
- Explain**
request
- Reward**
cooperation
- Monitor**
effects

