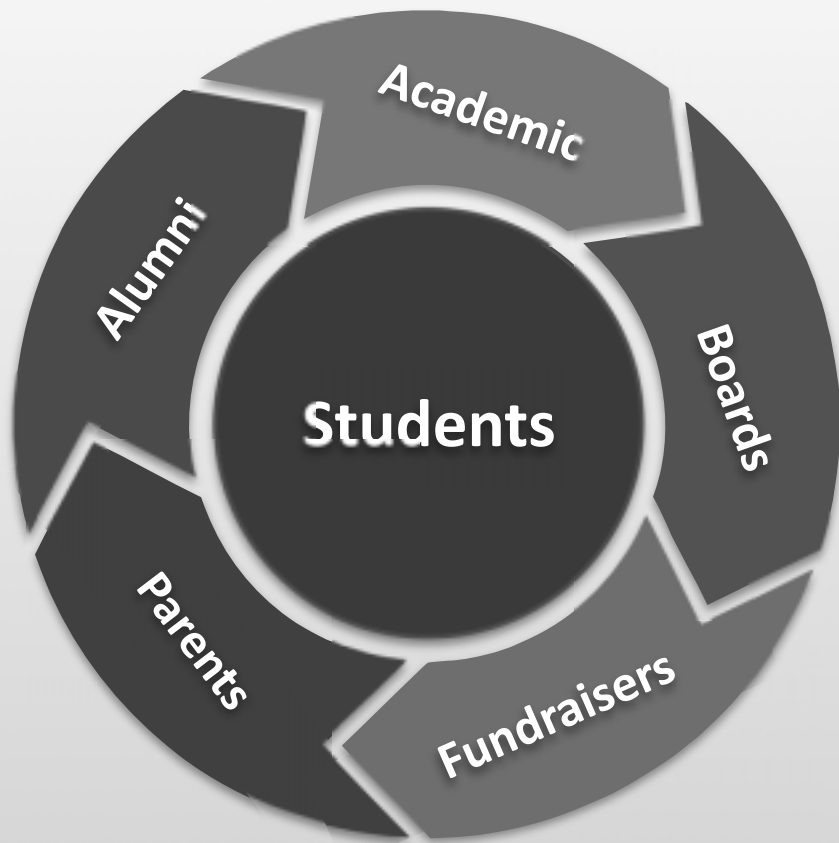


The Cultures of Higher Education



**Managing Change
Across Boundaries**



In Today's Conversation

- What we mean when we talk about the “cultures” of higher education.
- How different cultures see the university differently.
- Why understanding these “cultural differences” can be important when we want our change processes to be successful.



Clarification

- It may seem as though I'm saying that board members need to understand how faculty members see the world and not vice versa.
- But that's simply a function of our context.
- You already *know* how board members tend to see the world.
- If I were speaking to a faculty audience, my focus would be reversed from what it is today.



Second Clarification

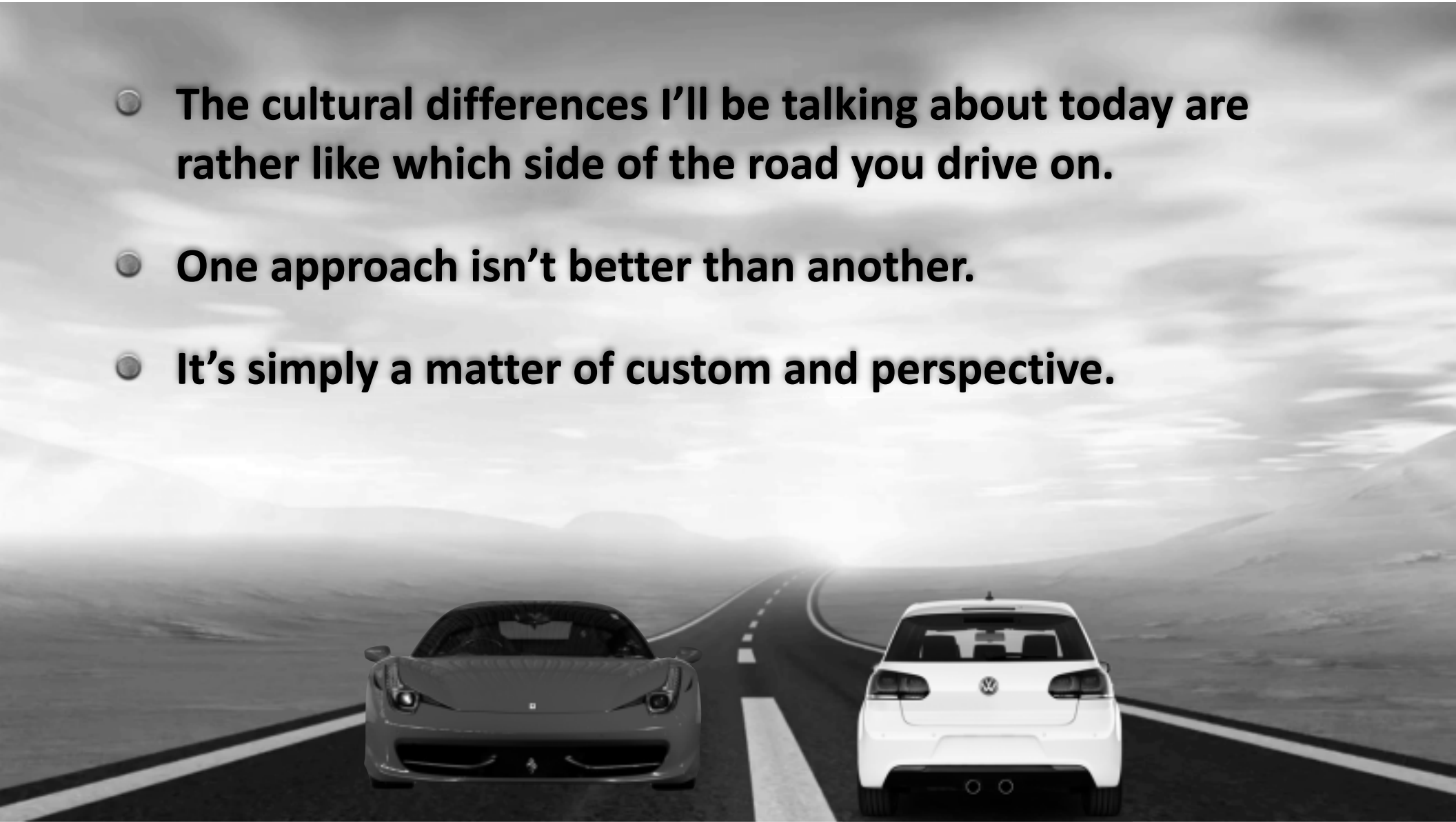
- In the interests of time, we'll need to talk about faculty members and board members in the aggregate.
- But I would never say that *all* faculty members believe such-and-such.
- Or that *all* board members believe such-and-such.
- Whenever you generalize, you run the risk of reductionism and reverting to stereotypes.
- We have to realize from the start we're running that risk today.

To Start: What Do We Mean By “Culture”?

- **Culture consists of the assumptions, perspectives, and practices that distinguish one group from another.**
- **Culture tells us which actions are considered acceptable and which actions are considered unacceptable.**
- **Culture has a historical basis: Who are we and what are our values on the basis of where we have been?**



- **The cultural differences I'll be talking about today are rather like which side of the road you drive on.**
- **One approach isn't better than another.**
- **It's simply a matter of custom and perspective.**

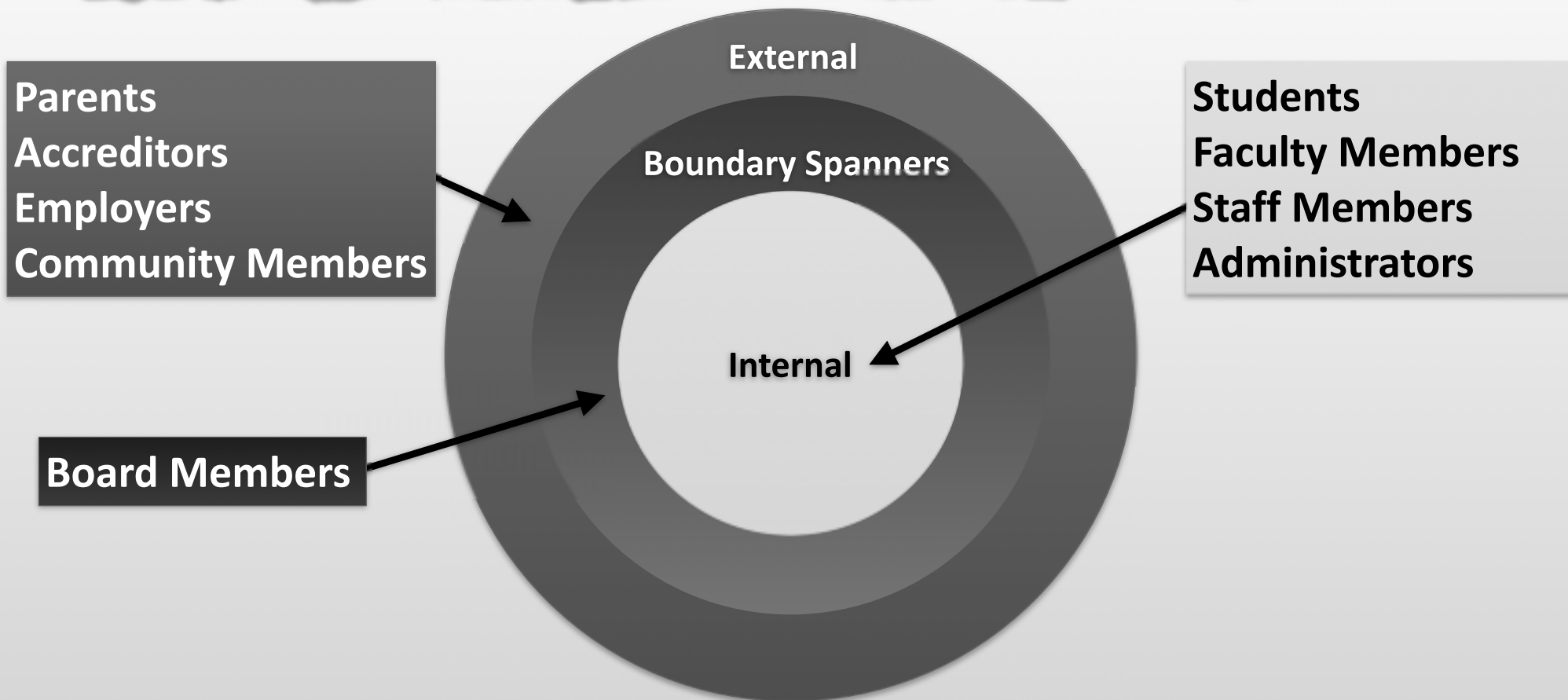


The Board's Role

And boards (both governing and advisory) are perfectly positioned to play a critical role in understanding and addressing these cultural differences.

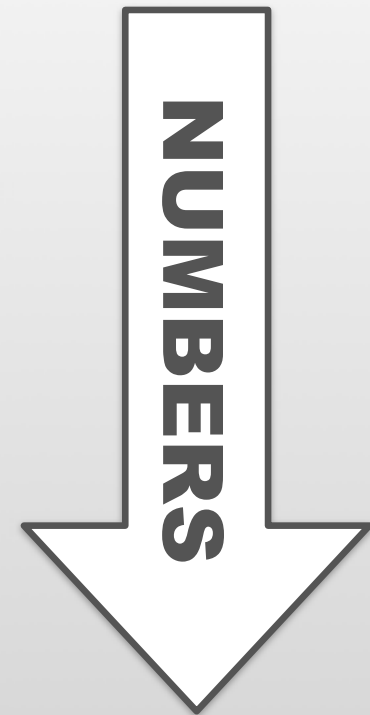
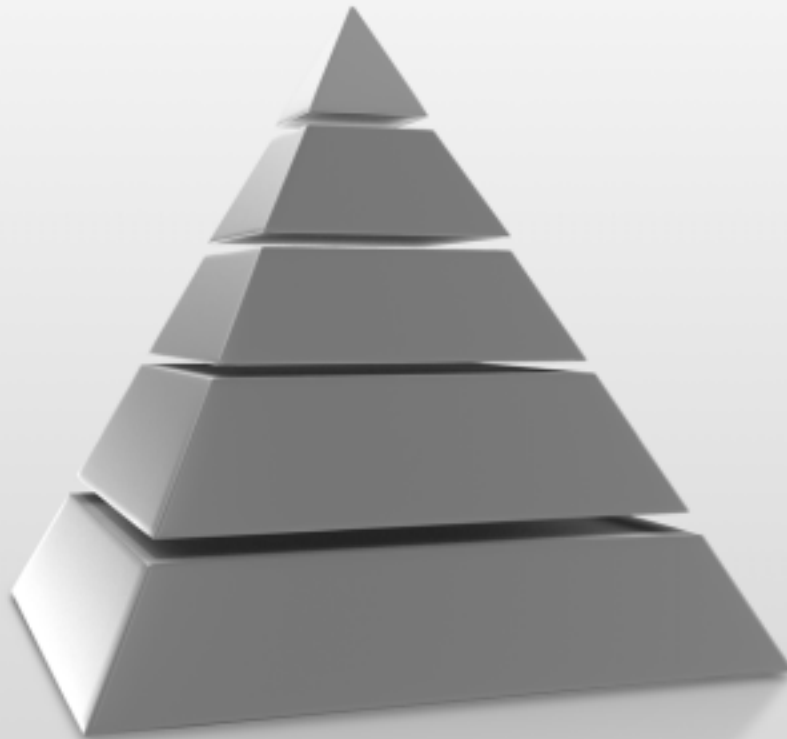
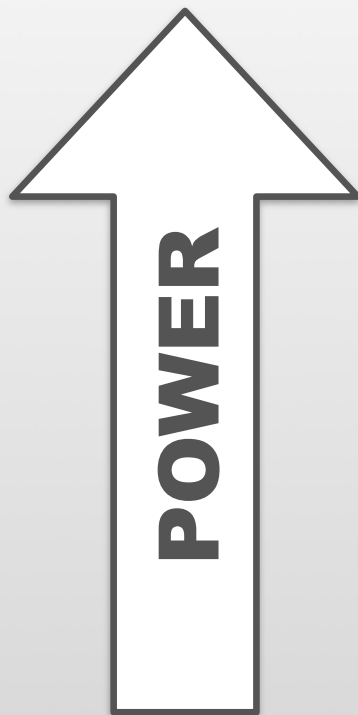


University Consituencies/Stakeholder Groups



**WHY DO THE CONSTITUENCIES OF
UNIVERSITIES HAVE DIFFERENT
CULTURES?**

Hierarchical Organizations



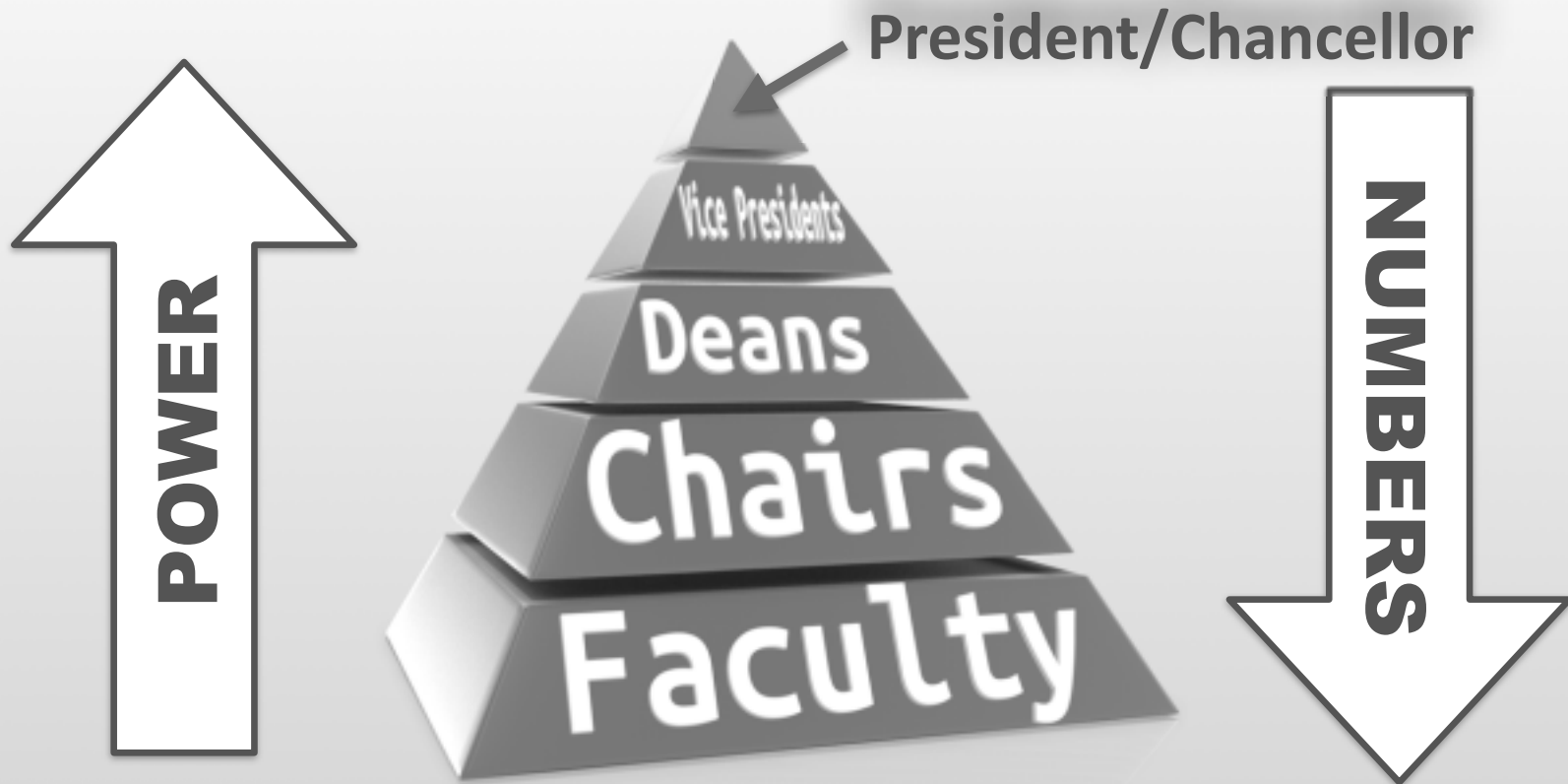
Hierarchical Organizations



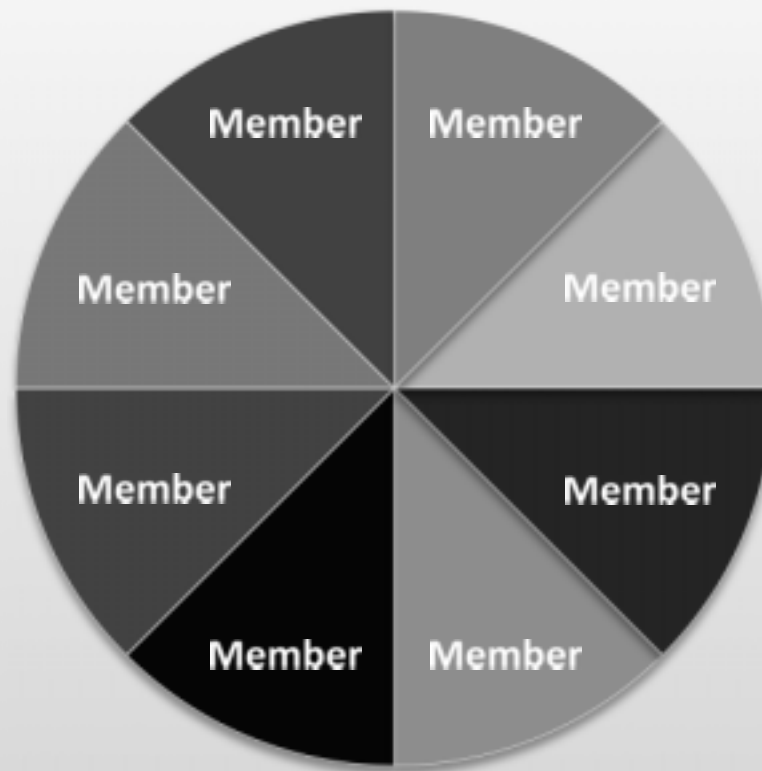
Hierarchical Organizations



Hierarchical Organizations

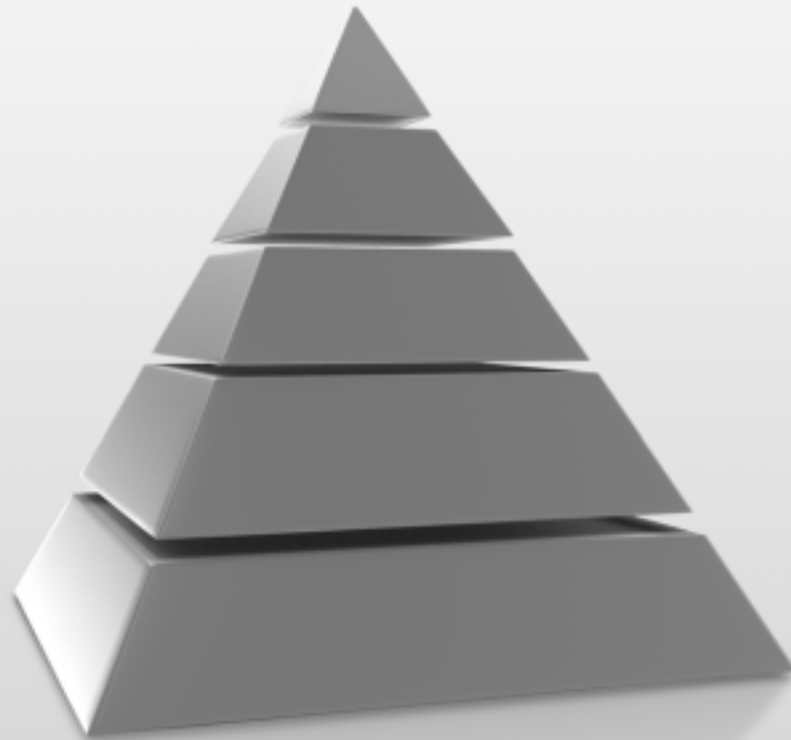


Decentralized Organizations



**The Power
Pie**

In a Hierarchy

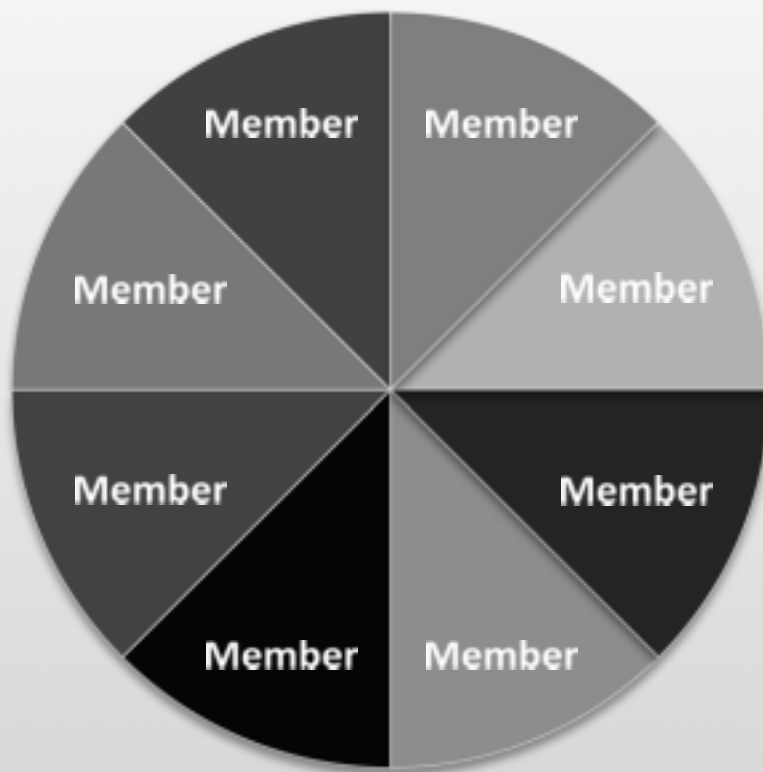


Decisions can be made top-down.

Bosses can *tell* people what to do.

Things can be done swiftly.

In a Distributed Organization



Many decisions are made by voting or consensus.

Supervisors rarely people what to do.

Things often take a lot more time.

As One Board Chair Observed


**“I have found in my experience that things at the university level often run very slow,” [University of North Carolina board chair David] Boliek told *The News & Observer*.
[February 7, 2023]**



Attributed to Many Different People



It's easier to
change the course
of history ...

A billboard structure with a tall central pole and horizontal cross-arms supporting a large rectangular sign. The sign has a thin black border and contains text in a black, handwritten-style font. The billboard is set against a light gray background with a subtle shadow cast on the ground below.

... than it is to
change a history
course.

A billboard structure identical to the one on the left, featuring a tall central pole and horizontal cross-arms supporting a large rectangular sign. The sign has a thin black border and contains text in a black, handwritten-style font. The billboard is set against a light gray background with a subtle shadow cast on the ground below.

But There Are Exceptions

- **When institutions went into lockdown due to the pandemic in 2020, many of them had their entire schedule of courses pivot from in-person, hybrid, and remote classes to 100% remote classes in ten days to two weeks.**
- **Many professors who had never taught online before (and swore they never would) quickly learned to adapt their courses to online versions.**



Why?


- It is human nature to rise to a crisis. (Witness wartime, natural disasters, personal emergencies.)
- Academic coursework lies at the very heart of what professors care about: People are often willing to make *huge* sacrifices for something they truly care about.
- They had no other choice: There was a clear and immediate *need* to change.



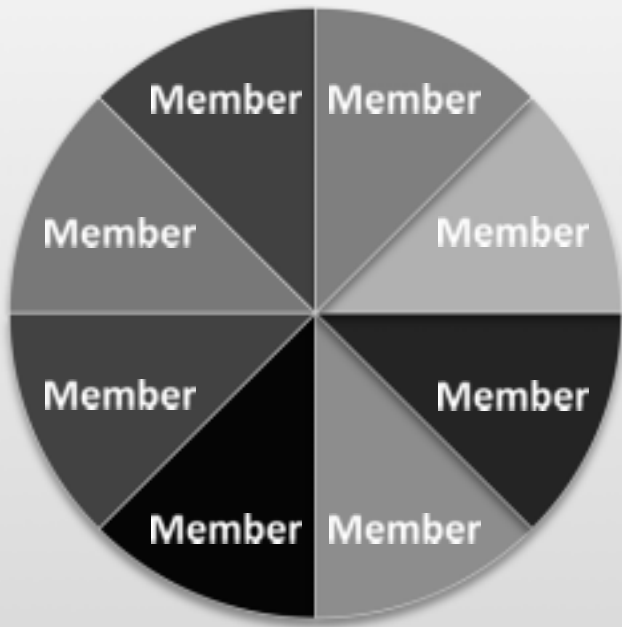
Why?

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We'll come back to this point later.

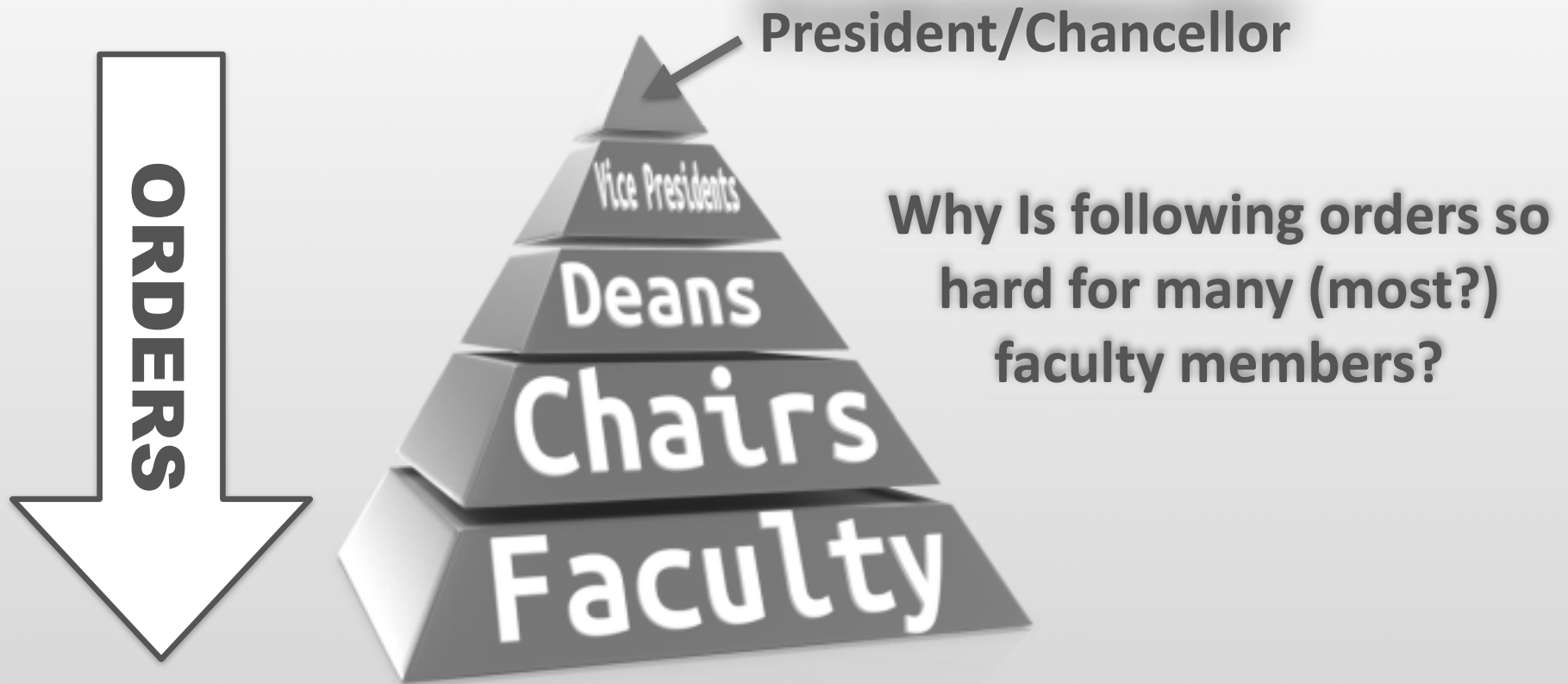


But Then Culture Took Over

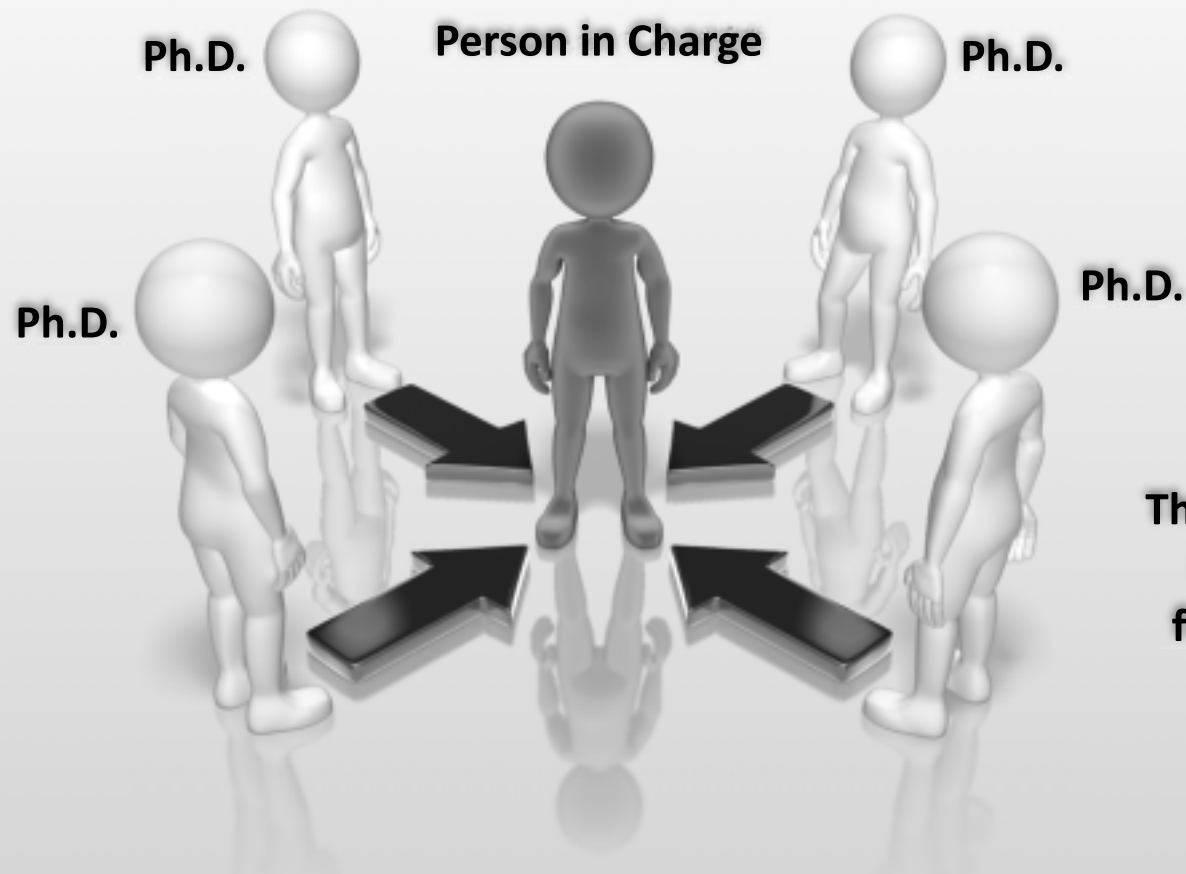


- **Post-pandemic, traditional methods of making decisions reasserted themselves.**
- **Committees and councils resumed.**
- **Decision-making slowed.**
- **So, we need to ask: Why does this type of organizational culture seem to be the default among university faculties?**

Or in Other words



Why Is Following Orders So Hard for Faculty Members?

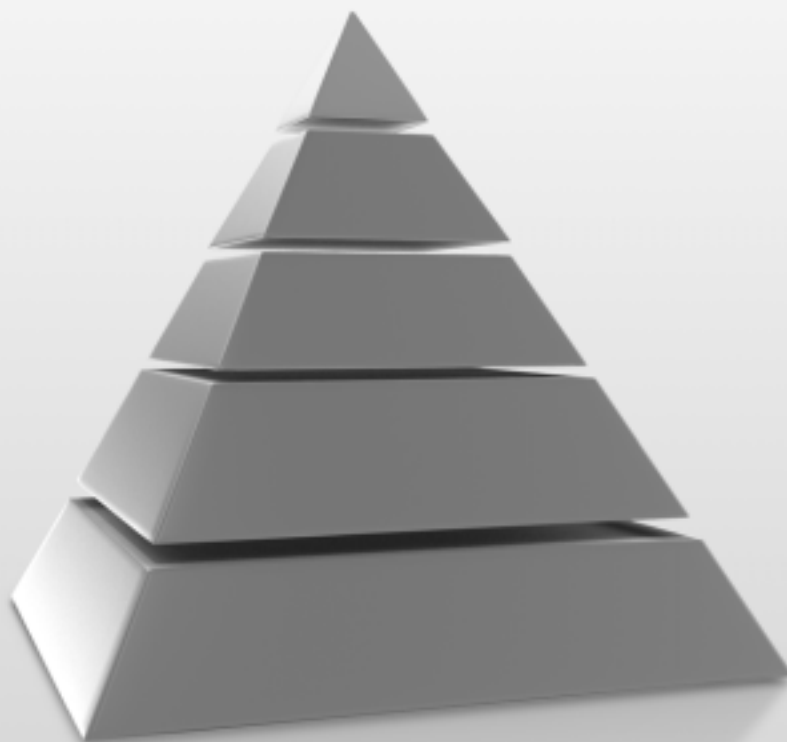


**These people are all
experts in their
fields ... and their
fields are all
different.**

The Challenge Increases ...

**... the further up
you go on the
academic hierarchy.**

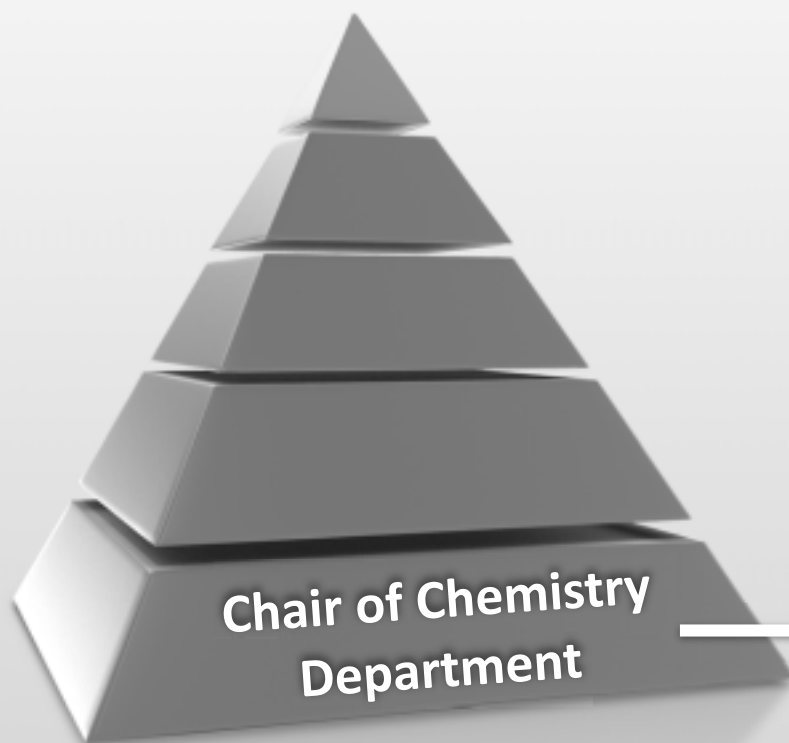
**Chemistry
Professor: "In order
for our students to
succeed, we
absolutely need a
new Nuclear
Magnetic
Resonance (NMR)
Spectrometer."**



The Challenge Increases ...

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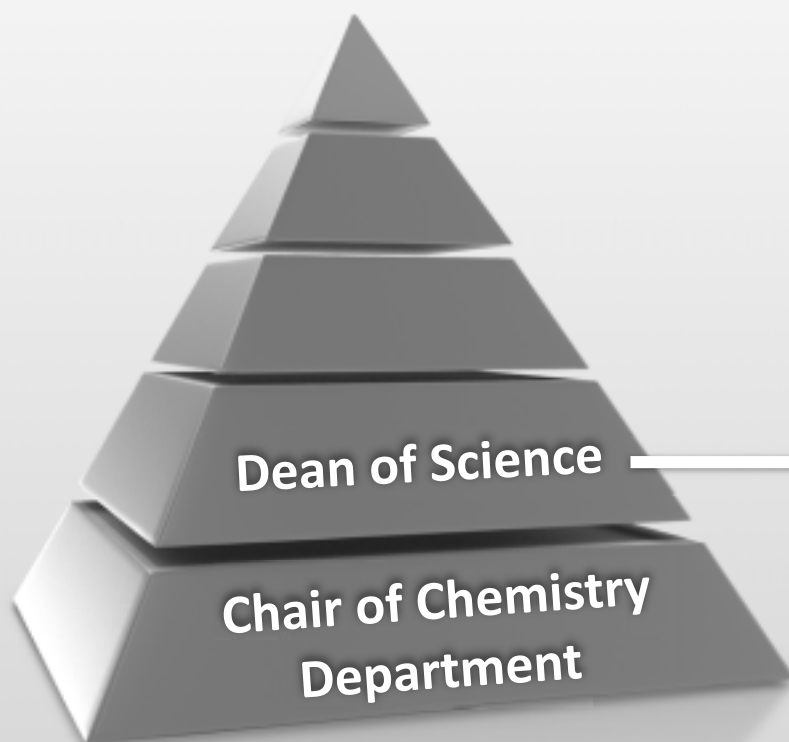


**May have a very
different focus in
chemistry (e.g.,
organic vs inorganic)
but almost certainly
knows whether this
claim is valid.**

The Challenge Increases ...

... the further up
you go on the
academic hierarchy.

**Chemistry
Professor:** "In order
for our students to
succeed, we
absolutely need a
new Nuclear
Magnetic
Resonance (NMR)
Spectrometer."

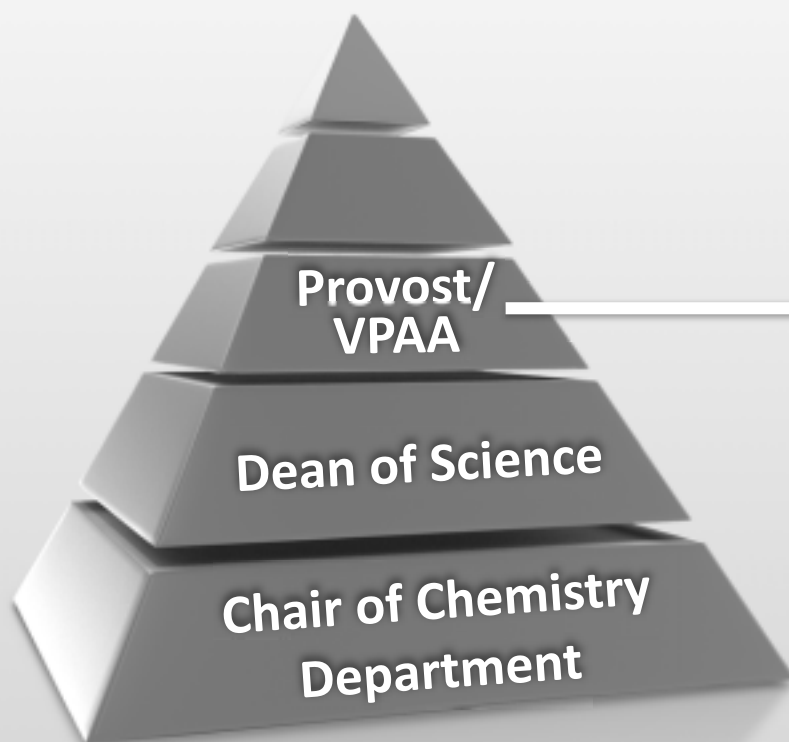


May be a biologist
but still has a fairly
good understanding
of whether the
claim is valid.

The Challenge Increases ...

... the further up
you go on the
academic hierarchy.

**Chemistry
Professor:** "In order
for our students to
succeed, we
absolutely need a
new Nuclear
Magnetic
Resonance (NMR)
Spectrometer."

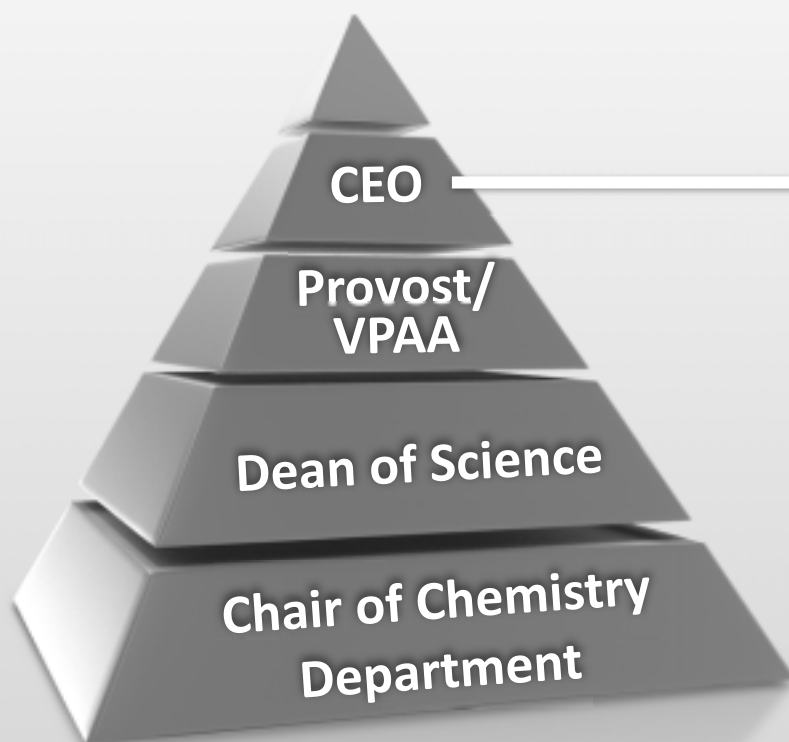


May be a scholar of
British history and
have absolutely no
idea whether the
claim is valid or
even what an NMR
is.

The Challenge Increases ...

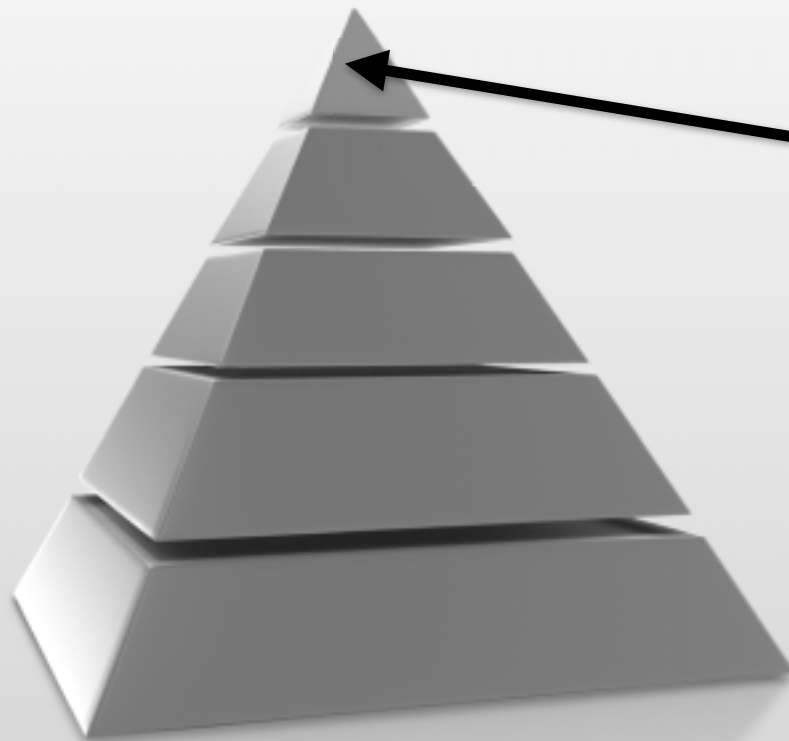
... the further up
you go on the
academic hierarchy.

**Chemistry
Professor:** "In order
for our students to
succeed, we
absolutely need a
new Nuclear
Magnetic
Resonance (NMR)
Spectrometer."



May be a scholar of
in yet a different
area or have come
to the university
from outside the
academic world.

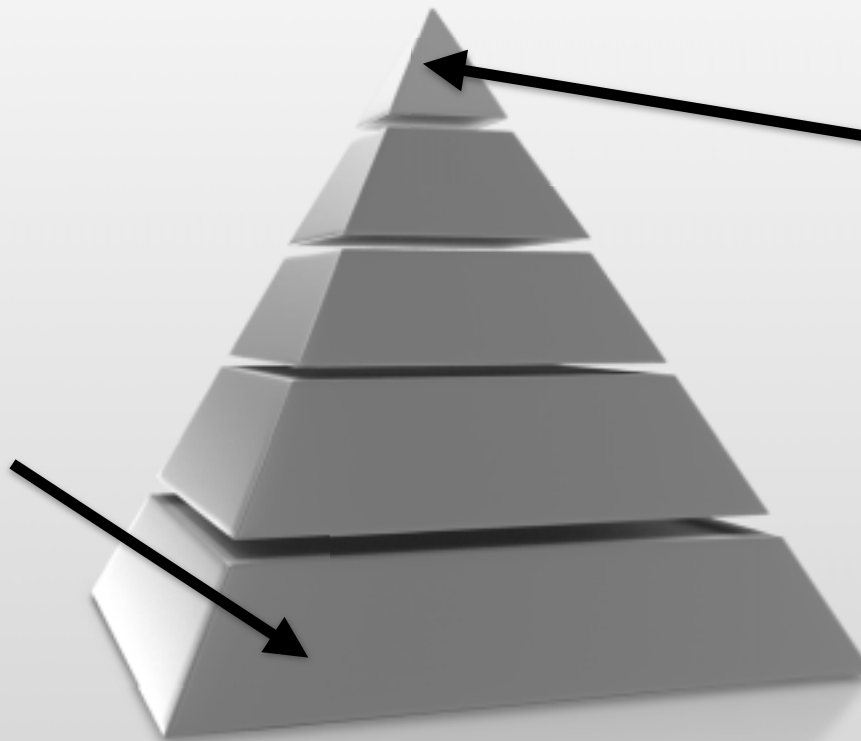
The Result



In a traditional hierarchy, the people at the top have the “best view”: the big picture.

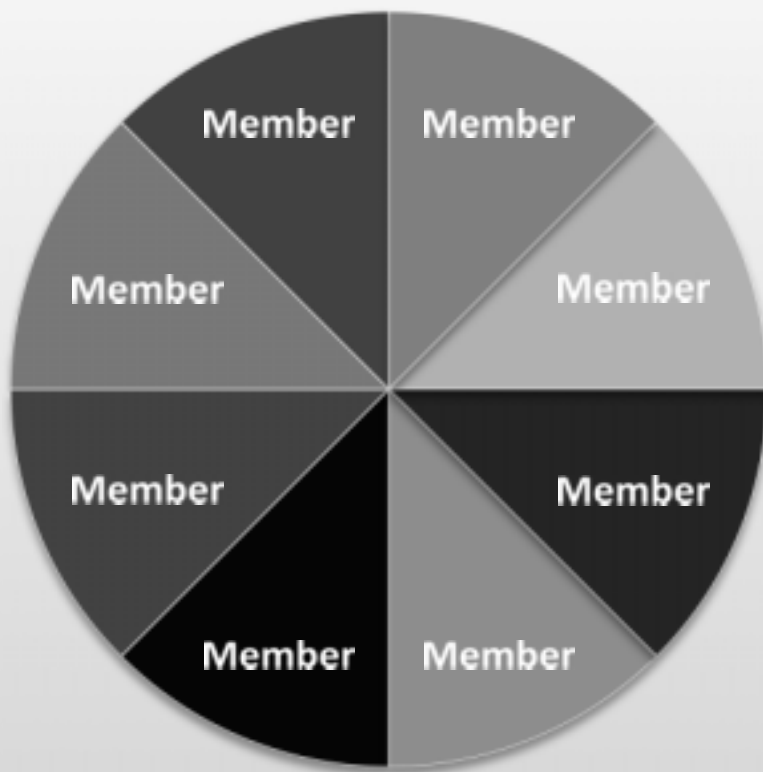
The Result

But in higher education, people lower in the hierarchy may have a clearer view of *certain* things such as program needs, curricular issues, and student ability.



In a traditional hierarchy, the people at the top have the “best view”: the big picture.

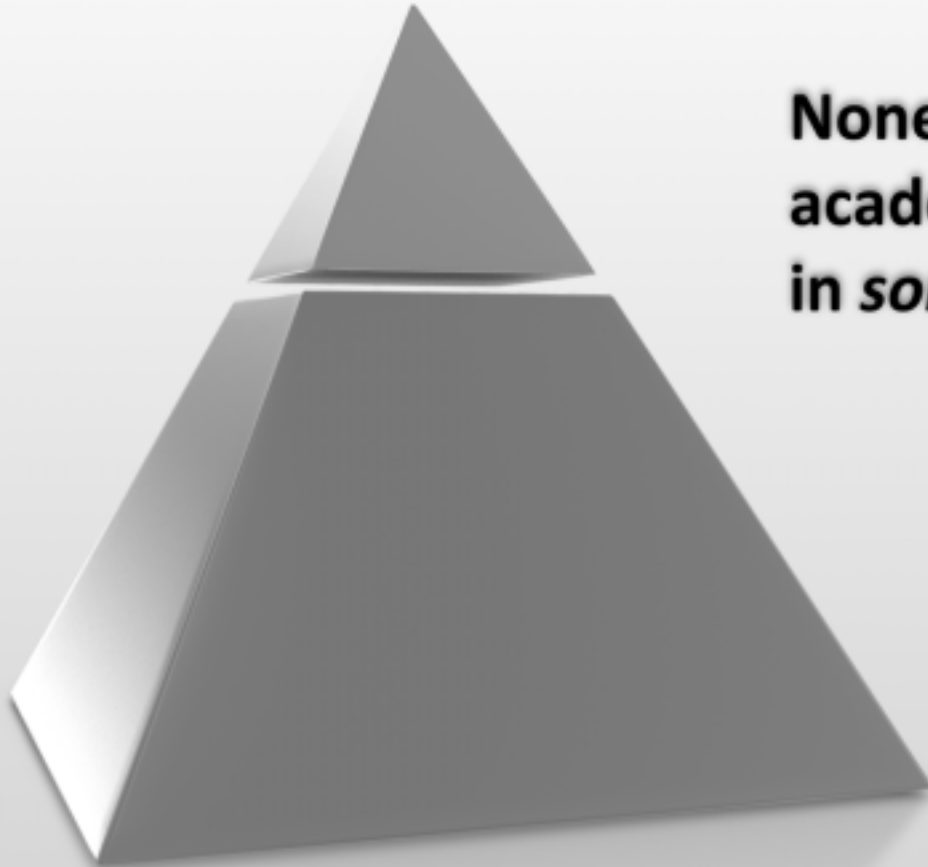
That's Why Academics Rely on Committees and Councils



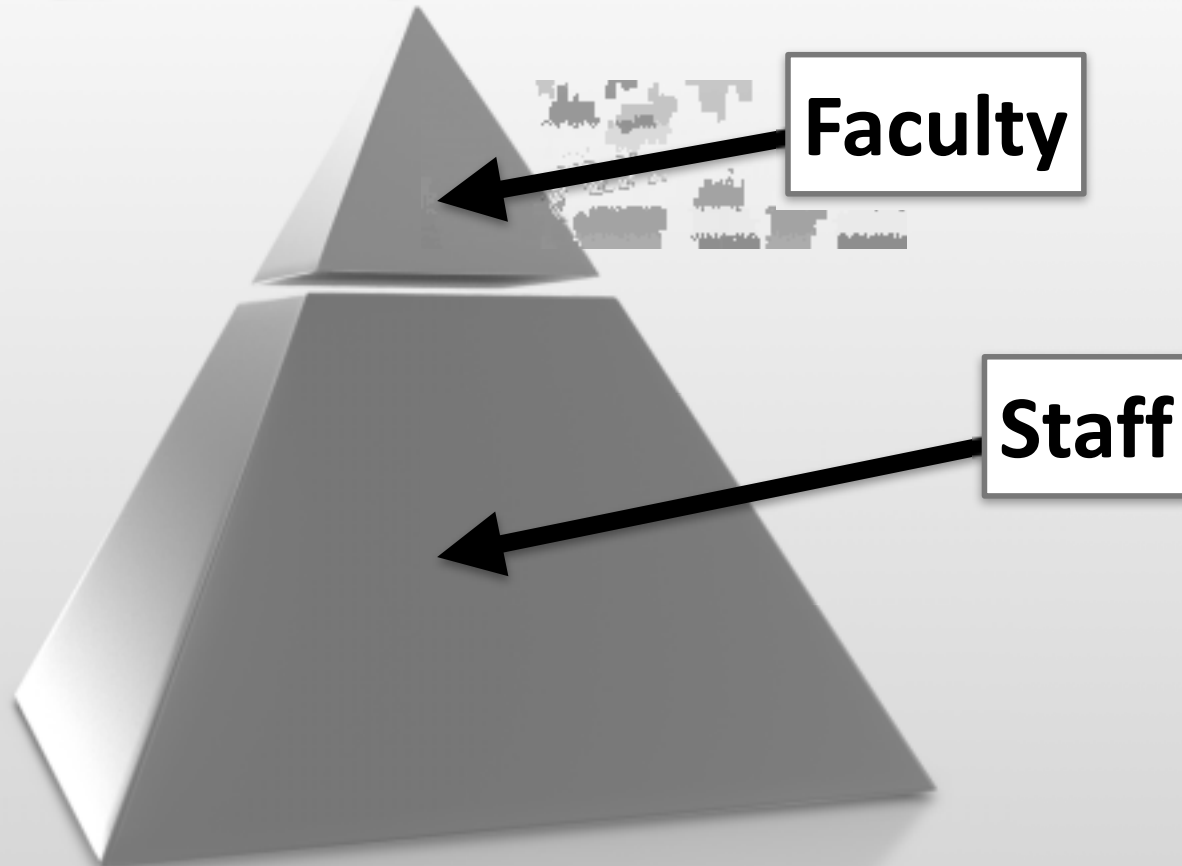
- Increases the likelihood of have the right expertise in place to make the right decision.
- Even though they take a long time to reach a conclusion.
- This type of decision-making is *expected* by most faculty members.

But ...

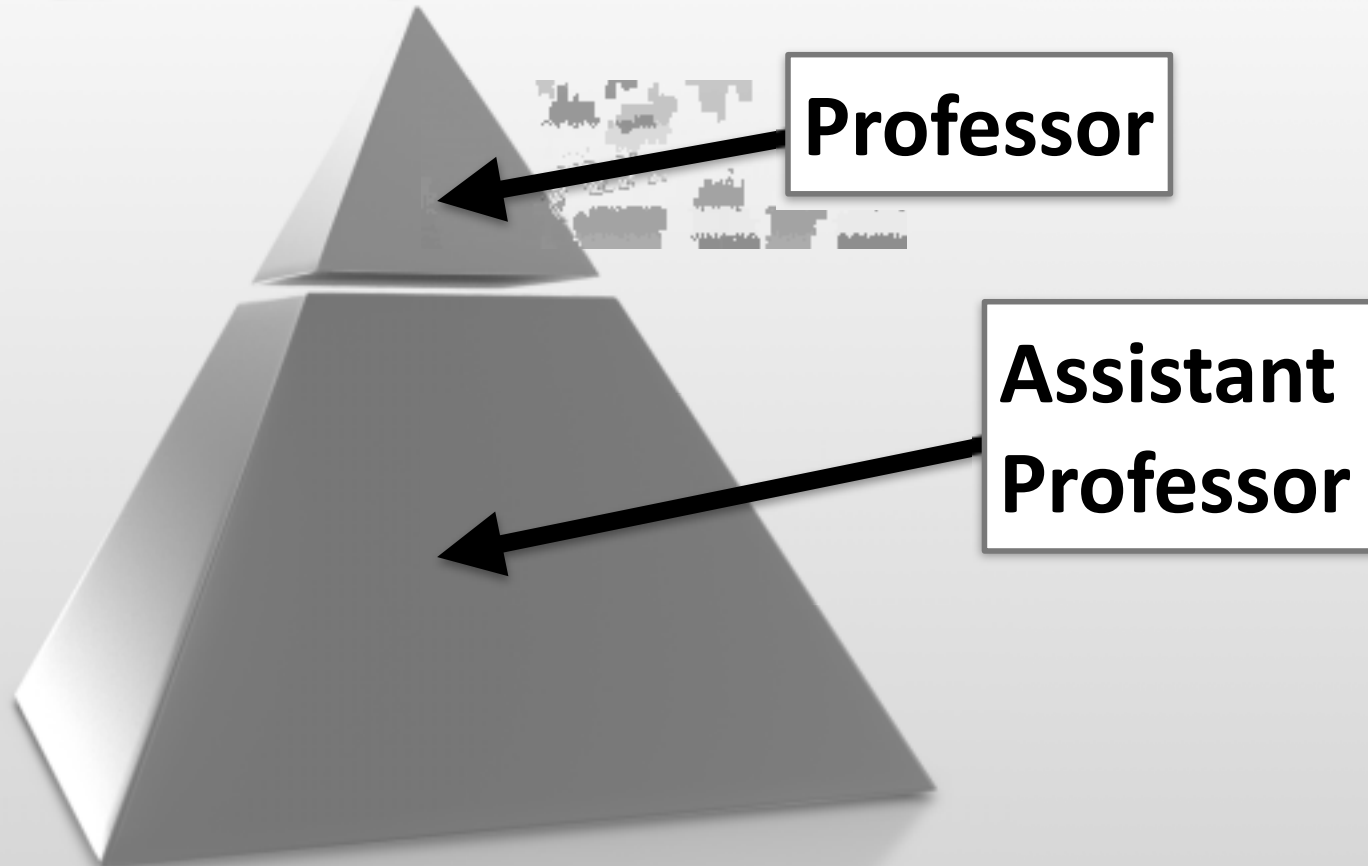
**None of this means that
academics are hierarchical
in *some* ways.**



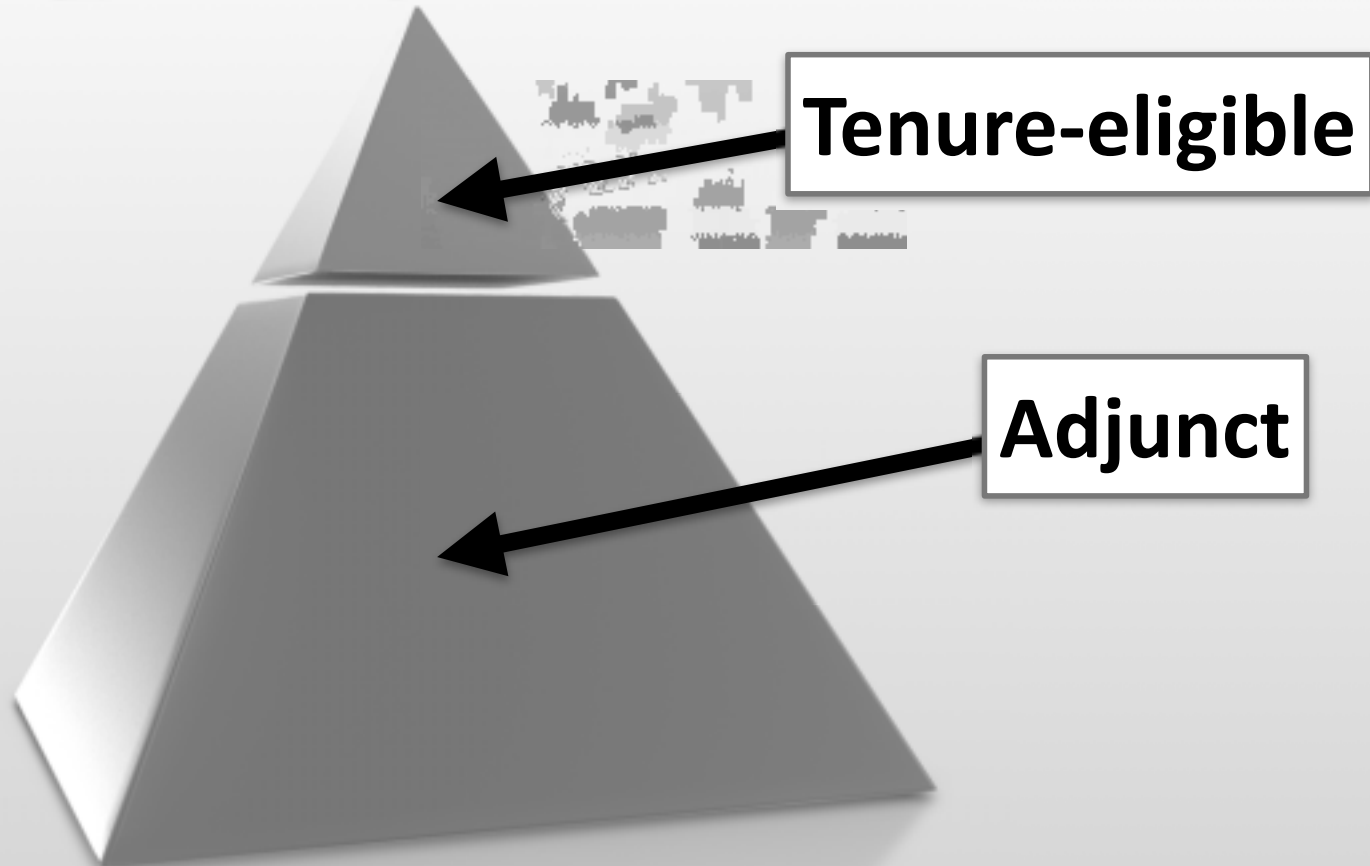
Social Hierarchy



Social Hierarchy

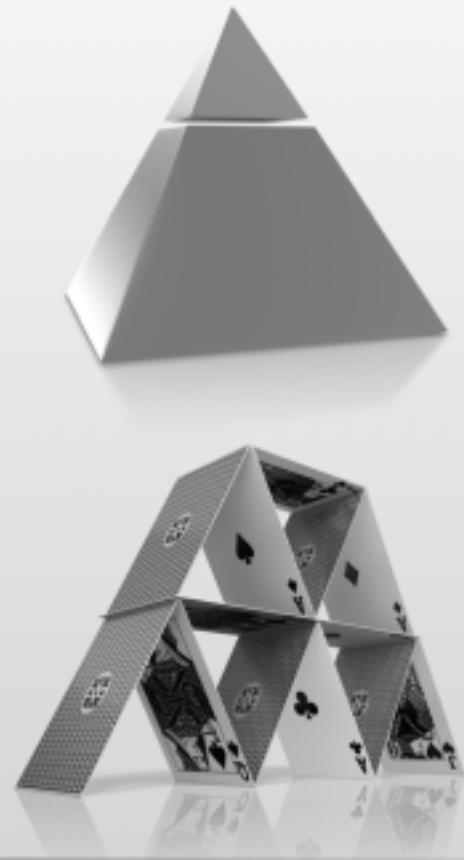


Social Hierarchy



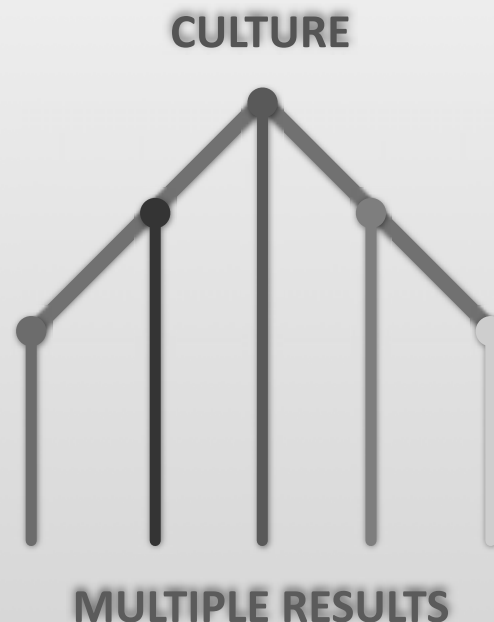
So, What We Need to Understand

- **University faculties have relatively strong *social* hierarchies.**
- **They just have relatively weak decision-making hierarchies. And that actually helps them make better decisions.**



So ...

What are the results that follow from the way in which university culture is (and largest has always been) organized?



**IMPORTANT RESULT #1:
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AFFECT
INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Communication Across Boundaries

Requires us to use the appropriate “currency” for the context.



Communication Across Boundaries

Otherwise there can be miscommunication.

