

# Minimal Valuable Collaboration

# Circles and Soup

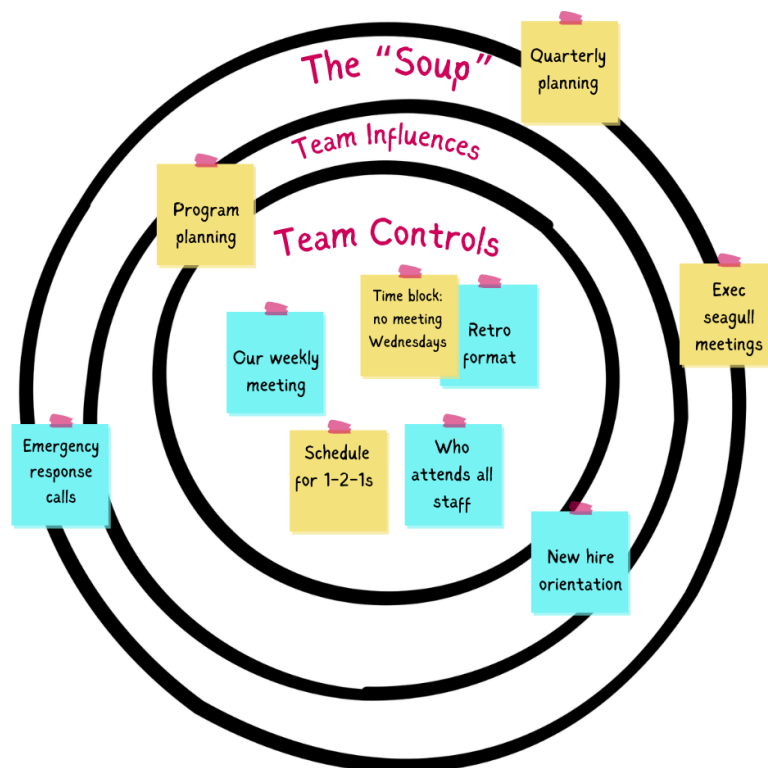
created by Diana Larsen and Esther Derby

## When

Use this when your group feels overwhelmed and powerless to change the situation.

## Basic Instructions:

- Draw three concentric circles, representing varying levels of control. Make the center circle quite large, and label it Team Controls. Label the next circle Influence and the final circle External Factors—or ‘The Soup.’
- Create a note for all the things you’re working through.
- Decide as a team where to place each item.
- Decide what to do with each item.
- **Things you Control:**  
Take direct action. Identify the next task and assign an owner.
- **Things you can Influence:**  
Figure out who owns these items and how to work with them.
- **Things in “the Soup”:**  
Decide how you will react to minimize negative impacts and maximize opportunities.



# How-To Tips

## Most teams have more control than they realize.

Teams often feel like customers or people higher up in the organization are making it impossible for them to take control of their work. To help a team that's having trouble coming up with items they control, get more granular. Look closely at how the team sets priorities, collaborates with one another, and communicates with outside groups, then build on these simple examples to find other items within the team's direct control.

## You can act even when you don't have direct control.

Even when the team doesn't have control, there are still actions they can take..

For items where you have Influence, you can:

- Identify who the owner is and learn more about that person's goals and needs.
- Lunch and libations! Create opportunities to build rapport and trust with the item owner.
- Make a pitch. Meet with the item owners to share your team's perspective and lobby for the changes you need.

For items in the soup, you can choose how you react. For example:

- Create barriers that make it harder for outside forces to disrupt your team. This might mean assigning a gatekeeper or creating an approval process that outsiders must go through before your team responds.
- Do some research. When the external force disrupting your team comes in the form of a competitor, another team, or senior executive, assign someone to figure out what influences drive those groups. When you understand these disruptors better, you can devise better strategies for minimizing their impact.
- Monitor for opportunities, and create alerts so your team can act swiftly when a new opportunity arises.

## Everyone swims in soup.

Recognize that every team at every level is impacted by forces outside of their control. Leading to the long-honored saying:

*Grant me the serenity to accept what I cannot change, the courage to change what I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

We encourage you to go beyond "acceptance" for those things you can't change by preparing how you'll react to them.

Learn more about this technique on [Diana's blog](#) and in our [Interview with Diana Larsen](#).



# Unleashing the teams & leaders of the future by turning insights into action.

At the New Rules for Work Labs, we connect with the front runners who are out there mapping the uncharted waters of work, and share their insights with you.

We then seek the simplest possible ways to put these insights into practice.

This handout describes an MVC – a Minimal, Valuable Collaboration technique.

MVC techniques are simple to use, apply to teams and individuals anywhere, work without any special tools or technology, and yield asymmetric returns on the time invested. Small actions that deliver big results.

Minimal refers to the effort required to learn and use these techniques, not their value.

The New Rules for Work project is hosted by Elise Keith and Dave Mastronardi.

We encourage you to share these techniques with your colleagues and friends, and invite them to become a subscriber

Join us at: [labs.newrulesforwork.com](https://labs.newrulesforwork.com)



*Comments, questions,  
feedback? Get in touch.  
Let's experiment!*

*- Dave & Elise*