

The Table Model

VMB-DGM – Van Merksteijn-Bern Domain Governance Model

Governance at human scale – an operating system for small groups that want to decide faster, fairer, and smarter than classical organizational structures allow.

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MALTA · JUNE 2026

CONCEPT DOCUMENT – FREE TO SHARE



What this document is

This is not a scientific treatise, not a political manifesto, and not a consultancy report. It is a **concept document intended as an operational description of a governance system** – useful for anyone who may one day want to implement, test, or change it.

The impetus is personal. A few years ago, Jacobus van Merksteijn wrote *Nova Democratia*, a detailed proposal for democratic renewal. As that proposal was developed, it became clear that the meeting structure reproduced the paralysis it sought to cure. What lies here is the result of honest self-critique: a radically simpler and operationally stronger system.

This document was left behind because the author will not be the implementer himself. His role is thinker and documentalist – to ensure that the idea is **complete, clear, and operationally ready** for whoever needs it, whenever that may be. Crisis forces change. When Europe enters a deeper crisis, people will look for a workable alternative. This document is meant to be picked up then, without everything having to be reinvented.

For whom

- The **entrepreneur** who wants something fundamentally different from matrix structures and KPI stacks
- The **council member or mayor** willing to let one district or domain experiment
- The **young thinker** who will face the same problems twenty years from now
- The **civil servant** who sees that the existing system will not hold

□ What I leave behind is not an army. It is a direction. For whoever wants to take that direction forward, the system is ready.

The Shared Core

Both models – VMB-EGS for large scale and VMB-DGM for human scale – share a coherent foundation. Anyone who wants to understand the models should first read these seven pillars. The rest is about how the core behaves at different scales.



Each of these seven elements is inseparably linked to the others. Remove one, and the system loses its diagnostic power. Together they form a self-correcting whole that structurally anchors transparency, purpose, and fairness.

Element 1 – The Track

What it is

Everything that is decided goes onto the Track: a **publicly readable, append-only, unerasable decision archive**. What, when, by whom, with what motivation. Nothing happens unseen. Nothing is erased afterward. Nothing is rolled back to rewrite history.

The Track is the shared reality the system runs on. Without the Track, none of the other elements work, because no element can respond to patterns that are not visible.

Why it is radical

This sounds simple – and technically it is. It is **radical in culture**. Most organizations have a strong interest in keeping decisions opaque – not because they want to deceive, but because transparency confronts them with mistakes for which they have no safe framework.

The key principles

Append-only

Once written, always readable. No revisions, no deletions.

Publicly readable

All group members have access. Transparency as the structural default.

Motivated

Not only what was decided, but also why – the reasoning is included.

Safe framework

The Track makes mistakes visible; the rest of the system ensures visibility does not become punishment.

Elements 2 & 3 – Directional Mandate & Envelope



The Directional Mandate

Each unit – neighborhood, city council, business division – receives a directional mandate at the start of the period. Not a budget, not a rulebook, not a sixty-page vision document. A directional mandate consists of **two to four measurable goals** for the period: a baseline, a target value, a timeframe.

Example: *"livability score from 6.8 to 7.2; two traffic bottlenecks resolved; number of lonely adults over 70 down by 15%."*

- ③ It sets the destination. It does not choose the route. Whoever does both ends up in micromanagement. Whoever does neither ends up in chaos.



The Envelope

Each directional mandate comes with one envelope: one amount for the entire period, granted once, not broken into a hundred line items. What the unit does with it to achieve the direction is its business. There are exactly **three boundaries**, no more:

- **Maximum per individual decision** – above this amount, it must go to the table
- **Maximum per category** – prevents the entire envelope from disappearing into one type
- **Reserve minimum** – a percentage that must remain at the end of the period

Unspent money does not automatically flow back up. The next envelope is determined by **what you achieved**, not by what you spent. The system rewards efficiency instead of consumption.

Element 4 – The Growth Rule


The overarching test that holds everything together. Every directional mandate is assessed at the end of the period on **two dimensions at the same time**: quality of the outcome and economic viability of the method.

Quality of the outcome

What did this block actually deliver? Not output (meetings, reports), but **outcome** – is the neighborhood truly more livable, is the problem truly solved?

Economic viability

Can this be sustained? Are we depleting people, materials, or resources? Does it use more than it produces – in the broadest sense?

 High quality without economic viability is unsustainable. Economic viability without quality is empty. Only those who combine both grow.

The nine outcomes

	Economically sound	Economically tight	Economically unsustainable
Quality achieved	Growth possible	Hold steady	 Alarm
Quality partial	Continue, refine	Diagnosis: mismatch	 Stop – review
Quality not achieved	Diagnosis: why?	Deepest alarm	 Dissolution of block

The top-right scenario – quality achieved but economically unsustainable – is the silent poison of almost every organization. A block that meets its goals by burning out people looks fine on paper. The growth rule makes it visible *before* the damage.

Elements 5 & 6 – Quality Score & Population Assessment



The Quality Score

Control is unavoidable. The question is not whether, but how. Conventional control is heavy: rules, audits, committees, reporting. This control is light: **two numbers per decision**.

- **Problem score** – was this a problem that deserved attention, and was it noticed at the right time?
- **Solution score** – did the chosen solution address the problem effectively and sustainably?

It is not the decision-maker who assigns the scores – self-assessment is not assessment. The higher-level block assigns the scores, at a distance from execution. With multiple assessors: the median, not the average. Not every decision is assessed – a sample per period, randomly drawn from the Track.

- All quality scores appear on the Track. At the top stands a randomly selected citizen panel that assesses the highest assessors. No one stands above the system.



The Population Assessment

The quality score is specialist assessment. But the population – the users, the citizens, those affected by the decision – also deserves a voice. **Not to decide, but to assess.**

- **Problem recognition** – did I think this was a problem that deserved attention?
- **Solution satisfaction** – do I think the decision is a workable solution?

The questions are neutrally phrased, limited in scope, provided with context, and the question asker is named on the Track. The result: for each decision, **three assessments** appear side by side – quality score plus two population scores. The combination is diagnostic, not punitive.

Element 7 – The Marking System

Errors are cheap. Prevention is expensive. An organization that tries to prevent every error in advance through classification, thresholds, and controls pays more in bureaucracy than the errors themselves cost. The fundamental reversal: **the system corrects not the rules, but the person.**

Three parameters

N – threshold: 3 marks

One mistake is bad luck. Two is coincidence. Three is a pattern.

T – counting period: 12 months, rolling

Older marks expire automatically. Those who recover regain trust.

P – recovery: 6 months clean

Authority restored without committee, automatically.

At N marks within T: two possible consequences

Domain downgrade

The person may still propose decisions within the domain, but they now go through the table. They lose sole authority. After six months without new marks: automatic restoration.

Domain exemption

In cases of serious or repeated patterns, the person is removed from the domain. The block redistributes the domain. Restoration only after a full re-test of domain affinity.

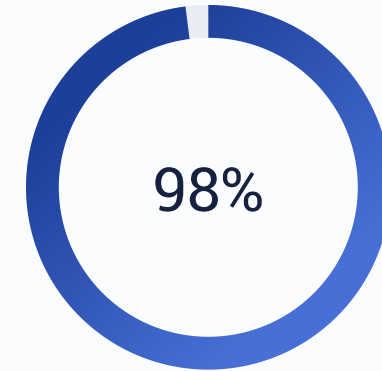
- ✔ No punishment. No shame. Diagnosis: this person, in this domain, in this period – it does not fit. The system rebalances who may do what, without expanding the rules.

VMB-DGM – The Table Model

VMB-DGM stands for Van Merksteijn-Bern Domain Governance Model. In everyday speech it is called **The Table Model** – a working name that honors its origin: a family business where most decisions were made by one of the parents alone, and the difficult topics went to the kitchen table where everyone could join the discussion.

It is a radically simplified implementation of the governance idea behind VMB-EGS, suitable for **small groups**: a company, a family, a team, a small board, a neighborhood council.

The deep insight: most decisions in an organization do not need heavy oversight. **About 98% can be handled quickly by one person with domain expertise.** Only the difficult 2% deserve joint attention. A system that does not recognize this – that sends all decisions through the same heavy machine – is more expensive than the mistakes it is trying to prevent.



Solo decisions

Handled quickly by one domain owner – Track 1

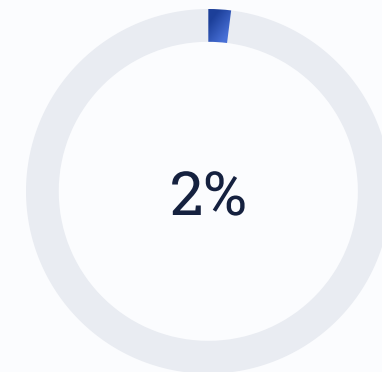


Table decisions

Shared attention for the difficult issues – Track 2

The Five Elements of The Table Model



Element 1 – The Group

N people together form N domains. With three people, three domains; with five, five. The group divides the domains itself at the start. The structure breathes with the staffing – there is no organizational chart that exists independently of the people.



Element 2 – Track 1: The Solo Decision

The domain owner decides directly within their area, without consultation, without a form. One voice, done. The decision is final but is placed on the Track for visibility. About 98% of all decisions go this way.



Element 3 – Track 2: The Table

When in doubt or when multiple domains are involved, the domain owner calls the table together. Everyone present contributes equally. Decision by majority of domain owners: with seven, 4; with five, 3; with three, 2. About 2% of decisions.



Element 4 – The Track

All decisions – Track 1 and Track 2 – go onto the Track. Append-only, publicly readable for all group members. What, when, by whom, with what motivation. Track 1 decisions remain final – the Track is for visibility, not revision.



Element 5 – The Hearth

Periodically, the group comes together to discuss Track 1 decisions in retrospect. By the hearth, not in a meeting room. The question is not "was this good?" but "how else could this have been done?" No finger-pointing. Collective memory, shared wisdom, better intuition.

The Table Model in One Drawing

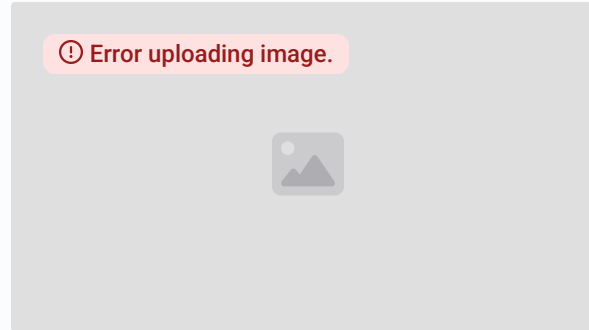
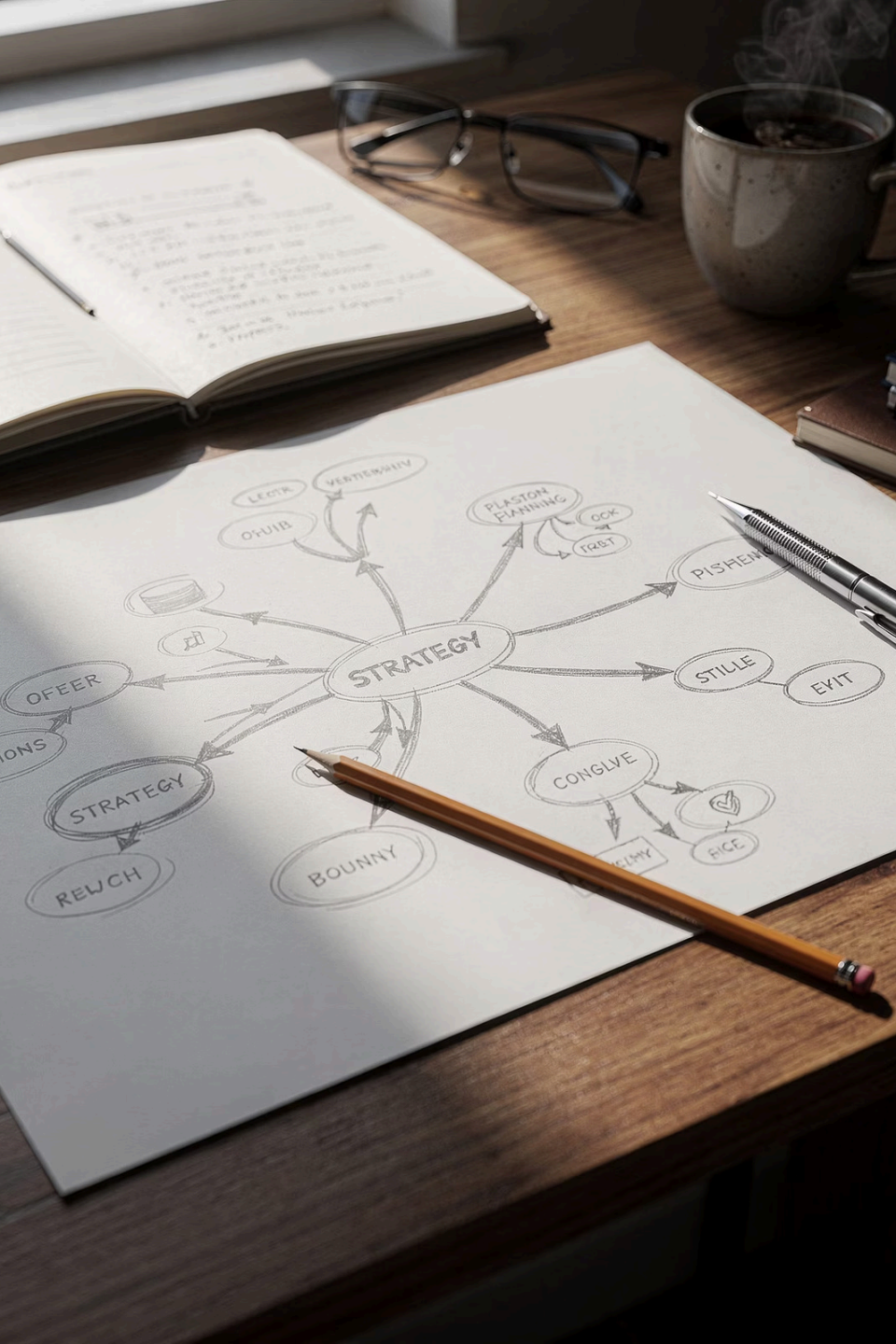
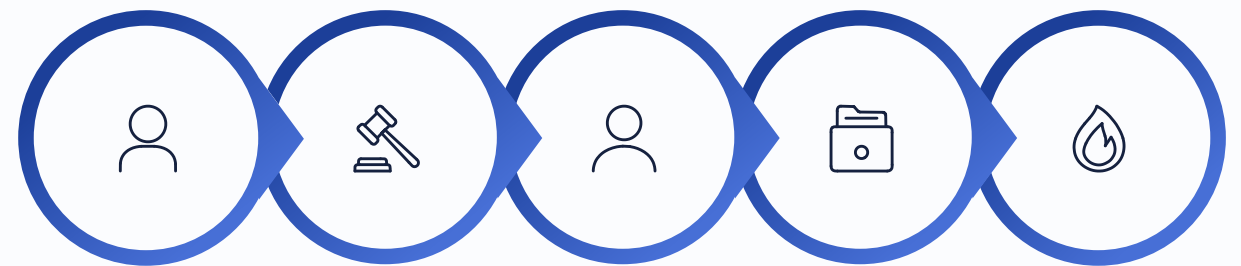


Figure 1 – VMB-DGM (The Table Model) in one drawing. Left: the group breathes with the number of people. Middle: each decision chooses one of two tracks. Bottom: everything goes onto the Track; the Open Hearth learns from it. Top right: the marking system corrects the right person, not the rules.



Domain

Track 1

Track 2

The Track

Open Hearth

Scenarios – The Table Model in Practice

A model learns best by responding to concrete situations. Six scenarios show how The Table Model moves – and how it differs from a classical organization.

- 1 The domain holder hesitates**
A routine topic suddenly feels bigger. He calls the table. No threshold, no justification required. The table decides by majority. The domain holder learns: was his intuition right, or wrong? Both learning outcomes are valuable.
- 2 A Spur 1 decision turns out poorly**
At the Open Hearth, weeks later, it comes up. The group discusses: how could it have been done differently? The decision stands, not reversible. The group assesses whether this was bad luck, coincidence, or a pattern.
- 3 Two domain holders disagree about who owns something**
A topic that both believe they own. One of them calls the table. There, not only is the topic decided, but also the boundary between the domains is revised – negotiable without turning political.
- 4 The votes are tied at the table**
With an even number, it can be 2-2 or 3-3. Most naturally: keep tableing until there is movement, or postpone. If it remains stuck: the domain holder with the most experience within the domain in question gets the deciding vote.
- 5 Three marks in ten months**
At the next Open Hearth, the consequence is discussed: domain downgrade or domain removal. The choice depends on the nature of the mistakes. In case of downgrade: after six months, a clean return. In case of removal: full reassessment.
- 6 Someone leaves or joins**
When someone leaves, the group divides the vacant domain at the next table. When someone joins, the newcomer is assigned a domain at the next table. No waiting period, no probation – trust is the default, marks follow naturally when mistakes happen.

Open Issues & Scope of Application

Three practical choices when introducing it

→ Who convenes the Open Hearth?

A fixed rotating role each month, the oldest domain holder, or naturally emerging on the initiative of whoever wants to? The group decides this itself at the start and records it on the Track.

→ What happens when votes are tied at the table?

A fixed tiebreaker (most experienced domain holder), postponing until more people are present, or continuing to table it until movement happens? Each has pros and cons depending on group dynamics.

→ What cadence for the Open Hearth?

Fixed (weekly, monthly) or variable – "when there is material"? A fixed cadence builds habit; a variable cadence prevents empty meetings.

Scale and scope of application

- ✔ Operational model. Works in practice in family businesses with two to eight decision-makers.

The Table Model scales upward as long as the table remains **physically possible**. Above about twelve people, the table begins to lose its intimate character and VMB-EGS with lottery becomes more suitable.

2–8

Ideal group size

Decision-makers for whom The Table Model is directly applicable

~12

Upper limit of the table model

Beyond that, the table loses its intimate character

The structure is not intended to replace trust, but to **support trust when the group becomes too large for personal memory alone.**

A Direction, Not an Army

| What I leave behind is not an army. It is a direction. For those who want to take up that direction, the system is ready.

The Table Model is not a utopian project. It is an **operationally ready system** – born from honest self-criticism of earlier, heavier governance proposals. It works now, in small groups, in family businesses, in neighborhood councils. It waits for broader application.

The seven core elements – the Path, the Directional Mandate, the Envelope, the Growth Rule, the Quality Metric, the Population Assessment, and the Marking System – are not seven separate ideas. They are one coherent system that structurally embeds transparency, purposefulness, and self-reflection **without adding bureaucracy**.

Crisis forces change. This document is intended to be picked up when it is needed – without everything having to be reinvented.

The legacy

Free to share

Concept document without copyright restrictions for use

Free to pick up

No implementer required – the system is independently usable

Operationally ready

No further elaboration needed – it is ready for whoever needs it