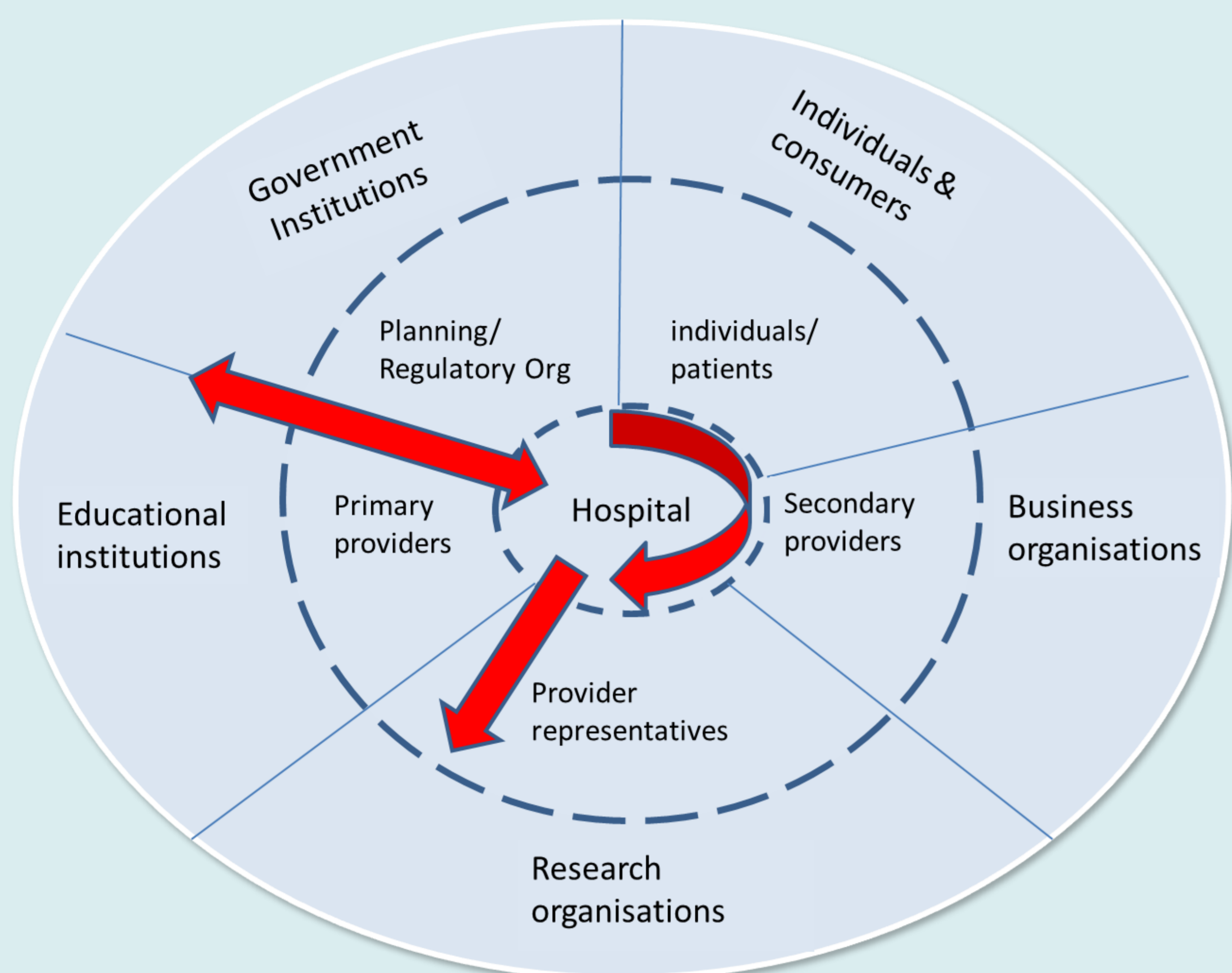


Agile, a guiding principle for health care improvement? - an integrative literature review

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From continuity to discontinuity

For hospitals to better handle the increasingly turbulent environment, the strategic management must shift their assumptions of **continuity** and a focus on operations to **discontinuity** and a focus on adaptive capacities. This enables improving existing care processes, as well as creating new ones, reflecting the needs of service users.

To meet this need, the strategic management of hospitals need to use **reactive strategies** to be prepared for the unpredictable, **proactive strategies** to foresee and impact future situations, and **embrative strategies** for transboundary integration.

This study concludes that by combining **agile** strategic thinking with **lean** operational management, a hospital may develop care structures and processes that fulfill both short and long term needs of service users.

Background

Development initiatives within Swedish hospitals (e.g. lean) have principally addressed improvement of internal processes. Less emphasis has been put on developing the strategic ability of a hospital management to interpret and act on environmental changes.

Aim

To deepen our understanding of the concept **agile** and its potential for strategic hospital management to optimize the design of organizational structures and processes.

Method

An integrative review including articles that 1) define agile, 2) describe agile capacities and 3) describe agile on multiple organizational levels. In total, 60 articles from various fields of research were included in the final analysis.

Findings and future research

Agile is placed at the intersection between the organisation and the external environment. Five capacities for organizational agility were identified (**Figure 1**). Agile and lean strategies have different, but complementary, objectives (**Figure 2**). In our future research, we aim to study how hospitals combine these objectives to achieve better care.

Practical implications

Our conceptualization of agile in the health care context, and in relation to lean, can help the strategic hospital management to assess and improve their ability to survive in a discontinuous environment and better meet the needs of service users.

Agile at the intersection between the organization and its external environment

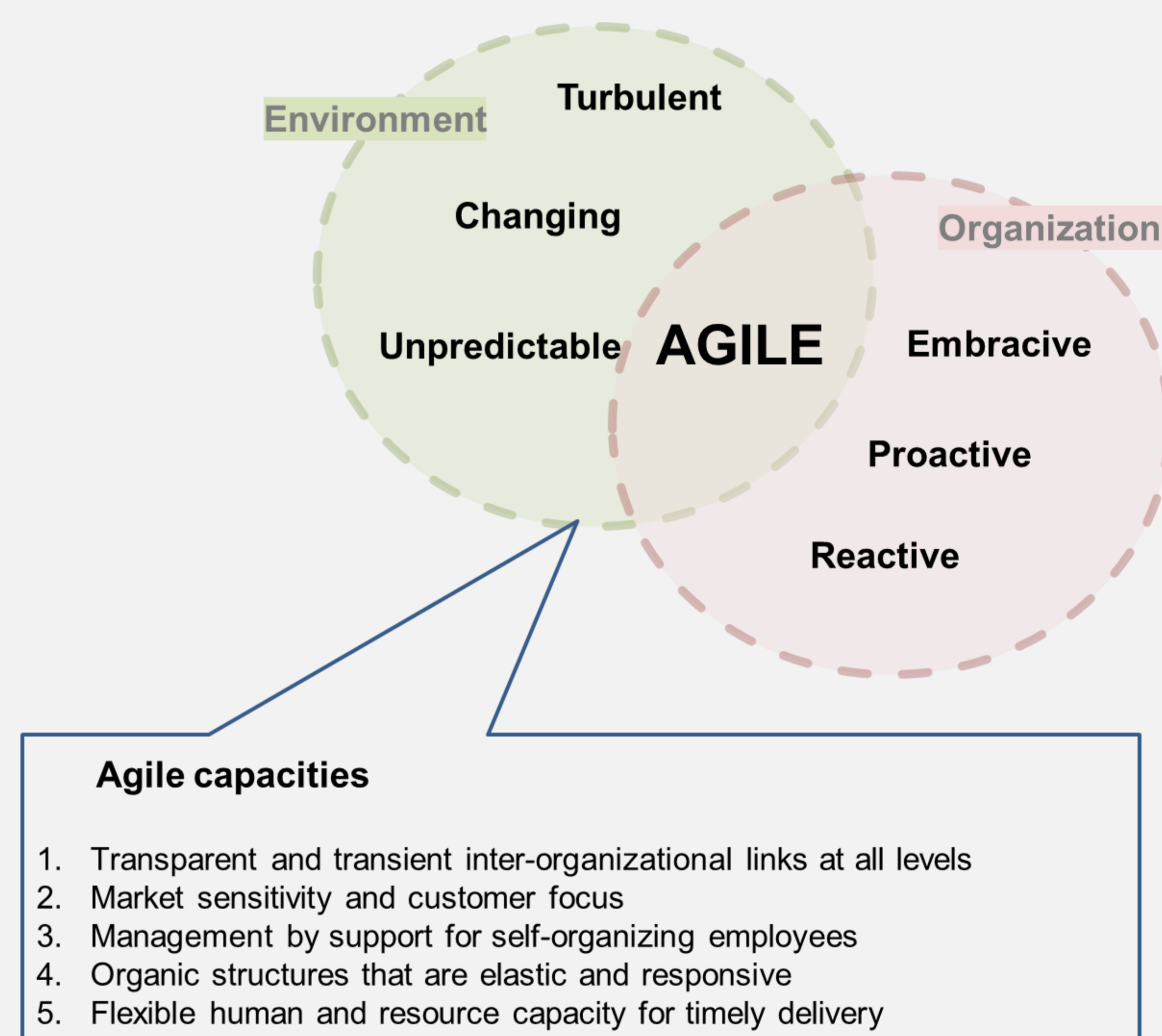


Figure 1

Agile and lean have different objectives

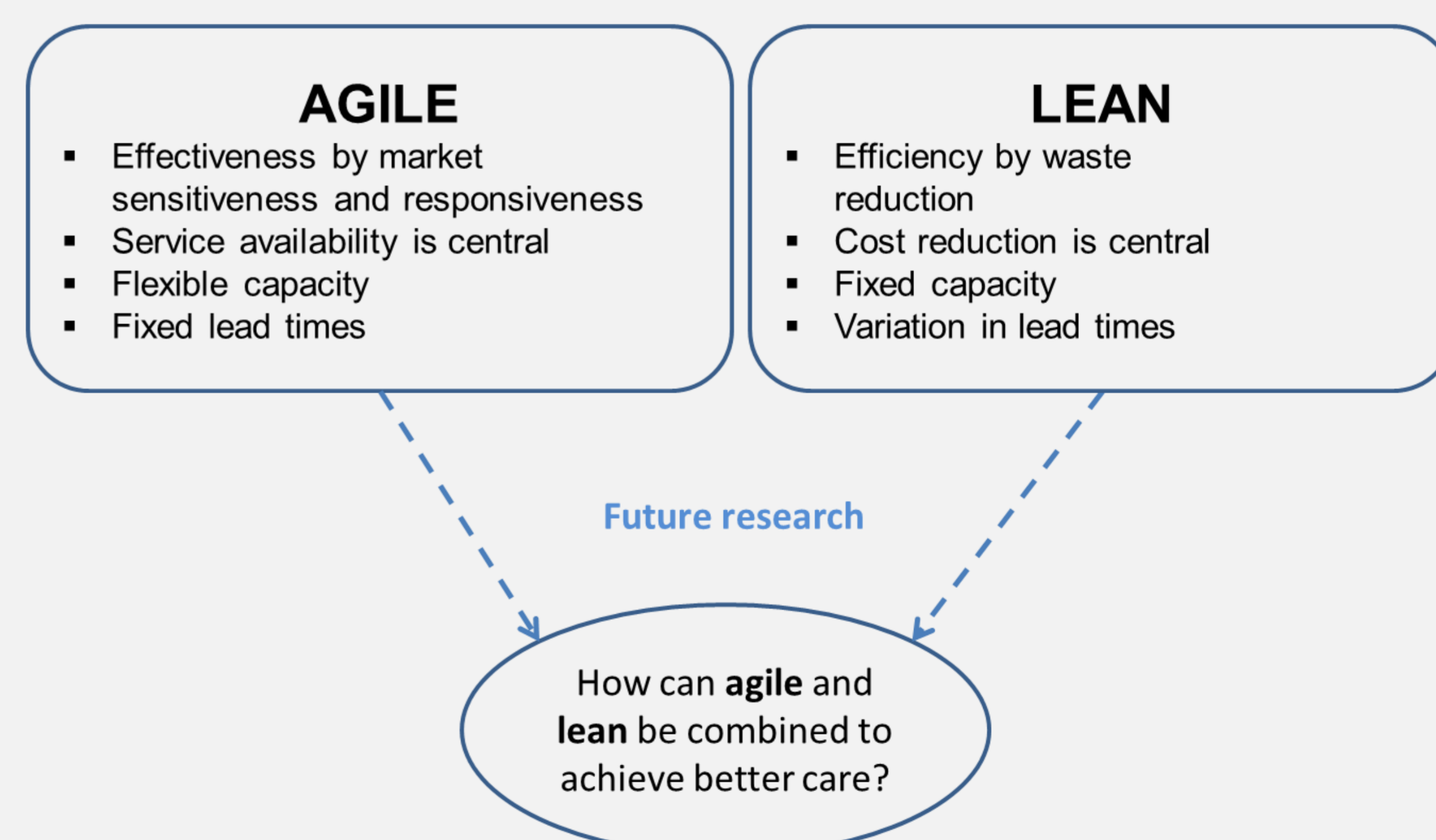


Figure 2

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