

THE GAIN WAS ALWAYS SHARED · CHAPTER ELEVEN

One Person's Gain

Chapter Eleven of The Gain Was Always Shared

Ammanuel Santa Anna

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THE LICENCE

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Chapter Eleven of The Gain Was Always Shared. The whole book, with every chapter, is at business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-gain-was-always-shared (DOI https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989502).

A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

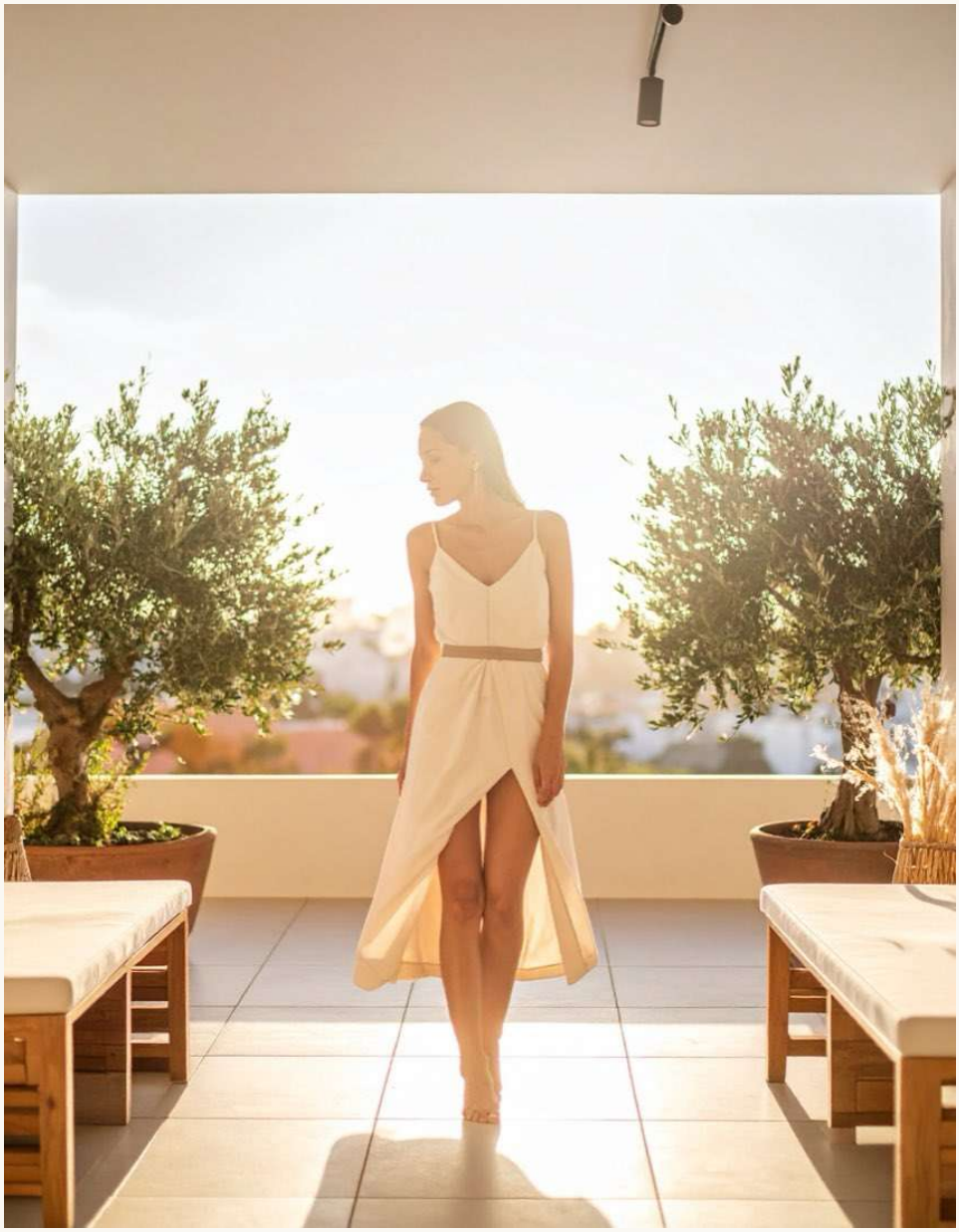
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ABSTRACT

Most of this book has been about plants of a hundred or more people, because that is where the research was done. But the idea at its centre does not depend on size. A firm that asks the people closest to the work what they know, answers them, makes one number visible and returns some of what is saved is doing something a household can do at a kitchen table and a single person can do with their own working week. This chapter brings the idea down to that scale. It is written for a reader who does not run a plant: someone who shares a household budget, works as an employee inside a firm they do not control, or works alone. It offers no advice about investments or savings products, and it promises no particular result. What it offers is a way of reading one's own economic life through the same four questions the earlier chapters asked of firms: who knows what, who answers, what can be seen, and what comes back.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

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The smallest firm

Most of this book has been about plants of a hundred or more people, because that is where the research was done. But the idea at its centre does not depend on size. A firm that asks the people closest to the work what they know, answers them, makes one number visible and returns some of what is saved is doing something a household can do at a kitchen table and a single person can do with their own working week.

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There is a reason to do this beyond convenience. Ammanuel Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* argues that economic life is not only something that happens in institutions but something carried in each person. In the book's chapter on the somatic dimension of economics, it puts that claim in a sentence:

> *The economy you live in is not just a system of policies, institutions, and market mechanisms. It is a pattern in your body.*[22]

A leader who has never examined how they themselves react when money is discussed will find it hard to build a firm that answers its people calmly. The household and the person are where the practice is learned.

A household as a small commons

A household that shares money is, in the terms Chapter 12 uses, a small commons. Several people draw on a shared resource. Several people can make it last longer or run it down. Nobody can manage it well alone, and the benefit of care is shared whether or not the care is.

Elinor Ostrom's design principles, read in this lineage's book on the commons, *The Pasture Was Never Empty*, translate almost directly. The boundary is clear: the people who share the budget. The rules work best when they fit local conditions, which in a household means the particular habits and pressures of these people rather than a template from a personal finance column. The people affected take part in making the rules. Monitoring is done by the users themselves. Small breaches are met with small responses. And there is a cheap, regular way of talking about disagreements before they become large.

Most households do some of this and not the rest. Commonly, one person holds the information and makes the decisions, and the others learn the result when something has gone wrong. That is the household version of the firm Chapter 2 described before Scanlon: the people closest to the costs are never asked, and their knowledge stays where it is.

The four questions at home

Who knows what. In most households the person who pays the bills is not the person who notices the costs. A partner sees the heating left on in an empty room. A teenager knows which subscription nobody opens. An older relative remembers which repair would have been cheaper if it had been done a year earlier. A hypothetical household, unnamed and built only for illustration, might discover that the person most aware of food waste is the one who cooks least often, because they are the one who clears the fridge.

The first step is the one Scanlon took in the mill. Ask. Not in a crisis and not as an accusation, but as a regular question: what do you notice about where our money goes that the rest of us might not?

Who answers. An idea offered at home and met with silence teaches the same lesson it teaches on a factory floor. The second time, it is not offered. The household version of the answer rule is simple: every suggestion gets a reply within a week, even if the reply is "not now, because". It costs a few minutes. It is also, as Chapter 4 argued about firms, the most frequent payment a group makes to its members, and the one most often neglected.

What can be seen. A household needs one number that everyone can see and that everyone can affect. Not the whole budget, which can feel like an exam, and not the bank balance, which moves for too many reasons. Something narrower: the monthly energy bill, the food bill, the amount set aside at the end of the month. Chapter 3 warned that a number which moves for reasons nobody controls teaches people that the number is weather. A household number should be chosen so that the people living there can see their own effect on it.

What comes back. When the number improves, something returns to the people who improved it. The book is careful not to prescribe what. In some households it is a shared outing, in some it is a contribution to something one member cares about, in some it is simply a sentence of recognition at dinner naming who noticed what. The point, as in Chapter 4, is that the return is felt by individuals even when the gain is shared. A household that says "the bill came down" has returned a measure. A household that says "the bill came down after you noticed the thermostat schedule" has returned an answer, a measure and a recognition at once.

What money carries from childhood

There is a reason these conversations can be harder at home than at work. Santa Anna's book describes the body as holding a record of every economic experience a person has had, and lists some of the earliest entries:

> *The first time you watched your parents argue about bills.*[100]

Two adults sharing a household bring two such records. One may have grown up where money was never discussed and any mention of it signalled trouble. Another may have grown up where it was discussed constantly and anxiously. When they sit down to choose a household number, each is reacting partly to the present and partly to a room they left decades ago.

The book's reflection questions make this explicit. One asks:

> *What economic somatic patterns did you inherit from your family of origin?*[101]

The question continues by asking not only about what was said about money but about how bodies changed when it was discussed: posture, the energy in the room, how parents looked when they worked. A household that wants to run its money as a small commons can begin there. Before any number is chosen, each person can say, briefly, what money felt like in the house where they grew up. It is not therapy and should not be treated as one. It is a way of making visible the thing that will otherwise shape every later conversation without being named.

This is the household equivalent of Chapter 10's family business conversation. The difference is only scale.



Reading your own workplace

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Reading your own workplace

Most readers of this book are not in a position to install a participation system. They work inside a firm someone else runs. The four questions are still useful, because they let a person read the circulation they are part of and decide where to put their attention.

Take the Circulation Map from Chapter 4 and fill it from your own position.

The up-current. Is there a route by which your ideas about cost, quality or waste can reach someone who can act on them? Is it formal or informal? When did you last use it?

The answer. When you last offered an idea, did anything come back? How long did it take? Was a refusal explained?

The measure. Is there a number you can see that tells you whether your work, or your team's, made a difference? Who shows it to you?

The share. When your team improved something, what came back: recognition, time, training, money, nothing? Has a target ever been raised because it was beaten?

The answers will not change the firm. They will tell you something about it. A person who finds that their ideas travel and are answered, even without any shared reward, is working in a firm whose circulation is partly open. A person who finds that ideas vanish, nothing is visible and targets ratchet is working in a firm where the current runs one way. Neither finding is a verdict on the person. Both are information about where effort is likely to be met.

Asking for voice

Sometimes the reading suggests a request. An employee cannot install an answer rule, but they can ask for one within their own team, and the request is easier to grant than most.

A hypothetical employee, unnamed, working on a small team, might put it to a manager like this:

> *I have had a few ideas about how we could cut rework on our team. I would like to send them to you in writing and get a short answer back, even if it is no. Could we try that for a month? I will keep a note of what I send and what happens, and we can look at it together at the end.*

The request is small, specific and reversible. It asks for nothing that costs money. It offers a record. And it changes, in a modest way, the circulation the person works inside. If the manager says yes, the employee has built a channel. If the manager says no, the employee has learned something important about where they work, at very little cost.

Santa Anna's book, writing about leaders who open meetings by naming what they are struggling with, describes the practice as costing about ninety seconds. The same proportion holds for a request like this. It takes very little time to ask, and the answer, either way, is worth having.

Working alone

A freelancer or sole trader is a firm of one, and the circulation runs between the person and their own work. The four questions still apply, in a slightly altered form.

Who knows what. The person doing the work knows things the person running the business does not, even when they are the same person. The tired version at the end of the week notices which client relationships cost more than they pay, which tasks always take longer than quoted, which tool wastes an hour a day. The planning version on Monday morning rarely asks.

Who answers. A simple practice: keep a short weekly note of what the working self noticed, and have the planning self answer it in writing. Yes, no, not yet. It sounds artificial. It is the same discipline as the answer rule, applied to one person who plays two roles.

What can be seen. One number, chosen because the work can affect it: hours spent on unpaid revisions, days between finishing a job and being paid, the share of the week spent on the work one is best at.

What comes back. When the number improves, return some of the saved value to the person who saved it, which is to say, to oneself, deliberately. Time, rest, training, a piece of equipment that makes the next week easier. Without a return, a person who works alone tends to treat every saving as capacity for more work, which is the household version of the ratchet.



The Vitality Inventory

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The Vitality Inventory

Santa Anna's book offers a weekly practice that suits this chapter closely. It calls it the Vitality Inventory, and it asks a person to review the economic events of the past seven days, purchases, work projects, financial decisions, conversations about money, and to notice for each one their state during it, whether it left them more or less alive, and what their body's honest assessment was. The book describes what the practice produces over time:

> *Over weeks and months, this inventory builds a somatic map of your economic life*[102]

and names what that map measures:

> *the quality of aliveness that your economic life produces.*[103]

The book's claim that such a map is more reliable than a financial spreadsheet is the author's judgement, not a measured finding, and this chapter does not make it. What the inventory can do, used beside the four questions, is add a dimension the numbers leave out. A household number that improves while everyone feels more anxious is telling only half the story. A working week that shows a better figure on paid hours while leaving the person depleted has moved one number at the cost of another that matters more.

Used together, the four questions and the inventory give a person a small, complete instrument: what is known, what is answered, what is seen, what returns, and how it all feels.

When the household critiques the plan

Chapter 3 read five ways a participation system fails in a firm. Each has a household form, and each has the same way through at a smaller scale.

One share among many. In a household of five, a person who saves on the energy bill sees only part of the benefit, and a person who wastes bears only part of the cost. The free-rider problem is real at home, as anyone who has shared a flat knows. The way through is the one Kandel and Lazear pointed to for firms: people who can see each other's effect on the shared number, and who care what the others think, behave differently from strangers.[105] A household number posted where everyone sees it, with a name written beside the change that moved it, does most of the work.

The ratchet. A household that cuts its food bill and is immediately told to cut it further has rebuilt the problem Chapter 3 described. The people who made the saving learn that the reward for effort is a harder target. Agree in advance, together, when the household target will be revisited, and keep to it.

Power. In most households one person holds more of the money and more of the decisions, for reasons that range from income to habit to history. A household that asks for everyone's ideas and then lets one person

decline them without explanation has the form of participation without its substance. The answer rule is the test here as it is in a plant: if suggestions stop receiving replies, the system has already closed.

Weather. A household number can move for reasons nobody inside controls: a price rise, a cold winter, an illness. When it does, say so aloud, and do not read the movement as anyone's failure. The choice of number in the Tool below asks for this in advance.

What the record sees. A household that only remembers its successes will learn very little from itself. Keep the page, including the months when nothing improved and the suggestions that turned out to be wrong. After a year it is the household's own study, and it will say more about this household than any general advice can.

None of this requires a household to become an institution. It requires only that the people who share a resource can see it, shape the rules for it, be answered when they speak about it, and trust what they are shown. Those are the same four conditions Chapter 3 found beneath every critique of gainsharing, and they hold at the smallest scale as surely as at the largest.

Beyond the household

The household and the person are not a retreat from the larger argument of this book. They are where it is practised first. A leader who has learned to ask and answer at their own kitchen table, to choose a number the household can affect, and to return some of what is saved to the people who saved it, enters the boardroom conversation in Chapter 10 with something better than a theory.

Santa Anna's book makes the larger connection explicit. Describing how gift economies understood wealth, it gives the principle in a sentence this chapter has tried to apply at the smallest scale:

> *Wealth was not something you had. It was something you moved.*[104]

A household where ideas move, answers come back and saved value returns to the people who saved it is a small place where that sentence is true. It does not need a plan, a committee or a formula. It needs a question asked at dinner, an answer given within the week, and one number on the refrigerator door.

The neighbouring books in this series take the same thought in other directions: gift and reciprocity reads the research on reciprocity that explains why an answered suggestion is worth more than its cost, and *Enough by Design* reads the economics of enough. The lens behind all of them is *Ecstatic Economics*, in its colour art edition at *Ecstatic Economics*, and the house's library is at hautelumiere.life.

The Tool: The Kitchen-Table Circulation

One page, for a household or a person working alone. Fill it on the first Sunday of a month and again at the end of the third month. It involves no financial products and no change to anyone's income.

1 · The people

Who shares this budget or this work:

For each person, one sentence on what money felt like in the house they grew up in (optional, said aloud rather than written if preferred):

2 · Who knows what

Three things someone here notices about where money or time goes that the person deciding may not:

When each was last mentioned, and what happened:

3 · The answer

Our rule: every suggestion gets a reply within ___ days, even if it is no. Who replies:

- Suggestions this month: ___ · answered on time: ___

4 · The one number

The number: · today: ___ · where it will be posted:

Things we control that move it: · things we do not:

5 · What comes back

If the number improves, what returns, and to whom:

Has the household or the person ever responded to a saving by expecting more? yes / no · when:

6 · The weekly inventory (one line a week)

WEEK	EVENT	STATE DURING IT (SETTLED / ANXIOUS / SHUT DOWN)	MORE OR LESS ALIVE AFTERWARDS
1			
2			
…			
13			

7 · At the end of three months

The number, then and now:

- Suggestions offered: ___ · answered: ___ · acted on: ___

What the inventory showed that the number did not:

One change for the next three months:

A note on method

No study in this book examined households or people working alone; the application here is this chapter's own, drawn by analogy from the firm-level research in Chapters 2 to 5. Ostrom's principles are summarised as the commons book in this series reads them, not from her primary text. The household and the employee in this chapter are hypothetical and unnamed.

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