

THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER EIGHT

The Field Manual

Chapter Eight of The Pasture Was Never Empty

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A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

This work is offered for education and leadership development. It is not legal, financial, accounting, investment, medical or psychological advice; take the advice of a qualified professional who knows your circumstances. Companies and events are described from the public record as the author understands it; characterisations are the author's analysis. Examples are illustrative, and no particular outcome is promised to any reader.

ABSTRACT

The first half of this book was about seeing. This chapter is about doing, and it is written to be used: open on a desk, a pencil beside it, a calendar open next to that. It sets out the full sequence by which a leader takes one commons inside an organisation from open to governed, in thirteen weeks, with the roles, the decisions and the artefacts each week requires. Thirteen weeks is a quarter, which is the unit most organisations already plan in, and it is long enough for every loop in Chapter 4 to close at least three times. That last point is the reason for the length. A commons is not governed when its charter is signed. It is governed when the sense loop has fired, the reflex has answered, a dispute has been settled and a rule has been changed by the people who live under it, and each of those has happened more than once. Before that, it is a document.

CHAPTER EIGHT

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Thirteen weeks

The first half of this book was about seeing. This chapter is about doing, and it is written to be used: open on a desk, a pencil beside it, a calendar open next to that. It sets out the full sequence by which a leader takes one commons inside an organisation from open to governed, in thirteen weeks, with the roles, the decisions and the artefacts each week requires.

Thirteen weeks is a quarter, which is the unit most organisations already plan in, and it is long enough for every loop in Chapter 4 to close at least three times. That last point is the reason for the length. A commons is not governed when its charter is signed. It is governed when the sense loop has fired, the reflex has answered, a dispute has been settled and a rule has been changed by the people who live under it, and each of those has happened more than once. Before that, it is a document.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* gives the reason the sequence below puts the users at the centre from the second week, not the eighth:

> *People comply more willingly with rules they helped create.*[56]

The claim of this chapter is this: the work of governing a commons is mostly the work of handing it back to its users in an order they can carry, while the sponsor holds the outcome steady above them. The weeks below are that order.

The composite

Throughout the chapter, one organisation is followed week by week. It is a composite, built for teaching: no single real firm, assembled from arrangements common in professional services. Every figure in it is set for illustration.

A consultancy of two hundred and forty people runs client work in twelve project teams. Between them sits a shared bench of eight analytics specialists, whose hours any project team can request. The bench is the firm's most valued common resource and its most quarrelled-over. Requests arrive by email, by message and in corridors. The specialists say yes to whoever asks most insistently, work evenings to cover the gap, and two of the eight have left in the past year. Project leads complain that they cannot get time; the specialists complain that they cannot finish anything. Nobody owns the bench's calendar. The managing partner has twice issued a policy on how to request specialist time, and twice it has faded within a month.

This is Gordon's open-access fishery again, with spreadsheets for nets. Every project lead who asks for a specialist's afternoon takes the whole benefit and bears a twelfth of the cost, which falls on the specialists and on the other eleven teams.



The roles

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The roles

Five roles carry the work. In a small group one person may hold two; in a large one, a role may be shared. What matters is that each is named before Week 1.

The sponsor. The person with authority over the commons from outside it: a managing partner, a division head, a chief operating officer. The sponsor's job is principle 7 and the top layer of principle 8. They set the outcome (in the composite: specialist hours used on client work within a sustainable total, and no specialist routinely working past an agreed limit), protect the users' right to design the method, and stay out of the method. The sponsor's commonest failure is to re-enter the room in Week 6 with a better idea. The sponsor commits in writing, before Week 1, to what they will decide and what they will not.

The convenor. The person who runs the thirteen weeks. They call the meetings, keep the sequence, and hold the users to the timetable they agree. The convenor is usually not the sponsor, and is best chosen from

among the users or from a neutral seat beside them. In the composite, the convenor is a senior project lead respected by both the specialists and the other leads.

The keeper of the record. The person who writes down what is decided, keeps the charter and the ladder, records rule changes with their dates, and maintains the health sheet from Chapter 9. Without this role, a group re-argues its own decisions every month. The role should rotate after the first quarter.

The user-monitors. Two or three people, drawn from the users and accountable to them, who watch the resource's condition and its use and report at the regular meeting. In the composite, one specialist and one project lead share the role, which takes the Japanese villages' lesson in Chapter 7, that the watcher's duty is held in turn, one step further: here the turn is shared by people on both sides of the resource.

The users. Everyone who draws on the commons or maintains it. In the composite, eight specialists and twelve project leads. Their job is principle 3: to design and change the rules. They are the role the sequence exists to serve.

Phase one · See (Weeks 1 to 3)

The first phase builds the sense loop before it builds anything else. Most failed attempts at governing a commons begin with rules. This one begins with eyes.

Week 1 · Name the commons and the people. The convenor, with the sponsor's written commitment in hand, runs the Commons Inventory from Chapter 2 with three or four users, including at least one from each side of the resource. The aim is not to pick the commons, which the sponsor may already have done, but to see it among the others and to draw its two boundaries: who draws on it, and what exactly it is. In the composite, the first argument is over whether the bench includes the two junior analysts who sometimes help; the users decide it does not, for now, and the keeper writes the decision down. The convenor also draws a stakeholder map of everyone the commons touches, including people who never request time but are affected when the bench is overrun; Alpha's Stakeholder Map is the instrument. The Luminous 100 asks a better question than the usual grid of power and interest:

> *What gifts does each stakeholder carry that our initiative needs?*[57]

Decision of the week: the resource and its users, written in two sentences. *Artefact:* the inventory table and the map.

Week 2 · Measure the delay, then shorten it. Before any rule, the convenor asks one question: how long does it take, today, between overuse and someone knowing? In the composite, the honest answer is *weeks*: nobody sees the bench's total load until a specialist resigns. The user-monitors build the smallest possible shared view: a single calendar of specialist hours, by team, visible to all twenty users, updated daily. No

new rule accompanies it. That is deliberate. The first change a group sees should be information, not instruction, so that the group's own norms can begin to work on what it now sees.

Decision: what will be visible, to whom, how often. *Artefact:* the shared view.

Week 3 · Audit with the users. The convenor gathers the twenty users, or as many as can come, for ninety minutes and runs the Principle Audit from Chapter 3, with the Case Reading Card from Chapter 7 for any arrangement someone wants to borrow from elsewhere. Scores are given with evidence from the past three months. In the composite, the scores are what one would expect: users clearly defined but no door for new project teams; no boundary on what a specialist's week contains; no monitoring until last week; no small first response, only the managing partner's policy; no place to settle disputes except escalation to the partner. The combinations make the order of work clear: the sense loop is now partly built, so the next pair is boundary and reflex.

Decision: the two moves the users choose. *Artefact:* the scored audit, kept by the keeper.

What to do if it stalls in phase one. The commonest stall is the users declining to come, because past attempts came to nothing. The answer is the shared view: let it run for a further week, then invite the users to the audit with one sentence about what it shows. People attend a meeting about something they can already see. The second commonest stall is the sponsor wanting to choose the two moves. The convenor reminds them of their written commitment.



Phase two · Design with the users (Weeks 4 to 6)

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Phase two · Design with the users (Weeks 4 to 6)

The second phase draws the membrane and installs the reflex, with the users holding the pen.

Week 4 · Draw the boundary and the door. The users decide what a specialist's week contains and how it is shared. In the composite, they agree that each specialist's week holds thirty hours of project time and the rest belongs to the bench itself: learning, maintenance of shared tools, and the documentation every team draws on. The thirty hours across eight specialists are divided among the twelve teams in proportion to each team's client commitments for the quarter, with a reserve of a tenth held back for urgent work. That is

principle 1B and principle 2B at once. The door is written too: a new project team joins the allocation at the next quarterly review, and draws on the reserve until then.

The convenor makes sure the specialists' side of the proportion is in the design. In the composite, the leads who draw most on the bench agree to give something back in kind: a lead from each heavy-using team spends an hour a fortnight documenting what the specialists built for them, so that the next team can re-use it. That is the *zanjera* in a firm: the labour of maintenance rises with the draw.

Decision: the allocation, the reserve, the door. *Artefact:* a one-page boundary note.

Week 5 · Write the ladder. The users write the Graduated Response Ladder from Chapter 5, adapted. In the composite, overuse is a team drawing past its allocation in a fortnight without using the reserve route. Rung one is a word from a user-monitor; rung two, raised at the regular meeting; rung three, the team proposes how it will repay the hours from its next fortnight; rung four, a temporary cap on the team's requests; rung five, review by all the users. The protections are written in: the same ladder for every team, including the convenor's own, and a right to be heard before rung three.

Santa Anna's book names the spirit in which the ladder should be written:

> *The goal is to maintain the community, not to destroy the violator.*[56]

Decision: the ladder. *Artefact:* the signed ladder.

Week 6 · Create the Thursday and agree the rule for changing rules. The users fix a regular meeting, fifteen minutes, same day each week, where the user-monitors report, the ladder's second rung is used, and disputes are heard. They also agree how a rule is changed: in the composite, by consent at the Thursday meeting, with any user able to propose a change and any user able to object, an objection being answered rather than outvoted. This is principle 3 and principle 6 installed together, because each needs the other: a group that can change its rules but has nowhere to settle a quarrel will use rule changes as weapons. The keeper then writes the One-Page Commons Charter from Chapter 6, gathering what Weeks 1 to 6 decided, and every user signs it.

Decision: the regular meeting; the rule for changing rules. *Artefact:* the signed charter.

What to do if it stalls in phase two. The commonest stall is a powerful user who will not accept an allocation. In the composite, it is the lead of the firm's largest client team, who has had first call on the bench for two years. The convenor does not go to the sponsor. The convenor shows the lead the shared view from Week 2, which already makes the cost of first call visible to everyone, and asks what allocation the lead would propose that the other eleven would accept. Most such disputes end in the room once the information is shared; Chapter 10 gives the conversation in full. If the dispute will not end, it goes to the Thursday meeting under the rule just agreed, which is the first test of whether the rule works.



Phase three · Run (Weeks 7 to 10)

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Phase three · Run (Weeks 7 to 10)

The third phase is where the commons begins to live. Nothing new is added. The group runs what it built and watches it work.

Week 7 · The first full cycle. The shared view runs; the allocation holds or does not; the Thursday meeting meets. The convenor's job this week is to make sure the meeting is short and real: the user-monitors report two numbers and one observation, the meeting asks whether anyone has a concern, and it ends. In the composite, one team is over its allocation by six hours; a user-monitor has already spoken to its lead (rung one), and the lead explains a client deadline. Nothing else happens. That is the ladder working.

Week 8 · The first dispute. It will come, and it should be welcomed, because it is the first test of the repair loop. In the composite, two teams each claim that a specialist's afternoon spent on a shared data model should be charged to the other. The Thursday meeting hears both in five minutes and decides the hours go

to the reserve, since both teams benefit. The keeper records the decision as a precedent. The finer point is speed: the dispute is heard in the week it is raised, which is what makes it small.

Week 9 · The first rule change. It will come too, and it should be welcomed for the same reason. In the composite, the specialists propose that requests for less than an hour bypass the allocation entirely, because the record-keeping costs more than the hour. The leads consent. The keeper records the change and its date. The group has now used principle 3, and the charter has its first amendment, which is the sign that it is alive.

Week 10 · The quiet week. The convenor watches for a particular failure: the meeting beginning to grow. A fifteen-minute meeting that becomes an hour is a sign that the group is using the Thursday for work that belongs elsewhere, or that something is going wrong that the ladder is not catching. In the composite, the meeting stays at twelve minutes. The convenor takes that as a result.

What to do if it stalls in phase three. Two stalls are common. The first is the shared view going stale because nobody updates it. The answer is to make updating it part of the work itself, a by-product, as the irrigator's turn at the gate was in Valencia: in the composite, specialists log hours as they start a task, not at the week's end. The second is the ladder never being used because nobody wants to say the first word to a colleague. The answer is to rehearse it at the Thursday meeting, using a breach that has already been resolved, so that the first rung becomes ordinary speech. The Luminous 100's reading of Nonviolent Communication supplies the question that makes the first word easier to say:

> *what is the living system between us — our team, our family, our community — needing that neither of us is providing?*[58]

Phase four · Review and nest (Weeks 11 to 13)

The last phase measures what happened, hands the arrangement its permanent place in the organisation, and decides whether to extend it.

Week 11 · Measure. The keeper fills in the Commons Health Sheet from Chapter 9, comparing the past four weeks with the three weeks before Week 2. In the composite, the measures are of the resource (specialist hours worked per week, and evenings worked), of use (requests met within the fortnight), and of the loops (days from overuse to someone knowing, share of breaches settled at the first rung, days from a dispute raised to settled, rule changes made). The illustrative figures are encouraging: evenings worked fall from an average of nine a week across the bench to three; requests met within a fortnight rise from about half to about four in five. The sheet also records what the figures cannot show, which is the subject of Chapter 9.

Week 12 · Review with the users and the sponsor. The users meet for an hour with the scored audit from Week 3 beside them and re-score the principles with new evidence. The sponsor attends the second half, not the first. The sponsor's questions are about the outcome they set: is the bench's total load sustainable, is

client work being served, is any specialist routinely past the limit? The sponsor does not ask about the method. If the outcome is met, the sponsor says so in writing, and confirms the users' authority over the method for the next quarter. That written confirmation is principle 7 made concrete, and in the composite it does more for trust than any other single act of the thirteen weeks.

Week 13 · Nest, and decide what comes next. The users decide three things. First, who holds the roles next quarter; the keeper and the user-monitors rotate. Second, what passes up to the sponsor's layer: in the composite, only the quarterly allocation's total and any dispute the Thursday meeting cannot settle. Third, whether the method should be offered to another commons. In the composite, the leads propose the same approach for the firm's two large meeting rooms, which are overrun in exactly the same way. The convenor agrees to support a new convenor from among the room's users, which is principle 8 growing: a second commons with its own loops, nested beside the first under the same sponsor.



What the sponsor does all quarter

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What the sponsor does all quarter

A field manual for the users would be incomplete without one for the person above them, because the sponsor is the role most likely to undo the work.

The sponsor does four things, which are the four duties of a good outside authority set out in Chapter 6. They protect the boundary from people outside it: in the composite, the managing partner tells a new client team that it joins through the door like everyone else, rather than by calling the partner. They make information available: the sponsor's own data on client commitments feeds the allocation. They provide a

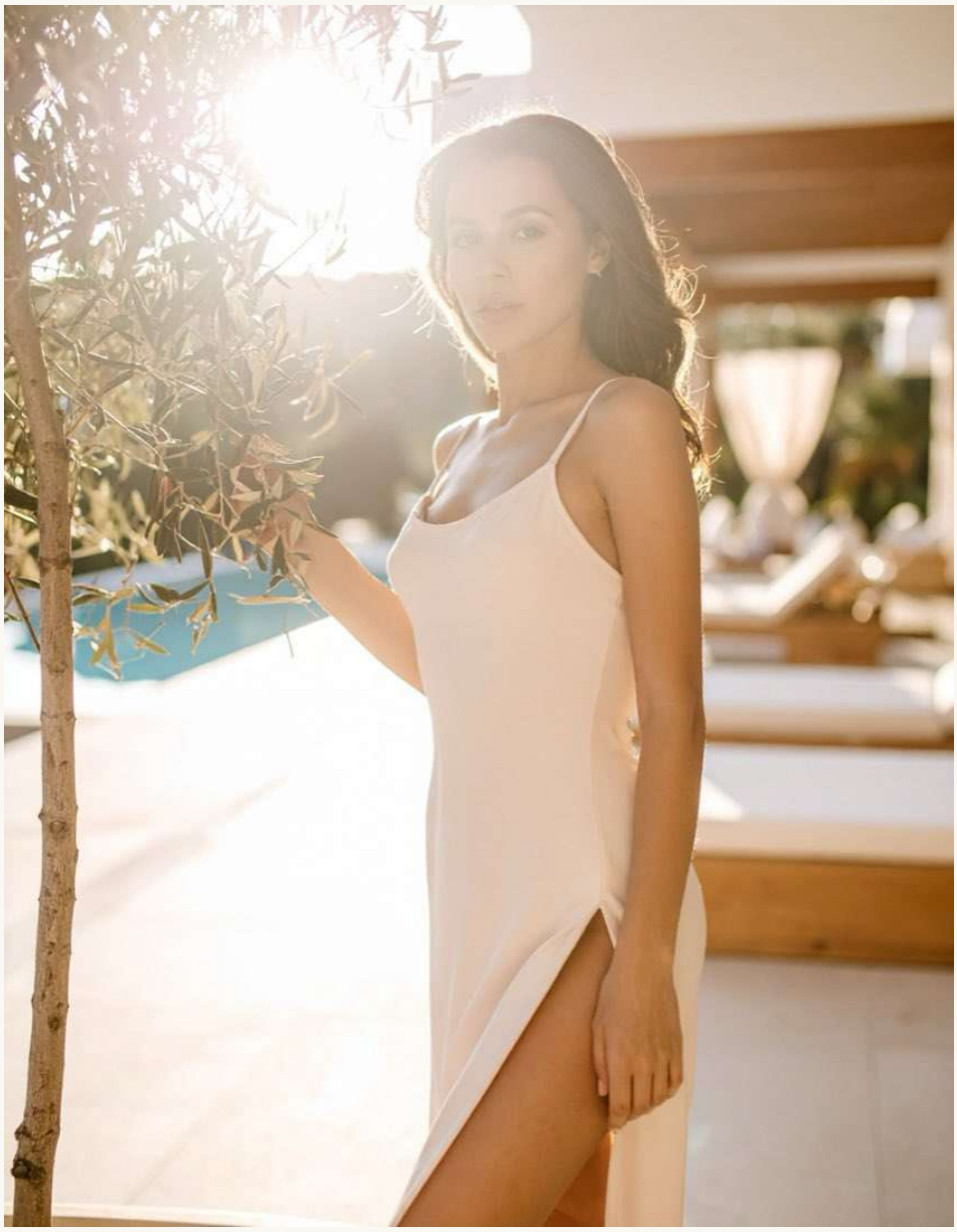
place for disputes the users cannot settle, and in thirteen weeks they are needed once. And they stay out of the method.

That last duty is hard for anyone who has run things. A sponsor who sees the Thursday meeting wobble in Week 8 will want to step in. The evidence in Chapter 3, from the forests of rural Colombia, is that an outside rule imposed on a group that is beginning to govern itself can crowd out the group's own norms and leave something weaker. The sponsor's restraint is not politeness. It is part of the design.

The Luminous 100's reading of polarity management describes the relationship between the sponsor's layer and the users' layer better than any organisational chart: centralisation and decentralisation, it says, are not competing alternatives but

> *breathing rhythms of a single living system*[59]

The sponsor holds the outcome; the users hold the method; each breathes in turn.



When the commons is large

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When the commons is large

The thirteen weeks are written for a commons of tens of users. A larger one, a firm-wide budget, a shared platform with hundreds of teams, a regional resource, needs the same sequence run at more than one layer.

The rule from Chapter 3 governs: find the smallest layer at which users can know each other, and run the thirteen weeks there first. Then run a lighter version at the layer above, whose users are the representatives of the smaller groups, and whose commons is only what passes between them. Valencia did this with eight canal communities and one tribunal. A large firm can do it with its divisions. The temptation is to begin at

the top, with a firm-wide policy, because it seems efficient. Ostrom's cases and the experience of most organisations suggest the opposite: a commons governed from the top down has a sponsor and no users, and the users drift back to open access as soon as the sponsor looks away.

What thirteen weeks cannot do

The sequence cannot make an unfair boundary fair; that takes the users' willingness to open the door, and sometimes it takes the sponsor's insistence on it. It cannot repair a group whose members do not want to share anything, though it can show them what not sharing costs. It cannot replace the relationship between the people involved; it can only give that relationship a structure that holds when goodwill is thin. And it cannot promise a result. The composite's figures are illustrative, and a real group's will differ.

What it can do is put every loop in place and let each close three times, under the eyes of the people who depend on it. That is how every long-lived commons in this book began, though none of them had a calendar.

Santa Anna's book states what such a structure gives the people inside it:

> *people feel safe because the boundaries are clear; they feel empowered because they participate in governance; they feel held because conflict resolution is accessible; and they feel connected because the whole system is organized around mutual benefit rather than competitive extraction.*[60]

In the composite, in Week 13, one of the specialists who had been looking for another job stops looking. The figures in the health sheet do not show that. The Thursday meeting does.

The sibling volume on gainsharing reads a closely related history: arrangements in which the people who improve a shared result share in what the improvement yields, which is principle 2B carried into pay.



The Tool: The Thirteen-Week Plan

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The Tool: The Thirteen-Week Plan

A planning sheet for the sponsor and convenor to fill in before Week 1, and for the keeper to tick through the quarter.

Before Week 1 · Commitments (one hour).

The commons:

Sponsor: · Convenor: · Keeper of the record: · User-monitors: ,

The users (list or attach):

The outcome the sponsor sets (one or two measurable sentences):

What the sponsor will decide:

What the sponsor will not decide (the method): · Signed by the sponsor:

The weeks.

WEEK	PHASE	WORK	DECISION	ARTEFACT	DONE
1	See	Commons Inventory; stakeholder map	The resource and its users, in two sentences	Inventory; map	
2	See	Measure the delay; build the shared view	What is visible, to whom, how often	The shared view	
3	See	Principle Audit with users; Case Reading Cards	Two moves	Scored audit	
4	Design	Boundary, allocation, reserve, door, give-back	The allocation and the door	Boundary note	
5	Design	Graduated Response Ladder	The ladder	Signed ladder	
6	Design	The regular meeting; the rule for changing rules; the charter	Meeting day; rule-change rule	Signed charter	
7	Run	First full cycle	(none: run it)	Meeting notes	
8	Run	First dispute heard and settled	The settlement	Precedent recorded	
9	Run	First rule change	The change	Amended charter	
10	Run	Watch meeting length; fix stale data	(as needed)	Meeting notes	
11	Review	Commons Health Sheet	(none: measure)	Health sheet	
12	Review	Re-score audit; sponsor reviews outcome only	Sponsor confirms method stays with users	Written confirmation	
13	Nest	Rotate roles; set what passes up; consider a second commons	Next quarter's roles; next commons	Note of decisions	

The stall check (every Thursday, two minutes). The convenor answers:

1. Did the shared view update every working day this week? (If not: make updating a by-product of the work.)

2. Was any rung of the ladder used? If none for three weeks, is that because nothing happened, or because nobody will say the first word?
3. Was every dispute raised this week heard this week?
4. Has the sponsor stayed out of the method?
5. Is the meeting still under fifteen minutes?

Keep the sheet with the charter. Chapter 9 explains the measures in Week 11; Chapter 10 gives the conversations Weeks 6 and 12 tend to need; Chapter 13 gathers every tool.

A note on method

The consultancy and its bench are a composite built for teaching; every figure in them was set for illustration. The thirteen-week sequence is this book's recommendation, drawn from the principles and cases discussed in Chapters 2 to 7; it has not itself been tested as a programme.

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