

ECSTATIC ECONOMICS · VOLUME II

The Pasture Was Never Empty

Elinor Ostrom's Eight Design Principles for Governing the Commons, at Work and at Home

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Santa Anna, A. (2026). The Pasture Was Never Empty: Elinor Ostrom's Eight Design Principles for Governing the Commons, at Work and at Home. Luminous Prosperity Inc. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989523
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Elinor Ostrom's Eight Design Principles for Governing the Commons, at Work and at Home

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Published by Luminous Prosperity Inc. for Haute Lumière. Author ORCID 0009-0008-3244-0306.

DOI 10.5281/zenodo.23989523 · this record's page: business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-pasture-was-never-empty/

Please cite as: Santa Anna, A. (2026). The Pasture Was Never Empty: Elinor Ostrom's Eight Design Principles for Governing the Commons, at Work and at Home. Luminous Prosperity Inc. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989523

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 things nobody owns are rarely empty and never ungoverned — the people who share them can write rules that keep them whole. Elinor Ostrom's eight design principles for governing the commons, at work and at home.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Things Nobody Owns



The Things Nobody Owns

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER ONE

A quarter past nine on a Monday

A quarter past nine on a Monday, and a team lead is reading the weekend's messages before anyone else is in. The team looks after a system that has to run every hour of every day, so somebody is always on call. There are nine people on the team. There is a rota, in a spreadsheet nobody quite remembers creating, and a habit of swapping shifts by message when something comes up.

She scrolls back through three months of it. The same three names hold most of the weekends. Nobody assigned them. They are the three who say yes when a swap is asked for, the three without small children, the three who have never complained. One of them sent a message at two on Sunday morning, fixing a fault alone, and added a line at the end that she reads twice: *no worries, I was up anyway*.

Nothing is broken. The system ran. Nobody broke a rule, because there is no rule to break. And yet something shared is being drawn down, week by week, by people who are each behaving reasonably. The rest of the team takes the whole benefit of a quiet weekend and bears none of the cost, which falls on three people's sleep and, sooner or later, on all nine when one of the three leaves.

The team and its rota are a composite, built for teaching: no single real team, assembled from an arrangement common in any organisation that runs around the clock. The pattern in it is not composite at all. It is one of the oldest patterns in economic life, and it has a name.

The word for it

A commons, in the sense this book uses, is any resource that more than one person draws on and that can be overdrawn. The grass on a shared pasture is the classic example. So are the fish in a lake, the water in an irrigation canal and the timber in a village forest. So, less obviously, are a team's weekends, a senior colleague's attention, a meeting calendar, a shared budget, a family's joint account and the goodwill of a key client. Each has users. Each can be depleted, crowded or degraded by overuse. And each is governed by some arrangement for who takes what, whether or not anyone has written the arrangement down.

For most of the last half-century the word *commons* has arrived in conversation already attached to another word, *tragedy*. In 1968 the ecologist Garrett Hardin published an essay in *Science* arguing that a resource open to everyone is ruined by everyone, because each user gains the whole benefit of taking a little more and bears only a share of the damage.[1] The essay was written about population. What readers kept was the pasture, and the conclusion that shared things are destroyed unless they are divided into private holdings or placed under the control of a government.

Elinor Ostrom spent her working life finding out whether that was true. It was true of some arrangements, and she said so. It was not true of many others. In *Governing the Commons*, published in 1990, she set out what she had found in alpine meadows, village forests, irrigation systems and fisheries that their users had kept in good order, some of them for centuries, without either privatising them or handing them to the

state.[2] The long-lived cases tended to share a recognisable set of arrangements, which she wrote down as eight design principles. In 2009 she shared the Nobel memorial prize in economic sciences, the first woman to receive it.

This book follows her to those eight principles: where they came from, where they run thin, how the house reads them, and how to use them on the commons a reader actually governs. Its claim is narrow enough to test:

Many of the shared things in a working life and a family life are governed by nobody, and the cost of that falls on the people least likely to say so. Ostrom's principles are among the most thoroughly tested accounts of how people who share something can govern it themselves, and they work on a rota or a joint account for the same reasons they work on a mountain pasture.

The team lead does not need a theory of human nature to fix the rota. She needs to see that the rota is a commons, that at the moment it is an open one, and that there is a well-documented way to make it a governed one, which does not begin with a new policy from her.



Why now

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER ONE

Why now

Ostrom's work is more than thirty years old, and a reader may fairly ask why it needs a book now. There are three reasons, and none of them depends on a fashion.

The first is that a great deal of what organisations now run on is shared and unowned. A factory could fence most of what it depended on: buildings, machines, stock. A firm of knowledge workers depends just as heavily on arrangements nobody owns outright: the knowledge in a shared repository, the attention of the few people everyone asks, the reputation that lets a stranger trust the brand, the calendar that decides

whether anyone has an uninterrupted hour. In 2007 Ostrom and the librarian Charlotte Hess published a collection of essays asking what the principles might mean for shared knowledge, and their answer is one this book returns to in Chapter 6: knowledge is not used up by being used, but the care that keeps it current is.[3] What is overgrazed in a modern firm is rarely grass. It is people's time and attention, and the goodwill that makes them give it.

The second is that the default answers are still the two Hardin offered. Faced with a shared resource that is being overdrawn, many organisations reach for the fence and the deed, a charge-back system that bills each team for its use, or for the fence and the government, a policy issued from above. Both sometimes work. Both often fade, the first because it turns a shared practice into a transaction and the second because the people it governs had no part in writing it. The cloud budget in Chapter 5 and the consultancy in Chapter 8 have each tried the second answer more than once before the book meets them. Ostrom described a third answer, and the evidence for it has held up as other researchers have tried to break it, though not in the form most people learned. Chapter 3 sets out what they found.

The third is that the principles were argued, in a paper Ostrom wrote with the evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson and the environmental scientist Michael Cox in 2013, to be general: not rules for forests and fisheries but the conditions under which cooperation can hold in any group whose members could each do a little better, alone, by taking more than their share.[4] That paper is a theoretical argument, and its authors presented it as a hypothesis. But it is the reason a reader can use these principles on a meeting calendar without stretching them, and it is why this book spends as long on a household's joint account as on a Swiss alp.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics*, on which this book draws throughout, puts the underlying discovery in a sentence:

> *some forms of wealth are best created and maintained through collective stewardship rather than private ownership or state control.*[5]

The word *some* is doing honest work there. Not every shared thing should stay shared. Chapter 7 gives a test, from the anthropologist Robert Netting's study of a Swiss village, for telling the resources that suit common holding from the ones better divided. The book's argument is only that the third way exists, that it is well evidenced, and that many leaders and households never consider it, because the word *commons* came to them already attached to *tragedy*.



Who the book is for

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER ONE

Who the book is for

It is written for five readers, and each will find a chapter written chiefly for them.

The first is a person who leads a team and shares something with it that keeps being overdrawn: specialist time, a budget, a rota, a room. Chapters 2 to 6 give the ideas and a tool at the end of each; Chapter 8 gives thirteen weeks, end to end, for taking one commons from open to governed.

The second is a person who sits above several teams, a division head, an operations director, a managing partner, and is tired of issuing the same policy every quarter. That reader is what Ostrom called an outside authority, and Chapter 6 says plainly what a good one does and does not do. The sponsor's role in Chapter 8 is written for them.

The third is a person who answers to a board, a finance function, a union or a set of partners, and will have to persuade them. Chapter 10 gives six conversations with scripts, including one for the colleague who has read Hardin and is sure he is right.

The fourth is a person who wants to know whether it worked. Chapter 9 is about measurement: the condition of the resource, how it is used, and whether the loops that keep it alive are turning, read honestly against a baseline taken before anything changed.

The fifth is a household. A joint account, the work of keeping a house, a parent's care, a cottage that three siblings inherit: each is a commons in Ostrom's strict sense, and many are governed by goodwill alone until goodwill runs out. Chapter 11 is written for a kitchen table.

It is not written for anyone who wants advice on investments, property or law. Where a chapter touches ownership of a house or the terms of employment, it says that a lawyer or the collective agreement governs, and it means it.

The house's reading

Ostrom's principles are usually taught as a list of eight. This book reads them as something else, and the reading is the particular contribution of the house it comes from.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* treats an economy as a living system rather than a machine, and it treats a commons as one of the oldest organs of that system. Its account of what was lost when common land was enclosed is not about acreage. It is about knowledge:

> *the subtle, embodied knowledge of how to steward shared wealth — knowledge accumulated over generations of collective practice — is lost.*[6]

That knowledge is what the eight principles write down. Chapter 4 reads them as the parts of a single organism: a membrane that says who is in and what is shared, senses that notice overuse, a reflex that answers it in proportion, and repair that settles disputes and lets the users change their own rules. A commons lasts, in this reading, when all four are connected in loops, so that a signal goes out, something happens, and the result comes back and changes the next signal. Remove a loop and the rule on paper does not change, but the system stops correcting itself.

The reading has a practical edge, which is why it belongs in a book of tools. A leader who sees eight rules will try to install them, one at a time, and will be surprised when the installation does not hold. A leader

who sees four loops will ask a better first question: which of them is already working, and which arrow is dotted? On the rota, the answer is quick. There is no membrane, since nobody has said what a fair share of weekends is. There is no sense loop, since the team lead found the pattern only by scrolling back three months. And so there can be no reflex and no repair, because nothing has been noticed in time to answer. The first move is not a rule. It is to make the weekends visible to all nine.

The same book is careful about what it is not claiming, and this book keeps the same care:

> *They are not anti-market (many coexist with and complement market activity) and they are not anti-property (they depend on legally recognized property structures).*[7]

A governed commons is not a protest against prices or ownership. It is the arrangement that markets, firms and families rely on, and rarely name, for the things that cannot sensibly be priced or divided.



How the book is built

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER ONE

How the book is built

The book has thirteen chapters. The first half is about seeing; the second is working ground.

**Chapter 2,* The Pasture Was Never Empty,* goes back to the pasture Hardin borrowed from an Oxford lecture of 1833, to the fishery economics that came before him, and to Ostrom's workshop in Bloomington. It sets out the eight principles in her order and corrects three myths about them. Its tool is the Commons Inventory, a way of finding the shared things a reader already governs.

Chapter 3, Where the Eight Run Thin,* takes the five most serious criticisms of the principles, from the review of ninety-one studies that found them well supported to the scholars who showed how a durable boundary can also be an unjust one. The principles survive, but not in the form most people learned them. Its tool is the Principle Audit.

Chapter 4, Eight Loops, Not Eight Rules,* gives the house's reading in full: membrane, senses, reflex, repair, and the nesting that ties them together, which Ostrom called polycentric governance. Its tool is the Loop Map.

Chapter 5, Thursday at the Apostles' Door,* sits before the cathedral in Valencia at noon on a Thursday, where a tribunal of elected farmers has settled disputes over irrigation water for centuries, and then follows a composite software firm that borrows the Thursday for its cloud budget. Its tool is the Graduated Response Ladder, which begins with a private word.

Chapter 6, A Commons on Monday,* steps back to show that the commons is not a corner of economic life but a condition every other part depends on: trust, reciprocity and reputation, the triad in Ostrom's presidential address of 1997. Its tool is the One-Page Commons Charter.

Chapter 7, Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds,* walks slowly through four long-lived cases and a comparison that did not end well, and gives a method for reading any case, including one's own. Its tool is the Case Reading Card.

Chapter 8, The Field Manual,* sets out thirteen weeks, end to end, for one commons inside an organisation: five roles, four phases, a decision and an artefact each week, and what to do when it stalls. Its tool is the Thirteen-Week Plan.

Chapter 9, Counting What the Commons Holds,* asks three questions instead of one: is the resource in better condition, is it being used well, and are the loops working? Its tool is the Commons Health Sheet.

Chapter 10, The Hard Conversations,* gives the six conversations with scripts: a board, finance, a union, partners, family and the sceptic. Its tool is the Conversation Cards.

Chapter 11, The Household Commons,* takes everything home: a joint account looked at every Sunday morning, the work nobody counts, an inherited cottage and a parent's care. Its tool is the Kitchen-Table Charter.

Chapter 12, The Gate in the Evening,* reads the whole book as one living system, sets it beside the other books of the house, says plainly what the book does not show, and ends on one image. Its tool is the Gate Card, ten minutes a week for anyone who keeps a commons.

Chapter 13, The Workbook,* gathers every tool in one place, in the order a team or a household is most likely to use them, with a ninety-day plan for each.



How to read it

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How to read it

Each of the first twelve chapters ends with a tool written out in full, meant to be filled in by hand and kept beside the charter it helps to write. Most take an hour or less. They can be used in the order the book gives them, and Chapter 13 sets out that order with times, but a reader who needs only the ladder or only the household charter can go straight to it.

Every case in the book is either a public, cited one or a composite, and the composites say so in the paragraph where they appear. Their figures are set for illustration and are not drawn from any filing or study.

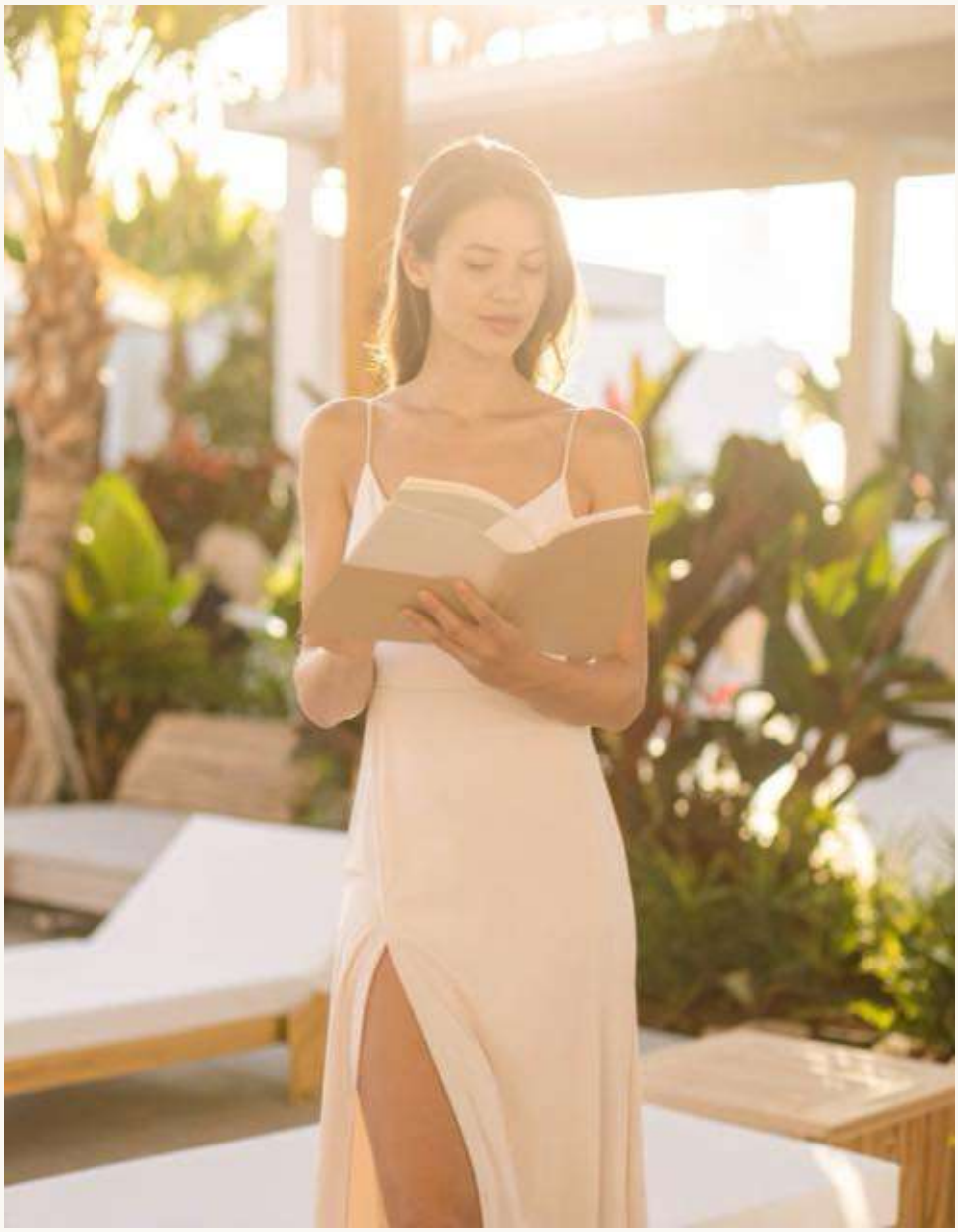
Every study cited in the notes carries a line saying what it cannot show, because the habit of saying so is half of what Ostrom taught her field. The thirteen-week sequence and the scripts are this book's recommendations, drawn from the principles and the cases; they have not themselves been tested as a programme, and the book says that again where it matters.

Nothing in it is investment, legal or tax advice, and nothing in it promises a result. The principles describe what long-lived commons tended to share. They do not guarantee that a particular team or family will keep its shared things in good order. What they offer is a way of seeing which arrangement is in place, and a sequence for changing it with the people who live under it rather than for them.

Back at the rota

On the Monday in the composite, the team lead does one thing. She takes the last three months of swaps out of the message thread, puts them in a single table, and shares it with all nine, with one line beneath: *I think this is a shared thing, and I don't think we've ever agreed how to share it. Can we look at it together on Thursday?*

That is the whole of the first week, and it is enough. Chapter 2 explains why the next step is to find the other shared things nobody has named, and the rest of the book follows the rota's logic outward to budgets, benches, canals and kitchen tables. The rota was a commons before anybody called it one. Most shared things are.



The Tool: The First Look

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER ONE

The Tool: The First Look

A ten-minute exercise, alone, before reading further. It is the smallest version of the Commons Inventory in Chapter 2, and it can be done on a train.

1 · Three things you drew on this week (4 minutes). Name three shared resources you used in the past seven days that someone else also depends on and that could run out, wear thin or get crowded. At work, think of time, attention, money, space, tools and goodwill. At home, think of money, time, the car, the evenings, a parent's care.

SHARED THING	WHO ELSE DRAWS ON IT?	IF I TOOK TWICE MY USUAL SHARE, WOULD ANYONE NOTICE? WHEN?

2 · The one nobody watches (2 minutes). Circle the row where the honest answer to the last column is *no one*, or *only when it ran out*. That is an open commons, in Hardin's sense.

3 · Who carries it (2 minutes). For the circled row, write the name of the person who bears most of the cost when it is overdrawn. If the answer is *me*, write that. If it is someone who has never complained, write their name and underline it.

4 · One sentence (2 minutes). Write the sentence you could say to the others who share it, this week, that would make the pattern visible without blaming anyone. Begin it with *I think this is a shared thing*.

Keep the page. Chapter 2 turns it into the full inventory.

A note on method

The team and its rota are a composite built for teaching; every detail in them was set for illustration.

CHAPTER TWO

The Pasture Was Never Empty



The Pasture Was Never Empty

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWO

A pasture in 1833

In 1833 an Oxford professor of political economy named William Forster Lloyd published two lectures on population. In the middle of them he asked his listeners to picture a common pasture. Each herdsman who adds a cow, Lloyd said, takes the whole gain of that cow for himself and bears only a fraction of the damage it does to the grass, because the damage is shared among everyone who grazes there. So each one adds a cow, and then another, and the pasture is ruined by people who were each behaving sensibly.

It is a good argument, and it was meant as one. Lloyd was not describing a field he had walked. He was building a model to make a point about population, and the pasture was the model's furniture.

A hundred and thirty-five years later, in December 1968, the ecologist Garrett Hardin borrowed Lloyd's pasture for an essay in *Science* called "The Tragedy of the Commons".[8] Hardin's subject, like Lloyd's, was population; the abstract of the essay is a single sentence about it. But the pasture was what readers kept, along with a line that has been quoted ever since: freedom in a commons, Hardin wrote, brings ruin to all. Within a generation the essay had become one of the most cited papers in the social sciences, and the pasture had been promoted from a thought experiment to something close to a law of nature. Shared things are destroyed. The only cures are a fence and a deed, or a fence and a government.

This book is about the woman who went and looked. Elinor Ostrom spent most of her working life finding out what people who share a pasture, a fishery, a forest or an irrigation canal actually do. She found that many of them do not ruin it. Some have kept the same resource in good order for centuries. And she found that the ones who succeed tend to share a recognisable set of arrangements, which she wrote down as eight design principles.

The claim of this chapter is narrow and useful: the tragedy of the commons is a true description of one kind of arrangement, the unmanaged and open one, and the eight principles are a description of the other kind. A reader who runs a team, a firm, a shared house or a family budget is almost always governing a commons of some sort. Which kind it is, is a matter of design.

What the fishery taught first

The idea that open access wastes a resource did not begin with Hardin, and it is worth knowing that, because the earlier version is more precise.

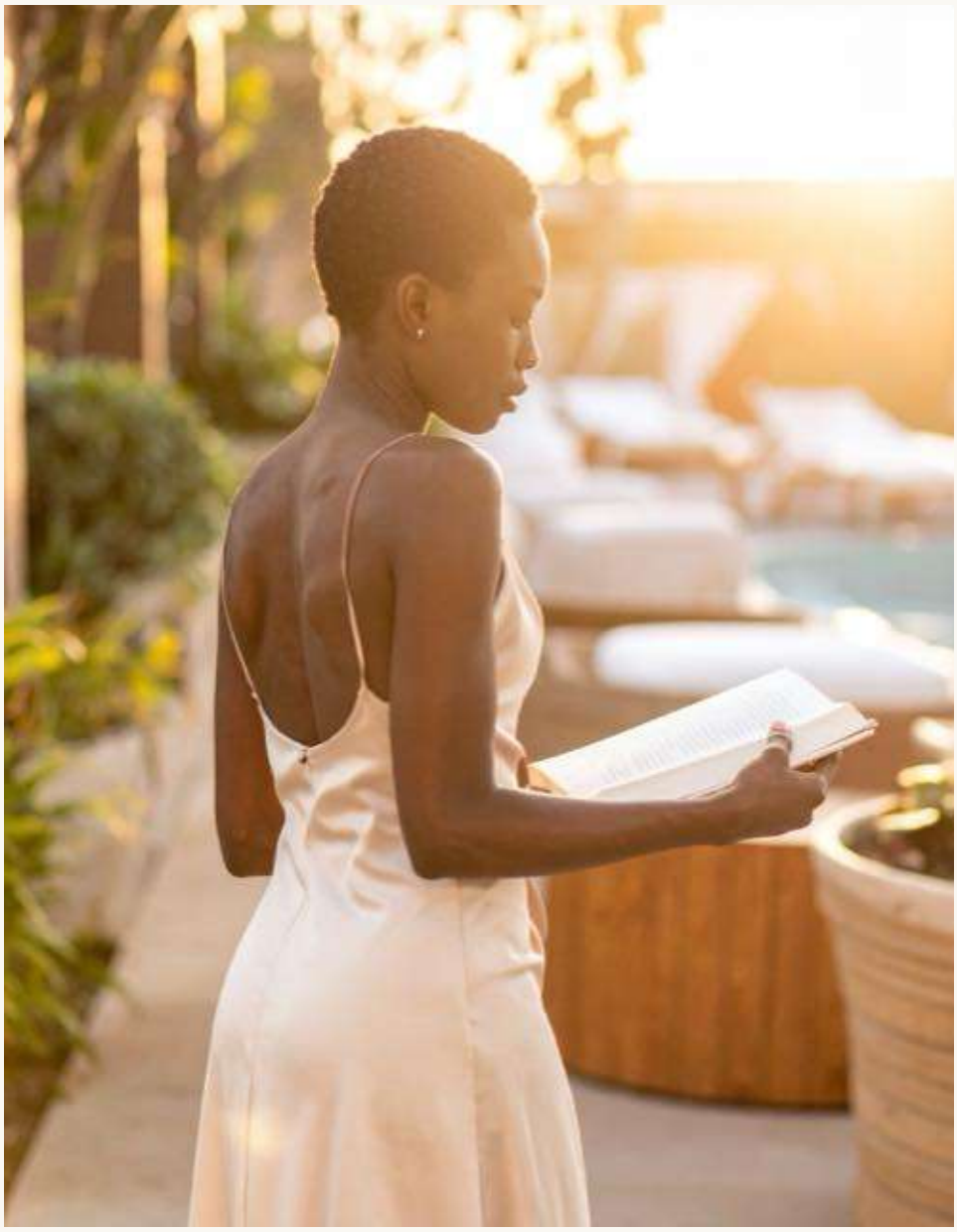
In 1954 the Canadian economist H. Scott Gordon published "The Economic Theory of a Common-Property Resource: The Fishery" in the *Journal of Political Economy*.[9] Gordon's fishermen are not villains or fools. They are ordinary firms facing a sea that anyone may enter. As long as fishing pays better than the next best use of a boat and a crew, more boats come. They keep coming until the surplus the fishery could have yielded, the rent of the sea, has been spent entirely on the extra effort of catching the same fish. The stock may or may not collapse. The money certainly does.

Gordon's argument has a condition built into it that Hardin's popular version lost: the problem is open access. Nobody can be kept out, and nobody has agreed with anybody about anything. Put a boundary around the fishery and an agreement among the people inside it, and the argument no longer goes through as written.

Hardin came to say as much. Thirty years after the essay, in a short piece in *Science* in 1998, he wrote that what he had described was the *unmanaged* commons, and that the title should have said so.[10] The correction arrived after the original had done its work in the world. In the meantime the pasture had been used to justify the enclosure of a great deal that was not, in fact, unmanaged.

Ammanuel Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* states the consequence plainly, and its sentence is one reason this book exists:

> *The tragedy isn't that humans can't cooperate around shared resources. The tragedy is that we've been told they can't — and have built economic systems based on that mistaken belief.*[11]



A workshop in Bloomington

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWO

A workshop in Bloomington

Elinor Ostrom did not set out to refute Hardin. She was a political scientist, trained at UCLA, whose doctoral research in the early 1960s concerned the groundwater basins under Los Angeles. Pumpers in those basins had been drawing water faster than rain replaced it, and salt water from the Pacific was moving in behind the falling water table. Nobody owned the basin, and the state did not run it. The pumpers, over years of litigation and negotiation, built their own arrangements: they settled how much each could take, appointed a watermaster to measure it, and paid for the injection wells that held the sea back.

That was the first commons she studied, and it already contained most of what she would later write down. A boundary, a set of agreed rules, someone accountable to the users who measured what was taken, and a way to settle disputes that did not ruin the parties.

At Indiana University in Bloomington, with her husband the political theorist Vincent Ostrom, she founded what became the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis. The word *workshop* was chosen, and it suited the method. Over two decades the Ostroms and their colleagues collected case studies of common-pool resources from all over the world, many written by anthropologists, historians and engineers who had never heard of each other, and coded them in a common form so that they could be compared.

The cases were a strange and beautiful collection. Alpine meadows above the Swiss village of Törbel, where no household might send more cows to the summer pasture than it could feed through the winter. Forests on common land in Japanese villages, managed for centuries by householders who took turns as inspectors. The *huertas*, the irrigated plains around Valencia, Murcia and Orihuela in Spain, where farmers sharing canals elected their own officials. The *zanjeras* of the northern Philippines, irrigation societies whose members dug and repaired the canals with their own labour and received shares of land and water in proportion. And failures too, among them inshore fisheries in Turkey and Sri Lanka, and groundwater basins where the arrangements came too late. Chapter 7 walks through several of these cases at the length they deserve.

In 1990 Cambridge University Press published the result as *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*.[12] The book's argument is modest in tone and radical in effect. Neither the state nor the market, Ostrom argued, is uniformly successful in sustaining shared resources over the long run. Communities of users sometimes do better than either, and they do it by building institutions of their own.

Santa Anna's book reads her work as the empirical spine of a larger claim. It calls the principles design specifications

> *extracted from the study of real communities that have managed real resources over real time periods, often spanning centuries.*[13]

The emphasis is the right one. Ostrom did not deduce the principles from a theory of human nature. She read the long-surviving cases, then the failed ones, and asked what the survivors had that the failures lacked.



The eight, in her order

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWO

The eight, in her order

What follows is the list as Ostrom gave it in 1990, paraphrased closely except where her words are quoted, with the finer point each one carries for a person who governs something shared. The paraphrase matters, because popular versions of the list drift, and the drift is often where implementation goes wrong.

1 · Clearly defined boundaries. Two boundaries, not one: who has the right to take from the resource, and where the resource itself begins and ends. A team that has agreed who may spend from a shared budget but never written down what the budget covers has drawn half the boundary.

2 · Congruence between rules and local conditions. Ostrom's phrase is "congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions", and it joins two ideas. The rules for taking from the resource and for maintaining it should suit the place, the season and the resource; and what each user puts in should bear a sensible relation to what each takes out. The *zanjera* member who receives more water digs more canal. Later scholars, as Chapter 3 shows, split the principle in two for exactly that reason.

3 · Collective-choice arrangements. In her words, "most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules". Not every rule, and not unanimously; the operative word is *modifying*. A rulebook its users cannot amend becomes, over time, a rulebook they work around.

4 · Monitoring. Someone watches both the condition of the resource and the behaviour of the users, and the watchers are either the users themselves or accountable to them. The second half is the part that matters most. Monitoring by an outsider who answers to nobody in the group is a different institution, and it tends to produce different behaviour.

5 · Graduated sanctions. A person who breaks a rule meets a response scaled to how serious the breach was and whether it has happened before, and the response comes from the other users or from officials accountable to them. The first sanction is usually small. Its job is to say *we noticed*, which is information, not punishment.

6 · Conflict-resolution mechanisms. Users and their officials have quick, cheap, local places to settle disputes. A dispute that can only be settled in a distant court at great expense is, in practice, a dispute that festers.

7 · Minimal recognition of rights to organise. Outside authorities do not challenge the users' right to devise their own institutions. Note the word *minimal*: the principle asks for room, not for independence.

8 · Nested enterprises. Where the resource is part of a larger system, the work of governing it is, in her phrase, "organized in multiple layers of nested enterprises". Small groups handle local matters; larger bodies handle what crosses between them. The Valencian canals each govern themselves, and a tribunal drawn from all of them settles what passes between their members.

Read as a list, the eight look like common sense, and Ostrom was untroubled by that. The finding was not that the principles are clever. It was that the long-lived commons in her collection tended to have most of them, and that the failures tended to lack several.

Santa Anna's book notices something else in the list, which the third and fourth chapters of this book take up at length. It reads the principles as a description of what a group feels like from the inside when they are present:

> *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.*[14]

Three myths, corrected

Popular accounts of Ostrom have their own myths, and three are worth correcting before the book goes further, because each one leads to a mistake in practice.

The first myth is that Ostrom proved Hardin wrong. She proved him incomplete. Ostrom accepted that open-access resources used by people who cannot communicate or make binding agreements will often be overused; her laboratory experiments with James Walker and Roy Gardner, published in 1992, began from exactly that baseline and showed that it changed when people could talk and could choose sanctions for themselves.[15] What she rejected was the step from *some* shared resources to *all* of them, and the conclusion that the only remedies were private property or central control. The leader's lesson follows directly. If your shared thing is open to everyone and governed by no one, Hardin is describing you accurately.

The second myth is that the principles are a blueprint. Ostrom resisted that reading for the rest of her life. In 2007, in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, she wrote against what she called panaceas: single institutional recipes, whether privatisation, state management or community control, applied everywhere because they worked somewhere.[16] The principles describe what successful cases tend to share. They do not say what a particular group should do on Tuesday. A leader who installs the eight as a template is making the very mistake she spent her last decade warning against. Santa Anna's book guards the same door from the other side, warning against a romance of the old commons:

> *Romanticizing the economic past is as unhelpful as demonizing the economic present. Every economic system has gifts and shadows.*[17]

The third myth is that she worked alone, or won alone. The 2009 Nobel memorial prize in economic sciences was shared with Oliver Williamson, for work on economic governance; Ostrom was the first woman to receive it. And the Bloomington Workshop was a collective enterprise from the start, Vincent Ostrom's theory of polycentric government as much its foundation as her fieldwork. The point is not pedantry. A body of work about collective action was itself made collectively, over decades, by people who shared a coding manual and a lunch table. That is the kind of commons this book is about.



What the book sees in it

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWO

What the book sees in it

Ecstatic Economics reads the commons as more than an efficient way to manage grass and water. Its claim is that a well-governed commons changes what economic life feels like to the people inside it, and it makes the claim through the body. Where shared things are well kept, it says, the hypervigilance of individual self-sufficiency begins to soften, and

> *The body relaxes into the felt sense of being held by something larger than the individual.*[18]

That is an unusual sentence to find in a book about economics, and it is the house's particular contribution to the reading of Ostrom. Chapter 4 takes it up properly: the eight principles as a set of feedback loops, and the commons as a living system rather than an inventory. For now it is enough to see what the sentence implies for a leader. A shared resource with no boundary, no agreed rules and no fair way to settle disputes does not only waste the resource. It keeps everyone who depends on it slightly on guard, because each of them has to defend their own share. The principles are, among other things, a way of letting a group stop guarding.

The commons, in this reading, is one of the oldest forms of the economy Santa Anna's book describes: wealth that circulates through relationship rather than accumulating in one place. The same idea appears from different directions in the sibling volumes of this lineage, in the reading of gift and reciprocity and in the account of markets held inside the society around them.



Where to begin

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWO

Where to begin

The chapters that follow go further: where the principles run thin (Chapter 3), how the house reads them as living-system rules (Chapter 4), a water tribunal that has met on Thursdays for centuries (Chapter 5), and how the idea reaches into knowledge, firms and the trust markets depend on (Chapter 6). The second half of the book is working ground: longer cases, a field manual, measurement, the hard conversations, and the household.

The first step is smaller than any of those, and it is the one most groups skip. Before a commons can be governed, someone has to notice that it is one. Most shared things in a working life are not called commons. They are called the meeting calendar, the senior engineer's attention, the marketing budget, the kitchen, the on-call rota, the goodwill of a key client, the family car on a Saturday. Each has users, a resource that can be overdrawn, and some arrangement, explicit or not, for who takes what.

Lloyd's pasture was never empty. It only looked empty from Oxford, where nobody could see the herdsmen talking at the gate.

The Tool: The Commons Inventory

A one-hour exercise for a leader and two or three colleagues, or for a household at a kitchen table. Its purpose is to name the shared resources you already govern and to see, for each, which kind of commons it is: open and unmanaged, or bounded and governed.

Step 1 · List the shared things (15 minutes). Write down every resource that more than one person draws on and that can be depleted, crowded or degraded by overuse. Aim for at least eight. Prompts: money (budgets, petty cash, a joint account); time (meeting hours, a shared expert's attention, a manager's open door); space (rooms, desks, a shared drive's storage); attention (a channel everyone posts in, a client's patience); trust (a brand's reputation, a family's goodwill toward one member); tools (a vehicle, a licence, a test environment).

Step 2 · For each, answer five questions in a table.

SHARED RESOURCE	WHO MAY TAKE FROM IT? (NAMED, OR "ANYONE")	WHERE DOES IT BEGIN AND END?	WHO DECIDES THE RULES, AND CAN USERS CHANGE THEM?	WHO NOTICES OVERUSE, AND WHOM DO THEY ANSWER TO?	WHAT HAPPENS THE FIRST TIME SOMEONE OVERDRAWS IT?

Write *nobody* or *unclear* where that is the honest answer. Those words are the finding.

Step 3 · Classify (10 minutes). Mark each row:

- Open: anyone may take, nobody watches, nothing happens on overdraw. Hardin's pasture.
- Fenced: the rules exist but the users cannot change them, or the watcher answers only to someone outside the group.
- Governed: a boundary, rules the users can amend, a watcher accountable to them, and a small first response to overuse.

Step 4 · Choose one (10 minutes). Pick the open or fenced resource whose overuse costs the most, in money, hours or goodwill. Write one sentence on what the overuse is costing now, with a figure if you have one and a note of where the figure came from.

Step 5 · Draw one boundary (10 minutes). For that one resource only, write down both boundaries of principle 1: who may draw on it, and exactly what it includes. Share it with the people who use it and ask them one question: *what would you change?* Their answers are the beginning of principle 3, and of the next chapter's audit.

Keep the table. Chapter 3 scores it against the principles; Chapter 6 turns it into a one-page charter; Chapter 8 builds a thirteen-week plan on it.

A note on method

The account of Ostrom's doctoral work on Los Angeles groundwater and of the Nobel award follows the published record as summarised in *Governing the Commons* and her Nobel lecture (Ostrom 2010, *American Economic Review*, https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.100.3.641). The Törbel winter rule is reported by Netting (1976) and Ostrom (1990); see Chapter 7 for the date of the village's articles and its caveat.

CHAPTER THREE

Where the Eight Run Thin



Where the Eight Run Thin

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER THREE

The test of a good idea

A good idea in the social sciences has a particular fate. It is first ignored, then quoted, then simplified, then tested, and only after the testing does anyone know what it is for. Elinor Ostrom's eight design principles reached the testing stage quickly, partly because she asked for it. She published them in 1990 as a hypothesis drawn from a few dozen long-lived commons, and she spent the next two decades inviting other people to try to break them.

They did try. The results are more interesting than either the admirers or the sceptics expected, and they matter for anyone who wants to use the principles on a real team or a real budget rather than admire them in a book.

Chapter 2 set out where the principles came from and corrected three myths about them. This chapter takes the five most serious criticisms, states each as fairly as its best critic would, and then gives the way through. The claim is simple: the principles survive their critics, but not in the form most people learned them. They survive as a set of conditions that work together, read in context, with the questions of power and scale put back in.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* holds the same double view of monitoring, the principle most easily turned into something ugly. It wants the watching, and it wants the watching to be of a particular kind:

> *Trust, but verify. Not through surveillance and punishment, but through transparent, community-embedded observation.*[19]

That sentence contains, in compressed form, a good deal of what the research below found.



The recipe that was never one

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER THREE

The recipe that was never one

The criticism. The principles are usually taught as a checklist, and a checklist implies that each item can be ticked separately and that more ticks are better. If that were so, a commons with seven of eight principles should do better than one with five, and adding any missing principle should help.

What the evidence shows. In 2010 Michael Cox, Gwen Arnold and Sergio Villamayor Tomás published a review of the principles in *Ecology and Society*.[20] "We analyzed 91 such studies," they wrote, studies that had tested the principles, openly or by implication, against seventy-seven cases from forests and fisheries to ir-

rigation and pasture. Their verdict was plain: "the principles are well supported." To code the cases they split three of the principles into parts, because each was doing two jobs at once. Principle 1 became 1A, the boundary around the users, and 1B, the boundary around the resource. Principle 2 became 2A, rules that fit local conditions, and 2B, costs to each user that match the benefits each receives. Principle 4 they coded as 4A, whether monitors are present at all, and 4B, whether the monitors are members of the community or accountable to it. The second of these, accountability, was the more strongly supported of the two.

In the reformulation they proposed at the end, they kept the splits of 1 and 2, suggested adding to principle 1 a fit between the user boundary and the resource boundary, and divided monitoring a different way: users watching one another's behaviour, and users watching the condition of the resource. Principles 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 they left as Ostrom wrote them.

Six years later, Jacopo Baggio and colleagues went further in the *International Journal of the Commons*.[21] Using a coded database of cases, they asked whether any single principle was necessary or sufficient for success. The answer was that none was, on its own. Success came from configurations: particular combinations of principles that appeared together in the cases that lasted, and different combinations in different kinds of resource. The principles behave less like items on a list and more like organs in a body. Their value is in how they work together.

The way through. Stop scoring the principles one at a time. Read them in pairs and triples and ask which are holding each other up. A boundary without monitoring is a sign on a gate nobody watches. Monitoring without a graduated first response becomes surveillance, because the only available reaction to what is seen is a heavy one. Collective choice without conflict resolution produces meetings that end in grievance. The audit at the end of this chapter asks about combinations for that reason, and Chapter 4 reads the combinations as loops.

The variables left out

The criticism. Eight principles cannot capture what makes a commons succeed, because success depends on many things the principles do not mention: the size of the group, how unequal its members are, how mobile the resource is, how fast it regrows, how close the market is, what the state is doing, what the technology allows.

What the evidence shows. Arun Agrawal made this criticism with care and with sympathy in a 2003 review in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*.[22] Three of the major syntheses of the field, he observed, Robert Wade's, Ostrom's, and Jean-Marie Baland and Jean-Philippe Platteau's, "jointly identify 36 important conditions" for a commons to last; strip out the overlaps and twenty-four different conditions remain. Add what the wider literature had found, and he judged the total to lie "somewhere between 30 and 40"; his own table lists thirty-three. Many of them are not institutions at all. They are features of the resource and the setting. A group of twelve households sharing a slow-growing forest faces a different problem from a thousand

boats chasing a migratory fish. Agrawal's point was that studies had too often looked only at the rules and too rarely at the context the rules sat in, and that small comparisons could not tell which of thirty variables was doing the work.

Ostrom accepted much of this. Her later work, especially the social-ecological systems framework she published in *Science* in 2009, was an attempt to give researchers a common vocabulary for the resource, the users, the governance system and the setting together, so that cases could be compared on more than their rules.[23]

The way through. Before applying any principle, describe the resource. How fast does it replenish? Can its use be seen, or is it hidden? Does it move? How many people draw on it, and how different are they from each other? A shared engineering budget is visible and slow to replenish; a team's goodwill is invisible and replenishes in its own time; a meeting calendar replenishes every Monday and is overdrawn by Wednesday. The same principle will take different forms on each. The audit asks for this description first.



Scale, and the commons nobody can see

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Scale, and the commons nobody can see

The criticism. The principles were drawn mostly from small, local, long-settled communities whose members knew each other. The largest commons of the present century are none of those things. The atmosphere, the open ocean, the stability of a financial system, the trust that makes a digital platform usable: their users are counted in millions or billions, they will never meet, and many of them cannot see the effect of their own use.

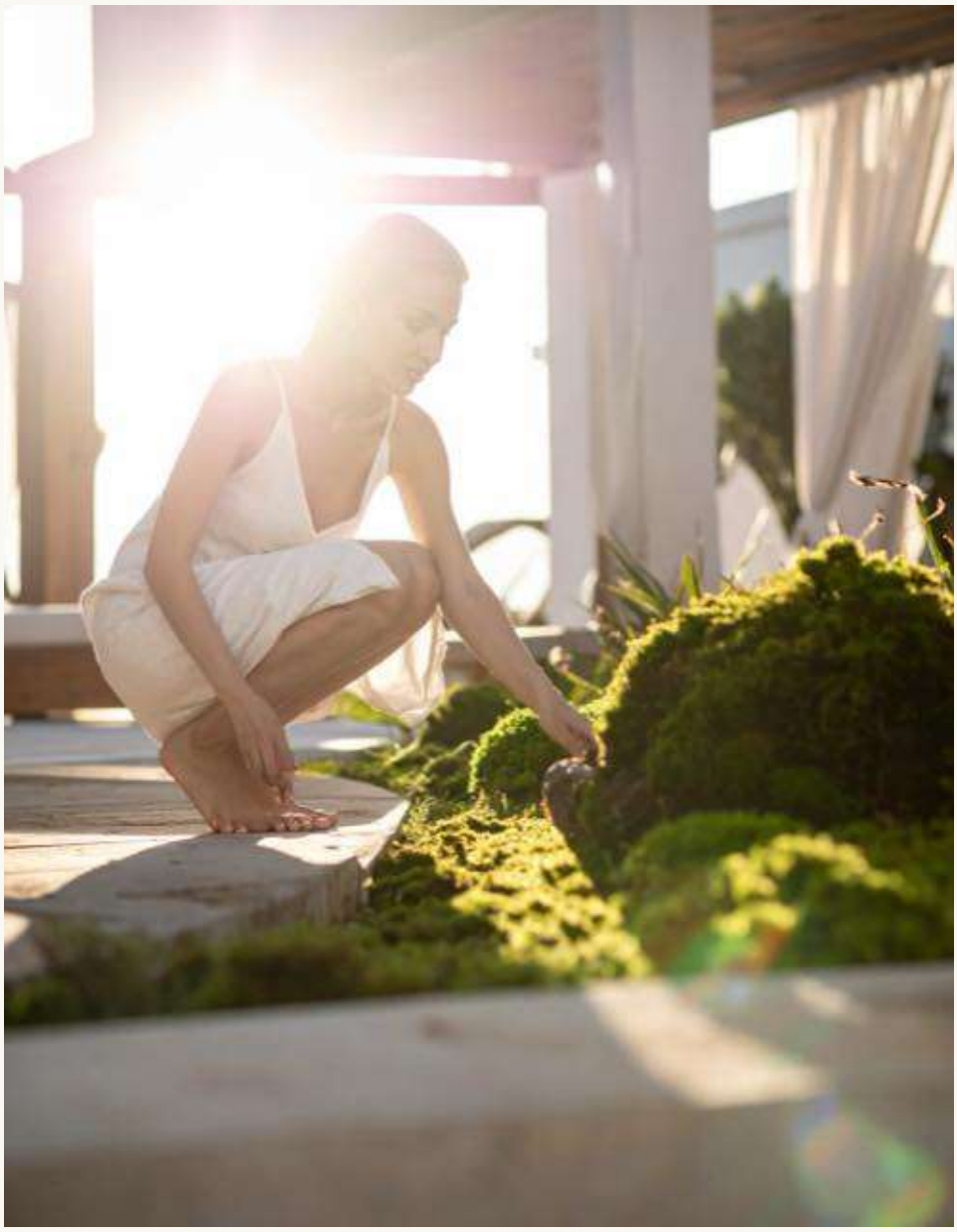
What the evidence shows. Thomas Dietz, Ostrom and Paul Stern addressed this directly in "The Struggle to Govern the Commons", published in *Science* in 2003.[24] They agreed that global commons are harder, and said why: the users are many and diverse, the effects are delayed and distant, and the people who bear the costs are often not the people who decide. Their answer was not a new principle but a stronger emphasis on three of the old ones. Governance at scale, they argued, needs good information about the resource and its users, which is monitoring; it needs ways to deal with conflict, which is principle 6; and it needs institutions arranged in nested layers, which is principle 8, with enough variety among them that a mistake in one layer does not become a mistake everywhere.

The Luminous 100, the house's reading of the frameworks organisations already use, describes the logic of nesting in its entry on Stafford Beer's Viable System Model: every team a viable system inside a viable department inside a viable organisation, each

> *simultaneously autonomous and embedded.*[25]

That is principle 8 written from the inside.

The way through. For any commons too large for its users to meet, find the smallest layer at which people can know each other, and give that layer real authority over what it can see. Then build the layer above it for what crosses between the smaller ones. In a firm of three thousand people, the shared resource of senior attention is not governed by a company-wide policy. It is governed in each division, and the company layer handles only what divisions take from each other. The audit asks, for each principle, *at which layer does this happen?*



The rule from outside

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The rule from outside

The criticism. Principle 7 asks only for minimal recognition of the users' right to organise. That understates the problem. Outside authorities do not merely fail to recognise local institutions; sometimes their well-meant rules actively damage them.

What the evidence shows. In 2000, Juan-Camilo Cárdenas, John Stranlund and Cleve Willis ran field experiments with villagers in rural Colombia who depended on local forests.[26] Participants played a game for real money that mirrored their real choices about how much to extract from a shared resource. In some

groups, they could talk to each other. In others, an external rule was imposed, with a modest chance of inspection and a fine for overuse. The striking finding was that the imposed rule, which should have improved behaviour, tended to do worse over time than communication alone. The authors called it institutional crowding-out: an outside rule, imperfectly enforced, displaced the group's own norms of cooperation and left something weaker in their place.

It is one set of experiments, in one region, with a game rather than a forest. It does not prove that external rules always crowd out. But it agrees with Ostrom's laboratory work and with a long line of field observation that cooperation is partly a matter of who made the rule. Santa Anna's book says it in a sentence any manager will recognise:

> *People comply more willingly with rules they helped create.*[19]

The way through. When an outside authority, a head office, a regulator, a board, must set a rule for a group that already governs itself, it can set the *outcome* and leave the *method* to the group. Head office sets the limit on travel spending for a division; the division decides how to share it. The outside rule then sits on top of the local one instead of replacing it. And when a new rule is being considered, ask first whether the group already has a norm that does the same work. Replacing a living norm with a written policy can lose more than it gains. Chapter 10 gives the conversation with head office in full.



The boundary that excludes

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER THREE

The boundary that excludes

The criticism. Principle 1 asks for clear boundaries: who is in and who is out. Every boundary that protects a resource also excludes someone from it. Many traditional commons that lasted for centuries did so partly by keeping out newcomers, women, the landless or the poor. A principle that rewards durability can quietly reward exclusion.

What the evidence shows. This criticism has been made forcefully by scholars of gender, caste and land, and Ostrom's own cases contain examples. Grazing rights on Törbel's alp belonged to citizens of the village;

in the Spanish *huertas* water went with land, so the landless had none. Agrawal's review makes the uncomfortable point directly: in a society organised by steep hierarchy, he wrote, arrangements that distribute benefits unequally may last longer than fair ones, and he named the caste system and racial inequality as examples.[22] Durability and fairness are different questions, and the principles answer the first more directly than the second.

The way through. Treat principle 1 and principle 3 as a pair. A clear boundary is legitimate when the people inside it can change it, and when there is a known way for someone outside to come in. Write the entry route down with the boundary. A team's shared budget that names who may draw on it should also say how a new member gains that right. A family that defines who may use the car should also say when the sixteen-year-old joins the list. A boundary without a door is a wall.

There is a quieter form of the same problem, which is the sanction. Principle 5 says graduated, but a graduated sanction can still fall harder on the people with least standing. Santa Anna's book names the purpose a sanction must keep:

> *The goal is to maintain the community, not to destroy the violator.*[19]

That means consequences designed to repair the resource and keep the person in the group, applied the same way to everyone, including whoever leads.

What survives

Put the five criticisms together and something clear remains. The principles are not a recipe; they work in combination. They are not complete; context has to be described before they are applied. They do not scale by themselves; they scale through nesting and good information. They can be undermined from outside; the outside authority should set outcomes and leave methods. And they do not guarantee fairness; boundaries need doors and sanctions need to be even.

None of this was hidden from Ostrom. Most of it was said first by her, by her collaborators, or by critics she invited to the Workshop. Her work has been tested by its friends more rigorously than most economic ideas are tested by their enemies, which is part of why it can be trusted.

The criticisms also explain why this book keeps company with others in the lineage. The history of gainsharing reads, in this light, as a long argument about principle 2B, the proportion between what people put in and what they receive; the evidence on employee ownership keeps returning to principle 3, the right to change the rules.

The pasture in Lloyd's lecture had no fence, no gate, no meeting and no way to settle a quarrel. Most real commons have some of those and lack others. The work is to find out which, in what combination, and for whom.



The Tool: The Principle Audit

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER THREE

The Tool: The Principle Audit

A ninety-minute exercise for a leader and the people who share a resource with them. Use one resource from the Commons Inventory in Chapter 2, ideally the one you marked *open* or *fenced* and chose in step 4. Do it with at least two people who draw on the resource and are not its formal owner.

Part A · Describe the resource first (15 minutes). Answer in a sentence each:

1. How fast does it replenish? (daily, weekly, yearly, never)

2. Can each person's use be seen by the others? (yes, partly, no)
3. How many people draw on it, and how different are their needs?
4. What is the cost when it is overdrawn, and who bears it?
5. Is there an outside authority (head office, board, regulator, parent) whose rules already apply?

Part B · Score the split principles (30 minutes). Use the reformulation of Cox, Arnold and Villamayor Tomás. Score each 0 (absent), 1 (partly present, or present on paper only) or 2 (present and used). For each score, write the evidence: one thing that happened in the last three months that shows it.

PRINCIPLE	SCORE 0–2	EVIDENCE FROM THE LAST THREE MONTHS	AT WHICH LAYER DOES IT HAPPEN?
1A The users are clearly defined			
1B The resource is clearly bounded			
1C The two boundaries fit each other			
2A Rules fit local conditions			
2B What each puts in fits what each takes out			
3 Users can change the rules			
4A Users (or people accountable to them) watch how the resource is used			
4B Users (or people accountable to them) watch the condition of the resource			
5 The first response to overuse is small			
6 Disputes can be settled quickly and cheaply			
7 Outside authorities leave room to organise			
8 Larger matters are handled at a larger layer			

Do not total the column; the total is not the point. Note whether the watchers in 4A and 4B answer to the users: that accountability was the best-supported finding in the review.

Part C · Read the combinations (20 minutes). Answer each question with the scores in front of you:

- Is there a boundary (1A, 1B) without monitoring (4A, 4B)? Then the boundary is a sign nobody reads.
- Is there monitoring (4A) without a small first response (5)? Then the monitoring will feel like surveillance.
- Is there collective choice (3) without conflict resolution (6)? Then rule-changing meetings will end in grievance.

- Is there a boundary (1A) without a known entry route? Write the entry route now.
- Is there an outside rule (Part A, question 5) that replaced a norm the group already had? Name the norm.

Part D · Choose two moves (15 minutes). Choose the two principles whose absence makes the others weak. Usually that is one pair from Part C. For each, write the smallest version that could start within two weeks; who will do it, and to whom they are accountable; and what you will see in a month if it is working (an observation, not a feeling).

Part E · Agree how to review (10 minutes). Set a date four weeks out. At that meeting, re-score only the two principles you chose, with new evidence, and ask the people who share the resource one question: *what would you change?*

Keep the scored table. Chapter 4 reads it as a set of loops; Chapter 5 shows a graduated response ladder in working form; Chapter 9 gives a health sheet that tracks the same loops, one you can keep over a year.

CHAPTER FOUR

Eight Loops, Not Eight Rules



Eight Loops, Not Eight Rules

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER FOUR

A rule is a still photograph

Write a rule down and it stops moving. *No household may send more cows to the alp than it can feed through the winter.* The sentence reads the same in a village archive today as on the day it was written. But the thing it governs, the meadow, the herd, the households and their winters, has never once stood still. The rule survived for centuries because something around it kept moving: people noticed, talked, adjusted, settled their quarrels and noticed again.

That surrounding movement is what the house means when it calls a commons a living system. Chapters 2 and 3 treated Ostrom's eight principles as a list, first in her own order and then under the pressure of their critics. This chapter reads them the other way: not as eight rules but as the parts of one organism that keeps a shared resource alive.

The claim is this: every one of the eight principles is either a membrane, a sense, a reflex or a repair, and a commons lasts when all four are connected in loops. Remove a loop and the rule on paper does not change, but the system stops correcting itself.

A loop is the simplest thing a living system has that a list does not: a signal goes out, something happens, and the result comes back and changes the next signal. Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* names the qualities that make the principles a loop rather than a list:

> *They describe a system that is relational, responsive, graduated, and nested*[27]

Each of those four words describes something a checklist cannot do. *Relational*: the principles live between people. *Responsive*: they change when conditions change. *Graduated*: they scale their answer to the signal. *Nested*: they close at the smallest layer that can close them.

Membrane: principles 1 and 7

Every living cell has a membrane. It is not a wall. It lets some things in and keeps others out, and it does so selectively, according to what the cell needs. Without a membrane there is no cell, only chemistry dispersing into the surrounding water.

Principle 1, the clear boundary around the users and the resource, is a commons' membrane. Chapter 3 argued that a good boundary needs a door; in the language of a cell, the membrane must be permeable in a known way. Principle 7, the recognition by outside authorities of the users' right to organise, is the other side of the same membrane. It is the outside world agreeing not to puncture it. Santa Anna's book says what the outside world owes in six words:

> *Commons governance needs protection from enclosure.*[28]

The finer point for a leader is that a clear boundary is kind. It removes the need for each person to decide, every day, whether they are entitled to draw on the shared thing. A membrane does not depend on the goodwill of each molecule arriving at it, and a boundary that works only when everyone is generous is not a boundary; it is a hope.



Senses: principle 4

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER FOUR

Senses: principle 4

A membrane alone is not enough. A cell that cannot sense its surroundings cannot respond to them. Principle 4, monitoring, is the commons' sense organ, and the reformulation proposed by Cox and his colleagues in 2010 makes the biology exact: users watching one another's behaviour, and users watching the condition of the resource.[29] A fishery that counts the boats but never the fish has one eye closed. Their review found something else worth carrying: of all the features of monitoring, the one the cases supported most strongly was that the monitors belong to the community or answer to it.

Two features make principle 4 a living sense rather than a camera. The first is that the signal comes from inside the body and returns to it. The second is that monitoring is cheap and frequent when it works. In many of Ostrom's cases, monitoring was a by-product of ordinary work: the irrigator waiting for his turn at the gate sees whether the one before him took too long.

Ostrom's laboratory work with James Walker and Roy Gardner showed why that matters.[30] In experiments published in 1992, groups of participants drew from a shared pool that paid them individually but depleted a common return. Without communication, groups overdrew, as Hardin would have predicted. With a chance to talk, they did much better. With repeated communication and the ability to choose a sanctioning arrangement for themselves, they came close to the best available outcome. The experiments used university students and money, not villages and grass, and they show mechanism rather than proof of what happens in a valley. But the mechanism is the point. The group that could see and speak could correct itself. The group that could neither, could not.

The finer point for a leader is the delay. Every sense loop has one: the time between overuse and someone knowing about it. A shared budget reported quarterly has a delay of up to three months, during which nobody can respond. A meeting calendar that everyone can see has a delay of minutes. Shortening the delay often does more than any new rule, because it lets the reflex fire while the response can still be small. Before adding monitoring, measure the delay of the monitoring you already have. Chapter 9 shows how.



Reflex: principles 5 and 2B

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Reflex: principles 5 and 2B

A reflex is a fast, proportionate, local response. A hand touching something hot pulls back before the brain has formed an opinion about it, and it pulls back as far as needed, not further.

Principle 5, graduated sanctions, is the commons' reflex. The first response to overuse is small and immediate, a word or a look, and it scales only if the overuse continues. Its job is information: *we noticed*. A reflex that fires at full strength on every touch is a seizure, and a commons that answers every small breach with expulsion destroys itself faster than overuse could.

Principle 2B, proportion between what each user contributes and what each receives, is a slower reflex. It is the body's metabolism adjusting to load. In the *zanjera* irrigation societies of the northern Philippines, members who received more land and water contributed more labour to the canals. When the balance drifted, the society's own accounting brought it back.

In the ordinary view, the meadow is the asset and the rule is overhead. In the living-systems view, the agreement is part of the productive equipment, as much as the canal or the fence, because it is what lets the meadow keep producing. Santa Anna's book puts the same idea as a definition of what the commons is made of: governance

> *based on trust, reciprocity, and the direct participation of the people whose lives depend on the resource's health.*[28]

Repair: principles 3 and 6

Living things are damaged constantly. What keeps them alive is not the absence of damage but the presence of repair.

Principle 6, accessible conflict resolution, is the commons' wound healing. Disputes are inevitable wherever a resource is shared. A commons that can settle them quickly and cheaply, in the users' own arena, heals small cuts before they become infections. A commons that can only settle them in a distant court at great expense lets them fester.

Principle 3, collective choice, is a deeper repair. It is the capacity of the system to change its own rules when the rules stop fitting. A living organism does this through growth and adaptation. A commons does it through the meeting at which the users decide that the old limit on cows no longer suits the new breed. Without principle 3, the rule written in one century governs the meadow of another.

The Luminous 100 describes the same capacity in its entry on sociocracy, the consent-based method of governing in linked circles. In the living-systems reading, it says,

> *the consent process becomes the organism's way of ensuring that no action proceeds until the whole system has metabolized it.*[31]

Metabolised is the right verb. A decision imposed on a group has not been digested; the group still has to do that work, usually later and more expensively, in the form of resistance. A decision reached by the people who will live with it has been absorbed already.



Nervous system: principle 8 and polycentric governance

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER FOUR

Nervous system: principle 8 and polycentric governance

The last principle, nested enterprises, ties the others together. A body is not one cell but a nested arrangement: cells in tissues, tissues in organs, organs in a body, each with its own membrane, senses, reflexes and repair, and each handling what it can.

In her Nobel lecture, published in the *American Economic Review* in 2010, Ostrom gave this nesting its proper name, polycentric governance.[32] The word came from her husband Vincent Ostrom, who with Charles Tiebout and Robert Warren had used it in 1961 to describe metropolitan areas served by many overlapping

units of government. Elinor Ostrom's own research on police services in American cities during the 1970s, as she recounts it in the lecture, found that many small and medium departments, overlapping and cooperating, often served residents as well as or better than single large ones. The finding cut against the reform orthodoxy of the time, which favoured consolidation. Polycentric systems, she argued, are many centres of decision, each with real authority in its own domain, linked by rules about how they relate.

A nervous system works the same way. It is not a chain of command from the brain to the toe. It is a nested set of loops, some closed locally in the spinal cord without the brain's involvement, others carried up when the local loop cannot resolve the signal. A unit solves its own problems until it cannot, then carries the context to the layer that can.

One of Alpha's thirty-one instruments, the Viable System Model, describes organisations in a closely related way: nested units, each with the functions it needs to survive, linked by channels that carry information up and authority down. The two vocabularies were built independently, Stafford Beer's from cybernetics and Ostrom's from case studies of commons. That they converge is some evidence that each is describing something real.



Why the loops generalise

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER FOUR

Why the loops generalise

If the principles describe how any living group governs what it shares, they should work beyond forests and fisheries. In 2013, David Sloan Wilson, Elinor Ostrom and Michael Cox published "Generalizing the Core Design Principles for the Efficacy of Groups" in the *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*.[33] Their argument, drawn from evolutionary theory, is that the principles are not specific to natural resources. They are the conditions under which cooperation can hold in any group whose members could profit, individually, by cheating: a classroom, a neighbourhood association, a team, a firm. The paper is a

theoretical argument with illustrative cases, and the authors presented it as a hypothesis to be tested. But it is the reason a leader can use these principles on a meeting calendar or a shared budget without stretching them.

The house goes one step further, and its step is the one this book is built on. What all the loops carry, round and round, is trust: the reasonable expectation that the others will take their share and no more, will notice if you do not, will say so mildly, and will settle a disagreement fairly. Every loop that completes adds a little to the stock. Every loop that breaks draws it down. Santa Anna's book describes what happens to a body when the stock is high:

> *This is not dependency — it is interdependence, the natural state of human beings who have lived in cooperative groups for the vast majority of our evolutionary history.*[34]

The Luminous 100's reading of systems thinking asks the generative form of the question a leader should bring to any commons:

> *Where are the virtuous cycles already alive in this system?*[35]

That question begins the tool below. Most groups looking at a shared resource ask what is going wrong. A better first question is which loops already work, so that they can be strengthened before anything is added.

The same reading of economic life as a living system runs through other volumes of this lineage, in the account of complexity economics and increasing returns, and in the account of regenerative and circular economies. Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* is the root of all of them.

A rule written five centuries ago is a still photograph. The meadow it governs has been breathing ever since.

The Tool: The Loop Map

A sixty-minute exercise for a leader and two or three people who share a resource. Use the resource you audited in Chapter 3, and its scored table. You will need a large sheet of paper and two pens of different colours.

Step 1 · Draw the resource (5 minutes). In the centre of the sheet, draw a circle and name the shared resource inside it. Around it, write the names of the people or groups who draw on it.

Step 2 · Draw the membrane (10 minutes). Draw a line around the users and the resource together. On the line, write who is inside (1A) and what the resource includes (1B); the door, how someone outside comes in; and any outside authority whose rules touch the line (principle 7), and whether those rules set outcomes or methods.

If you cannot draw the line because nobody knows where it is, write *no membrane* and stop the exercise there. That is the first thing to fix.

Step 3 · Draw the four loops (25 minutes). For each loop below, draw an arrow that leaves the resource and returns to it. Label each step on the arrow. If a step does not happen, draw that part of the arrow dotted.

LOOP	THE STEPS TO DRAW	THE QUESTION THAT TESTS IT
Sense (4A, 4B)	resource or user behaviour → someone notices → they tell someone accountable to the users	How long from overuse to someone knowing?
Reflex (5, 2B)	someone knows → a small response → behaviour adjusts → contributions and benefits rebalance	What is the smallest response that has actually happened?
Repair (6)	a dispute → a local, cheap place to settle it → a settlement both parties accept	How many disputes in the last year reached that place, and how many went around it?
Learning (3)	a rule stops fitting → users raise it → users change it → the new rule is used	When did the users last change a rule?

Step 4 · Mark the layers (10 minutes). For each loop, write beside it the layer at which it closes: the team, the department, the firm, the household, the extended family. Then ask whether it closes at the smallest layer that could handle it, or whether it has been sent upward without need (principle 8).

Step 5 · Find the living loops first (10 minutes). With the second colour, circle every loop or part of a loop that already works, with an example from the last three months. Then answer, in writing:

1. Which working loop could be made faster or cheaper this month? (Strengthening a living loop usually costs less than building a new one.)
2. Which dotted arrow, if completed, would complete the most loops at once? (Often it is the sense loop: without noticing, nothing else can start.)
3. What is the one action, by whom, by when, that completes that arrow?

Keep the drawing. Chapter 5 shows a working commons in which all four loops have closed every week for centuries; Chapter 9 measures each loop.

CHAPTER FIVE

Thursday at the Apostles' Door



Thursday at the Apostles' Door

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER FIVE

Noon, on a Thursday

The Door of the Apostles is the Gothic entrance on the side of Valencia's cathedral. On most days it is a door. On Thursdays, at noon, eight farmers in the black smock of the *huerta* take their seats in front of it. Each has been elected, for a term of two years, by the farmers who share one of the historic irrigation canals that draw water from the river Turia across the irrigated plain around the city.

The canals are called in turn, and anyone with a complaint against a neighbour is heard. Usually nobody has one. When somebody does, the parties speak for themselves, in Valencian, without lawyers and without paper. The procedure is summary and entirely oral. A person complained of is summoned up to three times; if he does not come, the case is decided without him. The tribunal decides on the spot, and its decision is final: there is no appeal. In most weeks the whole session is over in a few minutes. If Thursday is a holiday, the tribunal sits on Wednesday instead.[36]

This is the Water Tribunal of the plain of Valencia, the *Tribunal de las Aguas*. In 2009 UNESCO inscribed it, together with the Council of Wise Men of the plain of Murcia, on its list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. UNESCO's account describes it as "eight elected administrators representing a total of 11,691 members from nine communities", and places the origins of both courts in the al-Andalus period, between the ninth and thirteenth centuries; both are recognised under Spanish law.[37] The documentary record that historians can test is younger and more modest, which is the honest way to put it: the irrigation communities of the *huerta* and their customs are attested after James I of Aragon took the city in 1238 and confirmed the water customs he found there. Thomas Glick's history of medieval Valencian irrigation, published by Harvard in 1970, is the standard account of what the documents can and cannot show.[38]

Whichever date one prefers, the tribunal has done the same work, in the same place, on the same day of the week, for centuries. Elinor Ostrom used the Valencian *huertas* as one of her principal long-lived cases in *Governing the Commons*.[39] Chapters 2 to 4 set out her principles, their limits and the house's reading of them as loops. This chapter shows them working.

The claim of this chapter is practical: a commons is governed well when its smallest disputes are settled fast, in public and cheaply, because that is the loop on which all the others depend. The Thursday session is the visible part of an arrangement that runs all week.

What the tribunal is part of

The tribunal is not the government of the *huerta*. It is the conflict-resolution arm, principle 6, of a larger nested system. Each canal is run by its own community of irrigators, who elect officers, set the turns by which water is taken, employ guards who watch the channels, and share the cost of cleaning and repair. The tribunal sits above them, and settles what crosses between members of a canal and what the canal's own officers cannot settle.

Read against the eight principles, the arrangement is almost a diagram:

- Boundaries (1). Water rights belong to land within each canal's area. Who may take, and from which channel, is known.
- Local rules and proportion (2). The order and timing of turns are set canal by canal, and change with drought. Contributions to maintenance follow the land irrigated.
- Collective choice (3). Each canal's members meet and change their own ordinances.
- Monitoring (4). Guards walk the channels; and each farmer waiting for his turn can see whether his neighbour took too long, which makes monitoring a by-product of irrigating.
- Graduated sanctions (5). Penalties are set by the canal's ordinances and scaled to the offence.
- Conflict resolution (6). The tribunal, every Thursday, oral, local and quick.
- Recognition (7). The tribunal's jurisdiction is recognised by the state.
- Nesting (8). Canal communities inside the *huerta*, the tribunal over them, the river basin authority over the whole.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* describes principle 6 in words that could be a caption for the Thursday session:

> *Disputes are resolved quickly and locally, without expensive legal processes that only the wealthy can afford.*[40]

Here is what that sentence means in economic terms. A dispute that costs nothing to bring and is settled within a week is brought early, while it is small. A dispute that costs months and a lawyer is brought late, or never, and grows in silence until it breaks something larger. The Thursday session is cheap enough that grievances never need to accumulate.

What the case cannot show. The Valencian *huerta* is one case, in one culture, with a river, a climate and a history that no other place shares. Its longevity shows that the arrangement can last; it does not show that copying it elsewhere would work. Ostrom chose it because it lasted, which is the selection problem Chapter 7 takes up. It has its own exclusions: water rights go with land, so those without land have no voice in front of the door. And the tribunal's public, oral form depends on a community small and settled enough that a farmer's standing among his neighbours is worth more than winning a dispute. All of that is part of why it works, and part of why it is not a template.



The harbour gangs

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER FIVE

The harbour gangs

The second case is younger, colder and less ceremonial. Along the coast of Maine, lobstermen from each harbour fish their own stretch of water. For much of the twentieth century no statute gave them that stretch. The boundaries were held by custom, by what the anthropologist James Acheson, who studied them from the early 1970s, called harbour gangs.[41] Their claims were unrecognised by the state and backed, when it came to it, by surreptitious violence against the gear of outsiders.

In 1975 Acheson published "The Lobster Fiefs" in the journal *Human Ecology*. He distinguished two kinds of territory: *nucleated* areas, where exclusive rights were held loosely, and *perimeter-defended* areas, where they were held tightly. The difference in how firmly the boundary was kept, he argued, changed how hard the water was fished, with strong biological and economic effects. It is one study, of one fishery, from the early 1970s, and it shows an association rather than a cause. Acheson's longer account, *The Lobster Gangs of Maine* (1988), should be read for the detail. But the direction fits the logic of the principles: where the boundary held, the overuse that Gordon's model predicts for open access was checked.

The case also shows the boundary's darker side, the subject of Chapter 3. Exclusion protected the resource and it protected incumbents, and the sanctions, though they began with warnings, could end in the destruction of a newcomer's traps. A leader studying the case should keep both halves in view. What the case adds to Valencia is principle 7 seen from the other end: an informal arrangement the state did not at first recognise, which the state could later choose either to replace or to build on.

Santa Anna's book names the choice, in its account of what the principles describe:

> *a form of economic governance that is neither market nor state — neither the privatization solution of the right nor the regulation solution of the left.*[40]



A commons at work: the cloud budget

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER FIVE

A commons at work: the cloud budget

The two historic cases are instructive and remote. Most readers govern something closer to home. What follows is a composite, built for teaching: no single real firm, assembled from the kind of arrangement many technology firms run. Every figure is set for illustration and is not drawn from any filing or study.

A software firm of sixty engineers in six teams shares one monthly cloud computing budget of $40,000. Any engineer can start a server or a test environment with a click. The bill arrives at the end of the month. For two years nobody has owned it.

This is Gordon's open-access fishery with a credit card. Each engineer who leaves a large test environment running overnight takes the whole convenience and bears one sixtieth of the cost. In the composite, the bill has drifted to $52,000 a month, and the finance team's response has been a quarterly email asking everyone to be careful, followed by a freeze when the overrun becomes embarrassing. Both responses are what Chapter 3 called the outside rule: imposed without the users, felt as arbitrary, and quietly worked around.

The engineering lead runs the Commons Inventory from Chapter 2, then the Principle Audit from Chapter 3. The audit finds no boundary on the resource (1B), no monitoring the users can see (4A, 4B), and no first response short of a freeze (5). Collective choice (3) is absent; the budget was set by finance. These are the dotted arrows on the Loop Map from Chapter 4.

What the firm does over six weeks, in the order the Loop Map suggests:

Week 1 · Shorten the sense loop. A shared dashboard shows each team's spending from the previous day, visible to all sixty engineers. The delay between overuse and someone knowing falls from a month to a day. Nothing else changes yet.

Week 2 · Draw the boundary. The budget is divided among the six teams in proportion to what each used over the last six months, with a small common reserve for experiments. Each team now has a resource with an edge. This is principle 1B, and also 2B: what each team takes is now tied to an allocation it can see.

Week 3 · Give the users the rules. Each team decides its own practices within its share: which environments shut down at night, who can start large machines. One team chooses an automatic nightly shutdown. Another, running long experiments, does not. This is principle 2A, rules that fit local conditions, and principle 3.

Week 4 · Agree the first response. The six team leads agree a graduated response to overruns, written on one page: the ladder in the tool below. The first rung is a message from a colleague, not a manager.

Week 5 · Create the Thursday. Fifteen minutes every Thursday, the six team leads review the dashboard together. Disputes between teams, a shared database whose cost each claims is the other's, are settled there, in the room, in minutes. This is principle 6, borrowed without embarrassment from Valencia.

Week 6 · Nest it. Finance sets the firm-wide ceiling and the quarterly review. The teams govern inside it. Principles 7 and 8 together: the outside authority sets the outcome and leaves the method.

In the composite, the monthly bill falls back to about $41,000 by the third month. The figure is illustrative. The structure is the point: no new tool did the work except the dashboard. The loops did.

The book's account of graduated sanctions names the purpose the team leads were trying to keep:

> *The goal is to maintain the community, not to destroy the violator.*[40]

The first time a team overran, in the composite's fourth week, the response was a colleague's note on the Thursday call: *you were over yesterday, do you know why?* They did. A long test had been left running. It did not happen again, and nobody's name was mentioned outside the room.

The same structure works at a kitchen table, and Chapter 11 is given to it. One of Alpha's instruments, the Stakeholder Map, is a useful first step for a leader whose commons has more users than anyone has written down, and Chapter 8 sets out the full thirteen-week version of what this composite did in six.

At noon on Thursday in Valencia the last canal is called, nobody answers, and the farmers in black rise. The water goes on flowing to the fields.



The Tool: The Graduated Response Ladder

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER FIVE

The Tool: The Graduated Response Ladder

A one-page agreement for any group that shares a resource: a team, a set of teams, a household. Write it with the people who will use it, not for them. It takes about forty-five minutes. Principle 5 is the subject; principles 3, 4 and 6 are the supports.

Part A · The resource and the line (10 minutes).

The shared resource:

What counts as overuse, stated so that anyone can check it from information all users can see:

How users will see it, and how often (the sense loop):

Part B · The ladder (20 minutes). Five rungs. Write what happens on each, who does it, and when the next rung applies. Keep the first two rungs between peers.

RUNG	WHAT HAPPENS	WHO DOES IT	MOVES TO THE NEXT RUNG WHEN
1 · Notice	A private word: "you were over; do you know why?" No record.	A peer who saw it	The same overuse happens again within _____
2 · Name	Raised at the regular meeting (the Thursday), as information, with the person present.	The person, or a peer	It happens a third time within _____, or the explanation does not hold
3 · Repair	The person proposes how they will make it good (time, money, a fix), and the group agrees it.	The person, agreed by the group	The repair is not made by _____
4 · Restrict	A temporary, stated limit on the person's draw on the resource, with a date it ends.	The group, or an officer accountable to it	A further breach during the restriction
5 · Review	The person's access is reviewed by the group, with a route back written into the decision.	The whole group	(End of ladder)

Part C · The protections (10 minutes). Agree and write:

1. Every rung applies the same way to everyone, including the person who leads the group.

2. A person can always ask to be heard at the next regular meeting before rung 3 or higher takes effect (principle 6).

Records are kept only from rung 3, and only for months.

The ladder itself is reviewed every months by everyone who uses the resource, and anyone may propose a change (principle 3).

Part D · The regular meeting (5 minutes). Name the day, the time, the length (fifteen minutes is enough for most groups) and who attends. Most weeks it will end in less. That is the sign it is working.

Sign it, all of you, and put it where the resource is used.

A note on method

The cloud-budget firm is a composite built for teaching; every figure in it was set for illustration.

CHAPTER SIX

A Commons on Monday



A Commons on Monday

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SIX

The resource that grows when shared

A pasture has a limit. Every cow added takes grass that another cow cannot eat. That property, which economists call *subtractability* and which Ostrom treated as a defining feature of a common-pool resource, is why the pasture needs governing at all.

Some shared things do not behave like that. A proof, a recipe, a song, a method of irrigation or a piece of software is not used up by being used. One reader's understanding of an idea does not reduce another's. In 2007 Elinor Ostrom and the librarian Charlotte Hess published a collection of essays, *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons*, that asked what the design principles might mean for resources of this kind.[42] Their answer was careful. Knowledge is not subtractable in the way grass is, but the things that carry it are: the attention of the people who maintain it, the funding of the libraries that hold it, the trust of contributors who might stop contributing. A knowledge commons can be overgrazed too. What is overgrazed is the care.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* makes the same point about the commons in general. Its examples are land trusts, open-source software and community-supported farms, and of all of them it says that they are pro-circulation:

> *they keep shared wealth flowing through communities rather than accumulating in private hands.*[43]

The four chapters before this one traced the principles from their origin, through their critics and the house's living-systems reading, to a working case. This one steps back before the book turns to working ground. The claim is this: the commons is not a special corner of economic life; it is the condition that every other part of economic life depends on, and its principles are the most practical way this house knows of tending that condition. Markets, firms, families and gifts all run on shared things that nobody owns: trust, reputation, attention, a reasonable expectation that others will keep their word. Each of those can be governed well or left open.

The triad underneath

In 1997 Elinor Ostrom gave the presidential address to the American Political Science Association. It was published the next year as "A Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collective Action".[44] It is the most general thing she wrote, and it explains why the design principles work at all.

Her argument was that the old model of the self-interested individual, the one Hardin's herdsmen obeyed, was not wrong so much as incomplete. Real people bring three things to any shared situation that the model left out: trust, the expectation that others will cooperate; reciprocity, the tendency to return cooperation with cooperation and defection with defection; and reputation, the record of how each person

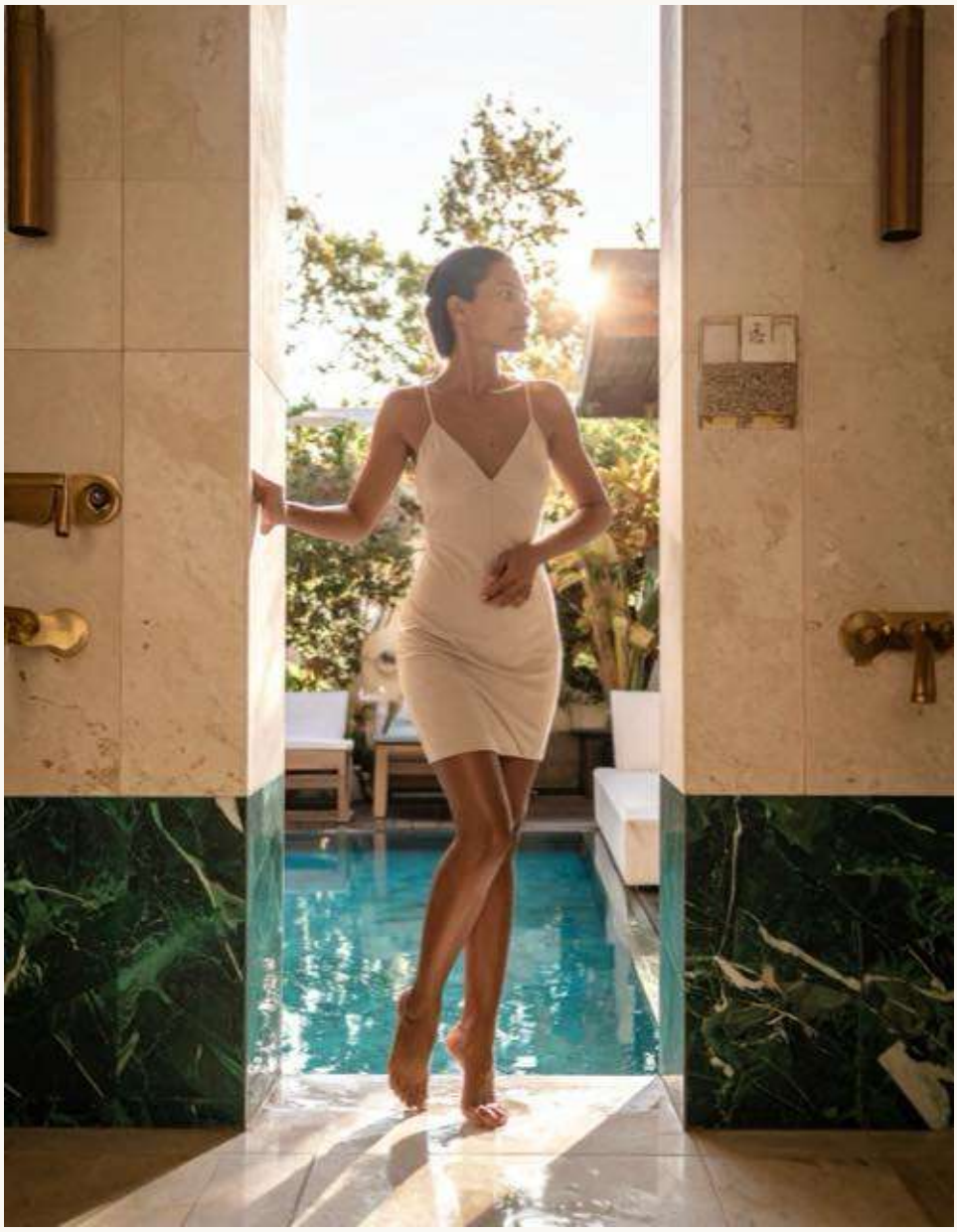
has behaved before. The three reinforce each other. Where people can see each other's behaviour and talk about it, reputations form; good reputations make trust reasonable; trust makes reciprocity safe; and reciprocity builds the reputations up again. Where people cannot see or talk, the loop never starts, and the self-interested model describes them well.

The design principles, in this light, are a way of starting and protecting that loop. Monitoring makes behaviour visible, so that reputations can form. Conflict resolution keeps a single bad exchange from destroying a reputation that took years to build. Graduated sanctions let reciprocity respond to defection without ending the relationship. Collective choice lets the group revise its expectations as it learns.

Santa Anna's book draws the consequence for every economic structure that keeps trust at its centre:

> *The commons, the cooperative, the community currency, the CSA — all are structures that make economic relationship primary and market transaction secondary.*[45]

That is the joining point with the sibling volume on markets embedded in society, which reads Karl Polanyi's argument that markets have always depended on social arrangements they did not create, and with the volume on gift and reciprocity, which takes up the experimental evidence on reciprocity that Ostrom's address drew on. A market is a remarkable instrument for setting prices among strangers. It does not, by itself, make strangers trustworthy. Something else does that work first, and that something is, in Ostrom's sense, a commons.



The commons inside the firm

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SIX

The commons inside the firm

Most organisations are full of commons that are not called by that name, and the inventory in Chapter 2 was a way of finding them. What changes when a leader begins to see them?

The first change is in what counts as an asset. Santa Anna's book describes what was lost when common land was enclosed: when shared resources become private property, it says, the

> *relational web of mutual obligation that governed their use is severed.*[46]

The same thing happens inside firms on a smaller scale. When a shared practice, the senior engineer who answers everyone's questions, the open calendar, the informal agreement that nobody books the large room for a two-person call, is replaced by a policy or a charge-back system, the arrangement may become more efficient on paper and lose the web of obligation that made it work. Sometimes the replacement is right. Often it is made without anyone noticing that a commons was there.

The second change is in what counts as governance. In most firms, governance means the board and the reporting line. Ostrom's principles describe a different layer: the arrangements by which people who share something look after it without being told to. Chapter 3 showed the evidence that outside rules can crowd those arrangements out. A leader who has seen this asks, before adding a policy, whether a commons is already doing the work.

Two smaller commons deserve a leader's attention because they are overgrazed in almost every firm. The first is documentation: the shared record of how things work, which everyone draws on and almost nobody maintains. It behaves exactly as Hess and Ostrom described a knowledge commons. The knowledge is not used up by reading; the care that keeps it current is used up by everyone who reads without writing. Principle 2B is the remedy, and it can be small: whoever relies on a page to finish a task leaves it a little more accurate than they found it. The second is the attention of the few people everyone asks. A senior colleague who answers forty questions a week is a common-pool resource with a hard limit, and the usual governance is none at all. A boundary (office hours), a sense loop (a count of questions, visible to the team) and a door (a junior colleague learning to answer the commonest ones) will usually do more than any reorganisation.

The third change is in what counts as fairness. Principle 2B, proportion between what each person contributes and what each receives, is the commons version of a question every firm faces about its people: how should the gains from shared work be shared? That question has its own long history, from the Scanlon plans of the 1930s onward, and it is the subject of a sibling volume. Employee ownership, which gives the people who share the work a say in the rules as well as a share of the result, is principle 3 applied to the firm itself, and it is the subject of another. Santa Anna's book insists on the structural reading of that second idea:

> *This distribution is not ideological ("power to the people" as slogan) but structural (specific governance mechanisms that ensure broad participation in economic decision-making).*[45]

What a good outside authority does

Principle 7 asks outside authorities to recognise a group's right to organise. It is worth saying what a good outside authority actually does, because most readers of this book are someone's outside authority: a government above a fishery, a head office above its divisions, a parent above siblings sharing a room.

It does four things, and the evidence in this book supports each. It protects the boundary from people outside who would ignore it, as the state did when it recognised Valencia's tribunal. It makes good information available, the monitoring that Dietz, Ostrom and Stern argued is hardest to provide at large scale. It provides a place where disputes can be settled when the local arena cannot settle them. And it steps back from the methods while holding to the outcomes, so that the group's own norms are not crowded out.

None of this is passive. A gardener does not grow the plant but does a great deal to make growing possible. Santa Anna's book, in its own list of what the commons needs from those above it, puts the first duty plainly: commons governance needs protection from enclosure.



Scarcity as a design choice

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SIX

Scarcity as a design choice

The deepest claim in Santa Anna's reading of Ostrom is about scarcity itself. His book opens by naming what it calls the dominant metaphysics of modern economics:

> *there is not enough, there will never be enough, and the fundamental economic problem is the allocation of scarce resources among competing wants.*[47]

Read carefully, the book's quarrel is not with the fact that resources are finite. The pasture has a limit; so does the meeting calendar. It is with where the *experience* of scarcity comes from. An open-access pasture is scarce for everyone, all the time, because each herdsman must race the others for the grass. The same pasture, governed by Törbel's winter rule, can feed the same number of cows year after year, and nobody needs to race. The grass is no more plentiful. The scarcity has been designed out of the arrangement.

That is the joining point with the sibling volume on scarcity and abundance, which reads Keynes's 1930 essay on the economic possibilities for his grandchildren and the modern economy of intangible assets, and with the volume on ecological economics, which places every economy inside the limits of the biosphere. Ostrom's work sits between them. It accepts the limits, and it shows that the experience of living inside them depends heavily on how the people who share them have agreed to behave.



Monday

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SIX

Monday

A book that ends its first half in admiration has not done its work. The second half is working ground, and it begins on a Monday.

For a leader, the first week is short. Run the Commons Inventory with two colleagues and find the eight shared things. Choose the one open resource whose overuse costs the most and describe it as the audit asks. Score it, read the combinations, choose two moves. Hold a fifteen-minute review with the people who share it and ask what they would change; those are the most important fifteen minutes of the week, and

the ones most leaders skip. Draw the Loop Map and find the dotted arrow that would complete the most loops. Chapter 8 turns that week into thirteen, with roles and decisions for each.

For a household, the first week is shorter still. Choose one shared resource, usually the joint account, sometimes the car or the evenings. Agree a fifteen-minute look at it together on the same day each week, and write the first rung of a response to overuse as a question rather than a reproach. Chapter 11 takes it further.

Neither plan needs new software, a consultant or a budget. Each needs about four hours in the first week and fifteen minutes a week after that. That is the economy of a commons: the governing is cheap when it is done often and early, and expensive only when it has been left undone.

Where it lasted, somebody was standing at the gate in the evening, talking with the neighbours about the grass. The rest of this book is about how to be that person on a Monday.

The Tool: The One-Page Commons Charter

A single page that any group can write in an hour: a team, several teams, a household, a volunteer board, a group of friends who share a house. It gathers the first five chapters into one document that the users write, sign and change. Use the resource you have worked through in the earlier tools, or start fresh.

THE COMMONS CHARTER OF (the group) FOR (the resource) Written on by (everyone who draws on the resource). Next review: .

1 · What we share. The resource, described in one sentence: What it includes and does not include (the resource's boundary): How fast it replenishes, and how we can see its condition:

2 · Who shares it. The people or teams who may draw on it: How someone new joins (the door): How someone leaves, and what they take with them:

3 · How we take, and how we give back. Each person's or team's share, or the rule for taking: What each contributes to keeping the resource in good order, in proportion to what they take: What changes in a hard season (a lean month, a drought, a crunch):

4 · How we change these rules. Who may propose a change: everyone who signs below. How a change is agreed (consent, majority, or another rule we choose): Where changes are recorded:

5 · How we see. What we watch about the resource's condition: What we watch about how it is used: Who watches, and to whom they report (it must be to us): How often we look together, and when (our Thursday):

6 · When someone overuses it. Our ladder, from Chapter 5, in brief: Rung 1 (a private word, by a peer): Rung 2 (named at our regular meeting): Rung 3 (a repair the person proposes): Rung 4 (a temporary limit, with an end date): Rung 5 (a review by all of us, with a route back): These rungs apply to every one of us, including whoever leads.

7 · When we disagree. Where disputes are heard (our regular meeting, or another named place): How quickly a dispute is heard after it is raised: Who decides if the two parties cannot agree, and who stands aside because they are involved:

8 · What sits above us. The outside authority whose limits we work within (head office, board, landlord, bank, parent): The outcome they set: The methods we keep for ourselves: What we pass up to them, and how:

9 · What we will notice in a month if this is working. One observation, not a feeling:

Signed:

Put it where the resource is used. Read it aloud at the first review. Change it the first time it stops fitting. A charter nobody has amended in a year is either perfect or forgotten, and it is rarely perfect.

A note on method

The plans and time estimates under "Monday" are this book's recommendation, not the finding of any study.

A NOTE FROM THE HOUSE

Most organisations are full of commons not called by that name: the shared hour, the common file, the expertise everybody draws on and nobody tends. A commons governed well is a gain waiting to be counted. Luminous Prosperity Inc. does this work inside organisations as a gainshare, paid as a share of the gain it helps find.

REQUEST A CONVERSATION

CHAPTER SEVEN

Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds



Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SEVEN

Why read old cases at all

A leader with a cloud budget to govern may reasonably ask what a Swiss alp has to teach. The question deserves a straight answer before this chapter spends four thousand words on meadows, forests and fishing grounds.

The answer is that the cases are where the principles came from, and a principle read without its cases is a slogan. Ostrom did not invent the eight; she read them off arrangements that ordinary people had built and kept working, some of them for longer than most nations have existed. Each case carries details that the list cannot hold: what the rule actually said, who wrote it, what happened when someone broke it, and what the place was like that made the rule fit. Those details are where the finer points of implementation live. They are also where the limits live, and a leader who knows a case well knows what not to copy from it.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* sets the standard this chapter tries to meet:

> *The test of any economic philosophy is not how beautifully it can be articulated but how it shows up in the design of a workplace, the structure of an enterprise, the architecture of a commons, and the felt experience of the people who inhabit these structures every day.*[48]

The claim of the chapter is this: each long-lived commons solved the same four problems, of membrane, sense, reflex and repair, in a form that fitted its own resource, and the form is what a reader must translate, not copy. Four cases follow, then a comparison that did not end well, then a method for reading any case, including one's own.



An alp above the Visp valley

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An alp above the Visp valley

Törbel is a village in the Swiss canton of Valais, on a steep slope above the valley of the Vispa. Its families have long held their vineyards, gardens, grain fields and hay meadows privately, and their high summer pastures, forests and waste lands in common. The anthropologist Robert McC. Netting lived there and studied its records, and in 1976 he published "What Alpine Peasants Have in Common" in the journal *Human Ecology*.[49] Ostrom built one of her principal cases on his work.

The rule that everyone remembers is the winter rule. No citizen, as Netting and Ostrom report it, may send more cows to the summer alp than he can feed through the winter on hay from his own land. It is a remarkable piece of design, and it repays a slow reading. It ties the use of the commons (summer grazing) to a private resource each household holds and can see (its own winter hay), so that each household's share of the common grass is limited by something it cannot fake. It needs no central allocation and no annual negotiation. And it is self-monitoring: a family that has sent too many cows up will be visibly short of hay by February.

On the date of the village's governing articles, care is needed. Ostrom, following Netting, dates the articles by which Törbel's residents formally organised the use of the alp and the other commons to 1483. The *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, the standard Swiss historical dictionary, gives other dates for the village's institutions: a farmers' association recorded in 1463 and an ordinance for the alp and common land in 1507.[50] The honest summary is that Törbel's written rules for its commons are attested from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and that the arrangement they describe has been in use, with amendments, ever since.

Netting also asked a question that a leader should ask of every commons: why is this resource held in common at all, when the village's other land is private? His answer, as Ostrom reports it, was that common tenure suited land where the value of production per unit of area was low, where use and yield were infrequent or undependable, where there was little room for improvement, where a large territory was needed for effective use, and where relatively large groups were needed to make the investments the land required. A high summer pasture meets every one of those conditions. A vineyard meets none of them.

That answer is worth carrying out of the mountains. Not everything in a firm should be held in common. A team's code repository, its on-call rota and its senior engineer's attention behave like the alp: shared use is natural, and dividing them would destroy their value. A salesperson's own client list, a writer's draft and a manager's one-to-one time behave more like the vineyard. The first act of governing a commons well is to know which of the two you are looking at.

What the case cannot show. Törbel is small, long-settled and unusually stable; its families have known each other's fathers. Its rights belonged to citizens of the village, so the arrangement is also a story about who was kept out. And Netting's evidence is historical and ethnographic, which is to say it shows a commons that lasted, not an experiment that tested why.

Three villages and their mountains

The second case is Japanese. During the Tokugawa period, from the early seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, many Japanese villages held large areas of forest and mountain meadow in common. The villagers drew from them fodder, thatch, firewood, timber and fertiliser, and the land was essential to farming in the valleys below. Margaret McKean studied the records of three such villages, Hirano,

Nagaike and Yamanaka, and her account, summarised in Ostrom's book and set out at greater length in McKean's 1992 article "Success on the Commons" in the *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, is one of the clearest pictures of a commons governed by detailed rules over a long time.[51]

What strikes a reader first is how much was written down. The villages set the days on which the commons opened for particular harvests, how many people each household could send, what tools they could carry, and how much they could take. Some products were gathered by the whole village working together and then divided. Households took turns in the work of maintaining the commons, and took turns in watching it.

What strikes a reader second is the watching. The villages appointed people whose job was to patrol the commons, often as a duty that households took in turn. Patrols caught people taking more than their share or entering on the wrong day. The response was graduated. A first offender might lose what he had taken or the tool he had taken it with, or pay a fine; repeated or serious offences brought heavier penalties, and in the last resort exclusion. McKean's reading, which Ostrom follows, is that the sanctions were mostly small, and that their main work was to make an offence known: the information did the governing, and the fine was the receipt.

Santa Anna's book draws the moral that the Japanese records illustrate, in a sentence about how this kind of watching differs from the other kind:

> *Trust, but verify. Not through surveillance and punishment, but through transparent, community-embedded observation.*[52]

The Japanese case adds one more thing the alp does not show so clearly: rotation of duty as a form of fairness. When every household takes its turn at the patrol and at the work, nobody becomes the permanent watcher, resented or feared, and everybody learns what the commons looks like from the watcher's side. A team that rotates the role of reviewing its shared spending, or of answering the support queue, borrows this directly.

What the case cannot show. These were hierarchical villages in a hierarchical society, and the commons rules sat inside a political order that nobody would choose today. McKean's evidence is documentary, from villages whose records survived, which is itself a kind of selection: a village whose commons collapsed may have kept fewer records. And the scale is small. A rule that works when every offender is a neighbour may not work when offenders are strangers.



A fishing ground off Alanya

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A fishing ground off Alanya

The third case is younger and has the advantage of having been watched while it was built. Alanya is a town on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. In the early 1970s its inshore fishery was in trouble: boats competed for the best spots, quarrels broke out over nets set in each other's way, and the cost of competing for position was eating into what fishing paid. Fikret Berkes studied the fishery in the following decade, and his 1986 article in *Marine Policy*, "Local-level management and the commons problem", compared it with

several other Turkish coastal fisheries.[53] Ostrom opens *Governing the Commons* with the Alanya case, and her summary of Berkes is the account most readers know.

As Ostrom summarises Berkes, the Alanya fishers worked out their arrangement by trial and error over about a decade. Each September a list was made of the fishers eligible to fish, whether or not they belonged to the local cooperative. The fishing area was divided into named locations, spaced so that the nets set at one would not block the fish from the next. The locations were allocated by lot. Then, through the season, each fisher moved each day to the next location along the coast, eastward in the first part of the season and westward in the second, so that every eligible fisher had an equal chance at the best spots as the fish migrated. The list of locations and the rules were written down and lodged with local authorities, and the arrangement was recognised by them.

Read slowly, the design solves every problem the loops in Chapter 4 describe, in a form that fits a migrating fish:

- Membrane. The September list says who is in. The named locations say what the resource is.
- Sense. Monitoring is free. A fisher assigned a good spot will be there at dawn, and will see anyone who has taken it; the person with the strongest interest in noticing a breach is the person standing at the place where it would happen.
- Reflex. A breach is visible and personal, and the response begins with the community's own pressure.
- Repair. Disputes are settled first among the fishers themselves; the rules, being written and simple, make most of them easy to settle.
- Proportion and fairness. Rotation turns a lottery of places into equality over a season. Nobody owns the best spot; everyone gets it in turn.

Santa Anna's book, writing about the principles in general, names what the Alanya fishers had built for themselves:

> *community self-governance of shared resources, based on trust, reciprocity, and the direct participation of the people whose lives depend on the resource's health.*[52]

What the case cannot show. Alanya is one small fishery, in one decade, with a particular fish and a particular coast. Rotation works because the best locations change predictably with the season; a resource whose best parts never move would need another rule. And the case is reported, at its most widely read, through Ostrom's summary of Berkes's article. A reader planning to borrow its design should read Berkes.



The canal diggers of Ilocos

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The canal diggers of Ilocos

The fourth case is the shortest here, because the reader has met it twice already. The *zanjeras* of the Ilocos region in the northern Philippines are irrigation societies whose members build and maintain diversion dams and canals, often of bamboo, sticks and stones that rivers wash away in the rainy season and members rebuild. The case comes to Ostrom chiefly through Robert Siy's study of them, published in Manila in 1982.[54] Membership carries shares, and shares carry both a right to irrigated land and water and a duty of labour and materials in proportion. A member with more shares gives more days to the dam.

The *zanjera* is the clearest instance anywhere of principle 2B, proportion between what each takes and what each gives, made into the structure of an institution rather than an occasional correction. It also shows how much labour a commons can call on when the proportion is felt to be fair: rebuilding a dam after every season of floods is heavy work, and it is done.

What the case cannot show. Its evidence comes chiefly from one study, reported through Ostrom; its labour demands are heavy in a way that suits a farming society and would not transfer to a firm without translation. The translation is the useful part. In a firm the labour is maintenance, documentation, mentoring and review, the work nobody is paid separately to do, and the *zanjera* says it should rise with what each person draws from the commons.



A comparison that did not end well

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A comparison that did not end well

Ostrom gave a full chapter of *Governing the Commons* to failures and fragile cases, and it is the chapter readers skip. It should be read first. The successes are selected for having lasted; only the failures show what was missing.

Berkes's own design made the point. He did not study Alanya alone. He compared it with other Turkish coastal fisheries, and not all of them had arrived at working local arrangements. Where fishers had no agreed list, no allocation of places and no recognised rules, the problems Alanya had solved remained, and

in some cases grew: more effort for the same catch, quarrels without a place to settle them, and outsiders who could not be kept out. The comparison is what makes Alanya informative. A single success could be luck; a success beside failures in the same country, with the same fish and similar boats, points to the arrangement.

Ostrom drew a general lesson from her failures that every leader should hold. The cases that broke down tended to lack several principles at once, and especially to lack the capacity to change their own rules, the ability to keep outsiders out, or the protection of an outside authority that would recognise and back the local arrangement. A commons whose users can make rules but cannot enforce them against people outside the group, or cannot get the state to recognise them, is fragile in a way that no amount of internal goodwill can repair.

Santa Anna's book offers the counterweight a reader needs after a chapter of admiring cases:

> *The commons revival is not a nostalgic return to pre-modern arrangements.*[48]

The cases are not a museum to visit and copy. They are evidence about what any group needs, gathered in places where the evidence happened to survive.

How to read a case, including your own

The four cases share a pattern, and the pattern is the method. Each case solved the same problems in its own way:

	TÖRBEL	THE JAPANESE VILLAGES	ALANYA	THE ZANJERAS
Membrane	Citizens of the village; the alp and forests	Village households; named forests and meadows	The September list; named locations	Shareholders; the canal and its lands
Sense	Each family's own winter hay	Rotating patrols	The fisher at the spot at dawn	Members working side by side
Reflex	Village penalties under the articles	Graduated fines, confiscation, exclusion last	Community pressure first	Penalties for missed work
Repair	Village assembly	Village officials	Local settlement, written rules	The society's own meeting
Proportion	Cows limited by private hay	Work and watch in turn	Equal chances by rotation	Labour in proportion to shares

The useful question is never *which of these should we copy?* It is *what is our equivalent of the winter hay?* What private, visible thing could limit each person's draw on the shared thing? What is our September list? Who

is standing at the spot at dawn? What would rotation look like here? The answers are local, which is principle 2A, and they are the users' to find, which is principle 3.

The Luminous 100's reading of systems thinking supplies the question to bring to any case, including one's own:

> *Where are the virtuous cycles already alive in this system?*[55]

Each of the four cases is, among other things, an answer to that question asked of a particular place. A leader reading them should come away less with rules than with a sharper eye for the loops already working in the commons in front of them.

The sibling volumes of this lineage read other old arrangements with the same eye: the gift economies in the volume on gift and reciprocity, and the long-lived, purpose-held firms in the volume on patient capital.

The rule about the cows and the hay is five hundred years old, give or take a generation. Every February since, someone in Törbel has walked into a barn and looked at what was left.



The Tool: The Case Reading Card

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The Tool: The Case Reading Card

A forty-five-minute exercise for reading any commons case, a historical one, a colleague's, or your own. Use it when you are tempted to copy an arrangement that worked somewhere else, and before you write a charter. Fill one card per case.

Part A · The resource (10 minutes).

What is shared?

Netting's five questions: Is the value per unit low or high? Is use frequent or occasional, dependable or not? Is there room to improve it? Does it need a large area or a large group to use well? Does it need investment that only a group can make? (A resource that answers *low, occasional, little, yes, yes* is a natural commons; one that answers the opposite may be better divided.)

Does the resource move or change through the year (like Alanya's fish), or stay put (like Törbel's alp)?

Part B · The four solutions (15 minutes). For the case, write how it solves each:

PROBLEM	HOW THIS CASE SOLVES IT	OUR EQUIVALENT, IF ANY
Membrane: who is in, what is included, where is the door?		
Sense: who notices overuse, at what cost, how fast?		
Reflex: what is the first response, and what follows?		
Repair: where are disputes settled, how fast?		
Proportion: what limits each person's draw, and what does each give back?		
Learning: how are rules changed, and by whom?		

Part C · What the case cannot show (10 minutes). Write at least three sentences:

- Why might this case have survived for reasons other than its rules? (Size, stability, culture, selection.)
- Who did the arrangement exclude, and what did that cost them?
- What is the evidence: a study, a summary of a study, a story, a memory?

Part D · The translation (10 minutes). Complete these sentences:

Our equivalent of the winter hay (a private, visible limit on each person's draw) is

Our equivalent of the September list (who is in this season) is

Our equivalent of the fisher at dawn (the person most interested in noticing) is

The one thing from this case we will try, at the smallest scale, for four weeks, is

Keep the cards with the charter. Chapter 8 uses them in its third week.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Field Manual



The Field Manual

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER EIGHT

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)

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER EIGHT

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

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER EIGHT

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.

CHAPTER NINE

Counting What the Commons Holds



Counting What the Commons Holds

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER NINE

Three questions, not one

Every leader who has governed a commons for a quarter is asked the same question by someone above them: *did it work?* The question sounds simple and is not. A commons has at least three things that can be measured, and they can move in different directions. The resource can recover while the relationships that keep it are fraying. The relationships can deepen while the resource, for reasons nobody controls, declines. And both can look healthy on a sheet while the loops that would catch the next problem have quietly stopped turning.

So this chapter asks three questions instead of one. Is the resource in better condition? Is it being used well? And are the loops working? The first two are what most people measure, if they measure at all. The third is what this book has argued keeps a commons alive, and it is the one most often left uncounted.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* is unsparing about what happens when an economy counts the wrong things. Of the most famous measure of all, it says:

> *The metric that drives global economic policy literally cannot distinguish between activity that generates genuine prosperity and activity that destroys it.*[61]

A commons can be measured into the same blindness. The claim of this chapter is this: measure the resource, the use and the loops together, read them against a baseline honestly taken, and treat every number as a question for the regular meeting rather than a verdict from above.

The first question: the resource

The condition of the resource is the measure that matters most and is often the hardest to see. For a pasture, it is the grass. For a fishery, the fish, which cannot be counted directly and must be estimated. For a team's commons, it is usually something with a body attached.

In the composite consultancy of Chapter 8, the resource is the bench of eight specialists, and its condition is the condition of the people on it. The obvious measure is hours worked; the more telling one is evenings worked, because evenings are where an overdrawn commons shows first, the way a falling water table showed first in the salt creeping into Ostrom's Los Angeles wells. A third is departures: two of the eight had left in a year. A departure is the commons' equivalent of a collapsed stock, and it is a lagging measure, arriving long after the damage.

For other commons the choice is similar. A shared budget's condition is its balance against its period, and the size and frequency of emergency top-ups. A knowledge base's condition is the share of its pages that are current, which can be estimated by sampling twenty pages a month and asking someone who knows whether each is still true. A meeting calendar's condition is the share of the working week left free for fo-

cused work. A household's joint account's condition is the balance at the low point of the month, and how often it touches zero.

Two finer points. First, choose at least one leading measure, which moves before damage is done, and one lagging measure, which confirms it. Evenings worked lead; departures lag. Second, prefer measures the users themselves can see and gather in the ordinary course of work. Chapter 4 called this monitoring as a by-product, and it matters as much for measurement as for governance: a measure gathered by an outsider, for an outsider, is the outside rule in numerical form.

The second question: use

Use is about how the resource is drawn on, by whom, and whether the drawing matches the rules the users agreed.

In the composite, the use measures are the share of each team's allocation drawn in a fortnight, the use of the reserve, and the share of requests met within a fortnight. In a shared budget, they are spending by group against allocation. In a household, they are the categories of spending each person draws on without asking, against what was agreed.

The finer point here is distribution. An average can hide a commons in trouble. If eleven teams draw within their allocation and one draws twice its share, the average looks tolerable while the twelfth team is behaving as Hardin's herdsman. Record use by user, not only in total, and look at the spread. The question principle 2B asks is whether what each takes bears a sensible relation to what each gives, and that question can only be answered person by person, or team by team.



The third question: the loops

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The third question: the loops

This is the measure this book adds to the ordinary practice, and it follows directly from Chapter 4. If a commons lives by four loops, each loop can be timed and counted.

The sense loop: delay. How long, on average, between overuse and someone accountable to the users knowing about it? Before the composite built its shared view, the answer was weeks; after, a day. This is the single most useful number a commons can keep, because every other loop waits on it. Measure it by taking each breach in the period and asking when it happened and when it was first noticed.

The reflex loop: the share settled at the first rung. Of all the breaches of the ladder in the period, what share were settled by a private word, rung one, without going further? A healthy commons settles most at the first rung. A share that falls over time means either that the first word is not being said, or that it is not being heard. A share of one hundred per cent with very few breaches may mean the commons is healthy, or that nobody is noticing; the delay measure tells the two apart.

The repair loop: days to settle. Of the disputes raised in the period, how long from raised to settled, and how many went around the agreed place (to a manager, a sponsor, a lawyer, or simply into silence)? Valencia's answer to the first is a week at most. The second number, disputes that went around, is the more important: each is a sign that the repair loop is not trusted.

The learning loop: rule changes. How many rules did the users change in the period, and who proposed them? A commons that has changed no rule in a year is either perfectly adapted or no longer listening. A commons whose rule changes all come from one person is not practising principle 3, whatever the charter says.

The door: entry. How many people joined the commons in the period, by what route, and how long did it take? A boundary that nobody has crossed in a year is, in practice, a wall.

None of these loop measures needs special software. Each can be kept by the keeper of the record in a few minutes a week, from the notes of the regular meeting. Together they form a picture that no measure of the resource alone can give: not whether the commons is well, but whether it can tell when it is not.

The Luminous 100's reading of the Balanced Scorecard asks the question these measures exist to answer, among others:

> *What processes are most alive?*[62]



Trust, read honestly

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Trust, read honestly

Behind all the loops is trust, which Chapter 6 named as the triad of trust, reciprocity and reputation in Ostrom's account. A leader will want to measure it, and should, with care.

The simplest honest measure is a short question asked of every user at the start and at the end of the quarter, answered anonymously on a scale of one to five: *I expect the others who share this resource to take their fair share and no more.* A second: *If I raised a concern about how this resource is used, it would be heard fairly.* The answers are not a measurement of trust in any strict sense; they are a measurement of what people are will-

ing to report about it, at that moment, to that asker. They are still worth having, because their direction over time, read alongside the loops, says something the loops cannot.

Two cautions. First, with small groups, the numbers are small. Twenty users answering on a five-point scale will produce movements that can come from two people changing their minds; read them as conversation starters, not results. Second, the act of asking changes what is asked about. A group that is surveyed on trust every week will begin to perform it.

The better evidence of trust is behavioural, and it is already in the loop measures. People who trust a commons bring disputes to it rather than around it. They say the first word rather than saving it up. They propose rule changes. They join through the door rather than calling the sponsor. A commons in which all four are happening is trusted, whatever the survey says.

Baselines and the selection trap

A measure means nothing without a baseline, and the baseline must be taken before the change, not reconstructed after it.

The thirteen-week sequence in Chapter 8 takes its baseline from the three weeks before Week 2, before any rule is introduced. That timing matters, because the first change in the sequence, the shared view, is itself an intervention. People who can see their own use change it. The baseline should therefore be gathered, where possible, from records that existed before the shared view: emails, calendars, invoices, recollection checked against documents. A baseline built from the first week of a new dashboard measures a commons that has already started to change.

The second trap is selection, and it is the same trap Chapter 7 found in Ostrom's own evidence. A leader tends to choose for governing the commons that is most visibly in trouble. Such commons often improve somewhat in any case, because things at their worst tend to drift back toward the ordinary; statisticians call it regression to the mean. A commons chosen for its crisis that improves after thirteen weeks may have improved because of the governing, or because the crisis was unusual. The honest response is not to stop measuring but to say so, and where possible to compare with a similar commons that was not yet governed. In the composite, the meeting rooms, which were overrun but not yet under a charter, provide that comparison for the first quarter.



When the measure becomes the target

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When the measure becomes the target

In 1975 the economist Charles Goodhart observed that statistical regularities tend to break down once they are used for control. The anthropologist Marilyn Strathern later gave the idea the short form most people now quote: when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure.[63] Every commons that begins measuring itself meets this sooner or later.

In the composite, the danger is plain. If teams are judged by whether they stay within their allocation, some will stop asking for specialist help they need, and client work will suffer while the measure looks per-

fect. If the specialists are judged by evenings worked, some will work from home at night and not log it. The measure stays green; the commons does not.

The defence is in the design of the measures and in where they go. Keep several, so that gaming one shows in another: evenings worked alongside requests met, allocation used alongside client outcomes. Let the measures go first to the users, at the regular meeting, as questions about their own commons, and only then, in summary, to the sponsor. And never attach a reward or a penalty to a single loop measure. The moment the share of breaches settled at the first rung becomes a target, breaches will stop being recorded.

There is a sharper version of the same lesson in a study every reader who designs a sanction should know. In 2000, Uri Gneezy and Aldo Rustichini reported a field experiment in Israeli day-care centres.[64] Parents sometimes arrived late to collect their children. In some centres a small fine for late collection was introduced. Late collections did not fall. They rose, and when the fine was removed they stayed at the higher level. The authors' title gives their reading: *a fine is a price*. Before the fine, lateness was a breach of an informal obligation to the teachers; after it, lateness was a service that could be bought. The fine had replaced a norm with a transaction, and the norm did not come back.

It is one study, in one country, of one kind of obligation. It does not show that sanctions always backfire. But it shows why the ladder in Chapter 5 begins with a word rather than a charge, and why the measures in this chapter should be read for what they say about the relationship, not only about the resource. A commons that starts to price its breaches may find it has sold its norms.

Many methods, one question

Ostrom's own last major book on method, written with Amy Poteete and Marco Janssen and published in 2010 as *Working Together*, argued that the commons cannot be understood by any single method.[65] Case studies show mechanisms and context; large comparisons show patterns but miss mechanisms; experiments isolate causes but strip away the setting; models make assumptions explicit but rest on them. The authors' recommendation was to combine methods, and to let each correct the blind spots of the others.

A leader governing a small commons can follow the same advice at small scale. Keep the numbers on the health sheet. Keep the keeper's notes of the regular meeting, which are a case study written as it happens. Ask the users, once a quarter, for one sentence each on what has changed. And when a number moves, ask at the Thursday meeting why, before concluding anything. A number that agrees with the story the users tell is worth believing. A number that disagrees with it is worth a conversation.



Reading results without fooling yourself

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER NINE

Reading results without fooling yourself

At the end of a quarter, the keeper and the convenor sit down with the health sheet. Five rules help them read it honestly.

First, say the denominator. Every figure on the sheet should state what it counted and what it did not: *nine evenings a week across the bench, from logged hours; evenings not logged are not counted.*

Second, a missing figure is not a zero. If the loop measures could not be gathered for three weeks because the keeper was away, the sheet says so; it does not fill the gap with the average.

Third, look for the measure that disagrees. If use is within allocation, the resource is recovering, and the loops are turning, but one specialist is still working four evenings a week, that one figure is the most important line on the sheet.

Fourth, distinguish a gate from a break. A rising number of rung-one conversations in the first month is usually good news: the sense loop is working and people are saying the first word. Read in isolation it can look like a commons in trouble.

Fifth, write down what the measures cannot show. The quality of a relationship, the specialist who stopped looking for another job, the project lead who began documenting her team's requests without being asked: none of these is on the sheet, and all of them belong in the review.

Santa Anna's book names the cost of the alternative, the vigilance of a person who must defend their own share alone, in words that apply to a team as much as to a household:

> *It forces each individual nervous system into a state of chronic vigilance that is metabolically expensive and psychologically exhausting.*[66]

A health sheet that never measures that vigilance has missed what the commons was for.

The sibling volume on ecological economics makes the same argument about national measures, and the volume on regenerative economics about firms' own accounts: count what keeps the system alive, not only what it produces.

A shepherd does not count the grass blade by blade. He walks the pasture in the evening and knows.

The Tool: The Commons Health Sheet

A one-page sheet kept by the keeper of the record, filled in at the baseline (before any change) and then every four weeks. Each line states what was counted and what was not.

The commons: Period: to Keeper:

Part A · The resource (condition).

MEASURE	LEADING OR LAGGING?	BASELINE	THIS PERIOD	WHAT IT COUNTS, AND WHAT IT DOES NOT
_____ (e.g. evenings worked per week)	Leading			
_____ (e.g. departures, emergency top-ups)	Lagging			
_____				

Part B · Use (by user, not only in total).

USER OR TEAM	ALLOCATION	DRAWN	GIVEN BACK (MAINTENANCE, DOCUMENTATION, OTHER)	NOTE

Spread: the highest draw against allocation is ; the lowest is .

Part C · The loops.

LOOP	MEASURE	BASELINE	THIS PERIOD
Sense	Average days from overuse to someone accountable knowing		
Reflex	Breaches this period; share settled at rung one		
Repair	Disputes raised; average days to settle; number that went around the agreed place		
Learning	Rule changes this period; who proposed them		
Door	People who joined; by what route; days taken		

Part D · Trust (start and end of each quarter only). Anonymous, one to five, with the number of people answering: *I expect the others to take their fair share and no more:* (n = ___). *A concern I raised would be heard fairly:* (n = ___).

Part E · The honest reading (written, five sentences).

The measure that disagrees with the others is

What changed for reasons other than our governing (season, a new client, a departure, regression from a crisis) may be

A figure that is missing, and why:

What the sheet cannot show, that the users told us:

The question we take to the next regular meeting is

Rule for the sheet: no reward or penalty is attached to any single line of it.

A note on method

The composite consultancy is the one followed in Chapter 8; its figures were set for illustration. The trust questions are this book's suggestion and have not been validated as a scale.

CHAPTER TEN

The Hard Conversations



The Hard Conversations

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TEN

Why the conversations are the work

Every commons in this book was governed by people talking. The herdsmen at Lloyd's gate, the farmers before the cathedral door in Valencia, the fishers of Alanya drawing lots each September: the institutions they built were, in the end, agreements reached in conversation and kept in conversation. A leader who wants to govern a commons inside an organisation will find the same. The charter, the ladder and the health sheet are written down after people have agreed. Getting them to agree is a series of conversations, and a few of those are hard.

This chapter takes six of them: with a board, with finance or head office, with a union or works council, with business partners, with family, and with the sceptic who has read Hardin. For each it sets out the worry the other person brings, what is true in it, and a script. The scripts are written to be read aloud and then put away. Nobody should recite them. Their job is to give a leader a first sentence and an order of ideas when the conversation arrives, which is usually before the leader feels ready.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* gives the reason these conversations cannot be skipped:

> *People comply more willingly with rules they helped create.*[67]

The claim of this chapter is this: every hard conversation about a commons is easier when it begins with what is true in the other person's worry, shows them what they can already see, and offers them a role in the rule rather than a rule to accept. Each script below follows that order.



A word on posture

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TEN

A word on posture

The Luminous 100's reading of Crucial Conversations names the condition every hard conversation needs before technique matters: a relational field that holds more than one point of view at once without collapsing into the narrowest one present. In practice that comes down to three habits.

The first is to speak about the resource, not the person. "The bench worked nine evenings last week" is a fact the other person can look at with you. "Your team takes too much" is an accusation they must defend against.

The second is to bring something they can see. A shared view, a health sheet, a single number with its source, turns an argument about impressions into a conversation about evidence. Most hard conversations about a commons are hard because each side is describing a different part of something nobody has seen whole.

The third is to ask before proposing. The Luminous 100's reading of Nonviolent Communication supplies the question that does the most work in all six conversations:

> *what is the living system between us — our team, our family, our community — needing that neither of us is providing?*[68]

Asked sincerely, it moves the conversation from who is to blame to what the shared thing needs.

With a board

The worry. A board's job is to protect the organisation and its owners. A director hearing that a leader wants to hand the governance of a shared resource to its users will worry about three things: loss of control, loss of accountability ("who is responsible if it goes wrong?"), and a fashionable idea taking management time from the business.

What is true in it. All three are fair. Self-governance without accountability is not what Ostrom described; every one of her principles has someone accountable for something. The board does need to know who is responsible. And an initiative that cannot show a result in a quarter should not take a board's attention.

The script.

> *"I would like ten minutes on one shared resource that is costing us more than it should, and on how I propose to govern it. The resource is [the specialist bench]. Here is what it is costing now: [two people left in a year; nine evenings a week of overwork; about half of requests met within a fortnight]. These figures come from [source], and I can show the detail. The usual answers are a policy from the top or a charge-back system. We have tried the first twice. The evidence from research on shared resources, the work for which Elinor Ostrom shared the Nobel memorial prize in 2009, is that resources like this are often governed best by the people who use them, inside limits set from above. So I am asking the board to do three things. Approve the outcome I propose to hold the users to: [the total load and the overwork limit]. Note that I, as sponsor, remain accountable to you for that outcome. And allow the users to design the method for one quarter. At the end of the quarter I will bring back a one-page health sheet: the condition of the resource, how it was used, and whether the arrangements for catching problems are working. If the outcome is not met, the board can decide what happens next."*

The finer point. The script separates outcome from method and keeps the leader accountable for the outcome. That is principle 7 in a boardroom: the board does not lose control of what matters to it; it declines to control what does not. A director who still objects is usually objecting to the method being outside their sight, and the answer is the health sheet, not a defence of self-governance.



With finance or head office

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TEN

With finance or head office

The worry. Finance owns the numbers and is held responsible when they go wrong. Its worry is that a budget divided among users who set their own rules will leak; that each team will spend to its allocation whether it needs to or not; and that finance will be blamed for an overrun it no longer controls.

What is true in it. An allocation can become an entitlement. Teams that fear losing next year's share will spend this year's, and a commons governed carelessly can be more wasteful than one held centrally. Finance also carries obligations, to auditors and regulators, that no team can take over.

The script.

> *"I would like to change how we govern [the cloud budget], and I want to do it with you rather than around you. At the moment nobody owns it, and you are left with the quarterly email and the freeze. Neither works for long, and both put you in the position of the person who says no. What I propose is this. You set the ceiling and the reporting you need; those do not change. Inside the ceiling, the six teams divide the budget among themselves, see their own spending daily, and agree how they will respond when one of them overruns. A small reserve stays unallocated for experiments and surprises. Two things protect you. First, an unspent allocation does not reduce next quarter's share, so nobody spends to protect a number. Second, you see the same daily view the teams see, and you are invited to the fifteen-minute review each week if you want to be. What would you need to see after a quarter to be comfortable with this?"*

The finer point. The script answers finance's real fear, the spend-it-or-lose-it habit, with a rule that removes the incentive. It gives finance the same information as the users, so that finance is not monitoring from outside but sees what the commons sees. And it ends by asking finance to set its own test, which turns a sceptic into a co-designer of the health sheet.



With a union or works council

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TEN

With a union or works council

The worry. Where employees are represented, any new arrangement touching how work is shared, allocated or monitored raises fair questions. Is this a way to intensify work under a friendlier name? Will the "monitoring" in the principles be used to discipline people? Who decided that this was a matter for the team rather than for collective agreement? Does the ladder of sanctions bypass agreed disciplinary procedures?

What is true in it. Monitoring can become surveillance, as Chapter 3 discussed. Sanctions designed by peers can fall harder on some than others. And an arrangement that gives teams discretion over a resource

can, if poorly designed, become a way of shifting management's problems onto workers. Representatives are right to ask.

The script.

> *"Before we change anything about how [the specialist bench's] time is shared, I want you to see what we have in mind and to have a say in it. The problem we are trying to fix is overwork: [nine evenings a week across eight people; two departures in a year]. The aim is to reduce it, and the measure we will be held to includes evenings worked. Three things we propose, and I would like your view on each. First, a shared view of how the bench's hours are used, by team, not by person. Its purpose is to show where demand comes from, not to watch individuals. Second, the specialists and the project leads agree together how the time is divided and what happens when a team asks for more than its share. The responses are about the team's requests, not about any employee's conduct. Nothing in this replaces the disciplinary procedure we have agreed with you, and we would like that written into the arrangement. Third, the specialists have an equal voice in changing the rules, and any rule can be raised for change at the weekly review. Would you be willing to look at the draft before it goes to the team, and to tell us what you would change?"*

The finer point. The script draws a clear line between the commons' ladder, which governs the use of a shared resource by teams, and the employment relationship, which is governed by agreement. It names the purpose of the monitoring and limits it to what that purpose needs. And it invites the representatives into principle 3 before the rules exist, rather than consulting them afterwards. Santa Anna's book gives the test such monitoring has to pass: observation that is

> *transparent, community-embedded*[67]

and not surveillance.

With business partners

The worry. Partners in a small firm, co-founders, the owners of a practice, share commons more intimate than any budget: each other's time, the firm's reputation, its cash, its best clients. A conversation about governing those is hard because it can sound like an accusation. "We should agree how we draw on the firm's cash" is easily heard as "you have been taking too much."

What is true in it. Sometimes one partner has been taking too much. More often each has a different, unspoken idea of what is fair, and the commons has drifted into an open-access arrangement in which each is quietly keeping score.

The script.

> *"I want to raise something that is not a complaint about either of us, and I would like us to decide it together. We share a few things that nobody owns: the cash in the business account, the time of [our one associate], the firm's name with [our two largest clients], and each other's evenings. At the moment we have no agreement about any of them except goodwill, and goodwill is doing a lot of work. I would like us to write one page. What each of us can draw without asking. What we each put back in. How we will tell each other early when one of us needs more, and what happens if we disagree. I will go first on what I think I have been drawing, and what I think I put back. Then you, and then we see where the differences are."*

The finer point. The leader goes first, naming their own use before anyone else's. That is the graduated response's first rung turned on oneself, and it makes the other person's honesty safer. The page that results is the One-Page Commons Charter from Chapter 6 at the scale of two people. The sibling volume on employee ownership takes up the larger version of the same question, when the partners are the whole workforce.



With family

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TEN

With family

The worry. In a family, the hardest commons are rarely money alone. They are a parent's time and care, the house where everyone grew up, the holiday home three siblings inherited, the attention of the one adult child who lives nearby. The worry a family brings to a conversation about governing these is that writing anything down will turn love into contract. "We don't need rules; we're family."

What is true in it. A family is not a firm, and a family that governs itself like one has lost something. Rules can harden relationships that were held by care. And some families do share well without a word written.

The script.

> *"I love how we look after [Mum / the cottage / each other], and I want it to stay easy. That is why I want to suggest something. At the moment it works because we are all being generous. But [I live closest and do most of the visits / two of us use the cottage most summers and one of us pays most of the repairs], and I can feel it starting to sit in me, and I would rather say so now than in five years. Could we spend an hour together, once, and agree a few things? Who does what. What each of us puts in. How we tell each other if it starts to feel uneven. And when we look at it again. It is not a contract. It is a way of making sure none of us has to keep quiet to keep the peace."*

The finer point. The script names the speaker's own feeling, plainly and once, and frames the agreement as protecting the relationship, not policing it. Santa Anna's book says what a well-held family commons offers its members, in its account of the nervous system's response to shared provision:

> *This is not dependency — it is interdependence*[69]

Chapter 11 takes the household commons further, with a charter written for a kitchen table.



With the sceptic who has read Hardin

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TEN

With the sceptic who has read Hardin

The worry. In every organisation there is a person who, on hearing the word *commons*, says: "Tragedy of the commons. Shared things get wrecked. Give each team its own budget, charge for everything, and let people be responsible for their own." Sometimes the person is senior. Often they are clever, and well read.

What is true in it. Hardin is right about open access. A shared resource with no boundary, no rules and nobody watching will often be overdrawn, as Chapter 2 set out. And privatising a commons, dividing it into separately owned pieces, sometimes does work: where a resource can be divided without losing its value, as Netting observed of Törbel's vineyards in Chapter 7, private holding may be the better arrangement.

The script.

> *"You're right about the open version, and that is what we have now: nobody owns [the bench], nobody watches it, and it is being overdrawn exactly as Hardin would predict. Where I part from him is on the cure. Hardin thought the only choices were to divide it up or to have someone above control it. Elinor Ostrom spent thirty years studying shared resources that people had governed themselves, some for centuries, and found a third option that often works better when the resource cannot be sensibly divided. And I don't think the bench can be. If each team owned an eighth of a specialist, nobody would get the specialist who knows the thing they need, and the eight specialists would stop learning from each other. So the test I'd suggest is practical. Can this resource be divided without losing what makes it valuable? If yes, divide it, and I'll help. If not, let's try the governed version for a quarter and measure it. Would you be one of the people who reads the health sheet at the end?"*

The finer point. The script agrees with the sceptic first, about something that is true, then names the precise point of disagreement, and ends by offering the sceptic a role in the test. Santa Anna's book describes the third option the sceptic has not considered as

> *neither the privatization solution of the right nor the regulation solution of the left.*[67]

A sceptic invited to read the evidence is usually a more careful reader than an enthusiast, and a commons is better for having one at the Thursday meeting.

When the conversation goes badly

Some of these conversations will go badly. A director will refuse; a partner will hear an accusation; a sibling will leave the room. A few principles help.

Stop before the conversation becomes a contest. A commons conversation that one side wins has already failed, because the loser will not keep the rule. Say what you heard, say you would like to come back to it, and set a time.

Return with the evidence, not the argument. The shared view, the health sheet and the single figure with its source do the persuading that more words cannot.

Offer a smaller scale. A board that will not approve a quarter may approve a month. A family that will not write a page may agree a single question to ask each other each season.

And accept the answer when it is genuinely no. Principle 3 cuts both ways. A group that declines to govern a commons in the way a leader proposes is exercising the very right this book is about. The Luminous 100's reading of Stakeholder Mapping replaces the strategist's question with a better one:

> *What gifts does each stakeholder carry that our initiative needs?*[70]

Sometimes the gift is the refusal, and what it teaches about the design.

The sibling volume on markets embedded in society reads Albert Hirschman's choice between exit and voice, which is what each of these conversations offers in miniature: a way for someone unhappy with a shared arrangement to speak rather than leave.

At Lloyd's pasture gate the herdsmen are talking, and not all of them agree. That is what the gate is for.



The Tool: The Conversation Cards

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TEN

The Tool: The Conversation Cards

Six cards, one for each conversation. Copy each onto an index card, fill in the blanks before the conversation, and keep it in a pocket. Do not read it aloud.

Every card has the same five lines.

What is true in their worry:

What they can already see (bring it): (a figure, its source, a shared view)

What I am asking for: (an outcome to approve, a role, an hour)

What stays theirs: (their control, their procedure, their veto, their relationship)

The question I will ask before proposing anything:

Card 1 · The board. Outcome I will be held to: . Method I am asking them to leave to the users for one quarter: . What I will bring back: the health sheet, on .

Card 2 · Finance or head office. Ceiling and reporting they keep: . Rule that removes spend-it-or-lose-it: . Their test after a quarter (ask them): .

Card 3 · The union or works council. What the monitoring is for, and what it is not for: . The line between the commons' ladder and the agreed disciplinary procedure: . The draft they will see before the team does: .

Card 4 · Partners. What I think I draw: . What I think I put back: . The page we will write together: .

Card 5 · Family. The feeling I will name, once: . What the agreement protects: . The one hour, and when: .

Card 6 · The sceptic. What Hardin got right about our resource: . Can it be divided without losing its value? . The role I will offer them in the test: .

After any card is used, write one line in the keeper's record: what was agreed, what was not, and when you will return.

A note on method

The scripts are this book's suggestions, not tested protocols. Where employees are represented, the law and the collective agreements of the jurisdiction govern what must be consulted on and how; a leader should take that advice before acting.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Household Commons



The Household Commons

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER ELEVEN

The first commons anyone governs

Before most people govern a budget at work, they have governed a fridge. A shared flat at twenty, a marriage at thirty, a family car, a joint account, a parent's care in later life, a house that three siblings inherit: each of these is a commons in Ostrom's precise sense. More than one person draws on it. It can be overdrawn. And the cost of overuse falls, sooner or later, on everyone who shares it.

Households are also where the commons is hardest to name, because naming it can feel like a breach of the love it rests on. Nobody wants to be the person who suggests rules for the kitchen. So household commons are often run as open access with goodwill: anyone takes what they need, nobody watches, and nothing happens on overdraw until something happens all at once, usually late at night.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* describes what that arrangement costs the body of each person inside it. It names the feeling at the root of most money quarrels:

> *the possibility that there won't be enough, that you'll fall behind, that the ground beneath your financial life could give way.*[71]

It also says, carefully, what it is not claiming:

> *People living in genuine material deprivation need material resources, not consciousness shifts.*[72]

This chapter honours both sentences. It is not financial advice and it does not tell anyone how to invest or what to buy. It is about the arrangements by which people who share money, time and property look after what they share. The claim is this: a household commons is governed well by the same loops as any other, made smaller, gentler and more frequent; and the gentleness is the design, not a softening of it.

The joint account

The commonest household commons is a shared account. Two or more people pay into it and draw from it; its condition is its balance; its overuse shows at the low point of the month.

A composite, built for teaching, with every figure set for illustration. Two partners, Ana and Sam, have one joint account into which both salaries are paid. Ana earns somewhat more; Sam works fewer paid hours and does more of the unpaid work of the house. Neither has ever said what each may spend without asking. Both are careful, and both have, privately, begun to keep score: Ana of Sam's spending on a hobby, Sam of Ana's on clothes. Twice in the past year the account has touched zero in the last week of the month, and both times the conversation has happened at eleven at night, with a bank notification as the opening line.

Read against the principles, the account has no boundary on what each person can draw (1B), no sense loop except the bank's own alarm (4), no first response short of a quarrel (5), and no place to settle a disagreement except the moment of discovery (6). Nobody has ever proposed a rule, so nobody has ever changed one (3). It is Gordon's fishery for two.

What Ana and Sam do, over a month:

The membrane. They agree what the joint account is for: the household's shared costs, a buffer for the shared future, and an amount each month that each of them may spend on anything at all, without asking or explaining. The last is the most important line. It gives each a private boundary inside the shared one, which removes most of the reasons to keep score.

The proportion. They talk, for the first time, about what each puts in. Ana's salary is larger; Sam's unpaid hours are larger. They decide that what each puts in is the sum of both, and that their personal amounts will be equal. Another couple might decide differently; principle 2A says the rule must fit the household, and principle 3 says the household decides.

The sense loop. Every Sunday morning, for fifteen minutes, with coffee, they look at the account together. The delay between overspending and both of them knowing falls from a month to a week, and the knowledge arrives at a calm hour rather than by alarm.

The reflex. They agree the first response to an overspend is a question, asked on Sunday, not a reproach, asked at once: *the account's lower than we thought; do you know why?* Usually the answer is ordinary.

The repair. They agree that money disagreements belong to Sunday morning, not to the moment of discovery. If one of them notices something midweek, they write it down and bring it to Sunday.

The learning. They agree to look at the arrangement itself every three months and change what no longer fits.

After three months, in the composite, the account has not touched zero, and neither of them is keeping score. The figures are illustrative. What changed is not that either became more careful. It is that neither had to guard.

That last point is the one Santa Anna's book makes about the commons in general, and it is truer of a marriage than of a pasture: where shared things are well kept,

> *The body relaxes into the felt sense of being held by something larger than the individual.*[73]

Time and the work nobody counts

The second household commons is time, and with it the work of keeping a house: cooking, cleaning, laundry, appointments, remembering birthdays, noticing that the milk has run out. This work draws on a resource, each person's hours and attention, and it maintains another, the household's daily life.

It is the household version of the documentation commons in Chapter 6: everyone benefits, and the care is used up by those who benefit without contributing. The *zanjera* principle from Chapter 7 applies directly. Those who draw more from the household's daily life should, in some proportion, give more to keeping it. A household where one person does most of the noticing has an unbalanced 2B, whatever the division of the chores on paper.

A simple practice helps. Once, for a week, each adult writes down every piece of household work they do, including the invisible ones: planning, remembering, noticing. At the end of the week, the lists are compared, on a calm evening. Most households find the lists surprise both people, in different directions. The comparison is the sense loop. What the household then decides is its own, which is the point.

Children can join the commons as they grow, and the door in principle 1 matters here: a household that tells a twelve-year-old when they will join the rota, and what they will gain by it, has given them a way in rather than a wall.



The house three siblings inherit

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The house three siblings inherit

The third household commons is the hardest, because it is held by adults who no longer live together and who bring decades of family history to it. A house inherited jointly, a holiday cottage, a family plot of land: these are commons in the strictest sense, governed, usually, by nothing at all until a dispute arrives.

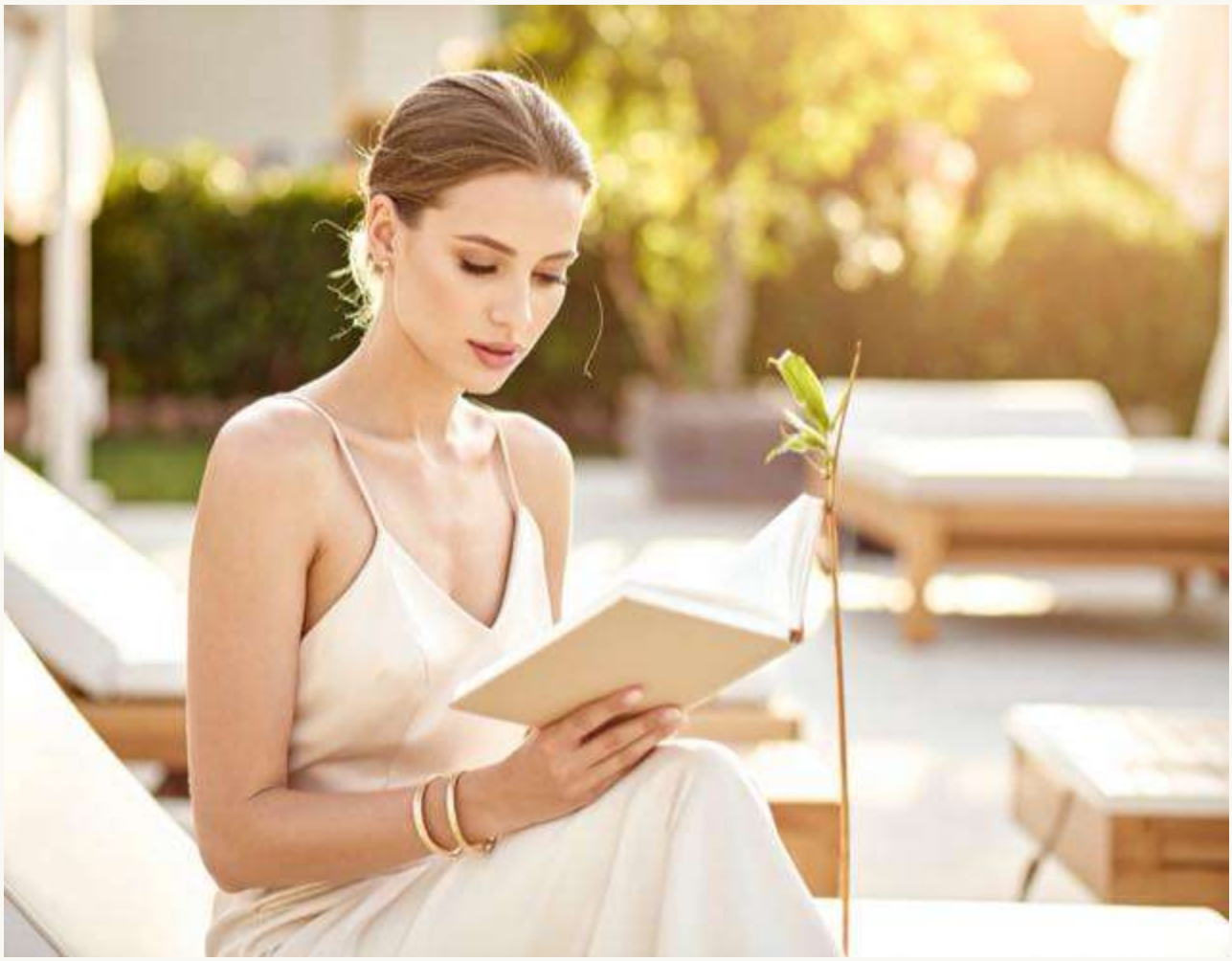
A second composite, built for teaching. Three adult siblings inherit their parents' cottage by the sea. One lives an hour away and uses it most weekends; one lives abroad and comes for two weeks each summer; one

cannot afford the share of repairs and rarely goes. The roof needs replacing. Nobody has agreed how costs are shared, how weeks are allocated, or what happens if one wants to sell.

The cottage is Törbel's alp, and the siblings need Törbel's answer: a rule that ties each person's use to something each holds and can see. The rule they reach, in the composite, has four parts.

First, the calendar: weeks are allocated each January, by rotation, so that every sibling has the best summer weeks in turn over three years, as the Alanya fishers rotated their best spots. Second, the proportion: running costs are shared by weeks used; the roof and other repairs to the fabric, which preserve the asset for all, are shared equally, with the sibling who cannot afford a full share contributing labour or deferring their share against any future sale. Third, the regular meeting: a call every spring, an hour, to settle the calendar, the costs and any disagreement. Fourth, the door and the exit: written terms for how a sibling may sell their share, to whom first, at what valuation method, and how a sibling's children may later join.

The fourth part is the one most families never write, and the one that most often breaks them. It is principle 1 at its sharpest: a boundary needs a door in and a door out. Families that agree the exit while everyone is on good terms rarely need to use it in anger. A lawyer should draw up whatever part of this touches ownership; the siblings' own agreement about use and costs is theirs to write, and works best when it is.



Caring for a parent

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Caring for a parent

The fourth household commons is a parent's care, and it is the one that arrives without warning. An ageing parent needs visits, appointments, help with forms, and company. Usually one adult child lives nearest and does most of it, often without anyone deciding that they should. The others contribute what they can from further away, and often do not know how much the nearest is carrying.

This commons has a resource with a hard limit, the nearest child's time and strength, and an overuse that shows late: exhaustion, resentment, a health crisis in the carer rather than the parent. Every loop matters, but the sense loop matters most. The siblings further away cannot see what is being carried unless someone shows them.

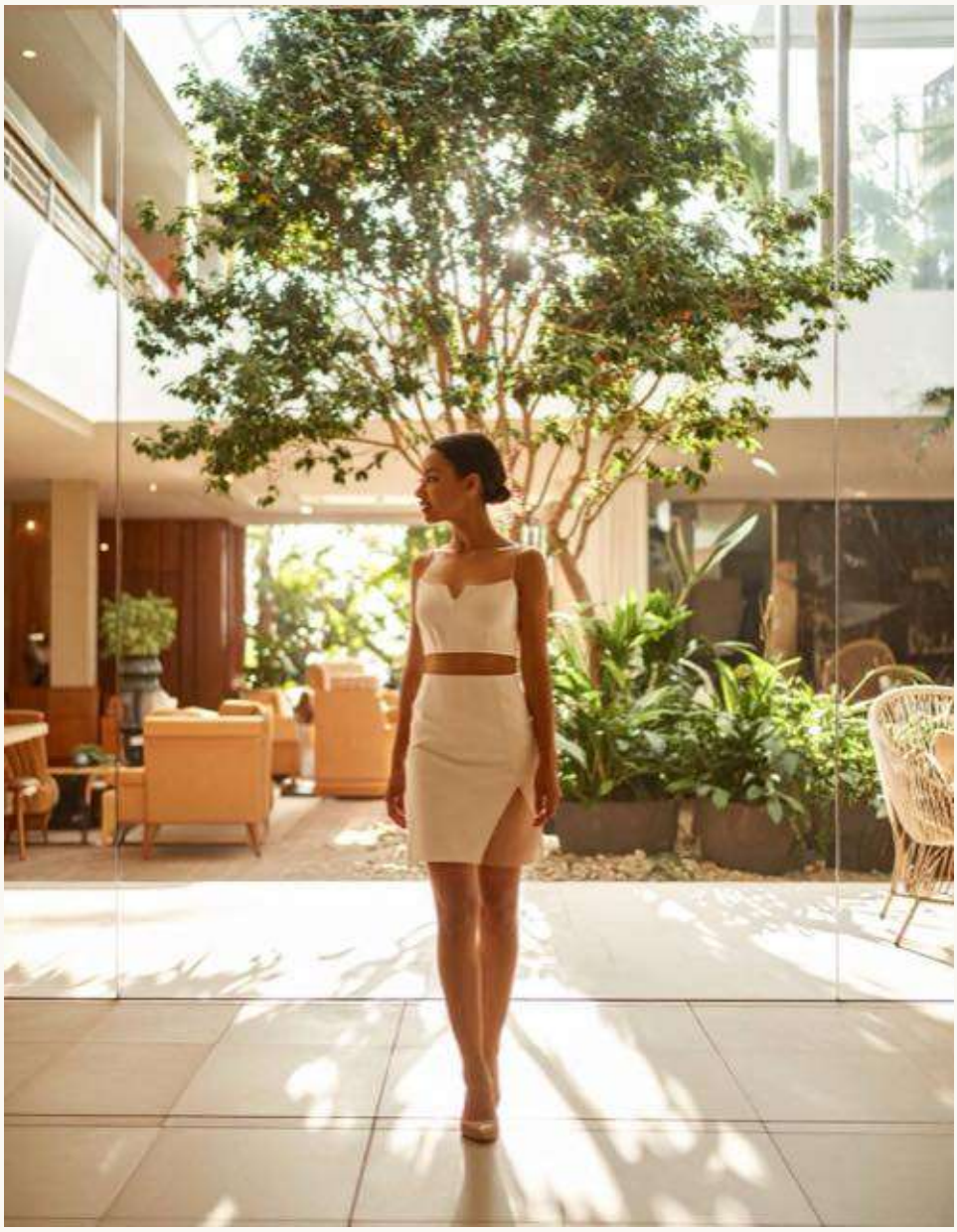
The practice that helps is the simplest version of everything in this book. A shared note, kept by the nearest sibling and visible to all, of what was done each week: two visits, one appointment, the pharmacy,

the forms. A call every fortnight, fifteen minutes, to look at it together. A proportion agreed out loud: if one sibling gives time, another may give money, or take a week in the summer, or do the paperwork from a distance. And a first response to imbalance that is a question, not a grievance: *you've done a lot this month; what would help?*

The Luminous 100's reading of Nonviolent Communication supplies the question that turns this conversation from a reckoning into a shared task:

> *what is the living system between us — our team, our family, our community — needing that neither of us is providing?*[74]

Chapter 10 gives the opening of the conversation; this chapter's charter gives its shape.



Money between friends, and the shared flat

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER ELEVEN

Money between friends, and the shared flat

Two smaller household commons are worth a paragraph each.

Friends who share costs, a holiday, a shared car, a regular dinner, do best with a simple boundary and a short delay: a shared note of who paid for what, settled at the end of each trip or each month, and a rule agreed at the start about what counts as shared. The common failure is not dishonesty; it is the delay, in which small imbalances grow into a feeling that outlasts the trip.

A shared flat is a commons of space, quiet, cleanliness and the fridge. The flats that work tend to have the whole set in miniature: who lives there (and how a new flatmate is chosen), what is shared and what is not, a rota, a weekly or fortnightly look at how it is going, a first response to a breach that is a word rather than a note on the fridge, and a willingness to change the rules when someone's work hours change.

What the household teaches the firm

A leader who has governed a household commons well already knows most of what this book teaches. The membrane with a private boundary inside it. The proportion that counts unpaid work. The Sunday morning, which is Valencia's Thursday. The question before the reproach. The exit written while everyone is on good terms.

Santa Anna's book names the larger thing a well-governed household offers, which is a refusal of the idea that each person must provide everything for themselves:

> *collective provisioning that allows individual nervous systems to rest*[73]

That rest is not idleness. It is the condition in which people in a household have attention left over for each other, because they are not each guarding their share.

The sibling volume on gift and reciprocity reads the household from the other side, as the place where most people first learn to give without counting; the volume on scarcity and abundance asks what *enough* means for a family. Santa Anna's book asks the same question in its reflection exercises, plainly: *What is your relationship to enough?* A household that has governed its commons well can usually answer it more calmly than one that has not.

On Sunday morning the account is open on the table, the coffee is still hot, and nothing in the figures needs discussing. That is the meeting working.



The Tool: The Kitchen-Table Charter

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Tool: The Kitchen-Table Charter

A one-page charter for any household commons: a joint account, the housework, a shared property, a parent's care, a shared flat. Write it together, in an hour, at a calm time. Change it whenever it stops fitting. It is not a legal document; anything touching ownership of property belongs with a lawyer.

THE KITCHEN-TABLE CHARTER OF (who) FOR (what we share) Written on . We will look at it again on .

1 · What we share. In one sentence: What it includes: What it does not:

2 · What each of us may use without asking. (For money: an amount each month. For time: hours or evenings. For a property: weeks.)

3 · What each of us puts in. Including the work nobody counts: Is it in proportion to what each takes? If not, what balances it?

4 · How we look at it together. Day: Time: Length: (fifteen minutes is enough) What we look at:

5 · When one of us goes over. Our first response is a question, at our regular time: " ?" If it happens again: What we never do: raise it at the moment of discovery, in anger, or in front of others.

6 · When we disagree. We bring it to our regular time. If we cannot agree there, we will (wait a week; ask to help; take a walk and come back).

7 · Who joins, and how. (Children, partners, new flatmates, the next generation.) And how someone leaves, and what they take.

8 · What sits above us. (A landlord, a bank, a will, the law.) What it decides: What we decide:

9 · What we will notice in three months if this is working. One observation, not a feeling:

Signed:

Put it somewhere you will see it. Read it aloud the first time you use it. Change it the first time it does not fit.

A note on method

Ana and Sam, and the three siblings and their cottage, are composites built for teaching; every figure and detail in them was set for illustration. Nothing in this chapter is financial, legal or investment advice.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Gate in the Evening



The Gate in the Evening

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWELVE

What Oxford could not see

The pasture in William Forster Lloyd's lecture of 1833 had no gate. It needed none, because nobody in the argument ever spoke to anybody else. Each herdsman decided alone, added his cow, and went home. The ruin of the grass followed from the silence as surely as from the cows.

Every real commons in this book has a gate, or something that does a gate's work. A door before a cathedral in Valencia, where eight farmers sit at noon on Thursday. A list drawn up each September in a Turkish harbour. A barn in Törbel in February, where a household can see how much hay is left. A dashboard that sixty engineers can read the next morning. A table on a Sunday, with the account open and the coffee still hot. In each case the gate is where the people who share something meet, see what has happened to it, and say so to each other. That is the whole difference between Hardin's pasture and Ostrom's. The grass is the same grass. The difference is the talking at the gate.

This last chapter reads the whole book as one living system, sets it beside the other books of the house, says plainly what the book does not show, and ends where it began. Its claim is short: a commons is not kept by its rules but by the loops the rules make possible, and the person who keeps one is less a manager than a gardener, who tends the conditions in which the users govern themselves.

The whole, read as one organism

Chapter 4 read Ostrom's eight principles as the parts of a single organism: a membrane, senses, a reflex, repair, and a nervous system that nests the small loops inside larger ones. Read from the end, the book has the same anatomy, and it is worth seeing it whole.

The first half was the senses. Chapter 2 found the shared things nobody had named, which is the first act of any commons: noticing that it is one. Chapter 3 listened to the critics, which is the senses turned on the idea itself. Chapter 7 read old cases slowly, for the details a list cannot hold. Before anything is changed, something has to be seen, and seen by more than one person.

The middle was the membrane and the reflex. The Commons Charter of Chapter 6 says who is in, what is shared and where the door is. The ladder of Chapter 5 says what happens the first time someone takes too much, and makes that first response a word between peers rather than a charge from above. The field manual of Chapter 8 installs both, in an order the users can carry.

The working chapters were repair and learning. Chapter 10's conversations are how a group settles what it disagrees about before the disagreement hardens, and how the people above it are brought to set an outcome and leave the method alone. Chapter 9's health sheet is the commons sensing itself: not only the condition of the resource, but whether the loops that would catch the next problem are still turning.

And Chapter 11 was the smallest layer of the nesting, the household, where most people first govern anything they share and where the loops are smallest, gentlest and most frequent. A leader who has kept a joint account well on Sunday mornings already knows the shape of a Thursday meeting.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* surveys a range of alternatives to extractive economics, from worker cooperatives to community land trusts, and finds beneath them all something it calls more important than any one of them:

> *a pattern emerges that is more important than any individual strategy*[75]

The first feature of that pattern, in the book's account, is a feedback loop restored. The worker-owner shares in the consequences of a decision; the member of a community farm knows the farmer.

> *In each case, the feedback loop that extractive economics severed has been sutured back together.*[75]

That is what each of the book's three composites has been doing on a small scale. The rota in Chapter 1 had no loop between the weekends worked and the people who benefited from them. The cloud budget had no loop between the server left running and the bill. The consultancy's bench had no loop between a request and its cost to the other eleven teams. In each case the work was not to add a rule but to close the loop, so that the consequence of taking came back, quickly and mildly, to the person who took.



The agreement is part of the equipment

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWELVE

The agreement is part of the equipment

There is a second thing the book has been saying throughout, and it is the one most easily missed by a reader who came for the tools.

In the ordinary view, the resource is the asset and the arrangement for sharing it is overhead: the meeting is a cost, the charter is paperwork, the time spent on Thursday is time not spent on the work. In the reading this book has given, the arrangement is part of the productive equipment, as much as the canal or the dashboard, because it is what lets the resource keep producing. A house essay on Ostrom's work, gathered in the corpus of Luminous Prosperity, puts it in a sentence:

> *When a community agrees on grazing limits, that agreement becomes infrastructure.*[76]

A leader who takes that sentence seriously will treat a fifteen-minute meeting that ends early as a working machine, not an indulgence, and will be as reluctant to cancel it as to switch off a server. A household that takes it seriously will protect its Sunday morning in the same way. The cost of the agreement is small and regular. The cost of its absence is large and arrives all at once, usually late at night.

The same reading explains why the book has kept warning against installing the principles as a template. A template is a machine part: it is made elsewhere and fitted. An agreement is grown by the people who will live under it, and it works because they grew it. Chapter 3's field experiments with forest villagers in rural Colombia, where an outside rule imposed on the players tended to do worse over time than their own conversation, are the clearest warning in the book. The sponsor in Chapter 8 who stays out of the method is not being polite. The sponsor is protecting the part of the equipment that only the users can make.



What the keeper of a commons does

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWELVE

What the keeper of a commons does

If the arrangement is grown rather than fitted, the role of the person who starts it changes. It is less like building and more like tending.

The keeper notices first, and makes what was noticed visible to everyone else. That is the team lead on Monday with three months of swaps in a table. The keeper goes first, naming their own draw on the shared thing before anyone else's, which is the partners' conversation in Chapter 10 and the first rung of the ladder turned on oneself. The keeper holds the gate open: keeps the regular meeting short and real, makes sure

a dispute raised this week is heard this week, and writes the door into every boundary so that a boundary does not become a wall. And the keeper steps back, again and again, from the method, so that the users' own norms have room to work.

None of that is glamorous. Most of it is fifteen minutes on the same day each week. Ostrom's cases suggest it is also what long-lived commons have in common across centuries and cultures that otherwise share nothing: somebody keeps showing up at the gate.

The last paragraph of the house essay on Ostrom begins with three sentences that could serve as the keeper's brief:

> *Build like it's alive. Govern like it breathes. Measure like it matters.*[76]

Beside the other books

This book is one of ten in a series that reads economic life through the same lens, each taking a different organ of the living economy. The commons sits at the centre of several of them.

Ostrom's triad of trust, reciprocity and reputation, which Chapter 6 traced to her presidential address of 1997, runs through *The Channel Keeps It*, which reads the experimental evidence on reciprocity she drew on, and ends at the same irrigation channels on the plain of Valencia where this book spent its Thursday. Principle 2B, the proportion between what each person gives and what each receives, becomes a question about pay in the history of gainsharing. Principle 3, the right of the people who live under the rules to change them, becomes a question about who owns the firm in the volume on employee ownership. The loops of Chapter 4 are read at the scale of a whole economy in the volume on complexity, and the long life of Törbel's winter rule, five centuries and counting, belongs beside *The Long Clock*, which is about the time a company needs. The volumes on ecological economics, regeneration, embedded markets and scarcity take the same reading to the biosphere, to waste, to society and to the question of what *enough* means. All of them grow from Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics*, and all of them are gathered at hautelumiere.life.



What this book does not show

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWELVE

What this book does not show

A book that has asked its readers to write down what each study cannot show owes them the same account of itself.

The principles are drawn from survivors. Ostrom read the commons that lasted and then the ones that failed, and asked what the survivors had that the failures lacked. That is strong evidence of association and weak evidence of cause. The review of ninety-one studies in Chapter 3 found the principles well supported, and the later work found that they matter in combinations rather than one at a time. Neither shows that adopting them will make a particular commons last.

The house's reading is a lens, not a finding. Reading the principles as membrane, senses, reflex and repair is this book's way of making them usable. It fits the evidence, and it converges with Stafford Beer's account of viable systems, built independently, which is some reason to trust it. It is not something Ostrom wrote,

and a reader who finds a different way of seeing the principles that serves their commons better should use it.

The sequence and the scripts are untested as a programme. The thirteen weeks in Chapter 8 are drawn from the principles and the cases, and the scripts in Chapter 10 from the same sources and from ordinary practice. Nobody has run the sequence across a hundred firms and measured the result. The trust questions in Chapter 9 have not been validated as a scale.

Every composite is illustrative. The rota, the cloud budget, the consultancy, Ana and Sam, the three siblings and their cottage were built for teaching. Their figures were set to show a structure, and a real group's figures will differ, sometimes in the wrong direction.

Durable is not the same as fair. The long-lived commons in this book kept people out as well as keeping grass in: the landless in Valencia, the newcomers in the Maine harbours, everyone who was not a citizen of Törbel. The principles answer the question of how a shared thing lasts more directly than the question of whom it serves. That second question is the reader's to keep asking, and Chapter 3's rule, that every boundary needs a written door, is the least the book can offer toward it.

And nothing here is investment, legal or tax advice. Where a commons touches ownership, employment or the law, the lawyer, the collective agreement and the law come first.

There is a phrase from the property scholar Lee Anne Fennell that suits the spirit in which all of this is offered. She called it Ostrom's Law, and its gist is that an arrangement which works in practice can also work in theory.[77] The phrase reverses the usual order of confidence. Ostrom did not begin with a model and ask whether villagers could live up to it. She began with what villagers were already doing and asked what a model would have to look like to explain it. A reader who governs a commons can take the same order: start from the loop that is already working, and build the theory of the arrangement from there.

Where to work it

The chapters of this book are a single argument and can be read in order. The workbook that follows, Chapter 13, gathers every tool in one place, in the order a team or a household is most likely to use them, with a ninety-day plan for a leader and one for a household.

For leaders who would like to work through a commons of their own with someone beside them, from the first inventory to the sponsor's written confirmation at the end of the quarter, Ammanuel Santa Anna works with a small number of them one to one, and the first conversation begins at hautelumiere.life.



The gate

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER TWELVE

The gate

Go back to Lloyd's pasture one last time, and this time walk to the edge of it at the end of the day.

There is a gate there, though the lecture never mentioned it. A man is leaning on it. Another comes up the lane with his cows and stops beside him, and a third a little later. They talk about the weather, and then about the grass, which is thinner by the stream this year. One of them says he will keep two cows back until the rain comes. Another says that is fair, and that he will do the same if it does not. Nobody writes anything down. Tomorrow evening they will be there again, and the grass will be a little better or a little worse, and they will say so.

That is the whole of it. It is one of the oldest economic institutions there are, and it is still the one many organisations and families are missing. A commons is not a field. It is a field with people talking at the gate.

The Tool: The Gate Card

A ten-minute practice for the end of a week, for anyone who keeps a commons: the convenor of a team's charter, the sponsor above several, an adult in a household. It is the loops of Chapter 4 made into five questions. Keep it on a single card per commons, for no more than three commons at once.

The commons: The week ending:

1 · The membrane (2 minutes). Did anyone join, leave, or ask to join this week? Did they find the door, or did they come round it (by asking someone senior, by simply taking)? If round it, write where the door should have been:

2 · The senses (2 minutes). What did the people who share this see about it this week that they could not see a month ago? How long after it happened did they see it? If the honest answer is *nothing* or *weeks*, write the one thing that would make it visible sooner:

3 · The reflex (2 minutes). Was a first word said this week, a private and mild *do you know why?* If not, was that because nothing happened, or because nobody wanted to say it?

4 · The repair (2 minutes). Was any disagreement about this commons raised this week? Was it heard this week, at the agreed place? If it went around the agreed place, to a manager, a parent, or into silence, write where it went:

5 · The learning and the carrier (2 minutes). Is there a rule that no longer fits? Who would propose changing it, and is it always the same person? And the question from Chapter 1: who carried most of the cost of this commons this week, and have they said so?

Once a quarter, lay the thirteen cards side by side. Count the weeks in which each question had a good answer. A commons whose cards show the first word said, disputes heard in the week and a rule changed at least once is alive, whatever else the quarter brought. Take the cards to the next review, with the health sheet from Chapter 9, and read them with the people who share the commons rather than to them.

A note on method

The rota, the cloud-budget firm, the consultancy, Ana and Sam, and the three siblings are composites built for teaching, introduced in Chapters 1, 5, 8 and 11; every figure in them was set for illustration. Nothing in this chapter is financial, legal or investment advice.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Workbook



The Workbook

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER THIRTEEN

How to use this workbook

Each of the first twelve chapters of this book ends with a tool. This chapter gathers all twelve in one place, sets out the order in which a team or a household is most likely to use them, and adds a ninety-day plan for each. The tools are reproduced as they appear in their chapters, so that these pages can be printed and worked from without turning back. Where a tool points to another chapter, that chapter holds the reasoning; the page here holds the practice.

Five rules from the body of the book govern every page that follows. A tool used against any of them is being misused, however carefully it is filled in.

1. Information before instruction. The first change a group sees is something it can look at together, not a new rule (Chapter 8, Week 2). People's own norms begin to work on what they can see.
2. The users hold the pen. The people who draw on a commons write and change its rules; the sponsor above them sets the outcome and leaves the method (Chapters 3, 6 and 8).
3. Every boundary has a door. Whoever draws a line around a shared thing also writes how someone outside comes in, and how someone inside leaves (Chapters 3, 6 and 11).
4. The first response is a word. The ladder begins with a private question between peers, never a charge or a fine, because a fine can turn a norm into a price (Chapters 5 and 9).
5. No reward or penalty hangs on a single number. The health sheet is read first by the users, as questions about their own commons (Chapter 9).

The order and the plans below are this book's recommendation, drawn from Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics*, Ostrom's principles and the cases in Chapters 5 and 7. They have not been tested as a programme. Nothing in this workbook is investment, legal or tax advice; anything that touches the ownership of property or the terms of employment belongs with a lawyer, or with the collective agreement where employees are represented.

The order of the tools

The tools are reproduced below in chapter order; the table gives the order in which most groups use them.

ORDER	TOOL	CHAPTER	WHO	TIME
1	The First Look	1	the leader, alone	10 minutes
2	The Thirteen-Week Plan (commitments)	8	sponsor and convenor	1 hour before Week 1, then 2 minutes each Thursday
3	The Conversation Cards	10	the leader, before each conversation	one card per conversation
4	The Commons Inventory	2		1 hour

ORDER	TOOL	CHAPTER	WHO	TIME
			leader with two or three colleagues, or a household	
5	The Commons Health Sheet (baseline)	9	the keeper of the record	baseline before any change, then every four weeks
6	The Principle Audit	3	leader with at least two users	90 minutes
7	The Case Reading Card	7	anyone tempted to borrow an arrangement	45 minutes a case
8	The Loop Map	4	leader with two or three users	60 minutes
9	The Graduated Response Ladder	5	everyone who shares the resource	45 minutes
10	The One-Page Commons Charter	6	everyone who shares the resource	1 hour
11	The Gate Card	12	whoever keeps the commons	10 minutes a week
12	The Kitchen-Table Charter	11	a household	1 hour, at a calm time

The ninety days, for a leader

The thirteen weeks of Chapter 8 are the ninety days. This plan lays the tools over them, with the decision due at the end of each stretch. The roles are Chapter 8's: sponsor, convenor, keeper of the record, user-monitors and users.

Before day 1 · Commit. Fill in the First Look alone. Then the sponsor and convenor fill in the commitments on the Thirteen-Week Plan: the commons, the five roles, the outcome the sponsor sets, what the sponsor will decide and what the sponsor will not. If a board, finance, a union or works council, or partners need to agree before anything starts, fill a Conversation Card for each and hold those conversations now. Chapter 8 notes that Weeks 6 and 12 tend to need a conversation of their own, so keep the cards to hand. *Decision before day 1:* the sponsor has signed what they will not decide.

Days 1 to 7 · Name the commons and the people (Week 1). Run the Commons Inventory with three or four users from both sides of the resource. Draw its two boundaries: who draws on it, and exactly what it is. Draw the stakeholder map. The keeper starts the baseline on the Commons Health Sheet from records that existed before this week: emails, calendars, invoices, recollection checked against documents. *Decision by day 7:* the resource and its users, in two sentences.

Days 8 to 14 · Measure the delay, then shorten it (Week 2). Ask how long it takes, today, between overuse and someone knowing. Build the smallest shared view the users can all see, updated daily, and add no rule

to it. The keeper finishes the baseline before the view has had time to change behaviour. *Decision by day 14:* what is visible, to whom, and how often.

Days 15 to 21 · Audit with the users (Week 3). Run the Principle Audit with as many users as can come, scoring with evidence from the past three months. Fill a Case Reading Card for any arrangement someone wants to borrow from elsewhere. Draw the Loop Map on the scored audit and find the dotted arrow that would complete the most loops. *Decision by day 21:* the two moves the users choose.

Days 22 to 42 · Design with the users (Weeks 4 to 6). In Week 4, the users draw the boundary, the allocation, the reserve, the door and what each gives back, and the keeper writes the boundary note. In Week 5, the users write the Graduated Response Ladder, with its protections. In Week 6, they fix the regular meeting and the rule for changing rules, and the keeper gathers everything into the One-Page Commons Charter, which every user signs. *Decision by day 42:* the signed charter.

Days 43 to 70 · Run it (Weeks 7 to 10). Nothing new is added. The regular meeting meets; the user-monitors report two numbers and one observation. Expect the first dispute and hear it in the week it is raised; expect the first rule change and record it with its date. The convenor runs the two-minute stall check every Thursday, and from Week 7 keeps a Gate Card at the end of each week. Watch the meeting's length: if it grows past fifteen minutes, find out why. *Decisions by day 70:* the first settlement and the first rule change, both made by the users at the regular meeting and recorded by the keeper. Nothing else is added; the group runs what it built.

Days 71 to 91 · Review and nest (Weeks 11 to 13). In Week 11 the keeper fills in the Commons Health Sheet against the baseline, with its five written sentences. In Week 12 the users re-score the Principle Audit with new evidence, and the sponsor joins for the second half, asks only about the outcome, and, if it is met, confirms in writing that the method stays with the users. In Week 13 the users rotate the keeper and the user-monitors, set what passes up to the sponsor's layer, and decide whether to offer the method to a second commons. Lay the Gate Cards kept since Week 7 side by side. *Decision by day 91:* next quarter's roles, and whether there is a next commons.

After the ninety days, the Gate Card and the regular meeting continue. The health sheet is kept every four weeks; the charter is reviewed on the date written on it.

The ninety days, for a household

Days 1 to 7 · Name one shared thing. Each adult fills in the First Look, at home rather than at work. Compare the lists on a calm evening and choose one shared thing to begin with: usually the joint account, sometimes the housework, the car or the evenings. Nothing else this week.

Days 8 to 14 · See what each puts in. For one week, each adult writes down every piece of household work they do, including the invisible ones: planning, remembering, noticing (Chapter 11). At the end of the

week, compare the lists on a calm evening. The comparison is the sense loop; what the household decides about it is its own.

Days 15 to 21 · Write the charter. In one hour, at a calm time, write the Kitchen-Table Charter for the shared thing you chose. Give its second line the most care: what each of you may use without asking or explaining. Agree the regular look: day, time, fifteen minutes. Write the first response to an overspend as a question. Set the date to look at the charter again, about three months on.

Days 22 to 84 · Keep the regular look. Fifteen minutes on the same day each week, with the shared thing open in front of you. Disagreements noticed midweek are written down and brought to the regular time, not raised at the moment of discovery. If the commons is held with adults who do not live together, a parent's care or an inherited house, use the family card from the Conversation Cards to open the first conversation, and agree a call at a fixed interval: a fortnight for a parent's care, once a year in spring for a shared property.

Days 85 to 91 · Look at the charter itself. Read it aloud together. Change what no longer fits. Answer its last line: the one thing you can observe, after three months, that shows whether it is working. If it is, choose the next shared thing, and begin again at day 8.

Where a household commons touches ownership, an inherited house, a share in property, the terms of a sale, the household's agreement about use and costs is its own to write. The parts that touch ownership belong with a lawyer.

1 · The First Look (Chapter 1)

A ten-minute exercise, alone, before reading further. It is the smallest version of the Commons Inventory in Chapter 2, and it can be done on a train.

1 · Three things you drew on this week (4 minutes). Name three shared resources you used in the past seven days that someone else also depends on and that could run out, wear thin or get crowded. At work, think of time, attention, money, space, tools and goodwill. At home, think of money, time, the car, the evenings, a parent's care.

SHARED THING	WHO ELSE DRAWS ON IT?	IF I TOOK TWICE MY USUAL SHARE, WOULD ANYONE NOTICE? WHEN?

2 · The one nobody watches (2 minutes). Circle the row where the honest answer to the last column is *no one*, or *only when it ran out*. That is an open commons, in Hardin's sense.

3 · Who carries it (2 minutes). For the circled row, write the name of the person who bears most of the cost when it is overdrawn. If the answer is *me*, write that. If it is someone who has never complained, write their name and underline it.

4 · One sentence (2 minutes). Write the sentence you could say to the others who share it, this week, that would make the pattern visible without blaming anyone. Begin it with *I think this is a shared thing*.

Keep the page. Chapter 2 turns it into the full inventory.

2 · The Commons Inventory (Chapter 2)

A one-hour exercise for a leader and two or three colleagues, or for a household at a kitchen table. Its purpose is to name the shared resources you already govern and to see, for each, which kind of commons it is: open and unmanaged, or bounded and governed.

Step 1 · List the shared things (15 minutes). Write down every resource that more than one person draws on and that can be depleted, crowded or degraded by overuse. Aim for at least eight. Prompts: money (budgets, petty cash, a joint account); time (meeting hours, a shared expert's attention, a manager's open door); space (rooms, desks, a shared drive's storage); attention (a channel everyone posts in, a client's patience); trust (a brand's reputation, a family's goodwill toward one member); tools (a vehicle, a licence, a test environment).

Step 2 · For each, answer five questions in a table.

SHARED RESOURCE	WHO MAY TAKE FROM IT? (NAMED, OR "ANYONE")	WHERE DOES IT BEGIN AND END?	WHO DECIDES THE RULES, AND CAN USERS CHANGE THEM?	WHO NOTICES OVERUSE, AND WHOM DO THEY ANSWER TO?	WHAT HAPPENS THE FIRST TIME SOMEONE OVERDRAWS IT?

Write *nobody* or *unclear* where that is the honest answer. Those words are the finding.

Step 3 · Classify (10 minutes). Mark each row:

- Open: anyone may take, nobody watches, nothing happens on overdraw. Hardin's pasture.
- Fenced: the rules exist but the users cannot change them, or the watcher answers only to someone outside the group.
- Governed: a boundary, rules the users can amend, a watcher accountable to them, and a small first response to overuse.

Step 4 · Choose one (10 minutes). Pick the open or fenced resource whose overuse costs the most, in money, hours or goodwill. Write one sentence on what the overuse is costing now, with a figure if you have one and a note of where the figure came from.

Step 5 · Draw one boundary (10 minutes). For that one resource only, write down both boundaries of principle 1: who may draw on it, and exactly what it includes. Share it with the people who use it and ask them one question: *what would you change?* Their answers are the beginning of principle 3, and of the next chapter's audit.

Keep the table. Chapter 3 scores it against the principles; Chapter 6 turns it into a one-page charter; Chapter 8 builds a thirteen-week plan on it.

3 · The Principle Audit (Chapter 3)

A ninety-minute exercise for a leader and the people who share a resource with them. Use one resource from the Commons Inventory in Chapter 2, ideally the one you marked *open* or *fenced* and chose in step 4. Do it with at least two people who draw on the resource and are not its formal owner.

Part A · Describe the resource first (15 minutes). Answer in a sentence each:

1. How fast does it replenish? (daily, weekly, yearly, never)
2. Can each person's use be seen by the others? (yes, partly, no)
3. How many people draw on it, and how different are their needs?
4. What is the cost when it is overdrawn, and who bears it?
5. Is there an outside authority (head office, board, regulator, parent) whose rules already apply?

Part B · Score the split principles (30 minutes). Use the reformulation of Cox, Arnold and Villamayor Tomás. Score each 0 (absent), 1 (partly present, or present on paper only) or 2 (present and used). For each score, write the evidence: one thing that happened in the last three months that shows it.

PRINCIPLE	SCORE 0–2	EVIDENCE FROM THE LAST THREE MONTHS	AT WHICH LAYER DOES IT HAPPEN?
1A The users are clearly defined			
1B The resource is clearly bounded			
1C The two boundaries fit each other			
2A Rules fit local conditions			
2B What each puts in fits what each takes out			
3 Users can change the rules			
4A Users (or people accountable to them) watch how the resource is used			
4B Users (or people accountable to them) watch the condition of the resource			

PRINCIPLE	SCORE 0–2	EVIDENCE FROM THE LAST THREE MONTHS	AT WHICH LAYER DOES IT HAPPEN?
5 The first response to overuse is small			
6 Disputes can be settled quickly and cheaply			
7 Outside authorities leave room to organise			
8 Larger matters are handled at a larger layer			

Do not total the column; the total is not the point. Note whether the watchers in 4A and 4B answer to the users: that accountability was the best-supported finding in the review.

Part C · Read the combinations (20 minutes). Answer each question with the scores in front of you:

- Is there a boundary (1A, 1B) without monitoring (4A, 4B)? Then the boundary is a sign nobody reads.
- Is there monitoring (4A) without a small first response (5)? Then the monitoring will feel like surveillance.
- Is there collective choice (3) without conflict resolution (6)? Then rule-changing meetings will end in grievance.
- Is there a boundary (1A) without a known entry route? Write the entry route now.
- Is there an outside rule (Part A, question 5) that replaced a norm the group already had? Name the norm.

Part D · Choose two moves (15 minutes). Choose the two principles whose absence makes the others weak. Usually that is one pair from Part C. For each, write the smallest version that could start within two weeks; who will do it, and to whom they are accountable; and what you will see in a month if it is working (an observation, not a feeling).

Part E · Agree how to review (10 minutes). Set a date four weeks out. At that meeting, re-score only the two principles you chose, with new evidence, and ask the people who share the resource one question: *what would you change?*

Keep the scored table. Chapter 4 reads it as a set of loops; Chapter 5 shows a graduated response ladder in working form; Chapter 9 gives a health sheet that tracks the same loops, one you can keep over a year.

4 · The Loop Map (Chapter 4)

A sixty-minute exercise for a leader and two or three people who share a resource. Use the resource you audited in Chapter 3, and its scored table. You will need a large sheet of paper and two pens of different colours.

Step 1 · Draw the resource (5 minutes). In the centre of the sheet, draw a circle and name the shared resource inside it. Around it, write the names of the people or groups who draw on it.

Step 2 · Draw the membrane (10 minutes). Draw a line around the users and the resource together. On the line, write who is inside (1A) and what the resource includes (1B); the door, how someone outside comes in; and any outside authority whose rules touch the line (principle 7), and whether those rules set outcomes or methods.

If you cannot draw the line because nobody knows where it is, write *no membrane* and stop the exercise there. That is the first thing to fix.

Step 3 · Draw the four loops (25 minutes). For each loop below, draw an arrow that leaves the resource and returns to it. Label each step on the arrow. If a step does not happen, draw that part of the arrow dotted.

LOOP	THE STEPS TO DRAW	THE QUESTION THAT TESTS IT
Sense (4A, 4B)	resource or user behaviour → someone notices → they tell someone accountable to the users	How long from overuse to someone knowing?
Reflex (5, 2B)	someone knows → a small response → behaviour adjusts → contributions and benefits rebalance	What is the smallest response that has actually happened?
Repair (6)	a dispute → a local, cheap place to settle it → a settlement both parties accept	How many disputes in the last year reached that place, and how many went around it?
Learning (3)	a rule stops fitting → users raise it → users change it → the new rule is used	When did the users last change a rule?

Step 4 · Mark the layers (10 minutes). For each loop, write beside it the layer at which it closes: the team, the department, the firm, the household, the extended family. Then ask whether it closes at the smallest layer that could handle it, or whether it has been sent upward without need (principle 8).

Step 5 · Find the living loops first (10 minutes). With the second colour, circle every loop or part of a loop that already works, with an example from the last three months. Then answer, in writing:

1. Which working loop could be made faster or cheaper this month? (Strengthening a living loop usually costs less than building a new one.)
2. Which dotted arrow, if completed, would complete the most loops at once? (Often it is the sense loop: without noticing, nothing else can start.)
3. What is the one action, by whom, by when, that completes that arrow?

Keep the drawing. Chapter 5 shows a working commons in which all four loops have closed every week for centuries; Chapter 9 measures each loop.

5 · The Graduated Response Ladder (Chapter 5)

A one-page agreement for any group that shares a resource: a team, a set of teams, a household. Write it with the people who will use it, not for them. It takes about forty-five minutes. Principle 5 is the subject; principles 3, 4 and 6 are the supports.

Part A · The resource and the line (10 minutes).

The shared resource:

What counts as overuse, stated so that anyone can check it from information all users can see:

How users will see it, and how often (the sense loop):

Part B · The ladder (20 minutes). Five rungs. Write what happens on each, who does it, and when the next rung applies. Keep the first two rungs between peers.

RUNG	WHAT HAPPENS	WHO DOES IT	MOVES TO THE NEXT RUNG WHEN
1 · Notice	A private word: "you were over; do you know why?" No record.	A peer who saw it	The same overuse happens again within _____
2 · Name	Raised at the regular meeting (the Thursday), as information, with the person present.	The person, or a peer	It happens a third time within _____, or the explanation does not hold
3 · Repair		The person, agreed by the group	The repair is not made by _____

RUNG	WHAT HAPPENS	WHO DOES IT	MOVES TO THE NEXT RUNG WHEN
	The person proposes how they will make it good (time, money, a fix), and the group agrees it.		
4 · Restrict	A temporary, stated limit on the person's draw on the resource, with a date it ends.	The group, or an officer accountable to it	A further breach during the restriction
5 · Review	The person's access is reviewed by the group, with a route back written into the decision.	The whole group	(End of ladder)

Part C · The protections (10 minutes). Agree and write:

1. Every rung applies the same way to everyone, including the person who leads the group.
2. A person can always ask to be heard at the next regular meeting before rung 3 or higher takes effect (principle 6).

Records are kept only from rung 3, and only for months.

The ladder itself is reviewed every months by everyone who uses the resource, and anyone may propose a change (principle 3).

Part D · The regular meeting (5 minutes). Name the day, the time, the length (fifteen minutes is enough for most groups) and who attends. Most weeks it will end in less. That is the sign it is working.

Sign it, all of you, and put it where the resource is used.

6 · The One-Page Commons Charter (Chapter 6)

A single page that any group can write in an hour: a team, several teams, a household, a volunteer board, a group of friends who share a house. It gathers the first five chapters into one document that the users write, sign and change. Use the resource you have worked through in the earlier tools, or start fresh.

THE COMMONS CHARTER OF (the group) FOR (the resource) Written on by (everyone who draws on the resource). Next review: .

1 · What we share. The resource, described in one sentence: What it includes and does not include (the resource's boundary): How fast it replenishes, and how we can see its condition:

2 · Who shares it. The people or teams who may draw on it: How someone new joins (the door): How someone leaves, and what they take with them:

3 · How we take, and how we give back. Each person's or team's share, or the rule for taking: What each contributes to keeping the resource in good order, in proportion to what they take: What changes in a hard season (a lean month, a drought, a crunch):

4 · How we change these rules. Who may propose a change: everyone who signs below. How a change is agreed (consent, majority, or another rule we choose): Where changes are recorded:

5 · How we see. What we watch about the resource's condition: What we watch about how it is used: Who watches, and to whom they report (it must be to us): How often we look together, and when (our Thursday):

6 · When someone overuses it. Our ladder, from Chapter 5, in brief: Rung 1 (a private word, by a peer): Rung 2 (named at our regular meeting): Rung 3 (a repair the person proposes): Rung 4 (a temporary limit, with an end date): Rung 5 (a review by all of us, with a route back): These rungs apply to every one of us, including whoever leads.

7 · When we disagree. Where disputes are heard (our regular meeting, or another named place): How quickly a dispute is heard after it is raised: Who decides if the two parties cannot agree, and who stands aside because they are involved:

8 · What sits above us. The outside authority whose limits we work within (head office, board, landlord, bank, parent): The outcome they set: The methods we keep for ourselves: What we pass up to them, and how:

9 · What we will notice in a month if this is working. One observation, not a feeling:

Signed:

Put it where the resource is used. Read it aloud at the first review. Change it the first time it stops fitting. A charter nobody has amended in a year is either perfect or forgotten, and it is rarely perfect.

7 · The Case Reading Card (Chapter 7)

A forty-five-minute exercise for reading any commons case, a historical one, a colleague's, or your own. Use it when you are tempted to copy an arrangement that worked somewhere else, and before you write a charter. Fill one card per case.

Part A · The resource (10 minutes).

What is shared?

Netting's five questions: Is the value per unit low or high? Is use frequent or occasional, dependable or not? Is there room to improve it? Does it need a large area or a large group to use well? Does it need investment

that only a group can make? (A resource that answers *low, occasional, little, yes, yes* is a natural commons; one that answers the opposite may be better divided.)

Does the resource move or change through the year (like Alanya's fish), or stay put (like Törbel's alp)?

Part B · The four solutions (15 minutes). For the case, write how it solves each:

PROBLEM	HOW THIS CASE SOLVES IT	OUR EQUIVALENT, IF ANY
Membrane: who is in, what is included, where is the door?		
Sense: who notices overuse, at what cost, how fast?		
Reflex: what is the first response, and what follows?		
Repair: where are disputes settled, how fast?		
Proportion: what limits each person's draw, and what does each give back?		
Learning: how are rules changed, and by whom?		

Part C · What the case cannot show (10 minutes). Write at least three sentences:

- Why might this case have survived for reasons other than its rules? (Size, stability, culture, selection.)
- Who did the arrangement exclude, and what did that cost them?
- What is the evidence: a study, a summary of a study, a story, a memory?

Part D · The translation (10 minutes). Complete these sentences:

Our equivalent of the winter hay (a private, visible limit on each person's draw) is

Our equivalent of the September list (who is in this season) is

Our equivalent of the fisher at dawn (the person most interested in noticing) is

The one thing from this case we will try, at the smallest scale, for four weeks, is

Keep the cards with the charter. Chapter 8 uses them in its third week.

8 · The Thirteen-Week Plan (Chapter 8)

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.

9 · The Commons Health Sheet (Chapter 9)

A one-page sheet kept by the keeper of the record, filled in at the baseline (before any change) and then every four weeks. Each line states what was counted and what was not.

The commons: Period: to Keeper:

Part A · The resource (condition).

MEASURE	LEADING OR LAGGING?	BASELINE	THIS PERIOD	WHAT IT COUNTS, AND WHAT IT DOES NOT
_____ (e.g. evenings worked per week)	Leading			
_____ (e.g. departures, emergency top-ups)	Lagging			
_____				

Part B · Use (by user, not only in total).

USER OR TEAM	ALLOCATION	DRAWN	GIVEN BACK (MAINTENANCE, DOCUMENTATION, OTHER)	NOTE

Spread: the highest draw against allocation is ; the lowest is .

Part C · The loops.

LOOP	MEASURE	BASELINE	THIS PERIOD
Sense	Average days from overuse to someone accountable knowing		
Reflex	Breaches this period; share settled at rung one		
Repair	Disputes raised; average days to settle; number that went around the agreed place		
Learning	Rule changes this period; who proposed them		
Door	People who joined; by what route; days taken		

Part D · Trust (start and end of each quarter only). Anonymous, one to five, with the number of people answering: *I expect the others to take their fair share and no more:* (n = ___). *A concern I raised would be heard fairly:* (n = ___).

Part E · The honest reading (written, five sentences).

The measure that disagrees with the others is

What changed for reasons other than our governing (season, a new client, a departure, regression from a crisis) may be

A figure that is missing, and why:

What the sheet cannot show, that the users told us:

The question we take to the next regular meeting is

Rule for the sheet: no reward or penalty is attached to any single line of it.

10 · The Conversation Cards (Chapter 10)

Six cards, one for each conversation. Copy each onto an index card, fill in the blanks before the conversation, and keep it in a pocket. Do not read it aloud.

Every card has the same five lines.

What is true in their worry:

What they can already see (bring it): (a figure, its source, a shared view)

What I am asking for: (an outcome to approve, a role, an hour)

What stays theirs: (their control, their procedure, their veto, their relationship)

The question I will ask before proposing anything:

Card 1 · The board. Outcome I will be held to: . Method I am asking them to leave to the users for one quarter: . What I will bring back: the health sheet, on .

Card 2 · Finance or head office. Ceiling and reporting they keep: . Rule that removes spend-it-or-lose-it: . Their test after a quarter (ask them): .

Card 3 · The union or works council. What the monitoring is for, and what it is not for: . The line between the commons' ladder and the agreed disciplinary procedure: . The draft they will see before the team does: .

Card 4 · Partners. What I think I draw: . What I think I put back: . The page we will write together: .

Card 5 · Family. The feeling I will name, once: . What the agreement protects: . The one hour, and when: .

Card 6 · The sceptic. What Hardin got right about our resource: . Can it be divided without losing its value? . The role I will offer them in the test: .

After any card is used, write one line in the keeper's record: what was agreed, what was not, and when you will return.

11 · The Kitchen-Table Charter (Chapter 11)

A one-page charter for any household commons: a joint account, the housework, a shared property, a parent's care, a shared flat. Write it together, in an hour, at a calm time. Change it whenever it stops fitting. It is not a legal document; anything touching ownership of property belongs with a lawyer.

THE KITCHEN-TABLE CHARTER OF (who) FOR (what we share) Written on . We will look at it again on .

1 · What we share. In one sentence: What it includes: What it does not:

2 · What each of us may use without asking. (For money: an amount each month. For time: hours or evenings. For a property: weeks.)

3 · What each of us puts in. Including the work nobody counts: Is it in proportion to what each takes? If not, what balances it?

4 · How we look at it together. Day: Time: Length: (fifteen minutes is enough) What we look at:

5 · When one of us goes over. Our first response is a question, at our regular time: " ?" If it happens again: What we never do: raise it at the moment of discovery, in anger, or in front of others.

6 · When we disagree. We bring it to our regular time. If we cannot agree there, we will (wait a week; ask to help; take a walk and come back).

7 · Who joins, and how. (Children, partners, new flatmates, the next generation.) And how someone leaves, and what they take.

8 · What sits above us. (A landlord, a bank, a will, the law.) What it decides: What we decide:

9 · What we will notice in three months if this is working. One observation, not a feeling:

Signed:

Put it somewhere you will see it. Read it aloud the first time you use it. Change it the first time it does not fit.

12 · The Gate Card (Chapter 12)

A ten-minute practice for the end of a week, for anyone who keeps a commons: the convenor of a team's charter, the sponsor above several, an adult in a household. It is the loops of Chapter 4 made into five questions. Keep it on a single card per commons, for no more than three commons at once.

The commons: The week ending:

1 · The membrane (2 minutes). Did anyone join, leave, or ask to join this week? Did they find the door, or did they come round it (by asking someone senior, by simply taking)? If round it, write where the door should have been:

2 · The senses (2 minutes). What did the people who share this see about it this week that they could not see a month ago? How long after it happened did they see it? If the honest answer is *nothing* or *weeks*, write the one thing that would make it visible sooner:

3 · The reflex (2 minutes). Was a first word said this week, a private and mild *do you know why?* If not, was that because nothing happened, or because nobody wanted to say it?

4 · The repair (2 minutes). Was any disagreement about this commons raised this week? Was it heard this week, at the agreed place? If it went around the agreed place, to a manager, a parent, or into silence, write where it went:

5 · The learning and the carrier (2 minutes). Is there a rule that no longer fits? Who would propose changing it, and is it always the same person? And the question from Chapter 1: who carried most of the cost of this commons this week, and have they said so?

Once a quarter, lay the thirteen cards side by side. Count the weeks in which each question had a good answer. A commons whose cards show the first word said, disputes heard in the week and a rule changed at least once is alive, whatever else the quarter brought. Take the cards to the next review, with the health sheet from Chapter 9, and read them with the people who share the commons rather than to them.

A note on method

The tools are reproduced from Chapters 1 to 12 of this book without change to their substance. The order of the tools and the two ninety-day plans are this book's recommendation, drawn from the field manual in Chapter 8 and the household chapter, Chapter 11; they are not the finding of any study, and every figure in the composites they mention was set for illustration. Nothing in this workbook is financial, legal or investment advice.

The commons inside your firm

The things nobody owns are rarely empty and never ungoverned. Inside a firm they are often where a gain is kept that nobody has counted.

Luminous Prosperity Inc. takes this work into organisations as a gainshare. The flow is opened from the inside, with the people who already hold what the firm knows. The gain is counted from records the firm already keeps, against a measure both sides sign before anyone knows the answer, and the house is paid as a share of what is found: between thirty and ten per cent of it.

A one-page charter can be written in an hour. Which of your commons is overgrazed, and what its recovery would be worth, is read from your own records and people. That begins with a conversation.

REQUEST A CONVERSATION

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