CHAPTER 7

Rotating Leadership and Responsibility

It may seem much easier, and perhaps more efficient, to just elect someone to lead your group. But our usual practice of electing group leaders, or even designating a single willing volunteer, sets up a dynamic where negative power imbalances can thrive, and where some people are less advantaged in the group than others. Just as important, members of the group may not learn the skills of leadership and do not have the opportunity to fully appreciate what it takes to be a group leader.

Using practices that rotate leadership and responsibility reverses the familiar and long-accepted customs of hierarchical structures: a linear chain of command, where a single individual or an elite few manages the group and assumes leadership and control.

Rotating leadership and responsibility turns over to each member of the group the rights and responsibilities for leadership, tasks, and decisions. It also opens the door for members to step back from leadership as needed, knowing that others in the group are able to assume this responsibility while they take some time off.

The leader at any one time is called a convener. When someone is responsible for leading a discussion, they can design a "SOPHIA" to inspire the discussion. Discussions take an orderly path using a process of "rotating chair," instead of relying on just one person to keep order. Then there are the more subtle ways of conducting the group's interactions—ways that create a culture of sharing and cooperation—that the remainder of this chapter describes.

The Convener

The one individual who comes to a gathering or who assumes leadership online with a specifically defined role is the convener. This role rotates so that each person in the group develops leadership skills. How often this role rotates depends on what the group needs, but the guiding principle needs to be "as often as possible." Here are typical convener responsibilities:

- Make sure the group knows when agreed-on time limits are near.
- Remain mindful of requests made by individuals for shifts in the agenda, tasks, or processes, and make sure these are integrated.
- Help group members be aware of alternative possibilities throughout the discussion, such as minority viewpoints that have not received full attention, hearing from people who have not spoken to an issue, or choices that have not been considered by the group.

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- Suggest group processes that can move the group along, such as calling for "circling" or "sparking."
- Remain attentive to possibilities for decision-building, and provide leadership for the group to do so.
- When it is time to end, shift the focus of the discussion to closing so that the group devotes the time they agreed upon for this part of the process.

In advance of a gathering, or a period of time approaching for online discussion, the convener can consider the following preparations:

- Review notes from the last gathering or from recent online archives.
  - Are there items from other gatherings or in the archives that need to be addressed or items that the group decided to carry over for discussion?
  - Does the group need any new resources or information related to issues brought forward?
  - Has anything happened that will affect the decisions made in the past?
- Review group process.
  - What individual concerns or needs have people expressed that should be considered in planning for this gathering or time frame?
  - What group issues have people identified that need to be considered?
  - What strengths does the group possess that need to be sustained and supported?
- Plan the agenda.
  - What announcements need to be shared?
  - Are there special time considerations or individual needs to be taken into account?
  - What new items need to be introduced?
  - What specific tasks or responsibilities need to be completed before the gathering or before beginning the online discussion?

At the beginning of the gathering or online discussion, the convener gets things going by starting the process of check-in. Next, the convener confirms with the group that all items are included on the agenda.

In face-to-face groups, the agenda can be written on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper (shelf liner or freezer wrap will do!) and posted before the time the gathering is scheduled to begin. The convener also identifies announce- ments or items that need to be mentioned without discussion and presents these just after check-in. In online groups, the convener posts the agenda in a message and calls for others to contribute to building the agenda.

During discussion, the convener actively attends to the process. For example, when the convener notices that some people have not had an opportunity to speak in a face-to-face gathering, she might request a circling process (see Chapter 7) to give everyone a chance to speak. Or, when she senses that all viewpoints have been heard, she begins the process of

value-based deci- sion-building (see Chapter 8).

Other members of the group can assume leadership roles at any time, but the convener remains particularly attentive to group movement. This does   not mean that the convener behaves like the traditional "Chairman of the Bored"—calling time limits, reminding people to use rotating chair, or calling on people to speak. Once the discussion begins, the convener participates in the discussion using the process of rotating chair, just as any other member of the group.

For groups that meet online, how you adapt the role of convener and the process for checking in depends on the kind of virtual structure you have (or do not have) for your interactions. An email or discussion board group that is formed to accomplish a task can benefit from forming a structure that includes a time frame within which they want to complete their task, identifying the individuals who are responsible for different tasks necessary for completing the work, and an agreed-upon approach to discussing issues as they arise in the group.

The online convener might be anyone who takes the lead on a certain discussion topic, with several conveners going at the same time on different topics. If an issue comes up that is controversial or difficult, one or more members of the group can post a SOPHIA to help focus the group's attention on ideas and possibilities related to the issue.

SOPHIA

Speak

Out

Play

Havoc

Imagine

Alternatives

A SOPHIA is a 5- to 10-minute "essay" (about 500 to 700 written words) that comes from your own inner wisdom. Sophia is a Greek word for female wisdom; Sophia was wisdom in ancient western theologies. In groups where discussion is a primary focus, a SOPHIA can be prepared by the convener or another group member in advance, and presented after check-in and after the group has agreed to the agenda.

A SOPHIA is intended to focus the group's attention on the topic of discussion. A SOPHIA is particularly useful in a class, a book discussion group, when a group is facing an important decision, or when a group is in a muddle about principles of solidarity. If the group has reviewed documents or shared readings in advance of the discussion, the SOPHIA draws on those readings, but brings the perspective of the speaker to interpret possible meanings of the readings

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for individuals and the group

An important purpose of a SOPHIA is to raise questions for all to consider. The questions are also called subjectives (not traditional objectives). Subjectives are critical questions that arise from varying perspectives on the issue under consideration. There are no answers to subjectives; rather, there are many possible responses, all of which will be respectfully considered in the discussion. The SOPHIA, and the subjectives that it contains, offers to the group many possibilities to consider.

Discussion: Rotating Chair Processes

Key features of Rotating Chair:

- The agenda is built and affirmed by everyone during check-in.
- The convener facilitates announcements, focuses the discussion, and provides leadership for the process.
- Whoever is speaking is the "Chair."
- Everyone in the group listens actively to the person speaking, and does not interrupt.

The chair is passed to someone who indicates a desire to speak, has not spoken already, or has not spoken recently (not the first raised hand). Following check-in, the convener focuses on any announcements. The group then reviews the agenda and identifies any items that need to be included that are not on the agenda, or reorders the agenda based on what people shared during check-in. If anyone has a brief item that simply consists of sharing informa- tion, this is a good time to mention that item. The group may set time limits and priorities on the agenda items.

In discussion groups, the convener (or someone in the group) then shares a SOPHIA that has been prepared in advance. The subjectives (questions) at the end of a SOPHIA often spark discussion. In task-oriented groups, the convener focuses the group's attention on the first item of business. Then, in face-to-face groups, the chair rotates to whomever wishes to speak, and discussion begins. The chair continues to rotate to members of the group who wish to speak.

Once the discussion begins, you express your desire to speak by raising your hand (or another signal the group creates). The person who is speaking (not the convener) is responsible for passing the chair to the next speaker. You pass the chair by calling the name of the person you are recognizing. If more than one person wants to speak, pass the chair to the person who has not spoken or who has not spoken recently— not the person who first raised a hand.

Passing the chair by calling a person's name is an important tool for a large group to help everyone learn everyone's name. In any sized group, it is a symbolic gesture that signifies honoring each individual's identity and respecting the presence of each person. Calling the next speaker's name is a clear signal that you have finished speaking, and that you are indeed passing the chair along.

You are not obligated to pass the chair to someone else until you have finished the ideas and thoughts you wish to share. At the same time, you have the responsibility to make way for all who are present to speak to each issue. Avoid making long, repetitive, or unrelated comments that prevent access to the chair for other people. If you tend to ramble and notice that others are not having time to speak, organize your thoughts and ideas in a journal and practice speaking more briefly in conversations outside the group. Then ask the group to give you specific feedback about how you are doing.

During the discussion, make notes of your own thoughts and ideas about what others are saying. Listen carefully to people who are speaking, allowing them time to complete their thoughts before you indicate your desire to speak. Frantically waving your hand in eagerness to share your thought is just as distracting and disrespectful as verbally interrupting.

At first, raising your hand can feel as if you have gone back to kindergarten. The benefits, however, soon become apparent. You can be confident that you will have a chance to speak, that you can complete your thoughts without interruption, and that someone with a louder voice will not intimidate you. Each person who wants to speak is assured of being able to do so. If you have a soft voice, you know that you don't have to shout to get attention. If you are unaccustomed to speaking in a group, you are assured of having encouragement and the time to practice those skills. If you speak slowly or often pause to gather your thoughts, you are assured that nobody is going to jump in and grab the attention of the group before you complete what you have to say. If you are someone who tends to dominate a discussion by being either long-winded or loud, you begin to learn the value of not speaking so much or so loudly, and of hearing what others have to say.

Active Listening

Active listening is a vital part of the process of rotating responsibility. In a face-to-face group, active listening means being fully tuned in to a speaker and verbally confirming your perception of what you heard. It requires deliberate awareness of how you perceive what other people say.

When you are ready to confirm what you heard, request the chair and paraphrase in your own words what you understood. The speaker can affirm your perception or clarify any misunderstanding. Other people in the group can also contribute to helping everyone become clear about the intended message.

In online interactions, use the same practice of confirming what you read in someone's message. Share in your own words what you understand, and ask others in the group to help clarify.

Discussion in Online Groups

Online groups have a distinct advantage in making it possible for everyone to express their thoughts and ideas; however, this can result in an overwhelming amount of e-mail or discussion board messages. Just as people vary in their comfort and ability to speak in a group, people have varying degrees of comfort and ability to communicate online. Some people send very brief, to-the- point messages; others prepare book chapters.

In an online group, every participant can compose messages that are short or long, with no limits. However, long and drawn-out messages in an online group are disruptive and annoying; they are difficult to wade through, and discourage others from focusing on other aspects of an online discussion. Group members may tolerate an occasional long message, but if you routinely post long complex messages, others will eventually barely scan what you have to say, or simply tune you out.

Very short messages leave people thinking that something is missing, or give the impression that you are not putting your energy and attention into the group. Give reasonably detailed information or content to your messages so that people know what you are all about.

Online discussions have the risk of overloading your inbox with scattered messages that wander through many avenues and sideline ideas. You can help avoid this for the whole group in several ways. As you read the messages that others in the group have posted, keep running notes to use when you form a response. Rather than responding to every message individually, you can form a single message that addresses several of your thoughts and ideas related to the discussion, and avoid repeating yourself, which can happen easily if you respond individually to every message. In your response, use people's names to identify a specific response to a message posted by that person.

Keep a notebook, or set up a folder on your computer, for your personal memos as you think about the discussion. When you read something that is important to the discussion, make a note of it or file it where you will be prompted to return to it. Or, you might have an idea that you want to contribute to the group. Compose a single message that summarizes ideas that have come to you over a period of a day or more.

Consider having someone set up a blog or a discussion forum online so that all the messages that relate to a certain topic get clustered together. These kinds of tools may not be necessary for a temporary group or a very informal group that exists just for socialization. But if your group has a focus and purpose that requires active participation over time, you will benefit from setting up a more advanced forum for discussion.

Passing It Along: Notes and Minutes

Everyone who participates in a group, either face-to-face or online, takes personal notes. These notes facilitate the process of rotating chair. They are not a record of the discussion and are not generally shared with the group. They are used as a personal tool to remain in touch with thoughts you have while you are paying attention to what others have to say. Your notes:

- Provide a log of thoughts and feelings you have during discussion, without interrupting the group process at the time you think of it.
- Form a personal journal that you can refer to when you are closing, or if an issue becomes a source of conflict.
- Remind you of things you agree to do or accomplish for the group.
- Help you focus on things to include in your closing.

For task-oriented groups, at least one individual can assume the respon- sibility for recording what happens at the time of a gathering in the form of minutes. For gatherings that last longer than about an hour, passing this task along to different individuals in the group is helpful. Other kinds of groups may or may not decide to have group minutes.

Like all traditional groups, some Peace and Power groups keep detailed records of all ideas and comments, including who spoke and a summary of what was said. Other groups keep simple records of who was present at the gathering, the decisions made, and the major factors that contributed to each decision. The group's needs may even vary from one gathering to the next.

Challenges of Peace and Power

The primary challenge of Peace and Power is to become comfortable with the new ways of doing things. Peace and Power seems simple, but when you try to start using the process, you may find it harder than you expected. If you have the opportunity to join a group that already uses the process, you will learn by example how things work. Entering a group using Peace and Power can feel like you are in a foreign country, and in many ways you are! Things happen very differently than they do "back home"!

If you and everyone in your group is beginning this process with very little introduction to it other than this book, you may find that you grow into it gradually. You will benefit from frequent reflection on how you are doing (see Chapter 9) so that you can gradually shape your practices to be consistent with the values you have chosen.

The following sections describe some of the typical challenges that all groups face when they use Peace and Power consistently, and give some ideas for how to move forward in meeting these challenges.

Getting Things Done

Because the process itself is so important in Peace and Power groups, sometimes it seems like things will never move along! And if you have tasks to accomplish, you may wonder when you will ever get to the actual tasks of getting things done. One of the challenges that is especially hard for new Peace and Power groups is to find ways to include everyone in the process. In traditional groups, this indeed would bring everything to a halt. In Peace and Power groups, it actually helps things move along because everyone benefits from being fully aware of what is happening, improves their skills and talents that contribute to the group, and feels the genuine support and connection that the group shares with one another.

The value of including everyone does not mean that every individual has to be present and involved at all times. This, of course, is unrealistic. So over time, your group develops ways to make sure everyone knows what is happening, has a way to let the group know their ideas and feelings, and is able to contribute in any decision-building process.

Groups that are formed to accomplish a task need to establish guidelines and timelines for their work. If your group uses an online social media service that provides Web page capability, notes, minutes, membership lists, photos, and documents related to your work can be posted on the Web site. Accessibility to information online is wonderful for groups using Peace and Power; it ties into the powers of sharing, distribution, nurturing, and many others.

You can develop task groups for specific or ongoing work. Task groups not only help you get things done, but also facilitate the process of helping people learn new skills. A task group usually gets involved in doing intensive work that requires special skills and knowledge. Learning a skill is done by participating in the work, not by simply hearing about the results of the work. Hearing or reading a finance task group's report, no matter how detailed, does not help anyone learn how to balance the books!

Task groups that are most effective in getting the job done and in passing along skills are those that have a balance of people who are experienced at the task and those who are learning. This requires a gradual shift over time in who is involved with any task group so that the work and responsibility rotate.

The Tyrannies Of Silence And Repetition

Interacting as a group is difficult, if not impossible, if some people in the group consistently do not speak up and share what they are thinking. When you do not express your viewpoint, your silence deprives the group of the benefit of your ideas. Silence, or online absence, also leaves people wondering what you are really thinking, or even worse, making assumptions about your thoughts and opinions.

Remember: this process does not function on the notions of majority and minority. Even if you are the only one who holds an opinion, the group is committed to the value of taking your

ideas and thoughts seriously. The group considers every viewpoint, regardless of how many or how few hold that view- point. Even more important, Peace and Power processes are based on valuing each individual, and others can only know what you uniquely offer to the group when you share your opinions, thoughts, and ideas.

At the same time, it is not necessary for every individual to address every issue. If someone has already expressed your viewpoint, you need not repeat what someone else has already said, although it is often important that you indicate to the group that you agree with that person. If you agree but have a different thought or concern to add, you need to share your additional thought so that it can be considered in the discussion.

Shifting To "Every-logue"

When two people are together, dialogue is highly desirable. It is important for both people to contribute to the discussion; otherwise, it is not a discussion. In a group larger than two, the same principle holds: everyone needs to contribute to the discussion. Otherwise, it is not a discussion.

However, in a group of more than two people, dialogue is like a monologue in a twosome—one or two people dominate the discussion so that other voices are not heard. Any form of domination in a group discussion models power- over tactics of traditional groups. Monologue in a twosome or dialogue in a group alienates others, promotes argument and debate between and among individuals, and prevents other viewpoints from being heard. Rotating chair is designed to facilitate "every-logue," ensuring that every person speaks, with a sufficient balance of attention devoted to every point of view.

When two people become engaged in energetic opposition to one another's ideas (face-to-face or online), it is especially important for other voices to come forward. Conflict can be fruitful and desirable (see Chapter 10), but when two individuals in conflict get caught up in the conflict itself, others in the group cannot participate in the discussion in a constructive way. As other people speak, the group can define what the issue really is. Also, the two people who are in conflict have an opportunity to stop speaking, and to reflect on their own positions, consider the thoughts and feelings of other group members, and decide if their thoughts and feelings are helping or hindering group process.

When you notice that two people are engaging in dialogue to the exclusion of others, request the chair or post a message. Share your observation of what is happening and convey your perspective on the issue. Then invite others to speak as well. Almost always, when other people speak, everyone gains insight and clarity about the issue, and many creative possibilities begin to emerge.

Sometimes one or two individuals have specific information about a certain issue. Directing a question to an individual and engaging in information exchange is different from exclusive

dialogue. Information exchange is simply that—information exchange. The pitfall to watch for is when a group consistently defers to one or two individuals as the "knowledgeable ones." This is a signal that sharing of information and skills is not happening, and the group needs to give attention to providing the opportunity for everyone to share points of view or information.

VARIATIONS ON DISCUSSION

Rotating leadership and responsibility can be done in many different ways, and you will create ways not included here. The idea is to find ways that are effective in expressing the values and intents of Peace and Power (see the value-based actions at the beginning of Chapter 6). Variations are often needed when the group is small (fewer than 6) or large (more than about 40). Small groups tend to be less formal, and often rely on "dinner-table" styles of discussion. When this happens, everyone gets to speak, but the discussion may wander. In large groups, some people may not have the opportunity to speak, and shy people may find it very difficult to speak. Here are some methods for promoting discussion that are consistent with Peace and Power processes.

SPARKING

In face-to-face groups, when an issue or a topic generates a great deal of excitement in the group, the discussion often moves naturally into a style that reflects the high energy of excitement. Many individuals begin to speak, sometimes at once, often spouting words and ideas into the air like a fountain. In an online group, you suddenly see a surge of message posts on the same topic. This type of discussion is referred to as sparking. When it begins to happen naturally, it should be allowed to continue as long as the discussion is giving the group new ideas and energy to move forward. When some individuals begin to lose interest, however, or the ideas are beginning to be repetitive, it is time for the convener or another group member to assume leadership, asking the group to cease sparking and return to the more focused style of rotating chair or online discussion. You can bring an idea or topic to the group that needs sparking. Ask the group to enter this style of discussion for a specific time, or plan to include sparking around the idea in the future.

Sparking is a valuable process for creating ideas and energy, but it does not work well to help everyone participate equally or to be heard. When you use it, do so with deliberate intent, and make sure everyone in the group is aware that this is what is going on. When it is time to cease, you can use circling to transition back to rotating chair and less intense discussion.

CIRCLING

Circling in a face-to-face group is what happens when the group suspends discussion and rotation of the chair, inviting everyone in the group to take a turn in speaking to an issue. People listen to one another in turn. Nobody responds to or discusses any comment or idea until everyone has spoken. If you have questions or want clarification, make a note to yourself so you

can seek clarification after everyone has spoken. Although it is often the convener, any group member who perceives that the group needs to focus and clarify may request the group to circle. Whoever calls for a circle then shares an idea of what the focus of the circle needs to be.

The process of circling is easily accomplished online. When someone in the group asks everyone in the group to speak to an issue or an idea, it is very important not to simply lurk and remain electronically silent. Your virtual presence in an online group is as important as your presence in a face-to-face group, perhaps even more so. The level of trust that an online group develops depends on everyone showing up online. You are known by the contributions you make to the online processes, and it is your responsibility to convey to others in the group what you are thinking and feeling, and to interact with the group process in ways that express your intentions with the group.

During circling, everyone speaks or writes very briefly, with comments lim- ited to the focus for which circling has been requested. This provides a connection with all of the points of view at that particular time. It also provides time for individuals to clarify their ideas in their own minds before speaking. Even if you have nothing specific to contribute at this time, it is important for you to contribute during circling. You might simply say: "I am not clear about this issue and need more time."

When the discussion seems to be nearing time to consider building a decision, but this is not yet clear, someone can request a circle to simply find out if people feel ready to move toward closure on the issue. At the end of sparking circling can be a time for everyone to share which of the ideas expressed "sparked" the most.

Circling is especially helpful when tensions are running high, with two or three individuals at the center of the struggle. You can use circling to interrupt exclusive dialogue that often begins during times of tension. Circling gives every individual in the group the responsibility and the opportunity to speak, to share insights of the moment, or to express feelings that may not already be apparent. Circling provides the opportunity for people at the center of a struggle to pay close attention to what others have to offer, and time to do some inner work with respect to the struggle.

TIME SIGNAL

Despite the best of intentions, individuals sometimes do get carried away. In face-to-face groups, if a group is having difficulty with extended mini-speeches that interfere with everyone having the opportunity to speak, they can agree to use a time signal to help speakers remember to bring their comments to a close so that others can speak. A time signal can be a simple "T" formed with the hands. In online groups, messages that are as long as book chapters consume everyone else's reading time. The group can agree on a virtual time signal to remind everyone to keep their posts within reason.

A conscious decision to use a time signal avoids the slip into unconscious patterns of interacting in face-to-face groups. Out-shouting, long tirades, or other verbal forms of domination are common power-over habits that many well-intentioned people have cultivated.

When a group is using rotating chair, a common unconscious habit used to try to interrupt long-winded speakers is hand-waving to ask for the chair while the speaker is still speaking. Not only is hand-waving disrespectful of the speaker, it is disruptive to the process and to the group, and places the responsibility for monitoring another speaker on those who are eager to speak.

When a group recognizes that long-winded speeches or excessively long posts are interfering with their process, then a consciously chosen signal is a respectful way to begin to shift patterns of response to others in the group. The time signal does interrupt the speaker, but it has several features that are different from the power-over verbal interruptions or distracting hand-waving. It is a signal that is preferably agreed on by the group because the group shares a desire to equalize access to discussion. The signal itself is quiet: It does not unnecessarily escalate emotions in the group with loud sound or frantic movement. Importantly, it is a signal that simply reminds the speaker of an agreed-on responsibility to respect others in the group and give way for others to speak.

The person who gives the time signal is not trying to overtake the speaker by asking to speak. The time signal is not a request for the chair; it is simply a reminder to the speaker that it is time to stop talking and give others the opportunity to speak. If no one shows a desire to speak, it is still beneficial for the group to remain silent for a few moments so that everyone can recover from the concentration given to the previous speaker and think about the direction they wish the discussion to take.

If you are the one who is given a time signal, you have several benefits: You have an opportunity to reassess the direction your lengthy comments were taking and refocus on the group as a whole. If you have become somewhat strident, you can take time to calm down.

CALMING THE AIR

Another hand motion that you can use in face-to-face groups is a calming motion, sometimes using both hands, palm down, moving in a slow, circular motion, as if you were petting a cat. This motion is very helpful for groups that tend to work with a high level of anxiety and stress, or that tend to erupt into unproductive sparking types of discussion. Frequent eruptions with everyone talking at once signal that anxiety and stress are running amok. A group can benefit from recognizing this pattern in their interactions and deliberately choosing to take steps to change what happens.

The calming-the-air motion reminds the group of their commitment to end interactions that feed unproductive anxieties, choosing instead those interactions that help everyone remain focused and calm. When someone calms the air, the group ceases what is happening, takes a

deep breath together, and remains still while they gather their thoughts and feelings to address what is going on.

In online groups, a calming signal can be agreed upon by the group. The message can be one or two simple words: "Everyone breathe!" When this message is posted, no further explanation is needed. The group understands that this is a call to remain silent for a few hours, and to resume posts in a spirit of returning to a focus on the group as a whole.

RANDOM RAVINGS[5]

Sometimes people think of loose ends that were not completely finished during a discussion, or the group leaves a piece of business hanging for lack of clarity on the matter. At some point during a face-to-face gathering, usually toward the end, loose ends tend to become more obvious. It is helpful to set aside a few moments for everyone to reflect on any items that may need to be mentioned briefly before the end of the meeting. This time on the agenda is referred to as "random ravings."[1] Online, you can enter the words "random raving" in the subject line of your message.

While you take notes during the gathering, remember that you can address random ravings later. You can simply circle any note you want to address later and not interrupt the flow of discussion. When the time for random ravings arrives, a quick review of your notes will help you recall these fleeting thoughts. Group members can scan their notes to see if any loose ends might be dangling that now need to be addressed. If a loose end deserves more discussion, the group can agree to place the item on the agenda for the next discussion.

CLUSTERS

Large groups can draw on the processes for Peace and Power, but need to do so using clusters. A large face-to-face gathering can begin with small clusters of participants checking in with one another, followed by each cluster reporting significant information with the large group. For example, if everyone in a cluster is in fine spirits and ready to participate fully in the gathering, then this cluster will simply report this to the group as a whole. If another cluster has a member who is recovering from being sick all week, and who will need to leave early to go to an appointment with the nurse practitioner, this can be shared with the large group. Another cluster might have someone who wants to place a 10-minute presentation on the agenda. Throughout the gathering, the group moves from the whole to clusters and back again.

A large online group can have several clusters, each with its own private e-mail discussion group. Most of the group members' online attention is within the cluster until the structure of the

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[5] Anne Montes of Buffalo, New York, suggested the idea of random ravings, and it instantly became a regular part of our gatherings. This is a wonderful example of how the possibilities for Peace and Power processes grow and expand.

larger group calls for their active participation.

When clusters are used, there is a convener of the whole, and there may also be conveners of the clusters, depending on the needs of the smaller groups. Clusters may need to make a written record of some of their discussions, either to recall the specifics of their work for reporting later to the larger group or to contribute to a written record of the work of the whole group. When value-based decisions are required, clusters can be a very effective means of making sure that every perspective is considered carefully, with each cluster taking a particular aspect of the decision as a focus for their discussion.