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Panic in the Chicken Coop



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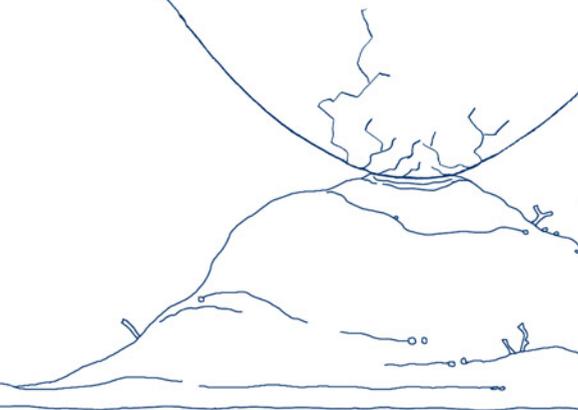
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Or: Something's Got to Change!
But How?

by Aletta von Meibom-Cirkel



There are many paths to a goal. The same is true for the goals that you have set yourself as a donor. If, for example, you want to join the fight against HIV/AIDS you could invest in direct help, such as the supply of medication, or treatment for sufferers. But you could also concentrate on preventative measures, and support organisations that educate HIV-positive pregnant women on how transmission through birth can be prevented.

This publication gives an overview of the different levers by which social change can be achieved, and thereby helps you to develop the lever for your own charitable involvement. If you are already active as a donor, this guide gives you the opportunity to reflect on your lever and maybe develop it further.

‘Panic in the Chicken Coop’ is part of a series of publications on skills for (more) effective giving. With their practical advice and step-by-step instructions, these guides form an integral part of the ‘Active Philanthropy toolbox’. ‘Panic in the Chicken Coop’ differentiates itself from the other guides in the toolbox by its fable-like narrative. At the same time the publication remains true to the Active Philanthropy principle of presenting complex issues in a graphic and easy to understand manner.

Besides the guides on skills for effective giving, the toolbox contains publications on choice themes designed to help donors embark upon a project, and help them find their individual niche, such as ‘Children’ or ‘Climate change’.

As a non-profit forum, Active Philanthropy supports families and individuals in developing and applying a personal giving strategy. The forum offers a safe-haven for donors to exchange, learn and cooperate, as well as find practical advice for improving the concept of ‘donating’ as a whole. This is made possible through a variety of services: from practically relevant publications, to workshops and excursions, as well as individual consultation. What we do is itself made possible by similar means, with charitably involved entrepreneurial families supporting Active Philanthropy with words and deeds.

Objectivity is fundamental to our work, and the effort we put into this is not spared in our publications. We would ask you to respect that the approaches and organisations presented are not comprehensive, nor are they subject to any assessment or rating by Active Philanthropy.

We owe thanks to the donors who read the initial drafts of this guide – with their constructive advice and criticism they supported us decisively. We hope you enjoy reading this handbook and that it helps you to find ‘the right method’ to achieve an even bigger impact with your projects.



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Main Characters

That's the fox, the old rascal. Chicken fricassee is his favourite. He doesn't get on too well with the woodsman and the farmer.

That's the farmer. He loves his chickens, but there are other animals on the farm that he's got to look after. The farmer's wife he likes best of all.

That's the woodsman. He loves the woods and is a great hunter. Only the fox keeps slipping through his fingers.

That's the fat mother hen. She lays the biggest eggs and is respected by the whole chicken coop.

Then there's a whole load of other hens.

And, of course, the rooster ...



The farmyard used to be a place of peace and tranquility, full of equal, happy animals. Even the hens, busybodies by nature, were carefree and content. Until now. For some weeks panic has reigned in the hen coop. And to blame is the fox, the old greedy chops. Yesterday he helped himself to the hen coop yet again. For the third time this month. Now the tranquility is over. The chicks are plagued with nightmares, the teenagers are rebelling because they can no longer leave the coop after dark, the elderly are increasingly suffering from high blood pressure and the eggs are getting ever smaller and more shrivelled. Something has got to change, that much is clear.

This stirs the exceptionally fat and universally respected mother hen into action. She takes the matter into her own hands and calls an assembly. All of the hens come (only the rooster remains outside on the dung heap and crows) and it's all eyes front as the fat mother hen steps up to speak:

“Dear hens! Things cannot go on like this! A chicken coop is not a fast-food restaurant. Something must change.” Clucks of agreement on all sides. “But how? That is the question”, continues the hen. “What lever can we use to change our situation?”

The chickens look at each other perplexed. “Lever? What lever?” But the fat hen isn't finished yet. “The lever, dear hens, is what will link our problem with a solution. Look at it this way: when one attempts to solve a problem, one must first of all understand the problem (in our case it is obvious: the disappearance of hens). One must be clear about, what goal one would like to achieve (an end to hen theft!). There must also be an actual need to solve this problem (the woodsman isn't doing anything about it). One must divine the causes of the problem (the fox, of course) and know whom exactly one would like to help – that is, one must define the target group (us!). Now one requires only the appropriate lever (the ‘how’) in order to reach the goal. All right?”

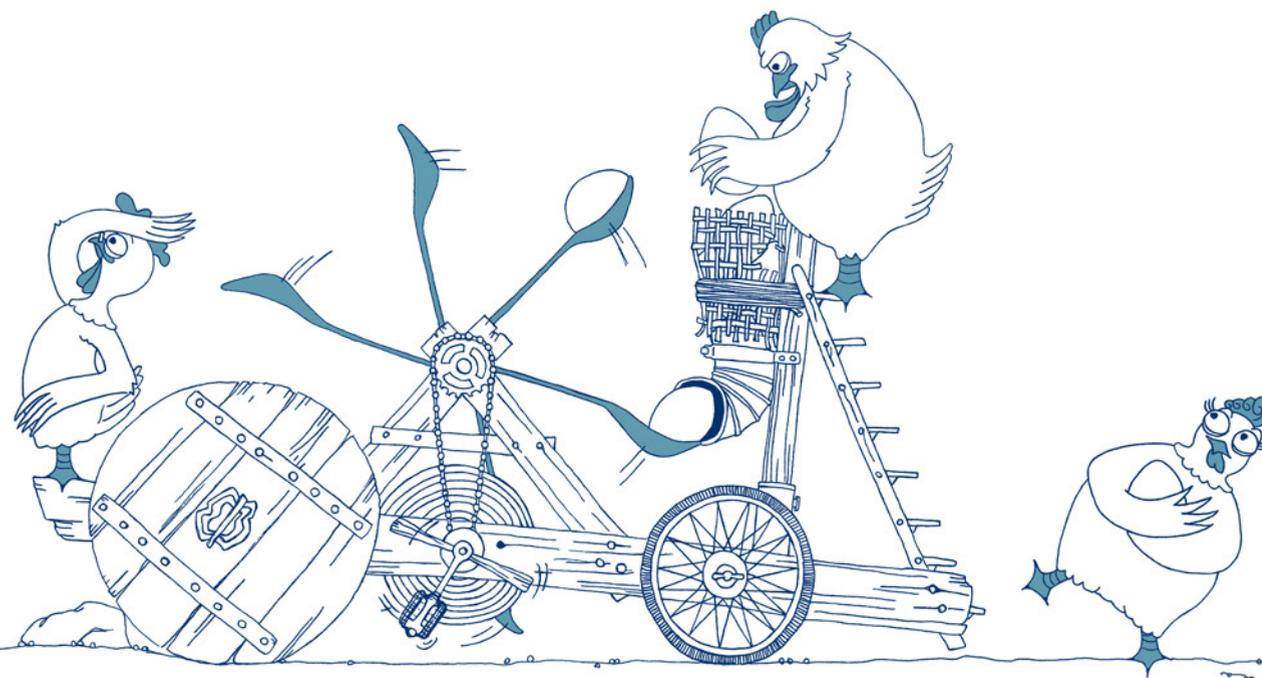
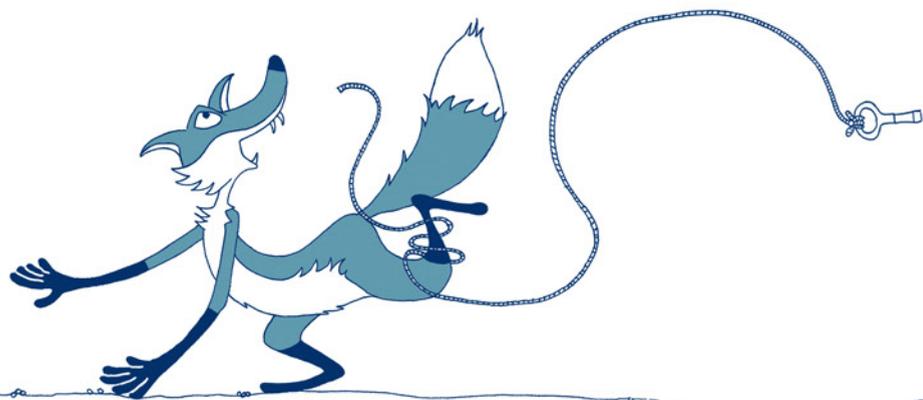




“And now it’s up to all of us”, says the fat hen. “Let’s all brainstorm and think what sort of lever might help us reach our goal.” At first it’s very quiet in the hen coop. But as hens can never sit still for more than a few seconds, it’s not long before the first hen opens her beak. It’s the hen with the small spectacles.

“Why don’t we invest in science and research?”, she clucks. “We could develop an automatic egg-firing machine for example.” The hen goes to the front and draws a complicated-looking diagram on the board.

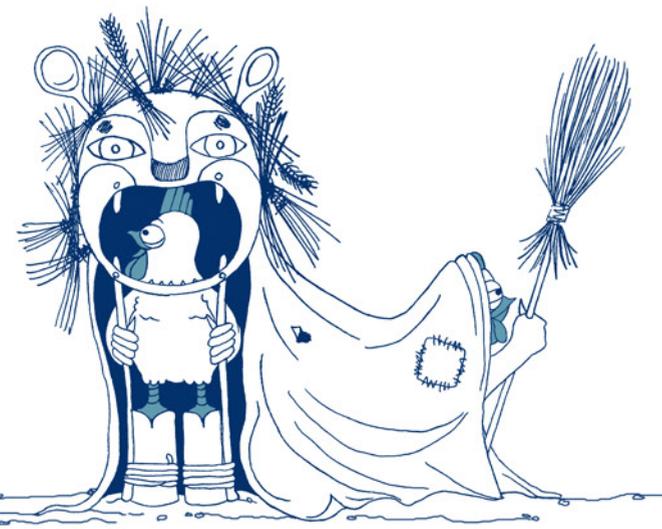
“I picture it like this: the machine is connected to a string that we stretch across the coop’s door. Next time the fox comes, he trips over the string, the machine is set off automatically and he gets pelted with rotten eggs. He won’t know what hit him! Of course it’s not fully hatched yet, but if a few clever hens – I’m thinking of maybe Prof. Dr. Fried-Egg and Ph. D. Poached, both experts in egg machine technology – put their heads together and work on developing something like that, I know we could really give the fox a taste of his own medicine.”

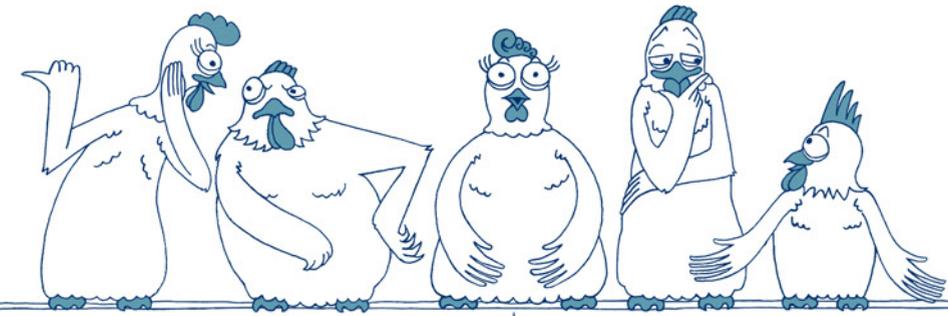


Another hen gets up to speak: “why do we need to re-invent the wheel? I heard that the hens in the next farm already have a great way of protecting themselves from hen-theft. If I’ve got it right, they have founded an academy for animal noises. There they teach you how to imitate wild animals – the roar of a lion, for example.” The hens are wide-eyed. “We could transfer that idea and set up an academy like that ourselves! That method has already been tried and tested, and we’ll save the cost of developing our own idea. We could even scale the method up, to reach every chicken coop in the land, so that all hens can benefit from it.”



ROAR!

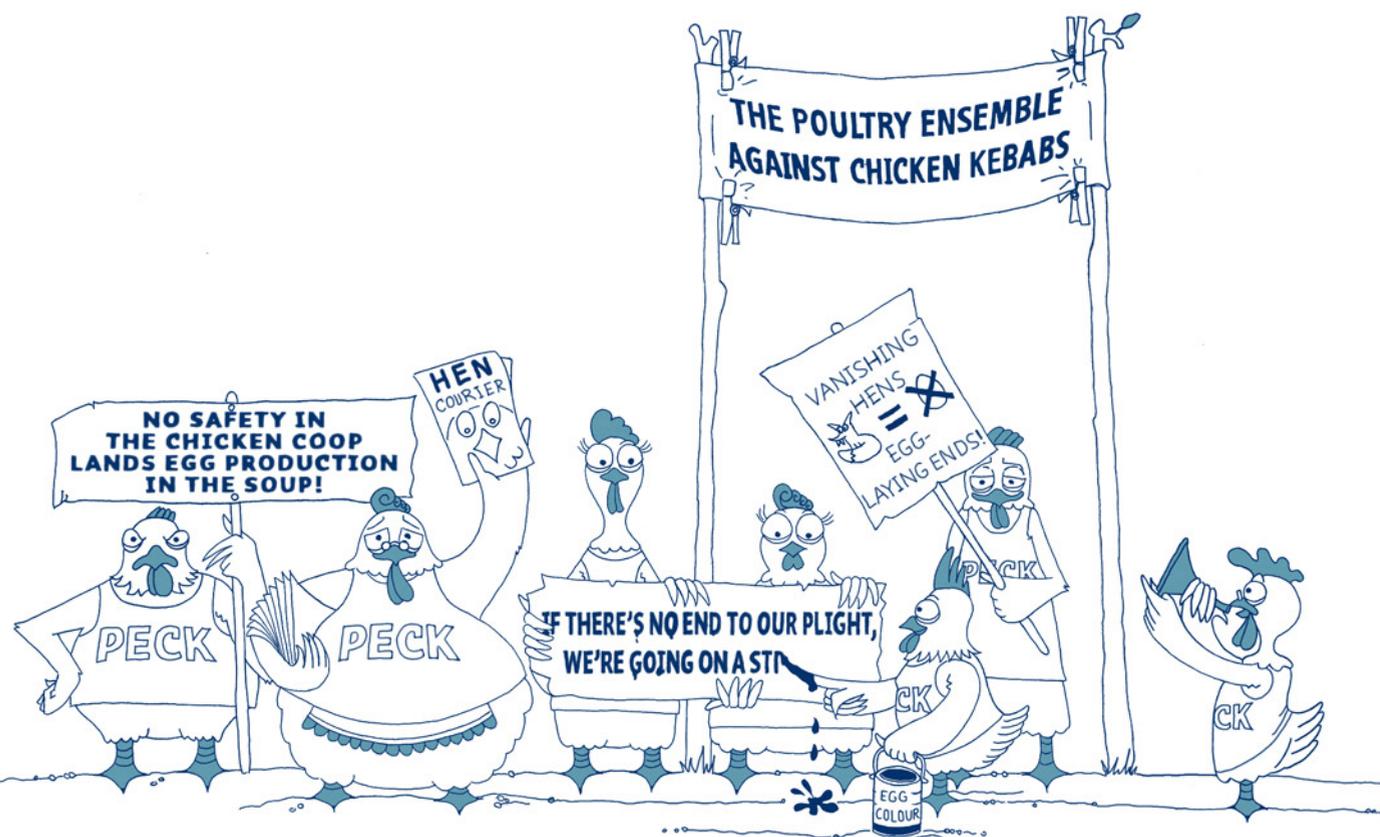




Now another hen takes the stage: “scaling up programmes and implementing them throughout the land is all well and good, but maybe it would be enough to just spread existing knowledge – do you understand what I mean? Maybe there’s already an antidote to troublesome foxes somewhere, and we and the other hens just don’t know about it: maybe a chicken perfume that foxes can’t stand, a chicken-feed ingredient that they’re allergic to or something like that. Perhaps there’s already a perfectly simple solution out there and we just have to make sure that it gets passed around.”

“But how exactly would that work?”, interrupts another hen. “If we look at the whole thing a little self-critically, we know perfectly well that we’d gladly spend the whole day clucking away. But listening is really not our strong point. Quite apart from that, it’s one thing to listen, but to really understand something and then put it into practice is quite a different kettle of fish.” “Quite right”, says the first hen, “that must be considered. But it’s fine! You have to know first what questions or reservations the target group might have – for example, whether the hens have reservations about the perfume because they’re worried that their chicks won’t be able to tolerate it. You have to pay attention to such things, if you want the new knowledge to be applied properly.”





“Yes”, says yet another hen, “all that makes perfectly good sense, but in my opinion the farmer is also partly responsible for maintaining justice and order. The conditions in our coop are dreadful! No security measures whatsoever. There are boards missing from the back wall: the fox can come and go as he pleases.” “This is about advocacy!”, summarises the mother hen. The other hens murmur their agreement.

The hen continues. “We must send a representative to the farmer to get him to better secure the hen coop.” “Absolutely”, says another – “and we should try to get the farmer’s wife on board as well, maybe by laying particularly beautiful eggs, so that she’ll put in a good word for us with the farmer.” “Exactly”, says the first, “and we should back the whole thing up with a big campaign for an entire chicken-movement: ‘PECK, the Poultry Ensemble against Chicken Kebabs’ or something like that, so that we can put pressure on from the outside as well!”

“Oh yes”, pipes up a particularly creative hen, “we could make signs: ‘No safety in the chicken coop lands egg production in the soup!’, or ‘Vanishing hens = egg-laying ends!’, or ‘If there’s no end to our plight, we’re going on a strike!’, and then we’ll demonstrate in front of the farmer’s house. And we can publish a really fiery piece in the Hen Courier to draw other chicken coops’ attention to the problem.”

The case is now taken up by another hen – the ‘Peace, man’ sort. “I don’t want to ruffle any feathers, but why do we have to be so confrontational with the farmer? I think it would be far better if we did things together and banked on cooperation: the farmer and the woodsman do go to the same pub after all. Maybe the farmer could persuade the woodsman to get rid of the fox. Ultimately the farmer suffers as well if his hens are being regularly decimated, and the woodsman could give his wife a lovely fox-fur wrap for her birthday.” One of the other hens contemplates out loud working with the farmyard dog, of whom the fox is absolutely terrified. But the idea is quickly dismissed, because the dog is not easy to deal with.



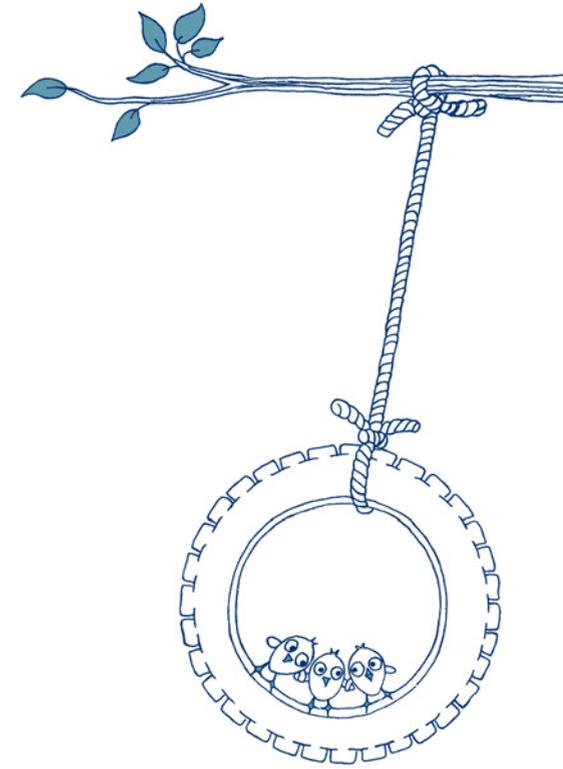
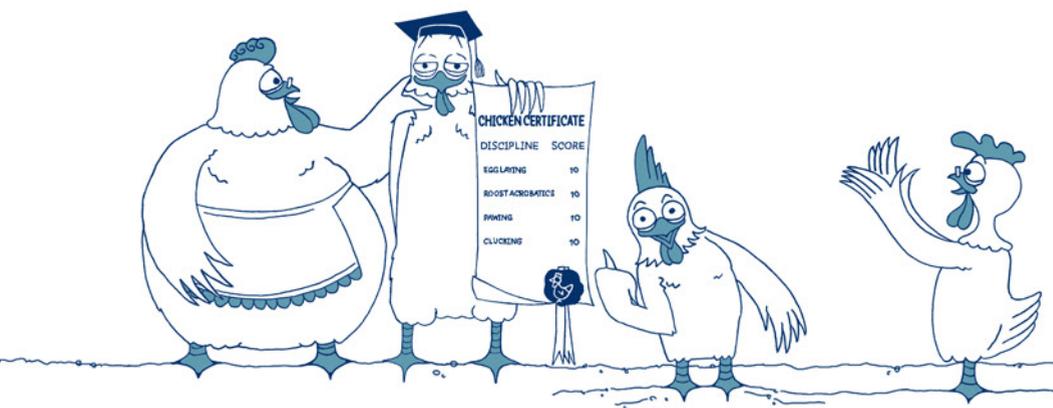
Now the live wire of the chicken coop cannot hold back any longer: “of course it’s by no means unimportant for us as a coop to arrange to cooperate with others. But that’s only one part of the whole, the tip of the iceberg if you will. First of all, we have to get our own house in order! Forgive the expression dear hens, but sometimes our coop is a real pigsty – organisationally speaking I mean. The most important thing is that we invest in ourselves – capacity building is the key phrase! We have a huge amount of potential in here – it just needs to be encouraged and better used. The rooster, for example, spends the entire day standing around on the dung heap crowing his heart out, then in the evenings he just lies in the corner snoring. We need a strong, competent manager; we need to invest in further education of staff (us!) we need clear spheres of responsibility. Our working equipment is hopelessly outdated, the financial situation is a catastrophe (the egg balance sheet from the year before last is still outstanding!) and we should develop ourselves a top-class network (cooperation – see above). I vote we apply to the farmer to hire a consultant chicken who can help us to really pull our socks up.”

“You may be asking yourselves how that helps us solve our fox problem. But I say that without a strong basic organisational structure all of our good ideas will come to nothing: who is going to set up partnerships and cooperations if the staff doesn’t have the skills required? How is the animal noise programme supposed to get off the ground if no-one feels responsible for the implementation? And how are we going to develop the egg-firing machine when our household is in utter chaos?”



“Yes”, says another hen, “but to go back to the point about a competent manager for a second. We all know that the rooster’s useless. However, are we supposed to just pull a replacement out of a hat? We’re completely lacking promising young talent. What we need for a better future is to encourage gifted young people, to promote elite formation. Maybe we could set up a scholarship fund for the most promising young hens and an alumni network for former recipients of the scholarships.”

At this point another hen interjects. “But there are already some stand-out individuals with big ideas, motivation and persuasiveness who have the potential to change things. Hens who work systematically, entrepreneurially and innovatively on long-term solutions to social problems and who won’t let anyone or anything get in their way. These hens simply aren’t given enough encouragement! If you have to lay an egg every day, you don’t have the time to come at something from a new angle and get to grips with big tasks. We should give much better support to these particularly engaged chickens (known as social entrepreneurs, submits the fat hen). We should, for example, free them from the obligation to lay eggs and set up a chickergarten (chick day care centre) so that they can focus on other matters.”

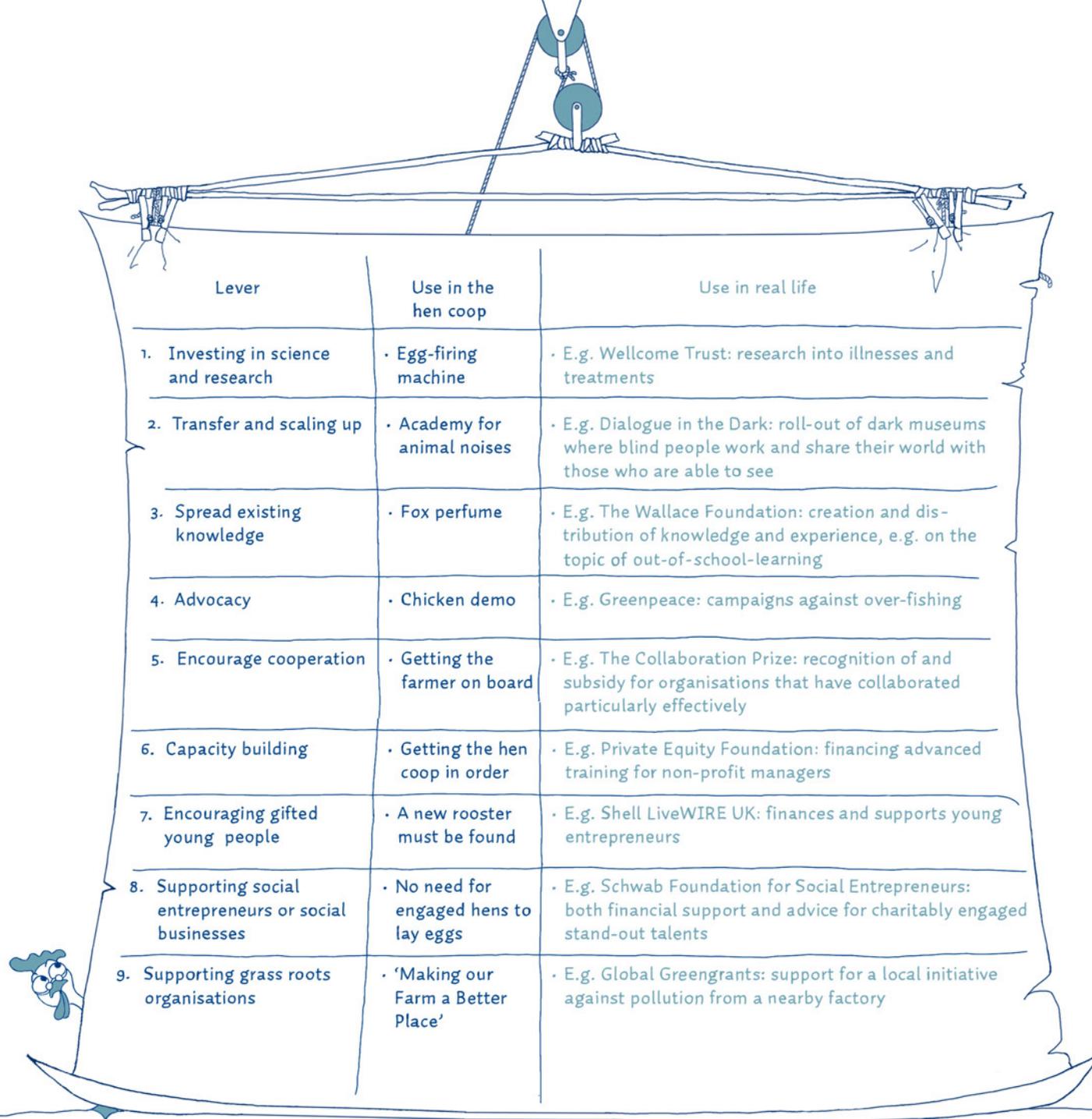




“But why is it always the most brilliant, cleverest and most beautiful who get all of the attention?”, bursts out one of the more mousy hens. “I think a lot can also be achieved by subsidising initiatives that are run with lots of passion and engagement from the heart of the population. We can support hens who don’t wield a huge amount of influence because of their office or position, but who try to take solving a problem into their own hands.” “You could call that supporting grass roots”, observes the fat hen. “Exactly”, says the little hen, “and as a matter of fact there’s already a group

on the farm that could look into the matter. ‘Making our Farm a Better Place’, I think they’re called. And all animals can get involved with that, not just chickens. With our help, why shouldn’t this group start working for safety on the farm as well? I’ve heard they’ve really got it together, and they know exactly how this place works.”

“Good”, says the mother hen, “we already have some very good things there – I’ll summarise quickly”:



Lever	Use in the hen coop	Use in real life
1. Investing in science and research	• Egg-firing machine	• E.g. Wellcome Trust: research into illnesses and treatments
2. Transfer and scaling up	• Academy for animal noises	• E.g. Dialogue in the Dark: roll-out of dark museums where blind people work and share their world with those who are able to see
3. Spread existing knowledge	• Fox perfume	• E.g. The Wallace Foundation: creation and distribution of knowledge and experience, e.g. on the topic of out-of-school-learning
4. Advocacy	• Chicken demo	• E.g. Greenpeace: campaigns against over-fishing
5. Encourage cooperation	• Getting the farmer on board	• E.g. The Collaboration Prize: recognition of and subsidy for organisations that have collaborated particularly effectively
6. Capacity building	• Getting the hen coop in order	• E.g. Private Equity Foundation: financing advanced training for non-profit managers
7. Encouraging gifted young people	• A new rooster must be found	• E.g. Shell LiveWIRE UK: finances and supports young entrepreneurs
8. Supporting social entrepreneurs or social businesses	• No need for engaged hens to lay eggs	• E.g. Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs: both financial support and advice for charitably engaged stand-out talents
9. Supporting grass roots organisations	• 'Making our Farm a Better Place'	• E.g. Global Greengrants: support for a local initiative against pollution from a nearby factory

“But what happens if our calculations are wrong? If everything we’re considering doesn’t work in practice?”, asks one hen.

“That’s a fair question”, says the fat mother hen. “Projects fail, results take time; we can’t count our chicks before they hatch. To succeed, we must always keep re-evaluating the effectiveness of our strategy. If our lever doesn’t work we must learn from our mistakes, tweak our tactics, cut things out here, put things in there, until it does work. The crucial point is that we don’t just rush at it blindly and have everyone doing any old thing any old how. We need to have a plan for removing our problem from existence.” The mother hen completes the panel from before. It now reads:





“And now comes the hardest thing of all”, says the mother hen –
 “now we have to decide on a lever.”

Night falls outside the hen coop, the hens talk until they’re blue in the face, things are suggested and then rejected again, a few feathers fly through the air, but they persevere and agree at last. Hours later the grand plan is drawn up. Based on the initial hypothesis that ‘successfully foiling the fox will put an end to the loss of hens’, the hens have worked out a lever and made a poster that they now hang from the highest rafters, for every chicken to see:

The Grand Plan

Initial Situation:

Problem: decimation of hen numbers. The fox is to blame.

Cause: the fox can help himself to the chicken coop unhindered.

Initial hypothesis: if the fox is foiled, that will put an end to the loss of hens.

Goal / Target Group



Lever

Measuring Success

Short term

Long term

- No more fox-related disappearances! The fox can no longer help himself to the chicken-coop or the farm.

- Combination of capacity building by training particularly strong hens as door-people (also effective against future dangers) and advocacy work, so that the farmer finally replaces the plank in the wall. In addition, collaboration with the farmers's wife and the woodsman will be set up to strengthen the chickens' position.

- Protest demonstration with at least 80 % of chickens
- Numerous articles in the Hen Courier
- Signed cooperation agreement with the farmer's wife
- Recruitment of a new manager

- Reduction of fox-related disappearances by 50 % within 3 months as a result of the new plank in the wall and by 100 % after one year as the hens learn how to protect themselves from other threats from the fox or other animals

The hens contemplate their grand plan attentively. Many nod with satisfaction, but there are also some who eye it sceptically: Will that work? Will we really manage that? Hens aren't as self-assured as they might seem.

This does not escape the fat mother hen's notice. She clears her throat and takes the stage once more: "Dear hens, you have done a superb job. I am absolutely eggstatic about our plan. Really first rate! Nevertheless, I can see that some of you aren't completely convinced. In a situation like this it's often useful to check over the result more than once."

"There are three key questions", continues the hen, "we should ask ourselves to properly check the result."

1st question: Is the grand plan plausible?

"This is the hardest question, since it asks whether our strategy is actually realistic, or if it's just wishful thinking. To work it out we ought to have a look at other initiatives that have tried to do the same thing. If other initiatives haven't managed to improve safety in the coop through capacity building, cooperation and advocacy, that should give us food for thought."

2nd question:

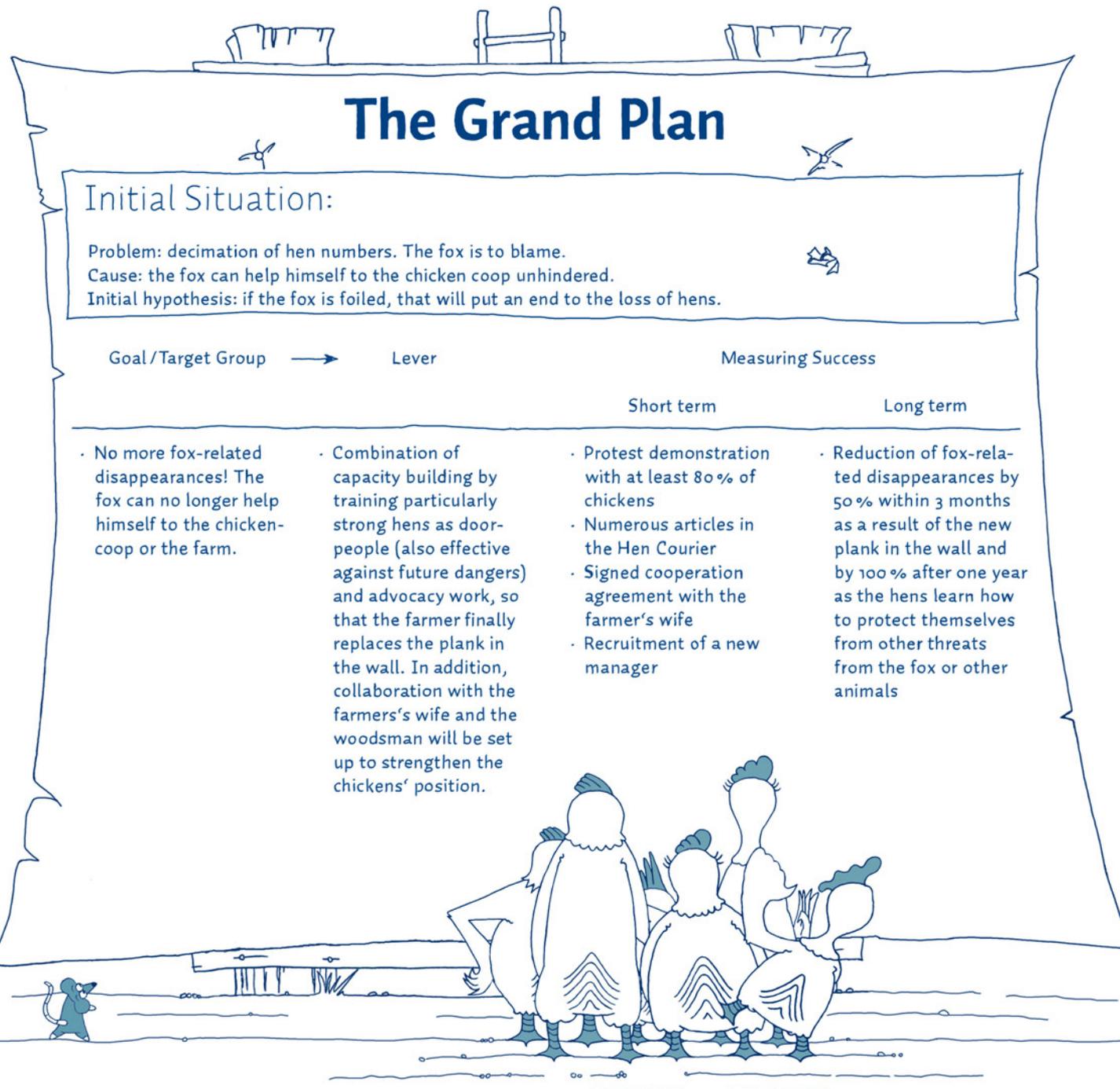
Can the grand plan be put into practice?

"This question is about cold, hard practicality in this particular context. The plan may be plausible in theory, but can WE implement it in OUR specific case? We could, for example, ask ourselves whether our chicken coop actually knows enough about capacity building, or whether indeed another coop has ever used capacity building successfully. If not, do we have the support we need to carry out our capacity building?"

3rd question:

How can we tell whether our grand plan was successful?

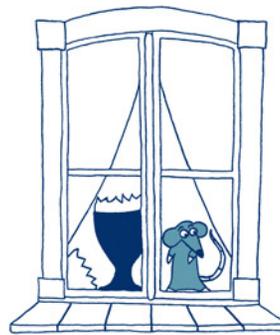
"The answer might seem obvious but that's not always the case. It depends on what we deem 'success' to mean, and whether we can measure, or even see, the impact of our activities. In our case: how do we know that we have done ENOUGH capacity building, ENOUGH cooperating and ENOUGH advocacy to keep the fox away in the long term? If the fox doesn't show up for a month, we might decide our strategy has worked perfectly. But how do we know the fox isn't curled up in bed with a bad cold, and will be back again next week? If we undertake something where it's extremely difficult or indeed impossible to recognise whether we've done enough (it's very hard to 'measure' the success of cooperation, for example,



and it's not easy to do it for advocacy or capacity building either), then it can be tricky to tell whether we have actually reached our set targets.”

“If our answer to any of these questions is: ‘Hm, perhaps not’, then we should think over the whole grand plan again, or at least read-just it. But if we are convinced we have considered everything carefully then there’s no time to lose and we should get started!”

Nods of agreement from the hens, a short silence and then – wild clucking. It was a long night in the chicken coop, but I have a feeling their plan worked, because a few weeks later, as I was eating my breakfast egg, the fox tiptoed past my window with a bundle on his back. It looked as if he was moving back in with his parents. Outfoxed by the chickens.





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Aletta works as Project Manager for Active Philanthropy. Active Philanthropy is a charitable forum for individuals and families interested or already engaged in philanthropy and helps donors to develop and implement their personal giving strategy. To this end the search for the appropriate lever and the development of a ‘theory of change’ often acts as the starting point for and cornerstone of (more) effective giving.

Aletta is a trained lawyer and holds a Master in European community law from Prague University.
