

# Peter & Paul and the alternatives

## Purpose

- Use a dilemma to bring out the difference between binding decisions and voluntary negotiations
- Elucidate the alternatives to a democratic process – guardianship or anarchy – and how they are often closer to hand than a democratic arrangement

## 1. The story of Peter and Paul

Once upon a time there were three boys doing what boys usually do and they came across a bar of chocolate:

- Bags I! It's mine, said Peter.
- No it's not, said Paul. You weren't the only one to find it!
- But I bagged it first, said Peter.
- That's not fair! It's not just you who decides that!
- The bar's mine, said Per, and hit Paul right in the eye!

There would have been quite a fight had it not been for an old man, who was standing nearby. He had heard the whole thing. And now he went up to them and said:

- Hey, boys! You shouldn't fight. Violence just breeds violence.
- But the chocolate's mine, said Peter. I bagged it first!
- But that doesn't count, said Paul. We must share and share alike.
  
- Now listen boys, the old man said. You must settle your differences peacefully – by negotiating. The boys just looked at him.
- But of course, said the old man. You must learn to compromise! And a compromise means that each of you gives way a little so that you meet half-way.

But the boys just went on staring at him.

- Oh! Come on now, he said, compromise! ... Get going, meet half-way!

But absolutely nothing happened.

- Good God! said the old man. One of you wants the whole bar and the other wants half of it. That's not possible, can't you see?! ... Now listen Peter, you give Paul at once a quarter of the bar! And see to it that you remain friends from now on!

And what happened then – well, that's another story.

## 2. Beehive

What makes this solution unsatisfactory? Leave the participants for a couple of minutes to buzz around in a *Beehive* (see Method Bank) about things in the story they find questionable. When they then present their views, jot them down on a flipchart and check whether they relate to points in the next step.

### 3. Talk

Talk about the following points, with lecture-like inputs. Use the *Chart of alternative forms of rule* as an aid (see Three basic issues).

- The man says one thing but does another: he advocates negotiation but actually dictates a solution. He plays the role of guardian, forcing the boys to accept his decision as binding on them: “Peter, listen to Paul at once and give him a quarter of the bar! And see to it that you remain friends in future!” His solution is based on the boys’ initial positions – Peter demands the whole bar, Paul insists on half.
- Peter invokes the rule “First come, first served”. To him the bar of chocolate is not a common concern that calls for negotiation or a joint decision; he resorts to violence to get what he wants.
- Paul does see the bar of chocolate as a common concern: “It’s not just you who decides that!” Moreover, he invokes a principle of justice: “Don’t you see we must share it,” though he, too, is prepared to use his fists.
- The story began with three boys – where did the third one go? He does not seem to have felt that the situation was his business; he did not see himself as a member of the gang.

Going through these four points usually raises numerous questions. In order to avoid unduly lengthy discussions that break the main thread, it may be advisable to introduce the *Fridge* (see Method Bank).

### 4. Discussion

A democratic solution requires:

- An association in which certain matters are treated as common concerns even though opinions may differ on how to deal with them
- that the members are prepared to accept the principles of *Equal consideration* and *Personal autonomy*
- that everyone is prepared to comply with a joint decision, whether they like it or not

Is there any chance of the dispute in this case being settled peacefully and democratically?

### Comments

The story can be seen as an example of a more general pattern. For example, put Serbia in Peter’s place, Bosnia in Paul’s, Croatia in the passive boy’s, NATO in the old man’s and you have a real case of conflict management that follows this pattern. In principle, a case in point was when the 1994 Dayton Agreement was imposed on the contending parties in the former Yugoslavia, except that besides requiring the parties to keep on good terms in future, the ‘old man’ called on them to set up a joint democratic rule for all the relevant ethnic groups in Bosnia.

Encourage the participants to suggest other current or historical parallels.

See the application *Focus on the agenda* for another version of the story of Peter and Paul.