Agreement-Based Organization

Version 1.2.1: 2016-05-15

Timestamped versions: 1.1.0   1.2.0   1.2.1
The latest WIP-RFC version can always be found here.
The issues and enhancements list is here.

Author: Greg Cassel
Contributors: Lynn Foster, Bob Haugen, Mikey Williams, Christine Yancy, Hailey Cooperrider, A. Renato, Jack Park, Josef Davies-Coates, Benjamin Brownell, Anne Marie Utratel, Xander Gieryn

Premises

Formal organization is not innately desirable, but it can crucially help us to [coordinate](#) our personal actions to realize collective potentials. Such coordination does not inherently require [coercion](#).

As peer-to-peer digital technologies mature, our formal social structures can evolve into increasingly organic *agreements* between mutually [consenting](#) parties, who act as partners within the context of goals which we genuinely share.

About this Document

Some ideas in 'agreement-based organization' are old, and others have recently emerged. My key influences here include innovators in [Loomio,](#) [Enspiral](#) and [Value Flows](#). Many thanks to the editorial contributors listed in this document's heading. Ongoing feedback is welcome in comments in the [WIP-RFC version](#), in related media, and by personal [email](#).

Part One here, <u>Creating Agreements</u>, will suggest principles and practices for developing and modifying consistently *consent-based* agreements. Part Two, <u>Complexly Related Agreements</u>, will suggest how to extend such principles to the team-based management of deeply complex goals. Emerging communication and collaboration tools make it possible, and increasingly feasible, to develop [complexly adaptive](#) social systems.

Intended Audience: Activists, organizers, managers, scientists, systems theorists and engineers.

Comparisons: Compared to consent-oriented [Sociocracy 3.0](#), and somewhat related systems such as [Holacracy](#), agreement-based organization is an intentionally minimal framework of suggested [protocols](#). It's a framework for generating bespoke or 'made-to-order' formal, consent-based relationships in all domains: within groups, between groups, between individuals and groups, and peer-to-peer. It's a framework for developing exploratory discussion and media-sharing networks, as well as [objectives](#)-driven [economic](#) agreements and [commitments](#). To the best of my knowledge, agreement-based organization is the first community-building framework which completely supports personal autonomy *and* the integrity of interpersonal agreements.

We need much more than inclusive frameworks to improve our interactions and communities. We surely must learn from organizational systems throughout history, and the co-working and co-living experiences of active communities. As a matter of [modular design](#), however, I

distinguish this developmental framework (or matrix) from all suggested 'recipes' for community management.

Suggested uses: Readers are initially encouraged to consider the suggested principles and practices here with small groups of trusted associates with clearly shared goals. This may be especially feasible for new projects, new alliances, and for the team-based management of newly defined tasks within existing groups. Reasonably controlled trials could foster inclusive grassroots transformations in complex communities and projects.

It's certainly easiest to explore these ideas in groups without legal status. However, legally binding contracts are an acknowledged type of agreement, which other agreements may connect with in complementary ways.

1. Creating Agreements

1.1 The nature of agreements

Agreements are **reciprocal understandings** of the **expectations** of two or more people, in any social context.

Reciprocal understandings help people to beneficially coordinate the nature and intensity of mutually influential actions. They help people to build interpersonal *trust* and *reputation* by striving to realize and, whenever necessary, to cooperatively adjust our expectations of self and others. Agreements create mutual accountability.

Implicit or informally worded agreements are the basis of most healthy and efficient social processes.

Formal agreements are declarative statements which explicitly document reciprocal understandings of expectations.   While it's possible to create formal agreements through spoken handshake deals, the vast majority of formal agreements are recorded in writing.

Formal agreements may be classified by terms indicating their cultural, economic or political context and perceived intensity. Common terms include: agreements, memorandums of understanding, letters of intent, guidelines, policies, rules, resolutions, commitments, contracts, bylaws, and laws.

The fundamental social value of formal agreements is to *prevent* or *resolve* potentially serious, persistent conflicts.

Persistent conflicts often arise from disagreements regarding the *identity, ownership,* or *rights of use* of **resources**.

Resources include all *sources* of matter, energy and information which people want or need to use, or to *re-source,* in their actions. This intentionally broad definition includes all personal (physical and mental) resources, material resources, social resources, and informational resources.

Some of our most fundamental conflicts involve shared, or *potentially* shared, resources for communications and collaboration. For instance, what is the purpose and nature of a specific group? Where and how does that group meet? Does anyone "own" those meeting places or tools, and do group resources have (intentionally or incidentally) coercive or exclusionary qualities? When such questions lead to persistent confusion or conflicts, formal agreements may be crucially useful.

1.2 Consent-based agreements

"The golden rule of agreement-based organization": In agreement-based organization, all prescriptive social tools and techniques will be established through consent-based written agreements.

Tools and techniques will be considered *prescriptive* whenever they establish *limitations or exclusion*s regarding *participation* or *social roles* and *rights*, including the management (governance, administration and use-rights) of any intentionally shared resources.

Agreement-based groups may use the "golden rule" above to modify other principles suggested below. Some possible amendments will be described.

Why "consent"? As adults, consent is the basis of our non-abusive informal relationships. With some creative redesign of our group processes, it can also become the basis of our formal relationships.

About consent vs. consensus: It's crucially important to distinguish consent-based decisions, and consensus process, from consensus per se. 'Consensus' indicates a strongly prevalent, perhaps even unanimous view. 'Consent', by contrast, indicates that a human agent is aware of an action or intention and *actively accepts* it. One need not *approve* of something they *accept*. This fact is critically important to the organic evolution of shared goals.

Generating consent-based agreements: Agreements may include all members of one or more *existing* agreements, *or* any other combination of mutually consenting persons. Consent-based agreements can be created, and amended, in two ways:

1. By directly attaching an agreement to an existing agreement or agreement-based group. This requires agree/abstain/disagree/block consensus process (see <u>Proposals</u>) or an equivalent technique, establishing the explicit consent of the existing agreement's members.
2. By adding (ink or digital) eligible signatures to written or digital documents. Each eligible signatory becomes a *member* of that agreement.

About conflict resolution: Discussion of actions which seem to *conflict with* or *contradict* formal agreements need not assume that the acting members *or* the existing agreements are at fault. Members should consider whether the agreements in question require revisions or supplementary materials.

Regardless of whether or not *harmful* actions-- i.e., actions which damage people or resources-- conflict with written agreements, restorative justice principles can help to heal damaged relationships and communities.

1.3 Proposals

Simple or obvious agreements can be composed directly, if people are willing to sign them! However, collective priorities can be most effectively identified and developed by considering oral or written *proposals.*

Loomio offers an online version of traditional *agree/disagree/abstain/block* consensus decision process. By allowing users to register and change their 'voting' positions asynchronously, Loomio fosters inclusive, unhurried deliberation and collective intelligence.

Written proposals: Whether using consensus process in live meetings, or asynchronously, formal *written proposals* are recommended for all issues which can't be inclusively decided-- and signed into agreements-- during a single meeting.

A well-written formal proposal should be mutually intelligible to all members of its intended audience, without depending on unreasonably precise or obscure terminology. In other words, a well-written proposal could be effectively paraphrased, or stated in more than one form.

Proposals may be created in any way. However, it's good practice for writers to share ideas or *draft proposals* with intended audiences before submitting formal proposals for deliberation and voting. Draft proposals may be edited at any time; by contrast, editing an *active proposal* would contaminate (and practically invalidate) previous votes. While it's possible to withdraw active proposals to edit and resubmit them, that's quite costly in the resources of people's' *personal time* and *attention.*

Simple and complex proposals: Any proposal may be relatively *simple* or *complex*. Complexity is meant here in this sense: "Something with many parts where those parts interact with each other in multiple ways."

Complex proposals may create more or *less* efficient decision process, depending on their conceptual and social contexts. A complex proposal can address a variety of (arguably) related issues; however, it's much harder to assess, to agree or disagree with, and to collectively revise. Complexly Related Agreements will describe options for pursuing complex goals without uniting those goals under monolithic agreements.

Exclusive and inclusive proposals: Many proposals (potential agreements) require substantial personal *trust* or *mutual accountability*. Such proposals may be implicitly or explicitly considered *exclusive* to the individuals or groups they're offered to. *Inclusive* proposals, by contrast, are offered in one or more social contexts-- often publicly-- for adoption by any readers who consent in writing. For instance, many petitions and pledges are inclusively available to the public. Inclusive agreements create mild or negligible social expectations, which their creators or trustees can informally steward.

About "noise reduction": It's desirable for each large or busy group to *limit the number of prescriptive proposals* which their members must consider. It's also desirable for such proposals to genuinely reflect the wants or needs of many members.

These crucial objectives can be facilitated by suggesting (or requiring) that proposal authors get endorsements or positive peer feedback, such as 'upvotes' or 'likes', before they advance their draft proposals to *active proposal* status.

Group members should always have reasonable time to consider prescriptive proposals. 'Reasonable time' may be described or defined either per group or per proposal.

Inclusive and reasonable proposal standards may foster the membership rights suggested below.

1.4 An Agreement-Based Organization "Membership Bill of Rights"

(1) No person will be a member of an agreement unless they consent to it in writing.

(2) Agreements may persist indefinitely, *or* they may expire at any specified date.

- For instance, groups may conduct an experiment which automatically expires *unless* their members review and renew the experiment.

(3) An agreement may specify any desired conditions for the addition of new members.

- Especially inclusive agreements may be openly available to the public.
- Some agreements may be open to all members of an *identified (*and *accountable*) group.
- More exclusive, trust-based agreements may suggest requirements such as:
  - At least one current member *proposes* the addition of a potential member.
  - All other current members *consent* to the addition of the new member.

(4) Members will be free to leave any agreement, or a group of <u>hierarchically</u> related agreements, via written notification.

- If members are unable to directly remove their names from the official list of members, then the list's administrator(s) should try to accommodate each removal request in a reasonably timely manner.
- Agreements may define formal, enforceable consequences for early withdrawal from substantial commitments.

(5) Agreements will not be altered, or attached unconditionally to other agreements, without the consent of active members in good standing.

- Agreement-based groups will only pass binding proposals after votes have been registered by all *active members* (see #6 below), *or* by other participation standards which they *mutually agree to*.
- It's recommended that consent should not be the sole metric for passing proposals in existing groups. For instance, groups may require a majority or supermajority of "Agree" votes, or use finely scaled peer feedback systems. However, groups are encouraged to explore this on a case-by-case basis.
- Bear in mind that even within a group context, most personal activity *can't,* and *shouldn't,* require a collective decision! Humans may operate freely by default, in the absence of coercive forces. *Peers* may co-operate freely within any explicitly defined limits of intentionally shared environments.

(6) Members of any agreement, or group of agreements, should be able to easily assume 'inactive status' regarding potential changes to their existing agreements.

- This can help groups to avoid cases of *unintended obstruction* by distracted or inactive members.
- Recommended tool: give each agreement's members a simple option to openly toggle their status as active/inactive. However, many groups may benefit from establishing

guidelines (and accounting tools) which describe the expected participation level of members.

(7) Members may create agreements which will *impose inactive status* on unresponsive members, either case-by-case or according to automated standards.

- Such agreements should consider the principle that prescriptive agreements should not be rushed. Time-sensitive matters can be handled via agreements which sanction *unofficial actions* and *emergency powers*. (See <u>Developing group tasks and roles</u>.) Such agreements can enable lenient standards for members' participation in non-emergency decisions.

(8) New or amended agreements will not impose new commitments upon inactive members.

- If inactive members desire to return to active status, and are eligible to do so, new commitments may be required of them.
- Similarly, groups which extend permissions and privileges to *outside parties*-- for example, with 'Terms of Service' agreements-- may modify those terms and cancel previous versions. Normally, other parties have the option to re-establish such agreements by accepting the new terms.

(9) Members may create any mutually desired rules for potentially *suspending* or *removing* members who act harmfully or in bad faith.

- Such rules may be analogous to the impeachment rules in many governmental bodies.
- Alternatively, members may create new or modified agreements (see <u>Distributed version control)</u> and *remove themselves* from prior versions, leaving clearly estranged partners behind. This strategy would especially emphasize our personal agency and autonomy.

(10) Agreements, and all contact information and media related to them, should be *freely available* and *easily accessible* to all of their members, without depending on <u>proprietary</u> software or hardware formats.

1.5 Media access and participation rights

Written proposals and agreements may use any desired standards of media access rights and participation rights/ <u>user permissions</u>, subject only (when applicable) to relationships between agreements and *other* agreements. (For example, members of a secret group should not normally be able to create public proposals in the name of that group.)

Media access includes the subject of *privacy*. Media access rights determine *permission to read* media items, such as proposals, agreements, and related media. Readers may or may not have additional participation rights, such as *writing (commenting* or *submitting content),* at a given level of organization. Likewise, writers may or may not possess *voting rights* (membership) per each agreement/group.

Media access and participation rights can be decided by each group of proposal discussants or agreement members. This is increasingly feasible with authorship and decision-making tools which enable adjustable *read/write* and *guest/member* (or *user/admin)* permissions per each media item, including digital texts. [Fractally](#) recursive use of permissions tools could enable networks to develop multiple 'levels of engagement', reflecting the personal [stakeholding](#) and commitments of diverse participants.

For instance, a complex network could enable guest/member options for participation at levels including *network, project, work group*, and/or board of *directors/trustees*. Media visibility within such groups may (or may not) extend one or more levels 'up' to broader, less specialized audiences.

1.6 Subjects to agree upon

This section describes *types of subjects* which our shared understandings, proposals and agreements can practically address. Such subjects include all *resources, activities and agents* we may individually or collectively desire to *develop, support, regulate or modify*. A complex agreement, or a group of complexly related agreements, may involve any or all of these types.

This section relates human intentions to both naturally [emergent](#) and designed **systems**. *System* is used here to describe material *and* social structures which are emergent *or* human-designed. In that intentionally expansive sense, "system" describes any *persistent pattern of activity* sustained by repeated inputs into one or more identifiable processes.

The main goal of this section is to advocate organizational focus, and agreements, based on rational and sustainable goals. To that end, this section leads into a direct consideration of the development of group tasks and roles.

1.6.1 Goals indicate desired future states or conditions.

- Goals always relate to the development, support, regulation, modification or destruction of one or more resources, activities and agents. Thus, goals always relate (often implicitly) to described or intended processes (see next section).

- The ongoing pursuit of goals often requires unpredictable creative activity.
- Our social goals may often include creatively co-exploring ideas and shared interests without attempting to reach mutually shared conclusions. This is the generic nature of a 'discussion group', and of many networks and virtual communities.

1.6.2 **Processes** indicate *types of actions* which transform identifiable *inputs* into identifiable *outputs*.

- Processes may develop spontaneously or be *designed* by humans. Both spontaneous and designed processes may be included in an intentional system. (For instance, a spontaneous process may be observed and then intentionally regulated or adapted.)
- Intentional processes support human goals, either directly or indirectly. They create or influence the conditions in which people interact within a group, or with external resources and agents.
- Intentional processes may occur singularly or recurrently.
- Most processes are complex, because they incorporate *related processes* which occur serially (procedurally) or in parallel (simultaneously).   (For instance, there are many parallel and serial physical and cognitive processes involved in preparing a meal.)
- Within the context of complex processes and systems, subordinate processes serve or provide *functions*.

1.6.3 **Tasks** indicate *required human actions*. A task is an action by an individual or group which is part, or all, of an *intended process*.

- For example, if you want pizza to be delivered to your front door, the delivery person performs the (complex) task of putting the pizza in the vehicle, driving the vehicle, and carrying the pizza to your door. While the entire *process* of pizza transportation involves many resources (including a vehicle) and actions, the driver's *tasks* are limited to her or his intentionally related and required actions.
- Importantly, we can (and often do) assign tasks to ourselves! However, we're mainly concerned here with social understandings and expectations.
- Collectively important tasks may often be undefined, or be performed in unrecognized ways. However, it's important to identify tasks which create tensions or conflict. (See Developing group tasks and roles.)

1.6.4 **Roles** indicate *types of relationship* which people *or* groups can have with other people or groups. Roles provide one or more expectations and recognized rights.

- As mentioned in <u>Media access and participation rights</u>, read/write and guest/member permissions may define fundamental *roles for participation* in written proposals and agreements. Whenever read/write and guest/member permissions are specified, they will be relevant to specially defined roles.
- Special roles create responsibility for intended systemic *functions.*
- Special roles often include ongoing responsibility for specific recurrent *tasks*.
- Multiple roles may often be combined into complex 'positions' or 'posts'. This can be quite efficient. However, the logic of such combinations can be highly debatable, especially if one or more roles includes positional coercive authority over collective resources, activities or agents.

1.6.5 **Protocols** indicate agreed-upon *guidelines* and *rules* for actions, including communications and the use (and sharing) of resources.

- Guidelines include any *best practices* and *recipes* which encourage *desired* actions, and discourage *harmful* and *irrelevant* actions.
  - Guidelines may be supplemented by mechanics and tools such as [gamification](#), [complementary currencies](#) and [mutual credit](#), designed to facilitate creatively [stigmergic](#) additions to community resources.
- Rules indicate any *required* and *prohibited* actions (and group content).

1.6.6 **Events** indicate occasions, of any duration, during which special conditions and/or activities will persist.

1.6.7 **Budgets** indicate the planned investment of any resources, commodities and currencies to support goals.

- In some cases, group expenses may be supported partly or wholly by internal contributions, including [collaborative funding](#) techniques.
- Agreement-based organizations could launch uniquely appealing crowdfunding campaigns, especially if they practice relatively open or [open-book](#) accounting.
- Debt investment (lending/borrowing) is perfectly acceptable for agreement-based groups, if lenders and terms are agreeable.
- Equity investment (financial shareholding) is allowable, and could be crucially helpful in theory. However, financial equity in fully agreement-based organizations must be separated from voting rights.
  - This may disallow some (but not all) legal forms of investment of nation-state currencies such as the US dollar.

- - See Joshua Vial's [Hacking Capitalism with Capped Returns](#) for some parallel thinking.
    - Equal ownership of voting shares will discourage traditional (modern) investors, but may encourage others who are interested in sustainable communities. Bear in mind that *member-investors* in agreement-based organizations will-- like all other members-- be able to block proposals which modify their existing agreements.
    - Agreement-based groups may, of course, associate financially with other types of groups and investors.
  - [Worker ownership](#) is a naturally desirable goal, especially between periods of predictably intense capital investment. Worker ownership [intrinsically motivates](#) labor.
  - While a healthy organization could probably accept *anonymous funding* from any source, it's good practice for major investors to be identified to all members of agreements and groups. One key reason: it's especially risky for groups to depend on funding sources which could be unexpectedly withdrawn during unfinished or yet-to-be paid work.

1.7 Developing group tasks and roles

Formal agreements create formal roles or *relationships* between individuals, peers, or identified 'types' of human agents. This section will suggest ways to develop such relationships sustainably. It bridges the concepts in Jo Freeman's forward-looking 1970 [principles of democratic structuring](#) with the technical possibilities of 21st century organization, including the agreement-types suggested in Complexly-Related Agreements.

Open assignment: In ongoing groups and organizations, roles may be openly available to all members, and some tasks may even be openly available to the public. However, it's often crucially helpful to *assign* tasks and roles directly to individuals or teams, and to log work reports in shared documents. This helps groups to ensure that collective priorities aren't neglected, and to limit wastefully redundant actions.

Specialization: Many tasks and roles may require special *familiarity* and/or *training*, depending on their organizational context. Specialists may be *consulted* or *assigned* to tasks and roles.

Specialists with *mutually recognized* qualifications, like other peer groups, may gather to pursue defined team-based objectives within communities and projects. Specialists may also be intentionally teamed with other interested parties, either through informal matchmaking or via community profiles which document self-assessed skills and interests, potentially coordinated with community reputation systems.

Assignment techniques: Tasks and roles may be assigned to individuals *or* to self-organizing teams through *open sign-up, elections, sortition* (drawing by lots), *rotation*, *recruitment*, or through ad hoc *personal nominations* and *offers*. While nominations and offers can be handled informally, it's good practice to use consent-based decision process to officially assign substantial tasks and roles within a group. Regardless of whether such tasks and roles are or aren't *urgently important*, they're often highly desirable to one or more agents who *currently* have the capacity to pursue them.

The assignment of personal responsibility for group tasks and roles may be variously described and labelled as volunteer work, [contracting](#) or [delegation](#), depending on highly variable potentials for creative agency, remuneration (see below) and positional coercive authority.

Delegation: Groups may explicitly enable designated responsible parties to subcontract or 'sub-delegate' elements of their expected work to others. This can cause problems if the responsible parties aren't genuinely responsible in their delegative decisions, and in monitoring delegated work.   However, delegation can facilitate especially effective and efficient work.

Sustainable group process, including effective conflict resolution, can be deeply fostered by openly sharing and documenting all subcontracts and delegative relationships.

Remuneration: Tasks and roles may or may not offer direct compensation ([remuneration](#)) of any type. Some roles are prestigious and highly desirable; other roles (and many tasks) are menial.

It's good practice for groups to provide direct compensation for tasks and roles which require personal investments of personal resources (including time), training or personal risk which seem to exceed the (direct *and* indirect*)* benefits received. Inclusive decision process and value-accounting systems such as [Network Resource Planning](#) can facilitate a dynamically fair and sustainable distribution of tasks and personal investments.

Legal tasks, roles and concerns: Groups which are [legal entities](#) will necessarily include special tasks and roles, which can be strict and complicated. New or growing groups should carefully consider the pros and cons of their options to file for legal status!

With or without group legal status, it's possible for individuals to be held legally accountable for certain types of "group activities". This document can help to minimize that by encouraging uncoerced, responsible decisions by each individual and each team within complex groups. However, it should always be remembered that no matter how much "teamwork" is valued, it's good practice for individuals to act as rarely as possible "in the name of a group". It's also good practice for all collective budgeting possibilities to be legally analyzed.

Unofficial and emergency actions: Roles with [executive](#) functions may (and often should) enable their holders to perform *unofficial actions* or use *emergency powers* on time-sensitive challenges which exceed their normal authoritative capacity. Some examples:

- A discussion group administrator may be enabled to *unofficially* suspend a highly disruptive participant, subject to official approval (or reversal) later.
- In legal organizations, directors or trustees with [fiduciary duty](#) may hold authority for emergency spending, budgeting and legal decisions.

In theory, a wide variety of unofficial (and at least partially reversible) administrative powers can safely be distributed to *all members* of massive networks. By contrast, emergency organizational powers must be limited to most-trusted people.

Unofficial and emergency actions should be recorded and reported to all members of related agreements. Such reports may or may not warrant further discussion and, in some cases, conflict resolution processes.

2. Complexly Related Agreements

This section will suggest how agreements-- and, thus, groups-- can be related to each other both formally *and* in a complexly adaptive way, through the rational development of complex processes and related tasks and roles.

Most ideas below can be used independently of the consent-based decision process described in Creating Agreements. However, I believe that they will foster a sustainably **modular** use of consent-based process when (and only when) collective decisions seem genuinely important. I believe that all complex *designs* and all complex adaptive systems--including life itself!-- develop modularly through [dialectic](#) exchanges of information and (other) resources between semi-autonomous agents and their environments. I personally call this iterative process "dialectic [holism](#)", and believe that it can be consciously extended to the collaborative development of our formal social structures. Organic agreements can evolve if flexible participation options are made available to all relevant parties in proposals and agreements.

2.1 Hierarchical/ordinal agreements

Agreements may be hierarchically *subordinated* to other agreements, to be governed by members of the 'parent' agreements. Subordinate agreements act essentially as *extensions* of parent agreements, by provisionally contracting or delegating authority for specific tasks and roles.

Hierarchical organization has long been prevalent for large-scale organization and government, especially since the start of the [Industrial Age](#). Among its many health issues, it often suffers from "silo effects": excessive inter-organization competition, deficient intra-organization intelligence, and gross inefficiency in the development of broadly desired goods and services. *However*, it's important to recognize that hierarchical governance is fundamentally rational for goals which *exclusively serve* a specific group's interests and investments. This often (but not inevitably) includes a group's administrative and maintenance functions.

In agreement-based organization, hierarchical agreements may require that the members of parent agreements retain full authority over the addition of members to subordinate agreements, or they may allow members of subordinate agreements to directly add members from the parent group *or* elsewhere. Groups should feel free to explore this on a case-by-case basis.

2.2 Federation and confederation

Agreements may be [federated](#) or [confederated](#) to enable the semi-autonomous development of a *coordinating body* and of *member groups* with *additive* permissions, privileges and responsibilities. In many cases, the coordinating agreement and the member agreements may be *separately available* for individuals and groups to enter.

It's often possible to terminate federated and confederated connections without disrupting the existence of separately available agreements. Termination may create deep social consequences, especially in the case of strong federations. Nonetheless, federation is a generally robust principle for the modular design of organizations.

2.3 Intercommunity

My personal use of the term 'intercommunity' reflects the fact that all formal groups are inherently artificial, and we can create *per-person* agreements which flexibly *granulate, aggregate* and *iterate* our formal relations across existing group and network boundaries.

Many 'feed-based' social media activities suggest the organic power of intercommunity. For example, people can join and leave many Facebook groups, sub[reddit](#)s, or (within a team) [Slack](#) channels whenever they please, personalizing their ongoing experience of (and interactions with) the platforms in question. We can extend such organic social qualities to inclusive consent-based agreements, and to the discussions, media, and process management tools we associate with them.

To fully explore our intercommunity potential, we can combine consent-based decision process with consistent options for media access, participation rights, and distributed version control for agreements at *all potential levels* of complexly related goals.

2.4 Distributed version control

Distributed version control is increasingly common in software development, and critically valuable for all complex *co-writing* processes. It can be fully applied to the development of proposals, agreements and memberships.

In distributed version control systems and platforms, such as GitHub, media files in any location can be branched or forked to be edited separately. Forked versions can be stored separately by any people or groups. Users can send 'pull requests' asking for changes or additions to be merged from a branch or fork to other versions. If users prefer to, or if pull requests are denied by admins, they can independently pursue development via their own forked version(s). Revisions to all files in all locations are consistently recorded, and are reversible.

The forking/ divergence of media files is *not* an inherently momentous or traumatic action. Creative innovations can be developed in parallel versions, or in parallel focuses on different components within an intentionally modular creative project. Divergent co-operative efforts may eventually converge, via informal or formal agreements between their participants.

Distributed version control can be used for *distributed agreement control,* with different memberships for many or most of the related agreements.

It must be noted here that the diverging (and possibly overlapping) memberships of forked agreements could often face social and economic pressures to either re-merge *or* to diverge their efforts further. However, this kind of pressure typically afflicts separately developed projects and businesses, whether they notice it or not! 'Distributed agreement control' could systematically improve the accountability and fairness of merger-related deliberation and decision processes.

2.5 Documentation and navigation

We urgently need to improve the documentation and navigation of our social structures. This will be especially true for the agreement-based organization of complex adaptive social systems. It will also become true for traditional organizations, with their complex hierarchies of positional coercive authority, *if* they can survive our explosive cultural and technological evolution.

As peer-to-peer global connections mature, we will all need tools which help us to navigate complex networks and projects quickly and easily at adjustable levels of detail. Our intentional global communities will require deeply inclusive *media networks* and *collaborative libraries,* and we will need to inclusively manage our co-working processes*.* We will especially need to receive consistently effective, adjustable *notifications* of actions and events which are personally important to each of us.

Organizational clarity has been a chronic failure point for complex groups and institutions. Major improvements in social tools and technologies, however, are well within reach. These improvements will dramatically favor collective activities which are based on *genuine agreements* instead of coercive, confusing or deceptive forces.