Ooph! How do we talk about Loomio in 5 years?

Because we have strong opinions about our social mission and loose opinions about how we might get there, we've never found it easy to talk about our long-term product roadmap. We're dedicated to being user-driven, so we're all hesitant to over-specify the roadmap. The challenge is to balance our fierce commitment to our social mission, with a bold inspiring vision, while maintaining the humility to say 'none of us know what's best.'

These are some factors that have combined to help us make progress on that challenge:

1. We invested in **rhythm** to bring people into strong alignment: the Scrum process sets a daily and fortnightly rhythm, and the 90-day process sets a quarterly rhythm.
2. We started the Strategy Working Group: a dynamic subset of people from across the organisation meet once a month to think about Loomio **three years out**.
3. We've raised enough **capital** to extend our runway out far enough for us to think abundantly again.

As a result, for the first time, we have a long term product roadmap that a lot of people across the coop are excited about!

This is a high-level sketch of where we might go, it's the edge of our thinking, it's big on vision and light on detail. It will be further refined over time with customer feedback, validation, design, and testing.

Have a read, make suggestions, ask questions. Are you excited about this strategy? What's missing that you'd like to add?

Where we are now: Loomio 2015

Loomio is currently heavily group-oriented, which means the core value of the tool sits behind several layers. To make a decision, a user has to go through the following steps:

1. hear about Loomio and decide to try it,
2. set up an account,
3. set up a group,
4. invite other people in (who also have to set up accounts),
5. start a discussion,
6. start a proposal,
7. then finally they can make a decision together.

In spite of these hurdles, we know that it's a useful tool for motivated purpose-driven groups.

For many people, their Loomio group acts as a home for their organisation / group / community / network. It's a calm focused environment that's purpose-built for constructive deliberation and decision-making.

Loomio groups are more or less walled-in. There are clear barriers between a Loomio group and anything external to Loomio (i.e. other online tools).

It's like a nice secluded conference room that you use on a regular basis, and can make comfortable for your particular group to use whenever you like. But it's not something that's built to rapidly spread to large numbers of people.

Development plan 2015

From now until the end of the year, the product development will focus on making this core element super rock solid and feeling really nice to use. (The rest of the org will be preparing for scale, and getting the online revenue and storytelling humming).

We'll also be doing a bunch of design work so that next year we can get stuck into some exciting new development with confidence. The next section of this doc sketches out the direction for this design energy.
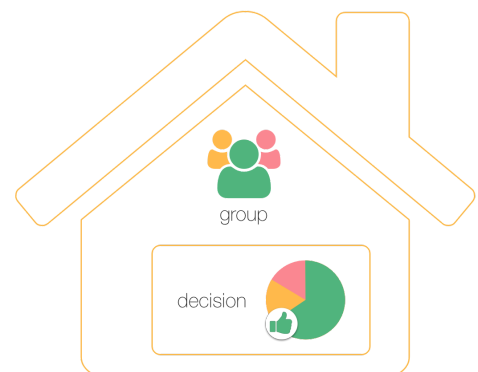
Where we will go next: Loomio 2016

In the last few weeks there have been a bunch of conversations about how we massively bring down the barriers to experiencing value from Loomio, while maintaining the richness and cultural context of the Loomio group as an online home for constructive deliberation.

Some of the barriers to adoption we came up with:

- Awareness: how do people find out?
- Onboarding: how do people understand the value?
- Activation: how do we turn a first touch into a habit?
- Ease of access: frictionless path to value for creator + participants
- Cost/benefit: perceived value exceeds perceived effort
- Trust/security (which can be a trade-off with usability)
- Tool fatigue (argh so many accounts!)
- Attention fatigue (argh too much information!)
- Email fatigue (argh too many emails!)
- Richness of experience (i.e. text-only Loomio is daunting)

The strategy session this morning (Sept 29) focused on sketching out a vision for how we can solve the immediate problems and set ourselves up for a big world-changing Loomio in a few years.

With contributions from James, Michael, MJ, Katherine, Hannah, Ben, Mary and Rich, this session was a pretty cool cross-section of the coop.

1. Removing barriers: introducing the intergalactic decision-portal!

Imagine a lightweight module that contains the decision-making functionality of Loomio in a super-accessible format that interacts with all the other tools you use every day.

Wherever your group is exchanging information and talking online, when you need to make a decision you can jump straight into Loomio. Without having to set up yet another account! Without having to create a group first! The idea is to provide Doodle-level convenience and ease-of-use.

Artist's impression of a Stargate-like teleportation device for teleporting people into a collaborative decision!

Development 2016

Integration with other communication tools will be a big part of this work. We're thinking of integration in a few broad categories:

URL
Anyone with a link can participate (like Google Docs). Share the link using whatever tools and platforms you're already using: email, Facebook, Trello, Slack. Users participate and experience the value, before they have to create an account (like [Doodle](#) or [appear.in](#)).

API
We can use our API and webhooks to do all kinds of neat stuff that makes Loomio work directly with the other tools that Loomio users also use.
e.g. notify a Slack channel of a new decision
e.g. track progress by turning a Loomio decision into a Trello card
e.g. forward an email chain to decide@loomio.org

Embed
Embed the decision widget on any web page. Works like [Disqus](#), which lets you easily add commenting functionality to any web page, news story, Wordpress blog, etc.

How does this fit with the business model?

Importantly, this is *not* a replacement for Loomio groups (which are our current focus for online revenue): it provides another entry point. Once you've made a decision, we provide a super easy pathway to set up a Loomio group for ongoing use.

This provides an entry point into the subscription customer pipeline. It's about getting people in the door, building a habit, and then training them in the culture of deep collaboration.

Once you've participated in a Loomio decision, you'll want to come back for more and convert to sustained regular use. And tell all your friends!

2. Place-making and culture change:
Loomio as the best home your group ever had

Imagine a really well set-up retreat centre or buzzing coworking space: what do you see? Faces, plants, posters, whiteboards, sticky notes, people rapidly grouping and regrouping...

There are places for a quiet chat and big meeting rooms equipped for multimedia. There's a host that welcomes you in and shows you around. There's a filing cabinet and a watercooler and a foyer and a sign on the street and maybe some crystals and a gong. All of these objects have a function. They were designed by someone.

Loomio Beta is a bit like a bare-bones hotel conference room that does the job but doesn't feel as nice as it could.

Loomio 2016 is the best online meeting place for your group. There are helpful humans and friendly robot facilitators encouraging your group to learn good group process, and telling stories of other people and groups that inspire you!

Development 2016

Here's some of the place-making/culture changing work we'll be taking on in 2016:

Storytelling: we tell stories about how and why people are using Loomio (Humans of Loomio), and eventually people will tell their own stories (Showcase)

Facilitation features: teaching people how to build a collaboration culture, e.g. welcome, orientation, onboarding, summarising, perspective-taking, etc

Knowledge management - develop organisational memory: search, archive, categories, tags, attachments, wiki

Addressing information overload - this is a pain point of all networked organisations. We can

deal with this productively by:

- intelligent notification settings (e.g start a thread quietly)
- deliver content with minimal cognitive overhead (e.g. activity feed, push notifications)
- multimedia experience: easily include audio, images, videos, emojis, in addition to text
- discussion threading: reply to a subtopic without notifying everyone

Other decision types: proposals are great but they are not good for every case. Adding a few more decision types will allow for greater flexibility and expression. c.f. Google Votes' five decision types:

1. **Yes/No**: select one of two possible options
2. **Plurality**: select one of multiple options
3. **Approval**: select multiple options
4. **Score**: rate options from 1-5 stars
5. **Ranked**: sort options in preference order

Where we will go in future: Loomio 2017+

At the moment, Loomio groups don't interact with each other. We know from really pioneering groups like Enspiral and Podemos that there is an emerging need for a tool for **groups of groups** to make decisions together.
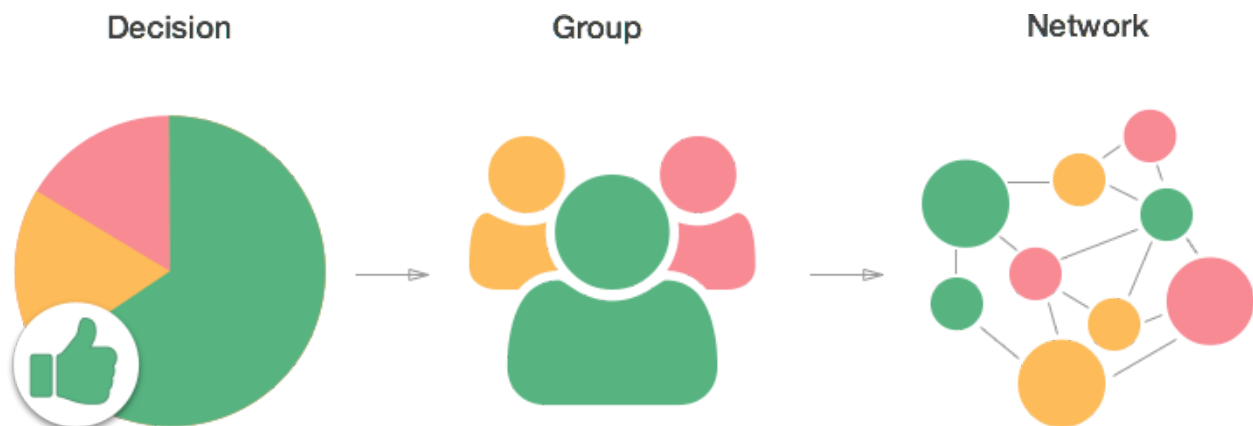
Current developments in large scale digital decision-making focus on "liquid" or "delegative democracy." (Check out Google's experiment in liquid democracy.)

There are lots of projects tackling this challenge (e.g. DemocracyOS, LiquidFeedback, Agora, Adhocracy), so that space is crowded. It's an exciting concept, but fraught with problems that we don't have any particular expertise in (e.g. identity verification and other anti-corruption efforts).

Once we've finished building *the decision making layer for the internet* and *the best online home for your group online*, Loomio will be well-positioned to open up a new space for large scale digital decision-making.

It's new territory so we can define a new language as we go. Some of the best writing in this space comes under the term "parpolity" (participatory politics); Occupy Wall Street's shaky experiments in this mode used the term "spokescouncil". We're currently playing with the term "**networked democracy**".

The fact is, we don't know what it will look like. What we imagine is taking all the awesomely collaborative democratic local groups, and connecting them together at a national or global scale. Preserving the value of local participation, and leveraging it with global connectivity.

Last year we worked with Podemos to sketch out the very first draft of a Loomio "network", we even got so far as to deploy the first network page (if you've got new Loomio enabled you'll need to log out to view that page).

In the future we imagine developing something like a "weather map of consensus". Imagine a proposal is developed in a local group, then distributed out across all the groups in the network, for each of them to deliberate on. The local group in Valencia has reached consensus, but they might be swayed by the argument that is emerging in Madrid.

Proposal: Ban the use of plastic bags in our region
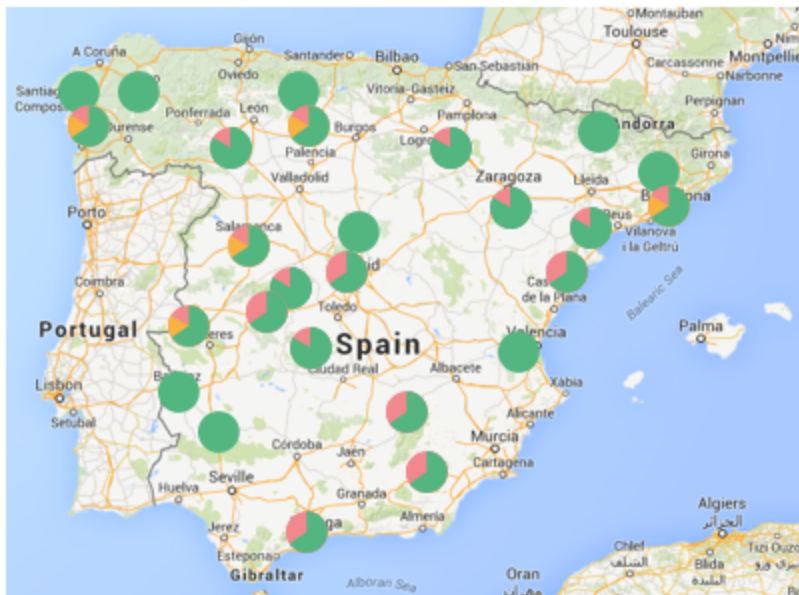
Or if a national political group is too big to wrap your head around, just imagine how it would work for Enspiral: self-contained groups for Lifehack, Loomio, Rabid, Cobudget, etc all getting together for network-wide deliberation.

Maybe each of those groups could send a delegate to a network-wide council. We're not really sure how this will play out, but it is fun to imagine! One thing is for sure: it has the potential to be vastly more inclusive and effective than the current way we make mega-scale decisions, and we are uniquely well positioned to explore this new territory.