THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF ONLINE TRIBAL BUREAUCRACY
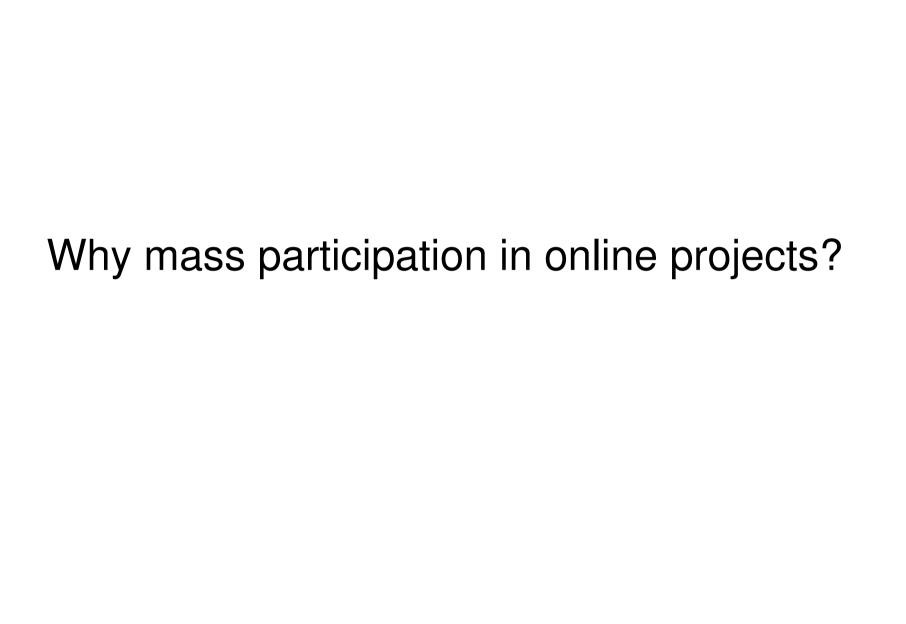
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FOURTH OEKONUX CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER, UK
27-29 MARCH 2009

PART 1
THEORY

Why mass participation in online projects?

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Autonomy (rejection of hierarchy)

Why mass participation in online projects?

Autonomy

Distribution (power is shared)

Distribution:

The right to fork (compromised in Web 2.0)

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People can rapidly attain powerful positions

Legitimacy online

Who rules in autonomous / distributed systems?

Why do others accept their authority?

Legitimacy online

Who rules in autonomous / distributed systems?

Why do others accept their authority?

Leaders must **justify** their central position.

Defining online authority

sovereign authority (role separated from person)

-bureaucratic (also rules, release schedules,
  official repositories, written records): needs to
  be democratised to fit communal form
-'value-rational' (Weber 1978).
-collective basis, will of the people

see Debian: Project Leader, Constitution
(organisation science: O'Mahony & Ferraro
  2007). But does not account for...

charismatic authority (role re-linked to person)

-charismatisation of meritocracy (expertise not
  bureaucratic / hierarchical)
-affective attachment to
-personal qualities:
  -brilliance of great founder (hacker-charisma)
  -position of great node (index-charisma)

see Linux, Wikipedia, Daily Kos

Orders of online authority

	cha./hacker authority	cha./index authority	sovereign authority	archaic power
role	elder, integrator	hub, bridge	adjudicator, enforcer	troll, scapegoat
act	aggregate	connect	deliberate	attack
space	project	network	assembly	forum
objects	FAQs	rankings	votes	flames
justification	epistemic	situational	procedural	honour

Evolution of orders

(draw graph)

distribution of authority
+
conflicting authority orders
=
conflicts

-> drain on resources
-> unity and purpose, rite of passage

Role of leaders

Integrate contributions / adjudicate conflicts

To be accepted, these decisions must be
  legitimated by meaningful relationship between
  role and structure

Networks offer no justification

Organisational form?

Volunteer associations (Harrison 1960)

Collectivist organisations (Rothschild-Whitt 1979)

Voluntary hierarchies (Weber 2004)

Introducing...

Online tribal bureaucracy (O'Neil 2009)

OTB is a hybrid form used by autonomous groups and characterised by:
-cooperative production of free content
-overlapping of authority orders: bureaucratic traits are mixed with collective and charismatic (or 'tribal') traits
-prevalence of conflict
-deliberative procedures

PART 2
WORK

Comparison: corporate bureaus (1)

(advantages of OTB)
Good match people/work (ownership of
  authority)
No misuse of resource by insiders (risk by
  outsiders)
No representational costs

Comparison: corporate bureaus (2)

(disadvantages of OTB)

No (legal) responsibility for well-being of
  participants

No means to oblige performance of unpopular
  tasks (lack of responsiveness / training)

Since decisions are collectively debated – there
  is more likelihood of affective conflict (flamewar)

Comparison: communes

(advantages of OTB)
Resolve scale issue (length of meetings)
Less unstable than communes (persons, unlike
  positions, are subject to sickness / moods)

(disadvantages of OTB)
Normative controls less efficient in large groups

Challenges: peer production and conflict

Elite projects: quarrels over control of development

Mass projects: Herding of autonomous content producers can generate humiliation

Wikipedia: inflation of authority mechanisms

Challenges: types of conflict

minor conflict - slows down the project
-task [project content]: uncontroversial
-affective [communes: persons not roles]:
  distributed work, but collective decision-making
-process [approach to task]: betrayal of
  democracy, criticism of injustice

major conflict - consumes the project (last 2)
individual explicitly breaks rules – justifies by
  opposition to archaic force

Challenges: enforcement

-hard to punish loner or transient effectively
  (norms assume symmetry of interests)

-granularity (not coarse penalty of Leviathan):
  even if centralised decision, depends on
  agreement of individual members to be applied

Debian: reluctance to intervene

Challenges: deliberative procedures

-Fact: path-dependence

-Fact: speed, over-excitement

-Risk: disappearance of due process (notification of rule to obey)?

-Risk: disappearance of sacred quality, of surprise provided by voting?

PART 3
MARKET

How to increase market share

Frame in terms of common sense, not common good:

Pragmatic, *not* normative
(Open Source rather than FLOSS)

Personal realisation is paramount in society (see Duncombe 2007)
Success-story as tool of depolitisation

Peer production in the business

'Post-bureaucratic' organisation

W.L. Gore & Associates: no hierarchy, no title: create idea, recruit talent, peer-review of performance, emergent leaders: rankings

Still have to compete for connections, best projects: still competition

Peer production and the market

-Free content in Capitalism: great product, great advice provision, reach those who would not buy

-Utopia online / consumption of hardware...

-Internet ideology of freedom

'New Spirit of Capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiappello 2004)

What replaces the market?

Capitalism rejected domination based on transcendence / tradition.

Reversion to earlier models of exchange (closeness, mutual help, solidarity): risk of reversion to pre-capitalist exchange (role=person).
Tribal model: charismatic / traditional leader

What form of exchange? (Everyone needs to conform)

These interrogations: explain my focus on peer organisation

Important questions remain: justice provision in relation to bureaucracy / State?

Connection to State? Possible? Desirable?

But if to represent viable alternative to bureaus, two other OTB issues need to be resolved.

Expertise and identity

Tension between mass projects based on
  participation of amateurs and elite projects
  based on participation of experts.
In one case anonymity is accepted.

But: is anonymity viable (no responsibility)?
But: total surveillance?
User-centric IDM? Web of trust? Solutions?

THANK YOU

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