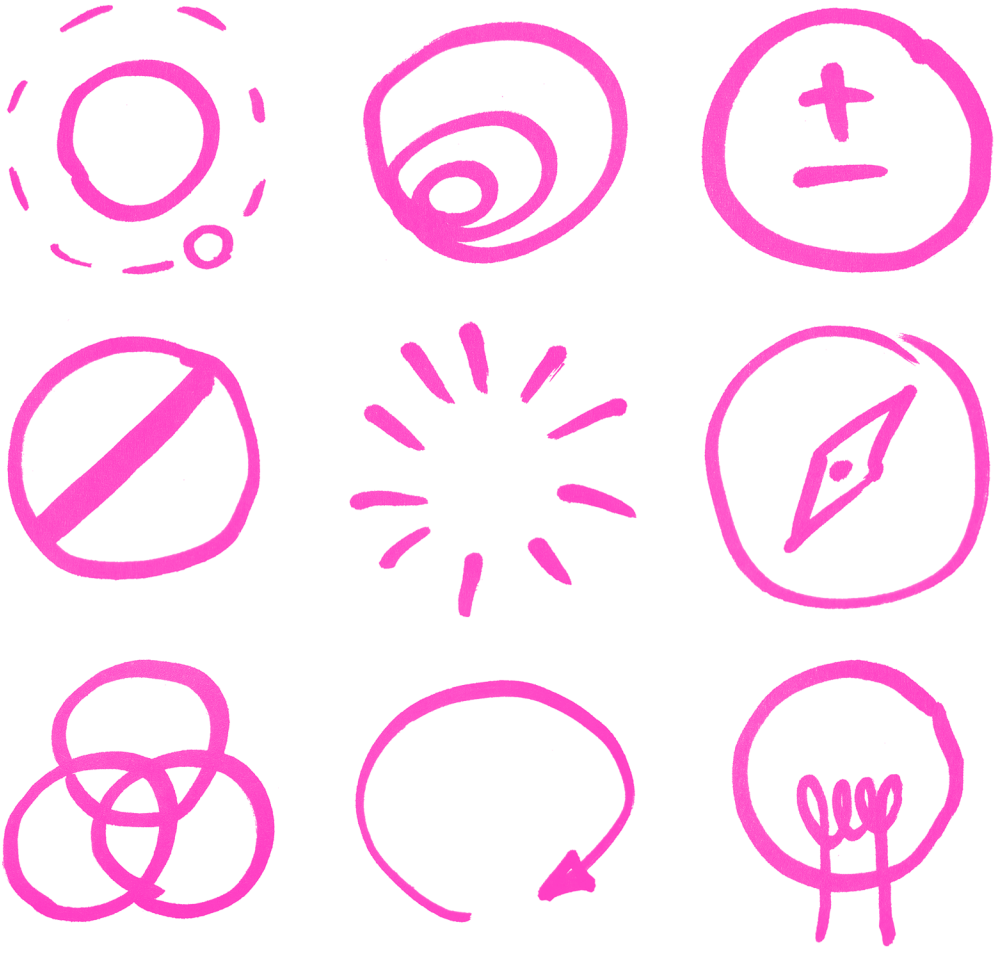

Patterns for Decentralised Organising

by Richard D. Bartlett

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This book is for sale at
http://leanpub.com/patterns-for-decentralised-organising

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This book is dedicated to my late granddad Fred, who died on the day I joined the Occupy movement. He was a sweet man, a generous hard worker, and a helluva good dancer.

Contents

Introductions

95% done

What's the sound of a humming team?

This is a book about working in groups. I'm not so interested in *what* you're working on together, I'm just going to focus on *how* you do it.

To my way of thinking, it doesn't matter if you're trying to build a better electric vehicle, or develop government policy, or care for sick people, or blockade a pipeline; whenever you work with a group of people on a shared objective, there's some *stuff* you're going to deal with, some challenges. *How do we decide what we're working on? who does what? who can join our team? what are our expectations for each other? what happens when someone doesn't fulfil those expectations? what do we do with disagreement? how do decisions get made?*

A hierarchical management structure is one way to deal with the challenges of working together. There's a boss at the top who calls the shots, they delegate some limited responsibilities down a ladder of managers, and the managers eventually pass a very small parcel of responsibility to the workers at the bottom of the pyramid. I don't really know anything about working in traditional hierarchies. This is a book for people who are trying to organise in *a different way*, for groups who want less hierarchy and more collaboration. There's not really a great word for it: self-organising, bottom-up, self-managing, horizontal, sociocratic, heterarchical, teal, cooperative, non-hierarchical… I call it "**decentralised organising**" because I'm thinking of a network of relationships with no central point of power and control, no single point of failure. All the contributors have different areas of focus, different degrees of commitment or experience, but that difference sits on top of a strong

foundation of equality: everyone's voice is equally valued, everyone is equally entitled to dignity and respect. It's more about *fairness* than *sameness*. A decentralised group is nimble, supple, limber: people adjust to each other and to the changing environment. Good ideas can come from anywhere, and no one person is irreplaceable.

Have you ever had an experience working with other people where it just felt *easy?* Everyone is playing to their strengths. There's not a huge amount of process or formality getting in the way. Together you're flexible and adaptable but not chaotic. You know when to take initiative, and when to stop and ask for input. You've got room to stretch and grow, but you can have an "off day" without feeling like you're letting people down. You're getting stuff done and having fun at the same time. Most of us have had glimpses of a way of working together that feels delightful, easy, productive, fun. When I say "a humming team", most people know what I'm talking about. So I want to know, *what does that hum sound like?*

I'm convinced there is not a "one size fits all" recipe, a management structure that you can take off the shelf and install in your collective or your company. But my hypothesis is that there are **patterns**: common design elements you can draw on as you construct a recipe that's right for you. Each pattern in this book names a challenge that you are likely to face, and offers tools and techniques you can try in response to that challenge.

In essence, I'm mostly drawing from three schools of thought: **Agile software development** (work in rhythm, develop peer accountability, talk about your problems and co-design solutions together), **feminism** (account for affective labour and distribute it fairly), and **anarchism** (consent, autonomy and mutual aid as first principles, combined with an honest and persistent appraisal of power). This is not a book about ideas though, it's very practical, straightforward, grounded in direct experience, and ready to be applied in your team right away.

You can read the sections in any order, so if you want to get straight into it, skip ahead to the *Patterns* now. Or if you want to know more about me and where I am coming from, read on…

Hi, I'm Rich

Let me introduce myself with a few bullet points:

- I'm a straight man, recently turned 33.
- Mum and Dad are working class, but their focus on education and hard work means I'm middle class.
- I'm a 4th generation New Zealander, but I'm a 1st-generation Pākehā — I mean my siblings and I are the first of our family to ask "what does it mean to be a settler on colonised land?"
- I grew up in a devout Christian family, growing vegetables on a farm in the Wairarapa. I left the farm and studied engineering in the city. I let go of the God stories.
- I've done some community organising and a lot of facilitation.
- I co-founded a tech startup.

All of these characteristics influence my way of understanding the world; these are some of the lenses I'm wearing. Maybe my engineering training comes through as a mechanical or deterministic attitude towards human relationships. Maybe you'll sense the privilege of my upbringing as a kind of naïve idealism. In this book I'm going to share some *principles of togetherness* which might be second nature to you if you come from a culture with more emphasis on the collective. I won't claim that any of this is new, or mine. My intention is to name complicated things in a simple way, to give you practical suggestions for improving your group work, to encourage you to keep trying, and to invite you into a particular way of thinking.

Living in the future

My experience with decentralised organising started in 2011, when I encountered the Occupy movement in Civic Square in Pōneke

Wellington. Without a central leader or a management committee, Occupy camps sprouted in hundreds of cities around the world, with remarkable coherence: committed to non-violence, inclusion, participatory decision-making, hospitality. Politics geeks call a movement like this "prefigurative", because we were prototyping the society we want to occupy, rather than demanding somebody give it to us.

The movement was decentralised, and each camp was decentralised too. At Occupy Wellington we had "working groups" to divide up all the tasks of running a small village: preparing food, maintaining shelter, running education and entertainment programs, external communications, 24hr hospitality. Nobody could tell anyone else what to do, we just had to figure it out together. When it worked, it was incredible, mind-blowing, transformative… but of course in the end *it didn't work*. Our camp, like so many others, devolved into an incoherent, unsafe, uninviting mess.

Coming out of that experience, my friends and I were left with a massive "what's next?" It felt like we had come so close to a completely new kind of society, and then it disintegrated into mud and noise. We had all been inspired by the participatory decision-making process; not the focus on "consensus" exactly, but the deliberating, listening, patiently growing shared understanding, working by consent, not using force, caring about and caring for each other.

Like many others around the world, we figured that digital technology could make deliberative decision-making much more accessible, and much less time-consuming. So we started a software project called Loomio (from "loom" as in weaving and "lum" as in illumination). At first we thought we were just making a tool for activists, but as soon as we released our first rudimentary prototype we were flooded with interest from all sorts of groups: city governments, companies, NGOs, community projects, families. Fast forward to the present, and Loomio is six years old, still growing, being used by communities, organisations, collectives and institutions all over the world.

While we've been building the software, we've also built a remarkable cooperative company, globally respected for our ethical commitments. From the outset, we put a lot of thought and care into the foundations: we're constitutionally required to prioritise positive social impact ahead of profit; the company is owned by the people working on it; the product is open source (a public resource freely available to anyone); the financing comes from patient ethical investment rather than extractive speculation; the business model is designed for fairness (people pay for value, so we don't have to do creepy things like mining their private data for profit).

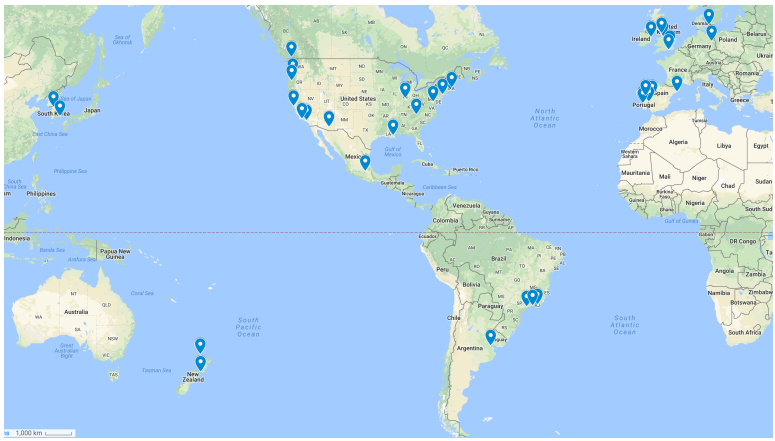
We've spent the past six years prototyping different management and governance structures, continuously adjusting and remixing to make a working environment that feels deeply nourishing, hugely productive, efficient and resilient. This book comes from that extensive R&D process: all the suggestions come from my direct personal experience.

This is *not* a book about how the Loomio cooperative manages a multi-million dollar software project without a management hierarchy (we already published that at loomio.coop). Instead, in this book I've taken the lessons from the Loomio story and *translated* them into terms that are ready to be applied in any company, collective, team or network that is trying to decentralise leadership and share ownership.

The bones of this book emerged from my work supporting dozens of teams and companies in Enspiral, a network of decentralised organisations experimenting with new ways of working. Over the years I noticed that we all faced similar challenges, and sharing our experiences accelerated the learning process.

The nuance, validation, and refinement of this text comes as a result of a year on the road, from the South Pacific to South Korea, the Americas, Europe and Scandinavia. During 2017, my partner Nati and I worked with folks from the Seoul City Government, healthcare providers in Brighton, a slum in Buenos Aires, tech startups in Berlin, communes in California, and activists from Mexico, Cuba, Canada, Iran and Spain. As we listened to their strug-

gles, we worked out the details of these *Patterns for Decentralised Organisations*, discovering what we all have in common. To me it doesn't matter so much if you're organising with protestors or programmers: humans are humans, all over the world.



World map showing our destinations in 2017

One last thing…

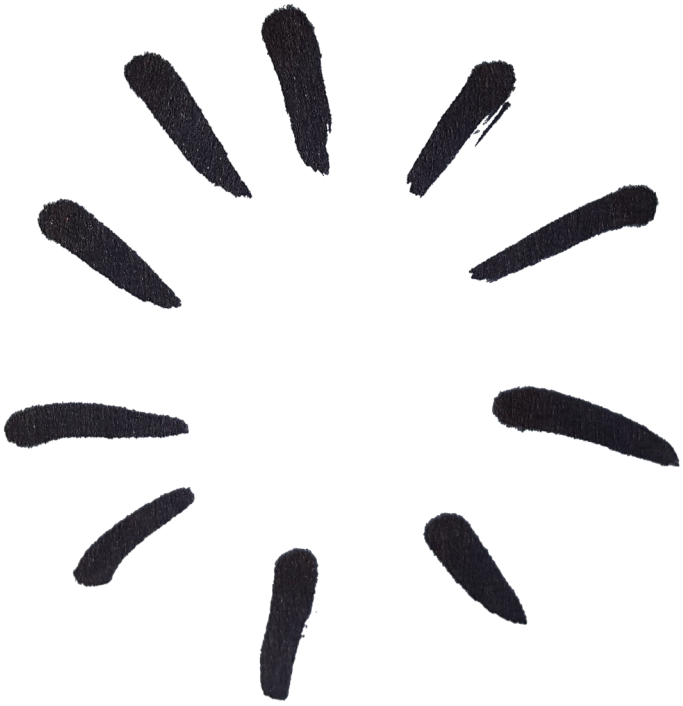
Eventually I came to understand "Occupy" as a short chapter in an ongoing movement of movements, a single iteration of a multi-generational evolutionary process. This "blessed unrest" mostly proceeds underground, but sometimes comes to the surface with names like the Zapatistas, counter-globalisation movement, the Cutlery Revolution, Arab Spring, 15-M, the Sunflower Movement, Idle No More, the Umbrella Movement, #BlackLivesMatter… I believe these chaotic movements are absolutely essential to repairing our relationships with each other, with the Earth, and all the creatures we live with. I see these movements learning from each other, and I'm eager to accelerate that learning process. This book is offered as a contribution to a collective memory, a common body of knowledge.

This first draft is written by one pair of hands, but the ideas are not mine, which is why the book is published with a creative commons license. I'm delighted to walk alongside a cohort of wise, courageous, loving and creative people. In designing organisational structures, I'm most indebted to Vivien Maidaborn, Mary O'Keeffe, Ben Knight, and Alanna Irving for their enormous contributions to the Loomio Cooperative. I'm forever grateful to the people who supported Loomio through our unorthodox fundraising campaigns: you paid my rent while I learnt all this stuff. I want to celebrate all my thinking-and-doing partners at Enspiral (especially the relentlessly supportive Teddy Taptiklis): Loomio would not exist without y'all. I'm thankful for the anarchists who extend my ethics with radical love and radical honesty (especially Audrey Tang and Emmi Bevensee), for the generations of feminists who exhausted themselves trying to get some of us men to do our fair share, and for the artists who insist on a life with less drudgery and more meaning.

I'm grateful to the people on my bookshelf: bell hooks, Nora Samaran, Frederic Laloux, Charles Eisenstein, Heather Marsh, Nathan Schneider, David Graeber, Elinor Ostrom, Patricia Shaw, Emma Goldman, Starhawk, Ursula K. le Guin, Kim Stanley Robinson, Octavia E. Butler, Marina Sitrin, Zeynep Tufekci, Clay Shirky, Yochai Benkler, Douglas Rushkoff…

Most of all, this book is the product of a thousand conversations with my work-and-love partner Natalia Lombardo who inspires me every day. Every second word is hers. The mistakes are mine.

Intentionally Produce (Counter) Culture



95% done

So let's say you're starting a new project. You've got a small committed team and you're all excited about working together without a rigid hierarchy. That's a great start! However, *saying* you want to work collaboratively is not enough. First you have to un-

learn a bunch of hierarchical habits.

For most of us, **hierarchy is an everyday part of our culture**. As a kid you are trained to look to your parents for guidance. Then you go to school, and you "pass" or "fail" by the standards explained to you by your teachers. Maybe you graduate and get a job: now you have a manager telling you what to do. As a citizen, every few years you get to vote in an election: a way to indicate your preference for who should make laws. You learn to obey those laws (or at least disobey discretely) because people with guns and badges will punish you if you don't.

Most of us are used to being told what to do, or telling others what to do. If you're in a leadership position, you learn to always have a credible answer, even if it's just a guess. If you're *not* the owner or leader of the project, you know you can take it easy because someone else is holding the ultimate responsibility.

Our whole lives have conditioned us for living inside hierarchy, so we have hierarchical habits.

Take me for example: I'm really good at arriving in a room and making sure that everyone thinks I'm the coolest guy here. Without even thinking about it, I'm mapping the social terrain, identifying the influencers and the underdogs. I perform a thousand subtle gestures to win favour with everyone. I learned those skills to navigate a world governed by status. The logic of hierarchy maps everyone on to a ladder from lowest status to highest status. I've been trained to spot that ladder and climb it at top speed. It's in my muscle memory. Those skills are great for self-promotion and ego-inflation, but they're terrible for collaborating with people, or for building genuine relationships. To be an effective collaborator, I need to unlearn that habit and learn a new one that suits.

So when you pull together a new team, it's not enough to just say "we're going to do things differently", you have to put in the work to build a new set of habits, behaviours and reflexes. You have to produce a different kind of culture, deliberately.

How do you produce culture?

At a workshop in the US, I asked the rhetorical question: *"how do you produce culture?"*, thinking that the method was impossible to put into words. But somebody called out a brilliant answer: *"Fermentation!"*

To make sourdough bread, first you need a starter dough. Mix in some fresh ingredients, and start the reaction by folding or kneading, then leave it somewhere dark and safe to rise. In just a few hours, that little starter has transformed the whole loaf.

To ferment a new group culture, your "starter dough" is a person or people who embody some of the qualities you want to develop. The "fresh ingredients" are new people who have a desire to grow. The "kneading" involves a lot of open, heartfelt conversations, some of which will be uncomfortable as you push into each other. The "rising" happens at a retreat, off-site or hui: somewhere safe and quiet that you can be together for a few days, isolated from the outside world.

To produce a thriving, distinctive culture, I don't know any substitute for spending time together.

For the first few years of Loomio, we would go away together every 6 months for a retreat, a pattern we learned from our friends at Enspiral. At the retreat everyone is present for 3 or 4 days, eating together, sleeping in the same place, sharing down-time as well as work-time. This abundance of time allows for the kinds of conversations that don't happen in an office. We dream together, each finding our individual connection to our shared purpose. We talk openly about what's not working, knowing that we have time to listen to the frustration and hurt, and time to co-design a different structure that suits us better. There's space to explore territory where we're all vulnerable: on retreats I've had conversations about my relationship to money, about the racist and sexist dynamics I perpetuate, and how it feels to live on a burning planet.

Perhaps the most important thing we do at retreats is simply *getting to know each other*. When I understand more about your

history, your passions and frustrations, your hobbies and quirks, I start to see you as a whole person. I get to know *who you are* and *where you come from*, beyond just *what you do*. I see you as a branch in a vast network, rather than an isolated point floating in space.

Of course, you don't need to go on a team retreat to get to know each other as "whole people". Across all the teams and companies at Enspiral, almost all of our meetings start with a "check in", a quick way to hear from everyone in the room: how are you? what do you want to do with our time together? This simple practice settles people and prepares them to collaborate. You can read more about "check ins" in this great article from Kristin Cobble: *How to Start a Meeting*.

When we know each other well, we start to see our differences as distinctive qualities, rather than just a source of conflict. We discover commonalities beneath our differences. We grow trust in each other. We develop this superpower called "belonging".

In 2011-2012, Gallup surveyed 200,000 employees in 141 countries and found only 13% of them are "engaged" in their work. To my understanding, disengagement at work is just one facet of a wider crisis of belonging. Humans evolved in groups, but modern Western society is designed for individuals. I say "belonging is a superpower" because I've seen how people thrive once they find their community of belonging. It could be a co-op, family, collective, club, or just a really great team at work. That's why I love supporting people into these small, tight, intimate groups.

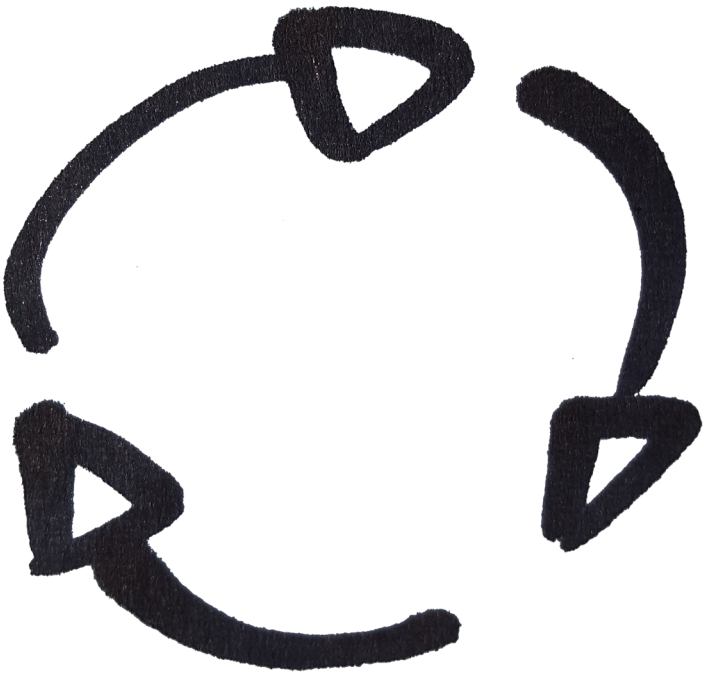
I remember my mentor Vivien Maidaborn identifying "the willingness to engage" as the first ingredient of a successful negotiation. I've found people are much more willing to engage when they have this sense of "belonging", a shared stake in our collective identity. You and I can be in conflict, my trust in you may be bruised, but I'm willing to show up and figure it out so long as I feel we are both genuinely invested in our shared project. **Consensus works to the degree that people care about each other**. As soon as you don't care about each other, you don't care if there's a disagreement, so you are not motivated to work it out.

When you have trust and belonging, all the challenges of working together are surmountable. But without trust and belonging, all the other interventions are bandaids. That's why this "intentionally produced culture" is the first pattern: it's the foundation that the rest of your organisational structure is built on.

Further reading

- 5 Reasons to Build a Network of Small Groups, Rather than a Mass Movement of Individuals
- A Caring Organisation: Processes & Structures for a Collaborative Workplace
- psychological safety study

Systematically Distribute Care Labour



95% done; add exercises + resources

It's impossible to sustain a thriving collaborative culture if the load of care is not shared fairly.

Care includes the practical stuff of hospitality, like preparing for a gathering and cleaning up after. It also includes emotional work,

like noticing that someone is not having a good time, checking in with them, and asking 'how can I support you to come back in?' "Care" includes all those **subtle gestures of consideration for the needs and feelings of other people**: organising for everyone to sign a birthday card, opening the window when the room is getting stuffy, listening to someone as they decompress after a bad day. Care is the gravity that holds a group together. When there's not enough care in the group, the group simply doesn't work anymore.

Take a second to think back on your experiences of working in groups. It's a safe bet for me to assume that in most cases, there were just one or two people doing almost all of this "care" work. I can make a confident guess that this imbalance created fertile soil for the seeds of conflict, bitterness, and burnout to grow.

When you're working in a group, you'll usually have some way of allocating tasks to people: Sally is building the website and Marc is writing the content. But in most groups, the *work of caring for people* is not acknowledged as "work". It's invisible, there's no system for allocating it. "Look after each other" doesn't come up on the quarterly objectives.

Fellow Loomio co-creator MJ Kaplan talks about "throwing the sheet over the ghost", naming the unspoken dynamics of a group so we can consider them together. Another way to think of this comes from my mentor Vivien Maidaborn: "if there's no formal system for managing a shared resource, look for the informal system."

Often you'll find that the "informal system" for managing care labour is really simple: **the person with the most sensitivity to the needs of others does most of the work of caring for everybody**. The upside is that you have an expert on the job. The downside is that this system is totally unfair to the individuals involved, and it makes your collective extremely fragile.

In the previous chapter I talked about the ever-present hierarchies in our culture. One of the most expansive hierarchies is that bastard called patriarchy. (If you want an accessible introduction to patriarchy, I hugely recommend a short book called *Feminism Is For Everybody* by bell hooks.) You can think of it like a brain

virus. When I'm infected with the patriarchy virus, I can look at the billions of different people in the world and collapse all that wonderful diversity down into two categories: "man" and "woman". Once I have these two categories, it's easy to organise them on the status ladder: man on top, woman beneath. Statistically speaking, your boss is probably a man (a 2016 study by the American Association of University Women found that 95% of the CEOs in the "S&P 500" list of companies are men). The eight richest people on the planet (who own the same financial wealth as the 3.6 billion poorest) are all men. If you believe in God, chances are he's a man too.

One of the ways that the patriarchy virus shows up in group work is that most of the time, "the person most sensitive to the needs of others" is a woman. Girls are raised to always be caring. My conditioning as a boy means not only do I not do my fair share of the care labour, *I couldn't even see care labour was happening until other people pointed it out for me*!

So in most groups, you have one or two people doing a lot of extra labour, without being acknowledged, supported, or paid. This role is reinforced over time: the more you listen to people, the better you understand how to support them, and the more they come to expect support from you. If this unofficial "chief carer" gets overwhelmed or frustrated, they'll stop, and the group loses its cohesion. Many people don't even know that the care work is happening, so they're certainly not prepared to pick up their fair share.

You might be suffering from Founder's Bottleneck

Patriarchy is not the only force that tends to centralise the care labour on a few people. There's also the founder effect.

I worked with a non-profit tech cooperative in the UK. They already have a culture of high trust and high autonomy, and they

have an intention to further decentralise leadership of the organisation. The team is suffering from what I call "founder's bottleneck". Everyone is comfortable working within their own domain of expertise, but when there are conflicts between colleagues, they'll go and talk to the founder, who can find a resolution where no-one else can.

In this case, "the person most sensitive to the needs of others" is the project founder. They recruited everyone on the team, so they know everyone well, and they're trusted by everyone. Even though everyone on the team is committed to decentralising leadership, the bottleneck makes it impossible for the founder to step away and let the team self-manage.

It's a bold claim, but I think I know some remedies for "founder's bottleneck". My evidence: five years since Loomio started, now all the founders have been able to step back from day-to-day operations and celebrate as the performance of the team keeps improving. Obviously, this is the result of many factors. Perhaps the easiest one for you to pick up and start working with right away is a system we made up called "stewardship".

Decentralised organisations decentralise the care labour

One of the things that has made a huge difference inside our team at Loomio, and in many other teams across the Enspiral network, is to **systematically distribute the work of caring for each other**. Our organisational structure says "caring is just as important as engineering and marketing", in fact, it's good if everyone takes a share of this work.

In the Loomio team, we distribute the work of caring for people with a peer support system we call "stewardship". (Note, our use of the word "stewardship" is related to, but different from the concepts introduced in Peter Block's acclaimed book on unpatriarchal leadership, called *Stewardship*.) You can read the details

of our stewardship system in the Loomio Cooperative Handbook, but I'll share the outline here:

Everyone *is* a steward, and everyone *has* a steward. The steward supports their stewardee. Everyone is caring for someone, and everyone is being cared for by someone else.

What does it mean to care for someone? What kind of care can you expect from a colleague? Those are big complex questions. At a baseline we ask the steward to be a reliable point of contact, someone who knows a little bit about what's going on in your life. We invite each steward to meet their stewardee once per month, and ask 'how can I support you?', listen to the answer, and go from there.

Each relationship is co-designed between the two people. They agree what they're up for. Every stewarding relationship is different, depending on what *they need* and what *you can offer*. Sometimes, it looks like professional development: "I'm focussed on these learning goals, can you help me come up with a plan and check in on my progress?" Other times, it's more like being a good friend or peer-counsellor, "I just need someone to listen to me rant about this annoying thing that happened."

Each relationship lasts for roughly one year, then we mix it up. We're continuously reconnecting different parts of the organisation together. You find that some people are really good at supporting other people, whereas other folks need more practice. Because we rotate these relationships over time, the skills get distributed. I remember one of my stewards had a simple technique: "Richard, what can I remind you of next month? What's something that's really present for you now, that you want me to remind you of next time we meet?" That was a really effective prompt for me to reflect and grow, so now it's something I do when I'm stewarding other people. It's just one simple technique in a growing toolbox of care skills. All of those skills, approaches, and techniques are being distributed around the team, so the emotional intelligence of the collective keeps increasing. That's an incredible environment to be in: it feels lovely, and it creates an extraordinary degree of resilience

in the organisation.

In fact, it's better than resilience: our organisation is designed to be "antifragile" — volatility and shocks make our bonds stronger! These stewarding relationships really kick in when things get difficult. If I'm stuck in a conflict in Loomio, my steward is the first person I'll talk to. (Details of our conflict resolution process are in the Loomio Cooperative Handbook). Inter-personal conflicts are much easier to resolve when you can count on the support of a trusted partner. Shared difficulty is a terrific bonding agent.

We've seen so many benefits from this simple peer-support system. These relationships nurture a growing network of trust throughout the organisation. The emotional intelligence of the team keeps improving. People develop more appreciation for each other's differences. Conflicts get unstuck. Most importantly, the responsibility and effort of caring for people is distributed. We don't all have exactly the same share of the work, but there's not one single point of failure either.

A Toolbox For Decision-Making

65% done

A decision is the threshold we cross from *understanding* into *action*.

This means decisions can be very divisive: my sense of belonging can be deeply shaken if I feel like we don't share the same understanding of an issue, or if I see the group taking an action

that I don't agree with.

In practice, every group has a toolbox of different decision-making protocols. Often this is not made explicit, but people usually have some sense of what mode of decision-making is appropriate for what task. For example: When I'm writing an email to a colleague, I can decide on my own when it is ready to send (I don't need input from anyone else). When I'm sending a newsletter out to 100,000 people, I'll seek advice from a couple of people before I make the decision to press "send". If I'm launching a crowdfunding campaign asking for $1M, I'll only proceed once I have full consensus from the whole team. In these examples, I've used three different decision-making protocols, without necessarily being conscious of the fact.

Because decisions are where "the rubber hits the road", you can avoid a lot of conflict by having an agreed decision-making protocol to make it explicit: these are the different decision modes we use, this is how you choose the right tool for the job.

4 Decision Modes

There are many different ways to make decisions. If you experiment with a few you'll discover the strengths and weaknesses of each. I'm going to look at four modes here: mandate, advice, consent, and consensus. {>>make a graphic here<<}

1. Mandate: I will make the decision, and I'm happy to answer questions about it after.
2. Advice: I will *listen to* the advice of people with expertise, and people who will be affected, and then I will make the decision.
3. Consent: if nobody has a strong objection, I will make the decision.
4. Consensus: we'll work together to find a decision that everyone is happy with.

Notice there's increasing unity, buy-in, participation, and access to collective intelligence as you proceed from 1 to 4. Conversely, there's more time spent in discussion and negotiation. If you have a mandate, you can make a decision instantly, whereas full consensus can take hours or weeks.

Many of the groups we work with have an explicit commitment to consensus decision-making, but in practice they're using a combination of all these 4 modes, without the language to describe them in this way. If you have a shared understanding of different decision-making modes, you can choose the right tool for the job.

> "The most important decision to be made collaboratively is the decision about who makes which decisions." Rosenberg

Some decisions are ideally suited to consensus: *what's our purpose and principles? how do we make decisions? what's are our priorities?* You can use advice or consent for decisions with less impact, like *what words are going on the website?*

Prerequisites for letting go

Most of us would like to loosen up, encourage autonomy, and allow each person on the team to make the decisions that seem best to them. But when it comes down to it, letting go can be extremely difficult. There are many foundational components that will help:

Transparency

The more you delegate, the less control you have over the outcomes, and the more opportunity there is for divergence between different parts of the team. You can resolve this by investing in transparency. In the ideal case:

- everyone knows the boundaries of the mandate (e.g. in a role description or project outline);

- a summary of your decisions is reported regularly;
- there's a clear pathway for people to gain that level of responsibility;
- you can count on the mandate being retracted if it not being exercised well.

Shared direction

Allow time for the learning curve

Patience: juniors are going to fail a bit on the way, but you have to give them space to learn or you will always be the bottleneck

Proactive relationship support

Reactive relationship support

Conflict resolution. We've built up layers: agreements, resources, practices; 1-to-1 conversation; peer-supported conversation; team supported conversation; external mediator; system review.

Proactive team reflection

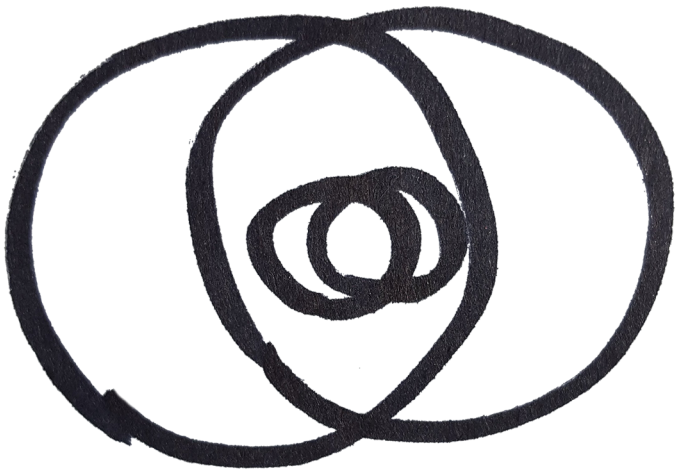
If all of your decisions are made by consent, you're likely to grow resentment over time. When you ask "does anyone think this proposal will cause harm?", a lot of people will say "no", while still holding on a sense of dissatisfaction.

Training

I've seen consensus decision-making work very well when the members are trained and the meetings are facilitated well. It's a reminder that slowness can be a virtue too, efficiency is not the only game in town. Listening, gaining understanding of each other, and creatively generating new proposals.

Exercise: Purpose Retrospective

Exercise: Distinguish Preference from Tolerance



Read more:

- How we make decentralised decisions by Manuel Küblböck at Gini
- How are decisions made in a distributed organization?, by Francesca Pick of OuiShare
- Generative Decision Making Process, Samantha Slade of Percolab

- The advice process explained in the Reinventing Organisations Wiki.
- the Gini company handbook, available online at handbook.gini.net