

# Designing a Direct Democracy with Liquidity and Trust

Andrew Chambers. Wednesday, 20 March 2019

This is a vision of a new Democracy built on equal parts inspiration and perspiration.

Since 1985 I have been exploring how we transition from the politics of today into a world that empowers us all more directly in a way that effectively harnesses the creativity and insight of everyone who cares to contribute toward the resolution of an Issue.

Part of my journey has been as an administrator, moderator and contributor for the Facebook page of an Australian Political Party – The Online Direct Democracy Party, an association that recently fell apart when it was amply demonstrated that the political format of “party” is very much designed to be controlled from the top down. However, in that time I instigated a small informal experiment to test some theories on participation in social media.

Why is that important?

Democracy is absolutely dependent on a “social” media, the forum, to be a place that any citizen can safely participate in the development and discussion on any Issue without fear, shame or hurt.

What I had been witnessing was a steady rise in the disaffection many people were feeling about engaging in activist politics because so much of our social media has become the haunt of anonymous bullies, trolls, those citizens emboldened by ego and intoxicants to deliberately hurt, belittle, shame and intimidate those who do not agree with their opinions.

## Moderation

My theory / hunch was simple. I would recruit a small band of fellow moderators and contributors to engage with our facebook page and post topical items that appealed to them. The rules were simple:

1. A poster takes responsibility for the post. Whatever the subject the poster had to be around to explain, defend or apologise, reword – whatever was necessary to best deliver an opinion without insult or disrespect (other than those intended for our politicians who it would seem are a permanent insult to our intelligence and morality)
2. No-one should feel intimidated, hurt, ashamed by the actions or words of another participant in any discussion and it is the poster’s responsibility to address those issues directly with the two parties.
3. Everyone get’s three direct warnings about their actions. Our aim was to encourage a diversity of opinion in a respectful manner and not to ban people in a reactionary way and only those who ignored the warnings would be banned.

We set off on this course, three or four of us generally and not unsurprisingly, we started to gain some attention, we started to build a community of regulars because we did hop in and engage the trolls, held them to account, questioned their means and motives, got to know their opinions, got to

know them and they us.

Sometimes I had conversations that would last weeks with people pejoratively labelled RWNJ who came and monstereed participants. We traded perspectives and I learned things about Milo I had not really wanted or needed to BUT it gave me a perspective and we almost had a cordial relationship going to the point where I was willing to allow one of the family to become a contributor. HOWEVER, parties are not democracies and Facebook pages are owned by individuals, my attempts to increase the range of the page's contributors was extinguished by the man who had the power to do what he wanted rather than engage in creating a broadly-based community of opinion.

This led to some spectacular bannings and banishments and an eventual curtailment of enthusiasm for our experiment BUT it had proven that it was possible to amplify engagement through taking responsibility and delivering a space where it was possible to express an opinion or contribution without fear.

For those of you who have done community consultations this should come as no surprise, it's simply extending common courtesy and respect into a realm where too little of it exists because we lack the structure to support it other than in an ad hoc way which leads me to another story.

I live in Broome WA, a remote town in the remotest region in Australia. We have a Facebook based Broome Noticeboard owned by an individual who took a very hands-on approach to that role. The board is big, it had over 16000 members, and discussions often became very topical, heated and the response was often harsh and summary.

One particular evening a local resident finished work, came home, had a drink or three then hopped into the board and a conversation about aboriginal youth crime in the town, a big issue in a town with high unemployment and a lot of bored, impoverished youth from broken or dysfunctional families.

The comments went viral. It made the ABC next day and there was a flashpoint. Some friends of mine were very much in the frontline of that response, being very socially active and not afraid to express their outrage they reported the post and the board to Police and to Facebook. I also knew the admin and had been in conversation with him via Messenger for some weeks prior. I was aware that he was "managing" the board virtually single handed which entailed 7 days a week of 16 or so hours a day of engagement.

Despite my repeated advice that he needed to engage more moderators he hadn't and he missed the post and all of a sudden he was in the middle of a conflagration that arose around him and was coming from all quarters.

Rather than seeking to fight the fire he chose to further enflame it and the whole business became nastier and nastier. I am now banned from that board, I took an AVO out on the owner after being threatened and it was a completely shit outcome for all concerned.

How could that have been different?

From my perspective the key issue here is the lack of a moderator who was capable of dealing with the situation because by any normal measure, the man was temporarily insane, a mixture of hubris, exhaustion and whatever he was consuming at the time. Had there been a moderator, as in the

model we had been using on the ODDP page, the intervention would have been immediate and direct and the likelihood of escalation reduced through engagement and taking responsibility.

The issue we face in this model is that of a reliance on voluntary labour. I can testify to the fact that to create a post for an Issue, to do the research to develop and guide the discussion, to provide the help and support to contributors while corralling the trolls takes an enormous amount of time and energy and that is NOT possible if Democracy is to proceed as a normal part of human life, which is necessarily what it needs to be.

We have two current possibilities to address this issue:

1. In light of the recent live streaming horrorshow from Christchurch pundits and politicians are mooted that our social media giants shoulder that responsibility and employ more human moderators and up the ante on AI interventions. This is a bad idea for the following reasons
  - a. They will employ more people from low wage nations, such as the Philippines (where a surprising number are already based.) It will be exploitative and it's asking people who do not share our culture and norms to make decisions in an unaccountable way.
  - b. It will cost the companies more which will be passed on as either even more intrusive advertising and spying OR they will impose a fee for use.
  - c. Under the moral veil of "moderating" our feeds there will be an even greater curtailment of freedom of speech and the transmission of ideas deemed by the corporation and its sponsors / overseers as "radical"
  - d. It is not necessarily creative or encouraging rather it is the role of sheriff and policeman which while necessary sometimes, is not conducive to encouraging engagement and more nuanced discussion rather it seeks to simply "put out the fire"
2. The second possibility lies in a radical plan that seeks to create a new professional class of Moderators / Curators / Help Desk / Archivist paid for through a voluntary cash transaction as part of a secure voting system that allows us all to participate in the discussion of Issues at a very local level with people that we know and can trust to take responsibility for ensuring:
  - a. the information is as truthful as possible
  - b. that every voice can be heard and amplified
  - c. and that no-one should be harmed for the expression of an opinion.
  - d. That anyone needing help get's it without shame and with courtesy

I see this role as being as fundamental to the success of the Democracy evolution as any piece of hardware or software. We need other humans to assist us with understanding sometimes complex and abstract concepts within issues, we need them to be capable and intelligent, there because it's both intellectually as well as financially rewarding and working towards always doing the best they can to get your vote to build both their revenue and their "Reputation"

## Reputation

Reputation is an important concept to bring in here. It's the same model that Ebay uses to rank "trustworthiness" of buyers and sellers in its market place. It can be attributed as a positive value and comment or negatively, either way it contributes toward the public tally of confidence in the person you're negotiating or interacting with. It's entirely conceivable that in a free market place of

ideas that an Issue will have more than one Moderator working in a constituency to guide the Issue through its nominated period of deliberation before the vote. Reputation allow us, as participants, to gauge who we will “trust” to shepherd us through the journey and to who we will contribute our monetary token of appreciation.

## Democracy

For the last 35 years it has been technically possible to create a direct digital democracy based on the existing technologies. The issue has been that we would be beholden to large corporations to provide the services necessary to deliver our decision making as a vote counted, accountable outcome.

To give this context I ask you to consider the democratic life of your dollar. While we are politically constrained to vote irregularly for a parliament, parties and politicians in a system premised on 16<sup>th</sup> century technologies our dollars have been liberated by 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. We can express our financial freedom of choice through a transaction anywhere on the planet that has connection to a mobile phone network. We do this with a reasonably assured level of security and accountability and for that privilege we pay our banks handsomely. They act as the Institution of Trust providing a clearing house for transactions between strangers who need have no knowledge of the other beyond what is necessary to transfer money between accounts.

A digital democracy is premised on something very similar – a vote is a transaction between two or more parties and we could very simply use a cash transaction as a proxy for a vote. That is, you could simply transfer a 55c token payment into a Yes or No account held by your representative, flagged in the meta data with all the information necessary to track which issue and which moderator the vote was cast for.

At the close of the polling period a simple accounting of balances would determine the outcome and trigger the response to the issue and the distribution of the cash to the Moderator, the representative’s office and toward the upkeep of the deliberation and discussion software. Respectively: 30c, 10c, 10c + 5c GST.

All this activity is recorded in your ledger and presented in the regular statement of account so you can check, as can the other parties, as to whether what you voted is what was recorded and actioned.

However, do we trust the banks enough to give them all that power / responsibility?

It also brings to the fore the question of identity, we know that the banking system is corrupt and corruptible if you’re willing to pay the price.

This is why many of the worlds’ smartest coders have been working on the solution for the last few decades and I’m pleased to report the solutions are theoretically and almost practically, at hand.

I am an ambassador for the Democracy Earth Foundation which is an honorary position that has no reward or rank it’s simply a matter of communication. DEF is a registered NFP and charity that is dedicated to the development of a self sovereign system of democracy such that any organisation of any size can implement democratic creation, discussion and voting on Issues. Unsurprisingly the software is called Sovereign and it’s based on blockchain technology provided by Ethereum and powered by a three token system which I will not try to explain now. It is freely available and will remain so. <http://democracy.earth/>

What it promises and is delivering is the same service our banks offer, a way to record transactions between parties in an incorruptible record of events that is both private but also publicly verifiable. While the technology of the blockchain and many of the components are created by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties the entire system is reliant on the active contribution and engagement of the people who use the network to create a distributed computer that processes the transactions and records them such that no ONE entity holds all the information or all the power.

## Identity

Fundamental to all this technowizardry is Identity. In the banking scenario your bank goes through a process of determining your ID and it vouches for you when a transaction is raised in your name, it acts as the “trusted” intermediary. In the online world we know that identity is liquid, real people can have many virtual identities and the internet has become a hunting ground for the conartists and criminals of the planet.

DEF proposes a simple process to minimise this issue of bogus identity through the very social process of friendship and association. They propose a Digital Birth that can happen at the time of actual birth or it could be something akin to a baptism, a ritual of proof, affirmation and creation. Put simply it is a cryptographic amalgam of information that’s uniquely you, your photo, speech, video, ECG, retinal scan, whatever, that produces a very unique and individual dataset, a digital you that then has to be confirmed, witnessed by other “proven” Identities who will stake their Reputation on the truth of that testimony. The circle of family, friends and associates can be of any size beyond minimal requirements, TBC, and it is an ongoing process of periodic proof of life check and confirmation that builds trust in a digital ID through real world association and witnessing.

It is not absolutely foolproof, no system designed by humans is resistant to the ingenuity of another human which is why we have laws and rules, why we have punishment and penalties to dissuade the widespread abuse of such things. But it is a proposal that is resistant to AI and easy abuse because in the end every ID must come back to a living human individual attested to by a ring of friendship in which all will stake their reputation on that testimony.

Thus far we can see that while this evolution is premised on technological change it is inherently rooted in human interaction and it is absolutely dependent on a healthy and growing economy of trust which is underwritten by payment for delivery of a professional, transparent, honest and truthful service that informs our choice, the vote.

## 3 things

To make discussion and voting on an issue possible we need a digital interface that runs Sovereign and the blockchain, handles the communication between other “peers” in the network. At present that’s an amalgamation of various technologies dependent on each of us having the ability to set it up and maintain it knowledgeably enough to know if it’s not running properly or is no longer under our direct control. I will not lie, it is a daunting task, one that I am hesitant to embark on, which is immediately a huge barrier to participation.

Here is a proposal that seeks to address that and within it is the potential for someones to make some good money, that is not something to be ashamed of and I run into too many within the DD movement who shy away at the mention of Democracy and money.

It's necessary and it's OK to expect to pay for a service or product if it's adding to the enjoyment and fulfillment of life. Personally, I do believe in Democracy and the Free Market, neither of which is present on the planet at this time.

This proposal has three key components

1. A consumer product that provides the same bridge any existing Access Point / Modem / Router with WiFi to all our media and modes of communication with an added and unique but infinitely replicable blockchain storage device and a "cryptocard" (one or two GPUs dedicated to processing the cryptographic work required to write blocks of information and do proof work). It is the core of an extended private, personal network keyed and secured by the other two components. It runs in the background handling all data routing, communication with other devices, processing and storage at the local level. One unit can support multiple individuals and their devices and is configured to share or trade computational power over the wider network.
2. Linked to it is your smart phone/tablet, a unique and individual device with the App – Sovereign (both ends of the transaction chain) Your smart phone provides all the "front end" input and control for the service and connects via wifi and VPN over mobile data so whenever you're in range you're connected. Like all such modern devices it can be secured with biometric locks (retinal, face, fingerprint or ECG or combination) beyond that it has 2<sup>nd</sup> factor for encryption and key.
3. An NFC token - bracelet, necklace, earring, ring, nipple piercing, implant – whatever floats the boat. To provide a unique signature with credentials and a second key to lock your kingdom. It's handy way to present digital ID credentials much as we use tap n go facilities on our existing cards this is for those other transactions that require ID – buying alcohol, entry into licensed premises, logging on and off the job etc. It's also a key that works with the phone to encrypt and unlock information housed in cheap and replaceable form.

With these three devices working together or in random combinations and interactions we can create a community of small business potential with a distributed computer system for doing bulk transactions or calculations. While no one device can authorise a transaction, it makes the whole process of stealing identity that much harder while making personal security and trust relatively easy and of a high standard

With variable on-tap processing power over a distributed network of similar devices we can keep tally and record of transactions between individuals within the network and those in the outside world, then encode them – one master for you on your private little network of 3 devices and a public copy to the network Ledger and for as far as we need to ensure a high level of public assurance and security in keeping archives and back-ups.

This little quartet, three devices and a human, provide the building blocks for liquid transaction and a very direct democracy at every level of government or business.

Having secure transactions based on trust allows communities to start to use non monetary transactions, to trade services and goods instead of money, it is simply premised on a contract executed and agreed between two parties and witnessed by others. It also allows for much needed innovation in the casual labour market place where illiterate and innumerate people can participate in complex transactions that are accountable but run as a simple background operation that requires minimal intervention; swipe in, swipe out.

There are issues at present with lack of access to digital communications and competence / confidence in using the baseline technologies but those numbers are shrinking rapidly as we see ever more users of mobile phones connecting to our networks. This proposal seeks to take complex operations away from the need for specialist skills and equipment to an adaption of existing consumer equipment and technologies such that it all becomes background processing while we concentrate on the real business of human life such as making a living and making decisions in a Democracy.

It's necessarily about creating our own private network that combines with many others to give us the power needed to handle the transactions of life but not being beholden to just one corporation for the privilege. It's about building trust through human interaction and sharing experience, knowledge to help us all get to a better decision and it's most importantly about regaining our privacy and sharing our information with consent.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

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