

SDOs as de facto do-ocracies

How standards are really made

About me

- Started in open-source and the web.
- 3+ yr stint as Facebook's W3C AC Rep.
- Lead testing at W3C.
- Now consultant for browser vendors + editor of the Generic Sensor API and WebIDL.

Generally @tobie around the web.

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Web SDOs

- W3C (pretty much all web APIs)
- Ecma international (JavaScript)
- Khronos (WebGL)
- WHATWG (W3C spinoff—we'll come to it later)

Underlying layer(s):

- IETF, etc.

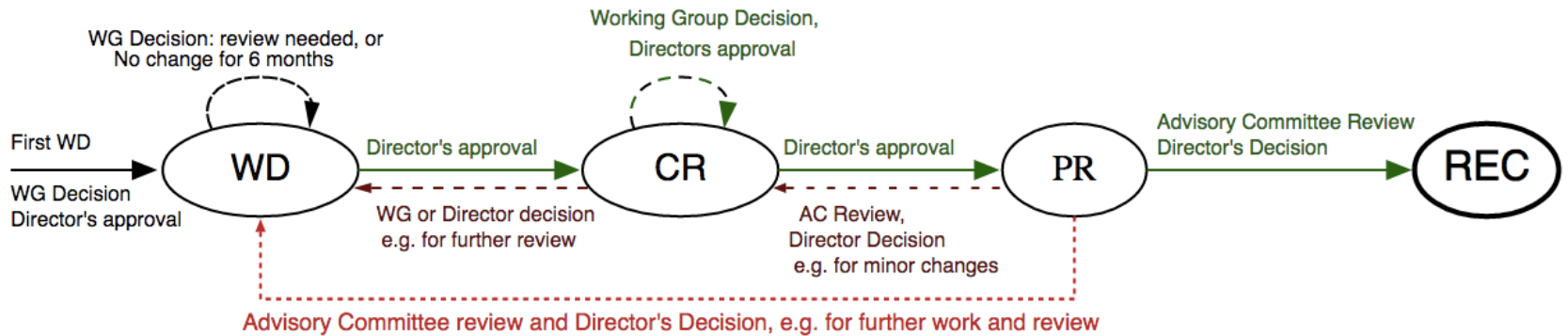
Particularities of web standards

- Specs mainly target browser vendors (aka implementors) which are handful of huge corporations.
- Some are also aimed at “authors” (everyone that creates content on the web, i.e.: content providers and web devs).
- End-users aren’t really represented.
- **Creates important power imbalance.**

W3C Organization

- Royalty-free patent policy (key value prop.).
- Structured in working-groups arranged around topics and IP concerns.
- Working groups composed of W3C members.
- Consensus-based.
- Very-much IETF inspired.
- Chairs/Editors.

W3C Process



<https://www.w3.org/Consortium/Process/>

Standards Expert



What society thinks I do



What my mom thinks I do



What my colleagues think I do



What my friends think I do



What I think I do



What I actually do

*“A **do-ocracy** is an organizational structure in which individuals choose roles and tasks for themselves and execute them. Responsibilities attach to people who do the work, rather than elected or selected officials.”*

<https://communitywiki.org/wiki/DoOcracy>

Do-ocracy typically evolves spontaneously in groups where:

- Stakes are low (*for those corporations*).
- Authority is non-coercive (*no one reports to W3C*).
- Work is plentiful
- Effort is rewarded with recognition.
- Culture of participation

<https://communitywiki.org/wiki/DoOcracy>

Dangers

- Burnout
- Despotism
- Frustration (*you're powerless unless you *do**)
- Lack of transparency (*de facto vs. de jure*)
- Resentment (*"no one else is working but me"*)
- Martyrdom Complex (*"I'm sacrificing X, you must too"*)
- Complacency (*"someone else will do it"*)
- Social Exclusion (*"only those who *do*, get a voice"*)



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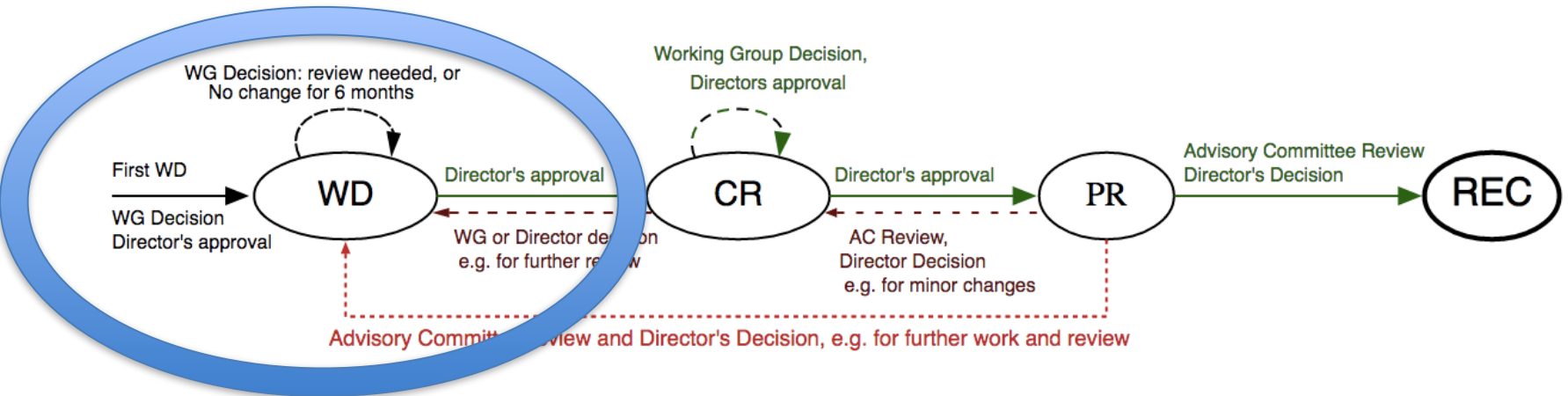
Browsers have changed

- Distribution (boxed software to internet-based continuous deployment)
- New versions used to be shipped at best in 18 months cycles (even worse post first browser war).
- Now evergreen browsers (auto-update, 6 weeks cycles)
- Adoption is a lot faster, which means it's now possible to consider deprecating features, experimenting.
- Feedback loop is much tighter => innovation!

...and so has the way they're built!

- FOSS
- Continuous integration
- Collaborative tools (e.g. GitHub)

Which in turns influences how standards are made.



<https://www.w3.org/Consortium/Process/>

Consequences

- Standards stay in WD mode for much longer.
- Living standard (WHAT WG).
- Convergence with FOSS (tooling, IP).
- Criteria for triggering IP commitments (REC status) no longer met.
- SDOs who want to stay in the game need to find new solutions.

Conclusion

- For the web, standardization is a do-ocracy.
- Steep learning curve + costs puts the web in the hands of the browser vendors.
- As standardization moves closer to FOSS, this increases.
- Related IP issues need to be solved.
- So far, market forces have sort of worked.
- Is that sustainable? Should we care?
- If so, how do we fix it? *(Hint: not with a cookie law.)*