Organizationally, it combines three core characteristics: (a) decentralization of conception and execution of problems and solutions, (b) harnessing diverse motivations, and (c) separation of governance and management from property and contract.

For now, take Wikipedia or FOSS as the core examples, where conception and execution (of a feature needing development, or an article that needs writing) are decentralized; where contributors rely on diverse motivations, many (about half in FOSS, all in Wikipedia) non-monetary; where the copyright licenses used make ownership or contract irrelevant to the core organizational question of who does what, when, with what resources and which collaborators, and where task construction generally is collaborative, though in some cases may be merely coordinated/collated.

Peer production itself has, over the past decade, developed into two quite distinct flavors. Commons-based peer production (CBPP), the original model of FOSS and Wikipedia, includes all attributes I ascribed to peer production. Firm-hosted peer production, such as Yelp or TripAdvisor, deviates in a critical way from CBPP, or full peer production, in that the governance and management are based in proprietary claims to exclusion from the site to enforce terms of use with regard to user contributions. These are anchored in firm control over the infrastructure or platform used to host and coordinate the peer production effort. (Fuster Morell 2010). Yelp is a clear example of this approach. The firm depends on its users to select restaurants, businesses, etc. to be reviewed, and depends on them to provide reviews; at the same time, the contributions are governed by terms of use that retain proprietary claims over the database, and outline certain acceptable use constraints as contractual obligations of the users.

These firm-hosted peer production models need to rely on contract terms that simulate the absence of property and contract. Firms do so by retaining and providing to users non-exclusive licenses to all user content, rather than asserting full ownership over it; by making contributions flow into the system without permission, and by limiting their own assertion of contractual and property rights to rare occasions and justifying those rare occasions by reference to shared norms, not merely to firm interest or legal power.