



SESSION

“Money in The Federation”

LOCATION

Room One

HOSTED BY

[PF] AlexM (Pegasus Fleet)

TIME

8pm GMT

(all times presented in CST [UTC-6])

[PF] AlexM, 2:00:37 PM

== ^ == ^ == ^ == EVENT: MONEY IN THE FEDERATION == ^ == ^ == ^ ==

Hello everyone, and thank you for joining me for this discussion. I hope everyone has been enjoying the conference so far. This hour's discussion is one that's been on my mind for a long time: Money in the Federation.

Throughout the history of Star Trek, the shows and movies have been widely inconsistent on the topic. The "official" stance had seemed to be that money did not exist in the future. Or at least that was Gene Roddenberry's official stance. Star Trek IV and Star Trek First Contact both outright stated that money no longer existed in the future. Several other episodes suggested this to be the case as well. Picard once told a 20th Century financier that people were no longer obsessed with the accumulation of 'things'. Doctor Bashir explained that he was unable to accept payment for his services as chief medical officer. Tom Paris explained that Fort Knox was turned into a museum and that money went the way of the dinosaur. And Jake and Nog once had a conversation about humans abandoning currency-based economics in favor of a philosophy of self-enhancement.

But despite these comments, there were dozens more that suggested to the contrary. The term money was often used as a figure of speech, such as the Federation spending a lot of money on training, or commenting to a subordinate that they just earned they're pay for the week. Most mentions of Federation money was far more overt, not just suggesting that money existed as a known concept, but that it was still used. Kirk offered to reimburse a group of miners on Rigel XII for lithium crystals. Doctor McCoy offered to pay a smuggler to take him to the Genesis Planet. In "Encounter at Farpoint" Doctor Crusher purchased a bolt of cloth from a vendor at Farpoint Station. Picard purchased a Horga'hn while vacationing on Risa. And countless times Starfleet officers were shown with drinks purchased from Quark's, using his holosuites, or even gambling. So there must be some way for these transactions to occur.

So here's the big question, and the reason that I wanted to share this discussion. Is it possible for the Federation economic system to be based on a philosophy of self-enhancement and still have money as a concept? Despite what Roddenberry might have insisted, I think that it is possible. In a post-scarcity economy, which Star Trek is strongly suggested to represent, hunger, want, and the need for possessions might actually be gone. The acquisition of wealth is no longer the driving force. People join Starfleet because they want to. They own businesses because they want to. They don't do it for the drive of gaining wealth, but because that is their passion. But that doesn't mean that money as a concept, as a means of facilitating transactions, must no longer exist.

So I raise this question to our attendees today. How do you think money works in the Federation, and how have you used it in your sims?

[PF] Reynard, 2:03:04 PM

The Federation is not the Culture yet, it has to have some unit of account to track resource use even if the average person doesn't interact with physical currency much.

[NDF] Cael Maz, 2:03:42 PM

In New Destiny we use Energy Credits for replicator use as payment for jobs done. In Avalon its both Energy Credits and GPL since it's an SS Ship.

Beautiful Night, 2:03:49 PM

Since material goods can be replicated, the only things that have value are that which can't be replicated: creativity, ingenuity, expertise

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:03:52 PM

I think for most of these things I default to what has been established with Gold Pressed Latinum. And I make a distinction between the Core worlds (with Earth at its centre) and the other 147 worlds in the Federation.

[BF] BlackWolf, 2:04:03 PM

It is kinda reinventing the wheel on that position. But I would say that trading goods is the way of crediting the system. Federation does not use a currency system, but it does have resources that can value if its equal to what they want in return.

[USF] USFArzie, 2:04:16 PM

I'm thrilled to be able to have made it to this talk. It's something I've been thinking about for a long time as well. If you go on Facebook, everyone always says, 'The UFP is a Communist/Socialist government because <<BLAH>>,' or 'The the UFP is obviously capitalist because <<BLAH>>.'

For my part, I've had to conclude that the Federation follows Distributist patterns.

Beautiful Night, 2:04:36 PM

I would say the exact opposite

WLandAlice, 2:04:41 PM

There are some things that cannot be replicated, though

Beautiful Night, 2:04:58 PM

UFP isn't socialist or bolshevik because the state doesn't own the means of production

the implicaitons we've seen through the very rare examples of commerce are that businesses are cooperatives, jointly owned by all 'employees'

[PF] AlexM, 2:05:35 PM

And I could see some things staying off the replicator inventory because the creator wants it that way. It would be like giving up a recipe that's been in the family for generations.

Beautiful Night, 2:05:47 PM

@WLandAlice and like I say, those thigns have value

@[PF] AlexM I agree, and when I write, often what gets bought is not a dress, or a book (unless they're antiques), but the replicator pattern for those items

[BF] Alexander, 2:06:38 PM

@[BF] BlackWolf I can't see bartering making a return, it was abandoned in our real-life for several reasons. While accumulation would no longer apply the other reasons we abandoned it still do

[STF] JoeP, 2:06:42 PM

Plus they aren't fully post scarcity

WLandAlice, 2:06:53 PM

And Federation personnel would have to have something of value to trade/use, at least the ones who want to frequent establishments like Quark's 😊

[USF] USFArzie, 2:06:55 PM

::nods:: That's why I'm saying they're Bellocian or Chestertonian Distributists. They tend to view both Capitalism and Socialism as equally flawed and exploitative, and it favors small-scale cooperatives and family businesses.

Beautiful Night, 2:07:05 PM

I tend to take the line of there is a Universal stipend

[STF] JoeP, 2:07:07 PM

There's always a shortage of starships so there is obviously scarcity

Beautiful Night, 2:07:25 PM

plus universal healthcare and free education

[USF] USFArzie, 2:07:33 PM

The means of production are as spread out as possible, but there's still a need for currency.

[PF] AlexM, 2:07:33 PM

Are you buying the replicator pattern @Beautiful Night, or are you buying the use of what is essentially the download license?

Marty, 2:07:47 PM

Latinum and Fed Credits have been used on Screen

[USF] USFArzie, 2:08:07 PM

Otherwise, why would that guy in 'Sisko's' be washing dishes. I'm sure it's not for self-betterment.

Beautiful Night, 2:08:33 PM

@[PF] AlexM that's probably getting into levels of IP law I haven't considered. when I've written a character buying a dress, she's often takes the one replicated for her in the shop, and has the pattern to reproduce it sent to her personal library.

[PF] Reynard, 2:08:38 PM

I think part of the confusion comes from the fact that the writers understand money about as well as they understand evolution.

Beautiful Night, 2:08:50 PM

I figure they don't bother with laundry, just replicate a fresh one

[PF] AlexM, 2:09:00 PM

The idea of a universal stipend was one that I've been a big fan of as well. Everyone gets paid by the government so they can buy things. But that stipend can be large because of the abundance of resources. But there are still limits. That stipend wouldn't be enough to buy a starship, for example.

Beautiful Night, 2:09:15 PM

@[PF] AlexM exactly

[PF] AlexM, 2:09:38 PM

But it would be enough to buy drinks at Quarks.

Or a new dress.

[PF] Reynard, 2:09:48 PM

Yeah, a combination of a stipend and advanced technology/automation making things cheap enough that most people don't even realize they're using it unless they want something special makes sense.

Beautiful Night, 2:09:52 PM

If you want an example of a different economy not based on standard ferengi style acquisitive capitalism, try The Fifth Sacred Thing, by Starhawk.

[STF] JoeP, 2:10:28 PM

@slybrarian I go one step further. The characters don't understand economics

Beautiful Night, 2:10:36 PM

I also figure from DS9, they must have some facility to translate universal stipend into something other economies use, like GPL

[PF] Reynard, 2:10:52 PM

hah yeah

[STF] JoeP, 2:11:00 PM

There's no reason to think Picard understands economics any more than any Navy Captain today

[PF] Reynard, 2:11:18 PM

Like Picard's brother probably gives him a serious side-eye every time he starts talking about betterment and stuff

[PF] AlexM, 2:11:24 PM

I like that @[STF] JoeP. Why would they need to understand economics if they don't really need to worry about money.

Beautiful Night, 2:11:34 PM

@[STF] JoeP I think that depends on the players. I think its okay for some people to understand economics, even though they don't use it. Its like understanding any old philosophy

Beautiful Night, 2:11:54 PM

or like understanding how the offside rule works in football, even when you don;t play

[PF] AlexM, 2:12:12 PM

That's not fair. No one understands the offside rule.

Not even players.

[STF] JoeP, 2:12:29 PM

@[PF] AlexM Even people who do need to worry about money don't understand economics, but you're right that when you don't _even_ need to think about money it would be even worse

@Beautiful Night Certainly.

[PF]Reynard, 2:13:17 PM

I think another key thing is that there is no longer a huge disparity in wealth, at least on Earth

Beautiful Night, 2:13:32 PM

I certainly don't think there are mega corporations left. Its all small businesses.

[STF] JoeP, 2:13:43 PM

My own head cannon is that it's free market capitalism but the price of most goods is close to zero

Beautiful Night, 2:14:06 PM

@slybrarian oh, absolutely. its supposed to be an ideal society. we've done away with crime, can't do that without doing away with material wealth inequality

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:14:21 PM

I think on some of the edge worlds, there would be some huge organisations. What about colonisation and terraforming? That sure sounds lucrative

[STF] JoeP, 2:14:25 PM

Or effectively zero such that the transactions costs are greater than giving it away

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:14:39 PM

I mean, we've established that very wealthy people buy their own moons

[STF] JoeP, 2:14:44 PM

There's clearly corporations on other planets

Beautiful Night, 2:14:49 PM

in fact on DS5 we have an old style entrepeuneur/tycoon/businessman. he is very definitely a villain

[PF] AlexM, 2:15:05 PM

I think a major factor is that wealth and material possessions aren't things of the past. It's that the acquisition of wealth and material things is no longer our driving factor.

Beautiful Night, 2:15:07 PM

and Bolia still has a bank with cash assets

[STF] JoeP, 2:15:11 PM

The Bolians canonically have a Bank, Ezri's family owned a mine

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:15:23 PM

I think that's the more important thing to draw from this @[PF] AlexM

[USF] USFArzie, 2:16:33 PM

Something that we added to OPX was a type of Homestead Act on new planets. Live and work on the land for three years, and it's yours.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:16:38 PM

I'm thinking most of the people in Starfleet like to believe they do it for their own betterment, and for the most part that would be true. I think people like Cassidy Yates are a lot less like that

Beautiful Night, 2:17:00 PM

one thing we have to remember is the writers of DS9 had a very different position on the economics of Trek to TOS/TNG/Voyager

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:17:18 PM

That must be why I like DS9 so much then 😊

[PF] AlexM, 2:17:19 PM

And really, TNG had a very different position than TOS.

Beautiful Night, 2:17:22 PM

so there tends to be a lot of semi conflicting information to reconcile

[PF] Reynard, 2:17:29 PM

I'd be cautious about putting TOS in with TNG

[STF] JoeP, 2:17:41 PM

That's because they had to actually resolve the contradiction

[PF] AlexM, 2:17:47 PM

Roddenberry stressed to the writers that money didn't exist in the 24th Century.

[PF] Reynard, 2:17:51 PM

Money was reference a lot more often. Roddenberry just changed his views over the years

[STF] JoeP, 2:18:21 PM

Yeah, Isaac Asimov gave him some crazy book in the 70's

Frank Sinatra(MisionControl)(CG), 2:18:46 PM

I have read some of Isaac Asimov's works. Very interesting.

[PF] AlexM, 2:20:45 PM

If there was a universal government stipend, I could see Starfleet officers wanting to join Starfleet to not just better themselves, but to get out there and explore. It's likely that they are earning an additional salary on top of their universal stipend, probably based on rank and position.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:20:59 PM

Have other people endeavoured to set up a reference for what's worth what in GPL? Just to add some consistency to my sim I've worked on that but it's very damn difficult

[PF] AlexM, 2:21:06 PM

And let's be honest, there are probably very few of us here today that wouldn't be willing to join Starfleet for free.

[PF] Reynard, 2:21:30 PM

Especially since there's a lot of parts of starfleet that probably aren't all that exciting.

[PF] Reynard, 2:22:04 PM

Like, being on the Enterprise is great. Managing waste reclamation on Starbase 1, not so much.

[PF] AlexM, 2:22:17 PM

It's that people want to join Starfleet because they want to, not that they need to. They don't need to join to support their families, for instance. At least not within the Federation.

[USF] USFArzie, 2:22:26 PM

My char did it for professional experience, and stayed on because Starfleet funded his research.

[PF] AlexM, 2:23:48 PM

@[OF] RottenEmu That's a good question. I thought about it a little while back, but never got anywhere with it. Are thinking just referencing slips vs bars, for example? Or how GPL converts into credits or some other Federation currency?

[PF] Reynard, 2:24:00 PM

I would say that there probably isn't a big gap in pay between enlisted and officers like there is now, though. Instead it'd be based entirely on experience and bonuses ie hazardous duty bonus, middle-of-nowhere bonus, etc.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:24:19 PM (edited)

What does it buy, what are the wages for a Civilian freighter captain / Engineer / Physician? @[PF] AlexM

[PF] Reynard, 2:24:21 PM

I think canon is all over the place as far as latinum

[PF] AlexM, 2:24:53 PM

It probably is. Canon is all over the place in general.

[USF] USFArzie, 2:25:25 PM

Canon is, but supplemental material like the LUG Trek books offers conversion rates.

[PF] AlexM, 2:26:21 PM

To continue on this thought though, there really hasn't been anything to compare wages too since we don't really know what 1 unit of currency is worth in contemporary money.

And they may not really be comparable at all.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:27:06 PM

We do have some examples though

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:27:18 PM

A Dabo Girl makes 10 strips

Beautiful Night, 2:27:26 PM

@[OF] RottenEmu I use the rough guide on Memory Alpha, in the discussion page for latinum, to give me an idea of what its worth in today's money.

so one slip is about \$2 US

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:28:09 PM

<https://starshipfawkes.nl/index.php/wiki/view/page/16> I'm thinking of adding examples as they come by from my own group.

[OF/RPG Discord] Phoenix Lalor, 2:28:20 PM

I found this years ago and still use it <http://ussmajestic.wikidot.com/starfleet-pay>

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:28:58 PM

is there something that relates these rates to GPL?

@Beautiful Night 2dollars to the slip sounds around the same rate that me and my First Mate came down to

Beautiful Night, 2:32:19 PM

IIRC that was done based on soom comment Nog made to Jake about a root beer being worth 1 slip

[PF] AlexM, 2:32:34 PM

Let me ask you this question. I read an article about this while I was prepping for this discussion. I'll share that article at the end, just because it's a bit lengthy. Anyway, one idea they mentioned was the idea of Federation credits not being issued by the government, but simply called Federation in the same way that American cheese is called American. Could the Federation Credit, or whatever currency they use, be a private currency like bitcoin?

[OF/RPG Discord] Phoenix Lalor, 2:33:13 PM

Crypto Currency?

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:33:24 PM

@Beautiful Night I got it from there as well, 10 slips for a case of root beer (of 12 bottles)

tall_S, 2:33:50 PM(edited)

I could see that - maybe not in the crypto sense but more like an all electronic/digital based credit system

Maybe even tied to an individuals biometrics

[OF/RPG Discord] Phoenix Lalor, 2:34:15 PM

yeah possible

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:34:18 PM

Oh I definitely don't believe there's physical currency in the UFP. It's all digital

[OF/RPG Discord] Phoenix Lalor, 2:34:40 PM

Credit chips. they use them not just in Trek

[PF] AlexM, 2:36:06 PM

The idea in the article was that maybe the Federation itself doesn't issue money, but the Federation worlds have developed their own currency. When the concept of money was first invented, it just represented a certificate that was "worth" something. It was used in the barter system to replace complicated trades.

The article also mentioned a Calgary Dollar or Chiemgauer. I'm not familiar with either of those.

Basically it's a currency that citizens could acquire and use to purchase goods and services, but it's not backed by the Federation government.

Beautiful Night, 2:37:19 PM

IS anyone here familiar with the LETTS system?

[PF] AlexM, 2:37:28 PM

I am not.

Beautiful Night, 2:37:30 PM

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_exchange_trading_system

I like some of the ideas here as a way of making a federation economy work. mostly the basic ide that everyone's time has a value,

[STF] JoeP, 2:39:38 PM

@[PF] AlexM All you need for useful money is the willingness of both parties to accept it. Private money is historically precedented; I think it was Scotland or England that had banks issuing their own money?

Beautiful Night, 2:40:11 PM

And as we know that some people enjoy doing manual things like farming, for pleasure on a small scale, it would be one way of trading the product of those 'hobbies' into a system that is post scarcity

Like Jean-Luc's brother's vinyard

[PF] Zerine Rolfe, 2:40:30 PM

The US had private money for a good part of the 18th and 19th century as well

[PF] AlexM, 2:40:33 PM

Right. That's what this guy was getting at. The government itself might not have a currency, but that doesn't mean that there isn't one in use within the Federation.

Beautiful Night, 2:41:35 PM

I do kind of like the idea that hand made and hand reared and hand cooked now have even greater value. My primary PC on DS5 runs a bar where she is very firm on the 'nothing replicated', if you come to her, you get something that someone has put their heart and soul into

Kind of like Sisko's dad's restaurant. He didn't have to do any of that, he'd be well looked after regardless, but he loved to cook. And people love to eat

The replicator may be able to spit out nutritioius and delicious meals faster than you can say, tea, early grey, hot, but people will always want the original thing

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:43:35 PM

and you always have purists that will insist that it just tastes better

Beautiful Night, 2:43:39 PM

Like, I have a jumper a friend made for one of my babies. She didn't just knit it herself, she sheared the damn sheep, dyed and span the wool herself too.

J'Loni Mo'Bri, 2:44:01 PM

Watching all this has given me an idea for my SB sim where I play. Thank you guys.

[PF] AlexM, 2:44:04 PM

I really like that idea as well. That goes back to the idea of no large companies, only small businesses. No one is going to go shopping at a big box store because that's what they can get from their replicators. People are going to shop at the small boutiques and tailors for new clothes.

Beautiful Night, 2:44:06 PM

better than anything I can buy in baby gap, and far more important

[PF] CorCordale, 2:44:57 PM

Unless what they buy are licenses that allow them to print objects out of replicators

[PF] AlexM, 2:45:05 PM

Why buy a suit at Garak's when you can replicate one? Because his was made with love. And contempt. Mostly contempt. But also with love.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:45:11 PM

I think the value for that jumper comes from the fact that someone invested their time and effort into that. Those are commodities that you can't make back. In the end time is the only really valuable currency as you can only spend it once

[PF] CorCordale, 2:45:33 PM

There may also be an elitist feel about having an ACTUAL object

As opposed to a replicated one

Beautiful Night, 2:46:08 PM

@[PF] CorCordale exactly that.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:46:16 PM

@[PF] CorCordale even then I don't think large chain stores would be a thing. Just look at YouTube, Etsy and other such channels to see what the human race alone is capable of if things are not being filtered by large, faceless, corporations

[USF] USFArzie, 2:46:52 PM

Something that bothered me about Sisko's, though, was the kitchen staff. He has an employee whose job it is to clean tables and/or dishes. I can't believe he does that because he enjoys cleaning dishes. Maybe because he gets to meet interesting people, but aside from that, I've got to believe he's getting something useful for his time.

[PF] CorCordale, 2:46:55 PM

"Check out my awesome guitar! Weedleeeewweeeeeee!!"

"Well, mine's a two hundred year old actual wood and steel guitar, forged by masters at the Fender Forge, and..."

Arzie: What he's getting is Munnie

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:47:16 PM

I think the free use community for Replicator patterns is roaring

Beautiful Night, 2:47:41 PM

@[USF] USFArzie I referree for a big fest larp here in the uk. We genuinely have people who come along and volunteer to clean the toilets all weekend

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:47:55 PM

@[USF] USFArzie What about life experience?

(I don't know how many young employees he had though...can't remember)

[PF]Reynard, 2:48:37 PM

The Expanse had an interesting idea where people had to work a service/retail job before they could do anything else

[USF] USFArzie, 2:48:45 PM

Queer, but still, that's a weekend. It's not their career.

If one going to choose look for life experience, I doubt it would be washing dishes.

Beautiful Night, 2:48:50 PM

@[USF] USFArzie they get free entry, free food and drink, and then they can play for free the next event.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:48:53 PM

I think this should be a thing in real life @slybrarian

[PF]Reynard, 2:49:32 PM

I think the idea was both so basic jobs got done and to prove you had a work ethic before people invested time in advanced training

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:50:03 PM

I am thinking that most of these things are automated

[PF] AlexM, 2:50:07 PM

Maybe the wait staff wants something to get them out of the house, but don't necessarily want a "difficult" job (there is plenty of stress to be had working in a restaurant, so I'm not trying to imply that it's simple). Meeting new people and having conversations might be the highlight of their day. Since the dishes could be recycled in a replicator, washing really shouldn't be an issue. At worst they probably have an ultrasonic dishwasher.

[USF] USFArzie, 2:50:08 PM

Ok, that I could believe, @slybrarian

Beautiful Night, 2:50:19 PM

@[USF] USFArzie if they wanted to learn how to work a commercial kitchen, it would be starting at the bottom.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:50:49 PM

even if you're using fresh produce you can just use the replicator to recycle the plates anyway.. so it doesn't really make sense either way

[PF]Reynard, 2:51:02 PM

Also to be fair, people don't have to put up with abuse in Trek because the alternative isn't starving

[USF] USFArzie, 2:51:22 PM

Hmm. Ok, I can see that. IIRC, Sisko did say that Dishwasher Boy would be taking over if his father died.

Nathan. Nathan was his name.

[PF]Reynard, 2:51:33 PM

I don't like the idea of everything being de-replicated instead of cleaned, it seems really wasteful

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:52:00 PM

And there you have your in character reason for hiring a dish washer boy @slybrarian

[PF] AlexM, 2:52:11 PM

Yes, but you're turning that waste matter into material for something else.

You're not just throwing it out or wasting water.

[PF]Reynard, 2:52:26 PM

like you can't tell me a sonic washer isn't less energy-intensive than turning a plate into energy and back

[USF] USFArzie, 2:52:40 PM

I don't know. I image that it's just being replicated into ingots of replicatable resource material.

Who care about energy-intensive when you have unlimited fusion power, though?

[PF] AlexM, 2:53:10 PM

That's my theory. It just gets turned back into something else.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:53:14 PM

Back into proteins and those are used to create new food on Starfleet installations 😊

"Eat recycled food"

[USF] USFArzie, 2:53:29 PM

Soylent Green is Dishes!

[PF] AlexM, 2:53:34 PM

Yep, but passed through the bio filter, of course

[PF]Reynard, 2:54:02 PM

Also you're probably going to get into deep trouble if you recycle the antique dinnerware

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:54:22 PM

Once that's done it cannot be undone 😊

[PF] AlexM, 2:55:11 PM

It looks like we have about five minutes left. We should probably start thinking about wrapping up, or getting ready to head over to #overflow-one

As promised, here is the link to that article I mentioned:

<https://medium.com/@RickWebb/the-economics-of-star-trek-29bab88d50>

Does anyone have anything else that they want to say before we hand the room over?

[USF] USFArzie, 2:57:31 PM

Thank you very much for hosting this. I'm looking forward to rereading the transcript!

[PF] AlexM, 2:58:48 PM

Thank you very much for joining me. I think this was a very good discussion, and one that I was really looking forward to having. I'm no economist, but this has always been an idea that's interested me.

[OF] RottenEmu, 2:59:49 PM

I liked it, very helpful for my game! 😊