

Ten thoughts on community leadership

- ▶ **Florian Effenberger @floeff**
- ▶ Executive Director, The Document Foundation
- ▶ FOSS Backstage
Berlin, March 6, 2020

Who's waking me up?!

- ▶ **free software enthusiast** for over sixteen years
- ▶ founding member and executive director of **The Document Foundation** (LibreOffice)
- ▶ active with **Open-Source-Treffen e.V.**
formerly active OpenOffice.org Deutschland e.V.
and Freies Office Deutschland e.V.
- ▶ also active in infrastructure and marketing



“Community”

What is a community?

- “a **group of people** with a **shared identity** and **joint interests**” (loosely based on a German Wikipedia article)
 - be it in **private capacity** and/or as **company representative**
 - my take: shared identity often **due to** joint interest
 - common **memories, ventures and experiences**
- term these days is used **way too frequently**
 - marketing website around any random product
→ “community”?!

What is a community?

- ▶ many **different actors**, many **different directions** (“anthill”)
- ▶ organization or entity as **legal backing**
 - ▶ **donations/funds** and contracts
 - ▶ **statutes** and rules
 - ▶ **roles** and elections
 - ▶ **formal**: board, treasurer, supervisory board
 - ▶ **informal** (often “dynamic”): marketing, infrastructure
 - ▶ *If you’re not running away fast enough, you’ll get some role ;-)*
 - ▶ **But: What does such a role entail?**

1. “Cooperation”

Cooperation

- unclear, **who** will actually share a role with you
- **cooperation** is key
 - **open and honest** → you're all in the same boat
 - plausible and trustworthy → **transparency**
 - **effective** → after all, it's your (spare) time
 - both internal **and** external → community

Cooperation

- some **things in common** are important
 - share your **goals**, visions and plans
 - define clear **responsibilities** and duties
- **different views**
 - new perspectives = **diversity** = new opportunities
 - compromises and **common denominators**
 - goals are not always mutually exclusive
 - *rope pulling is no fun without some resistance ;-)*
- if working together is **fun**, this is the icing on the cake

2. “Commitment”

Commitment

- your **contributions** were noticed by others
- the community trusts you and your **skills**
→ be **proud** of that **trust put in you**
- but beware: now there will be **additional work** for you
 - **completely new** tasks await you in **additional areas**
 - **additional time will be required**
- depending on role, organisation, size and contributors, up to **15-20 working days per year**

3. “Variety”

Variety

- ▼ **public face** of the project
 - ▼ organizational
 - ▼ as representative
 - ▼ **legally**
- ▼ Sounds like being a rockstar, but **the blatant truth** is...
 - ▼ regular **meetings**
 - ▼ **budget planning** and reserve building
 - ▼ **tax declaration** and activity report
 - ▼ coordination of **employees** and **tenders**
 - ▼ trademark, copyright, regulations
 - ▼ **cooperations** and partnerships
 - ▼ **barely visible** to the public
 - **frustration**

Variety

- you might need a **”thick fur”**
 - willingness to **learn**: new things and about yourself
 - **persistence**
 - **tolerance** to frustration
- take advantage of **different skills** and interests
 - > everyone can do something different,
make use of your group’s strenghts
- clear definition of **responsibilities**

4. “Delegation”

Delegation

- it's a **sign of strength**, but needs **trust**
 - you simply **cannot** always do everything on your own
- colleagues, volunteers, service providers, employees
- key areas and their rationale
 - **accounting** (*is time consuming and boring*)
 - **legal** and **tax** advise (*needs knowledge and bears risks*)
 - **administrative** (*is time consuming and boring*)
 - **IT services** (*needs availability and security*)

Delegation

- rather focus on the essentials
 - **smaller tasks** distract, “**micromanagement**” sucks (time)
 - **strategy**, long-term goals (“**the big picture**”)
 - **responsibility** for community and project
 - **gather knowledge**, to **control** tasks delivered
 - “delegate, control, be interested”
- **trust** your comrades
- **Topics unknown to you can be important!**

5. “Responsibility”

Responsibility

- ▼ everyone's **shared responsibility**
 - ▼ **you** are part of the group, **you** are responsible
- ▼ tasks and **duties**
 - ▼ get an **overview**, meet the **deadlines**
 - ▼ comply with **regulations** → doesn't get easier
 - ▼ timely and sensible **use of donor's money**
- ▼ **Topics unknown to you can be important!**

6. “Social”

Social

- responsibility for tasks, projects and **maybe a paid team**
 - paid team members **depend on their job!**
 - **They are therefore depending on the project's success. And as such, they also depend on YOU.**
- **Even if you do this pro bono**, your team **rightly** expects
 - job **safety** → keep good employees
 - a **positive** work environment
 - make use of that: “turn your hobby into a job”, international cooperation, “working for the good thing”

Social

- **steep learning curve** especially when pro bono
 - **remote team** needs good interaction
 - takes a **lot of time** and is a **challenging task**
 - **talk with** each other, **listen** to each other, mutual **understanding**, **laude** their work → **“soft skills”**
- You’ll get a lot in return...
 - **motivation** and **loyalty**
 - a lot of **valuable experience**, also for your own job
 - **a good cooperation with the community**

7. “Diversity”

Diversity

- ▼ **Open source projects are amazing, because they are diverse and international.**
 - ▼ language, **culture**, religion
 - ▼ age, **profession** and **life experience**
 - ▼ points of view and values
 - ▼ **but also:** peculiarities, challenging personalities
- ▼ **big difference** between local associations and worldwide projects
- ▼ new points of view, positions, opinions and insights
 - **be open and challenge yourself!**

8. “Coordination”

Coordination

- **languages**

- **English** as common denominator?

- Many countries **are part of the community** and give precious insights

- language for **contracts**?

- **timezones**, seasons

- daylight savings can be different (e.g. US)

- **meetings**, office times, work-life-balance

Coordination

- **volunteers** prefer evenings and weekends, **paid employees** prefer regular office hours
→ there is **no “ideal” scheduling**
- **practical hints** for a good compromise
 - polls (including time zone support!) and time zone converters
 - alternate time slots
 - calendar invites (timezones!)

Coordination

- **ways of communication**
 - **e-mail** → asynchronous, everyone gets a copy
 - *Hint: proper subject tagging (vote, discuss, info etc.)*
 - **phone/video** → easier for some topics, but synchronous
 - *Hint: preparation and actual vote on different media*
- everyone's **participation**, also subject to regulations
 - sensible meeting **frequency**
 - proper **agenda, deadlines** and voting periods
 - **representation** and **quorum**

9. “Trust”

Trust

- **no role can fly without trust**
- “e-mails don’t have a face”
 - **gestures and facial expression**, feelings and emotions
- always assume the best → **confirmation bias**
- a different legal setting can be a challenge
 - create **translations** of key documents
 - **trust** your colleagues and employees

10. “Reward”

Reward

- It's **worthwhile** and exciting.
- It lets you grow **personally**.
- It will give you **professional** advantages.
- It gives you new **points of view**.
- It **enriches** your life.
- You will make **new friends**.

Thank you very much!

Let's get in touch...

- ▼ article:
<https://blog.effenberger.org/2017/11/01/ten-thoughts-on-community-leadership/>
- ▼ e-mail: floeff@documentfoundation.org
- ▼ Twitter: [@floeff](https://twitter.com/floeff)



All text and image content in this document, unless otherwise specified, is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/). This does not include the LibreOffice name, logo, or icon.