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Ten thoughts on community leadership - How leadership in an open source community can work, in ten lessons learned

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IO SONO FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA

Comune di Pordenone

POLO TECNOLOGICO ALTO ADRIATICO
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About Florian

- **free software enthusiast** since 2004
- former international marketing project lead at OpenOffice.org (volunteer role)
- founding member, statute co-author, executive director of **The Document Foundation**



“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 legal representative**
- 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 colleagues
- **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 therefore depend 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,**
  <u>because</u> 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**.

Thanks, Questions?



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