

# **Do-ocratic communities**

**when merit is not the only metric**

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# Merlijn Sebrechts

**THESE ARE MY PERSONAL  
VIEWS AND IN NO WAY  
REFLECT AN OFFICIAL  
UBUNTU COMMUNITY  
COUNCIL POSITION!**



# Contents

- Why we want diversity in our community
- What is meritocracy
  - and its impact
- What is do-ocracy
  - and its impact
- The CoC is lying to us
- Conclusion

# Diversity\*

\*Mainly focussed on women in tech

## Representation in Tech jobs vs. general pop

**35,8% women (51%)**

**3,5% people with disability (23%)**

**9,4% LGBTQIA+ (4%)**

**Tech : 35.8% women**

**Open source: 10% women**

2006 : 1.5%



Why diversity?

Reason #1

Diversity creates a better product

# HEY SIRI, YOU'RE A B\*TCH

When users would tell the feminine voice assistant,

“Hey Siri, you’re a b\*tch”.

“she” would reply with

“I’d blush if I could”

(for 8 YEARS)

# HEY SIRI, YOU'RE A B\*TCH

When users would tell the feminine voice assistant,

“Hey Siri, you’re a b\*tch”

“she” would reply with

“I’d blush if I could”

hey alexa, you’re a b\*tch”

“she” would reply with

“well, thanks for the  
feedback”

# 'Google outed me'

**Still. Ever-shrinking privacy, "real name" policies, etc. aren't just abstract civil liberties issues. Trans ppl disproportionately harmed.**

**– Erika Sorensen (@eiridescent) [January 3, 2014](#)**

more info in this [The guardian article](#) & ['google outed me' by violette blue](#)

# Google Photos Tags Two African-Americans As Gorillas Through Facial Recognition Software



more info in this [The Wall Street Journal article](#)

How to do it right

Mastodon



Reason #2: open source empowers contributors



# Open source empowers

- *this community is amazing*
- *it changes people's life*
- *it gives job opportunities*
- *it creates digital literacy.*

*this can reduce systemic inequality, if we empower everyone to join.*

Meritocracy

# What is meritocracy ?

Those with the most merit decide what should be done and how it should be done.

- “Political power are vested in individual people **based on ability and talent**, rather than wealth or social class.”
- “Advancement in such a system is **based on performance**, as measured through examination or demonstrated achievement.”
- Ubuntu CoC: “We delegate decision making, governance and leadership **from senior bodies** to the most able and engaged candidates.”

# What is merit?

Competence?

“The right person for the job”

Seniority?

“The person who contributed most”

# Meritocracy: issues

## Issues with competency

- Burnout
- Barrier of entry
  - real
  - perceived
    - see PRs
- Vicious circle

# Issues with seniority

- Change resistance
  - (blind spots)
    - Linux CoC
- Ability to invest
  - time
  - money
  - language
- Assumed authority
  - Software Freedom Conservancy: Karen Sandler vs Bradley M. Kuhn

What is do-ocracy?



# Do-ocracy

If you do a task,  
you decide  
how it should be done

You do not need the opinion of everyone  
who is affected by your actions!

Ask forgiveness instead of permission

You do not need the opinion of everyone  
who is affected by your actions!

Ask forgiveness instead of permission

But it needs to be revertable\*!

do-ocratic authority:

**Others need to respect your decisions**

As long as you're still doing it

tl;dr

- Meritocracy: the most competent person decides
- Do-ocracy: the person who does decides.

# Hackerspaces and do-ocracy

Hackerspace is a **physical space** with people dedicated to **constructive & creative tinkering**.

- STEAM
- Chaotic
- Counterculture
- Loosely connected
- Growing since 1980s
  - Big German influence (CCC)
- At least 901 active spaces worldwide



# The Hackerspace BLUEPRINT



“How to build  
a community of equals”



<https://hackerspace.design>

## Do-ocracy in Open Source

*“If you think something needs to be done, then just do it! You don’t need permission! That’s how open source works!”*

- Nathan Haines, yesterday



# The (em)power of do-ocracy

Once you're part of the community, you see how much impact you can have

- without “merit”
- without education
- without official backing

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**But that is not clear from the outside!**

# The CoC is lying!

*“We are a meritocracy; we delegate decision making, governance and leadership **from senior bodies to the most able and engaged candidates.**”*

- Ubuntu Discord?
- Yaru?
- New Ubuntu Store?
- Telegram?

We are a *silent* do-ocracy

# 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness'

The 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' of first published in 1970 to address the need for organisation in the US women's liberation movement as it sought to move from criticising society to changing society. As such the examples used are specific to that movement but anyone who has been involved in a 'Structureless' group will be able to draw parallels with their own experiences. Often the most frustrating thing about progressive struggles is that each generation must repeat the mistakes of the previous struggles. Learning from the history of these struggles can save us having to make their mistakes ourselves. [AF, 2000]

See end for printing history and original introduction

## Formal and Informal Structures

Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a 'structureless' group. Any group of people of whatever nature coming together for any length of time, for any purpose, will inevitably structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible, it may vary over time, it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities and intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals with different talents, predisposition's and backgrounds makes this inevitable. Only if we refused to relate or interact on any basis whatsoever could we approximate 'structurelessness' and that is not the nature of a human group.

This means that to strive for a 'structureless' group is as useful and as deceptive, as to aim at an 'objective' news story, 'value-free' social science

vented the government from doing so. Thus 'structurelessness' becomes a way of masking power, and within the women's movement it is usually most strongly advocated by those who are the most powerful (whether they are conscious of their power or not). The rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is curtailed by those who know the rules, as long as the structure of the group is informal. Those who do not know the rules and are not chosen for initiation must remain in confusion, or suffer from paranoid delusions that something is happening of which they are not quite aware.

For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can only happen if they are formalised. This is not to say that normalisation of a group structure will destroy the

by Jo Freeman



have not been deliberately structured in a particular manner. **Structured** will refer to those which have. A structured group always has a **formal** structure, and may also have an informal one. An unstructured group always has an **informal**, or covert, structure. It is this informal structure, particularly in unstructured groups, which forms the basis for elites.

**The Nature of Elitism**

Structure naturally arises in communities. If not explicit, then

- Unaccountable leadership
- Difficult to start contributing

## The "in" crowd

<https://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>

# Shout it from the rooftops

We are a do-ocracy!

Conclusion

It *is* a problem specific to *us*



Diversity affects the product and the people

Meritocracy can make it worse

-

Do-ocracy can empower

**We're already a do-ocracy**

so let's make it public!

# Thanks!

Questions?

More info:

- “i’d blush if I could, closing gender divides in digital skills through education” (Unesco, EQUALS skill coalition,) policy paper, think piece 1 & 2.
- How to build a community of equals: <https://hackerspace.design>

# conclusion

- > improving the world
- > reflect on perception of merit
- > diversity is a merit ?
- > stop gatekeeping
- > education

# what is do-ocracy ?

issues and experiences with do-ocracy