Why Giving Credit Accurately Helps Diversity

Outline

Examples of community contributions and false credit

Why does credit matter?

Who is more likely to get credit?

How giving credit accurately benefits a community and improves diversity

How taking credit unfairly benefits an individual and reduces diversity

What communities can do to improve giving credit accurately

How you can contribute to an example written credit policy

val@valerieaurora.org

Why care about who gets credit for contributions?

"Some people have their whole 'GitHub resumes' built off copy-pasted contributions.

1. Open PR

2. Get comments asking for changes, you only have time to fix it a few days later.

3. PR gets closed as fixed by another PR submitted by a frequent contributor.

4. Find said PR is your exact code with a variable name change (approved instantly through lower 'friend' review standards)

5. Look at that user's profile and notice almost every contributions were copy-pasted from other people."

https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=37676826

val@valerieaurora.org

Contributions come in many forms

DevOps, bug reports, design, documentation, event organization, mentoring, standards definitions, etc.

"A few individuals brought up situations where their work was sidelined or sidestepped when creating new IETF initiatives or working group drafts. For some scenarios mentioned, significant contributions were not acknowledged. In these cases, **the women had written drafts which were later usurped by other drafts without referencing the previous work or even acknowledging that the initial work existed.**"

https://www.ietf.org/blog/report-experience-of-women-participating-in-the-ietf/

(This happens to men and non-binary people too, obviously)

val@valerieaurora.org

A little about me: Valerie Aurora

15 years professional software development (networking, file systems, Linux, Solaris)

12 years professional diversity, equity, and inclusion in technology

My work has been plagiarized multiple times 😡

And I've had to correct people for giving me credit wrongly as well!

val@valerieaurora.org

When someone gets credit, they get:

Money: jobs, raises, promotions, bonuses

Influence: people listen to their opinion more

Opportunities: speaking at events, travel, grants, visas

Professional networking: build relationships with people in their field

Satisfaction: a sense of justice and fairness, feeling appreciated

They also get most of these things even if they didn't actually do the work they got credit for

val@valerieaurora.org

"Good people don't ask for credit"

Translation: We punish people with less power for asking for credit so more powerful people can take it unfairly

The Al Capone Theory by Valerie Aurora and Leigh Honeywell

https://hypatia.ca/2017/07/18/the-al-capone-theory-of-sexual-harassment/

"People who engage in sexual harassment or assault are also likely to steal, **plagiarize**, embezzle, engage in overt racism, or otherwise harm their business."

val@valerieaurora.org

Who is most likely and least likely to get credit?

Most likely:

People who **match the stereotype**

People who are already known

People with a lot of power

People who control who gets credit (leaders, maintainers, etc.)

People who can get away with harming others

Least likely:

People who don't **match the stereotype**

People who are less well known

People with less power

People with little or no control over who gets credit (first time contributors, beginners, etc.)

Benefits to a community for giving credit accurately

Improves retention – people stay in the community longer

Encourages future contributions to the community

Attracts kind, creative, fun people who value the respect of their peers

Improves the public reputation of the project

Makes more people willing to use and rely on a project

Gives credit to people who don't match the stereotype of a contributor

Improves diversity, equity, and inclusion

val@valerieaurora.org

"Benefits" to individuals for falsely taking credit

In a "do-ocracy", contributions are the main source of power (esp. code)

Taking credit for other people's contributions increases their power

Helps existing leaders to maintain control of the project

Keeps more of the monetary and career benefits to the individual

Reduces competition by screening out anyone who cares about fairness

Increases job security for powerful individuals and people who look like them

Reduces diversity, equity, and inclusion through corrupt behavior

val@valerieaurora.org

Some credit-giving philosophies, summarized

➢ It is obvious who should get credit and theft of credit is not a problem

➢ Everyone needs to be vigilant and intentional about giving credit accurately

➢ Credit goes to the person strong enough and fast enough to take it

val@valerieaurora.org

Ways to give credit better

Senior people deliberately put effort into praising junior people

Give credit by name frequently and proactively

Record the original contribution separately, then make edits

Create public lists of contributors and make them easy to update

Correct inaccurate or false credit quickly

General principle: people with more power intentionally look for ways to give credit to people with less power

Suggestion: Adopt a written policy for credit

You may think your policy is obvious and what people expect, but people have wildly different ideas about how credit should be given!

"I used to think it was fine to take someone else's contribution and then create a total rewrite of it in my own branch and merge that. Or to go into someone's PR and push a rewrite into a new commit on Github. [...] **But someone had to do the same with me for me to realise that it kinda sucked and really soured the experience of being a contributor.**"

https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=37677321

Help the Open Source WG write an example written credit policy

val@valerieaurora.org