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Open Source and You

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The case for the prosecution

- Three types of project:
  - Type 0 - lone developer/small group
  - Type 1 - supported by consulting
  - Type 2 - big company backing or IPO
- OS developers need to make money from their work to support it

Short Open Source history

1983 Richard Stallman starts GNU project

1985 Free Software Foundation (FSF) started

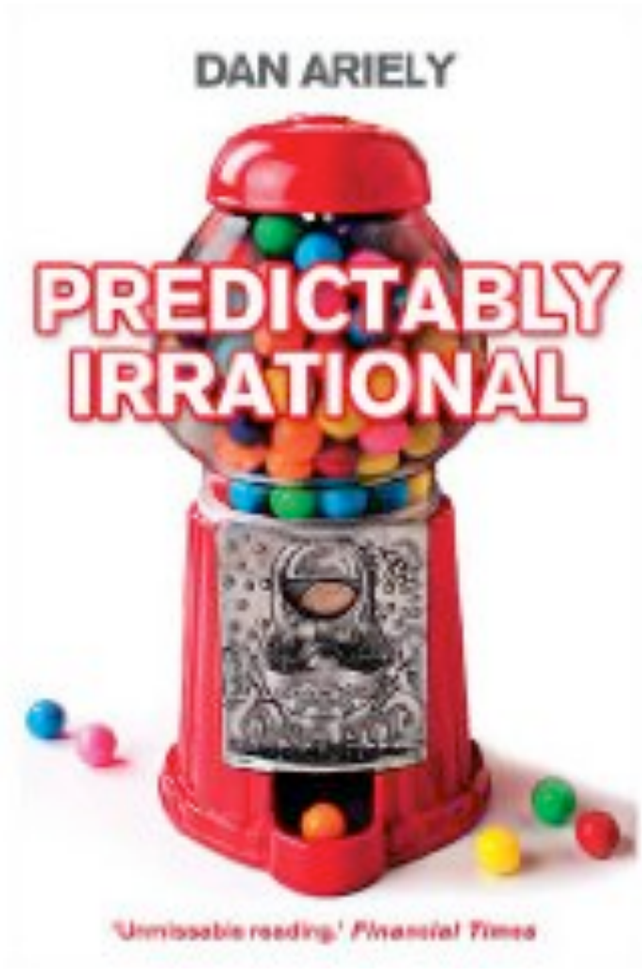
1998 Open Source Initiative (OSI) started

1999 Apache Software Foundation (ASF) started

1999 Cathedral and the Bazaar published

GNU project to break unix monopoly on tools
Allow people to fix and modify code themselves - free as in speech
OSI more interested in promoting use of and contribution to OS - not so fussed about free
Is the fact it's free (no cost) more important than the openness of the code?

The Power of Free!



Daniel Ariely: Predictably Irrational
Free (as in beer) causes us to make less rational decisions.
BOGOF - difficult to just say no
Popularity of Justin Bieber demonstrates just how irrational it is anyway
Microsoft had a point about TCO (even though it was marketing B$)
Some might say, you get what you pay for

from Wikimedia Commons

Free houses are about freedom (compared to pubs)

How do projects start?

- One man/woman scratching an itch
- Company dump
- Company released and maintained

Alternate World Comics

"Road of Skulls"

Consider Grails plugin system - should have a byline of "where mortals fear to tread"
Caveat Emptor

So company-maintained is the only way to go?

Breaks social contract

Users expect it:

- to work
- to be regularly updated

Users think company is making money off it, so should be actively maintaining it
Consider reviews on App Store of paid vs free

Consulting struggles to cover its own costs

Does no one else profit from the project?

Better money can be made off of ops than dev
Companies move to products if they can - better scaling of revenue

Cathedral vs Bazaar

Company-maintained leans towards Cathedral model
Cathedral model does not encourage contributions as well as the bazaar model does

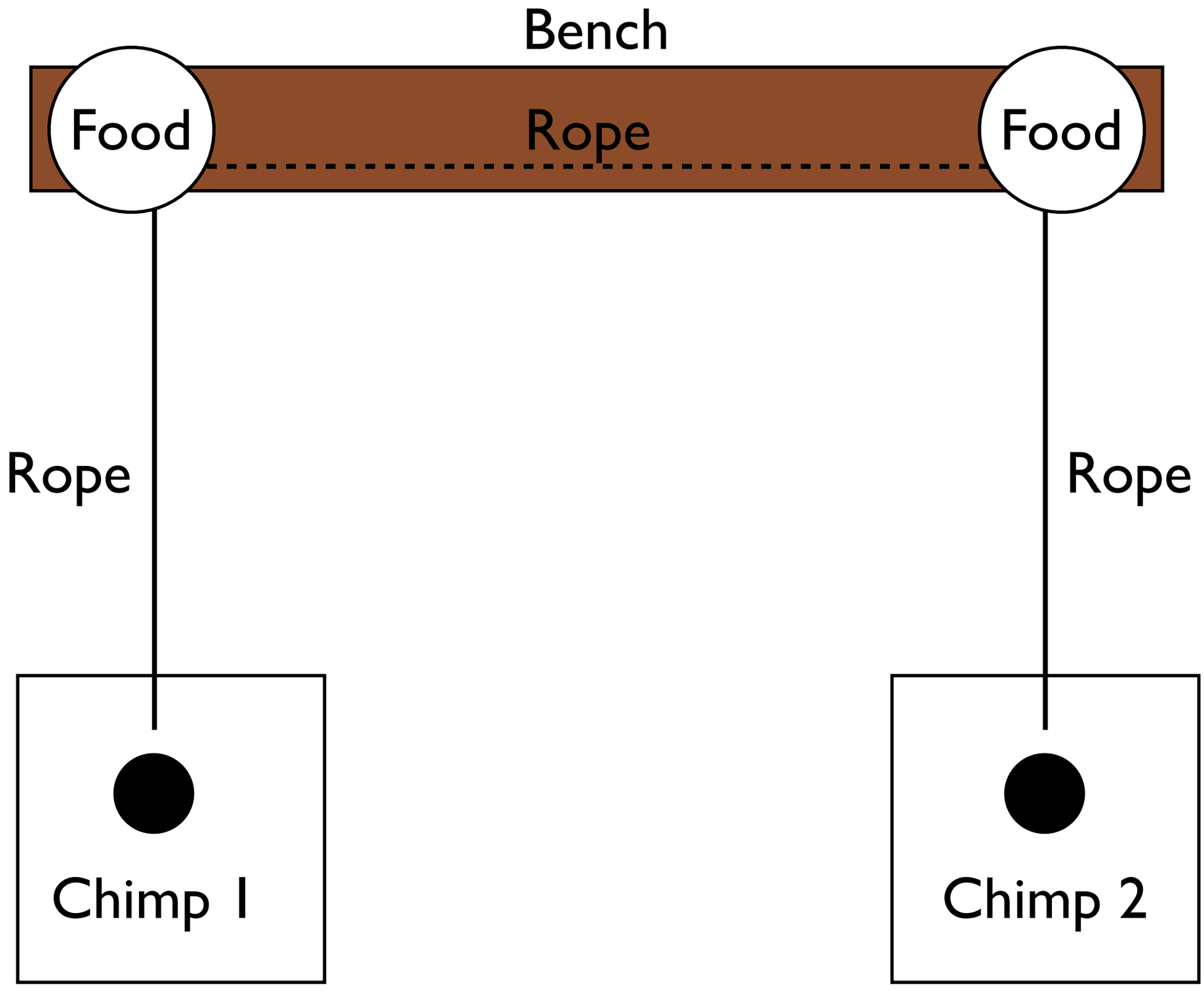
Don’t panic!

- Open source gave us
  - Linux
  - Apache Httpd
  - Spring framework
  - VIM
  - Many, many other projects

Humans are social creatures

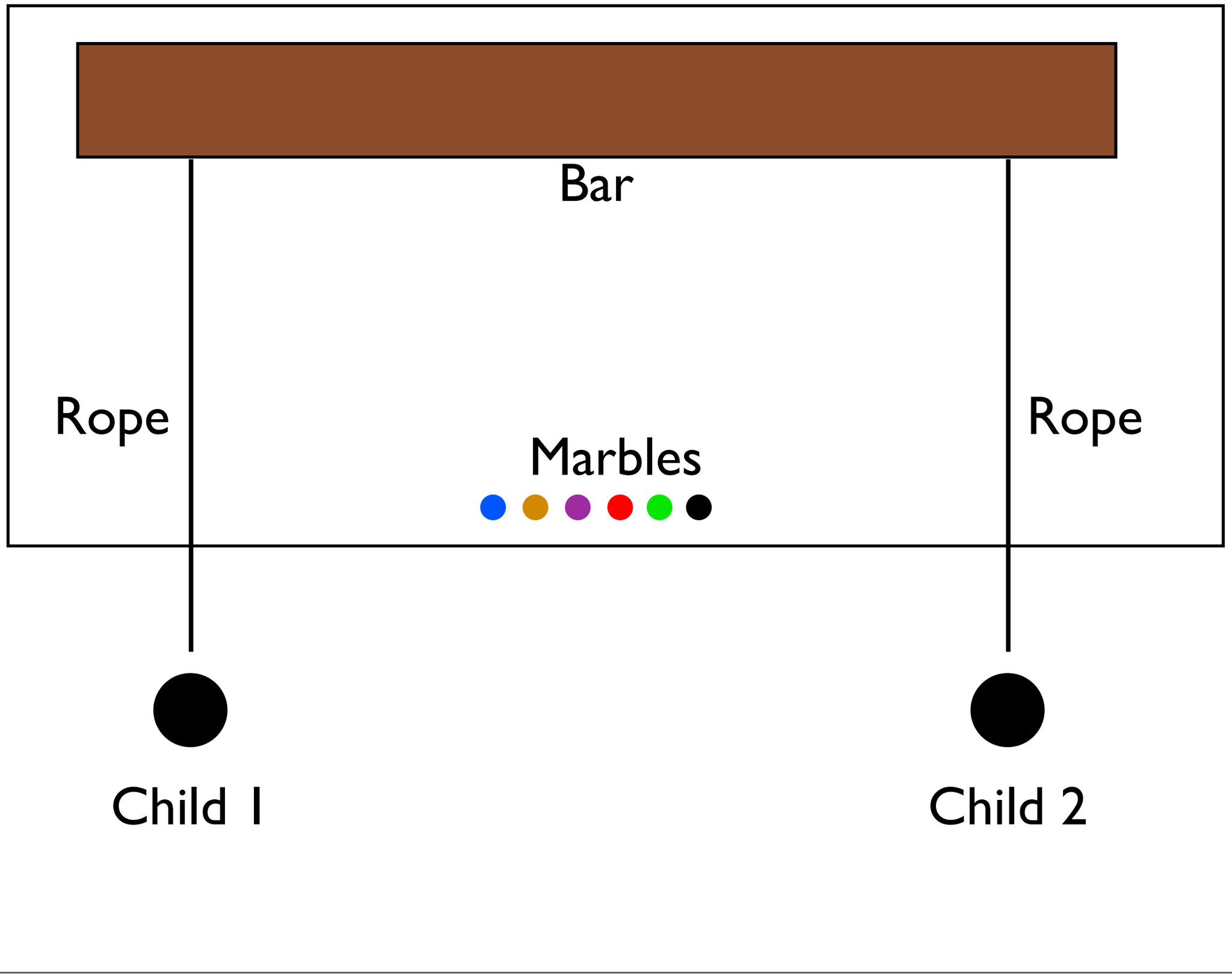
Horizon: what makes us human?
Compare Chimpanzee experiment with the human child one

Chimpanzee Experiment



The chimpanzees collaborate to pull the food towards themselves
If one end of bench reaches a chimp before the other, the chimp with the food lets go of the rope and the other chimp is left foodless

Child Experiment



Children collaborate to pull the bar together, which releases the marbles
But if the marbles are distributed unevenly between the children, the child with more marbles will give some to the other child – an equal share in the reward of the collaborative effort

Open Source is a social & collaborative enterprise

Let’s not forget it!

What does it take for a project to be collaborative?

Fulfill user expectations

Easy to use
Reliable
Documented
Not too clever

Increases pool of potential contributors
Happy users == more committed contributors

Small, focused projects are better

More comprehensible codebase
Avoids overcommitment on scale front (although not number of projects!)

Large project needs

- good structure
- internal separation of concerns
- solid internal model

Engagement

A successful project requires good engagement with the community
Community is diverse - accept that
English not always first language
Cultural differences
Don’t just say “you could contribute it”

Clear vision and values

Users and contributors feel better knowing where a project is going
Frames discussions about features
Guides contributions

Contributing guidelines

Not just styles, but requiring tests, doc changes, etc.
Avoid broken windows syndrome
Contributors feel more secure knowing what's involved - fewer questions
Like in parenting, you want to follow a path between too strict and too lax

Southwark

(Suth'k)

Ask someone on streets of London where "South-wark" is will produce look of incompreshension
Inconsistency is barrier to comprehension and communication

Southall

(South-all)

Leicester

(Lester)

Cirencester

(Siren sester)

Tough

I had a tuff day yesterday

Bough

I climbed up the buffs of a tree
oh sorry, bows (as in ‘how’) of a tree

Cough

I had a bit of a cow, but it’s better today
oh sorry, I mean coff

Inconsistency is not just in place names

Spsuope you wree an iiodt, and sspopue you were a mbmeer of Cngsores; but I rpeaet msleyf.

Suppose you were an idiot, and suppose you were a member of Congress; but I repeat myself.

Mark Twain

ti is ertbte ot be eiovtln, fi hteer is iocvleen in rou estahr, hnta to upt on the lokca fo ovnienloenc to rovec pmoectien.

it is bteetr to be veiolnt, if terhe is vionclee in our hetars, tahn to put on the caolk of nieovnclone to cevor ipmoectne.

it is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of nonviolence to cover impotence.

Mahatma Gandhi

Brain is amazingly good at pattern recognition
If the first and last letter of each word is in the right place, more comprehensible than completely jumbled
Consistency in code == recurrent patterns == better comprehension

Project handovers

Cathedral and the bazaar: “When you lose interest in a program, your last duty is to hand it over to a competent successor.”

It’s not just about the technology

People count
It’s often better to invest in people than technology

Aims

- Encourage contributions
- Reduce cost of managing contributions

The truth is, you need to invest fairly heavily to make these a reality
But important for viability of open source project unless you find a way to finance development and maintenance

Learning to contribute

It can be intimidating at first - get involved in discussions, answer questions on forums, never feel that you're not good enough

Range of contribution areas

- Raising issues with tests
- Documentation
- Discussions and support
- Plugins and modules
- Website
- Core code

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All are important!

from Wikimedia Commons

Who regularly votes?
Give yourselves a pat on the pack: easy to think a single vote doesn't count or politicians are a bunch of money-grabbing liars and they're all as bad as each other
But single votes from large blocks of like-minded people = power
Rails 4 > 500 contributors in 2013 (source: Rails 4 release announcement by DHH)

Reduce the feeling of isolation

Make a song and dance about those that contribute
Run as many collaborative hack sessions as possible

Yes We Can!