Exercise 6.1: Enabling New Contributors

Enabling new contributors to join a project is essential to both longevity and vitality. It is the normal life cycle that many project members eventually leave a project for many reasons ranging from not enough time or lost interest, to disagreeing with changes in goals or governance issues or personal conflicts. New blood brings in both more labor or fresh ideas and tools.

What are some of the methods that can be used to ease the glide path of new project members and get them to the point where they both feel comfortable with the project and can make useful contributions?

✅ Solution 6.1

- Have a structure for mentorship, for attaching new members to patient long time contributors. These can acclimate new people to the project ecosystem and teach them proper practices.

- Keep discussions in the open. If decisions are made behind closed doors and it looks like those with the strong connections to project leadership have inordinately favored behaviour, new members will be confused and possibly discouraged.

- Make sure reviews and rejections are based on issues and have clear explanations.

- Avoid abusive, even toxic tones in discussions, even between senior members who know each other well and may not take offense, possibly due to cultural factors. Of course one not should not go crazy and install over-bearing thought police, either internally or externally, but be sensitive. New members may not know that the person you just (humorously) insulted is your oldest friend and they may be intimidated and fear they will be treated with the same irreverence.

- If you are a maintainer, don't just exert control over submissions because you can. Lead by explaining the logic of decisions, by suggesting what would be a more acceptable change set, and encourage others to contribute their views rather than ruling soley by fiat.