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Fostering Inclusion, Keeping the Net Neutral

ACM-W chair Jodi Tims offers ways everyone can promote inclusiveness, while Daniel A. Reed assesses the debate over Net neutrality.

Jodi Tims
How Can We Foster Inclusiveness?

<http://bit.ly/2scVMMX>
January 3, 2018

This post is a follow-up to the article “Achieving Gender Equity: ACM-W Can’t Do It Alone,” which appeared in the February issue of *Communications*. If you have not yet read the article, doing so will provide relevant context.

The goal is to elicit thoughts on the question “What can an individual do on a day-to-day basis to ensure that her/his environment fosters inclusiveness?” When asking this question of ACM-W Council members, I received a number of suggestions, some of the “day-to-day” variety, and others that would require a bit more time and effort to enact.

Want to quickly achieve a better understanding of the issues faced by women in computing and contribute to more supportive environments for all computing professionals? You can:

- Once a month, reach out to a female colleague you do not know and ask about the work she does. Then, introduce her to someone she should

know (or who should know her) in your organization.

- Find an ACM article about equity and diversity, read it, and share it with peers, students, and others.

- Talk with peers and at staff meetings about issues of diversity such as unconscious bias and stereotype threat.

- Reach out to colleagues you trust and ask them to candidly assess if there are any gender or ethnic/minority biases in the current project.

- Ensure all members of a meeting, regardless of gender, have a chance to contribute to a discussion by explicitly inviting contributions from those who have been silent.

- Make sure original ideas are attributed to the person who generated them. It is frequently true that ideas offered up by women get remembered as coming from men.

- Seek out a person that most likely has a background or culture different from your own. Ask them how they made their career choice and what persuaded them to stick with a computing career. Use this input to encourage young women you meet to consider computer science as a future pathway.

- Invite a female colleague to give a presentation on her work at a weekly meeting or to a group of students.

- Once a month, become familiar with at least one woman (professor and/or student) on your campus and recognize the work they do and the accomplishments they have made to their chosen STEM profession. Introduce them to your students, peers, co-workers, friends, and others.

- Talk to people you meet from businesses/universities other than your own about issues of gender equity in their environments. Take good ideas back and share them with your colleagues.

Actions that may require more time or effort or may require the participation of others in your organization are:

- Team up with colleagues and adopt a local elementary, middle, or high school class. Visit three to five times a year and plan sessions and activities to sensitize/empower young men and women for inclusiveness.

- Use training resources to encourage young women to push back against negative peer pressure from both women and men that tries to dissuade them from sticking with computing.

- Mentor a female high school or college student interested in computing.

- Make sure that hiring, tenure, and promotion committees, as well as teaching faculty and managers, understand how unconscious bias can affect their decisions, and help those groups develop mechanisms to disrupt those biases.

- Nominate a female colleague for a promotion/award/recognition.

► Locate and attend a Women in Computing event. ACM Celebrations, ACM-W Student Chapters, and the Grace Hopper Celebration are options to consider.

Please contribute your ideas to this posting. ACM-W will feature the ideas generated on our Web page and in other publications. This will help us empower all computing professionals to do their part in transforming ACM into the premier example of a professional organization committed to gender equity.

Comments

One of the things I think is important is if you manage a group of students that do some level of community outreach (tech camps, school visits, and the like), it is important to ensure you have a diverse group of students. Not only will it help the target audience relate to those students and be more comfortable asking them questions, but it will also give your group different perspectives and ideas.

—Brian Krupp

Daniel A. Reed
The Shifting World
of Net Neutrality
<http://bit.ly/2IS4yJQ>
 December 11, 2017

N.B. While at Microsoft, I served on the U.S. Federal Communication Commission (FCC) Technical Advisory Committee, during a portion of Julius Genachowski's service as FCC chair (2009–2013). At that time, Tom Wheeler led the advisory committee, and he later succeeded Genachowski as chair of the FCC (2013–2017).

Utter the phrase “network neutrality” (<http://bit.ly/2E7WQmV>) and one is likely to engender two possible reactions. The first is a bewildered stare of incomprehension, something geeks experience frequently when using jargon-speak in inappropriate circumstances. (*Exhibit A: Holiday gatherings with extended family.*) The debate has also become major news, with extended coverage in such outlets as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and it has begun to penetrate the popular consciousness.

The other response, from policy wonks, technical experts, and Internet/telecom service and content providers, is likely to be impassioned advocacy, with much gesticulation. They will either opine that we must ensure unfettered and equal Internet access by and

for all, or that we must ensure continued Internet innovation and free enterprise investment.

Both are clearly true. What, then, is the debate really about?

Although the early Internet grew from government research (see ARPANET and NSFNET, for example), today's Internet was largely built by the private sector, which rightly expects to profit from its investment. Simultaneously, the Internet is a crucial element of our society, supporting business and commerce, government services, and public communication; these are societal needs of great importance. Simply put, both the public and the private good matter, and they are sometimes in conflict.

Technically, network neutrality is about Internet traffic management and its possible prioritization. Can service providers give preference to some content based on defined criteria? Or is every packet the same and all content must be treated equally? The technical answer is obvious. Anyone who has operated networks or conducted network research knows that signaling and quality of service (QoS, <http://bit.ly/2E76wOm>) guarantees are essential elements of network management. The real issue is not technical network management, but about applying traffic shaping (<http://bit.ly/2nPLQZ4>) and other techniques to favor (or disfavor) certain entities based on business, market, or social advantage.

Thus, the network neutrality debate is largely a power and economic struggle between Internet service providers and those who deliver content and services. In an increasing number of cases, those two entities—service and content providers—are the same. Cellular operators and cable companies are two prime examples, providing broadband access while also offering content that competes with other content providers (such as Netflix).

The struggle is further convolved with a combination of social and political perspectives—pro-regulation or anti-regulation. Then there is the woefully obsolete nature of the governing law—the Communications Act of 1934 (<http://bit.ly/2FRbBL4>). There have been updates, most recently the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (<http://bit.ly/2GUTN2Y>), but 20-plus years is a geologic eon at Internet speed.

The legal and policy debate centers on whether the Internet should be con-

sidered a common carrier, like radio, television, and telephony, under Title II of the 1934 act, or as an information service under Title I of the 1934 act. The technical irony is that radio, television, and telephony are now all streamed over the Internet. That convolution is what makes application of the 1934 law so challenging. The Internet is a carrier but it is also an information service.

After much debate, via the Open Internet Order of 2015 (<http://bit.ly/2sccEmN>), the FCC, under Wheeler's leadership, chose to apply Title II, though forbearing several of the elements of Title II. I believe that was the right decision, allowing “light touch” regulation for equal access, but others disagree. On Dec. 14, 2017 (<http://bit.ly/2E5HjUw>), the FCC, under new chair Ajit Pai, reversed the 2015 ruling and shift questions about discriminatory rulings to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

Depending on one's perspective, the reversal of the 2015 order is either wonderful, allowing free enterprise to flourish without unnecessary and burdening government regulation, or disastrous, endangering fair access and innovation and allowing a small number of large companies to shape the future of a critical resource with little oversight. In practice, the full measure of either is unlikely to accrue, but there will be real effects. That is why there is so much heat surrounding the debate.

Regardless of one's business, legal, or social opinions, it is clear the network neutrality debate is yet another example of technical and business change rapidly outstripping outmoded laws, while powerful social and economic forces are at play. The nexus of digital privacy, transnational data flows, and the scope of extraterritorial legal reach is yet another. We badly need updated legal frameworks that reflect current realities and that are sufficiently flexible to accommodate rapidly evolving technologies. I wish I were more sanguine about that near-term probability. It is crucial that computer scientists become more involved as non-partisan experts.

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