



The Success of Open Source

Steven Weber

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Much of the innovative programming that powers the Internet, creates operating systems, and produces software is the result of "open source" code, that is, code that is freely distributed--as opposed to being kept secret--by those who write it. Leaving source code open has generated some of the most sophisticated developments in computer technology, including, most notably, Linux and Apache, which pose a significant challenge to Microsoft in the marketplace. As Steven Weber discusses, open source's success in a highly competitive industry has subverted many assumptions about how businesses are run, and how intellectual products are created and protected.

Traditionally, intellectual property law has allowed companies to control knowledge and has guarded the rights of the innovator, at the expense of industry-wide cooperation. In turn, engineers of new software code are richly rewarded; but, as Weber shows, in spite of the conventional wisdom that innovation is driven by the promise of individual and corporate wealth, ensuring the free distribution of code among computer programmers can empower a more effective process for building intellectual products. In the case of Open Source, independent programmers--sometimes hundreds or thousands of them--make unpaid contributions to software that develops organically, through trial and error.

Weber argues that the success of open source is not a freakish exception to economic principles. The open source community is guided by standards, rules, decisionmaking procedures, and sanctioning mechanisms. Weber explains the political and economic dynamics of this mysterious but important market development.

The Success of Open Source Details

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From Reader Review The Success of Open Source for online ebook

Robert says

The Open Source software movement has begun to radically change computing, the internet and the world. The Open Source community and their philosophy of volunteer programmers creating better software is beginning to overshadow the profit driven business model subscribed to by Microsoft and other giants in the software industry. This new movement promises to revolutionize how the global marketplace does business. Steven Weber of Berkley University explains how this could happen and how the Open Source movement has the potential to be a powerful equalizer in the growing disparity of global wealth. This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the history and impact of Open Source software and the community that drives it.

Nicole Engard says

This book is not the kind of title you can read from cover to cover in one sitting. It's a tough read, but a read that is well worth it. I love looking at open source from another point a view - that of a sociologist.
<http://blogs.liblime.com/open-sesame/...>

Anne says

I've recently read an article about the best books on open source software and the book by Steven Weber was there (<https://www.bgosoftware.com/blog/top-...>) . After reading "The Success of Open Source" I can state that the book really provides in-depth information about the impact of open source software on the IT sector.

Krishna Kumar says

A look at the open source movement and its various facets. The author dwells into the phenomenon of why people would contribute their time willingly to something that offers them no return. The book shows what kinds of software lend themselves to success in the open source environment.

Bob S. says

The author takes a Political Economics perspective that raises two important questions about Open Source:

- 1) Why do people participate without traditional incentive mechanisms (coercion and money)?
- 2) How does a largely unstructured mass produce a useful output, without the benefit of traditional coordination mechanisms (the firm and the market)?

The text includes a very interesting history of the Open Source movement. As a Business Analyst (BA), this was particularly interesting to me, because the focus is on the processes through which conflicts were

resolved (or not). Since all projects experience conflict over goals, choice of solutions, pace of progress, or personality (to name just a few), this presentation is relevant to just about any project (not just open source projects).

Ultimately the author generates a picture of an alternative organizing principle (or set of principles) that underlies successful initiatives operating in conditions that characterize Open Source projects. As a BA, with interests in process in general, not just in software development processes, the larger ramifications of this alternate organizing principle are quite interesting. For example, at one point the author considers religious traditions as comparable to open source code bases. The comparison works because most religions have been re-organized as access to some body of wisdom literature, making them "non-excludable and non-rival" (as opposed to access to e.g. religious ceremony). That is, anybody who wants to read the Gospels or the Upanishads can, and their reading does not preclude another individual from reading the same source. This has consequences for the organization of the religious community -- in fact the same consequences faced by the open source community (and especially its leadership).

At another point the author maps open source organizational style to the field of International Relations, finding it useful to contrast a "network" organizational style with the traditional "hierarchy" organizational style that formal governments share with the Firm (the closed-source analogue). Particularly interesting is the insight that the space in which organizations of the two styles interact is unmapped, yet vital to emerging conditions in the 21st century.

I think this book will appeal to many different audiences for very different reasons. If you want a better understanding of the history and social dynamics, I highly recommend this book. For BAs looking for something they can immediately apply in the realm of proprietary (hierarchically organized) initiatives, there are other texts available. However Project Managers, who often need to operate without direct supervisorial authority, despite the larger organization's hierarchical structure, should find the discussion of the nature of open source leadership (along with the case studies of its success and failure) quite helpful in their own work.

Sridhar Jammalamadaka says

Takes you to the past in time machine, showing how open source evolved. Well written!

Lin Clark says

Truly insightful, non-handwavey analysis of the economic and political differences that make open source effective as a strategy for organizing production.

Ruslan says

<https://medium.freecodecamp.com/being...>

Tom Smyth says

nice history of open source and an insightful review of reasons for its success. i consult this one again and again.

Manderson says

A really well thought out and analytical approach to the open source model of software development. Weber stays above any pat glorifications and consistently takes the conversation to another level by attempting to generalize open source as a model that can be transferred into other paradigms.

Matt says

As one commenter said, it's not a book you can read in one sitting. Offers a solid overview of the history of the open source software process and an engaging analysis of the challenge of open source to traditional ways of thinking about organizations. Covers some of the same ground as Shirky's Here Comes Everybody, but with more depth.

Jason Shao says

Paul Z. from UBC said this was good.

Alexia Gaudoul says

A clear and well-written introduction to the topic of open-source development and governance, with many insightful ideas and good illustrative examples.

Jared says

An indispensable introduction to the open source software movement. While it is undoubtedly an academic treatment, and thus somewhat less readable, it is still accessible enough to be of use to the general reader interested in the topic.
