

Issues of Company Involvement in Open Source Software Projects

*Workshop Proposal by Matthias Stuermer, ETH Zurich
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Although a recent study (Ghosh, 2006) reveals that still two thirds of open source software (OSS) is written by volunteers, the contributions from corporations in OSS is significant¹. Since volunteer communities differ in various aspects from OSS projects sponsored by firms (West and O'Mahony, 2005), it is of interest how company involvement influences established or new OSS projects.

In this workshop, issues concerning company involvement in OSS projects and firm-community relationship evolution shall be explored and relevant topics identified. The following discussion items are of particular interest:

- *How large is the influence of company interests in established OSS projects and what are their effects?*
- *What are the benefits and threats for a community project if firms start to sponsor it or employ key developers to continue working on it?*
- *What type of contributions are most likely to be sponsored since no volunteers are motivated to do them?*
- *What types of OSS projects and which tasks are attractive for voluntary contributors?*
- *What are best and worst practices of behavior by firms within OSS communities?*
- *What option of sanctions possesses the volunteer community?*
- *How should release management be organized in order to inhibit takeover by a sponsoring company?*

Additional topics shall be discussed if time allows:

- *What are possible negative effects for a project when competing firms control the development process?*
- *When does crowding-out (Frey and Jegen, 2000) occur in bounty systems, when not?*
- *Under what circumstances will the fork of a 'company project' be more successful than its origin?*

Targeted attendees of this workshop session are volunteers in OSS communities, paid developers by firms involved in OSS projects and OSS researchers interested in firm-community relationship.

¹ Ghosh 2006: "Almost two-thirds of FLOSS software is still written by individuals; firms contribute about 15% and other institutions another 20%"

References

Frey, Bruno S. and Jegen, Reto, "Motivation Crowding Theory: A Survey of Empirical Evidence" (January 2000). Zurich IEER Working Paper No. 26; CESifo Working Paper Series No. 245. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=203330>

Ghosh, Rishab Aiyer (2006). 'Study on the: Economic impact of open source software on innovation and the competitiveness of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) sector in the EU' UNU-MERIT, the Netherlands.

West, J. & O'Mahony, S. (2005). 'Contrasting Community Building In Sponsored And Community Founded Open Source Projects', Proceedings of the 38th Annual Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences.