

CORPORATE CONTRIBUTIONS TO OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT: IN SEARCH OF A NEW METAPHOR FOR CORPORATE-COMMUNAL ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

In a watershed book on open source software development, Raymond [8] sets up two metaphors that have had a major impact on the conceptualization of open source. The metaphors are the cathedral and the bazaar. In the last 15 years, numerous researchers have seized on these metaphors to explain software development. This paper questions whether these metaphors make sense in today's world now that for-profit corporations are developing open source software.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have commented on Raymond's metaphors of the cathedral and the bazaar and have come to the conclusion that Raymond was positioning closed source (proprietary software development) against open source software. On the one hand there is the cathedral, a very complex, cumbersome building that requires extensive teams of builders to finish the project over a long period of time. The cathedral then dominates the city, overshadowing other buildings. On the other hand there is the bazaar: a noisy, even chaotic place where relationships are temporary, quick, and somewhat chaotic in conducting business.

CATHEDRALS AND BAZAARS REPRESENT METHODS

While this is intriguing, Raymond, in our opinion, was not setting up a comparison of closed and open source. It is clear in his book that he was including early open source projects as cathedrals, "This model was and still is typical of both commercial software and the great freeware cathedrals built by the Free Software Foundation in the 1980s; also of the freeBSD/ netBSD/ OpenBSD projects that spun off from the Jolitzes' original 386BSD port." [8, p. 16].

Raymond, as it turns out, was limiting his discussion to open source projects alone. Both cathedrals and bazaars referred to open source projects. Some open source projects resembled the cathedral while others resembled the bazaar. Having cleared up this misconception, we now examine how open source software development has recently changed.

CHANGING OPEN SOURCE ATTITUDES AND STRUCTURES

Open source attitudes have changed as software professionals became aware that contributing to open source communities was beneficial to the corporation [1], [2], [3], [7]. Along with new attitudes, new practices have been created. One such example is the community formed by the Linux workgroup called SPDX, which stands for Software Package Data Exchange. SPDX has

fostered a community and set up governing rules for the purpose of producing quality software that adheres to the licensing requirements of open source [4].

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

We observed that neither the traditional tribes of open source developers nor the dominant for-profit corporations could, without the help of the other, produce the software they are now developing. This is a new order of business, one that encourages the sharing of knowledge, cooperation, and proactive contributions to open source software. These corporate-communal arrangements result in corporate gain while sharing software with the open source community.

It is time for a new metaphor [5], [6]. This paper examines a range of metaphors in search of one that better embodies the phenomena that we are observing here and now. The cathedral and bazaar have been replaced. In this paper we use discourse analysis to understand how we can best describe the opportunities that have recently been made possible through corporate-communal cooperation.

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