# Chapter 5.16
# Community Customers

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## ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the role of the project/product community in the open source product life cycle. It outlines how a community-driven approach affects not only the development process, but also (and more importantly) the marketing/sales process, the deployment, the operation, and in general the resulting software product. Participation in the community is essential for any organisation using the product, leading to the concept of a community customer. Specific community participation guidelines are given to organisations and individuals who deploy and use open source software, further develop it, or offer lifetime services on the product.

## INTRODUCTION

Open source is not only about cost, or freedom to choose, learn, and modify. A very important aspect of open source projects is their *organisational* freedom. This freedom leads to both challenges and opportunities for organisations which intend to merely deploy open source products in their routine operations, not planning any development. Open source product procurement, deployment, and operational maintenance are different from those of traditional products, largely because of the organisation of the processes which breed and raise open source software.

We start from Evers' definition of an open source project, which is: "Any group of people developing software and providing their results to the public under an open source license" (Evers, 2000). However, we immediately want to add that this definition, as many others, overemphasizes the importance of *development*. We would

like to extend the definition by including *users* of the software, as will be argued in the rest of this section.

Bonaccorsi and Rossi (2003) analyze open source as a *process innovation*. Various economic questions have been raised on why such a process can produce anything at all, mostly concentrating on the traditional economic question: "Why do programmers write open source codes if no one pays them to do it?" The body of literature about this economic aspect is huge, and this chapter will not elaborate on this issue. Instead, we focus on the observation made by Bonaccorsi and Rossi that "There is a large group of individuals who are not capable of developing programmes but only of using them" (2003, p. 1244). They put this group next to the hobby developers and the members of the hacker culture, traditionally assumed to be the majority of open source contributors. For this chapter, we would like to further divide the first group into *individuals* and *organisations*. It is especially the organisational user participation in the open source process that is of interest to us.

This chapter focuses on the role of the community of stakeholders, usually simply called "the community," which forms around an open source product. Observations from various angles and theoretical background lead to concrete recommendations for organisations and individuals who consider adding an open source product to their ICT portfolio. The chapter does not aim at open source development, but explicitly addresses "end-using organisations" and explains why and how they have to consciously play a particular role in the community. When using open source products, they become a customer of the community, not of a vendor—but a customer they are, with associated real costs to pay and real benefits to enjoy. The term *community customer* will be introduced to define the role(s) such an end user, which may be an organisation, must play.

We can now rephrase our definition of an open source project: "Any group of people developing or deploying software common to the group and providing their development results and usage experiences to the public under an open source license."

## BACKGROUND

Even after the formal founding of the Free Software Foundation (Stallman, 1985) and the subsequent translation of the principles of free software to business situations by the open source movement (Raymond, 1998a), it took a while before analysts worked out *why* the open source model works, and the issue still is not fully understood.

A popular insight, fielded by Raymond and many others, is that open source developers are mostly driven by "ego." They develop and show the world the results to boost their self-esteem. However, this analysis turns out to be over-simplified. A better analysis can be made by referring to existing (business) economic notions which got developed when studying non-profit economics, a relatively new field by itself (Hansmann, 1980). These insights also cover the non-developing community participants, often a much larger number than the actual developers (Craig & Beck, 1993). We will briefly summarize several known reasons why people may contribute to open source projects without being paid to do so, and place them in the context of their role in the community.

### Rent-Seeker and Donator Approach

Two main aspects of open source community participation can be distinguished: *rent-seeking* and *donation*.

In *rent-seeking*, "emphasis is put on the fact that although no wages are paid to contributors, other pay-offs may turn the investment of labour into an open source project into a profitable decision" (Franck & Jungwirth, 2003, p. 402). This aim to mostly establish individual reputation is not only driven by ego, as Raymond states, but also can be used to improve credibility on secondary