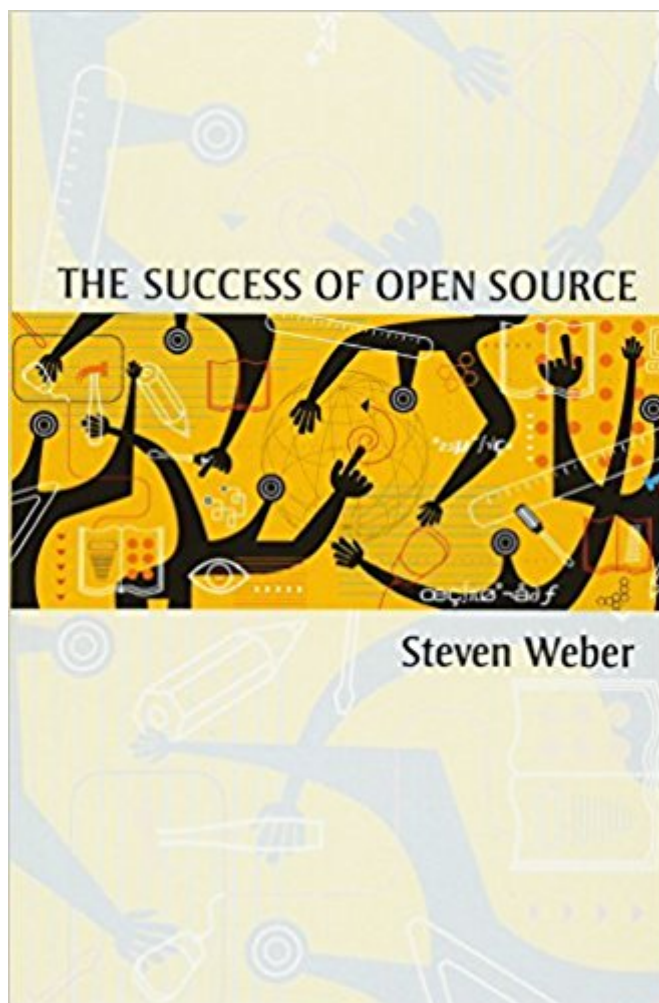


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The Success Of Open Source



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

We can blindly continue to develop, reward, protect, and organize around knowledge assets on the comfortable assumption that their traditional property rights remain inviolate. Or we can listen to Steven Weber and begin to make our peace with the uncomfortable fact that the very foundations of our familiar "knowledge as property" world have irrevocably shifted. (Alan Kantrow, Chief Knowledge Officer, Monitor Group) Ever since the invention of agriculture, human beings have had only three social-engineering tools for organizing any large-scale division of labor: markets (and the carrots of material benefits they offer), hierarchies (and the sticks of punishment they impose), and charisma (and the promises of rapture they offer). Now there is the possibility of a fourth mode of effective social organization--one that we perhaps see in embryo in the creation and maintenance of open-source software. My Berkeley colleague Steven Weber's book is a brilliant exploration of this fascinating topic. (J. Bradford DeLong, Department of Economics, University of California at Berkeley) Steven Weber has produced a significant, insightful book that is both smart and important. The most impressive achievement of this volume is that Weber has spent the time to learn and think about the technological, sociological, business, and legal perspectives related to open source. The Success of Open Source is timely and more thought provoking than almost anything I've come across in the past several years. It deserves careful reading by a wide audience. (Jonathan Aronson, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California) In the world of open-source software, true believers can be a fervent bunch. Linux, for example, may act as a credo as well as an operating system. But there is much substance beyond zealotry, says Steven Weber, the author of The Success of Open Source... An open-source operating system offers its source code up to be played with, extended, debugged, and otherwise tweaked in an orgy of user collaboration. The author traces the roots of that ethos and process in the early years of computers... He also analyzes the interface between open source and the worlds of business and law, as well as wider issues in the clash between hierarchical structures and networks, a subject with relevance beyond the software industry to the war on terrorism. (Nina C. Ayoub Chronicle of Higher Education 2004-04-16) A valuable new account of the [open-source software] movement. (Edward Rothstein New York Times 2004-05-08) Weber's ideas are timely and informative for anyone who wants to explain or advocate Open Source... The Success of Open Source... gives a readable, thought-provoking, and occasionally funny account of what Open Source is and means, making it an extremely valuable resource for those who want to engage and discuss these issues on an intellectual level. (Joshua Daniel Franklin Slashdot 2004-05-17) Weber sees the central issues raised by [open source software] as property, motivation, organisation and governance. He uses a

study of the open source movement to illuminate the motivation of programmers and the way [open source software] projects are co-ordinated and governed, and to ask if there are lessons in it for society...Weber's work brings to mind an earlier book, *The Machine that Changed the World*, a study of how Toyota's production system transformed the way cars are made everywhere. That book made two simple points: that the Toyota 'system' was a car, and that it was not uniquely Japanese. Steve Weber's book can be--and is--similarly summarised: 'Open source is not a piece of software, and it is not unique to a group of hackers.' And it has the potential to change the world. (John Naughton *The Observer* 2004-06-06) While much in Weber's account will be familiar to anyone concerned with this debate, his book should make this extraordinary phenomenon understandable to a much wider audience...[*The Success of Open Source*] deserve[s] the careful attention of a wide audience, including, especially, governments. (Lawrence Lessig *London Review of Books* 2005-08-18) Weber's book deserves the glowing response it has received within and outwith the computing community, and provides a careful, thought-provoking study of an important phenomenon of the twentieth century. For these reasons alone it is worth reading. And while it will of course appeal to those interested or participating in the Open Source movement, for the information professional, in particular, it offers helpful insight into the advantages and limits of sustainable models of cooperative effort that do not depend on remuneration or hierarchy. This is particularly pertinent as libraries increasingly make available metadata they have created about digital or physical assets, and as they are involved in the management of digital assets...[I]nformation professionals are increasingly called on to administer, arbitrate, and communicate about digital rights. Many of those they interact with in this capacity, especially in an academic setting, will have been influenced by the Open Source movement or have parallel attitudes to collaborative work -- this book may assist them to develop a more nuanced articulation of opinion and a greater understanding of the issues. (R. John Robertson *Library Review* 2006-01-01)

We can blindly continue to develop, reward, protect, and organize around knowledge assets on the comfortable assumption that their traditional property rights remain inviolate. Or we can listen to Steven Weber and begin to make our peace with the uncomfortable fact that the very foundations of our familiar "knowledge as property" world have irrevocably shifted. (Alan Kantrow, Chief Knowledge Officer, Monitor Group) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I am a commercial software developer/manager who has often wondered about the broader motivations and implications of the Open Source movement, which is permeating many large patches of my industry. I found this book incredibly helpful in giving me the background I needed to understand the various Open Source products and articles I encounter day to day. Although my background is technical, this book generally is not. Although some technical information is unavoidable, Weber does a great job of maintaining his position as a professional political scientist and an informed layman on software technology. It may seem strange for a political scientist to approach this subject, but it turns out to be very beneficial because of the skill he has in analyzing organizations, their cultural, governmental, economic and societal impact. This isn't really a political science book; it is deeply about Open Source. But, Weber did manage to get me a little more interested in political science too. Weber is a terrific writer. This is one of the best-organized, concisely written and cleanly reasoned books I have ever read. That said, this is not light reading; you will need to put your thinking cap on and think big thoughts with the author pretty frequently. This is exactly what I was looking for. There's plenty of shallow analysis out there concerning Open Source. What Weber provides is the cross-discipline perspective of a professional scholar who has studied Open Source carefully. I believe this book will prove useful to future historians when they want to understand the roots of Open Source, which, as Weber presents, could be very profound to our global economy and culture over decades to come. The first chapter cleanly outlines the goals and big questions of the book. It also provides a primer on some of the main themes and terms such as the nature of property, what "free" means, current progress/status of Open Source etc. This brief chapter helps those who are very new to Open Source and sketches the trajectory of the rest of the book; just what you expect from a professional scholar. Chapters Two through Four are about 30% of the book and chronicle the historic roots of Open Source (primarily the Unix community) through the past few decades of computing. The history comes right up to the present to show how what started as fits and spurts for decades, has now become the wildly successful realization of an unlikely vision; a phenomena in modern technological accomplishments. These chapters help the reader grasp the true vision of Open Source. Chapter Five gathers hard data from surveys and empirical data from the online transcripts of Open Source projects to dissect the individual motivations of Open Source developers. There is very little guesswork here. Some of the myths about why the developers do what they do are dismantled and replaced with more intelligent information about their intricate motivations. Although I am not an Open Source developer, I have been a software professional for twenty years and worked with hundreds of other developers. Weber's sketch of the Open Source developer is very believable and resonates with many individual

developers I have known. Chapter Six studies the way the Open Source community, especially developers, organize themselves in various communities such as Linux, Apache and others. There are some good insights here for commercial teams to learn from. Chapter Seven unfolds many legal implications around property rights, business models and specific case studies such as Red Hat, Debian and many others. This is great information and a unique contribution that is hard to find summarized as it is here. Chapter Eight explores the long term potential for profound impact Open Source may have globally, politically and economically. There is also interesting analysis concerning how hierarchical organizations interface with networked (web) organizations. Finally, some suggestions for other fields of study that may copy the Open Source model are explored. I do not think you will find a more helpful analysis for the non-technical aspects of Open Source. If I could give this book seven stars, I would.

I sat down intending to write Steven Weber a fan letter. (I decided to say it to you all instead.) I loved this book. I have 11 other books on open source, I wanted to learn everything I could because it's such a fascinating phenomenon. I thought I might even write about it. Never mind. Nothing I could write could touch this brilliant work. I had to work to read it. His range of subject matter was incredible. He talked computers like a hacker. He talked licenses like a lawyer. He talked economics like a business man. He talked business models like an entrepreneur or Venture capital investor. He told the history of open source like he was one of the voices of the movement. This book tells the whole story. In fields or industries I didn't know well, I had to google some stuff to grasp the entire meaning. He doesn't baby you. But, I loved that. I learned so much, I'm still bubbling with excitement. The book took two or three times longer to read than normal. But, I didn't want it to end. I've read over a hundred books this year. I've written some myself. Until today, I've never written a review. This book showed me how a book should be written. If you are seriously interested in the extraordinary story of open source, buy this book.

This is the first book that I have read about open source. In my opinion, it provides an easy to read synopsis of how open source collaboration in IT has greatly impacted the knowledge economy.

I love this book. It is the book I wish I had written. You can sometimes tell it's written by someone who is not really a software development "native", but the economics and the Big Picture collaboration/cooperation stuff is spot on (and that's the whole point of this book, so...). I put little sticky notes on some of the pages because they were so pleasant to re-read. I had the sense that I

was experiencing little epiphanies - perhaps these were just as the author intended. Get this book if you want a high-level, Big Picture coverage of the impact of open source and an overview of the relevant historical developments. -megan

The Success of Open Source is not a just wistful paean to Linux as the title would suggest. Rather, it is two books in one. The first book is one of the very best recapitulations of the open source movement and all of its predecessors. The second book is about how something that just seemingly shouldn't work, works so well, and how those principles behind its working extend to more than just the open source movement. The author, a university professor, draws liberally from the traditions of historians, economists, sociologists, and psychologists to paint a compelling picture of why the forces behind open source are not going to go away any time soon. Read in best companion with *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*, which IS a bit of a wistful paean to Linux, it illuminates its subject wonderfully.

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