

The Rise and Fall of Open Source

Or: forkbombing an OSS community

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1 A brief History of Open Source

- Originally, only de facto open source software existed
- Collaboration of companies and universities
- During the 80s, commercial software distribution models started to come up
- Since then, Open Source became a paradigm and a lot of literature was published
- In the Post-Dotcom era, projects started to lose corporate support and some resources
- Lots of forks were made during the last few years
- Few people working on lamy projects = few people per project
- Only maintenance can be covered, no evolution → closed source projects with paid developers gain market share

2 Strengths

- Open Source can be maintained by anyone
- Forks are easy if they ever become necessary (Anyone can take the code and do whatever he likes with it)
- Everyone can contribute - combined knowledge of a huge community can concentrate on the project
- Dynamic - no market constraints or shipping regulations for certain versions (i.e. «The version must be out on November 1st - with or without bugs!)

3 Exploiting the paradigm

- Forks are a serious thing to do
- Developers tend to disagree on specific matters
- Open Source makes forking easy
- Constant maintenance cost per project - if a project forks, the cost is doubled
- Maintenance (security patches etc.) hog up the developers
- Project can get to a state where no innovation takes place because the given resources can only cover maintenance
- Worst case: project cannot even cover their maintenance cost - product becomes gradually unuseable

4 Vulnerabilities

- Developers disagree over certain technologies and some decide to fork off a new project incorporating the new technology
- Developers get mad at each other for personal reasons and a fork is created for each competitor
- Developers disagree over the source control system in use and fork off a new project with a new SCMS

5 Threat mitigation

- Diversification inside the project tree - branch off, experiment, don't simply fork
- Keep your mouth shut - there's no reason to mix personal disagreement with technical reasoning
- Model: Managed diversity (BSD style)