

OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE

How should public administration view and what position should it take regarding this type of software? Some ideas and opinions.

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Open Source / Proprietary Software

Traditionally software's code is kept secret ... dependency on product leading to monopoly.

Open source: code available to anyone to tailor to their specific needs ... no dependency on one supplier ... freedom of choice.

Users of OSS have right to use, copy, distribute, examine, change software ... NO license fees.

Positive Effects of OSS

(from “The Swedish Agency for Public Management”
Report on OSS)

Simpler license management.

Reduced dependency on a product, less risk for “locking in” effects.

Lower costs overall.

Increased competition.

Increased quality and stability.

Increased activity on part of local/domestic businesses.

Increased security.

Open formats simplify communication with general public.

Negative Effects of OSS

(from “The Swedish Agency for Public Management”
Report on OSS)

- Possible need for extensive migration.
- Could lead to higher demands for in-house competence and maintenance within the agency or authority itself.
- Could be difficult to find the right product.
- Possible interoperability problems with proprietary software.
- Fewer available consultant and support services on the market at present.
- Psychological resistance among decision makers.

Competition

It is dangerous to become overly dependent on monopolies, especially foreign monopolies which siphon off currency out of the country without creating any significant amount of jobs or economic growth.

Increased use of OSS can increase opportunities in local IT sector stimulating the creation of companies which would be able to offer their services in maintaining computer systems, modifying software to match local requirements.

Some final remarks

All software whether OSS or proprietary has a price tag involved ... a “mix” of the two kinds of software is possible, one does NOT exclude the other.

There are various examples of the use of OSS in public administration of other countries (Sweden, Germany, China, Spain) ... can Malta benefit too?

Many large suppliers (IBM, HP, Sun etc.) use free and OSS in their own products and solution.

... finally!

Free and open source software is not a makeshift phenomenon but a fully adequate and dependable competitor to existing proprietary products and solutions ... if competition is good in other sectors of the economy it is certainly also good in the IT sector.