The Enterprise Future is Open Source

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When modernizing their IT infrastructure and business processes, many companies around the world already rely on open-source technologies. One of the main reasons for this choice is the sheer speed at which innovative solutions can be developed and implemented through the use of open source in their businesses.

When decision-makers are deciding between the closed or open-source path for their company, they have to think pragmatically. Digitalization technologies are developing rapidly, and what might be the height of innovation one day can quickly fall out of practice soon after. Therefore, one important, and often decisive, aspect for businesses to consider is the speed with which innovation can occur with the technologies in use. For an increasing number of companies, this is essential if they are to keep pace with the accelerating digitization of business processes—or even entire business models. In this respect, the support provided by the software landscape is of the utmost importance.

Worldwide development power

A quick look at the global open-source community is enough to see the development power that lies within the community's pool of knowledge. While proprietary closed-source providers are bound by their own interests, the open-source community can react quickly and efficiently to emerging developments, potential threats, and market changes. Not only this, but open-source developers are also able to serve as readily available modernization partners and can offer constructive assistance in the development of innovative software solutions.

In addition, an existing pool of developers means that there is already a wealth of open-source solutions and platforms for companies to pick and choose from, allowing them to select exactly which solutions best meet their needs. While closed-source options may offer top-to-bottom development of brand-new software, this may turn out to be more of a curse than a blessing. Instead of spending time developing an innovative software stack from scratch, companies can instead build upon proven, widely used and constantly optimized basis solutions.

At least an estimated 80 percent of a software stack is not considered mission-critical, so it makes little sense for companies to reinvent the wheel in order to develop their own exclusive solutions. For this part of software stack modernization, they can use proven open-source solutions, platforms, interfaces and tools. This allows companies to focus largely and more efficiently on the 20 percent or so of the software stack that is essential for digitizing and differentiating their business models. And for this, too, open source provides the massive development power of the global expert community and a broad range of proven solutions.

Rigid structures hinder real development

The IT world has long since said goodbye to the once-common fixed schedule of software updates and has instead opted for a principle of continuous improvement for software, which has always been a staple in the open-source community. While this is certainly an improvement, this methodical approach can be driven and optimized far better with a worldwide, almost infinitely scalable developer community than with the inevitably limited resources of closed-source providers. With open source, software codes are shared publicly around the world and jointly developed. All changes are immediately visible and available to all participants, whether for their own use or for optimizing their own solutions. This has unbeatable advantages in terms of agility, flexibility and speed.

For example, the open-source community can provide responses to unpredictable events, developments or requirements with far faster reaction time than the limited manpower of the manufacturers of hermetic software. Ultimately, this also has an impact on quality and security, because the constant work of the worldwide developer community means that applications experience an ongoing increase in both areas, which benefits all users. For example, the interoperability of open-source software is usually much higher than that between different closed-source programs. This is because open-source developers often use as a basis a software stack that was developed jointly in the community and is regarded as a benchmark for certain functional scopes. Communication and service disruptions can thus be avoided far more easily because the individual components are compatible with each other and can all be controlled and operated under a common interface.

Promoting transparent collaboration

When the world turned to working from home in the last year, many companies had to jump into digital transformation headfirst—and without much warning. In a short time, the use of collaboration and workflow tools for digitalized processes became indispensable in everyday business life, and it is not difficult to imagine that such tools will not only maintain their relevance in the aftermath of the crisis, but also that they will continue to play a significant role in the way we work.

However, even after a few months, the downsides of the platforms that were hastily chosen by companies have now become obvious to many users. Connectivity problems, administrative hurdles, vendor dependency, and reliability weaknesses as well as data protection and security risks are the most common causes of dissatisfaction with the decisions that businesses had to make under pressure. And when users are busy struggling to work with the tools in front of them, they certainly are not driving innovation forward.

The more critical these applications become for workflows, teamwork and remote capability in companies, the more important it is to select the right collaboration tools. The well-known software giants have recognized how explosive the situation has become and are trying to secure the future market with their proprietary systems. However, they also have to face the criticism regarding closed source in the new work scenarios, which they were already confronted with in the days of conventional office workplaces. These include weakness in innovation, lack of interoperability, non-transparent licensing complexity, non-transparent pricing and the various efforts to force customers into a vendor lock-in through proprietary restrictions.

Business-critical applications should be open and controllable. The transparency of open source is diametrically opposed to the sealed approach of closed source, where codes are kept in a black box and sealed off from view. Open-source solutions, on the other hand, benefit in terms of security and product quality from the worldwide developer community, which ensures constant further development. This means that the entire open-source community can react far more quickly to critical situations or new challenges than with the inevitably limited developer resources of closed source.

The not-so-small matter of budgets

By opting for the open-source path, companies are also able to not only reduce costs quite dramatically, but also to relieve budgets of expensive, unnecessary parallel and exclusive solutions. As a result, innovations can be accelerated more cost-effectively, leading to an increased scope of innovation.

Perhaps more importantly, however, the sheer flexibility enabled through open source also promotes innovation. In an age where the digitalization of business processes is evolving rapidly, companies must be able to adapt and react faster than ever before but also remain unbound to the limitations set by proprietary closed-source options.

Open source, by its very nature, facilitates experimentation on a global scale, offers transparency and flexibility, and simplifies the search for precisely the right solution that will put the digitization of the company on the most successful, future-proof path.