Competing on a Common Platform: A Research Project

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Why This Project? Why Now?

- Many individually founded open source projects fail (Healy and Schussman, 2003)

- Most projects that succeed in producing commercial grade software do so with intense commercial support

- Many firms have experimented with some elements of community managed open source projects

- Producing a range of hybrid models that vary in their plurality and governance

- But, there has been no research on hybrid models, how they are created, managed and sustained

Research Questions

- How do sponsors of a common platform decide what to contribute to the platform?

- How do sponsors value the costs and benefits of working with a shared platform?

- What institutional structures support competition? Cooperation?

- How do projects manage the multilateral contributions of competitors to create vendor neutral innovation?

- How do committers manage their dual allegiance to project and firm?

Approach

- **Phase I: (February – March, 2005)** - Interview EMO, strategic members, and select sample of add-in providers

- **Phase II: (June – August, 2005)** – Study selected subprojects with committer interviews, observation/site visits to committer development teams, and study online interactions

- **Phase III: (September – November, 2005)** – Analyze contribution pattern data within top level projects and across the projects hosted by the foundation, conduct follow-up interviews

Preliminary Discoveries

- Not all sponsors compete directly- are there interesting differences between different types of sponsor activities?

- Sponsors use the platform for different purposes – and thus may be competing **with** the platform, as opposed to '**on**' the platform - thus timing of contributions is critical

- Each sponsor has had a different concern with respect to 'coopetition' which has affected the design of the foundation and management structure - the design of the mgmt infrastructure may be more robust as a result

Relevant Prior Work

- **"Managing the Boundary of an Open Project"** (with Fabrizio Ferraro), in *Market Emergence and Transformation*, forthcoming.

- **"Hacking Alone? The Effects of Online and Offline Participation on Open Source Community Leadership"** (with Fabrizio Ferraro), *under review*.

- **"What Makes a Project Open Source? Migrating from Organic to Synthetic Communities"** (with Joel West)

- **"Nonprofit Foundations and Their Role in Community-Firm Software Collaboration"** in *Perspectives on Free and Open Source Software*, MIT Press, 2005.

How You Can Get Involved

- Conduct an interview with me!
- Send me an email - **somahony@hbs.edu**
- Potential future committer survey
- Check website for research updates in 6-9 months