Open Source Software in Irish Government Bodies: A Total Cost of Ownership and Procurement Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the use of open source software within Government Bodies in Ireland. The primary areas of investigation include the advantages and challenges brought about by open source software, the reason for its use, as well as any hidden costs brought about by its use by Government Bodies. A secondary focus of this study is an analysis of the total cost of ownership and public procurement elements of open source software. An interpretive research approach was used throughout this study to explore the factors which affected the success of open source software within Government Bodies in Ireland. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with nine participants from the ICT functions of Government Bodies. The participants were all at managerial level, with the majority holding overall responsibility for the ICT function within their respective organisation. The findings indicated strong use of open source software among the organisations interviewed with a robust ICT governance framework around the total cost of ownership of software projects, and the expected project benefits. The main advantages of open source software were found to be in the areas of cost and the quality of the software. In contrast, the main challenge was found to be in the area of skills availability and ICT procurement. The findings from this study conclude that while open source software is seen in a positive light by the majority of the organisations interviewed, the choice of software is ultimately driven by business requirements. A number of recommendations are also made.