

## Book Review

Schweik, Charles M. and Robert C. English. 2012. *Internet Success: A Study of Open-Source Software Commons*. Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press.

Reviewed by: Arul George Scaria, Centre for Philosophy of Law, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium.

**Internet Success:** *A Study of Open-Source Software Commons* is a treasure trove for researchers from different disciplines who are attempting to understand the constantly evolving open-source software (OSS) commons. The core research question addressed by this book is “[w]hat factors lead some OSS commons to success and others to abandonment”. The authors answer this important question using the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework and extensive empirical data.

The book has four different parts that flows smoothly from one to the next. Part 1 provides an excellent introduction to the context of the work, particularly the importance of studying the OSS commons. The reasons cited by the authors, including the fascinating way the OSS has inserted itself into our technical infrastructure, warrants special attention. As the authors rightly point out, the study of the OSS is also important in view of the fact that it can foster socially relevant collaborations in many other areas. The rich historical background of the OSS and the resulting availability of data are certainly factors contributing in this direction. Part 2 of the book provides a comprehensive overview of the OSS ecosystem and the OSS developers, based on extensive literature review. The detailed analysis of the key incentives and motivations for the four general organisational types (firms, governments, non-profits, academic and research organisations) deserve special mention in this regard.

Moving from theoretical discussions to empirical observations, Part 3 provides an overview of the different empirical studies conducted by the authors. This part begins with an interesting case study on the Open-Source Geospatial Foundation. The next chapter in this part describes in detail how the authors have defined “success” and “abandonment” of the OSS projects. It also explains how

they classified the projects hosted in SourceForge into those two categories. The methodology and the statistical tools used for conducting a survey among the developers are also explained in a manner comprehensible even for those with very limited exposure to empirical methods. Based on extensive empirical data, Chapter 10 provides answers to most of the testable hypotheses and Chapter 11 provides a multivariate model of OSS success and abandonment. Part 4 of the book provides an overview of the overall conclusions from the study and illustrates that factors like leadership by doing (working more hours), clear vision, and well-articulated goals play a pivotal role in the success of projects at both the initiation stage (before the first release) as well as the growth stage (after the first release). Moving away from the traditional academic discussion approaches, the authors have also included in the final chapter a very detailed discussion on the practical implications of their findings, apart from detailed explanations on the theoretical implications of the study.

Maintaining readability, while ensuring scientific rigour is one of the most difficult challenges for any academic work and the authors have achieved this in a highly impressive manner in this book. The writing style adopted in the work would ensure that readers from different disciplines will be able to navigate easily through enormous data and intricate findings. The authors have adopted detailed illustration of their research methodologies in all parts of the work (see for example, Chapter 9, which discusses the empirical survey) and have also given detailed explanations for even common statistical tools (see for example, explanation of dependent variable at p. 128 and explanation of statistical significance at p. 202), wherever they are used. The authors also explain in detail why each of the tested hypotheses were supported or rejected. While some may not like this style of very detailed writing, it is important to note that only detailed illustrations can enable proper replications of a study like this. It is also important to note in this context that the authors have made available supplementary materials, including the data used in the study, through a website (<http://www.umass.edu/opensource/schweik/supplementary.html>) for enabling replications of the study. Such replications may enable future research works to overcome some of the explicitly mentioned limitations of this study, including the question of representativeness of SourceForge for all open source projects and the survey sample for all developers working in this area. To summarise, this book makes a very significant contribution to the fascinating, yet under-explored, area of OSS commons and it is a must read for all researchers interested in the area of collective action.