Understanding Open Source Software Development
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This is a useful little book on Open Source Software (OSS) Development. Eleven relatively well-balanced chapters with well-structured sections and frequent quotations from original research literature make it an interesting and a reliable read. Occasional anecdotal side-bars provide welcome diversions. Short chapter conclusions contain helpful summaries. Over 200 up-to-date references on OSS literature, and the online support point to further studies and research in OSS Development.

The introductory chapter explains the purpose of the book, its intended readers, its organisation, and the online support available for it. Chapter 1 is an overview of OSS dealing with Open Source Initiative (OSI) criteria, OSS Development licenses, OSS products, and the OSS development process. Chapter 2 gives a history of OSS including Berkeley Software Distribution (BSD), TeX, Free Software Foundation (FSF), Linux, Apache, Mozilla and the formation of OSI. Chapter 3 sets out the landscape of OSS by considering the relationship between FSF and OSI, OSS project coordinators and hosts, OSS Companies and related organisations. Chapter 4 is concerned with arriving at a framework for analysing OSS. The analytical framework relates to questions on qualification (what?), transformation (how?), stake-holder (who?), environment (where & when?) and world-view (why?). Each of these framework issues are discussed in chapters 5 - 9. The final chapter is a critique on OSS and its future.

One blemish is the absence of the “Conclusion” section in chapter 9. Another is the omission of the “Modularity” subsection heading in chapter 5. Also, while reading the book, one quite often gets the feeling of having come across the same passages before. On closer examination the same material is indeed found to have been reused albeit in a slightly reworded form. While redundancy can improve understanding, often the pieces of text “reused” have added little value to the book. To give just one example, Eric Allman as the author of Sendmail appears in at least three places (pages 29, 139, 171).

To summarize, the book should form a good start for novices and experts alike, and form the basis for further investigation into OSS Development literature. The price tag of £22.99 is quite reasonable.

Star Rating: 3.5