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)

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