

Challenges & factors influencing the OSS adoption rate in the SA government

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Abstract

South Africa is seen as one of the most progressive countries when it comes to advocating the use of Open Source Software (OSS). The South African government acknowledges that OSS is a viable choice when it comes to software adoption and implementation in the public sector (SA, 2006b). OSS policies are also in place indicating that the South African government is on the positive route towards full OSS implementation.

According to SITA (SA, 2002) and Vital Wave Consulting (2006:2), the South African government is one of the largest procurers of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Africa. The expenditure for proprietary software licences amounts to R3.7 billion annually and most of this expenditure is channelled to foreign companies (Gopalakrishnan, 2006) such as Microsoft and SAP.

In 2004, it was predicted that a mass adoption of OSS in South Africa will occur sooner than later (Clarkson, 2004). Although the discussions regarding the implementation of OSS in the public sector began in 2000, it still does not appear that OSS is widely used in South Africa (Johnston & Seymour, 2005:438) especially in the public sector. Proprietary software such as Microsoft Office, Windows XP and now Windows Vista still dominates the market (Johnston & Seymour, 2005:439) especially on the desktop-end of many departments in the public sector.

SITA (2007) has also acknowledged that the rate of OSS adoption within the South African government is slow and this is due to a number of challenges and implementation factors. In 2006, the OSS working group (GITOC) proposed concrete targets for OSS implementation within the South African government (Vital Wave Consulting, 2006:4). These targets were stated in terms of state budget (10% of ICT expenditure in government for 2006); installations (60% of web servers running on OSS and 30% of desktop applications; skills level of key personnel

So far, government departments and agencies that are in the process of migrating fully to OSS include SITA, CSIR, SARS (South Africa Receiver of Revenue), Department of Science and Technology and Department of Home Affairs (SITA,

2007; Archibald, 2007; Vital Wave Consulting, 2007). There are no reports that seem to suggest that any of the South African government departments or agencies have fully implemented OSS.

Although it is a challenge to acquire reports that discuss the status of OSS adoption and implementation within the South African government, it is evident within the open source community that not much had actually been achieved (Archibald, 2007). The key objective of this paper is to provide some insight into the challenges and issues facing the adoption of OSS within the SA government. This is achieved through analysis of an extensive survey held amongs all governmental departments. This survey was completed in March 2008 and provide some valuable insight into the adoption challenge of OSS.