1 Article

Tony O'Driscoll wrote the following article at 26th May 2010 making it a very recent and actual opinion piece about the subject.

"CALL TO ACTION: Let's stop the spill the open source way"

http://opensource.com/business/10/5/call-action-let%E2%80%99s-stop-spill-open-source-way

Basically it tries to wonder why we cannot gather efforts together like an open source community to stop the oil spill that currently and apparently cannot be stopped. At first glance it might not have the computing part that we were searching in an issue but if you read further it is just this computing world that according to the author has to step up and learn the rest of us how to use the open source mechanisms to solve real life problems like this oil leak.

2 The Author

Tony O'Driscoll Ed.D. is a Professor of the Practice at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. The place of publication is Durham NC, USA. This tells us that the author stands closer to the subject then myself and probably has a stronger emotion about the subject. Also the author is a blog-writer on the opensource.com website so this makes clear that the author is defending and pleating in favor of the open source debate.

3 Opinions, Facts, Arguments

When looking at the article we see that the author starts off with spitting some clear facts that make us feel uncomfortable. A summary :

- "amount of oil gushing from the Gulf of Mexico is, conservatively, at least 10 times the official amount of 5,000 barrels per day."
Source : http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126809525

- "leak in the Gulf is totaling 350,000 barrels per week"
Source: Calculation of the author.

- Ushahidi is being leveraged to create an oil spill crisis map
Source: http://blog.ushahidi.com/index.php/2010/05/08/labb/

- BP has pledged to be transparent in "providing the American people with the information they need to understand the environmental impact from the spill and the response steps that have been taken."
Source : http://www.bp.com/bodycopyarticle.do?categoryId=1&contentId=7052055

The facts in this article speak for them but some of them (like the leakage numbers) are not exactly facts that don't have a discussion about whether or not they are true. So in a way these facts are disputable.

The author has strong believes in the open source way of working which comes back in various segments of the article. Quoting a part of the article which clearly tells you the mission of the author and also the organization for which he writes : "The mission of opensource.com is to bring the open source way to new areas of endeavor. There have been lots of useful discussions and debates as to

whether or not the application of open source principles such as community, transparency, contribution, collaboration, authenticity, participation, meritocracy, respect, responsibility, and accountability are feasible and practical outside the realm of software development and distribution."

A real life example of open source and physical problems is not provided. The author assumes that it is not a question of whether or not open source methodology would work but just a matter of when the action would be started. He is convinced that it would work once petrol engineers and other people in related areas start contributing in brainstorming this challenge can be fulfilled. Also he assumes that a company like BP is not "Too big to fail" but too small to succeed. Together, as a whole, we could do more.

Personally I would like to know more about the company BP and their reputation in these kind of nature dramas and also if there are examples of open source methodologies applied to physical problems like these but then in a smaller scale.

The author asks the audience in person to stand up and help and gives some examples to prove his point. With this language he tries to motivate the reader to help in one of his "One Week Challenge" points.

However, there are points that don't really speak in favor of the proposed solution.

- No successful example yet in a smaller scale

- No leadership. There is no way to know when or even if the community will come up with an answer .Transparency and meritocracy get in the way of efficient decision making and prevent issues from dragging on too long.

- Innovation by committee is beyond the reach of the open source way.

This ethical issue here is whether or not outsiders are allowed to stand up and fix a problem that a private company created. After all, this is not just BP's problem but also the world's problem.

"Is it morally justifiable to ask (use?) 'everyone' to solve BP's (or the world's) problem." Can BP be arrogant enough and play the blame card and be to closed trying to solve the problem on it's own?

When analyzed with our argument framework we come up with the following results.

Kantianism

Literally everybody that is joining the effort to solve the product that initially were not even involved is being used as a means to an end. If the case was that BP is asking/demanding open source initiatives to stand up and help them it would be morally incorrect according the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative. However, we do treat ourselves and others as ends because it is voluntarily in the end the result would be good for mankind making this morally correct. If we say the universal rule is that any open source result should benefit everyone then this can be claimed correct and morally justifiable.

Act Utilitarianism

In terms of happiness and unhappiness we are going to calculate what it would cost, who is affected and the effects of the proposed solution. If BP would solve the problem on it's own it has to use their own resources which can possibly be not proficient enough. So simply said : the longer it takes for the

problem to be resolved, more unhappiness is gathered. Happiness is only achieved when the problem is resolved. We could also state that if people were allowed to help solving this problem together more happiness was achieved then when we blame BP and wait for them to resolve the problem. The certainty that BP solves the problem by using leadership and effective decision taking does make a better case (thus happiness) in favor of BP.

Because we don't have enough facts about the situation we say that the weighing scale is equal so no action would be morally better or worse.

Rule Utilitarianism

If a oil leakage has been discovered and I as a person think I can help doing so I should be able to help

The benefits of this is that people that are not directly related or not directly the ones to blame for the problem can offer their help for free for the sake of our planet. A negative consequence would be that the people who were to blame for the problem could easily get away with it and also there is no control or and if the proposed solutions by the community are valid. If they fail they could not be held responsible making the possibility of creating a bigger problem existent.

The expected harms caused by letting people help solving nature problems outweigh the expected benefits therefore this action is the wrong thing to do.

Social Contract

Thinking about the rights in this example is problematic so we will talk about the duties that BP should perform. Again, if BP would call for open source action to solve the problem that they created it is morally wrong from them. On the other hand, it is a right of people to have freedom of speech and propose solutions even if they are not asked for it making it morally a good thing to do. Accepting this open source help is another question which, depending on the outcome of the proposed solutions, will have a different public opinion.