

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-benefits-of-open-source>

All of the smart people don't work for you. So how can an organization harness a broader intellect and get them to work on their projects? Keep your ideas free and accessible, and share them with anyone willing to participate. This kind of product innovation and reinvention creates community beyond the company walls, says Greg Papadopoulos, CTO of Sun Microsystems, whether it's a devoted team of engineers or users. In the end, if a business is willing to allow others to have a hand in its technology and development, they will benefit from a finer finished product overall.



Transcript

What is that innovation happens elsewhere, which is a Bill Joy quote.. What does that mean? Innovation happens everywhere, is maybe the other way to think about it.. If you're at a company, the smart people don't work only for you.. There are more smart people elsewhere.. You have to recognize that.. This is the sort of Tom Sawyer thing.. How do you get them to work on your stuff? You want to be a catalyst.. How do you act in that catalytic way? You get them to work on it because it's cool, because it's free.. That's key because your stuff lets them do even cooler things.. So how do you get that to happen, how do you get other people to work off of your ideas and build network effects around what you do? How do you do that? There's one simple idea..

You make it free.. In the Richard Stallman sense, this is free as in freedom, not free as in beer, not just that might be useful as well.. And the free as in freedom is taking the ideas that you're working on and the artifacts and finding ways of sharing those and sharing those in a way that invites other people to both participate and to riff their own.. This is certainly the basis of thinking in open source software.. I'll talk a little bit more about that.. But there's a business thesis here which is that this kind of sharing creates communities and those communities extend beyond the walls of your company.. That's really key.. The communities can be of developers.. They can be of users in the case of software.. And those communities, their growth creates markets..

So once you have people adopting your technology or using it, or your service, something like YouTube is a great example of shared user communities and there's a market there somewhere.. You figure it out...