Digitalisation

There is an entire kitchen operation behind software, ***open source is just a recipe***

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At a glance

In the discussion about open source software (OSS) and proprietary solutions, it is often forgotten that software is not a simple product that you select once and then it's done. Software is a highly complex operational task that requires ongoing maintenance, coordination and responsibility.

For laypeople, the development of software can be compared to the team effort in a well-rehearsed kitchen. The same quality is expected every day. If one cook is absent, another has to step in. If an ingredient is spoiled, it has to be replaced. None of this happens by itself. Someone is needed to coordinate operations, enforce standards and keep track of countless ingredients, processes and contingencies. If this role is missing, quality suffers first, then trust, and in the end spoiled ingredients creep into the dish. In the worst-case scenario, the guest catches food poisoning.

This is exactly what happens with modern software. A large proportion of the building blocks used today come from open source projects. The recipes are openly accessible and can be tested, improved and further developed. This openness is a great strength and drives innovation. However, it says nothing about how reliable, secure, stable or independent the finished system is in operation.

Even a software kitchen is not just made up of recipes and ingredients. It thrives on people, clear processes and responsibility. The decisive factor is who puts together a menu from open recipes and who runs the kitchen. Established international software companies take on precisely this role as professional, coordinating chefs. The fact that this role often receives little attention in public discourse is problematic. Without it, open source would suffer a massive loss of security and reliability.

Two examples clearly demonstrate this. The backdoor in the Linux software module xz-utils was not discovered by chance, but by a Microsoft employee in the course of his daily work on productive systems. At the same time, companies such as Google operate continuous, industrial quality assurance for thousands of open source projects with programs such as OSS-Fuzz. This monitoring, integration and assumption of responsibility is not a matter of course, but part of professionally organized operating models.

Because these companies use OSS on a large scale themselves, they do not cook indiscriminately with everything that is available. Ingredients are specifically selected, checked and sorted out if necessary. Recipes are tested, adapted and integrated into their own tried and tested cookbooks. This creates clear processes, quality controls and responsibilities.

Open Source is therefore comparable to high-quality ingredients and freely accessible cooking instructions. They can be the basis for excellent cuisine. However, whether this results in a simple snack or a Michelin-level restaurant is only decided in the day-to-day operation of the kitchen. And that's where the professionals come in. Quality, safety and reliability are the result of organization, discipline and continuous care. Openness alone does not make a good dish, it is merely the beginning of good software.

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