




Open Source Means More Than Marketing

Open source stands for innovation. It is also an integral part of the SAP world. Almost every player in the SAP ecosystem – be it a partner, an independent software vendor or an add-on manufacturer – is therefore embracing open source.

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Marketing on its own is not enough. IT thrives on trends and hypes, and SAP users must also embrace these developments: DevSecOps, AIOps, GreenOps, or containerization are just a few examples. In the context of mission-critical SAP applications, it is important to proceed in a mindful and informed manner. Most innovations such as AI/ML, IoT, Industry 4.0, or big data will have a lasting impact on the future, also in the SAP world. And these innovations have one thing in common: the open-source foundation.

Labeling is not enough

Almost all software vendors and stakeholders in the SAP ecosystem therefore invest into open source. However, innovations and open source can no longer be installed like an update or a new component. Companies must choose their solutions and partners carefully; after all, not everything that labels itself “open source” is actually open source. Even an open source promise is not enough. It is much more important that all the basic principles of open source are upheld and practiced.

In many areas, there is still a need for action. Many add-on products and industry solutions related to SAP – for example, in areas such as enterprise information management, HCM, document processes, archiving solutions, or more specialized integration platforms - have been established and in use for years, but in many cases without an open source basis. Traditional software architectures and development methods that are no longer up to date and, above all, not cloud-enabled, are unfortunately the rule, not the exception. Modernization will be necessary and is promised to customers.

But what are the principles of open source software? For a software to be open source, it needs to be developed in a decentralized and collaborative manner and is based on the commitment of a community. The software is often more flexible, secure, and durable than proprietary products, because it is

not designed by a single developer or company, but by communities. All contributors in the open source ecosystem also actively participate in projects and communities.

Even though open source stands for high flexibility and interoperability in principle, its use is not always a trivial matter. Especially for productive use in development and operation, companies need more than just a download from a repository. Proven policies for the secure and sensible use of open source need to be in place. Of course, there are also countless so-called frameworks that simplify the modernization of the application landscape. But here, too, caution is advisable. There are many frameworks that are backed by only very small communities and for which continuous further development is therefore not guaranteed. This is not always a disadvantage and is also a typical feature of the open source culture. For mission-critical applications, however, such frameworks are problematic, and experience and routine are required for evaluation. On the other hand, carefully curated „enterprise-ready“ solutions based on open source are also available – especially regarding the infrastructure and technology foundation – which have been supplemented with support services, certifications, and SLAs. In terms of SAP, this concerns, for example, the Linux operating system, Ansible automation, API management, or the layers of a hybrid multi-cloud architecture.

It is clear that the modernization of the SAP world is progressing relentlessly. Open source solutions, platforms, and technologies are playing a crucial role in this process. However, just because a software says open source doesn't always mean it actually is open source. Consequently, when selecting a partner, companies should always pay attention to their open source competencies, experience values, project successes, and roadmaps – question the CTO! After all, a resilient and stable IT landscape is essential, especially for business-critical SAP systems. The motto should be: Be careful when choosing software and partners. “Open-source washing” alone is not enough.

Linux ist eine Plattform für R/3 bis ECC 6.0 und das alleinige Betriebssystem für Hana. Linux ist die Speerspitze für Open Source bei SAP. Diese Kolumne widmet sich vorwiegend Linux/Hana-Architekturen.

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