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## Cliff Saran's Enterprise blog

# The challenge of open source in the enterprise is not technical



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There is no doubt that open source is the future of software development. But IT leaders trying to instil an open source culture in their organisation may struggle due to business practices established years earlier to support commercial software contracts.

Computer Weekly recently had a chat with Amanda Brock, the CEO of OpenUK about how enterprise software contracts have evolved with the advent of open source.

In 2010, when she worked on the legal side of open source contracts, Brock said that companies were dealing with procurement at the stage when adoption was just starting to happen. Open source purchases went through a buying process, which was traditionally geared towards purchases of commercial software licences. The drive to digitisation has led to the status of software developers being elevated. Historically, organisations have tried to put software licences into their contracts for open source products. Brock says that this doesn't make sense in the context of open source because the software has a licence attached to it. "The licence is whatever version you've downloaded," she says.

"Developers don't have to go through procurement, they don't have to go through legal," says Brock. They need the ability to pull down freely available open source components and tools from public repositories like GitHub and GitLab. In doing so, they discover new and improved ways to achieve their coding objectives without having to reinvent the wheel. Their applications benefit from functionality

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that is freely available and widely used across the open source community.

## Commercial open source

To make money from the freely available code, businesses develop a commercial offering around open source products. It is fair to say that those organisations closest to the code – the main contributor, original developers or the maintainer responsible for the repository- are best placed to offer these commercial contracts.

But since the source code is freely available, anyone can create a version, or fork, of the original open source software, and offer rival services. The risk, says Brock, is that if it is offered as a commercial product, the business responsible for this fork may not have the same level of expertise as the maintainer of the original code. This business may well win out in a tender process as it can potentially undercut the competition on price, but is it best placed to keep the fork of the open source product maintained over the long term?

Brock points out that in itself, open source is not a business model. Managed services provides a commercial wrapper. But commercial open source companies are increasingly looking at SaaS as the direction they will take their enterprise software products.

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