Managing InnerSource: An Expert Study

InnerSource is attracting a lot of attention from the software industry. InnerSource, which promotes the adoption of open source development and governance principles and practices, seeks to overcome bottlenecks and challenges in organizations. Most organizations are organized along the 'divide and conquer' principle: business units, departments, and teams are all managed by a manager – these are middle managers, because they sit between executive managers and the people who do the actual software development work.

As it turns out, the role of middle management is often perceived as challenge in InnerSource. That's not the fault of middle managers, but it's a natural reaction to the tension that can arise when trying to take down barriers and silos within an organization.
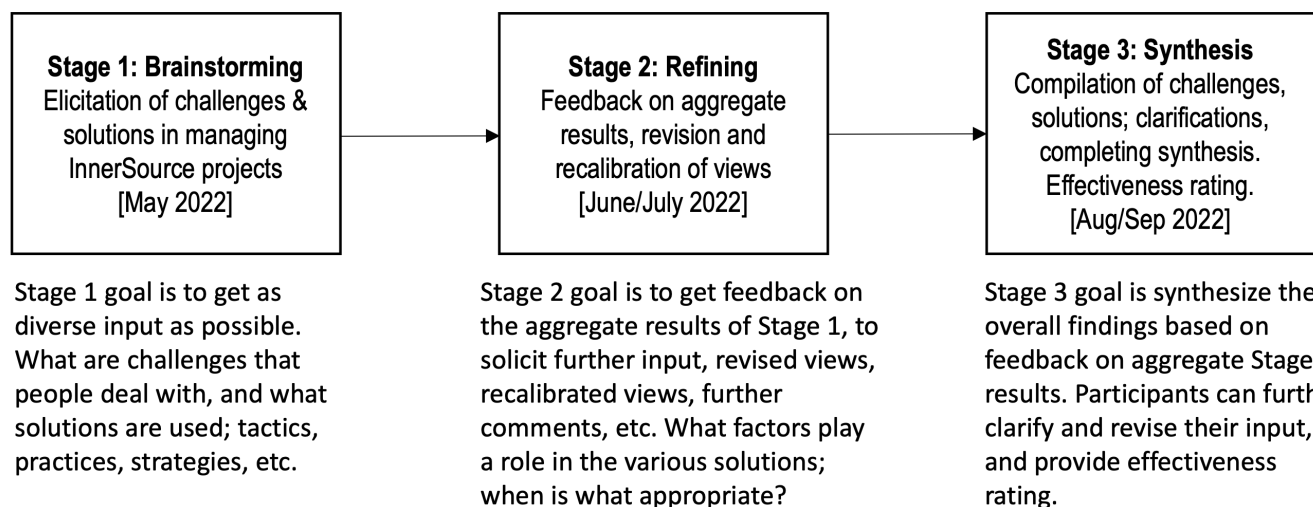
We are conducting an expert study to identify these challenges and to identify practices, tactics and strategies that could help overcome these. We are looking to recruit about 25 experts – people who have practical experience in InnerSource, in any type of role: executives, advocates, middle managers, and developers.

Who are We?

We are Yogi Shastri and Klaas-Jan Stol, two researchers with University College Cork, at the School of Computer Science and Information Technology.

About the Study

The study follows a "Delphi" study design; that's a multi-stage study, consisting in this case of 3 Rounds. In each round, we'll be looking for input from the expert panel. The process is shown in the figure below. Participation in each round is expected to take about 1 hour, with a total time commitment of 3 hours, spread over May-September. We're planning to write up the results between Sep-Oct 2022 for submission to a scientific journal. Participation is anonymous, unless you wish to be named.

Stage 1: Brainstorming
Elicitation of challenges & solutions in managing InnerSource projects
[May 2022]

Stage 2: Refining
Feedback on aggregate results, revision and recalibration of views
[June/July 2022]

Stage 3: Synthesis
Compilation of challenges, solutions; clarifications, completing synthesis. Effectiveness rating.
[Aug/Sep 2022]

Stage 1 goal is to get as diverse input as possible. What are challenges that people deal with, and what solutions are used; tactics, practices, strategies, etc.

Stage 2 goal is to get feedback on the aggregate results of Stage 1, to solicit further input, revised views, recalibrated views, further comments, etc. What factors play a role in the various solutions; when is what appropriate?

Stage 3 goal is synthesize the overall findings based on feedback on aggregate Stage 2 results. Participants can further clarify and revise their input, and provide effectiveness rating.

All interaction will be over email. In each round, we'll provide a 'prompt' for participants to answer. We will anonymize the results. Results will be analyzed and aggregated, and they provide the input for the next round, until we finish in Round 3.

How can I participate?

We're looking to recruit about 25 people who have experience with InnerSource. If you're interested in participating, please fill out this brief Google Forms information sheet to provide your name, contact details, your current role, experience, and so on: https://forms.gle/TvfgU3VF9mR1QmWK9. We're looking to recruit a diverse panel, in terms of background and role.

If you have any questions, please contact us by email: yshastri@ucc.ie, and k.stol@ucc.ie.
We also have a study website, https://user-group.github.io/delphi2022.html which has a FAQ.