

Executive Summary (Innovation in the Software Sector)

Architecturally, software types can generally be described as belonging to one of three basic categories: i) applications, ii) operating systems, or iii) middleware. Applications are software programs providing functionality focused on a particular task for end users, and as noted above, may reside locally on a machine or be delivered remotely. Examples of common software applications for individual household and office users include text processing programs, electronic spreadsheets, desktop publishing programs or various email and web browsing applications. Operating systems reside locally, and serve as the platform interface between the hardware system and other types of user software programs while also providing services (e.g. file print). Middleware is a broad category of software ranging from task-specific functionality to platform-type functionality that permits applications to operate across operating systems and interoperate despite being written in different computer languages. Most software products have a fairly limited product life cycle; it is not uncommon for new versions of many software applications and operating systems to be released every few years. This is in marked contrast to other traditionally manufactured goods, such as furniture, major appliances and automobiles, which often can be expected to last for a decade or more.

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