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http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/newsletters/december2010.pdf

OSS Watch
Supporting open source in education and research

http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk

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Online newsletter available at
- http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/newsletters/december2010.pdf

Welcome to our final newsletter of 2010. In this issue, we bring you an article by Elizabeth Tatham, which looks at the broad range of roles found in open source projects, thus showing how anyone can contribute to an open source project, whatever their skills. We also bring you a blog post from Sander van der Waal who argues that much of the material we produce is applicable outside the HE and FE sector, and a guest post from Alvina Lopez looking at Daniel Pink's latest book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*.

Finally, we'd like to wish you a happy Christmas and we'll see you in the new year.

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News from OSS Watch

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- OSS Watch news feed
- http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/rss/osswatchnews.rss

Symbian Foundation to close its open source code websites

The Symbian Foundation has decided to shut down its websites containing open source code, software fixes and documentation from 17 December. The platform will remain open source, however, and related documentation, code and updates will be available on request.

- http://www.itproportal.com/2010/11/29/symbian-foundation-close-its-open-source-code-websites/

GuildHE goes open source

With the aim to support research excellence and create a community of cross-institutional collaboration, GuildHE has chosen University of London Computer Centre (ULCC) to provide a virtual research environment (VRE). At the core of the solution is the leading open source e-portfolio software Mahara with Moodle providing the platform for the development of shared training resource.

- http://bit.ly/GuildHE

Attachmate to buy Novell for $2.2 billion

Novell has agreed to be acquired by Attachmate for $2.2 billion, ending months of speculation over its future. The company has also agreed to sell certain intellectual property assets to CPTN Holdings, a technology consortium led by Microsoft.

- http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9197598/Update_Attachmate_to_buy_Novell_for_2.2_billion

Kiwi open source software first in world to to get Microsoft Server certification

SilverStripe, a web development company delivering open source content management systems (CMS) for websites and development services to businesses throughout Australasia, Europe and the USA, has achieved 'Certification for Windows Server 2008 R2' for version 2.4.0 of its flagship product, SilverStripe CMS. This is a world first, according to Microsoft, as the software is the only truly open source web application to achieve certification on the Windows platform.

- http://www.nbr.co.nz/article/kiwi-open-source-software-first-world-get-microsoft-server-certification-133334

IBM, 15 European partners to develop 'smart' cloud

IBM has announced that it is leading a joint research initiative with 15 European partners, including standards bodies and companies in the telecommunications, healthcare and media industries, to develop an object-based, standardised 'smart cloud' storage architecture. The goal of the collaboration is to improve delivery of rich data and storage services across national boundaries and a variety of vendors.

- http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9196281/IBM_15_European_partners_to_develop_smart_cloud_

Microsoft releases F# under Apache licence

Microsoft has released the sources of the F# programming language as open source code under the Apache 2.0 licence. The compiler and libraries are now available as 'code drops' within the F# PowerPack collection on the CodePlex website, Microsoft's hosting platform for open source projects.

- http://www.h-online.com/open/news/item/Microsoft-releases-F-under-Apache-licence-1131485.html

Nokia reclaims Symbian smartphone software

Nokia has taken back control of the Symbian operating system, 18 months after it set up a non-profit foundation to oversee its development. Nokia will control the future direction of the world's most popular smartphone software from April 2011.

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-11713192

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Roles in open source projects

Full article can be found at http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/resources/rolesinopensource.xml

1. Introduction

You don't need to be a software developer to contribute to an open source project. The code, documentation and artwork that make up an open source project have all been created, tested, used, discussed and refined by members of the project community. These processes can be broken down into a myriad tasks, requiring different skills, levels of involvement and degrees of technical expertise. So, if you want to get involved in an open source project, there is a range of roles to choose from. These include:

- providing feedback
- helping new users
- recommending the project to others
- testing and reporting or fixing bugs
- requesting new features
- writing and updating software
- creating artwork
- writing or updating documentation
- translating

All of these contributions help to keep a project active and strengthen the community. The project team and the broader community will therefore welcome and encourage participation, and attempt to make it as easy as possible for people to get involved. The exact roles and mechanisms for participating will be dictated by the project's governance model and vary from one project to another.

The tools for communicating within the community and making contributions will also vary.

For most projects, the first step is normally to join one or more of the project mailing lists, depending on your area of interest. Mailing lists are generally the main communication channel, but some projects may also use forums or other tools. The project's website should provide clear guidelines on how to get started and which channels to use.

Let's explore some of the roles you could fulfil in an open source project.

2. User experience

Project teams are always keen to know more about how users engage with the project and how they would like it to look and function. This feedback is vital to the life of the project. Without it, the team would not be able to improve the software's usability, a key element that could make the project stand out among its competitors.

As a new user, you may feel reluctant to make requests or provide criticism, no matter how constructive, for fear of seeming impolite or ungrateful. But most open source projects will encourage you in every possible way to contribute to discussions on user mailing lists or add feature requests to the issue tracker. At the same time, they will probably make you aware that not all feature requests will be implemented, although every comment will be carefully considered and feedback will be provided as to how important that request is.

3. User support

Once you have gained some experience of the project, you can support new users who have no experience. Helping people to get started is critical to the medium- to long-term success of the project. This is because some of these newcomers will themselves become contributors and ensure the ongoing development and support of the project.

The quickest, easiest and most significant way to provide such support in the early stages of your involvement is to answer newcomers' questions. These are often best answered by those who have themselves recently experienced the same issues. By answering questions from newcomers, you will also be helping the project by saving the developers time. As you gain experience, you will be able to ask and subsequently answer more complex questions. In turn, you will be supported by more experienced users as the complexity of your own requests grows. In this way, providing support will benefit both you and the project itself.

> **"The quickest, easiest and most significant way to provide such support in the early stages of your involvement is to answer newcomers' questions."**

4. Evangelising and marketing

It goes without saying that the lifeblood of any open source project is its users: more users means more opportunities for success. And feedback from users on what they want helps to ensure that the product is of increasingly good quality. So it is vital that the project attracts users on an ongoing basis. As an existing user, you can help the project to do this by telling people about it and encouraging them to try it out.

The project may also engage in more active forms of marketing, such as representation at conferences and workshops. By being willing to present the project to others, you can also help to ensure that a flow of users, and thus potential contributors, is maintained.

5. Software design and implementation

As a software developer, your first step towards contributing code will probably be reporting bugs and submitting fixes. If you are not yet a committer on the project, you would normally make these contributions by submitting a patch on the issue tracker. You might then go on to design new features for the project or redesign or develop current ones.

Remember that all significant code contributions should be discussed on the developer mailing list before implementation. This will allow the project team to ensure that the design is appropriate and that user experience will not be adversely affected. Smaller contributions, such as bug fixes, can be submitted as patches on the issue tracker without discussion.

▸ Article continues at http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/resources/rolesinopensource.xml

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Guest post Daniel Pink's *Drive*: open source model is key to future development

Guest post published on November 16, 2010

This guest post is contributed by Alvina Lopez, who writes on the topics of accredited online schools.

What continues to surprise me most about open source software (OSS) development is how the particular mindset OSS embodies has seeped into an incredibly diverse range of discussion that transcends software itself. Daniel Pink's latest book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* is the latest example of how OSS has served to concretely demonstrate truths about human behavior.

The basic gist of Pink's book is that business models of the 20th century have it all wrong in terms of what drives employees to perform better. Pink argues that for workers whose jobs require creative skills the kind of work that represents an increasing majority of jobs in America and the UK now that repetitive tasks are being more frequently outsourced, money is a poor motivator. Rather, by delving into the latest research in neuroscience and behavioral science, Pink suggests three things that motivate creative production: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

Pink defines autonomy as having greater freedom at work. Given the chance to be self-directed, Pink demonstrates, workers will approach tasks they've designed themselves with greater enthusiasm. Pink cites the company Google, which requires that all employees spend 20% of their time working on whatever they feel like doing. Google has noted that some of the company's most innovative ideas have grown out of their 20% rule. Mastery, according to Pink, is the desire to become highly skilled and knowledgeable in a specific skill or set of skills for its own sake. The final piece of the motivation puzzle is purpose: knowing that what you are spending your time doing is reaping tangible benefits for others.

When looking at Pink's scheme, it comes as no surprise that he offers the open source software revolution as the golden model of true human motivation in action. Those of you in the OSS camp know full well the personal fulfilment derived from working on a project in which you are given an opportunity to join a community, collaborating with others freely and openly, working on your own time to master your craft, and helping others out in the process.

Although many open source software developers subscribe to the open source mindset, Pink points out that few look at the bigger picture. In an interview published on OpenSource.com, Pink noted:

'I think that people who are involved in open source sometimes don't realize how extraordinary it is. [...] If you had presented it in business school to some strategy professor saying, "I've got this new business model for creating software, and here is how it goes: A bunch of people around the world who don't know each other get together and work for free. And these are highly skilled, technically able people who decide to do really tough, sophisticated work for free, and they give away their product", it would have seemed ludicrous. And the fact that it worked and it worked so well, and the fact that it has challenged if not toppled other software products that are created in the more conventional way, ought to give us some hints about how we structure firms, how we organize workers, and I think deep down what really motivates people to do amazing things.'

In the final analysis, Pink's book about motivation demonstrates why OSS is so successful, and how the model can inspire and inform both businesses and individuals seeking fulfillment through work. It's an engaging read that will remind you why and how OSS plays such a pivotal role in the development of expanding human capability.

http://osswatch.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2010/11/16/daniel-pinks-drive-open-source-model-is-key-to-future-development/

Use OSS Watch's resources within your organisation

Published by Sander van der Waal on November 30, 2010.

Open source software projects can form a perfect example of a level playing field in software development. This is especially true for projects that have a meritocratic governance model in place, which by definition recognises all contributions to the project equally regardless of the person or organisation contributing. This is one of the reasons why we believe open source software projects are the prime example of open innovation in software.

It is therefore of no surprise that a lot of the materials that we write at OSS Watch are not just applicable to the Higher Education and Further Education sector in the UK (which form our remit as defined by our main funding body JISC). On the contrary, many of our documents discuss issues related to open source that apply just as well to the public sector at large, or to the commercial sector for that matter. I will highlight a few of the most relevant documents here.

Suppose you are in an organisation that's developing software either for itself or collaboratively with other departments or other organisations. If you are considering the longer term sustainability of your software you might want to consider releasing your code under an open source licence. To better understand what software development in open source projects actually entails, our document that deals with getting to grips with the open development method could be of interest.

> "In many cases it is more beneficial to join an existing project community rather than trying to create your own"

In many cases it is more beneficial to join an existing project community rather than trying to create your own. Joining an existing project means that you can tap into an existing body of knowledge and benefit from the development efforts of other, potentially myriad, developers. To better understand the mechanisms of contributing to an open source project some of more technical documents, like the one that explains what a software patch is, could be helpful. In any case you will have to make sure that all the provisions are in place to be able to contribute your code to the project.

If you are sure there is no existing project where your code will fit, you could consider starting your own open source project. In that is the case, it is important to consider what the right governance model is for your project. Do you want to go with the benevolent dictator model, which leaves all decision to one person or governing body, or do you want to create a level playing field by choosing a meritocratic governance model? Another important aspect in open source projects is ensuring the Intellectual Property is properly managed, which means that you should consider putting a Contributor Licence Agreement in place.

A completely different use case that we come across often is considering open source in a procurement process. Also then many issues are the same irrespective of whether your an academic institution, some other organisation in the public sector, or a commercial company. Our document on decision factors for open source software procurement could be useful in these circumstances. To get a more detailed and substantial view on existing open source projects, we have developed the Software Sustainability Maturity Model that guides you through the most important issues you should consider as an end-user of open source software.

To summarise, there are many aspects of open source software where our resources may be of use. All OSS Watch documents are available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 England & Wales licence, so you are free to reuse our content as long as you mention where you got it from and make any derivative work available under a similar licence.

‣ http://osswatch.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2010/12/01/use-oss-watchs-resources-within-your-organisation/

Events

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‣ OSS Watch events feed

‣ http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/rss/events.rss

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Sakai VLE Event, Oxford, 9 December 2010

Due to recent changes in the marketplace, many institutions have begun to review their VLE service provision, and as a result there appears to be growing interest in the Sakai Collaborative Learning Environment. The Sakai Foundation and SunGuard/rSmart invite you to join colleagues from UK universities already using Sakai to find out more about their experiences, the future of Sakai, the Sakai community and support options. This free workshop will be hosted by Oxford University Computing Services.

‣ http://permalink.gmane.org/gmane.comp.cms.sakai.devel/39016

Frequently Asked Questions

Q What is the best way to give credit to open source developers?

A Good open source projects are developed by the community, so there are usually no individual ‘rock stars’. One of the best ways to give credit to the community is to draw attention to the project by saying publicly (and on the project mailing list) how useful you found it. You can go one better by engaging with and contributing to it yourself - or, best of all, by encouraging others to do so.

Q What is open innovation?

A Many people confuse innovation with invention, but innovation is about more than invention. While invention focuses on the creation of something new without necessarily realising economic benefit, innovation is the application of inventions to generate economic benefit. Open innovation recognises that in the modern world no single organisation has a monopoly on invention and promotes the sharing of inventions and/or innovations across organisational boundaries.

Find out more about open innovation in our briefing document Open source and open innovation.

Find answers to your questions at: http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/about/faq.xml

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