

Skills Development in FLOSS communities

Martin Michlmayr <tbm@cyrius.com>
University of Cambridge
The Debian Project

Objectives for today

- International issues of contributing to FLOSS
- General problems and opportunities
- The future

My background

- I've been actively involved in FLOSS for over 10 years
- I'm interested in free software specifically but also in FLOSS as an example of volunteer groups
- I'm a "typical example" from the FLOSS poll (learning, sharing knowledge)
- ... and yet different (management)

Types of FLOSS projects

A FOUR-SQUARE DEPICTION OF FLOSS ORGANIZATION

	Distributed	Co-located
Volunteers	Prototypical FLOSS dev eg Perl	'sprints' and 'hackathons' eg Zope and Apache
Non-volunteers	Virtual work teams eg Ximian	Traditional Workplaces eg MySQL

Figure by James Howison

- Volunteer groups have certain unique features
- e.g. regarding management

Who drives FLOSS?

- USA: companies
- Europe: community
- Asia: government

Where is FLOSS done?



Asia

Cultural Boundaries

- "Shy", Formal
- Lack of English

Solutions

- Have someone who acts as an intermediate
- ... not ideal

Learning opportunities

- FLOSS is a great way to learn
- But there are also dangers
- Specifically: what happens if too many people join at the same time? (cf Usenet)

Issues

FLOSS involvement is specific to some people:

- Technical people, especially doing development
- People who are self-motivated, autodidact
- We need more mentoring
- And involvement from other people
- (Question: how do we get developers to accept non-technical people?)

Mentoring and formal FLOSS training

- Training programs, Master programs
- Focus: not on development, but on participating in FLOSS
- Example: communities are very different

The Future

Many opportunities:

- People have more spare time
- The idea of FLOSS can be extended to other areas