Malaysia Government Open Source Policy

Submitted by Ian Lynch on Tue, 2008-11-11 22:08




On the 5th November I travelled to Malaysia at the invitation of Mohammed Zahar Othman, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science at the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris [1] (UPSI), to set up a research project to see how INGOTs can be used to help support the Malaysian Government's strategy for Open Source Software in the public sector. Right at the start I have to say terima kasih banyak-banyak (Thank you very much) to Zahar and his colleagues for providing a wonderful experience. Malaysia is a fantastic country with a great climate and people that are just as warm and friendly as the weather. If you get a chance to visit don't miss the opportunity.

THE FAMOUS KUALA LUMPUR TWIN TOWERS



Governments like to demonstrate that they are innovative and on the ball. They like to be associated with cutting edge reform and the political kudos that goes with it. In the field of technology, the reality is often at odds with the rhetoric because politicians and civil servants suffer from the same lack of experience of alternative technologies that prevents consumers from asking why routinely used software is so expensive, vulnerable to virus attack and carries over fundamental flaws from version to version. Do you ever question why your computer slows down over time? Is that inevitable or is it a design "feature"?

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My recent trip to Malaysia at the invitation of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris [1] (UPSI) provided a great insight into the Malaysian Government's strategy [2] to move all public administration to Open Source software. The Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit [3] (MAMPU) and the Open Source Competency Center [2](OSCC) published implementation guidelines in August 2008. In contrast with political strategies that are more about presentation and spin, this publication is a refreshing object lesson in planning for change, taking into account the existing position and infrastructure.

Seven strategic thrusts are identified

1. Development of an Open Source Software Technical implementation plan
2. Provision of a Governing Body to champion, monitor and drive the implementation
3. Training and development of the human resource to support implementation
4. Promoting creativity and innovation via R&D to enhance competitiveness
5. Optimisation of resources through smart partnerships with relevant organisations
6. Provision of incentives to develop and deploy Open Source Solutions
7. Revision and improvement of policies and legislation to encourage the take up of Open Source Technologies and to further their development.

THE UPSI INGOT TEAM



There is an acceptance at government level that Open Source methods and solutions save money and that it is the government's duty to get long term value for money for the tax payer even if that requires some short term costs involved with changing established practice and the pain that goes with that. It is not fundamentally about throwing a lot of money at the problem but targeting investment strategically and clearly articulating expectations. Analysts Gartner said **"Malaysia shows what being strategic on Open Source means"** (Gartner 2006) and they certainly have a point. If Malaysia can do this then it is rather interesting that governments that would consider themselves more technologically advanced can't.

As in most other fields, actions speak louder than words. Doing things differently or before mainstream adoption is the essence of innovation and competitive advantage. Malaysia demonstrates how in the world of technology a small country can provide active leadership in the

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management of technological change. In 5 pilots across 4 ministries, savings reported were

- 80% on software licensing costs
- 58% in development and consultancy
- 7% in software support
- 31% overall.

TRADITIONAL DINING MALAYSIAN STYLE AT UPSI



If such statistics require a cross-reference, an Oracle [4] spokesman at the Malaysian Government Open Source Software Conference [5](MyGOSSC), said that 90% of the company's software management costs were generated by the 10% of software that was not Open Source. This is quite a startling statement from a company that depends on proprietary database software for its main business! Add to this BECTA's [6] survey in UK schools back in 2005 and perhaps the message here is that there is far greater risk in not having a clear Open Source strategy than in having one.

Another statistically significant observation is that the number of women at MyGOSSC matched the number of men. How many technology conferences could we say that about in the UK?

It seems some governments are far too afraid of upsetting corporate vested interests at long term

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cost to the tax payer. Malaysia shows that there is nothing to fear on that score and that putting the needs of the tax payer before those of shareholders of private companies is a responsibility governments ought to be taking more seriously.

ODF OLYPIAD PRIZE GIVING



In phase 2 of the Malaysian strategic planning, the key themes are sustaining previous initiatives together with catalysing and accelerating Open Source implementation. Specifics include training personnel, enhancing community collaboration and formulating effective incentives and rewards. A feature of MyGOSSC was the presentation of prizes and awards to young people that had taken part in the Open Document Olympiad [7]. Clearly, for Malaysia, embracing rapidly growing changes in global attitudes and methods for technological development is seen as providing competitive advantage. The aspiration to become a key hub for technology in South East Asia will not happen without real strategic reform, just talking about it is not enough. Those countries currently waiting to see what others do and then claiming to be technology leaders are deluding themselves. They are far more likely to be locked into expensive proprietary systems for longer which in the current times of economic recession and financial austerity, compounds the advantage they hand to their more enlightened competitors. Malaysia provides the example for others to follow.

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