

The LibreOffice Portuguese Community: a researcher's view

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ABSTRACT

The success of Open Source Software (OSS), along with the importance that their communities have created around their project's and products (Ubuntu, LibreOffice, Android and CyanogenMod, etc) has recently attracted the attention of researchers and commercial companies. While the first ones are learning lessons from the success of OSS and applying some of them, the second ones are also acquiring knowledge. They are now more open minded and import the apprenticeship to develop their systems, implement it to their structure and even help to make them compatible with their products (like HTC, Motorola, Samsung and Sony Ericsson do with CyanogenMod¹).

These OSS communities are normally called communities of practice and they are a group of people who are informally bounded by their common interest and practice in a specific domain. The LibreOffice Portuguese Community has been in great growth and trying to answer the "The Document Foundation" (TDF) requests. The "real time" translations of the package and recently the development of the IT and LibreOffice Open Manual are examples. The author feels that it is time to make a short scientific analysis, through a reading of the creative processes and production, based on international scientific developments and conclusions. The objective of this paper is to make the first step of a study of how LibreOffice is contributing to the sustainable development in Portugal.

General Terms

Management, Documentation, Performance, Experimentation, Human Factors, Theory, Verification.

Keywords

Open Source, OSS community, LibreOffice, LibreOffice Portuguese Community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The TDF community is based on a meritocratic foundation, which "provides a stable environment all around the LibreOffice community", words from Charles-H. Schulz, Board Member of the TDF. One of the key aspects found many times in members words, and particularly developers, is the sense of welcome, encouragement, friendship and openness. After Oracle bought Sun, the OpenOffice.org project became a very "closed" environment. Oracle required a copyright assignment and various other commitments, which has separated split and ideals, and naturally, many members migrated to the TDF community, where the environment was less "tight" and more appealing.

The change of the license during the recent 4th version of LibreOffice to GPLv3+ (new contributions are dual-licensed under both LGPLv3+ and MPL) brought the necessary independence (from the Apache OpenOffice project) and openness to an easy commitment and contribution from the contributors, applying and justifying all the considerations about licensing presented by Lerner & Tirole (2002). According to Charles-H. Schulz "the LGPL v3 is a very good license, but it is neither evolutive nor exactly the one(s) we wanted. (...) The GPLv3+ is the standard Free Software License, but if you notice the "+", it also lets the code evolve with the license (to the v4, or v5 for instance)."²

But the success of a project, and also of course of a community, is not only based on the aforementioned aspects, but also an accompanying community that provides the platform for developers and users to collaborate.

This strongly happens inside all TDF, from developers to users, from bloggers to testers. There is a philosophy of mutual feedback that gives motivation to volunteers members, "whose participation and contribution is of essential importance to the success of this Open Source Software (OSS) project" like Ye & Kishida (2003) stand for.

Since in Portugal there is a lack of scientific written knowledge and scientific analysis (especially) in this area, when there is already some international scientific basis, it's important to establish a relation and a bridge, as from the TDF community, as from the OSS communities in general.

2. THE COMMUNITY

To define the actual state of the LibreOffice Portuguese Community, the best answer is given by Wenger (1998). He

1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CyanogenMod>

2 <http://standardsandfreedom.net/index.php/2013/01/24/the-meaning-of-the-4-0/>

classifies the communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.” This definition lies on three characteristics: **The domain of interest**, which is, of course, the LibreOffice Suite and everything directly linked (ODF, open and free documents, etc.); **The community**, actively engaged in the translation of the suite, production and revision of the dictionaries and spellcheckers (old and the new Portuguese orthographic agreement), documentation (translation and IT and LibreOffice Open Manual) and bug reporting; **The practice**, proven by the activity in the mailing lists and social network (+LibreOffice PT³) which gives a shared repertoire for their practice, together with inter-mailing and chat services.

Since Wenger (2006) built an example of how a community of practice should be like, it is important to establish a bridge between this assessment and LibreOffice Portuguese Community. The interactions are well established. When there is a doubt or a problem to solve, the question is posted in the mailing list and the team together decides which is the better solution (*Problem solving, Discussing developments*). This happens especially in the translation and design/marketing teams that work directly with TDF (*Requests for information*). Since there's no Portuguese support site yet, the Google Plus community is fitting the needs for answers and “how to's” (*Seeking experience*). The project of the IT and LibreOffice Open Manual (*Documentation projects*) seeks also to fulfill a gap in the Portuguese free documentation, providing a solution so that tutors and teachers can teach free content (*Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps*). Gathering the knowledge of various areas, the leader Adriano Afonso manages a team of professionals, trainers and professors (*Coordination and synergy*) to create a Manual (Afonso, 2012) based on content created by them and also based on some content of the IT and OpenOffice Open Manual (Afonso, 2010) and the LibreOffice English documentation (*Reusing assets*). There's also a continuous work done by the leader, who has spread the word of this project around in schools, workshops and conferences (*Visits*) along with presentations revised by the community.

There is also a strong interchange between the community and the Natura Project⁴ from the University of Minho that keeps the dictionaries and spellcheckers (old and the new Portuguese orthographic agreement) updated. The interchange also extends to Caixa Mágica, the main Portuguese GNU/Linux distribution, based on Ubuntu, in which is working to have the direct updates of the LibreOffice suite and dictionaries, but also the inclusion of the IT and LibreOffice Open Manual on the 20th version.

2.1 Structure

After October 2012 there weren't any active groups or communities established, only a few people (the translation team and a few other members) were working for the project. Since the participation of the actual leader to the first LibreOffice Conference (Afonso, 2011) the community was created and some projects gained strength.

In some aspects, like the group of developers or programmers, it is hard to separate this community from all the TDF community,

3 <https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/116263501379882421864>

4 <http://natura.di.uminho.pt/wiki/doku.php>

but since the focus here is the local analysis, we'll maintain the Portuguese domain.

Analysing the Community from the inside, it's also possible to make a connection with the work of Ye & Kishida (2003), who gave a general structure to the OSS Communities. The given structure separates the members in eight roles which are now analysed based on the context of the Portuguese LibreOffice Community.

Project Leader – there is not a project leader by definition, since he is directly attached to the TDF, but a founder who plays a role of attribution and coordinates some details; **Core Member** – there are various core members, each one assigned to different teams. The most defined and active are the translation and documentation teams; **Active and Peripheral Developer** – Ye & Kishida (2003) separates these two roles, but here we understand that it is not necessary. There isn't any local team or group defined here since this is the specific case where they work directly on the TDF platform. This role is a team by itself, and the groups that exist are separated by projects, not geographic distribution. This is also hard to define because there are some Portuguese developers located in different countries; **Bug Fixer and Reporter** – lots of Portuguese members share their bug finds in the TDF platform, but for now the percentage of Portuguese bug reporter's is much bigger than bug fixers (trying to separate this ones from the developers); **Reader** – it is too hard to identify here if there are any, but assuming the same as active and peripheral developers, since they have to analyse, at least, parts of the code; **Passive User** – the Google Plus community is growing each day, and a lot of downloads are made from this country.

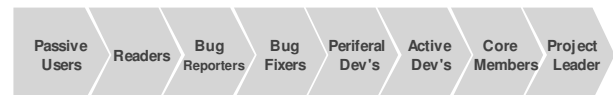


Figure 1: General structure of an OSS community by Ye & Kishida (2003)

2.2 Communication

Correia (2012) identifies the most common communication platforms used by the OSS communities. **Forums**: these are probably the least used platform by TDF. The Portuguese community doesn't use it, like the TDF core; **Mailing Lists**: this form of communication is, by standard, the most used, and the Portuguese community, like many others from other countries, have their own mailing lists, in their own languages; **IRC**: not so used by the Portuguese community, but used very much especially by developers in all countries; **Wikis**: the TDF wiki is one of the main platforms where all the work is based on. This is a place where many important things are placed, like decisions, events and their presentations, marketing plans, brand definitions, training programs, etc. Many of the communities around the world have their own translated contents; **Podcasts and Blogs**: not very used by the Portuguese community, but widely used by the TDF itself⁵ for press releases and important board members, who constantly “spread the word”.

5 <http://blog.documentfoundation.org>

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the methodologies for collecting the data, the direct observation and participant observation (Saunders 2007, Yin 2009), this paper has been a parsing of the LibreOffice Portuguese Community, comparing the definitions given by the literature review, resulting in a *status quo*.

This analysis also concludes that, a lot of work still has to be done, not only in the community, but for further study. Compared to other groups and communities, it is still very young and has to grow much more in number. However, so far it has fulfilled what they intended to do. The group is trying to meet, as much as possible, market needs. Localisation (versions in different languages, including dictionaries and spellcheckers), by common sense, is definitely the most important step for testing, and then, adoption. The next step to be considered is the documentation and some support, which has been done with the IT and LibreOffice Open Manual. There is a sense of responsibility to do just what the community can accomplish.

Looking around, last year the Portuguese version was the 28th most frequently downloaded language pack, and the 29th highest locale, with some 150 000 individual product downloads. The Apache OpenOffice still doesn't have a Portuguese version of their software, and there aren't any Portuguese communities (since most of them migrated to TDF).

4. FURTHER RESEARCH

Correia's (2012) research came to the conclusion, inside the Portuguese territory, that there are optimal points for the companies to participate and collaborate in the communities, fulfilling their interests, helping the project. There is a concave relationship between participation in communities and a technical and financial performance of commercial OSS firms (Stam, 2009).

So it's suggested, that in a near future, a more profound study could be made, a survey of how the LibreOffice Suite and the LibreOffice Portuguese Community may be contributing to the sustainable development of enterprises, and also the country itself.

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