

ODPG: A Grass Roots Approach for the Introduction of Open-Source Productivity Suites

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Abstract. Open-source software (OSS) is already a commodity, especially at the server side, such as the LAMP (Linux-Apache-MySQL-PHP/Python/Perl) stack for web applications. In addition, OSS is recently gaining popularity at the client side. However, there are many problems to eliminate monopolies on productivity software running on office-workers' desktops, and the migration from proprietary software to OSS is not so easy in the real business environment. In this paper, the current status of OSS productivity utilization, problems in the desktop use of OSS, and experiences and challenges by a discussion group for migrating to an open-source productivity suite into Japanese businesses are reported.

1 Introduction

Recently, a number of local governments in Japan have begun to adopt open-source productivity software such as OpenOffice.org (OO.o) that can handle the OpenDocument Format (ODF). The main reason is to reduce the licensing cost by replacing proprietary products with open-source products. We refer to this switch from proprietary productivity software to open-source as “the ODF-based migration” in this paper.

On the other hand, enterprises, especially large organizations are still skeptical about such a migration for various reasons. “The OpenOffice.org and OpenDocument Format Promotion Group Japan” (ODPG), was founded in 2010 to promote the utilization of OO.o and ODF in not only public sectors but also private enterprises.

In Japan, some groups and communities are actively working on promoting of ODF and open-source productivity software. ODPG promotes the spread of open-source software into enterprises through cooperation with other associated organizations.

In this paper, we illustrate frameworks and detail the activities of ODPG. In order to enforce the OO.o and ODF promotion, we need to broaden the mutual understanding of closely related ODF promotion groups.

1.1 Acceleration of ODF-based Migration

In Japan, there are many reported cases of ODF-based migrations by local governments and some of these are illustrated in Figure 1. Small and medium city offices as well as large prefecture offices have tried and decided to switch their productivity software to an open-source one. In addition there are many other local governments that are now evaluating new software and are assessing whether to maintain their old software.

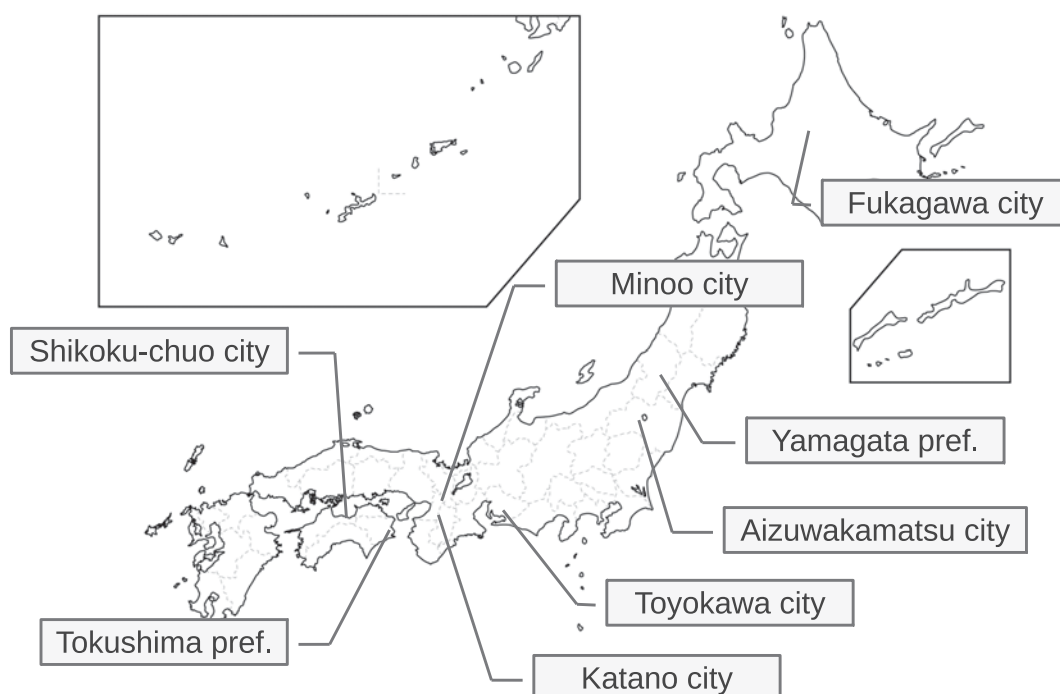


Fig. 1. Case examples of ODF-based migrations in Japan

Unquestionably, one of the main reasons for these movements is cost efficiency. However, there are other reasons for an ODF-based migration. One of the important reasons is why organizations decide to discard their old proprietary software licenses and adopt open-source software is the issue of vendor support.

Many of these organizations had been using Microsoft (MS) Office XP and/or MS Office 2003 before their decision favoring an ODF-based migration. However, Microsoft announced that the support for this software would be terminated in a few years. This announcement forced some organizations to decide whether to subscribe for new licenses for the new versions of Microsoft's products or to evaluate other products.

These issues are not confined to public sectors but should be also discussed in private sectors. ODPG was formed to address these issues.

2 The OpenOffice.org and the OpenDocument Format Promotion Group

ODPG is an organization established for the purpose of cooperative work in further contribution to the introduction of “OpenOffice.org and OpenDocument Format” into Japanese enterprises. The number of members of ODPG is 22 as of August 2011. The board of the ODPG consists of five enterprises.

2.1 Position and Role of ODPG

Figure 2 shows an image of the ecosystem surrounding OO.o¹. The community council and development team are located at the center of its community.

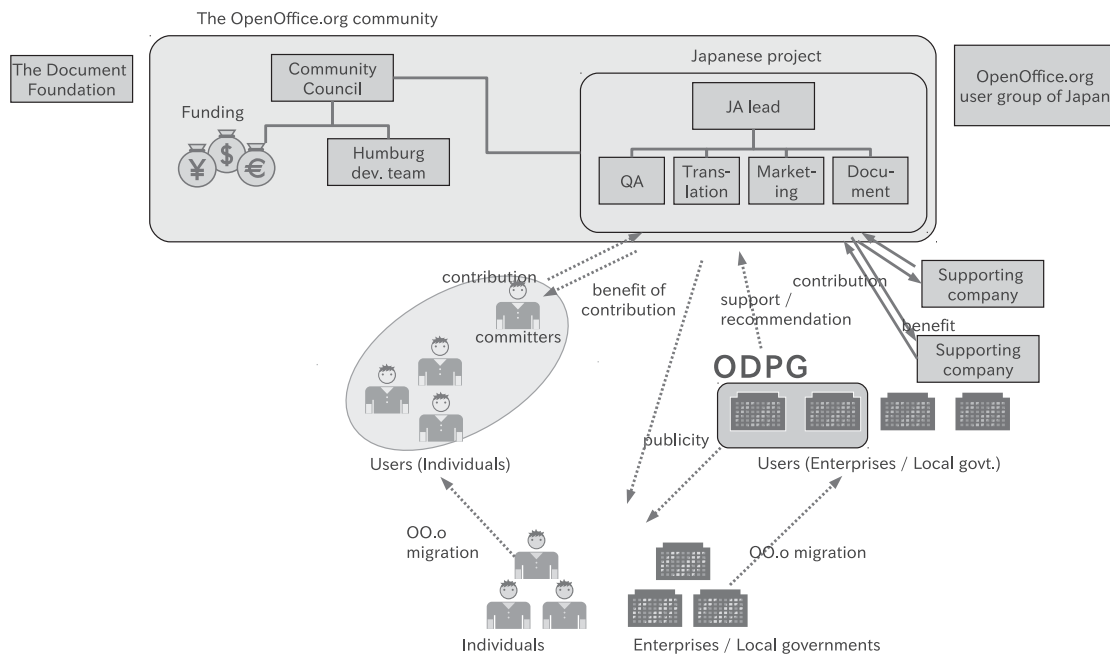


Fig. 2. OO.o and ODF ecosystem

The OO.o community has several localization projects and the Japanese project is one of those local communities. It has sub-projects like quality assurance, translation, marketing, and documentation. The community is supported by its users. The users can contribute to the community by reporting bugs,

¹ On June 1st 2011, Oracle announced that it contributed OO.o to the Apache Software Foundation. Hence, the situation surrounding OO.o is slightly changed from that shown in Figure 2.

requesting new features, and giving any type of comments to the community. They may also participate in the development itself.

Users are divided into two categories. One includes individual users and the other includes enterprise users including the local government office. ODPG is defined as an enterprise user group in the OO.o ecosystem. There are still many potential users of OO.o and/or ODF, and the role of ODPG is to offer help and information for those candidates in their own ODF-based migration.

2.2 Activities of ODPG

The main activity is to share information regarding the ODF-based migration, especially on the “know-how” in using OO.o and ODF efficiently. In addition, ODPG focuses on collecting information about problems and interoperability issues for trouble-free utilization of OO.o and ODF. Other important activities of ODPG include the compilation of proposals and recommendations for enterprises and related organizations. And ODPG is also working on other related activities for spreading OO.o and ODF into Japanese businesses.

ODPG holds two types of meetings. The first type includes the working group (WG) meetings. WG meetings are held periodically every month for the purpose of information sharing, discussion, writing materials, and so on. WG members are composed of those who are interested in the WG’s activity.

There are also regular meetings, which are held two or three times a year. All members of the ODPG can participate in the regular meetings and occasionally non-members are allowed to attend the meeting. In these regular meetings, reports from each WG and demonstrations of migration examples of some members are presented.

3 Working Group Activities

Currently, ODPG has two working groups. One working group is the case study working group, which compiles the best practices in the migration strategy and planning, migration tools, and practical migration examples. The other one is the technology study working group, which studies interoperability issues between proprietary and open-source products.

The following descriptions of the two working groups in this section are the activities of last year.

3.1 WG1: Case Study Working Group

The scope of WG1 is the information sharing among ODPG members. For example, the current situation of organizations that have already introduced OO.o and ODF into their business scene is of major interest to WG1 members.

The topics of the promotion framework, the group (team), and activities such as case studies of success and/or failure are also discussed in WG1. Educational tips and guidelines for employees are also important factors for successful ODF-based migrations. The initial cost of migration, running costs, and efficiency are not negligible issues. Furthermore, key-points of migration, problems, and solutions are significant topics for discussion.

The goal of WG1 is to support enterprises and/or organizations in their planning migration from proprietary productivity suites to OO.o. Another important goal of WG1 is to expand the market share of OO.o and ODF by accelerating ODF utilization in enterprises that are already successful in their ODF-based migration.

Last year WG1 conducted a questionnaire survey on organizations that have already succeeded in their ODF-based migration. Prior to the questionnaire-based analysis, several important focus points had been discussed by WG1 members. The discussion concluded that the present state of ODF-based migrations, issues in decision making, obstructive factors for the migration, licensing issues, system infrastructure, and so on, should be highlighted using practical case studies.

The questionnaire tackled the following topics:

Decision making in OO.o migration

- Who was the decision maker?
- How did you organize your migration project?
- What was the main purpose of the migration?
- How did you estimate the migrating cost?
- How did you consider the side effects of the OO.o migration?
- What was the most important point in planning of the OO.o migration?

Licensing issues

- How did you manage licenses before the OO.o migration?
- Did you change the license management methodology?
- Did you change the type of contract for the proprietary office suite?

Documents management

- How did you manage documents?
- How did you modify your document templates?

Education & user support

- Did you prepare education courses for OO.o migration? (e.g., How to use OO.o)
- Did you change your help desk and/or user support?

The questionnaire was sent to ODPG members and twelve answers were collected. The number of answers is too small to discuss tendency statistically, but it can give some findings².

² The results of the questionnaire and the analysis of the survey are only disclosed to members of ODPG.

3.2 WG2: Technology Study Working Group

WG2 is the technology study working group. It collects useful information mainly on the technological aspect of OO.o and the other ODF tools. WG2 also carries out some technological surveys, and gives feedback comments to members as well as to related organizations and communities.

The goals of WG2 are to support enterprises and/or organizations that are planning a migration from proprietary productivity suites to OO.o, especially on the technological front, and to foster young OO.o and ODF supporters in Japan. Another main purpose of WG2 is to ensure the utilization of OO.o and ODF in Japanese enterprises by providing technological information.

Last year, WG2 reviewed a similar project that had been carried out by the Information-technology Promotion Agency (IPA), Japan. Its report was compared with the current situation. Furthermore, comments on the lack of functions of OO.o and work-around techniques implemented by the ODPG members were collected and summarized.

WG2 also contributed some efforts to the human resource development program, named OpenOffice.org Internship Japan 2010, organized by Good-day, Inc.³ (Figure 3) in the last half year of FY2010.



Fig. 3. Good-day's announcement of OpenOffice.org Internship Japan 2010

³ Good-day, Inc. has some contributors and engineers who have enthusiastic efforts and skills for supporting the Japanese version of OO.o.

4 Related Work

There have been many academic studies on the migration to OO.o [1–7]. However, almost of all studies are focusing on the migration in the public administration offices. For instance, Ven *et al.* [1] studied the case study at the ministerial cabinets of the Brussels-Capital Region and Karjalainen [6] reported the Finnish case involving more than 10,000 copies of OO.o. Perry and Margoni [7] reported the case of the Canadian government. Some of these studies were executed under the Consortium for Open Source Software in the Public Administration (COSPA) [8] project financed by the European Union’s Sixth Framework Programme.

On the other hand, the activities of ODPG significantly differ from these case examples in that the ODPG is mainly focusing on the ODF-based migration in private sectors, and it is a private organization with no recourse to public funds.

5 Remaining Problem and Future Work

ODPG was established in September 2010 and periodic meetings have been held until the time of writing. However, the members of ODPG should have a deeper discussion in both WG1 and WG2.

There still remains a strategic problem, that is, “how to deal with LibreOffice (LO)?” The question arises: “Should ODPG focus on LO and other OSS productivity suites, or exclusively on OO.o?” In addition to this practical problem, ODPG should also tackle other strategic problems. “How should enterprise users follow the changes made by the development community?” and “how can enterprise users contribute to the development community?” are urgent questions that should be addressed by the ODPG.

In addition to such problems, ODPG needs to improve the relationship with the other communities, such as the OpenOffice.org user group of Japan. Apart from the domestic organizations, establishment and improvement of the relationships between ODPG and other international organizations working on this issue should be explored.

6 Conclusions

The public sectors as well as many enterprises in Japan are starting to consider the migration from proprietary productivity office software to OO.o and ODF. In order to achieve consistent and smooth ODF-based migrations, ODPG has been established by some of those enterprises. In the activities of ODPG, the members are discussing the key-points and related topics on ODF-based migration.

Although the current scope of ODPG's activity is restricted to the domestic industry in Japan, ODPG considers positively any contribution from foreign countries. Any comments and questions are welcome.

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