South African FOSS Business Models training

13 at 16 December 2010

SUMMARY OF TRAINING AND EXPERIENCES

The first national FOSS Business Models training in South Africa (conducted by a product of 2009 ICT@innovation FOSS Business Models train the trainer) was held during 13 and 16 December 2010. Initial it had been planned for 26-29 of October 2010 but due to the low turnout of trainees who were willing and could afford to pay the training fees it was postponed to 2011. Nevertheless one of my company's value networks came through in November and provided a few trainees.

a) **Achievement of objectives**

The objectives of the training were twofold. Firstly i and ii below were part of the broader objectives that ict@innovation had for the nature of these trainings. However, as a trainer and FOSS based SME in South Africa, I had additional objectives for the training i.e iii, iv and v. Despite a few challenges, all the objectives were squarely met and the training opened up a number of insights into what FOSS can bring to the South African communities.

i. To roll out national trainings as part ict@innovation 2010 programme

The training was conducted as per the requirements and timing of the programme except that the specific dates were changed and the number of trainees were very low. Initially the training was scheduled for October but was moved to December 2010.

ii. To equip South Africans with Business skills to operate success FOSS based businesses

This objective was achieved through the content made available to the trainees and delivery method used in the training.

iii. To test the market place and confirm whether the training is really in demand

The South African business environment is pregnant with unlimited opportunities. However, it is also competitive and requires a lot of work in the era of marketing training products like the FOSS Business Models. Moreover, IT training is still based on proprietary products from companies such as Microsoft, Cisco, SAP, IDS Scheers etc who offer certification through colleges and universities. The purpose of this training was to dip stick the market to find out if FOSS Business Models will suffice to meet the needs of South African in general and or if it aligns with the government's broader ICT objectives.

iv. To establish if the FOSS Business Models training and related trainings can be sustainable

Following use of the training to achieve the above objective was to determine if the training (s) identified to meet the market needs would results in sustainable business models. It was established that due to the high demand for FOSS trainings in the country the result will be quite a number of sustainable business models (FOSS projects and IT training) that will make a positive impact in business. The training business models are reusable across the country

v. To explore any other FOSS business opportunities for Aflent

Vast opportunities for Aflent were unearthed as a result of engagement of various stakeholders pre and post training/. Some of the training prospects interestingly have a national coverage.

b) **Divergence from planning**

There not much of deviations from the training plan in terms of the content except for a few adjustments to meet the specific trainees needs. The original plan for the October 2010 was to deliver a basic FOSS Business Models course that applies to diversity trainees from different backgrounds. However, the nature the trainees that attended the December training were more technical and had specific needs.

c) Report on training conducted

FOSS Business Models South Africa was well received by the trainees The training (normally two week training) was compressed into four days to suit both the trainees and tutors availability as well as the purpose of the training.

  i. Focus of the Training
      FOSS Business Models: A practical approach to delivering ICT solutions

  ii. Trainers and Tutors
       The training was conducted using trainers mainly from ict@innovation and an external supporting tutor
       - Introduction to FOSS Concepts (Keutlwile Leso)
       - FOSS Business Models (George Nyambuya & Bheki Majahana)
       - FOSS Business Skills (George Nyambuya & Bheki Majahana)
       - FOSS Case Studies (Keutlwile Leso)
       - Communicating FOSS (George Nyambuya)
       - FOSS Training as a Business Model (Coley Zephenia)

  iii. Evaluation
        Assessment of the training for effectiveness and efficiency was done using three approaches, that is, observation of participants' behaviour during exercises and practices during the face to face training, online collaboration and online test for the entire training that participants are required to pass as a prerequisite for certification.

  iv. Continuous engagement and networking
       Trainees were encouraged to register on ict@innovation e-learning platform on the training created to facilitate not only writing of the test or module exercises or access training information but also to begin to interact among themselves and the broader FBT network.

  v. Outcomes of the training
      From the training evaluation forms submitted by the trainees it was clear that the training was impressive especially the work delivered by Leso which focussed on the core needs of this particular group of trainees.

d) **Tutoring**

Four tutors delivered the training. The teaching method was essentially face-to-face and ict@innovation training module was used as the base material consisting of the main principles and concepts driving the training. In addition, other relevant customised presentations were used by tutors where necessary. The quality of work delivered was high because I used experts in the training. Leso has been involved in innovative projects with FOSS and he brought his experience in the form of case studies based on his previous and current work. He managed to bring trainees into perspective as far as FOSS developments in the corporate South Africa. Nyambuya as the Programme Manager for ict@innovation provided invaluable expertise in the FOSS Business Models and brought in his invaluable Communication skills and experience gained from years of interfacing with different levels of local, continental and international stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. On behalf of Aflent I also brought my training experience on best of practice training business models, practices and methodologies for the benefit of the participants.

e) **Motivation of participants**

Participant had different expectations before the training which were changed after the training. Hitherto a majority of trainees were anticipating a four day training involving obtaining technical expertise in FOSS and how use the software to do small projects. However, during and after the training participant realised that there was more to the training than just acquiring the knowledge for use in their immediate organisations or

companies but the training exposed a more involving mandate as future trainers as well as FOSS advocates. Since the training gave participants a broader picture of how the training fits into wider national, continental and global developmental ICT goals, they were more inclined to be involved in FOSS project even outside their immediate boundaries.

f) **Assessment of participants for future involvement in FOSS Business (e.g. are the participants likely to open up their FOSS Business? If not, what is missing?)**

There was two SME who attended specifically to find out how they could use FOSS to expand their businesses. Training opened up opportunities for them in twofold: firstly using FOSS to expand their business and compete in the marketplace at low cost; and secondly to become a consultant and generate revenue for his company.

Business Administrators who came from government Department were not necessarily eyeing setting up their own businesses but were looking out for opportunities for their departments.

Other technologists who were using FOSS haphazardly benefitted hugely. There was a significant paradigm shift in this category of learners as they discovered how huge FOSS business has become and opportunities available to create wealth through running or partaking in comprehensive FOSS projects, training and research across the globe.

g) **Recommendations for future training**

FOSS Business Models is not enough to address the needs of the South African business community and the society at large.

The future entrepreneurs expressed the anticipated need for skilled resources to deploy FOSS projects within their companies and for clients. Currently the skills base is quite low and IT skills, by and large are a scarce resource in South Africa not to mention FOSS applications expertise.

They recommended parallel application specific trainings that will support FOSS initiatives. Trainings such as OpenICDL, Linux, CRM certifications etc need to be rolled out in order to build up the required competencies.

Overall the training has been quite a huge success and opened up a wide array of opportunities for all participants and as a result.