

A successful Danish-Bolivian partnership in the software-field

Open Source Workflow Software¹, Business Process Management Software and ProcessMaker² are for many people IT-words that belong to an unknown world. However, in an old, charming building in the capital of Bolivia, La Paz, exactly those strange “words” are turned into a profitable and successful business by the company Colosa in a joint venture with the Danish IT-company Xcompetence.

Colosa is a Bolivian-based software development company founded in 2002 with the vision of developing process management software to mid-sized companies. In 2004 Colosa released the product ProcessMaker, a business process management software suite that is now a registered trademark and the flagship product of the company. Last year the company developed a new Open Source version of ProcessMaker, which has been very successful and exported to companies all over the world.



For almost two years Colosa has, together with the Danish IT-Company Xcompetence, been part of the Business-to-Business Programme (B2B) funded by Danida. The overall objective of the programme is to contribute to poverty reduction through the development of the private sector. This is done by supporting the establishment of long-term and sustainable partnerships between Danish and Bolivian companies.

The beginning of the partnership between Colosa and Xcompetence can be drawn back to the “ICT-fair” in Copenhagen in January 2007. Here both companies participated, and with the B2B Programme in mind, they developed the idea of a partnership with a division of work that would benefit both companies. The two companies have since participated and finished both the contact and pilot phases of the programme and have applied for the project phase, which is the 3rd and last phase of the B2B Programme.

¹ Open Source is a development method for software that harnesses the power of distributed peer review and transparency of process. Open Source licenses guarantee free distribution and open access to source code. For more information, visit the Open Source Initiative at <http://www.opensource.org>

² ProcessMaker is Open Source business process management (BPM) software that enables small to mid-sized businesses to automate document intensive, approvalbased processes across systems including finance, HR and operations. ProcessMaker allows users across single and multiple sites to create and share workflows, customize forms, manage processes, and enhance reporting. For more information, visit www.processmaker.com

According to the General Manager of Colosa, Adolfo Lang, the success of ProcessMaker is mainly due to the beneficial collaboration with Xcompetence, supported by the grants from the B2B Programme: “During the pilot phase we took our first steps into this cutting edge open source software industry. Before we were regarded as a local player; now we are competing as an international player, confirming we are on the right path.”

The overall goal of the collaboration between Colosa and Xcompetence is to transform Colosa from a traditional, locally bound, software company to an Open Source enterprise with globally reaching products and services. This is being achieved through the development of ProcessMaker, software that will be marketed in Europe, USA and Asia, and will thereby create new job opportunities in both Bolivia and Denmark.

In order to meet these objectives, the two companies have been working closely together sharing experiences and knowledge. Two of Colosa’s employees spent four weeks in Denmark with Xcompetence earlier this year, where they received training in how to improve technical aspects of ProcessMaker to fit European standards, Open Source community management and how to do business in Denmark. “Xcompetence has the natural experience of working in Europe, which can give Colosa inside knowledge about how the software and related services should be developed and implemented,” says Adolfo. During the visit, the Bolivian employees also had the opportunity to train Xcompetence staff on the features and functions of ProcessMaker.

Patricia Cabero, one of Colosa’s employees who visited Xcompetence, tells that the visit not only was a good learning experience for her, but also for the Bolivian team: “When we came back from Denmark, we shared our impressions and knowledge about how to improve the product with our colleagues.” The Colosa visit to Denmark was followed by a visit to Bolivia by Xcompetence where the training activities continued and further improvements to ProcessMaker were implemented.

The Danida program and the collaboration with Xcompetence have allowed Colosa to expand its business operations, establishing a new Open Source division where five people are employed. The funds from the program allowed improvements in ProcessMaker’s business marketing on the Internet, investments in better equipment, and the start of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives to improve the working conditions within Colosa. Furthermore, Colosa was able to participate in international Open Source fairs, where the company met with executives of related businesses.

Adolfo is optimistic about the future, “With Xcompetence we are going to develop very high quality consulting, training and support practices,” he says. “We anticipate reaching a breaking point where we can rely less on the funds of the program and start investing our own funds.” However, Adolfo is certain that ProcessMaker has a long road ahead, and that the hard work must continue: “To be a competitor in this market you don’t need to walk – you need to run!”

Seeing Bolivia as a country only offering raw materials for primary production is a misperception – the country's growing IT-sector and the success of Colosa is just one example for that.

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