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9th APNG (Camp Chair) Report

Sumith Gamage (LK)

1. Preface

It was a long journey for me, which started from 5th APNG camp in Cairns, Australia. I received a full fellowship as a student in this camp in July 2004. With the experience I received in 5th Camp, we founded APNG local committee in Sri Lanka, LKiNG. There after, continuously I took part in APNG camp organizing committees. Then, it was my privilege to lead the 9th Camp in Xi'an, China.

2. Preparation

I was bit shocked and quite happy when I was offered to chair the 9th APNG Camp. So, we started preparation from the 8th Camp itself in Singapore. We had our initial committee discussion at NUS, Singapore before heading back to our own countries. Then we had camp committee meetings once a month to plan the event. When the event got closer we had more frequent meetings and at the end we had meetings once a week. Additionally, the time period of the meeting was grown to 4-5 hours from 1-2 hours. I received a very good support from many of the committee members and they took part in sharing responsibilities.

3. What We did Differently

According to the experiences we had in 8th camp and previous camps we decided to do many things differently. After considering several proposals we selected “Build the Innovative Next Generation in Asia-Pacific” as 9th camp theme. A video competition was held and selected a APNG promotional video clip.

We introduced a new partial fellowship scheme for international non-student participants in addition to local fellowship offered for local (Chinese) participants. For the first time of APNG history, we had the APNG camp for 4 days providing APNG participants to have more interactions with more seniors by taking part in APAN activities.

This time we started few more new initiatives too. One was FOSS (Free and Open Source Software) initiatives which contained several FOSS presentations from fellows, a keynote speech from a FOSS leader in the region and workshop on FOSS tool (SAHANA) used in disaster management. Further we had a “Live-E!” workshop. Both these events were collaboratively organized with APAN, opening the sessions to APAN participants too.

Additionally, we initiated a program letting local students to support on APAN local organizing. We thought that will be a win-win opportunity. From local organizer's point of view, they get student support for event organizing. From the student's point of view they get an exposure in organizing an international event. Further, we tried to publish best selected papers in APNG with APAN proceeding. Both these initiatives were not succeeded in 9th Camp due to several reasons.

Since many years, we have identified that fellow's reports are very valuable for the betterment of the next camps, to learn from the past mistakes. Fellows & general participants are the stakeholders of this program. Their feedback is very vital. However, the number of fellowship reports we received in past few years were not good enough. This time we have a special implementation plan to take camp reports from all the APNG fellows considering lack of feedback.

4. The Knowledge Sharing

APNG is a pool of diverse knowledge from different regions and different levels of people. The workshops and the other technical sessions on the first day gave a good introduction to the state-of-art technologies in the region. The next day focused more on keynote speeches on hot topics matching our theme.

Third day was basically devoted for fellowship presentations and workgroup discussions. There were many presentations from each working group (Disaster Management, Live-E!, Internet Technology, and Internet Culture & e-Commerce). Working groups discussed status and reported their plans for the coming year.

5. Difficulties Faced

Of course, the troubles and difficulties will arise for whatever we do,. It's our responsibility to overcome all of them and reach the final goal without degrading the quality. I strongly believe that we managed to do it with the team work of the committee.

We faced our first difficulty, when our former camp chair stepped down without a prior notice. This was quite shocked and confused the camp organizing committee. However, with Tommy-son's leadership in heading the APNG executive committee, the problem was eliminated.

We had a minimal support from the local organizers at this time. The options provided by them for meals and refreshments were expensive. There were many other economical options as we found in Xi'an. Language was a huge problem when we communicated directly with Chinese. Xiaohui Shi (local APNG camp chair) & Ting Lui (local fellow) helped us a lot in communicating with them.

We received a strong (anonymous) criticism about the fellowship received by the committee. He highlighted that the camp organizing committee take all fellowships and give away the rest to their friends. This matter was openly discussed on the committee

mailing list and committee meeting openly. The suggestions/proposals were openly requested from the criticizer, committee and others. Committee decided to stick with the initial plan since the criticizer was not responsive and the time was limited.

6. Fun

APNG Camp is a CAMP in its all senses. It is not restricted only to technical sessions. APNG believes a lot in cultural exchange, team building, leadership identification, multi-ethnic corporation, regional collaboration among generations (next-to-next & next-senior) and many other social aspects too.

Team Building

On the very first meeting, all the participants were divided in to 5 groups. The intention was to have a diverse group working together. Those teams were allowed to discuss among them and requested to do a performance at the end of the session. It demonstrated ability of next generation to perform with a short preparation time. The teams were assigned to explore Xi'an under following topics:

1. Xi'an History
2. Xi'an Lifestyle
3. Xi'an Transportation
4. Xi'an Food & Beverages
5. Xi'an Entertainment

On the last day of the camp each team shared their surveyed information with colorful presentations. It was an excellent coverage of all aspects of Xi'an. Finally, on the closing ceremony best 3 teams received valuable presents to remember Xi'an forever!

Costume Party

This is a unique event in the APNG Camp. It took place at the dinner on the third day. We had this event for the 5th time in consecutive camps. However, we had the most organized, most colorful and most entertained costume party in the 9th APNG Camp. All the participants took part in their costume. While having the delicious Xi'an food, teams from each country entertained others with their cultural activities such as songs, dances, etc.. Here are some of the activities stuck hard in my memory:

1. Ball playing magic from Kumar from Malaysia
2. Morning exercise from Japan
3. Song sung by Sri Lankans with everyone
4. Traditional dance from Myanmar

At the end of the event following awards were given away as selected by the previous generation (Prof. Kilnam Chon & Mr. Tommy Matsumotto) ☺:

1. Best Costume
2. Funniest Costume
3. Simplest Costume
4. Best performance
5. Second best performance

I should not forget to thank for the nice souvenirs we received from Thailand & sweets we received from Bangladesh.

7. Experience

APNG is a place where all of us can share the knowledge. As Camp chair I got immense experience which I will never ever have in my life. APNG is the place that makes the next generation ready for the leadership in the region.

This was my first time in organizing an international event with a diverse group from different countries. It was quite interesting to lead such a multinational team. We did not have representation from Xi'an, so we had to do all coordination remotely. I should not forget the support we received from Xiaohui Shi, the camp co-chair from China and Ting Liu, the fellow from Xi'an under this situation.

The experience I received in raising funds by working closely with professionals (especially Mr. Tommy Matsumotto, APNG Executive Committee Chair) was outstanding.

8. Support

9th Camp could be a dream without the support from many parties. It was a collaborative effort which reached the success.

No event will success without the financial support at all. This time we had the most number of sponsors to the event. First of all, I must thank our Gold sponsors (JR & APNIC). the Silver sponsors (ISOC, .ASIA & JPIX), Bronze sponsors (DreamArt & NIDA) and other sponsors (IOSN, WIDE & CERNET).

There was big man behind everything from identifying the teams, leading the groups, giving advices, keeping our enthusiasm, bringing us up in difficulties and supporting in all aspects whenever we needed. He is non other than APNG grandpa, Tommy Matsumotto.

Special thank goes to Ravindra De Silva and Xiaohui Shi who arranged the sponsorship from IOSN and CERNET respectively. Kung and Barry, you did a great job as APNG secretariat and web-master. Atsushi Hikita and Japanese team, your presentation, demonstration and technical workshop on "Live-E!" helped a lot. It was the first time; we had a tutorial in APAN as APNG. Isuru & Sagarika, you did a marvelous informative session on Disaster Management. Ting Liu & Xiaohui Shi; we might not do this camp in Xi'an at this success level without your cordial support.

We had entire camp organizing committee working together, specially Aadit in fellowship coordination, Amaraweera in Banner design, Kashif in speakers organizing. Sham Ahmad, you did an excellent job in designing the "APNG promotional video clip".

At the same time, you showed your colors with Jaya Kumar chairing work group presentation sessions on day 3.

9. Suggestions

The time spent in Xi'an was wonderful. We managed to have it since we learnt from the previous APNG camps. However, nothing will be perfect. There are many places we still can improve.

Upload & Sharing Photos

Many of the people brought their digital cameras and they captured the sweet memories of the event. There were many people who did not have cameras. Even though they had, they might have missed some of the interesting incidents. Therefore it is very important to share all the sweet memories. Barry has already prepared a place for this in APNG site (<http://www.apng.org/files/webFileBrowser.php>). I would like to suggest all the participants to share the interesting photos/videos here. Additionally, I would like to suggest APNG to have a much better solution for photo sharing like Plogger (<http://www.plogger.org/>).

Multiple Tracks

We felt that the fellows did not have enough time for their presentations. Therefore, we introduced two parallel tracks. This also was not that success, since half the audience missed half of the list of presentations. My suggestion for the next camp is to have only one track. If the time is a limiting factor, we can select only the high quality presentations to present at the camp. Others may have on the web for the interesting people to refer.

Late Arrival for the Session

Many of the time participants were late for the sessions in the morning and after breaks. This looks odd for the presenters. There should be a mechanism to enforce arrival of participants on time.

Session Chairs

The camp chair was the person who chaired the all the sessions in all the camps in the past. However in the two tracks of the fellows' presentations in the 9th camp we tested a different scenario. Two of the participants were selected as the session chairs for each track respectively. This was very successful even though we informed them at the last moment. I think this is a good practice we should plan properly well in advance.

After Camp Activities

After all previous camps we lost contacts of participants. There were almost zero activities we organized as APNG to keep the participants of APNG intact. We must get all their inputs and participation in work group and other activities. One such option is to get their involvement in APNG Blog.

Additionally, it is very important to have camp reports from each participant as well as from APNG camp organizers. We should send these reports with the next year plan to our sponsors. So we can attract more sponsors. At the same time we should reach sponsors well in advance.

Fellowship Evaluation

Since the camp committee also can apply for the fellowship, it is not a good idea to let camp committee to evaluation fellowship applications. This will be seen as unfair by the outsiders. So, it is vital to appoint a non-bias evaluation committee for fellowship evaluation.

Team Building

This is one of the most important aspects of APNG. We had a nice activity, but there were couple of places we could improve. The teams were not well distributed. Some teams had many people, while other team had less people. There were many people from the same country in one team while there was no representative from that country in another team. Many people blamed that they did not have enough time for their team building activities. We may have a better program, if we address these issues next time.

APNG Website

Current APNG website is an old passion static web. We have to always go though the web-master for all the minor updates. It has very limited functionalities compared to modern content management system. I think, now it's the time for APNG to adopt a good content management system for the site (E.g. Joomla! - <http://www.joomla.org/>).

10. *Best wishes for the 10th Camp*

It's all our pleasure to hear the celebration of 10th APNG camp back in the Thailand where the 1st APNG camp was held. It's going to be a 5 day camp for the first time in APNG history at a grand scale. We would really happy to see the enthusiastic AIT team leading the role once again with an energetic team from all around the world. I wish you all the best and success for the 10th APNG camp!

11. *Final quote:*

No need to back the steps on criticism! But let's use it to correct our next step!! Then the next camp will be far better!!!

Good luck APNG...