



Looking Ourselves in the Eye



## The Quest For Project Identity and Definition





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## Achievement

We started out building software that people *could* use.



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## Evolving Goals

Today we're building software that people *want* to use.



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### Growth in..

Team numbers

Library depth

Application diversity

User base

Industry interest



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## Realizing the Promise

*Why are we spending this opening keynote talking about this?*

Continuity

Efficiency

Stability

Sustainability



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### Our Personal Experience

"There are quite a few open source projects that I classify as successful [...] Two examples I'll give are KDE and X.org. These projects are making good progress and doing really good things."

- Charles M. Hannum, NetBSD founder



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## Our Personal Experience

We share a sense of unique community ... on-line with each other.



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### Our Personal Experience

We share a sense of unique community ... when interacting with users.





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## Our Personal Experience

We share a sense of unique community .. at conferences, trade shows.



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## Our Personal Experience

We share a sense of unique community ... in our industry experiences.



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### Our Personal Experience

We share a sense of unique community ... serendipitously.



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KDE

## A Literal Description

KDE is a community of people ...

who produce desktop software ...

that is used all over the world.



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### Therefore KDE is:

- a desktop.
- a project!
- a platform?
- a "powerful Free Software graphical desktop environment for Linux and Unix workstations."

**\*YAWN\* / "Huh?"**



## Looking Ourselves in the Eye



### Yes! ... and no.

That is a *place* rather than a *direction*

Does not capture everything we are, were and will be

Yet we all know that there is something special about our project



### What is the essence of KDE?



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KDE

## Seeking Out Our Identity

**Active:** a verb (journey) rather than a noun (destination)

**Timeless:** consistent over the entire lifespan of the project

**Inclusive:** seen in everything we do, evident in everyone we are

**We each have a role to play in relating,  
being and interpreting this story**



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**KDE is**

**Building communities around Free software,  
and bringing Free software into communities.**





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## **We Do It Because**

**It is what we enjoy doing.**

**It is what we believe in.**



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## The Building Blocks

**Community**

**Technology**



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**Or as Tarzan Says:**

**Villages**

**Tools**



## Looking Ourselves in the Eye



### Our Village

Artwork

Documentation

Human-computer interaction

Marketing

Quality assurance

Software development

Translation



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KDE

## A Whole World of Villages

Cultures

Professions

Avocations

Companies

Technologies



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## The Fundamental Unit





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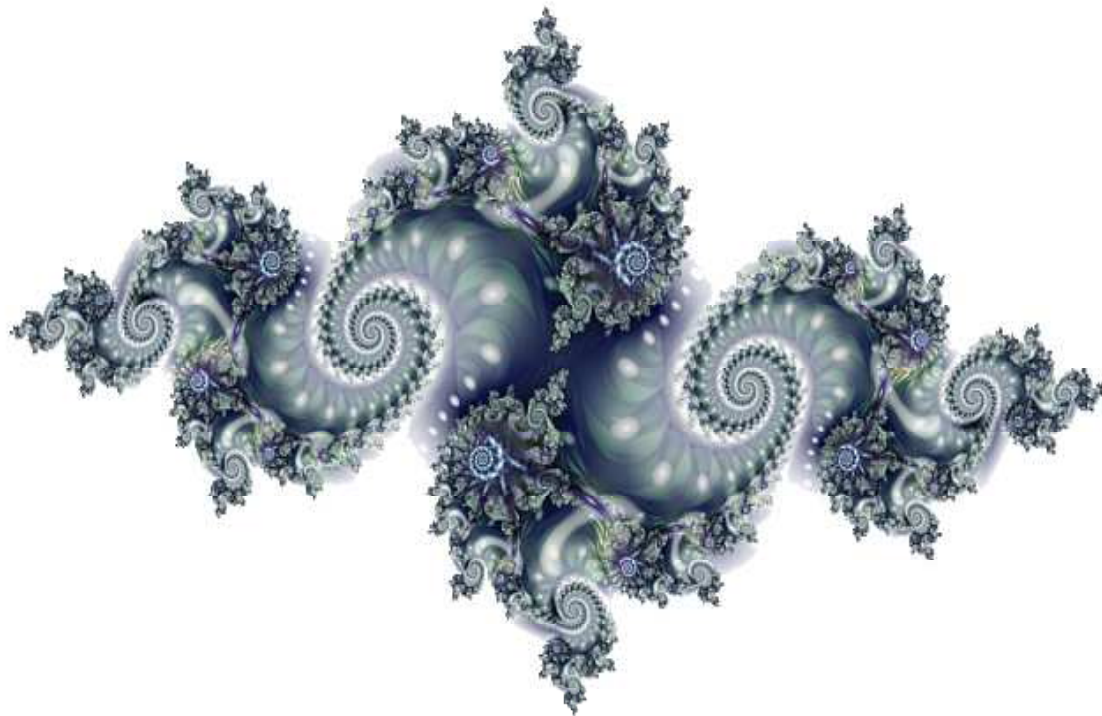


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# Looking Ourselves in the Eye







## Organic Self Organization

Smaller structures cooperate creating larger structures

Local simplicity allowing for global complexity

"Lighting up the coastline one lamp at a time"





## Plasma: A Lighthouse Beacon



Plasma started with

- A visual style
- A naming scheme
- Technical priorities
- Specific design fundamentals



## Replicating Consistency

Certain new projects adopted some of these hallmarks

- Phonon
- Solid
- Decibel
- Oxygen

... there are other blueprints at work, too



## Central Coordination

Sometimes we do need central coordination

Supports (not supplants) the organism

Examples

- KDE e.V.
- the working groups

*Think about coordinating with others!*



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KDE

### The Role of aKademy

Building community within KDE

Reaching out to other communities

Creating Free software that kicks ass!





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## Challenge One

KDE4



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KDE

## Challenge Two

Growing our community



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KDE

## Challenge Three

That marketing and management thing





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## Challenge Four

Succeeding without sacrificing what makes us special



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## KDE is

**Building communities around Free software,  
and bringing Free software into communities.**

Slide Note 1:

Slide Note 2:

The project is 10 years old.

Initial purpose: bridge the usability gap.

Slide Note 3:

Now we're taking the next step of creating something inately desirable.

Slide Note 4:

What started as a fairly small group of people (30-ish) working together is now pushing towards 2000 people.

What started as a code base one person could grasp all at once within their mind is now a huge sprawl of not only libraries but immense and impressive applications.

And over this same time span we've accrued a user base in the millions, one that is likely growing yearly by at least 2 million, and that's not counting desktops that run KDE applications in another environment.

This leads to various efforts to monetize and otherwise put KDE to use.

These signs of success bring with them both advantages and challenges that we are experiencing now and will continue to experience in the years to come.

Slide Note 5:

Simply put: to manage the success to date and push on to even greater things without losing what it means to us to be a part of the KDE team.

We have come to expect an increasing level of continuity from every aspect of the project: software and interface design, art direction, public relations, industry involvement. We need to know what KDE is to achieve this.

Our limited resources require that we are efficient. Constantly discussing issues that would be otherwise answerable independently and without long group deliberations is a waste of those resources and a recipe for error or non-action. Requiring too many people to be involved in locally solvable issues also draws upon our resources.

Preserving KDE over time requires that we share a well identified concept of what that is. I want to see this project thrive for generations to come. New blood should invigorate the project and reinforce what we have going here.

When those who join us or even come after us are given the knowledge of what this thing they are becoming a part of is, they can continue on with focus. Confirming our identity is how we pass on to future generations of the KDE family what it means to be part of KDE.

Part of our team. Part of our process.

so we ask ourselves: what is KDE?

Slide Note 6:

We've all had similar experiences and it is what not only binds us together but helps us define direction together.

This is visible to the outside world ... we get complimented all the time by people on the outside peering in. In fact, people in Hannum's other "good example" have actually sat down and discussed with us how we manage to get the stuff done that we do. They aren't alone.

We ourselves experience a unique sense of community...

Slide Note 7:

Slide Note 8:

Slide Note 9:

Relate 3-4 highlight examples of community experience ...

We've all had similar experiences and it is what not only binds us together but helps us define direction together.

How do we hold it all together? Primarily through self-organization. We avoid descending into chaos due to our common bonds and communication. This is achieved through our shared experience of community.

Slide Note 10:

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Slide Note 11:

So ... how do we describe this sense of identity in terms of KDE?

Slide Note 12:

A community...

- 1500+ people on 5 continents, most of whom are volunteers

- ... building up a storm of software

  - 4,000,000+ lines of code

  - 100s of applications

  - One of the most complete client side platforms in the world

- ... that is used the world over

  - Millions use KDE (6-10% market penetration; KDE is 60% of that?)

  - Not just Europe and North America: Asia, Africa and South America too

  - Scientific communities using KDE software

  - Education: LTSP has millions of seats and the core of their educational software is KDE's educational suite

Slide Note 13:

... while these statements may all be factual ...

Do any of them actually communicate something that:

we will still relate to and work towards in 6 months, a year, 5 years, 50 years from now?

gives us an idea of who we are or where we are going?

Does any of this really capture our story and represent what KDE is in a way that's both understandable and attractive to others?

Does this definition inspire you? Does it really communicate to people who aren't intimate with KDE the way we are what KDE is?

Slide Note 14:

It's the destination not the journey

There must be a reason we have such a vibrant community of contributors and users, are so popular and so widely deployed and why so many other projects and people look up to us as an organization.

Slide Note 15:

What is KDE?

KDE is the combined story of each one of us and that which we create .. It is the summation of our actions which just happen to produce software which bears our name. Most importantly, it is a verb rather than a noun.

Over the last 10 years we have delivered 3, soon to be 4, major revisions of the K Desktop Environment. Each has been distinct in scope, technology and creative teams. Collectively these releases have spanned numerous releases, each consisting of 1000s of individual changes. During this time core technologies, individual applications and contributors have come and gone in a natural ebbing and flowing.

In this way both our product and our community continues to evolve in the most organic of fashions.

But since these things are variable over time they are not what KDE is. Rather, they are the result of what KDE is. So we are left once again asking ourselves: "What is KDE?" "What is our community?"

This story of community defines our reason for being here and why most of us got involved at all in the first place. It is therefore important for us to identify this story because it is what drives us forward with purpose even as everything else changes with the tides.

Every one of us here plays a role in telling, being and perpetuating this story. This is because each of us is the story and, at least in part, are defined by that story. While it is true that we are here for a variety of different, often personal, reasons, those reasons all contain a shared harmony.

Slide Note 16:

Slide Note 17:

Because we enjoy the process,

believe in the results

and want to share it with people around us.

We each have our own why, as well as our own how. We're a group of individuals that are bringing this meaning into being together. That's part of what is so special about this: extreme diversity working on a common set of aims. Willingly. Voluntarily. Passionately.

Slide Note 18:

Slide Note 19:

We know what the tools are: software. That's the technical conversation we'll be having for the next week here in Dublin.

Right now We're interested in discussing the first aspect of this equation: the community, or village.

Slide Note 20:

Within KDE there are several disciplines practiced which together make up our community.

1500+ people engaged in doing their thing

Each of these groups is further made up of smaller groups that are also self-similar

There is great overlap between these communities as well: many people exist in more than one KDE community at a time. Some are involved with more than one Free technology community and bridge our community with others. In fact, it goes beyond just technology because ....

Slide Note 21:

... we exist as a borderless village. This is how we bring technology into other communities: by co-existing with them.

People from various communities take up a non-exclusive citizenship, if you will, within the KDE community. We often do the same in return, and this results in massive cross pollination and people with vested interests in both KDE and the other communities they call h

ome. The lines start to blur and this gives KDE greater stability. We don't simply rely on people being turned on about C++ code and desktop computers, but about their life and how these tools affect it.

Slide Note 22:

Making up all of these teams, communities or villages is the discreet unit of "individual people". It is this swirling mass of thoughtful, creative individuals that give KDE its shape. Just as Great Barrier Reef is made up of millions of creatures, so KDE is made up many people (apologies for the music in advance ... 3 minutes of photos later...)

Slide Note 23:

Slide Note 24:

When we try and fit the template of our essential definition to the reality of the project, we find that KDE shares a fundamental trait with fractals: self similarity.

What describes the overall project often describes most any individual component equally well. This pattern emerges due to our practices of self organization ... what does that look like and how does it contribute to what makes KDE special?

Slide Note 25:

If you had to start from scratch and try and build this entire thing from the group up in a top-down fashion, it would be a herculean task that most people in this world could not accomplish.

We make the improbable possible by relying on our essential principles to guide the project into being a remarkable, organic and complex set of structures through self-organization.

KDE is, at its heart, still very simple: people building community around free software because we like doing that.

It's like lighting up a coastline: stringing all those lights on your own is a monumental task but when each community does it you can q



quickly illuminate and define the very complex coastline which is otherwise not visible at night.

Once identified, it becomes apparent that this process is a powerful, valuable tool for us to use purposefully in order to affect positive global improvements within KDE while retaining what is already working well.

Slide Note 26:

Slide Note 27:

Other projects replicated, and sometimes mutated, the concepts in plasma for their own use. Some adopted the whole package, others cherry picked bits such as "a cool name that doesn't start with a 'k'".

It gives the project a feeling of harmony, direction and unified vision that is as visible externally as it is to us.

Before we knew it we could see the coastline of KDE4 start to emerge.

And now people who live on other islands or just float by in their passenger ferries can make out the shape of our coastline too.

No top-down structure and very little (almost zero) organizational effort was needed.

This is just one example of the self-organization in KDE.

Slide Note 28:

No tool is good for every situation, and so sometimes we also need central coordination.

Marketing, HCI and technical working groups. KDE e.V. --> enable large scale decision making and processes which require coordination and buy-in. e.g. aKademy, consistent and concerted marketing for the project, ensuring there are release cycles, etc.

It's not either/or, it's both/and: we constantly rely on both in different mixes.

Suggestion: When working with other communities, think about coordinating first with others in KDE so that we export an orderly and functional interface rather than a chaotic one that may work for us but which is ultimately confusing and scary for others.

Slide Note 29:

As we push the envelope of technology we're also pushing the envelope of creative mechanics. Nobody has done what we're doing in the manner we're doing it. We're crossing over from the realm of a small team working on simple code bases to enormous teams working on massive constructions. We're one of the first "enterprise scale" projects in the Open source world, if you will. And unlike the few o

ther projects of similar scale and ambition that exist we're not driven by any one company, we're not overseen by a single human entity and we're not content to simply reimplement what's existed before us; and we're doing it in what is one of the most difficult market segments for open source.

The uniqueness that surrounds us means we have to figure out a lot of new stuff. We don't have all the answers for today but we're getting there year by year, release by release, commit by commit. It takes time and we need patience with our selves; we also need to lay out what our goals are, individually and collectively. Each one of us has a part to play in this thing we're doing and we're each going to do it a bit differently in accordance with who each of us are. That is, in it's barest essence, why we are here at aKademy. To take new, exciting, hard, fun steps forward that make us feel like we're fulfilling our goals in life. We are here to embrace the challenges before us and do what we do best: solve them while enjoying the process.

Slide Note 30:

So what are the challenges we face? We could go around this room and collect probably a hundred things that need to be addressed in the short to mid term. I've made an exhaustive list of my own, and really I find that they all sort out into these umbrella issues ...

- \* Defining the feature sets
- \* Forming a release plan
- \* Binary compatibility, accessibility, artwork ...

Slide Note 31:

- \* Reaching out to a broader global audience
- \* Core developers, artists, usability

Slide Note 32:

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Slide Note 33:

Slide Note 34:

Master Page Note: