Promote exposure, awareness for software testers in Malaysia

ONE example of how professions that were once obscure but have now become essential in Malaysia's quest to fulfill its economic target is the demand for software testers.

The local software industry is growing so fast, in fact, that there is a danger that the country may be seeing a shortage of software testers sooner rather than later.

There is now an effort to promote software testing as a key specialisation in the software industry.

Under the Malaysia Software Testing Hub (MSTH) initiative, ensuring a continuous and consistent supply of software testers have become a key agenda in Malaysia's ambitions to become a key player in software testing.

MSTH is a public-private initiative to develop the software testing industry as a new source of economic growth. The initiative is under the purview of the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department and the Malaysian Software Testing Board (MSTB), as representative of the industry, has been entrusted to lead the planning and implementation of programmes under the initiative.

Establishing sustainable supply of competent software testers, along with balanced development of the market — both demand and supply sides, are crucial elements in establishing a sustainable software-testing ecosystem in Malaysia, thus transforming the country into a preferred destination for outsourced software-testing services.

As part of the MSTH communications programme, MSTB is organising a series of events in major cities to promote awareness of software-testing and MSTH programmes over the next few months with Penang being the first stop.

The Penang event will see MTSB conducting a recruitment drive for software testers and held a C-Level discussion with relevant Penang-based companies on the software-testing industry development programme.

For students from universities in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia, MSTB during a Career Talk, provided an opportunity for them to learn more about the merits of choosing software-testing.

"The purpose of this talk was to share with students, particularly those in the software engineering field of studies, the career opportunities and prospects available in the software-testing discipline," said MSTH president Mastura Abu Samah.

She said in addition to the talk, MSTB will also hold a Testing Tools Workshop, which will provide participants with practical demonstration and hands-on experience on industry-leading automated testing tools typically used in advanced testing projects.

She further explained that from the onset of MSTH roll-out in 2009, it has been acknowledged that Malaysia must have a quality pool of skilled and competent software-testing professionals to support the envisioned software-testing ecosystem.

"MSTB has been promoting internationally-recognised professional certification for software testers under the International Software Testing Qualifications Board (ISTQB) scheme. Obtaining the certification is crucial in our global market positioning as it documented proof that the competency of our test professionals are on par with similarly-certified professionals from other parts of the world," she added.

Currently, Malaysia has more than 2,000 ISTQB certified testers and the target is to have 10,000 by the end of the 10th Malaysia Plan (2015). Malaysian universities are anticipated to contribute a large portion of the number.

Mastura said towards achieving this, eight universities are in a pilot project aimed at generating ISTQB-certified testers from among graduating software engineering students, and Universiti Sains Malaysia is one of the pilot universities.

Other universities are Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka and Universiti Malaysia Pahang.

The pilot programme also involves the German Testing Board (GTB) as an international collaborator. Similar to MSTB, GTB is an industry-driven organisation, comprising representatives from Germany's big names such as Fraunhofer FOKUS research institute, T-Systems (part of Deutsche Telekom) and Lemförder Electronicand Sogeti Deutschland.

For its part, GTB provided lecture materials for use in the MSTH Pilot Programme. The materials, based on ISTQB foundation level syllabus, are currently being used in 40 universities across Germany. Experts from GTB also regularly participated in seminars and workshops for the pilot universities, sharing Germany's experiences developing the country's software-testing industry. Germany had more than 25,000 certified testers as at end of 2012.

Lessons learnt and other implementation experiences from Malaysia's pilot programme are being collated and will be used as input to improve the lecture materials and formulation of a roll-out programme to all universities. — *by CHARLES FERNANDEZ*

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