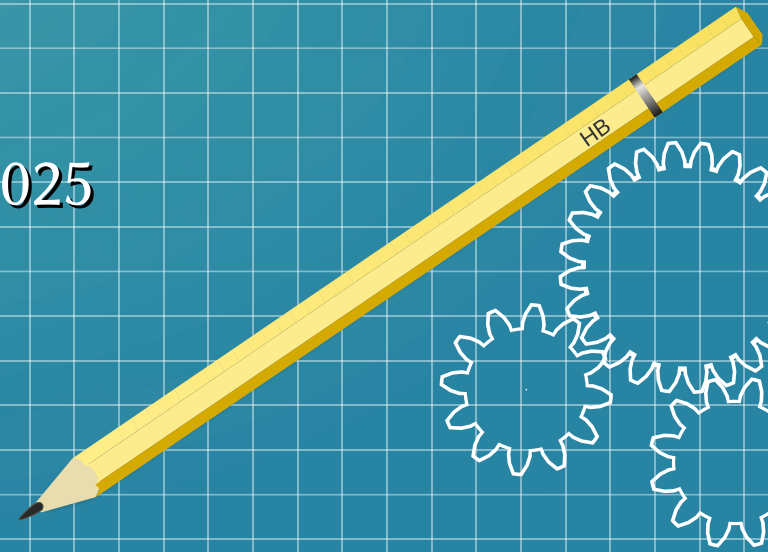


Why open source communities do(n't) work (anymore)

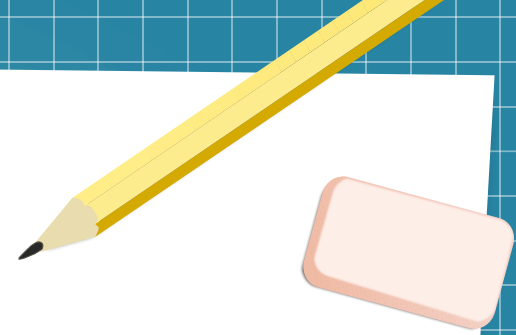
Lessons learned over the past 21 years

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SFSCON, 8 November 2025

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First things first



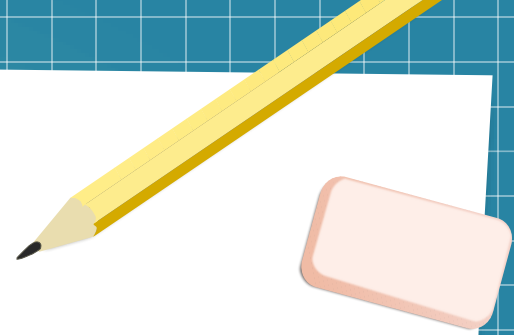
- This presentation is based on my **personal experience** of 21 years
- For the purpose of this talk, I use the terms “**free software**”, “**FLOSS**” and “**open source**” interchangeably

My journey with free software



- 2001 **Selfmade router for school**
***Knowledge and software** available free of charge*
*Documentation, forums, help from the **community***
- 2004 **OpenOffice.org**, e.g. marketing project lead
Responsibility, trust, learning, got to know myself
- **Volunteering → Learning → Engagement**
Freelance IT journalist, consultancy for companies

How to define FLOSS?

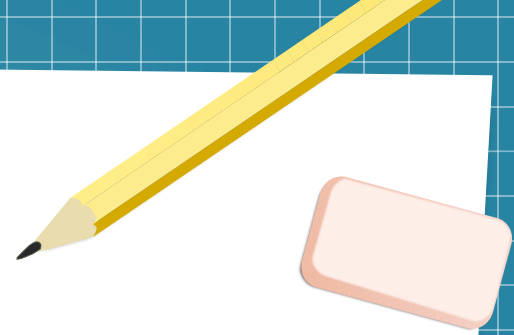


legal

e.g. certain licences

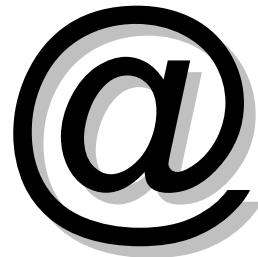
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How to define FLOSS?

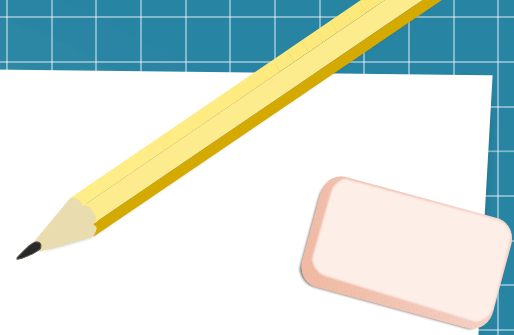


technical

e.g. freely accessible repositories



How to define FLOSS?

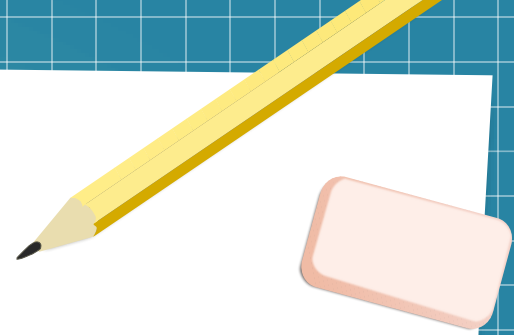


tax/financial

e.g. non-profit, for the public good



How to define FLOSS?

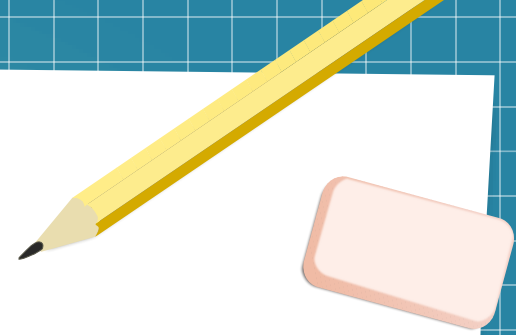


organisational

e.g. as an association or foundation



How to define FLOSS?



human/social

equivalent of **humanitarian projects**,
implemented through **software and technology**,
for the **good of society**, with **higher goals** in mind



The harsh reality



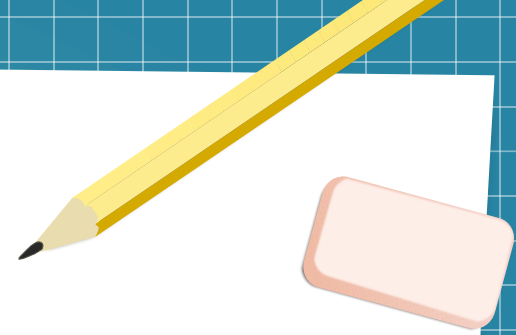
- **Not everyone cares** about licences, open standards or freedom
Many people are pragmatic and technology is “not their thing”
- **The geopolitical situation** makes some more people think
But how sustainable is this? We have already had major scandals...
- **Cost** is the most noticeable factor
How important is this with supposedly “inexpensive” subscriptions?
- Cloud is down vs. own FLOSS infrastructure is down
Double standards, “too big to fail”
- In “real life” **comparable to animal welfare or “buy local”**

The world has changed



- From a **“colourful character”** to **“business as usual”**
We’ve arrived at the market, but are also judged differently
- Companies seem **more open source-friendly** now
There are more offers and more “competition”
- Our former **unique selling points** may be diluted

Growth has its price



Ongoing **professionalisation**

Associations, foundations, companies, lobby organisations



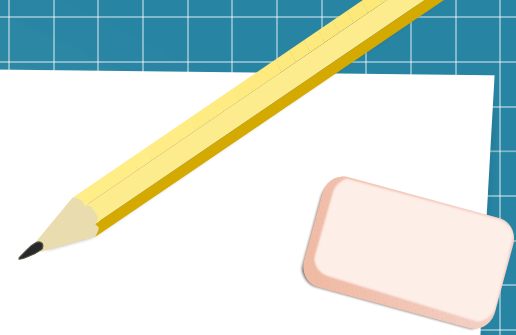
Commercial **value**

E.g. codebase, marketing, reputation and brands



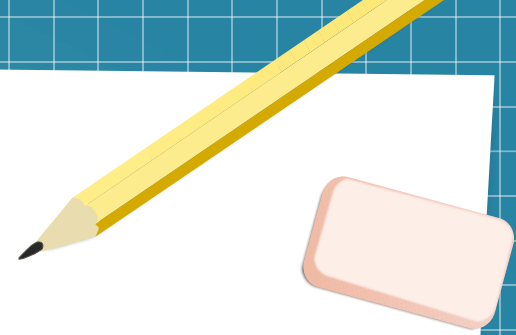
“Politics”

Challenges and obstacles



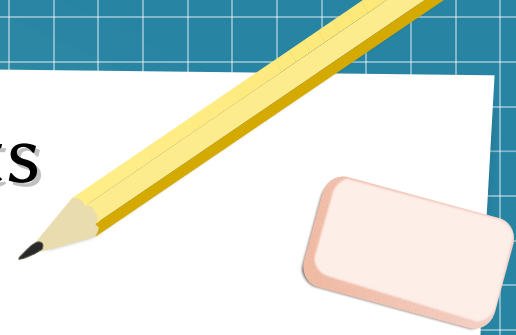
- Balance project interests and **personal/company interests**
- **Frequently interact** with other projects and organisations
- **Avoid narrow-mindedness** at any rate (*“we've always done it this way”*)
- Plan for **changes in the economic situation**
 - **contributors**
e.g. change or loss of job, lottery win, inheritance
 - **end-users and customers**
e.g. migration away from FLOSS
 - **sponsors and donors**
e.g. inflation, change of company strategy

Challenges and obstacles



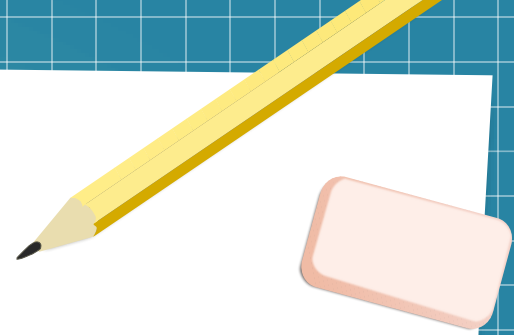
- Expect **alternative products, web apps and forks**
- Work on **good governance**
 - “Compatible” and **competent leadership**
 - Set **clear responsibilities**
“We’re all just volunteers...”
 - Follow **laws and regulations**
Most of them apply to nonprofits as well

We need to remember our roots



- Good FLOSS projects are **sustainable**
- They support the **common good**
- Anyone can use them, **anyone can participate**
- Contributors usually have a **special connection** to the project
Let's make use of their strengths and skills
- Mentoring and **knowledge transfer** are key
- In the “spirit of free software”, **projects must support each other**

Our strength



Our strength lies within
our **people** and their **mindset**

Used wisely, this leads to
better software and **better decisions**



Any questions? ;-)

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