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The Story of Open Source Development by Zoltan Mesko

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Open Source Software Development is the process of developing software whose source code is freely available without any restrictions and limitations. Open source software development is a community-driven methodology to develop products, from the design and development stages to distribution. Developers across different parts of the world are passionate about their collaboration, and several successful projects including Firefox, Moodle, and Drupal are widely considered the behemoths of open sourcing today. Moreover, many companies are using open source software as the foundation to build their business models.

The story of open source development started long before Richard Stallman created the Free Software movement. In the 50's and 60's almost all the software that existed was mostly produced by research institutes. Software was not seen as a product. In those times, computer companies were in the hardware business; and software was made freely available to encourage hardware sales. The source code was distributed with the software because users often had to change the code to fix bugs or add new features to support hardware issues. During this time software was developed and distributed by communities of user groups and no effort was needed to make it freely available. Things started to change in the early 1970's when operating systems and compilers began to grow very fast, with the emergence of micro-processors. For almost a decade until the early 1980's computer vendors and software companies began to routinely charge for software licenses, and sell software as a product imposing legal restrictions on new software developments through copyrights, trademarks, and leasing contracts. At that time two different groups, both in United States, were establishing the roots of the current open source software (OSS) philosophy. In the East coast, a programmer at the MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab launched the GNU Project and the Free Software Foundation, his name was Richard Stallman. On the West coast, the Computer Science Research Group (CSRG) of the University of California at Berkeley were improving the UNIX system, and started to build lots of applications which quickly became known as â€œBSD UNIXâ€•. With the advent of Usenet, an Internet user group, programming communities started to share their software and contribute to each others' work. This is when the real development of the open source movement began.

Today, open-source approaches have emerged in fields like biotechnology and bioinformatics. The international effort to sequence the human genome, for instance, resembled an open-source initiative. It placed all the resulting data into the public domain rather than allow any participant to patent any of the results.

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