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Free Software vs. Proprietary Software

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Decision Keys

- Available resources

Technological



Economical



Human



- Institution policy

- Research: Own developments
- Agreements with software companies



Technological resources evaluation

- State of the art
- Hardware availability
 - Hardware may limit the software
- Environment
 - Operating system
 - Available server software
- Development tools
 - They may not be available



Economical resources evaluation

- Budget for software licences
- Budget for IT staff
 - Developers
 - Administrators
 - Training
- Evaluate maintenance cost
 - Licensed software: Licences + support contract
 - FOSS: In-house staff or support contract



Human resources evaluation

- Staff training
 - IT Staff
 - End users
- Motivation
 - IT Staff
 - Non IT Staff



Institution policy

- Software availability due to agreements with software companies
 - “Campus” licences (Microsoft)
 - “Free” training licences
- Promotion of free software / Open source
- Departments that promote software development
- Our experience:
 - Hybrid environment FOSS + Software Licences



Development vs acquisition

- Advantages of own development

Total control of the software

Taylor-made software

Long-term benefits

IT Staff training



Development vs adquisition(2)

- Advantages of adquisition
 - Fast deployment
 - Development responsibility is outside our organization.
 - If the source code is available, we can adapt the software. In this case we'll need some learning time.
 - This software is used by many users, therefore it is intensively tested.



Development vs adquisition(3)

- Disadvantages of own development
 - If there is not a previous know-how, learning curve
 - Development gap
 - Changing requirements during development



Development vs adquisition(4)

- Disadvantages of adquisition
 - Licencing costs
 - External dependancies
 - We have nothing to sell

Our own experience

- Own developments:
 - Intranets for projects: workflow system for a Helpdesk system.
 - Extranet for projects
 - Backup tools
 - Statistics management



Acquisition

- Proprietary software in end users PCs
 - Well known by users
 - MS Windows, MS Word ...
 - Adobe Acrobat suite
 - Fireworks
 - Provided by the Institution



Modifications

- Free software modified by the IT Team
 - OpenKM: a free Knowledge Base system
 - Modified to adapt it to the needs of the project.
 - Moodle
 - Drupal (on going work)



Conclusions

- The key factors for deciding for one of the possibilities will be:
 - Available resources
 - Institution Policy
 - Own development capacity



And what about you?...

- What problems have you encountered?
- What decision have you made?
- And what about the results?