

Why Free and Open Source Software Matters and What Commercial Enterprises Might Do About It

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You are standing at the end of a road
before a small brick building. Around
you is a forest. A small stream flows
out of the building and down a gully.
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From “Adventure”, a program created by Will Crowther and extended by Don Woods in the mid 1970s

Plan

Part 1: Why should commercial enterprises pay attention to free and open source software?

Part 2: What might commercial enterprises do about it?

Why should commercial enterprises pay attention to free and open source software (FOSS)?

Free and open source software

realizes the potential that software offers

for efficient aggregation of the efforts
of many participants

who may be
diverse in geography, time, skills, motivation.

Economic and technical fundamentals

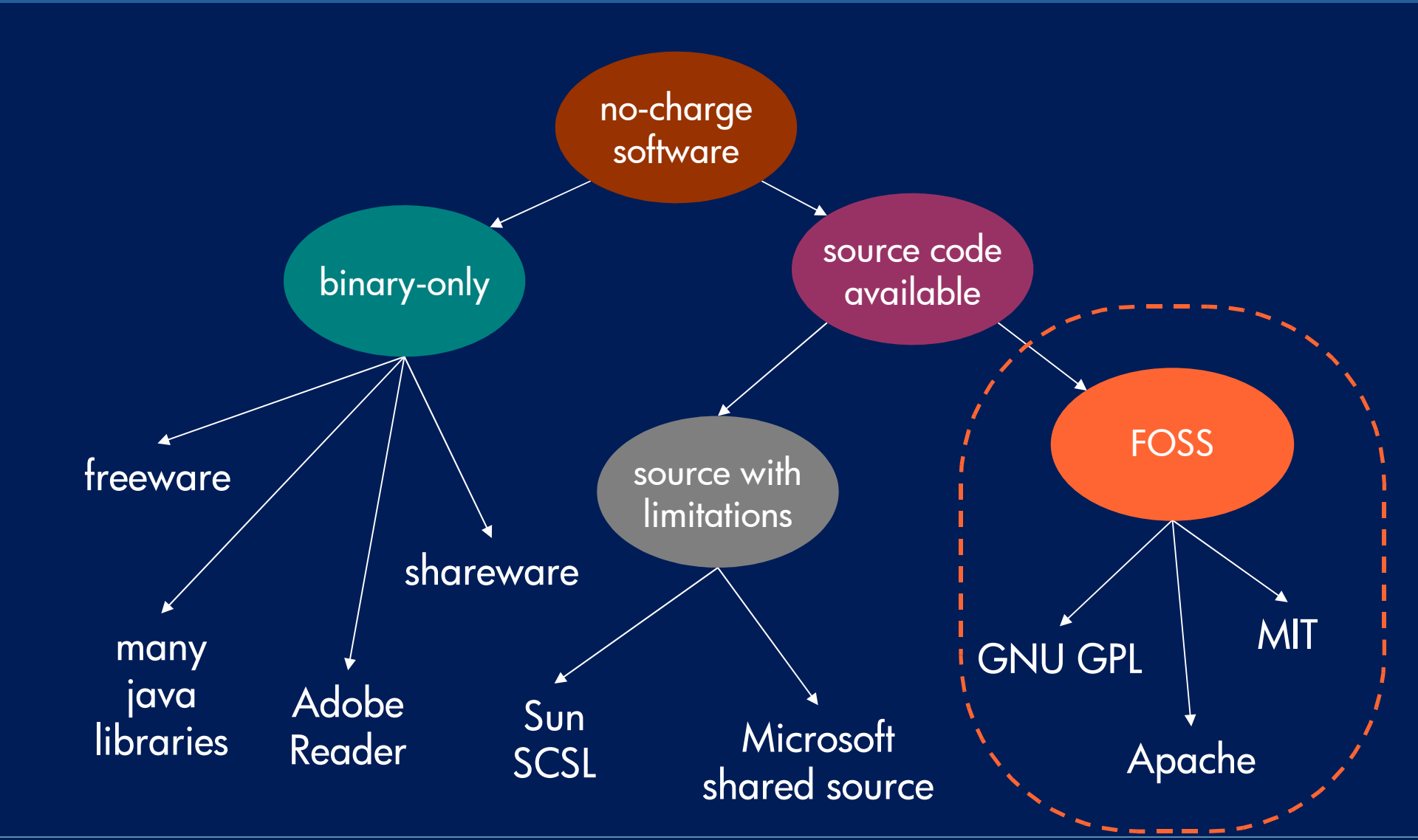
- Software has zero marginal cost
- The web provides a low cost collaboration and distribution mechanism
- Low cost tools (hardware and software) for software development are widely available

Role for licenses

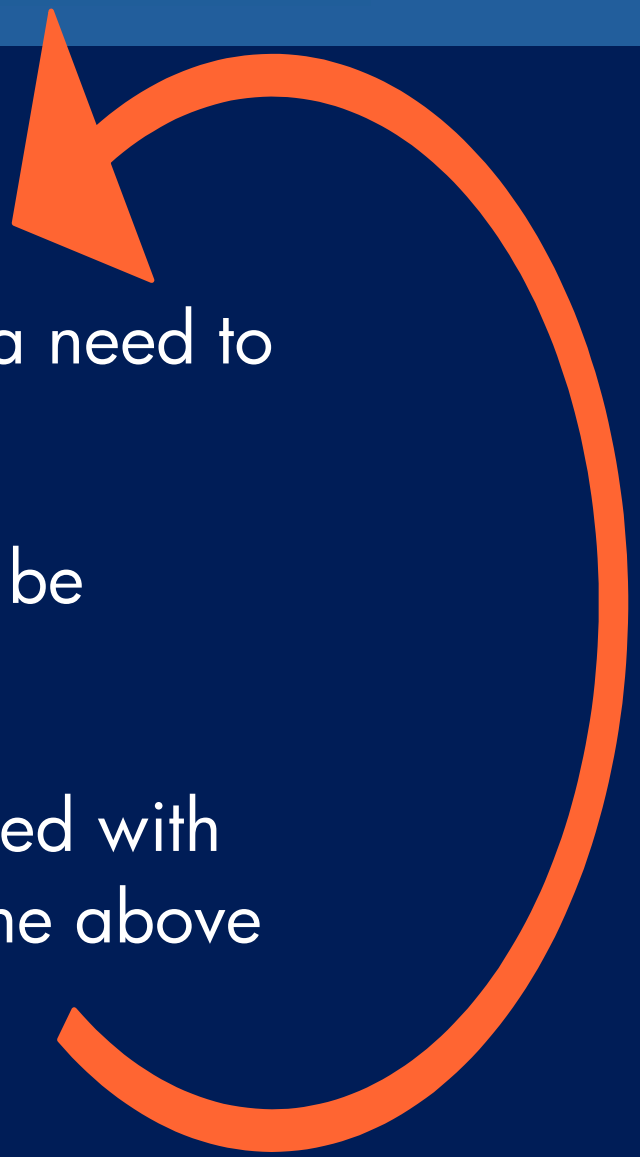
But, default copyright rules would be an impediment

- Software is automatically subject to copyright
- Author's permission is required for copying, modifying, distributing

FOSS in the context of other “no-charge” software

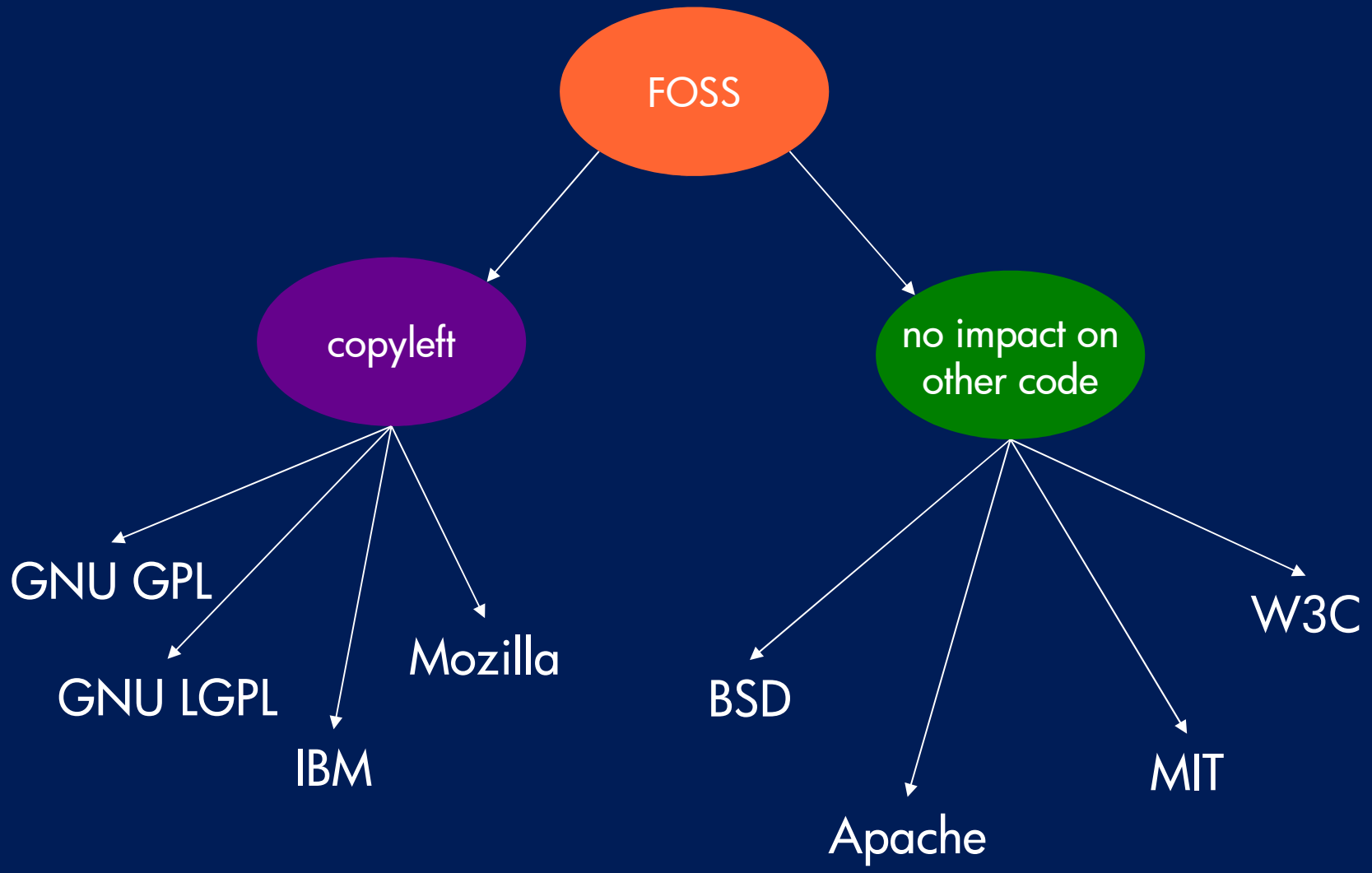


Major characteristics of FOSS licenses



- redistribution is permitted without a need to pay fees for distributed copies
- source code is available and may be modified
- modified versions may be distributed with permission for others to do all of the above

Two types of FOSS licenses



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Part 2: What might commercial enterprises do about it?

First: Understand

First,

- Understand the phenomenon, including the practical characteristics
- Determine the relationship that enterprise will have

Then,

- Adapt processes according to the chosen relationship

Adapt processes – Third party software

FOSS is third party software that is licensed

- internal processes should reflect this basic fact
  - provide for diligence in understanding license terms and taking steps to abide by them
- but, existing contract review processes may not be appropriate
  - volume; lack of negotiation or execution; FOSS may enter the organization through different route

Adapt processes – Education

Establish correct understanding across the business

- FOSS is unfamiliar to many
- FOSS is unlikely to be a point activity that only a few people need to understand

Adapt processes – Possible additions

- Central function
  - where FOSS is well understood
  - central awareness of all FOSS activities
  - develop connections with the community
  - review business unit activity to confirm that decisions are based on sound understanding and analysis

- Develop tools
  - amount of activity can create an information management challenge


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