

development goals. Code artists are intrinsically motivated and choose and decide their own individual priorities. Software still gets finished because the most challenging elements attract the highest attention. This coordination from within favors the journey instead of the goal and still leads to results. The chosen path is often different from the one a well-managed commercial software project would have taken, and usually it also incurs fewer compromises of quality versus deadlines. If such compromises are accepted on a regular basis, it is generally a good sign that a Free Software project is in the process of turning into a commercial, or “less Free,” one. Typically, this happens when either a major group of developers spin a company off the project, a funding partner asserts control over major contributors, or the project itself stops innovating and goes into maintenance mode.

Most kinds of structure and organization imposed on a Free Software project are met with resistance. Contributors join KDE for many reasons, but enjoying the bureaucracy of the project is not one of them. People who join a Free Software project usually are very aware of using and protecting their own freedom of choice. At the same time, the necessity of a minimum amount of formal organization is recognized. Although almost all technical challenges are no match for a good team, formal structure is where centrifugal forces are most effective. Many Free Software projects have dissolved because decisions of political scope were forced through by influential team members. Finding a formal structure that solves the problems the project faces once it becomes significant but at the same time does not hinder the further technical development is one of the most (or the single most) important steps KDE had to take in its history. The fact that a very stable and accepted structure was found surely contributed significantly to the long-term stability of the KDE community.

In 1996, KDE founded KDE e.V. as the representation of the KDE contributors. An e.V., or “eingetragener Verein,” is the classical not-for-profit organization in Germany, where most of the KDE contributors were based at the time and where the contributors met. The main force leading to its creation was that a legally capable body representing the project was needed to enter into the Free Qt Foundation. The Free Qt Foundation was an agreement between Trolltech, the makers of Qt, and KDE with the purpose of ensuring that KDE always had access to Qt as a free toolkit. It guaranteed (and still does) that, should Trolltech stop to develop and publish the free version of Qt, the latest released free version can be continued without Trolltech. This agreement was even more important when the free version of Qt was not licensed under the GPL. Today it is, and the foundation is now dealing mostly with resolving copyright subtleties, developer rights, and other similar issues. It was important because many contributors would have hesitated to spend their time on a project that ran the risk of being commercialized, but it also served as an example that KDE as a project must be able to carry legal rights. Later on, the KDE trademark was registered and is held by KDE e.V., which assumed many other responsibilities such as serving as the host of the large annual KDE conference.

Regarding the architecture and design of KDE, the organization is still rather influential, even if it is not supposed to manage the development. Since it is assumed that most of the