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xGUS - a helpdesk template for grid user support

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The xGUS helpdesk template is aimed at NGIs, DCIs and user communities wanting to structure their user support and integrate it with the EGI support.
xGUS contains all basic helpdesk functionalities. It is hosted and maintained at KIT in Germany. Portal administrators from the client DCI or user community can customize the portal to their specific needs. Via web, they can edit the support units, variables which are used for the classification of tickets like 'Type of problem', 'VO'etc. and the hyperlinks to related web pages displayed on the portal.

The xGUS portal is a template framework for a helpdesk system. It is based on BMC Remedy ARS with an Oracle database for the tickets and a MySQL database for news and user administration.
The portal contains various features needed to provide effective user support. Users can access the portal using their grid certificate imported into their browser or via login and password. They can submit tickets via a web form and classify their problem by setting e.g. a 'type of problem', an 'affected site' or a priority. The tickets get assigned to the appropriate support unit by the first level support. The responsible support unit gets informed via email about open tickets. The user can choose whether he wants to stay up to date about every step of process or only get notified once the problem is solved. Users and support staff can also use an email interface to add comments to the ticket. When replying to an email received from the helpdesk, the answer text is added to the ticket history.
Support staff can create relations between different tickets. If several tickets depend on the solution of another one, they can be marked as slaves. When the master ticket is solved, the solution is transferred to the slaves and they are solved automatically. If one ticket depends on the solution of several other tickets, these tickets are marked as children of this ticket. Only when all of the child tickets are solved, the parent ticket can be solved, too.
With the news module, which is included in the portal, events and news can be announced via the portal. Registered users can add tickets of their personal interest to their dashboard.
Subscription to a ticket triggers email notifications about ticket updates for interested users who are not the submitter.
Tickets which can not be solved within the helpdesk instance, can be duplicated to GGUS, the EGI helpdesk. All changes which are made in GGUS are synchronized to the original ticket.
The xGUS instance is a tool to track and document problems. It can also be used to collect statistics on the problem solving process.
Based on the same technology, adjustments the interface between GGUS and xGUS can be made quickly and efficiently. Clients need not care about technical details of their helpdesk system. All server related issues are handled at KIT, as well as the operation and maintenance of the helpdesk portal itself.

Summary

With the xGUS framework DCIs and user communities have easy access to their own, independent helpdesk system with many helpful features. They can benefit of the experience gained over several years in the GGUS team instead of starting from scratch with a new helpdesk system. Their user support can be integrated into the existing and well-established structure with GGUS at the center. All problems described in the tickets are stored in databases as well as the steps that have been done to obtain a solution. Each helpdesk system becomes a problem database which can help to solve similar or related problems.

The helpdesk system gives project leaders and users the possibility to gain an overview of problems and to find out where improvements could be necessary.
xGUS offers a comfortable way for user communities, who need a user support infrastructure, to obtain an independent helpdesk portal which provides all necessary functionality to track and classify problems. It enables a quick and easy communication between the user and the support staff. Helpdesk administrators can customize the helpdesk to the specific needs of the community. They can set links on the portal which are helpful for users like domumentations or other relevant web pages.
The use of xGUS guarantees a consistent user support infrastructure linked into the central support systems of the major grid infrastructures.

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