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The Delay in Submitting the CD, and What to Do About It

This is my summary of the chronology of events that led to slipping the submission of the CD to SC22 by two weeks. In my opinion, the process we set up for reviewing and approving the CD before submission worked as planned. The delay was ultimately caused by confusion about the charter of the Project Editor (and his helpers). I have made two recommendations for how this charter should be clarified in Monterey and how the editing process should be improved.

1. Chronology

At Austin, we agreed to a schedule for finishing changes to the WD, having it reviewed by an ad hoc editorial group, and then submitting it to SC22 as a CD, along with the Disposition of Comments document. Our scheduled mailing date for the CD was April 14, 1995.

On Sunday, April 2, as part of the planned review process, Bill Plauger submitted approximately 150 comments of various kinds on the library clauses of the draft, which were referred to the library editors, including Mike Vilot and Nathan Meyers. The subsequent changes did not resolve (or in some cases even address) the comments. In email sent on April 12, Tom Plum characterized the remaining issues as falling into these categories:

A) WG resolutions from Austin (3/95) which are not yet incorporated (or not completely incorporated) into the Library section;

B) substantive Library changes made since Austin that were made without any WG resolution to support them;

C) WG resolutions prior to Austin which are not yet incorporated into the Library section;

D) substantive Library changes made prior to Austin that were made without any WG resolutions to support them.

In many cases, Mike and Nathan's changes had apparently been guided by internal Library subgroup discussions or personal understandings that were not reflected in WG resolutions. As for the seriousness of the issues, Tom indicated in a phone conversation (April

13?) that the category A and B problems were such that he felt obliged to raise procedural objections with SC22 on the CD on the grounds that the CD did not reflect the WG's decisions.

Given that we were within two days of the mailing, that there was not a known consensus on WG or library subgroup intentions on some issues, and that the editors and reviewers were submerged in discussions of the editors' charter and license, there was no realistic possibility of resolving the technical issues in time. (I was not aware of the specific issues. I received a copy of Bill's comments on April 12.) Since Bill Rinehuls had indicated that the SC22 office would be shut down the week of April 24, and ANSI is on a two-week release schedule anyway, the minimal delay would be two weeks. I informed SC22 we would be taking that delay, and would work out the problems.

With Josée's assistance, several more iterations were made on the library sections over the next two weeks. The entire process was rather painful because it appeared that the actual edits did not always correspond to the description of the edits, and that new changes were being made even while trying to reach closure. However, by the end of April, everyone had agreed on an acceptable combination of editing changes, editorial comments (boxes), and Monterey action items to resolve the open issues, and the CD was sent out according to the revised schedule.

In my opinion, there was no need to involve other members of WG21 in this process. We were following the agreed-upon edit/review procedures, the people involved were technically competent, and attempting to introduce more people into the sensitive technical and personality problems would likely delay us even further.

2. Editorial Charter

I believe the review process operated as intended, but there is clearly a disagreement over how much latitude the editors have to make changes at this point in the standardization process. The "Skaller Resolution" gave wide latitude to the Project Editor in making important¹ changes, so long as they did not contradict WG decisions and so long as suitable editorial boxes were introduced as notification. In order to keep advancing the CD, however, we must ensure that we can trace important changes from previous WD versions to new versions via explicit committee decisions or unavoidable action by the project editor. In email sent April 13, I outlined my opinion on what the editor's charter should be:

At this stage, the Working Draft editors' responsibility is to make the WD reflect the decisions of the committee as recorded in the official resolutions. Under the agreed-upon WG21 and X3J16 procedures, small-group discussions are only used to determine what resolutions to bring before the committees and/or what vote to recommend on other resolutions. They have no weight in changing the content of [the] standard.

Editors have latitude in making purely editorial changes, including expanding on descriptions in a way that does not change their meaning.

1. An "important" change is one that is substantive (i.e., that changes the set of valid programs, conforming implementations, or their behavior) and also is not an obvious or trivial correction.

We have also given editors the authority to make “command decisions” on content if the resolutions or existing text were clearly impossible or self-contradictory. (But not in cases where the editor [simply] felt the resolution was ill-advised.) In the cases where such [command] decisions were made—or might have been made—the editors must bring each before the committees at the next meeting for confirmation or change. When we are producing a final draft between meetings, as now, these issues should be brought before the review committee. This extremely conservative approach is the only way to reconcile the committee’s right to control the standard with the project editor’s more detailed knowledge of the actual words.

Once a WD is approved by the committee (possibly with explicit exceptions from the editor’s issues list), it becomes the law—even if later we discover that some inconsistency with past resolutions crept in unnoticed. Any other policy would lead to even worse confusion. When an uncorrected problem is rediscovered, it must be brought forward again—hopefully in a way that lets the committee reaffirm its previous (but unimplemented) intent. This is actually a benefit to editors, because you don’t have to continually review ancient resolutions.

I recommend that we repeal the Skaller Resolution and replace it with a charter similar to the above.

3. Post-Meeting Editing Sessions

Our experience after Austin indicated how valuable it was to have an immediate editing session following the meeting. A group of people working together and providing immediate feedback on issues that arise can produce a much better draft. After Austin, this was done for all sections except the Library. Post-meeting editing sessions are, in fact, explicitly encouraged by ISO.

I recommend that we establish the post-meeting editing session as official policy, and ask all subgroup leaders to ensure that enough people will be available to do all the editing explicitly called for at the meeting. More than simply a convenience, this process will help ensure that the editing work is done efficiently, and will minimize surprises later on. The Project Editor can then make any additional editorial or formatting changes that turn out to be necessary.