ISO/IEC JTC 1/SGFS
Title: ISO/IEC JTC 1 Special Group on Functional
Standardization

Secretariat: NNI (Netherlands)

Title   : EWOS Liaison to ISO/IEC JTC1/SGFS: Comment on SGFS
            Issues List (N 439)

Source   : EWOS

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To: ISO/IEC JTC1/SGFS

From: European Workshop for Open Systems

Date: 10 April 1992

Subject: Comment on SGFS Issues List (N439)   '

In addition to the comments on TR 10000-1.3 previously
submitted in EWOS/TA/92/14, EWOS makes the following comments
on the Issues raised in N439.

EWOS also proposes that consideration of the procedural
aspects of the issues discussed here should be taken up by
SGFS in the broader context of the JTC1 Special Working Group
on Procedures (SWG-P).

Issue #2: New Functionality

EWOS believes that the process of creating and approving ISPs
which is currently in place for OSI Profiles does not lend
itself to filling in items of functionality which are not
present in the referenced standards. The solution is, as
identified in the discussion of this point in N439, to
identify the missing element and seek to obtain its
standardisation, either by amendment of existing standards, or
by creation of new standards. In this situation, the issue
becomes identical to that described under Issue #3 - "Gaps".
This is an issue which is general to Functional
Standardization, and not just to the OSE extensions.

EWOS is aware of a growing need to include some aspect of
"identification" of the desired/selected profile, and this
seems to be an issue which is touched on at one point in Annex
A of N439. But unless the base standards for interworking via
protocol or interface provide for the transfer of such
information, there is little the profile can do to fill the
gap.

Issue #3: Gaps

Where a Gap is identified during specification of a Profile,
the ISP should identify the function that is not standardised,
but not include any reference (normative or informative) to a
source of potential definition or product to fill the gap.

The question is asked (from the current standards point of
view) how an informative reference can actually fill the gap
in an ISP; if it is informative, it has no formal status for
the implementor or procurer; if it is intended to be
definitive, then it runs up against the problem of introducing
such specifications into a standard by the back door.

The user of the Profile (supplier or user) can make his own
insertions into the gaps, using criteria of availability and
market acceptance to choose between any competing solutions;
this aspect cannot be regulated by the Profiles or by the
standardisation process.

In general, it is a good suggestion to profile writers to
include as much as possible of what is considered to be useful
information in a Profile, and to make use of Informative
Annexes to hold such text. Guides to good practice can
significantly enhance the usefulness of an ISP,' without
necessarily going to the extent of laying down firm
requirements.

There is a suggestion in Issue #3 in SGFS N439 page 3 line 7 -
keep ISPs with gaps at DISP status until the gap can be filled
by the "proper" route of base standardisation (fast tracked if
possible). This should not be necessary, given that the ISP
contains only the identification of the gap, not a proposed
filling for it. In addition, ISO/IEC documents cannot remain
permanently at DIS status - they must be withdrawn or turned
into Technical Reports.

Normally, the initial process of scoping a new Profile should
select functions that are, or are likely to become, available
as standards. The situation of backtracking from an intended
definition is described in WDTR 10000-1.3 (N442 subclause
6.1.3.b, and a modification to that is proposed by EWOS in
EWOS/TA/92/14 item 7).

Issue #4 - Conflicting Options

This is not a new issue for Functional Standardisation - just
as it is not a new issue for base standardisation. A clear
example occurs in the FTAM profiles (AFT11 etc) where the
roles of sender/receiver, intitator/responder are mutually
exclusive, yet specified as options of the one profile. The
solution which says that separate profiles should be defined
for each of the unique combinations still does not solve the
issue, since two systems which desire to communicate have to
select compatible profiles, which is no harder (or easier) to
arrange than that they should select compatible options of the
same profile. The supplier's solution is often to provide all
the relevant competing options in one implementation - but
where there is a lack of a dynamic selection process, the
situation for the user may still exist, when dynamic
configuration of each system may take place.

It should remain an objective of both the base and functional
standardisation processes that unambiguous specifications
should be provided in order to prevent such situations
arising.

Issue #8 - Trivial Conformance

The experience of OSI profile work has been that problems of the nature described in Annex C occur when particular decisions on conformance classes are taken when a base standard is initially written, and these do not turn out in practice to be the correct choices. The answer to this, as with the Gaps issue, is to return to the base standard and either remove completely, or reorganise the statements on conformance.

A standard which is written with the expectation that profiling will occur probably should only include the minimum of conformance requirements, sufficient only to ensure a working interface or protocol. A standard which is intended to be a complete and self-sufficient definition of a set of functionality could go further and have higher expectations of conformance by implementations.

This issue should be directed back to the main JTC1 standardisation subcommittees, and (in particular) to SC21 WG1 which is particularly concerned with conformance methodology.

Issue #9 - Indirect Reference

The first example quoted in Annex D seems to be a case where a Profile could validly choose between two stated alternatives; but if those alternatives are still in the class of informative options, the profile cannot legitimately make such a choice into a requirement on the implementor.

As mentioned above under Issue #3, guides to good practice can significantly enhance the usefulness of an ISP in such a situation.

Other Open Issues have either been addressed in TR 10000-1.3 or in the EWOS comments on it in TA/92/14 (SGFS N5xx).