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ISO/TC 97 SPECIAL GROUP ON FUNCTIONAL STANDARDIZATION

Summary of results achieved at the first meeting of the ISO/TC 97 Special Group on Functional Standardization.

The fundamental results of the four days' meeting of the Special Group on Functional Standardization (= SG-FS) have been laid down in the accompanying documents TC 97/SG-FS/1 (with Annex 1, the list of the delegates present), 5 and 6 (together forming the Minutes) and TC 97/SG-FS/4 (the Resolutions of the meeting).

Since there may be many parties working within the large TC 97 field (Information processing systems) and related fields interested in a quick evaluation of the SG-FS's activities, the delegates to the SG-FS meeting decided to complement the official documents mentioned with a brief overview of the results and a general idea of the work to be done in the near future.

Constitution of the Special Group on Functional Standardization

An important result (which is not in the minutes!) is, we feel, the fact that delegates were present and were working harmoniously together from various parties and organizations in the IT field that were, up to now, often working apart from each other. The list of delegates exemplifies this:

- o the General Secretariat of ISO and IEC were both represented
- o experts on functional standardization from Japan, Europe and the USA attended, the delegates representing both the TC 97 sphere, IT manufacturers' and users' organizations such as POSI, SPAG, MAP/TOP, OSITOP and COS that were, up to now, working outside the ISO/IEC environment.

All delegates realized that the status, scope and rules of the SG-FS were, to begin with, only partly defined, but this proved no handicap: the discussions were not bogged down in procedural matters. On the contrary, the orientation was decidedly practical and pragmatic.

The field

It was considered essential to start with a discussion on the scope and aims of the SG-FS and a definition of the most important concepts used. The following definitions and boundary lines were agreed upon:

- o The term functional standard will in the SG-FS's practice be replaced by the term International Standardized Profile (ISP), defined as: An internationally harmonized document which identifies a group of (existing) standards, together with options and parameters, necessary to accomplish a function or set of functions.



The SG-FS will request ISO (or ISO/IEC) to establish a new type of publication to be known as ISP.

(The reason for this new name and new type of publication is that the procedure underlying an ISP is extra fast and that a DISP may, if need be, contain material that is not yet standardized.) The status of an ISP was estimated to be comparable to the status of an ISO/DIS (draft international standard).

- o The aim of the SG-FS is to develop ISP's within the field of TC 97 (Information processing systems). This means the work is not limited to the OSI-environment, although in its initial stage this OSI-terrain is expected to be the main part of the field to be covered.
- o ISP's can and should be developed in those regions where a gap concerning interoperability exists between a number of fundamental (or base) standards and applications that are required by the market. (This, in fact, limits the field: where the fundamental standards have been written in such a way that they can be implemented without serious risk of endangering (future) interoperability, they can be considered sufficiently functional in themselves, thereby rendering ISP's superfluous.)

The challenge - time lines and quality in IT standards

ISP's build on (a number of) already existing base standards. This is firm ground, but those standards intentionally and of necessity leave the implementors many options and parameters to decide for themselves. Moreover, many implementations that the users require are up to now insufficiently covered by the existing standards. Since the traditional procedure for developing standards takes a considerable time, there is the great danger that manufacturers and/or large scale user groups or users meanwhile implement their own de facto standards. Therefore, ISPs should be developed

- o together with the most important manufacturer and user organizations,
- o preferably harmonized (which also means: acceptable) on a worldwide scale,
- o within a very limited time frame,
- o with a high technical quality level.

The most important result of the meeting may well be the procedure developed within the SG-FS in order to combine these four seemingly incompatible requirements. As described in Resolution 3 (document TC 97/SG-FS/4 Rev.. and the ISP process schedule illustrated in the Annex to that document), the timing for the completion of the ISO processing of an ISP is targeted as 7 to 10 months (technical stability to be achieved within 5 to 7 months).

This is achieved by dividing the normal work associated with the development of a standard into two parts. The initial technical drafting work, i.e. the first part, is done outside the ISO environment (and therefore outside the time frame of 7-10 months), the second part, comprising the editorial review, the balloting among TC 97 members and of course the publication, inside ISO.

This division requires a high level of quality of the incoming proposals made by the so-called "feeder" organizations (or originators - TC 97 SC's may also contribute feeder documents). It is assumed that in order to

achieve this level

- o the proposal will be accompanied by an Explanatory note, including a checklist,
- o there will be a joint planning operation of feeder organization and ISO,
- o the (technical) development process done under the aegis of the feeder organization is sufficiently open (membership, voting rights etc.).

Also, an early warning system is envisaged:

1. The plan to draft a PDISP shall be announced as soon as possible to the Taxonomy Group,
2. Every PDISP received from a feeder organization shall immediately upon receipt be distributed by the SG-FS secretary to all SG-FS-members.

Since it is assumed that in the procedural (ISO) stage no important changes will be made in the technical contents of the proposal, this effectively leaves the 6 months' period necessary for technical scrutiny as used with fast track standards unimpaired.

The future

Important tasks that yet have to be done before the SG-FS can be said to have reached the point where feeder proposals can be accepted, reviewed and processed:

- o The planning of the SG-FS's priorities and the working methods have to be defined, starting with a classified catalogue of ISP's. This catalogue must, in order to be sufficiently market oriented, be developed in close cooperation with the feeder and liaison organizations. (A convener for this working group has been appointed. The group will meet in June in Washington).
- o The requirements necessary to safeguard the integrity of the process have to be established.
- o The rules of the SG-FS have to be laid down and the SG-FS's recommendations (and solutions) have to be accepted (perhaps in a modified form) by the ISO (or ISO/IEC). Also, the SG-FS's rules (e.g. as to membership and liaisons) have to be implemented.

This is still "a tall order". The group's atmosphere, however, is such that it is considered possible to process the first feeder documents before the end of 1987.

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