



LETSI: HR-XML Consortium Seeks Cross-Domain Interoperability

By JIM FARMER | Published: November 19, 2008

This is a guest post by Jim Farmer.

“Learning, education, and HR standards communities have very little to show in terms of cross-domain standards interoperability and convergence despite significant investments over a period of more than a decade.” Chuck Allen, Executive Director of the HR-XML Consortium, made this assessment of standards that cross the boundaries of standards-setting bodies in a “White Paper” submitted to the LETSI SCORM 2.0 Workshop held October 15-17, 2008 in Pensacola, Florida. As learning systems exchange data with various administrative, ERP and human resources systems, standards are needed to avoid expensive continuous redundant software maintenance.

Although Allen didn’t cite historical opportunities, during development of the HR-XML resume specification, the Consortium requested assistance from higher education in recording competencies and the description of academic work such as publications. Higher education did not respond.

In his contribution Allen, as an example, asked for assistance in defining Score as a Type “A numerical record of the marks allotted to individuals in the measurement of abilities, capacity to learn, in the assessment of personality, or in other measurable characteristics (e.g., credit worthiness).” Allen wrote: “‘Score’ is a data type used in at least a dozen contexts within the HR-XML Library. Organizations such as the Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC.org), among other learning and education standards organizations include a Score data type definition within their standards. Broadly speaking there is much similarity in design and in the recognition in a need for such a data type, but no uniform practice among and between standards organizations. ... The addition of a Score data type to the CDT will provide a basis for more uniform treatment of this key data type across different HR, learning, and education standards organizations.”

Allen recognized the difficulty of cross-domain-should we say “cross organization”-efforts. “Constructive liaison between standards organizations that produces tangible results is very challenging. Often convergence and interoperability initiatives are scoped too broadly. Instead of taking on broad topics as areas for convergence, a more constructive idea is for standards organizations to commit to the creation of a small set of lower-level core data types. Another

common problem is that liaison between standards organizations almost always fails when framed as “convergence” between two standards.”

Allen suggested cooperation: “In developing the next generation of SCORM standards, I urge LETSI to work with other standards stakeholders on a narrowly scoped project aimed at developing a small set of neutral core components that each organization could draw upon as their time lines and priorities dictated.”

He further suggested: “UN/CEFACT provides the methodologies and neutral turf where this work might be achieved. Resources are thin across the standards community, but I believe a small amount of attention to a handful of common components could have a big payoff. As an example, I’ve provided a discussion draft related to one such component proposed to go into HR-XML’s forthcoming version 3.0 library. This has been submitted for the consideration by UN/CEFACT’s core data type catalogue committee.”

College and university CIOs should agree with Chuck Allen. This standardization is especially important now. More than seven higher education “standards” organizations are working separately on these common elements.

A copy of Mr. Allen’s “white paper” is available here [<http://www.letsi.org/letsi/pages/viewpageattachments.action?pageId=4754275>] and also here [http://www.immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/HR_XML/H080821A.pdf].