Co-Evolving OpenXML And OpenDocument Format

As the accusations/counter-accusations fly before the ballot resolution meeting on OpenXML (DIS 29500) I long to be a modern-day Mercutio crying out "A plague o' both your houses."[1] But that won't foster co-evolution between OpenXML and OpenDocument Format (OpenDocument herein).

If we had a co-evolutionary environment, one where the proponents of OpenXML and OpenDocument, their respective organizations, national bodies and others interested groups could meet to discuss the future of those proposals, the future revisions of both would likely be quite different.[2]

Co-evolution means that the standards will evolve based on the influence of each other and their respective user communities. Both remain completely independent and neither is subordinate to the other.[3] What is currently lacking is a neutral forum in which proponents can meet and learn from each other.[4]

Creating such an environment is going to take time and effort so I would like to suggest a first step towards fostering co-evolution between OpenXML and OpenDocument.

Companies should follow the example of Novell with its participation in both TC 45 (OpenXML) and the ODF TC (OpenDocument) committees. After the DIS 29500 BRM those committee's will be SC 34 and the ODF committee. Such committee members should contribute insights and solutions learned while working on the "other" Open* standard.

I have been asked why as the Project Editor of ISO/IEC 26300 and OpenDocument TC Editor, why am I advocating such cooperation?[5] The answer is fairly simple. The difficulties we face today are the result of not talking to each other in the past and we can't change the past.

But we can decide to act differently today. Today we are not going to be silent but speak to someone working on other standards. Today we are going to try to help with another standard. Today we will work towards a common meeting place in SC 34. Today we will sponsor conferences on multiple standards for developers. Today we are going to .... (What goes here is up to you.)

Peaceful co-evolution will mean better standards at lower costs in a more timely fashion. What is there to not like about that?

Patrick Durusau
Chair, V1 - US TAG to JTC 1/SC 34
Convener, JTC 1/SC 34/WG 3 (Topic Maps)
Editor, OpenDocument Format TC (OASIS), Project Editor ISO/IEC 26300
Co-Editor, ISO/IEC 13250-1, 13250-5 (Topic Maps)

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1   Romeo and Juliet, Act 3, Scene 1
2   A co-evolutionary environment would include UOF (Unified Office Format) and PDF/A as well.
3   See co-evolution at Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-evolution.
4   Personally I think SC 34 would be the appropriate environment, modulo some rule changes to create roles for vendor consortia and to make the entire ISO process more "open" in the traditional sense of the word.
5   My work on OpenDocument Format 1.2 is being sponsored by Sun Microsystems although I am not an Sun employee. This and other opinions that I express are solely my own.