

Highlights of WS-I Spring Community Meeting: June 14-17, 2005 in Amsterdam

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I. Executive Summary:

Probably the most important event at this meeting – an IBM led BOF (Birds of a Feather) session on **B2B Web Services Profile**- was a non- happening for WS-I. This raises the question of what new work WS-I will take on now that the Basic Security Profile (BSP) documents are nearing completion. The B2B Profile, presented by IBM, includes three sets of emerging web service standards: WS Addressing, WS Reliable Messaging (without WS Policy aspects) and the WS-I BSP. It was noted that two of three WS Addressing documents were nearing completion in W3C (core document and SOAP binding). The WS Reliable Messaging standard work is just starting this month in the newly formed OASIS WS-RX TC. The BSP work should be completed by this fall at the latest (see BSP WG report below). So it appears that all referenced web services standards are mature enough for profiling.

More details on the B2B Profile will be discussed later in this article. Let's first review the key accomplishments of the various WS-I Working Groups (WGs) as reported at the closing plenary:

-BSP WG voted to generate a set of new public working drafts, which will likely become the final WG approval draft this July. A revised charter for the WG will be developed for WS-I Board of Director (BoD) approval. It will recommend work on a **BSP 1.1 set of documents**, which will profile the OASIS WS-Security 1.1 documents - now in Technical Committee Draft status. "Fairly comprehensive" BSP 1.1 draft documents will be developed this summer. The OASIS WS-Security 1.1 drafts were viewed as being "incremental changes" to the WS-Security 1.0 standard, so the WS-I profiling work should not take too long. Only other work will be to review the Sample Apps and Test Assertion Documents to be completed by those respective WS-I WGs.

Note that the four existing WS-I BSP drafts (from May 2005) are available for download and public review from:

<http://www.ws-i.org/>

-Sample Apps (SA) WG reviewed and revised their Secure SA Architecture document. Target completion date is this July. The SA WG had three joint meetings with Test Tools, BSP, and Requirements WG. SA WG could provide useful feedback on Use Cases and Usage Patterns being developed by Requirements WG, but can not generate actual sample apps without one or more profiles created (by a new, BoD chartered WS-I Profiling WG).

-Test Tools WG was without a chair for this meeting. Test tools for BSP interoperability testing are urgently needed. Paul Cotton of Microsoft, who chairs the **BSP WG** voiced the following concern at the closing plenary session, "Does the Test Tools WG have an architecture that can properly test the BSP?" There was no response to this important question.

-Requirements WG had a productive meeting, but not enough voting members were present to move on any of the motions generated. All motions were deferred to the next meeting (via telecon) that achieves quorum. The approach to be taken by the WG is to collect usage patterns and validate them against use cases. In the absence of sufficient use cases, the WG will ask the opinion of users – most likely via survey. Such a survey was already done to prioritize messaging models (Asynchronous Messaging and Reliable Messaging were the top two priorities from that survey). In the joint meeting with SA WG, it was noted that these usage patterns would be developed with a lot of detail, but short of protocol specification or profiling.

The following revised motion will likely be approved at the next teleconference (to be scheduled by a new Requirements WG chair, as the existing chair has resigned):

The WS-Requirements Group will develop a collection of usage patterns that are intended to explore potential interoperability issues surrounding asynchronous messaging, reliable messaging, and security.

It will accomplish this task with the following action plan:

1. Construct a limited number of usage patterns in common commercial use
2. Clear definition of terms used in the usage patterns (performed in parallel with 1)
3. Validation of those usage patterns through best efforts attempts to map these patterns to industry use cases. The mapping will be accomplished via solicitation to the WS-I membership and to customers via their WS-I member vendors
4. Explore available specifications and profiles to expose ways that these usage patterns may be implemented
5. Should there be sufficient doubt concerning interoperability of these realized usage patterns, one or more profiling charters may be developed for recommendation to the WS-I Board of Directors.

A “Response Routing” usage pattern, submitted by the IBM CIO office, was considered. In this case, the response of a request is routed to a different entity that originated the request. Static or dynamic routing could be used.

-XML Schema Study Group did not meet. Activity is deferred to next week’s W3C workshop on the same topic. WS-I members attending that workshop were requested to strive for a concrete conclusion to properly address the XML schema interoperability problems that were identified at the March WS-I Community meeting. Please refer to the March 2005 WS-I meeting report at: <http://www.webtorials.com/main/newsletters/dcti/WS-I-0305.pdf>

-Basic Profile (BP) WG is coming out of hibernation. **BP 1.1 with errata** will be finalized in July. After BoD approval, it will then be submitted to ISO JTC as a new standard. This author asked if the BoD’s had considered augmenting the BP to include **WS-Addressing** – now near finalization

within W3C. Answer: not yet. *That leads us to the topic of what new technical work WS-I might take on after this summer and the aforementioned IBM led BOF on B2B profile.*

II. "It's My BOF, I'll Cry if I Want to" [from Leslie Gore's hit song, "It's My Party" -AKA "It's Judy's Turn to Cry"]

Chris Ferris of IBM led a most stimulating BOF on IBM's work in creating a Business- to- Business (B2B) profile of emerging web services standards that are or have been worked by open standards bodies (OASIS, WS-I, W3C).

While the advantages of web services for eBusiness {or B2B} transactions have been well advertised, there is very little use of it today. Such a B2B profile, if adopted by a critical mass of users, could launch a huge new market for web services. An analogous profile for web services as grid infrastructure will be considered at next week's GG14 meeting in Chicago.

The IBM B2B Profile was developed as part of IBM's "client centric profile initiative" for an "on demand" IT operating environment (AKA IBM WebSphere platform). The current conundrum faced by users is rampant confusion, caused by a proliferation of web services standards and WS* specs (53 at last count). Many of these standards/ specs are overlapping or competing in functionality (*which could be the subject of a separate and long article*). As a result, users are not sure of what WS protocols, specs or standards to use, or ask their web services middleware vendors for.

Microsoft comment from the floor: "We ask customers what scenarios they want to enable (vs what specs/ standards they need)."

There is a huge recognized value in profiles:

- WS-I deliverables (BP along with supporting Sample Apps and Test Tools) have proven to be invaluable to users and reduces confusion in the WS marketplace.
- The profiles define what's real and implemented by many vendors.

However, WS-I is now in a holding pattern, with no new technical work taken on since the BSP WG was started. As per the summary above, that work is scheduled to be completed by this summer.

IBM observes that its customers and industry vertical groups are confused. They want to use WS for B2B apps, but they don't know how all the WS* specs fit together, which one's they need, or how they can be combined with (OASIS or W3C) WS standards. The B2B Profile is seen as being a means of breaking this web services industry deadlock.

IBM's client centric profile initiative is separate and distinct from the IBM-MSFT WS* workshop process. It involves the following action items:

- Collaborate with clients to understand their business challenges requiring standards based solutions.

- Identify sets of standards that address business challenges.
- Develop profiles and usage scenarios articulating the interoperable use of the identified standards.
- Identify solutions, which include client support and composability (with other specs/ standards) aspects.
- Use profiles and usage scenarios as a basis for product development and services engagements
- Work within industry groups to establish the identified usage scenarios and corresponding profiles as the broadly applied standard method.

The benefits of this approach are readily apparent:

- Increased interoperability, productivity, and flexibility.
- Reduced risk, time to market, and integration cost.
- Improved ROI.

This collaboration process – between IBM and its customers- has evolved over the last 18 months. The resulting profiles and usage scenarios are published royalty free and provide early implementation support (on WebSphere). There have been “proof of concept” demos, interop testing, and feedback provided to profiles and implementation teams. *IBM has observed the same web service requirements across many industries. However, web services policy expressions and assertions have found to be industry group specific.*

The **IBM Basic B2B Profile** (see references below) involves specification of all important aspects of: WS-I BSP (4 documents), WS Reliable Messaging (subject of several articles by this author), and WS Addressing (now nearing W3C standards completion)

Chris stated that WS-I could take on this work, whenever it chooses to do so. He said, “Customers want this work to be done within WS-I, which has brand recognition for specifying WS stacks.” The IBM B2B Profile even used the WS-I profiling template!

To this author, Chris’ offer to redirect the B2B Profile work to WS-I was a “nick of time” savior for an organization stuck in political (BoD) gridlock and rapidly running out of work to do.

In the ensuing discussion, there was general support for the B2B work, but no one suggesting it should be considered now by WS-I at this time:

- One BoD member got close to an endorsement (note: all comments are anonymously quoted). He stated, “The B2B Profile is very valuable work if web service are to be used for real business applications. The work should be done in WS-I or some other open standards organization.”

- Another important WS-I player (who also chairs a W3C standards group) seemed to make a strong case for doing the work in WS-I when he stated, “my company can’t implement this if it is controlled by IBM- it could change at any time.” But then he added, “WS-I will only work on projects that n-1 BoD members approve.” *That seemed to cool things off.*
- An end user in the audience chimed in with two thought provoking questions, “Does WS-I want to influence the outcome of end users B2B transactions using web services? If not this, then what else will WS-I work on?”
- One vendor suggested an alternative to the B2B Profile (which this author raised at the closing plenary during the BP WG report- see above): BP 2.0, which includes WS Addressing.
- Another vendor, representing a Japanese company opined that WS-I process may not provide enough visibility from start to completion of the project, because WS-I mailing lists are not open to the public (they are actually only open to WS-I member company representatives that have joined that specific WG).

So at one point during the discussion, Ferris stated, “**It’s My BOF and I’ll Cry if I Want To.**” He sensed good support for the B2B Profile work, but that attendees seemed to feel WS-I was not the correct venue for the work at this time. This raises two important questions:

1. What is a better standards organization; considering that WS-I is the only one that deals with interoperability aspects of web services (W3C and OASIS) standards?
2. Will WS-I cease to exist after this fall, as no new work has been chartered?

Having been involved in web services standards for well over two years, I was hoping WS-I would take on this work to enable web services to realize its market potential in eBusiness applications. I was quite disappointed that there was no follow up proposal to do this. As I left the room at the end of the BOF, I felt like it was "Alan's turn to cry."

Postscript: WS-I no longer has a monopoly on creating web services profiles! The GGF OGSA WG has just completed development of a **Basic WS-Resource Framework Profile**, which will be used in building a grid infrastructure on top of web services. “Report from GGF14” will be published in a forthcoming webtorials.com article by this author.

References:

1. **IBM Basic B2B Profile**

<http://www-128.ibm.com/developerworks/webservices/library/specification/ws-b2b/>

2. Understanding the IBM Basic B2B Profile

<http://www-128.ibm.com/developerworks/web/library/ws-b2bpaper.html>

3. Link to IBM view on organization of Web Services standards

<http://www-128.ibm.com/developerworks/webservices/standards/>