

Minutes from the joint meeting of the DALNET Steering Committee and the Information Hub D Committee (IHDC)

Chaired by: Scott Muir  
Those present: Karan Bacsanyi, Duryea Calloway, Willy Cromwell-Kessler, Joan Emahiser, Jim Flaherty, George Libby, Sandra Martin, Dave Murphy, Leo Papa, Kerry Sanders, Karen Torbolino, Ann Walasky  
Location: VA Hospital, Detroit  
Date: 11/29/00

The meeting began at 8:40 with a welcome from Scott and an appreciation that so many had managed to attend.

Scott, by way of opening procedures, explained that the joint meeting had been called out of concern and a need for clarification expressed during the last DALNET Board meeting. The question raised by the Board related to the duties and areas of responsibilities both the Steering Committee and IHDC enjoyed, where overlap existed and in what areas did both bodies realize their separate roles.

Calling upon others to help, Scott went over the original reasons the Steering Committee came into being: to guide and plan the implementation of Horizon®; to act as a cipher between the Board and the then Ameritech Corporation; and to help maintain the timetable envisioned jointly by DALNET and the system builders---all this as each part of the implementation plan was completed. The entire process was to have been finished by March, 2000. It was then thought that the Steering Committee itself would move on and grapple the concept of an 'information hub' which had long been considered the next stage in DALNET's continuing role, as an information provider in Southeast Michigan. However, since Horizon technical developments had become slower than envisioned, and negotiations with Ameritech became protracted as a result, the Steering Committee today now saw a major part of its role as an oversight body, ensuring Epixtech® meet its contractual obligations.

IHDC was formed to begin the task of making DALNET into a multifaceted information provider, using technical innovations to bring about the organization's use of multimedia platforms as alternative points of access. This in turn would help DALNET form partnerships with local non-profit organizations and provide a much-needed, conduit through which non-profits would reach more of their constituents. DALNET would evolve into an organization at the center of Detroit's revival, proving and promoting the ideal that organized, timely and accurate information could best be met by DALNET through its member libraries.

The point was raised that a technology committee had at one time existed, but had not met often. With concern growing over Ameritech, and unfulfilled deadlines coming and going, technology outside that of Horizon was given less prominence. Many libraries had been bringing their systems online and problems inherent in a tight schedule pushed the need for such a committee into the background. It was revealed that reviving the Technology Committee again had recently been discussed. It could fill the twin roles of advice and research, as to how technology be integrated into the growing environment of databases, hardware and software all needing to work together in a coherent system.

Discussion moved on to how well each committee was fulfilling its role within the organization. The Steering Committee was now more of an advisory body to the Board, but this role was tending to slow down or retard other developments proceeding elsewhere. Its primary concern was to have the Horizon system run efficiently, meeting the needs of all its users, but that goal took up most of the Committee's resources, causing progress in other areas to become fragmented.

IHDC for its part was investigating other technologies to enhance information access; digitization was one such technology, but thought to be of limited use without a versatile search engine to link each content area. Some felt communication was a component lacking in the present structure; it seemed that in many cases one committee was ignorant of the others concerns and progress.

The question was asked...referring to a technology committee... that, given the number of other committees already formed, was yet another absolutely necessary? Would a new committee be formed from members of the existing two and would this then provide the necessary communication thought lacking?

Other comments stressed IHDC's evident global role and outlook and that this same role called for it to communicate more with other areas within the organization. As achievements are realized within IHDC, are they should be compatible with Epixtech's developments, which DALNET inevitably must make use of through the Partnership Agreement?

It was suggested the phrase, 'steering committee'.....a body to steer and advise, to make concrete, long-term decisions for ratification and implementation by the Board. However, such a committee needed input from small investigative groups that would focus on small elements of a much larger picture. The two elements combined would lead us in a straight to where we wanted to go.

General consensus was given to the idea that the information-hub concept was at the philosophical heart of DALNET, but that today our concerns are taken up with Epixtech and the much-needed enhancements it should be providing. Our growth is constricted by our lack of progress in implementing Horizon fully. IHDC is engaged in doing more of what DALNET should itself be doing. The need for a focused vision, coupled with coordination and effective communication is evident. The concept of a partnership between DALNET and Epixtech is a valid one, but in tandem with that is the need for the Steering Committee to have a new voice. A concentric authority and decision-making process seems to lie with a small core who in turn seem to inform the Steering Committee. Yet, this is at odds with the Committee's fundamental role of finding ways to implement and integrate change. Does the Committee, through its role, prompt non-communication?

The point was raised that the Board itself is running out of patience with Epixtech which means the way it sees its progress forward is unclear, because its vision is bound-up in its frustration with a lack of progress.

A series of questions were then raised for discussion:

- a) Why should the Steering Committee change when IHDC is already fulfilling its role?
- b) Should we be looking at changing roles in both committees?
- c) Will the information hub work directly out of Horizon or will it be somehow grafted into the existing system?
- d) Access restrictions: who sees what?
- e) What function has the Meta-Data Subcommittee?
- f) What is it's overlap and relationship with the Database Subcommittee?
- g) Where is the meta-data to be used?

At this point discussion shifted to the Meta-Data Subcommittee and an illustration was handed out, showing the various elements of a database structure. Willie Cromwell-Kiesler briefly explained the illustration after which she explained the uses of meta-data.

The Meta-Data group is primarily concerned with standard-neutral methods that will work across disparate platforms. Yet, in order for that to happen, methods need to address every need and requirement of the database of clusters of databases. The need for an over-arching search engine is crucial to address to database protocols. However the work the group is doing remains unclear as to where, how and when results will be implemented, and who has the decision-making powers.

Discussion ensued concerning the relationship between the Database and Meta-Data Subcommittees, which in turn led to a larger discussion concerning the relationships between all the DALNET committees. (Please see diagram.)

Attention shifted to the procurement of additional funds through grants. The recent efforts to write and submit a proposal based on the Institute Of Museum and Library Services was not fully understood by those present. How can a proposal be written without input from other committees closely concerned with implementing the specifics of a grant? On the other hand, it was also noted that institutions within DALNET were pursuing their own technological initiatives, an example being Detroit Public's research into wireless networks

The decision-making role of the DALNET Board was discussed in as much as how well informed it was and how dynamic was its approach to new technologies and what constraints are placed upon it because of the Partnership Agreement with Epixtech. Technology and systems personnel, at the varies institutions tend to 'shape' information

for presentation to the Board, but perhaps a more holistic approach is necessary, bringing service personnel into the mix.

Discussion continued concerning changing the charge given to the Steering Committee. However, before any application was made to the Board, an agreement between IHDC and the Committee would be a precursor. A model including communication, commitment and collaboration would need to be built, otherwise any direction new enhancements may take us have the potential to defuse goals and future planning. Having two liaisons, one from each committee, who would observe and report back to their respective groups was considered a useful suggestion and a positive step forward.

Finally the meeting considered the future role of IHDC itself. Could the Steering Committee be aware of Horizon developments and also be cognizant of trends in technology...or should IHDC's given mandate expand to include Horizon implications? How and when might this occur?

In the beginning, we asked the question, what was a hub. Can we have moved on and are grappling with significant change, but unless we continue to deal effectively with change, when it occurs, then inability to adapt will stifle future growth.

Respectfully submitted.

Dave Murphy

12/1/00