

MoReq2010 – on the track or off the rails?

A personal view from Marc Fresko

I am writing this in early August 2010 – some weeks before publication of this Bulletin. Such is the price we pay, willingly, for the privilege of reading the Bulletin in paper format. It is possible that the situation has changed in the intervening weeks – indeed I hope it has. For the moment however...

A potted history of MoReq

Most readers will be familiar with MoReq (now often called MoReq1) and MoReq2.

Both were projects of the DLM Forum and the European Commission (EC) to produce a definitive specification for systems that manage electronic records. MoReq1 was published in 2001, and was quickly accepted and adopted by many. It served the same purpose as the American DoD 5015.2 standard, but in a more accessible, pragmatic and less US-centric way. However, its success took both the DLM Forum and the EC by surprise, as there was a total absence of any infrastructure to support it. MoReq1 existed as if "orphaned", without any

software testing regime and without any governance of any kind. And of course technology moved on, lessons were learned... so the DLM Forum and EC determined to launch another project, MoReq2, to update the original and to ensure the update could be governed.

MoReq2 was published in 2008, also meeting with great approval – but also with great disapproval. Approval came mainly from the user community – tens of thousands of potential users downloaded and used it. The perceived value of MoReq2 was demonstrated by the number of translation projects: about 15 translation initiatives are being tracked, compared to 10 for MoReq1. But system vendors did not like MoReq2, complaining that it was too complex; that it was too long; that it was fundamentally mis-conceived; and just "wrong". With two honourable exceptions, >>>>



>>>> software vendors did not adopt MoReq2, and instead exerted their influence to get the DLM Forum to replace it.

So it was that the DLM Forum launched the MoReq2010 project, in Spring 2010. MoReq2010 aims to address the weaknesses of MoReq2, by:

- stripping out many requirements from the “core” specification, resulting in a more compact and accessible core;
- making the specification more “modular” and changing the relationship between the core and the modules;
- broadening the applicability of the specification, to bring in smaller systems and non-traditional record-keeping systems;
- rationalising and modernising the specification.

The MoReq2010 timetable

The current plan is that MoReq2010 will be completed and published by the end of 2010. Along the way, the project relies on two open, public, consultations. The first, to establish basic concepts, started in July and is under way as I write. The second is expected in the Autumn.

Unfortunately, the project has slipped seriously compared to its original plans, and continues to slip further. The first consultation was in two parts, starting on 7 and 22 July respectively (not 1 July as stated on the consultation Web site). Presumably in an attempt to claw back some of the slippages, the part 2 consultation was shortened to only two weeks. As part 2 contained many of the crucial records management concepts that will underpin MoReq2010, this seems grossly inadequate. Even the four weeks allotted to the part 1 consultation is unreasonable, given that the four weeks are in the middle of peak Summer holiday season. I can only express the hope that the DLM Forum agreed to extend both consultations, an agreement that was lacking at the time of writing.

The second consultation, presently planned for September, offers the chance to comment on the draft text of MoReq2010. This leaves a period of about one month between the two consultations, with the implication that all of MoReq2010 will be drafted in that short time.



Conservatively, that would mean designing, structuring and authoring around 10,000 words per day, something that is very unlikely given the demanding need for structures and hyperlinking (remember, we are talking of not just a specification but also its design, its underlying models, metadata definitions, glossary, test data and XML schema).

So the most likely scenario is that the second consultation will not take place in September. Assuming that is the case, the subsequent steps of finalisation and review will push delivery into 2011. In the best case scenario, perhaps some version of the core requirements might be published in 2010, leaving the rest of the components to follow in 2011.

The final piece of the puzzle is MoReq2010-compliant software. This will begin to appear on the market if, and only if, the vendors accept MoReq2010; and then only after they have had time for their development efforts. As I write this, the consultation proposals seem to my mind to be very vendor-centred – too much so in fact – so acceptance is more probable than not. But if the radical proposals in the current consultation are accepted, it seems most unlikely that MoReq2010-compliant software could reach the marketplace before 2012, so think of late 2012 before there is a decent selection of MoReq2010-compliant products to choose from.

What shall we do while we are waiting?

This raises the question: *what should we use as a model requirements specification for electronic records management while we are waiting for MoReq2010? Should we delay plans and wait for MoReq2010? Give up on MoReq entirely and use some other standard? Continue to use MoReq2?*

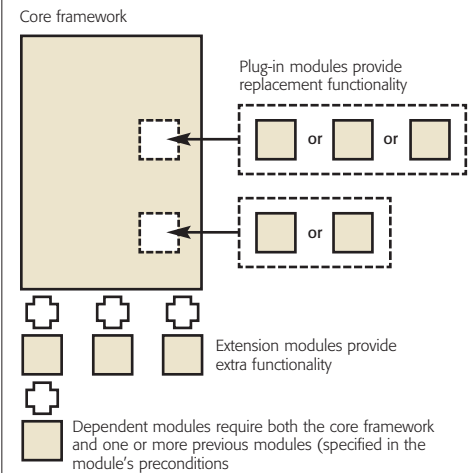
Putting projects on hold is risky. We do not know for sure when MoReq2010 will arrive, and we know even less what will be in it (see below). There are virtually no cases in which a delay to wait for MoReq2010 makes sense.

By contrast, it makes perfect sense to continue relying on MoReq2 because everything in it remains as valid as the day it was published. The fact that the

MoReq2010 project has started does not make any difference to that fact, as MoReq2010 will replace MoReq2 but it does not invalidate it in any way.

Finally, there remains of course a risk that MoReq2010 will have some serious shortcomings, either in its timing, in its content, or in its adoption by the vendor community.

So waiting for MoReq2010 means waiting an unknown time for an unknown product.



Proposed modular structure of MoReq2010
Taken from MoReq2010 consultation document, available from <<http://contribute2moreq.eu>>

If you stick with MoReq2 for now, at least its strengths, weaknesses and status are well known and understood. This is another reason for continuing to use MoReq2 for the next few months.

If you care about electronic records management, you should also take this opportunity to sign up for the MoReq2010 consultation process. Then play your part – contribute to the consultation as you can (see below for details).

So, in summary, prospective users of MoReq should:

- Continue to use MoReq2 until the content and acceptance of MoReq2010 become clear.
- Join the MoReq2010 consultation process.
- Monitor the MoReq2010 consultation portal frequently.
- Contribute actively, and fast, to the consultation process, to shape MoReq2010.

What will be in MoReq2010?

Of course, the big question is what MoReq2010 will contain. The good news

for RMS members is that the project is very much centred on the UK: the project was brought about by DLM Forum members from England, the competition for a contractor was designed and run from England with an entirely British selection board, and the contractor is based in England as are the project manager and head of the expert group formed to review it. The other good news is that you can affect the contents, by taking an active part in the consultation.

The less good news is that the consultation proposals contain several ideas that will strike most records managers as unfortunate. Ideas such as removal of usability requirements, adoption of a new model that actively discourages customisation, changes in terminology, unnecessary new constructs and a needlessly complex module structure. This said, the consultation holds out the prospect of several genuine advancements, such as the management of paper and the "in-place" management of electronic records stored outside the system, and more cross-referencing.

It is worth emphasising the importance of contributing to the consultation process. The final shape of the specification will be

determined by the "crowdsourcing" inherent in the consultation process; this genuinely will take precedence over previously-held beliefs and preferences. It is naturally easy

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for vendors to marshal resources to comment and lobby; equally it is naturally difficult for records managers to comment as a group. So please do consider making your mark, and contributing your views.

On track, or off the rails?

"Going off the rails" is of course an analogy related to trains. It might seem strange to use a railway analogy to assess the MoReq2010 project – Victorian-era technology is not obviously a good comparator for 21st century information management. But it is apt because train crashes can have unexpected consequences, just like IM. In fact, it is not so long ago that a train caused

one of the most expensive car insurance claims ever, when a retired schoolteacher stalled his classic car on a level crossing. A high speed goods train crashed into the (thankfully vacated) car, writing it off. By a quirk of fate, not only was the train derailed, but much of it fell down an embankment into a lake. That sounds bad enough, but there was more: the lake housed a fish farm, and fish that were not immediately electrocuted as the train plunged in were slowly poisoned by the chemicals that leaked from the train's cargo. The eventual insurance claim was for not only a replacement classic car, but also a new train, its load, track repairs, cleaning an entire lake – and lots of fish.

So it seems with the MoReq2010 project. It is rushing along, admittedly late (a late train in the UK? surely not...) but seemingly on track. But the destination is not clearly in sight, and I sense it is very close to jumping the rails, causing untold collateral damage to countless projects and initiatives along the way (and maybe even fish).

Will MoReq2010 turn out to be fit for purpose? Most probably it will. The consultant contracted to develop it is exceptionally able and knowledgeable. But the emphasis on crowdsourcing, the lack of a vision, the short consultations, the focus on vendors' needs and the desire to remove non-essential requirements clearly combine to present large risks to this particular train. ©



Useful Web sites

MoReq2010 consultation Web site:

<<http://contribute2moreq.eu>>

MoReq1: <<http://tinyurl.com/ygrly9d>>

MoReq2: <<http://tinyurl.com/39x6shb>>

MoReq Collateral: <<http://moreq2.eu>>

European Commission's MoReq page:

<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/archival_policy/moreq>

DLM Forum: <www.dlmforum.eu>



The Author

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