Dimensions 1.0 Specification (Public Working Draft from 19 July 2005)
Frequent asked questions

On 19 July 2005, the International Steering Committee of XBRL International approved the release of the Dimensions 1.0 Specification as a Public Working Draft[1]. The purpose of this paper[2] is providing the XBRL Consortium a high level overview regarding the business rationale of the Dimensional Taxonomies Specification.

Q. What is a dimensional taxonomy?

A. Most of the taxonomies that we have seen to date are "mono - dimensional" in the sense that they are hierarchical lists of financial reporting concepts (technically called "elements"). Dimensional taxonomies have an intrinsically a broader scope and might define for each business reporting concept different "dimensions", which represent hierarchies of a range of information, such as geographic regions, industries, business segments, etc.. A "dimension", according to the "Dimensional Taxonomy Requirements" document, represents each of the "*different aspects by which a fact may be characterised. A dimension is a (possibly empty or possibly infinite) set of members. A typical example of a dimension is the "product" dimension that identifies for a concept (Sales) each one of the possible products that its fact can be expressed about*". A dimensional taxonomy is something that leverages the taxonomy building tools and other XBRL-specific tools in the market, and all of the conventions we have established for references, multilingual labels, presentation, and so on.

Q. What problems do dimensional taxonomies solve?

A. It (1) makes taxonomies more modular, more reusable, easier to maintain, and (2) makes XBRL taxonomies more useful for anyone who is an "active consumer", that is, a producer of XBRL instances who has the power to compel instance creators to conform to their taxonomy. As an example of case (1), Microsoft once reported revenue by region, today by business segment. If Microsoft had represented revenue in each region in the primary taxonomy, then they would continually add more elements under revenue. Today this issue is addressed by using "tuples" to define terms that are naturally organised as a two-dimensional table. But tuples force the taxonomy builder to make decisions about how things should be nested, that can't possibly be appropriate for all the range of uses we envision taxonomies to serve. So, that is how they contribute to modularity, reusability, and maintainability. As an example of case (2), there is a defined way in XBRL to organize facts in instances, called "segments" and "scenarios". But there is no way within XBRL for a taxonomy author to say anything at all about what should and could be included in segments and scenarios. Dimensional taxonomies do that as well. They therefore provide a solution to both problems (1) and (2).

Q. Why the dimensional taxonomy has been only being created recently, especially for COREP and was not part of Specs 2.1?

A. The capability has always been latent in XBRL 2.1, and had been shown on a small scale since early 2002, but formalizing the ideas into a specification and ensuring interoperability is a significant task. In January 2005, European banking supervisors (CEBS) launched a formal consultation on a common reporting framework (COREP, for COmmon REPorting) that credit institutions and investment firms will use to report their solvency ratios under the CRD. Common reporting will also make it easier for supervisors to co-operate and exchange information as it will help to reduce differences in implementation and contribute to a more level playing field across Europe.

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[1] This is made available to the public and is open for comment for at least a 45 day period as the specification works its way through the XBRL International process eventually leading to "RECOMMENDED" status.

[2] Many thanks to Walter Hamscher, John Turner and Michael Ohata for their valuable input.

As groups operating on a cross-border basis within the Single Market are currently required to prepare and submit supervisory reports using different national formats and different technology platforms, the adoption of a common technical protocol (XBRL) recommended by CEBS will allow institutions to take full advantage of the common reporting framework.

The COREP framework is characterised by an information data model necessarily based on a dimensional taxonomy structure. No other XBRL working group had such requirements before and there was no need to have it in the Specs 2.1. In the meantime, many other players have considered that the dimensional taxonomy could be of great help for them and have decided to consider the dimensional taxonomy as an improvement of their XBRL projects.

Q. Is this a new change in the XBRL 2.1 Specification?

A. No. The dimensional taxonomy specification is a modular extension to the XBRL 2.1, Specification. Its architecture is such that the compliance to its requirements also conforms to the base specification. XBRL documents with dimensional information may be processed without error by any processor that is capable of correctly processing XBRL artefacts, even if those processors are unaware of this modular extension. It is also designed to make maximum use of components of the XBRL 2.1, Specification in its components so as to require a minimum amount of retooling of applications in order to be implemented.

Q. What is the status of this new specification in the recognition process from XBRL International?

A. A specification is only recommended when there is a requirements document, a specification, a conformance suite, and two vendors whose products pass the conformance suite. Naturally, these components can't all spring into existence at the same moment. There is currently a Public Working Draft that will be followed shortly by a conformance suite; by the time that becomes a Public Working Draft we would expect both the Requirements and Specification to become Candidate Recommendations.

Q. Who should I contact if I want further explanations?

A. Feel free to contact the authors

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