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A Definition of the Term "Soon" for Use in Discussions with Working Group Chairs and Area Directors
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Abstract

Many discussions with IETF Area Directors and Working Group Chairs utilize the word "soon" to qualify a commitment to action. This document attempts to provide a definition of that term so that common expectations may be realistically set.

Requirements Language

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in RFC 2119 [RFC2119].

Status of This Memo

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction 2
2. We Are All Volunteers 3
3. The Kompella Time-Dilation Effect 3
4. Possible Interpretation of the Term 'Soon' 3
5. Optimism Is the Curse of the Drinking Man 3
6. Towards A Definitive Meaning 4
7. Guidance in the Use of This Term 5
8. Boilerplate for Inclusion in All Communications 5
9. IANA Considerations 5
10. Security Considerations 5
10.1. Privacy Considerations 5
11. Normative References 5
Author's Address 6

1. Introduction

In everyday exchanges between IETF participants and those with IETF management roles (for example, Area Directors and Working Group Chairs) commitments are often made to deliver actions.

For example, a Working Group Chair may say "I will issue a working group last call on this document," or an Area Director could say "I will process your publication request and review your document." Alternatively, a document author might say "I will produce a new revision of this document," and a participant sometimes says "I will provide more details / suggested text / a follow-up review."

In all of these interactions it is common for the speaker to offer some expected completion time for the action. Sometimes this is expressed in elapsed time (for example, "I will do this within the next two lunar cycles"), frequently it is stated with reference to an absolute point in time (such as, "I will do this by the third Sunday in Lent"), but usually the qualifier applied is "Soon."

Frustration and disappointment are common currency in the modern world, but there is no need for the IETF to add to this state of affairs. Nor should the IETF be responsible for increasing cynicism and jaundiced pessimism. Therefore, this document attempts to

provide a definition of the term "Soon" so that common expectations may be realistically set.

2. We Are All Volunteers

It is a commonly held belief that in the IETF "we are all volunteers." Even those of us who are paid to do our jobs are confident that we are only working out of the goodness of our hearts and that our salaries are poor recompense for our daily travails.

And, of course, it is well known that you cannot induce a volunteer to do anything that might interfere with their otherwise compulsory activities of looking at pictures of cats, creating memes, or pipe-smoking. Therefore, it is highly inappropriate for this document to make any attempt to constrain anyone into giving a meaningful delivery date for any action that they promise. To that end it is expected that this document will be withdrawn and a fulsome apology issued soon.

3. The Kompella Time-Dilation Effect

When serving as co-chair of the CCAMP working Group, Kireeti Kompella was often called to account for not offering a completion date for tasks to which he committed.

After wise consideration of this situation, Kireeti would offer an answer such as "I will do this before the end of June," and everyone would go away content. It was only as July gave way to August that Kireeti would explain that he had failed to indicate to which year he was referring.

In such cases of high residual KTDE, use of the term "Soon" would better set expectation, and Kireeti has given an undertaking to transition to this term by the end of the second quarter.

4. Possible Interpretation of the Term 'Soon'

Many learned articles have been written on possible interpretation of the term "Soon". No doubt the author will add citations and references one day soon.

5. Optimism Is the Curse of the Drinking Man

The software industry is infamous for its inability to provide reliable estimates for development projects. No-one is quite sure why this should be. Is it because troops of evil mice come into the workshop late at night while the cobbler is asleep in his bed alongside his long-suffering wife and unpick the seams of carefully

constructed function calls? Is it because coders make it all up as they go along and have no idea what they are doing? And is it a coincidence that sotware is so appropriately spelled?

IETF working group milestones are commonly held in disrepute. They are certainly not dates that anyone had ever been held to, and inspection of most working group charters will show that either the chairs intend employing time travel or that no one pays any attention to the milestones. It may be because Area Directors often say to working group chairs that "milestones are just a tool for you to manage the working group", or it may be because no one likes a bully.

These two factors obviously contribute to an environment in which the term "soon" has little or no currency except as padding to fill an awkward gap between a promise and the full stop at the end of the sentence.

None of which is intended to imply that:

- Women don't drink
- Women are less optimistic than men
- Women are less more optimistic than men

6. Towards A Definitive Meaning

The purpose of this document is to provide a working definition of the term "soon" so that parsers of IETF communications may reasonably understand the meaning and so that a degree of linguistic interoperability between speakers may be achieved. The following definition applies:

> SOON This word, or the adjective "SHORTLY", mean that an item is truly optional. One IETF participant may choose to deliver the item because a particular marketplace requires it or because the participant feels that it enhances their reputation while another participant may omit to deliver the same item. A participant who does not deliver a particular item MUST be prepared to continue to work with with another participant who does deliver the item, though perhaps with reduced credulity. In the same vein, a participant who does deliver a particular item MUST be prepared to continue to work with another participant who does not include the item, though perhaps with less respect (except, of course, for communications about the feature the item provides).

7. Guidance in the Use of This Term

Terms of the type defined in this memo must be used with care and sparingly. In particular, they MUST only be used where it is actually required for explanation of when a deliverable will arrive or to limit behavior which has potential for causing harm (e.g., limiting retransmissions of requests for action). For example, they MUST NOT be used to try to impose a particular schedule on participants where the schedule is not required for anything other than vanity.

8. Boilerplate for Inclusion in All Communications

In many IETF communications a word is often used to signify the proximity of an event described in the communication. This word is often capitalized. This document defines this word as it should be interpreted in IETF communications. Authors who follow these guidelines should incorporate this phrase near the beginning of their communication:

> The key word "SOON" in this communication is to be interpreted as described in [This.I-D].

9. IANA Considerations

This document makes no request for any IANA actions.

10. Security Considerations

Just say no!

Further security consideration will be added to this document SOON.

10.1. Privacy Considerations

See "Author's Address" Section.

11. Normative References

[RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", BCP 14, RFC 2119, DOI 10.17487/RFC2119, March 1997, <http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119>.

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