



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 January 2017

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Executive Committee

Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

Twenty-third session

Geneva, 3-4 April 2017

Item 7(e) of the provisional agenda

Recommendations and standards

Related issues

Executive Guide to United Nations Core Components (UN/CCTS & UN/CCL)

Summary

This document provides an executive guide to the United Nations Core Component Technical Specification (UN/CCTS) and the United Nations Core Component Library (UN/CCL), with a view to helping governments, government agencies, industries and private companies to understand better how Core Components can be used to improve the exchange of data.

The purpose of the United Nations work on Core Components is to provide data (i.e. semantic) definitions that can be used by different information technology applications, databases and structures (i.e. that is syntax neutral). Use of the same data definitions greatly facilitates the exchange of data across applications and databases. This ability to exchange data is referred to as “interoperability” and it is increasingly important in world where there are more and more requirements to exchange information between parties located across the globe and with different systems and requirements.

The Core Components approach described in this document is more flexible than other standards in this area, because of the emphasis on having semantic standardization done in a syntax-neutral fashion, which enhances information interoperability across multiple business situations.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/12 is submitted to the twenty-third session of the UN/CEFACT Plenary for noting.

GE.17-00775(E)



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I. Introduction

1. In a paper document, information can be presented in free text. However, in official forms or common business documents, information is typically presented in structured boxes, which require the entry of specific information related to parties, places, transport or goods details, etc.

2. Within an electronic message, the majority of information is structured in order to provide specific, identifiable information that can be interpreted correctly by automated systems. In order for this to work, both the receiving and sending parties need to use the same semantics (or basic meaning) for each component of data. To provide these common semantic definitions, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) has developed the **United Nations Core Component Library (UN/CCL)**.

3. If information is presented in a very “flat” manner (i.e. with all components being on an equal level), this may create confusion or redundancy. For example, if we have a data component called “City Name”, do we mean the city name of the destination address, or that of the expedition address, or perhaps that of the freight forwarder, etc.? If we want to know which instance is being referred to, then one option is to qualify “City Name” each time it is used. If this is done for every component of an address, redundant data is required. On the other hand, if the “basic core component” of “City Name” is used in an aggregate core component such as “address” and is used in a business context such as “shipping destination”, then “City Name” and all of the other basic core components used in “Shipping Destination” do not have to be individually qualified.

4. In order to make the UN/CCL more workable, the information is grouped into logical aggregations and/or it is associated with its business context. This enables a more flexible maintenance as the majority of concepts are expressed in aggregate core components that are built using a smaller number of basic core components (like building blocks) or by associating a core component with a business context. Each change to a basic core component will be inherited in all of its uses. For example, if the base component “City Name” is changed, then it will be changed in all types of “addresses” that include “City Name” and in all of the business contexts that use “City Name”.

5. This requires a strict methodology for creating the base components: the aggregated components, and the components within business contexts. This methodology can be compared to the rules of grammar for a language, which allow language speakers to understand one another. For the UN/CCL, this methodology is called the **United Nations Core Components Technical Specification (UN/CCTS)**. The specifications in the UN/CCTS are not only useful for creating and maintaining the UN/CCL, they can also be used by business analysts, business users and information technology specialists who supply data content and who design applications that use the data definitions from the UN/CCL.

II. Applications

6. UN/CEFACT uses the UN/CCTS to develop the UN/CCL. The UN/CCL is used by UN/CEFACT to develop reference data models and business messages. The business messages developed by UN/CEFACT using the UN/CCL are currently in the XML syntax. These UN/CEFACT messages focus primarily on improving the exchange of trade data information among governments, government agencies, industries and private companies.

At the same time, the UN/CCL can be used in other syntaxes and data formats because the core components have been specifically designed to be syntax neutral.¹

III. Benefits

7. The UN/CCTS provides a methodology for identifying and capturing business information in a standardized way that allows its maximum re-use while supporting and enhancing information interoperability across multiple business situations. The UN/CCTS specification focuses both on human-readable and machine-processable representations of this information.

8. The *Core Components* approach described in the UN/CCTS is more flexible than current standards in this area because the semantic standardization is done in a syntax-neutral fashion. The UN/CCTS enables UN/CEFACT to develop the UN/CCL.

9. The UN/Core Component Library (UN/CCL) is of global benefit since:

- It is continually being maintained to ensure that it is adapted to changes in processes, regulations and new areas;
- The increasing number of users ensures a wide pool of experts' knowledge globally,
- Its free availability supports the development of affordable software tools.

IV. More information

10. The UN/CCTS and UN/CCL are available free of charge on the UN/CEFACT web site:

- Core Component Library:
http://www.unece.org/cefact/codesfortrade/uncl/ccl_index.html
- Core Component Technical Specification:
http://www.unece.org/cefact/codesfortrade/ccts_index.html

¹ For example, the International Air Transport Association's CargoIMP and CargoXML standards use the UN/CCL.