Frontline Humanitarian Logistics Initiative

How it started:

This initiative started with NetHope where it is still coordinated and supported. A Microsoft proposal to create a field-based ERP for the Humanitarian sector generated two related workstreams; a) development of a common data model to underpin the ERP application and b) development of a tailored supply chain component (for the ERP). A small group of interested agencies is now spearheading this with a focus on the supply & logistics function.

While these agencies got together initially through our shared interest in the proposed Microsoft application, we quickly recognised the broader potential value of the common data model and are trying to broaden this out to include other agencies, irrespective of the IT software they are using or developing.

Project outline:

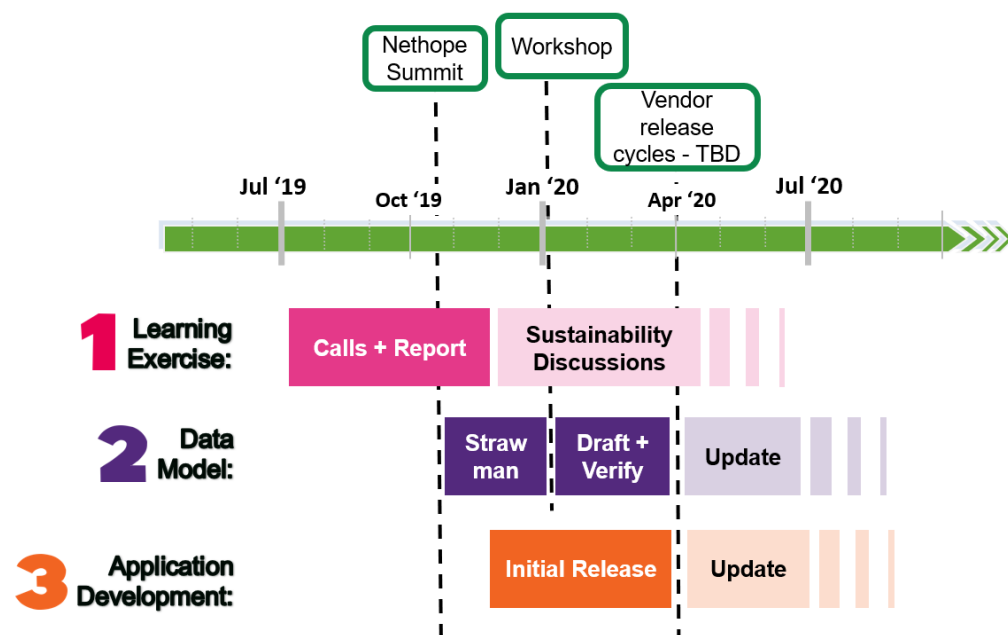Our approach has three stages, which are separate but also connected:

1) Learning Exercise. To make sure our efforts are grounded in an up-to-date understanding we are engaging organisations through questionnaires and interviews. We shall gather a picture of the where organisations sit within the supply chain automation spectrum, as well as the broader operational challenges associated with information management at the 'front end' of our supply chains. Regardless of your interest to participate in further steps, it would be extremely useful at this stage to simply add your organisational inputs to the mix. The results of the exercise can give you useful insights into where your organisation stands relative to the bigger picture, current opportunities and challenges.

2) Humanitarian Logistics Data Model. It was apparent in the GLM that this required some further detailed explanation of precisely what it is and what it will 'do'. We have found some experts to put together what we hope is a brief yet clear answer (see "Humanitarian Logistics Data Model FAQ").[1] We hope this gets you interested and, if it does, we are very happy to find answers to any further questions you may have. In short, the data model will drive efficiency and interoperability in (future) software development regardless of what platform you use.

3) Application Development. Despite this coming from a Microsoft proposal, the involvement of NetHope means that more tech companies are being approached to be part of this third stage of the initiative. With the Data Model underpinning each tech company's system, your organisation can choose to work with whichever tech company you prefer. While the Data Model is still under construction, now is the ideal time to approach your tech provider to get them on board and into the 3rd stage of the initiative. Through the Learning Exercise, we may also be able to identify organisations that are using the same systems, so you can take a coalition approach to your tech provider and leverage your collective bargaining or powers of persuasion. As mentioned at the start, the more of us who are working with systems built using the Data Model, the easier it will be for us to collaborate at the critical moment.

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[1] https://oxfam.box.com/s/j9wrl1jcuq3ww0vkb6upvajptv87xa37

Timeframe:

Why now/ what's the hurry?

Firstly, stronger collaboration on innovation through IT is long overdue. This initiative has created momentum among organisations and tech companies, and if we don't pick this up now it could easily die down again. Moreover, the success of the data model depends on the breadth of engagement in its development. We don't have to have every organisation in the sector on board - but we need to have enough to ensure that our understanding of key areas and concepts is both comprehensive and representative.

This is our opportunity to achieve that. If we fail it is quite possible that the tech companies, who have already identified this as a gap in the market, will go ahead and build products anyway. The problem with those products is that without our input now, they will likely be based on a scope that is too narrow, inevitably leading to the parallel existence of several (non-compatible) data models. This would add significant hurdles to any planned future harmonisation and efficiencies.

I'm in! How do I sign up?

To tell us you are interested to sign up to any or all of the above, please contact: mike.smith@oxfam.org (Skype ID is live:msmith.work)

For more information see:
- Overview: https://solutionscenter.nethope.org/resources/initiatives/frontline-humanitarian-logistics
- Detailed initiative proposal: https://oxfam.box.com/s/sidz921ehryh63l433ag0afwznnfgpru

If you want to participate in the Learning Exercise:

The Learning Exercise consists of a pre-call set of questions and call with Dr. Fraser Stephens who will analyse the responses and produce a final report. He has been involved in Humanitarian Logistics for more than 15yrs, working for MSF and Fritz Institute, and with a number of organisations including: IMC, Merlin UK, Kenyan RC, WVI, OGB. He has held various positions in technical Project/ Product management and is well versed in sector collaboration so is very well placed to facilitate us.

Please email Fraser between now and October 15: fraser@pefe.co.uk

Some of the questions in the pre-call material and during the call may need thought about linkages with other functions such as Finance or Programmes - please feel free to include them in the call if you need to.

Initial findings will be shared at the NetHope Global Summit, October 21, 2019 with follow-up discussions and formal writeup shortly afterwards.

A Short Note on Funding:

The final application development stage will be funded by technology providers. NetHope are currently fundraising for the Learning Exercise and data modelling. While this is ongoing, we may need contributions from participants, for example to cover their own costs of attending workshops and for the independent facilitators. This could be in the region of £2-4k, depending on the number of organisations that participate.