Background:

I have work in the standardization of SPARQL, serving as an editor for SPARQL 1.0 and SPARQL 1.1 Query. Outside of W3C participation, previously I have worked with UK government organisations who wish to publish linked data and currently, while working at TopQuadrant, with large enterprises who use RDF-based systems internally.

Position:

RDF has evolved and grown and as it has grown, the needs of end users, information modellers and applications developers have evolved.

The first RDF developers had to deal with the details end-to-end, from RDF/XML parsing through to use of the information in an application. Then toolkits emerged to provide reusable libraries for basic task such as parsing and writing. Next, triple stores emerged for the storage and access to RDF data at scale. Currently, we now see both web-centric and industry-centric platforms.

Today, applications are developed by teams, and each RDF developer today not have to deal with the details end-to-end. They are able specialise within their team. They are able to focus on the specific needs of their use case.

When we talk about about reaching more developers, we need to understand who these other developers are and how their needs differ from the original end-to-end experts and current developers and information scientists.

These developers are likely working with RDF data as part of a larger task. They may be using RDF for the first time or use it only in some projects.

The decision to use RDF or not, is taken based on the principles of RDF and the benefits of non-proprietary standards for the data format, having schemaless ("schema on read") databases, natural fit to information modelling and data integration as a core aspect.

Any barriers are not due to specific aspects of the technical design of the core RDF data model.

W3C working groups are at the start of the chain of delivery from technology to application. In looking at what will enable the next wave of developers, I suggest that W3C needs to take a communication and education view, and not just a technology view.

Technical work needs to factor in costs of change to all the written material in blogs, slides and books about RDF.

Technical work needs to coordinate to present news and information about emerging W3C standards work; working groups still need to look outwards and should coordinate strongly in explaining their work in the wider context.

In my experience, the choice to use RDF is not due to specific detail of the RDF. In many ways, it is remarkable that RDF has achieved the reach is has without significant changes to the data model. Enhancing the tools and standard languages around the core data model will have more effect.

For the next generation of developers, we should look at their needs while not losing the existing developers.

W3C is well-suited as an environment for reaching out to new communities of developers, both web and enterprise. Any style change is a change to how RDF and linked data has developed in W3C, but not to W3C as a whole.