Never Break the Chain: A Report on the IEEE Blockchain Initiative Workshop in Alexandria, VA

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Recognizing the importance of Blockchain and related technologies, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers held a workshop to foster the development of an initiative. During the day and a half event, representatives from academia, industry, government, and IEEE volunteers and staff gathered to define that initiative. As several subject matter experts discussed the status of the technology, attendees gave their own perspectives, and attendees generally agreed an IEEE initiative was imperative. This diverse group of experts generated more than great ideas; they defined the work that must be done for Blockchain to reach its potential, and focused the energy to accomplish it.

I'll assume you know what Blockchain is. But if not, I encourage you to learn more at https://blockchainincubator.ieee.org/. The IEEE already has resources gathered for you to learn about it, become engaged in the efforts, and help develop the technology for humanity.

The workshop's team of experts gathered in late October to define a framework for the IEEE under two important conditions: the IEEE must be uniquely positioned to fill a need, and the effort must provide real benefit and value to Blockchain.

The first day focused on presentations that cover the state of Blockchain technology, deployment, use cases, and other relevant information. We discussed what makes Blockchain disruptive, how it influences society, what the future may be for Blockchain technology, and what the IEEE can do to help Blockchain develop effectively. The group explored in depth the importance of Blockchain, and its many use cases. We recognized the importance of reliability and security of Blockchain, and discussed many application areas including communications, smart contracts, FinTech, vehicles, supply chain, and energy transactions.

Several IEEE organizations have already recognized the importance of Blockchain technology, and have already created a strong base from which to build.

Concluding that first day, the attendees all discussed the various efforts, projects, and focuses where the IEEE can provide the most value in its unique position.

Day two turned discussion into the first steps of action. After reviewing how to support an IEEE initiative, the teams broke up into interest groups that defined the actions to be executed. The societies involved have supported several members with expertise in the key areas of effort, so a strong team is being formed rapidly. This team defined work to be accomplished through training, conferences, standards, publications, and several special projects. We all recognized the needs to define many aspects of Blockchain, distributed ledger, crypto currencies, and related technologies. Most importantly, we all clearly see the need to make these technologies reliable, dependable, secure, flexible, and applicable to the problems it is well suited for, not misapplied, not poorly designed, and not vulnerable.

Because Blockchain and its related technologies hold a lot of excitement and opportunity for the future, and are unique in many ways, the special projects are perhaps the most critical and exciting efforts to come. Fortunately, the attendees at the workshop were the right people to define the key efforts, and get them started.

But for this initiative to be successful, we need at least two things: make sure the work we accomplish is self sustaining so that the value created returns value to the community, and to engage the help from all members interested in developing this new technology space.

This is where you come in. Become a link in the chain. While not a chain gain, and not a bunch of block heads, the IEEE members and experts in Blockchain technology recognize hard work is in front of us. But the effort is important, and can have profound impact on society. More than just an opportunity, we recognize a real need for IEEE involvement here. The IEEE is uniquely positioned to add value, as the premiere organization of engineering experts and technology development. And we know it is our role to provide tangible value to society. Help us develop Blockchain technology, and strengthen the community.