The Rise and Fall and Rise (Hopefully) of Standard MUMPS

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The Rise...

"Necessity is the mother of invention"
-Plato

"Necessity sure is a mother!"
-Anon

The Dawn of Time

Necessity:

No third-generation languages are available that provide good database programming capabilities, especially for inherently sparse data.

Invention:

MUMPS   *(Thanks, Octo!)*

Diaspora

Necessity:

> Having many different dialects of MUMPS makes it impossible to create portable code. This serves to tie large projects such as DHCP (as VISTA was then known) to a single vendor, at increased costs.

Inventions:

> The MUMPS Users Group (MUG), attracting vendors competing for a slice of the growing community.

> The MUMPS Development Committee (MDC),defining Standard MUMPS which allows portable MUMPS code and, hence, competition.

Decentralized Hospital Computer Program

Necessity:

The VA was the second-largest group of hospitals in the country, and even after ten years of trying they are not computerized. The bureaucratic large-project model was simply not adequate for this problem.

Inven tion:

Ted O'Neil and Marty Johnson brought information from a government study on hospital software that showed why they had failed, and what could work.

As an experiment, they undertook a user-driven rapid-prototyping development project, spawning the fabled "Underground Railroad" and resulting in DHCP.

The Pinnacle: 1984–1995

DHCP is embraced and supported by the VA.

Several MUMPS vendors (InterSystems, DataTree, Micronetics, DEC) compete for contracts from the VA and other large companies and organizations.

Vendors and the VA support an active and financially viable MUG (later MTA) and an active MDC.

Standards that ensure portability and backwards compatibility are enforced by FIPS conformance.

The Fall...

" No good deed goes unpunished."

-Clare Booth Luce

"The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft a-gley."

-Robert Burns

The Loss of Vendors

InterSystems sets its sights on Oracle and the other "big database companies."

They purchase first DEC MUMPS, then DataTree and finally Micronetics, leaving no competitors large enough to support the VA's needs.

This lack of vendors removes the competitive nature of the Users' Group meetings. Attendance declines, financially eviscerating the MUMPS Users' Group (now MTA) and consequently the MDC.

Decline of VA Support

The large hospital software vendors eye the VA and lobby Congress to force the VA to drop support of DHCP, arguing that "The VA should not be in the software business. It's more cost effective to buy COTS (Commercial Off the Shelf) systems."

The VA Administration makes repeated attempts to replace DHCP (all unsuccessful due to user outrage).

The VA supports the Austin ITC instead of the MTA meeting, further dropping attendance and adding to the MTA's cash hemorrhages.

Irrelevancy of the MDC

Flush with the successes of the previous standards, the MDC believes it controls the future direction of MUMPS.

Starting with the 1995 standard the MDC attempts to push the boundaries beyond what the MUMPS vendors are willing to develop.

With no competition, InterSystems chooses to ignore the MUMPS standard, making it largely irrelevant.

The Nadir: 1999–2001

Only one MUMPS vendor (InterSystems) capable of supporting DHCP, with their own non-standard implentation (Caché) .

No users' group exists for MUMPS or DHCP.

The MDC, while never officially dissolving, becomes moribund and ceases to function in any capacity.

The "Millennium Standard", passed by the MDC, never goes to canvass nor is it published.

But…

The Phoenix Egg

"Yes, my friend, like a young phoenix she will rise fully plumed and glorious from her mother's ashes."

-Arthur Lee

One lone working group of a task group of a subcommittee of the MDC refuses to die (MDC/SC16/TG1/WG1) and continues to meet.

This object-oriented MUMPS working group, made up primarily of VISTA users reinvents itself as WorldVistA.

Strangely Familiar

Today there are three MUMPS vendors, viz. InterSystems (Caché), Fidelity (GT.M) and Real Software Company (M21), all interested in competing for the VA's contracts. Both GT.M and M21 implementations are effectively immune to being bought out by InterSystems.

WorldVistA has become the *de facto* users' group. The VISTA Community Meetings are "the place to be" for VISTA (and for MUMPS).

The VISTA Expertise Network takes on maintenance, training and deployment tasks for interested VISTA adopters, and identifies, once again, the need for a standard MUMPS for future VISTA development.

Enter the MSO:
the MUMPS Standards Organization

Backed by the VISTA Expertise Network

Comprised of the same officers and largely the same membership as the MDC

Built to capitalize on what we did right, and change (and hopefully fix) what we did wrong.

Making changes

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

-George Santayana

Let's not make those same mistakes again!

What is our role?

The MDC...

...tried to steer MUMPS development and became irrelevant to the vendors.

The MSO...

...will work closely with the vendors, documenting what exists and recognize development as the purview of the vendors. Vendors are special-class members.

Who holds the reins?

The MDC…

...freewheeled at the whim of individual members until arbitrarily establishing a new standard.

The MSO…

...will use a three-step process:
1) Determine goals for what should be in a new standard.
2) Develop required specifications.
3) Review specifications and goals to ensure standard is neither more nor less than what was intended.

How do we function?

The MDC...

...held periodic costly meetings, supported by costly mailings, with little being done between meetings.

The MSO...

...will hold primarily electronic meetings, with electronic documents and distribution, encouraging frequent meetings and continuous activity.

How do we establish consensus?

The MDC...

...used a cumbersome and expensive canvass procedure that could (and did) result in long delays.

The MSO...

...will streamline this process using standard and acceptable practices to ensure diversity and consensus.

How do we reward officers?

The MDC...

...made significant demands on its officers with no compensation, leading to burn-out.

The MSO...

...shifts many of the duties to the chair, who receives compensation from the VISTA Expertise Network to allow a reduced workload from the "day job."

Keep what worked

"Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater."
-American proverb (derived from
Thomas Murner's *Narrenbeschwörung)*

Use a deliberative multi-step process to develop standard specifications.

Secure support from a parent organization (built into the bylaws).

Keep the same officers and largely the same membership to ensure continuity.

Where do we go from here?

There will be a meeting November 8–11, 2007 during which:

• the MSO will establish the charter members,

• the resurrected MDC will transfer the mantle of MUMPS standardization to the MSO and then dissolve itself, and

• the MSO will begin the process of determining what should be in the new MUMPS standard.

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USER-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT · CUSTOM IMPLEMENTATION · RESPONSIVE SUPPORT

Questions and Answers(?)

Thank you for your attention this afternoon.

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