

The Name Change . . .

by Catherine N. Pfeil

Over the past year, there has been a lot of activity about the name of our organization. The Board of Directors and the M Technology Association staff have tried hard to keep the members informed of the issues and actions throughout this period. This effort was not always as successful as we had hoped, and we find that we still are working to respond to the concerns of some members.

At the Board meeting in December 1992, Ed de Moel was an invited guest and, consequently, was invited to submit an article to reflect on his reactions and conclusions about the past year. Ed had been very active in his objections to the name change. As the meeting concluded, he expressed the opinion that he could help others to understand the complex issues that motivated the name change and reassure them that our goals and essence have not changed.

Ed has written a chronological review of the entire event from his perspective. He also has examined how his own reactions influenced the perceptions he formed versus the actual information that was trying to be conveyed. You may find the article to be a bit of a surprise. I encourage you to read it. Read all of it, especially the final section.

We really are still the same underneath all the names. ❖

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M . . . Have We Lost Our UMPS?

by Ed de Moel

I have come to the conclusion that it is important that our name change will benefit us all. As a vocal and active objector before, let me relate my experiences and discoveries that lead me to this conclusion.

Opposition? No, We're Not on Opposite Sides

Over the past fifteen years, a discussion has divided the MUMPS community. Some of us like and love the name MUMPS, some of us don't. In the past two years, this discussion has been forced to a conclusion: the membership voted on a name change. The outcome of the vote: 88 percent in favor of a new name . . . And a few were in favor of keeping the old name.

As of now, there no longer is a platform to discuss the merits of a specific name. The vote has been cast, and the outcome is unambiguous. Being internally divided can be only detrimental to the goals that we all want to achieve.

Having said this all, why this article? Well . . . whose name did we change? The language? No, we didn't. We changed the name of one of the MUMPS Users' Groups, the North American one. The name of the language has not been changed. Some of the other MUMPS Users' Groups around the world prefer to keep their old name. Some companies have invested beaucoup bucks on name recognition for something that they sell

with a name that has the word MUMPS in it, and they don't want to lose their investments.

Angry—But Not Anymore

So, why are some longstanding members still angry? Because their views were defeated in this vote? We don't think so. Of course, many find it frustrating that their views didn't win, but that's not the point. The anger really deals with some details of the process that led to this result.

Polarization—Or Simply Confusion?

So far, the tone of this article has set the stage for some serious bashing—I'm angry and whoever is responsible for it will pay for it. Is that the goal here? No, of course not. That course of events will only prolong the division within our membership and make the polarization stronger and more obvious. Still there are a few unanswered questions:

- Is everyone who voted aware that the name of the language is and remains MUMPS?
- Is everyone who voted aware that a MUMPS Users' Group has no authority to change the name of the language?
- Is everyone who voted aware that [the vote was] to change the name of the organization, and that the vote had no effect whatsoever on the name of the language?

And, if people weren't aware of these subtle, but important details, would they have voted differently had they realized the subtleties?

What we really want to achieve with this article is to disseminate information. In particular:

- Correct the erroneous information that upset so many members;
- Emphasize the correct information where incorrect information was perceived, even if correct information was supplied.

In short, what we want to achieve is that once again, we become one group, under whatever name, without polarized factions.

Enemies? Never!

At the Annual Meeting in New Orleans (1991), a Board member made a statement: "We're going to change the name of the language." And some members had thoughts like "over my dead body" (please don't see this as an invitation). Then we received a *MUMPS News* that was devoted almost completely to the pros and cons of a name change. But . . . there was another message in this issue that many of us missed. Reread it, and see that the message is there: MUG-NA does not have the authority to change the name of the language.

Still, MUG-NA needs to solve one specific problem: the press laughs at staffers, and refuses to publish any MUMPS article. Reasons? Well, the name MUMPS may be one problem (but that shouldn't be a larger problem than a name like OOPS or LISP), but the term Users' Group sounds to the press like "bunch of amateurs," and they don't want to talk to nonprofessionals.

Let's continue our chronological report of the events. The next event was

the Annual Meeting in Phoenix (1992). Suddenly the Board had printed stationery with a new letterhead and requested that the membership approve the new name selected by them. And that really did not seem right. Perhaps that went more than a little too far. And still nobody spoke up. Why? Well, we were waiting for the long-promised vote. That wait was almost at an end. Shortly after the Phoenix meeting, we received our ballots.

Although the presentation of the Board in the Phoenix meeting indicated that 14 percent of the respondents preferred to keep the old name, that choice did not appear on the ballot. Neither did the ballot allow for a write-in possibility, and that's where some of our members lost their tempers.

Some members even wrote open letters to the Board that were published through electronic-mail distribution. This led to the discovery of a logistics problem: the Board only meets occasionally at the offices of the user organization in Silver Spring, and therefore does not see all the incoming mail immediately. The problem that no acknowledgment of receipt of some letters was made, was corrected, and even better, the pros, cons, and reasons for the flow of the process were addressed in a succession of small-discussion meetings at the MUG-Europe meeting in Vienna, Austria. Maybe the Board really isn't an inaccessible clique of good old boys!

What did we talk about in Vienna? Well, the name change, but most importantly:

- Whose name?
- Why?
- How do we make a better process for future actions of the Board?

- What exactly was miscommunicated?

To reiterate:

- The organization, not the language;
- The press won't listen to us;
- More detailed and more often repeated bulletins, highlighting the important parts; and
- The answers to whose name and why.

Common Goals

We believe that our first common goal is to use, and promote the use of, a specific way of dealing with information. In particular, organize data in MUMPS structures so that information can be extracted from it, and promote the use of software, written partly or primarily in MUMPS, to achieve this goal.

Our second goal is to facilitate the first by coordinating our efforts through an organization. Originally, this organization was just a bunch of MUMPS programmers, but currently it looks more or less like a multistory building.

What we did in this vote was put a new name on an office building in Silver Spring. Within the "building" that represents our organization, there still is the familiar room that has the name "MUMPS programming language" on it. If you don't like that name, you can also refer to it by its official names: ANSI X11.1 or ISO 11756, or by its alternate name M (Please note the subtle, but important difference between: "Primarily use the name M" and "use the name M as the primary reference." M is an alternate name for MUMPS. MUMPS is the primary name.).

Future

It is important that we change our image from a "bunch of amateurs" to a professional organization. In this view, the name of the organization is immaterial (even if I happen to have a preference). What is important is that we present ourselves as professionals.

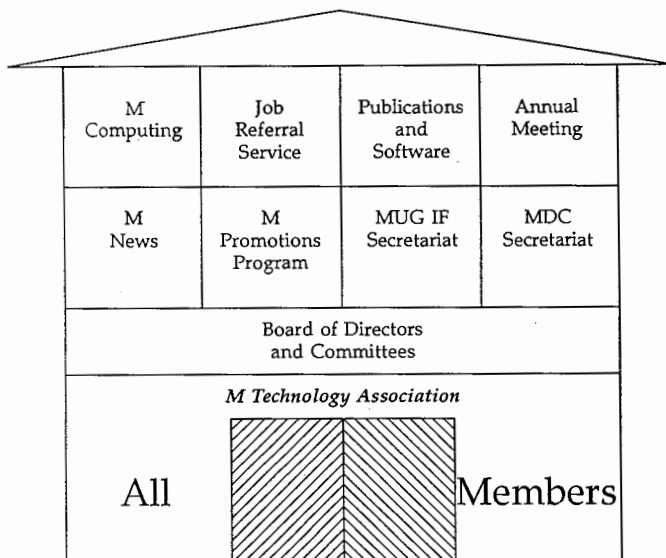
What have we changed, that makes us think that the future will be different? Well, so far, not much. The "building" has a new name (and address), but the rooms in the building are still the same.

What has changed is the intent of our Board members: they want the world to know about MUMPS. What has changed is that we no longer say, "Isn't it fun to write programs in this language," but instead, "This and this

and this are quantifiable benefits that come with the use of this tool" (and the tool in question is often an application written in that funny language). Or, "If you use this language, the level of portability that comes with it allows you to migrate to the latest and greatest hardware at a cost that is at most so much, while this is totally impossible with product X and costs at least so much with product Y."

We use a language called MUMPS. In the U.S.A., our organization is called M Technology Association. ❖

Ed de Moel has been a member of MDCC-Europe since 1980 and a member of MDC since 1987. He has taught and worked with MUMPS at universities in the Netherlands since 1976. He joined Science Applications International Corporation in 1990.



The "building" that represents our organization.

Q: How can I write portable M code?

A: Make sure your code adheres to the ANSI/MDC X11.1-1990 standard. The best reference is available from MUG — **The 1990 ANSI MUMPS Language Standard.**

You'll find complete specifications for writing code, including:

- Variable Scoping
- Parameter Passing
- Extrinsic Functions.

