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FROM THE EDITOR**Changes: A Recurring Theme?***by Richard F. Walters*

Richard F. Walters

Back at the 1994 Annual Meeting in Reno, the Editorial and Review boards approved a series of focal topics for the 1995 issues. The focus for this month is "Changes in the Workplace," and we are delighted to have a very thoughtful pair of articles written by Don Gall and Kate Schell that bear directly on this subject, as well as others that at least peripherally address the concept of change.

What we didn't know in Reno, though, was that change was going to be an even more important part of our lives in the M community in 1995. Indeed, so many things are happening—the standardization review process, restructuring DSM, the appearance of run-time license versions of M, and its migration into the GUI Windows environment to mention just a few—that one might be tempted to say that there are even more changes affecting M now than in recent years.

Such is not really the case. A colleague of mine once remarked that Adam was supposed to have said to Eve, "We are living in a time of profound change." M, nee MUMPS, has been changing without cessation as long as I can remember being involved with it (which takes me back to about 1970, not long after it first appeared at Massachusetts General Hospital). No, you can pick almost any twelve-month period and point to almost as many dramatic changes to the language as we are experiencing today.

The effect of these changes, though, is cumulative, and changes do make one think about where M is headed. There has been lots of serious conversation about the future of M in recent months. The Internet newsgroup has been full of commentaries about the role the language and its implementors and users should be playing today. Some of these comments lean toward "flame" (as cybertalkers would say) denunciations of M, followed by equally impassioned defenses and thoughtfully balanced responses. But change we do, and evolve we do, and it is definitely healthy now and then to back off and see where we are going.

Each of us has a different perspective on the long-range evolution of M. Wearing my executive editor hat, I see a serious need to bring some of these deeper thoughts out into the open, preferably in the form of articles for publication in *M Computing* so that we can all see some of what is going on. I am in fact seriously considering culling a few of the news items that come across the Internet bulletin board so that all of you M readers, even if you have no access to the Internet, can enjoy the lively debates that come from serious and not-so-serious participants in that stew pot of a dialogue.

One point that I would like to make as strongly as I can, however, is that the one change we cannot survive is *complacency*. "Fifty years from now, what difference will it make?" is an insidious self-fulfilling prophecy if it results in you, the readers and contributors to M, sitting back and letting others manage *your* affairs. A recent commentary on the United States pointed out that democracy is fast disappearing in this country, which now has the *worst* voter turnout of all industrialized nations. Think of it: a nation priding itself on practically founding the democratic principle, too apathetic even to cast a vote that might affect the way the nation is governed.

M users beware! Unless each of you raises a voice, takes part in the activities available to you in this wonderful fellowship, writes up your activities, and shares in the excitement of discovery of the new things M is now achieving, you will be contributing to the gradual decline, through apathy, of a wonderful institution. This plea is more than a wake-up call for us to get more articles for *M Computing* (which incidentally, we badly need); it is a much broader clarion call to become involved with the goings on affecting M.

I hope you will join me in Chicago in a few months at the next Annual

Meeting, and I hope we have a bang-up controversial, table-pounding set of discussions of the type I recall from more than one previous Annual Meeting! Please, all you nice people: Get involved, and let us and the world know you care. ■

Richard Walters is the executive editor of *M Computing* and a professor of computer science at the University of California, Davis. Write to him in care of the managing editor at MTA, or use MTA's e-mail address MTA1994@aol.com.

Dear Editor: I read the *Product News* in the November 1994 issue of *M Computing* entitled "At Last! Royalty-Free Application Licenses for M Developers."

I too have been waiting and pushing for one of the M vendors to provide some way of producing and distributing M products without the fees usually required. I have also recently purchased Visual M and I'm in the process of learning Visual M, Visual Basic, and InterSystems M.

There is an M product that I want to convert over to Visual M, so that will be my first attempt at this new M. I can only hope that the other M vendors will get the message, and will see that if M is to grow, we (M developers) must be able to compete with other products that are available for the low-end and middle PC users, as well as those large multicomputer or networked institutions.

I appreciate Drs. Moore and Berman's review of Visual M, and I hope that you may continue to publish articles about this and any other ideas that could benefit the M community.

Dan Baer
TIPS
Forest Park, Georgia

Dear Editor: I repeatedly run into articles, letters, and actual language modifications wishing to make M appear and work like other languages. Why is this? I honestly don't get it.

My impression of the history and intent of M was that not having data-typing was an advantage. Many other languages have data typing. If you can't be flexible, then use another language. As for readability, I think that most experienced M programmers find M code very easy to read. Why make it read like another language?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To me, C, Pascal, and much of Basic are hard to read. Familiarity is the key. Internal documentation helps a lot also.

Finally, I have found nothing in the recent language extensions that I couldn't do just as well, just as (or more) efficiently, and just as (or more) clearly using the more basic form of M. Why is an expensive extrinsic function more in line than a DO/QUIT?

How far should M go to be just like a dozen other languages in hopes of broadening the use of M? I believe that the answer is in the question. If we make M like a dozen other languages, then M will have no special qualities to recommend it.

Mike Little
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