The Standards Hiatus
by
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Why wasn’t the standard sequence
F66, F77, F88
What caused the extra 3 years?
Where we came in

• LS involved from late 70s, joined WG5 1980, X3J3 1982
  – Modules
  – Precision/kind selection
  – Pointers
  – Generic overloading, inc. operators
  – Wrote Varying_Length_String standard & module

• ME joined both WG5 and X3J3 in 1986
  – Internationalisation features
  – Character kinds
  – General procedure issues
Committees - early 80s

• US committee, X3J3
  – Designing language, writing US standard
  – Liaising with ISO committee (WG5)
  – ISO expected to adopt US standard as international standard
  – ~50 members
    • ~20 vendors
    • ~10 apps developers
    • ~10 big labs
    • ~10 general users
Committees - early 80s

• ISO committee WG5
  – Members represent national standards bodies
    • 8-10 countries, 40+ attendees (Liverpool ‘87 had 54)
    • Majority of users over vendors
    • Heavy overlap with X3J3 members
  – Role, comment on X3J3 work & recommend direction
X3J3 processes

• Very political as well as technical (but fun!)
  – Multiple shifting alliances and agenda
  – Small majority intent on major modernisation
  – Large, mainly vendor, minority
    • “standardise existing practice”
      + “my one small pet functionality”

• Working dynamic
  – 10-15, active constructive developers
  – 5-6, positively destructive
  – Rest, various levels of passive participation

• Slow but positive progress until 1986
WG5 processes

• Much larger moderniser majority
  – favours more advanced features
  • Several pet features never make it through X3J3, (Event handling, BITS)
  • In early ’80s a number of WG5 members join X3J3

• Not overly unhappy through to 1985
• Wheels come off in ’86/’87
The Grand Compromise

• First candidate document formal vote 1986
  – Resounding NO vote (document just not ready)
  – X3J3 officers panic, propose “grand compromise”
    • Very restricted subset
    • Internally inconsistent (voted piecemeal)
• Half X3J3 and most of WG5 appalled
  – Desperate work to correct damage
  – WG5/X3J3 meetings Liverpool ’87
    • Detailed recommendations on content made by WG5
      – Put back most of functionality lost by “grand compromise”, albeit some in much modified form
X3J3 response

• The next three meetings worked on new & revised features
  – May ‘88 meeting voted on them all
    • Those receiving a two thirds majority were added to a list
    • The complete list was then voted on
      – It was resoundingly defeated!
    • The Chair panicked
      – Everyone was asked to bring their own proposals for the complete language to the next meeting!
X3J3 and WG5 Meetings

• X3J3 meets four times a year – in February, May, August and November
• WG5 usually meets once a year
  – In 1986 WG5 and X3J3 met back-to-back in Halifax, Nova Scotia
  – 1987 had back-to-back meetings in Liverpool
  – In 1988 France was hosting WG5 – and would not consider meeting in August
  – So X3J3 met alone in August
Jackson Hole - August ’88

• The meeting started with ca. 10 new proposals
  – Much horse-trading between votes reduced this to 3 by the middle of the week
    • ABMSW (similar to WG5)
    • Minimalist (existing practice + arrays)
    • Less minimalist (existing practice + arrays + VAX structures + MILSTD)
  – All attempts at further compromises failed
Jackson Hole - August ’88

• Full X3J3 membership expected to go to WG5 meeting in Paris with all three possibilities still live
Jackson Hole - August ’88

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• US members then voted to forbid the US delegation to WG5 from even presenting the ABMSW proposal!
Paris September ’88

• WG5 incensed!
  – ABMSW proposal placed on agenda by UK
  – Minimalist proposals voted down
  – Modified ABMSW adopted (+pointers + non-default character + module for VARYING_STRING)

• WG5 took control of content
  – Mandated a member to attend X3J3
  – Passed a resolution highly critical of the US
Boston November ’88

• After every vote the WG5 rep. was asked if the result was OK
  – If it was not in accord with WG5’s wishes it was taken again!

• The Chair had to report to X3 every day

• By the end of the week X3J3 had agreed a programme of work which more or less corresponded with what WG5 wanted
Progress to F90 & beyond

• Several meetings to implement Paris ’88 plan
• Formal voting & Public comment processing (18 months)
  – Vast number of comments
  – Organised disinformation campaign
• F90 finalised London March ’91
• Standardisation process changed irrevocably
  – ISO the primary standard
  – WG5 controlling body, determines content
  – J3 development and editorial
• F95 and F03 both produced more or less on time
Postscript

• In 1995 ME was appointed WG5 Convenor
• At his first meeting in this role a new method of using Type 2 TRs to ‘beta test’ features was proposed and approved
  – The US was not happy with this
    • X3J3 requested its SC22 representatives to oppose it at the SC22 Plenary
    • After discussions between the US HoD and the WG5 Convenor, the US supported the WG5 proposal
• The Final Step in the power transfer was made