



James C. Peterson

# Qwerty, Time, and Risk

Our keyboards still have “qwerty” across the top line. This layout of keys is not the most efficient for typing, but it avoided hammer conflict in the first mechanical typewriters. The people who learned how to type on those first typewriters preferred not to learn a new layout, so the next typewriter iterations carried on the pattern, gathering even more typists invested in the “qwerty” line-up of keys. Continuity has a significant benefit in minimizing the time required to retrain.

Continuity also facilitates cooperation. This journal asks for submissions in one of the Word formats, not because it is the best word-processing program, but rather, because it is the one most widely used and enables all the reviewers, editors, checkers, and printers involved in developing and printing each article, to work together. The original author and the many people who shape a successful article at some point in the publishing process, dispersed across state and national borders, can be counted on to be able to handle that software. They can focus on the content and formatting rather than compatibility issues. Converting everyone from one common platform to another, even to a word processor that is better in some sense, would be disruptive and demanding over an extended period of time. This always leaves open the question as to when such a change will be worth the effort. There will no doubt be a point eventually, when the change will offer a net benefit.

Paradigm shifts—those in which one comes to understand something in a substantially different way—are even more complicated and demanding, and yet each of our authors in this issue is proposing some sort of paradigm shift. Karl-Dieter Crisman advocates open source software replacing much of our routine dependence on proprietary software.

Janet Warren argues that half the world’s population should be more concerned about the sin of apathy than the more often-cited sin of pride. She writes that if that were to change, more women would contribute to the STEM disciplines. Gregg Davidson states that the evidence is so overwhelming for common descent, that it is time to understand Adam and Eve as a hominid couple chosen by God to be the first endowed with souls. In contrast, Denis Lamoureux sees Adam and Eve as an assumption of ancient science that Genesis uses to describe human sin and the need for forgiveness, not as a particular first human couple. Then Derek Schuurman tells how he found on site that his earlier work, that of sending refurbished computers and software to developing nations, had not been as successful as he had hoped. He offers a new paradigm: establishing open source software and solar-powered computers as a more effective alternative.

Paradigm shifts create new risks. Implications and complications that no one predicts are to be expected. Early adopters relish investing the needed time and expertise to explore and troubleshoot changing approaches. It is a judgment call, then, for the rest as to when the evidence, benefits, and reliability are sufficient to make the switch. The widespread adoption necessary to keep cooperating can take considerable time through an often awkward transition. It took a century and a half for the solar system proposed by Copernicus to be widely acknowledged as more likely than the geocentrism that had prevailed for millennia. We often make such conversions more quickly these days, but not necessarily less painfully. Sometimes it takes a rising generation in a field to recognize the validity of the new approach, since they are not as invested in what had been previously taught.

# Acknowledgment

At other times, a new approach is shown to be lacking before it spreads; thankfully, it dies out before more people fall under its misapprehension. Simply being new is, of course, not automatically superior. Eventually, if a new paradigm indeed makes better sense, the changeover can be worth the effort. We have seen that time and time again.

It has been said, in short, that if you think education is too expensive, remember the cost of ignorance.

In parallel, it might be said that paradigm shifts are often jarring and disruptive. They can be uncomfortable, even disorienting. Yet a paradigm shift is not as costly as failing to change when change is warranted.

*PSCF* offers, in this issue, some proposed new approaches that are well worth the evaluation of our readers. ♦

**James C. Peterson**, *editor*

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