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VIEWPOINT

Is It Real or is It Client/Server?

by Pamela G. McIntyre

Have you noticed that the hoopla over client/server technology has finally died down? Now it's object technology and the Web. When will it end? My guess is never. It's part of American free enterprise. When one thing dies, whether it is a product, a service, a concept, an idea, or just about anything else, someone dreams up something new and the cycle starts all over again.

What bothers me the most is that many times the "something new" isn't really new. Only the words are different. When the words "client/server" hit the market, I couldn't find even two people who could give me the same definition of client/server technology. It sounded very much like a description of the same old networks I'd been working with for years. And when people started referring to even the oldest of mainframe systems as client/server, I'd had enough.

I figured out long ago that this is how management consultants survive. Every so often, one of them makes up a new concept (real or imagined). Do you remember "management by objectives"? How about "total quality management" or "quality circles"? There are dozens of permutations. Maybe it's not permutations, just mutations. I would swear on my honor that these terms all refer to the same thing, although what that is, is still a mystery. The scary thing is that if this is true, we are on the verge of insanity, at least according to Einstein whose definition of insanity was to keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect a different result.

Well, if total quality management actually worked, it would still be here and companies would still be implementing it. Instead, we have mutated through several more levels of intellectual debris.

Is this true of technology as well? I think it is. After all, isn't the Internet one of the best examples of client/server technology you can think of? And it has been around for a long, long time. That's good news, however! It means that technology can be successfully recycled. Since M hit the streets as MUMPS in the sixties, it's overdue for a strong comeback, provided, of course, that you do not continue doing the same old thing and expect a different result.

Welcome to Viewpoint. The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of MTA. Guest writers and responses to columns are welcome and will be printed at the discretion of MTA. Email: MTA@mtechnology.org

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