Processing
(threads, agents, formalism)

- How can processing activity be structured on a single processor?
- How can application-level information and system-level information be combined to provide efficient scheduling of processing activities?
- Why is mobility of a processing activity desired and how can it be achieved?
- How can the concepts of communication, processing, and mobility be represented in a formal model?

Context
Support for concurrent and parallel programming

- conform to application semantics
- respect priorities of applications
- no unnecessary blocking
- fast context switch
- high processor utilization

functional

relative importance

performance
“Heavyweight” Process Model

- simple, uni-threaded model
- security provided by address space boundaries
- high cost for context switch
- coarse granularity limits degree of concurrency

“Lightweight” (User-level) Threads

- thread semantics defined by application
- fast context switch time (within an order of magnitude of procedure call time)
- system scheduler unaware of user thread priorities
- unnecessary blocking (I/O, page faults, etc.)
- processor under-utilization
Kernel-level Threads

- thread semantics defined by system
- overhead incurred due to overly general implementation and cost of kernel traps for thread operations
- context switch time better than process switch time by an order of magnitude, but an order of magnitude worse than user-level threads
- system scheduler unaware of user thread state (e.g., in a critical region) leading to blocking and lower processor utilization

Problem

- Application has knowledge of the user-level thread state but has little knowledge of or influence over critical kernel-level events (by design! to achieve the virtual machine abstraction)
- Kernel has inadequate knowledge of user-level thread state to make optimal scheduling decisions

Solution: a mechanism that facilitates exchange of information between user-level and kernel-level mechanisms.

A general system design problem: communicating information and control across layer boundaries while preserving the inherent advantages of layering, abstraction, and virtualization.
Scheduler Activations: Structure

- Change in processor requirements

Communication via Upcalls

The kernel-level scheduler activation mechanism communicates with the user-level thread library by a set of upcalls:

- Add this processor (processor #)
- Processor has been preempted (preempted activation #, machine state)
- Scheduler activation has blocked (blocked activation #)
- Scheduler activation has unblocked (unblocked activation #, machine state)

The thread library must maintain the association between a thread’s identity and thread’s scheduler activation number.
Role of Scheduler Activations

Invariant: there is one running scheduler activation (SA) for each processor assigned to the user process.

Avoiding Effects of Blocking
Resuming Blocked Thread

Performance

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<th>FastThreads on Scheduler Activations</th>
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