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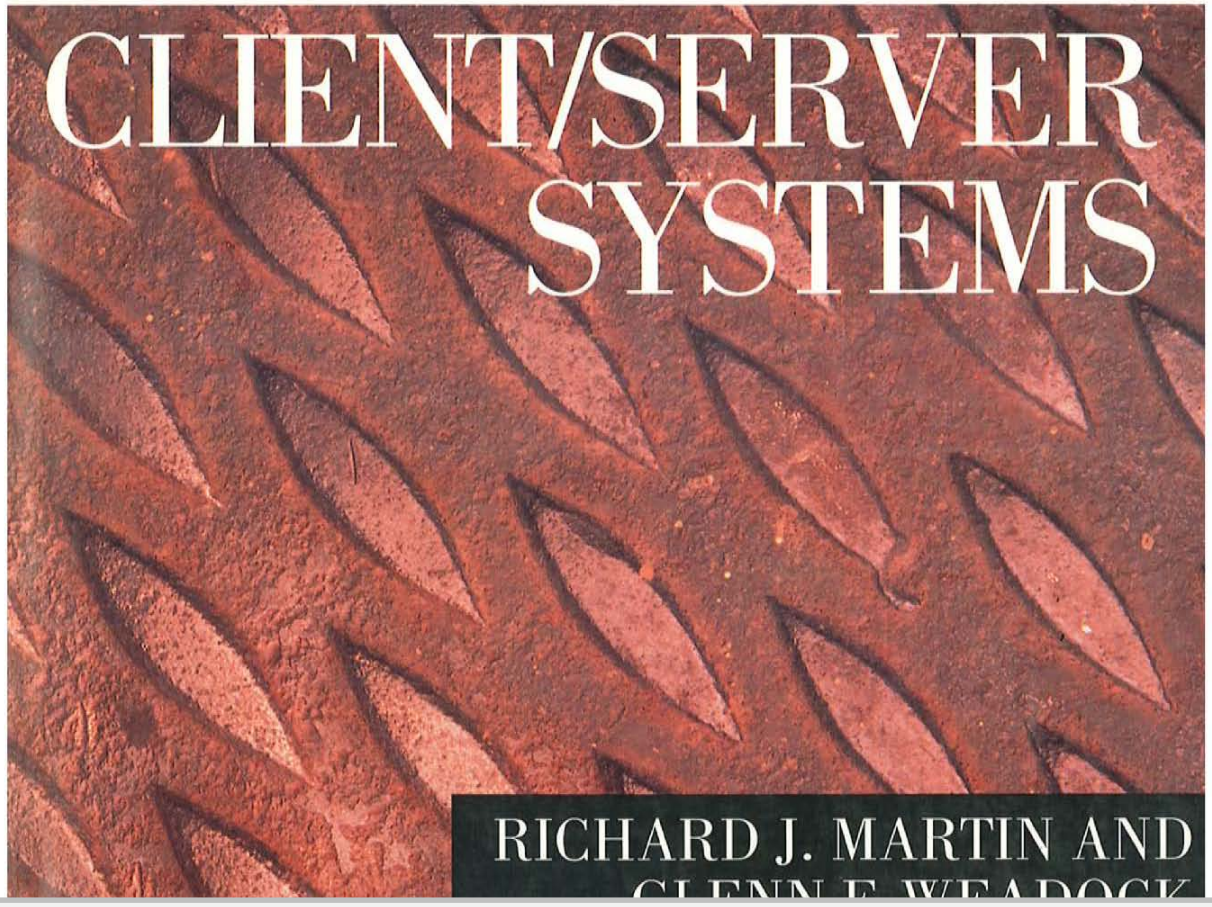

CLIENT/SERVER SYSTEMS

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When employees become sufficiently familiar with a number of different applications, and particularly when those applications have a consistent appearance, then the employees often stop thinking about those applications as being separate or distinct. The same set of programs that the Information Technology department categorizes as three or four applications, the users will categorize, and use, as one large application. When that happens, the users are right!

How might separate applications become consolidated or combined by users, without any help from the IT department? Well, let's put you back in the role of being that Personnel clerk who now has Payroll data responsibility. Guess who's going to get the opportunity to respond to any sort of ad hoc question that needs personnel or payroll data as part of the answer?

How are you going to answer these ad hoc questions? As much as possible, you will do so by using tools with which you are already familiar. If the Personnel system can give you part of the answer and the Payroll system can give you part of the answer, sooner or later you're going to figure out how to get part of Personnel running right alongside part of Payroll. You're going to start dragging and dropping (or at least cutting and pasting) data from one window to the other. You're going to start responding to ad hoc problems with ad hoc solutions, cobbled together from bits and pieces of production systems.

Once users start creating their own ad hoc applications, the concept of "application" becomes so fluid and flexible as to be meaningless. Programs, rather than being fixed quantities that can only be executed under a prescribed set of circumstances, become automated tools that allow users to apply familiar techniques to an ever broader universe of data. Employees become more capable, the organization becomes both more productive and more flexible. A paradigm shift has occurred.

So we return to the question that started this chapter, "Why client/server?" No one knows what the ultimate value of client/server computing will be. We're not at that point yet. But penultimately, the value of client/server computing has proven to be in its ability to empower users, to give them ever better access to ever greater ranges of information, and to put them in control of the computer, rather than the computer in control of them. To achieve this value, client/server systems need to be bulletproof. They need to be fast, reliable, easy to use, predictable, always available, secure, honest, loyal, steadfast and true.

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