Scheduler Activations

With some slides modified from Raymond Namyst, U. Bordeaux
User-level Threads

✓ Fast thread management (creation, deletion, switching, synchronisation…)

✗ Blocking blocks all threads in a process
  – Syscalls
  – Page faults

✗ No thread-level parallelism on multiprocessor
Kernel-Level Threads

User Mode

Kernel Mode

Process A

Process B

Process C

Scheduler
Kernel-level Threads

❌ Slow thread management (creation, deletion, switching, synchronisation…)
  • System calls
✅ Blocking blocks only the appropriate thread in a process
✅ Thread-level parallelism on multiprocessor
Hybrid Multithreading

User Mode

Scheduler

Process A

Scheduler

Process B

Scheduler

Process C

Kernel Mode

Scheduler
Hybrid Multithreading

✓ Can get real thread parallelism on multiprocessor

✗ Blocking still a problem!!!
Scheduler Activations

- First proposed by [Anderson et al. 91]
- Idea: Both schedulers co-operate
  - User scheduler uses system calls
  - Kernel scheduler uses upcalls!
- Two important concepts
  - Upcalls
    - Notify the user-level of kernel scheduling events
  - Activations
    - A new structure to support upcalls and execution
      - approximately a kernel thread
    - As many running activations as (allocated) processors
    - Kernel controls activation creation and destruction
Scheduler Activations

• Instead of

User Space

Kernel Space

Hardware

• ...rather use the following scheme:

User Space

Kernel Space

Hardware

CPU time wasted

syscall

I/O request

interrupt

CPU used

upcall

upcall
Upcalls to User-level scheduler

• New
  – Allocated a new virtual CPU
  – Can schedule a user-level thread

• Preempted
  – Deallocated a virtual CPU
  – Can schedule one less thread

• Blocked
  – Notifies thread has blocked
  – Can schedule another user-level thread

• Unblocked
  – Notifies a thread has become runnable
  – Must decided to continue current or unblocked thread
Working principle

- Blocking syscall scenario on 2 processors
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Scheduler Activations

- Thread management at user-level
  - Fast
- Real thread parallelism via activations
  - Number of activations (virtual CPU) can equal CPUs
- Blocking (syscall or page fault) creates new activation
  - User-level scheduler can pick new runnable thread.
- Fewer stacks in kernel
  - Blocked activations + number of virtual CPUs
Adoption

- Adopters
  - BSD “Kernel Scheduled Entities”
  - K42
  - Digital UNIX
  - Solaris
  - Mach

- Linux -> kernel threads