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Users, Usability and Grids: Introducing Pegasus, a social study of the development and use of GridPP.

Wednesday 9 May 2007 17:30 (20 minutes)

Describe the scientific/technical community and the scientific/technical activity using (planning to use) the EGEE infrastructure. A high-level description is needed (neither a detailed specialist report nor a list of references).

Pegasus (www.pegasus.lse.ac.uk) is a project looking at the
development and
use of GridPP by the particle physics community as it prepares
for the LHC
experiment. The research studies the techniques, practices, and
infrastructure
involved in the development of GridPP with the aim of providing
qualifying
guidance to others contemplating the development of complex Grid
infrastructure. Our study is qualitative, with the aim of
discussing and
understanding how Grids come into being and

Report on the experience (or the proposed activity). It would be very important to mention key services which are essential for the success of your activity on the EGEE infrastructure.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'user' as "one you uses or
employs a
thing", or "a person who takes narcotic drugs". Both these
definitions suggest
a passive, accepting role for the 'user' as a person who employs
and is
controlled by a thing; only able to employ (or reject) the
features it affords.
Indeed in the case of narcotics (and many computer
systems) the user is a passive, subdued, and manipulated victim.

For Grids however we argue that this relationship between the
'user' and
technology is far too simplistic. Through a discussion of a
social science study of
the development and use of GridPP for users of the LHC particle
physics
experiments, we aim to unpick and question the role of 'users', and
subsequently the aspiration to make Grids 'usable', in terms of
the working
practices of scientists shaping Grids to reflect their needs.
(**CONTINUED IN
NEXT BOX**)

With a forward look to future evolution, discuss the issues you have encountered (or that you expect) in using the EGEE infrastructure. Wherever possi-

ble, point out the experience limitations (both in terms of existing services or missing functionality)

We discuss how the experiments conducted as the LHC impose
themselves on
the requirements for Grids, and act as an organising vision
(Swanson &
Ramiller, 1997) for Grid innovation and development.
We discuss the negotiation process inherent in the development of
any
standard, and we explore the importance of 'power-users' as
spanning the gap
between developers and so called users.

Swanson, E. B. and Ramiller, N. C. (1997) The organizing vision
in information
systems innovation. Org Sci. 8-5

Describe the added value of the Grid for the scientific/technical activity you (plan to) do on the Grid. This should include the scale of the activity and of the potential user community and the relevance for other scientific or business applications

Pegasus draws on the Information Systems field, which itself
consists of a
range of disciplines. We draw on the social sciences to provide
qualitative
reserach methods which enable us to understand the working
practices,
collaboration and communication involved in developing GridPP. We
also draw
on Software Engineering as it provides us with comparisons with
existing
methods and practices for developing complex IT infrastructure
(for example
Open-Source, Agile Methods and Globally distributed development
practices).

At the User Forum we propose to provide a presentation based on the
argument that in order to consider usability we need to
reconsider what we
mean by Users in the context of the Grid. (**CONTINUED IN NEXT BOX**)

Authors: Dr VENTERS, William (London School of Economics); Dr YINGQIN, Zheng (London School of Economics)

Presenter: Dr VENTERS, William (London School of Economics)

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