

# **AN INTERVIEW ABOUT OPERATIONS NAVIGATOR AND MANAGEMENT CENTRAL WITH MRS. NEELA PATEL**

(BY CHRISTOPH CUSCOLECA, ROCHESTER/MN, AUGUST 2001)

During my time at the IBM laboratories in Rochester in summer 2001 I attended a session about Management Central. Actually I didn't want to go to this session, but as I had time to spend I decided to learn more about Management Central.

The funny thing was, that no one else was at this session, so I told the lecturer, Mrs. Neela Patel, that it is not necessary to give this session just for me. So we started talking, and I told her about my job and the Operations Navigator project I am into. And then we started an interview.

I wish to thank Neela, because it was very nice to help me, and also it was funny.

NP = Neela Patel, CC = Christoph Cuscoleca

CC: Hello Neela, would you please tell me a little bit about you and your job at IBM?

NP: Hi Christoph! I am a software engineer with IBM, Rochester and am glad to be able to do this. Any customer who has dealt with the AS/400 or the now "iSeries" has heard about Rochester. My job at IBM has revolved around Management Central and its components so far. I have worked on testing, designing and developing Management Central. I also do other things outside of development like education at events like COMMON and PIE & PID Summer Schools. (PIE = Partners in Education, PID = Partners in Development)

CC: When did you start working for IBM with the AS/400 and what did you do before Management Central?

NP: I started working with IBM in June'98 and since I started I have been working on Management Central because there is always so much new to learn and develop. Before Management Central, which is before IBM for me, I was in school getting my Master's degree in Computer Science.

CC: Are you also involved in Operations Navigator?

NP: Management Central is integrated into Operations Navigator so in that sense I am involved with Operations Navigator. But as far as development is concerned, I am not involved in the development aspect of Operations Navigator outside of Management Central.

CC: What exactly is your job with Management Central?

NP: Within Management Central, I have done various things starting with testing and then designing and developing a infrastructure on which we can develop applications more easily. Most recently, I have been writing an application to manage B2B transactions via Management Central.

CC: Can You please tell me more about that B2B transaction software?

NP: About the application that I have been working on : Managing B2B transaction through management Central :

Not sure if you have heard about Connect for iSeries. It is a product that IBM came out with for making it easier for a customer to plunge into the B2B market. It helps it make easy to get a business ready for accepting and sending transactions over the internet. Now, this is an attempt to try to automate some parts of the business via transactions so that a person does not have to sit and dial phone numbers to different suppliers or buyers trying to get the best deal available.

But then whenever you do something like this, there is always the problem about "administration" as in, if something goes wrong with my transactions and they are getting stuck somewhere and never reaching completion then how does a customer find out. The other aspect of this is also to look at the trend of your business and maybe during holidays there is a big boom and your servers cannot handle it and you might have to decide to put in additional systems for a temporary time frame.

For these considerations and other things, in Management Central we are providing a function where the customer can open a graph of the transaction activity over a selected length of time and interval and look at the number of active transactions at any given point in time. This graph gives real-time updates and you can also view the historical trends in the past. The other main feature is that we can monitor for the number of active transactions (this leads to whether the systems can handle the current load) and/or the time that any particular transaction takes (this leads to whether the transactions are getting stuck somewhere) and like any other monitor in Management Central, they can specify a OS/400 command to run upon reaching thresholds for either or both of these metrics and you get the eventlog and other features that all monitors in MGTC have.

CC: What do you think are the pros & cons of Management Central and Operations Navigator?

NP: First of all let me start by saying that Management Central is a wonderful product. I am not saying this because I am working on it. But when I was fresh out of school and these days in school we did not see a "green screen" anywhere, so I was quiet surprised that these things actually existed in today's world. And when I started looking at the things that Management Central and OpsNav provide, I was thrilled with what I see because if I am a customer with multiple systems then it is tedious for me to do systems management when the only means I have is a "green screen" interface. And if I am a small customer then I do not have the money to spend on the expensive enterprise systems management solutions out there. Management Central provides a customer exactly that. A systems management tool, which is provided as part of the base operating system on the iSeries to manage multiple systems. What is even better is that Management Central can also be used to manage a single system. What has happened in the recent years is also that people coming out of school have almost no "green screen" skills. Everyone is used to Graphical interfaces and customers worry about finding the proper skills to do jobs like systems management. With Management Central and Operations Navigator, we are trying to bridge this gap because now for fresh graduates, this is just like any other application they are used to

using on Windows. We have tried to drive the point across as to how simple things get with Management Central by making customers compare PTFs on just 2 systems on the green screen and time that. Now have them do this via Management Central and time it. They themselves realize how much time was saved and how easy it was. Now, just multiply this 10 times if a customer has 20 systems.

CC: Are you also familiar with the „green screen“?

NP: Yes, I am not only familiar with the green screen, but also use it once in a while. Unless all the function gets into Operations Navigator and Management Central, there will be things that can only be done on the green screen.

CC: Can you please tell me about the benefits of Operations Navigator and Management Central?

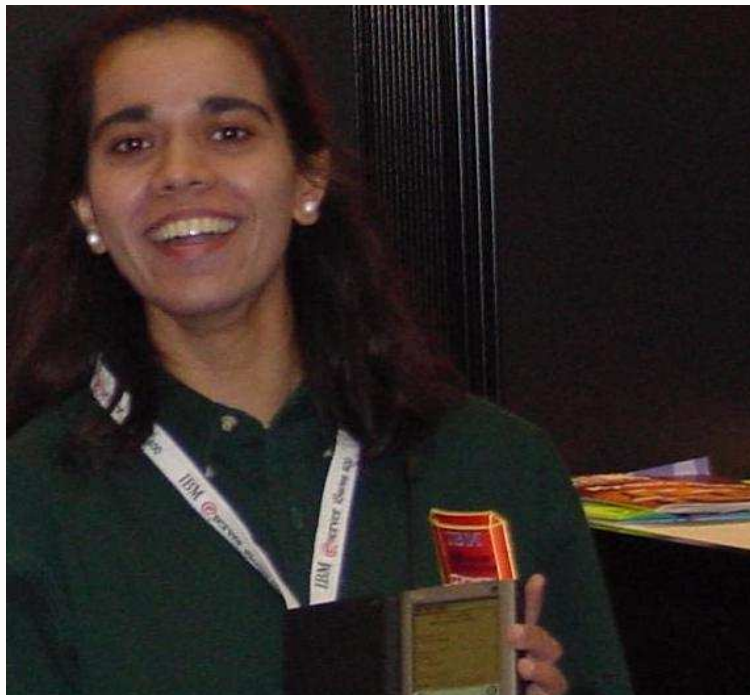
NP: Things seem to be more intuitive via Ops Nav and Management Central, first because everything is GUI driven and that's what people are used to today and that's what people like. Secondly, also because green screen skills are not thought in school these days, so people fresh out of college do not feel out of place as the user interface is windows based, which they are used to for a long time now. In a company, if you are trying to convince your boss to buy an iSeries box or boxes and are trying to put together a talk with him, do you think that in today's world, he will want to buy a box you are proposing, if you show him how to do things on the green versus another person who is proposing a box that has an easy to use GUI front end to it ? The answer is the latter today. As we move forward, green screen skills are getting harder and harder to find so we want a box that is easier to use for today's generation and companies don't have to struggle to find the right people because of the iSeries not having a easy to use interface on it. This is an overall argument about Ops Nav and Management Central. Think about other things like, ftp. To transfer a file over to an IFS directory or a QSYS library from my PC, I would normally have to use ftp and go the right path and send or get the file. Now, with Ops Nav, you can just drag and drop the file. Now, if you have multiple files then you can just multi-select them and transfer them over. And people normally don't think of iSeries as a "drag- and - drop" kind of box, unless they are familiar with functions like these that are available. As for Management Central, you can perform so many "green-screen tedious" tasks with a few wizards that guide you thru everything. You can send, send and install PTFs on multiple systems from one system or compare your PTFs on your systems, or run commands or monitor all or one of your systems for CPU-specific functions, jobs, server, message queues on different criteria, manage user and groups on multiple systems as easily as on one system. Plus, you can schedule particular tasks to be performed on certain date and time or on a regular basis. And all this is available at no additional cost to the customer. It is part of the OS/400 !!!!!!! Now, things could not get any better than that, could they ?

CC: What are the limits?

NP: There are no hardcoded limits in the code for Management Central. But there are practical limits which are determined by your network bandwidth. So, I cannot give you a specific list of limitations because it will vary on a case by case basis.

CC: Don't you think that it is dangerous to let people work on an AS/400 with Operations Navigator and/or Management Central, without knowledge what is really going on on the system?

NP: Let me pose a question back to you. Is it dangerous to let someone use the green screen on an iSeries machine without a knowledge of what really is going on on the system ? More than likely you will answer this with the fact that there is control with the "authority" level that a user is given on the green screen with most users being "\*USER" and not "\*SECOFR". Similar control is available in Ops Nav and Management Central via the use of the Application Administration (App Admin) function. With App Admin, you can not only control which users see which function, just like on the green screen, but also customize the access according to your specific needs. Plus, Ops Nav and Management Central both are designed in such way that it will give a warning message to the user before something significant is being asked to be done by the user like deleting a file/folder. As a matter of fact, it is ideal for people with little knowledge of the iSeries as thru' Ops Nav and Management Central is all GUI driven and easy to use and understand wizards are available for a multi-step task. Of course, as I have mentioned before, with Management Central you get the added capability of being able to perform different tasks on multiple systems with no additional steps then when performing the task on a single system.



CC: I mean someone who has now idea of object concepts and all the other things that make the AS/400 what it is. Doesn't a GUI lead someone to do things and he thinks he knows what he is doing (even if he doesn't)?

NP: You are right about the fact that the GUI helps people perform tasks of which they do not know as much as the GUI is very "user-friendly". That is true to a certain extent even with Ops Nav. But there are certain very very basic things that you have to know as far as the fact that the As/400 has QSYS and IFS file systems, so that you understand there are libraries and IFS files....But for the most part I would say that, it is true and that is the reason also that the fresh graduates have a lesser learning curve

in using Ops Nav versus using the green screen directly. And it is also easier to find those kind of skills and easier to entice people towards these jobs.

CC: Do you think it is always easier to work with Operations Navigator than with a green screen?

NP: Yes, I believe so and as I mentioned, I come from a "non-green" environment school days and it is even more comfortable for the fresh graduates these days. But again, not 100% function is available via Ops Nav and Management Central so there are things that you have to use the green screen for. Although, we are working towards achieving that 100% mark, there is a lot of functionality that the iSeries provides.

CC: There are a lot of new functions in Operations Navigator V5R1, how about the future? Are there any new functions planned?

NP: Yes, V5R1 is by far the largest software release for the iSeries. But we do not stop here. We are always planning new functions. Our goal is to give the customer the most integrated server box available in the market today so we keep adding new functions and enhancing the functions that are already available.

CC: Are there any risks using Operations Navigator & Management Central? How about security?

NP: The only risk you run into with using Ops Nav and Management Central, that I can think of, is that your employees might actually get their work done sooner than they did using just the green screen. :) As for security, if you think that OS/400 is secure then Ops Nav and Management Central are also secure. We are not aware of any security problems or issues as of now.

CC: What is Management Central Pervasive? Can you tell me a little bit about it?

NP: Management Central pervasive is all about allowing you to be able to access your iSeries systems pervasively (anywhere and everywhere.) via a wireless device like a cell phone, PDA or a web browser. It is a set of functions that was shipped as PTFs on V4R5 release for the iSeries and since then as been enriched every release. Initially, in V4R5 you can check to see if you system is up or down and today the functions on pervasive include, being able to run commands on multiple system, take a look at your system, job and/or message monitors and manage jobs like hold, release , end them. All this from a cell phone or PDA or web browser. This helps the systems to make sure that their systems are running healthy and there are no glitches as this is very critical for businesses that need to be up and running 24 X 7. To give you a simple day to day business example , you could have a runaway job that is causing some trouble on 2 of your systems while you are on your way to work. But now with Management Central Pervasive, you can control those jobs from your car from a cell phone and either hold them or end them. That way, the business keeps running smoothly while you get to work after a 1 hour drive and fix the problem. This function is also available as part of the OS/400. You might need to download some PTFs depending on what release of the iSeries boxes you are considering.



Neela Patel at the COMMON US.

- CC: Do you know any useful sources or Web-sites for Operations Navigator and Management Central?
- NP: Yes, there is plenty of information out there that people are not aware of. Here are some of the websites that could serve as a starting point.  
<http://www.ibm.com/eserver/iseres/sftsol/MgmtCentral.htm>  
Redbooks: <http://www.redbooks.ibm.com/>  
Management Central\_- A Smart Way to Manage AS/400 Systems SG24-5407-00  
Managing AS/400 V4R4 with Operations Navigator SG24-5646-00
- CC: When you close the Operations Navigator after your first sign-on, and the restart it again, you don't have to sign on again. Isn't that a security risk?
- NP: No, I don't think so. The user is given the option as to whether he/she wants to sign-on each time Ops Nav is restarted or wants us to remember so that they do not have to sign-on each time. On the Properties page of an iSeries in Ops Nav, if you go to the Connection tab, there are three option available:  
a) User windows user name and password (no prompting)  
b) Use default user id , prompt as needed  
c) Prompt each time - This will prompt every time that Ops Nav is restarted. Timeout can be specified in seconds. (Some customers think this is very annoying.)  
The user is making a conscious decision regarding this. We are not placing any security restrictions on the user.
- CC: Thank You for the interview, Neela.