

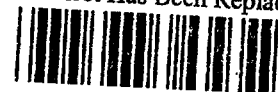
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ABSTRACT

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR JOINING PARTICIPANTS IN
A COMPUTER CONFERENCING SYSTEM

The present invention is an apparatus and method for joining participants in a conferencing system. In a computer conferencing system having a plurality of participants coupled by a communication medium, each participant of the plurality of participants having a meeting manager, a process and apparatus is disclosed for joining participants in the conferencing system. This process comprises the steps of: 1) collecting public meeting information generated by any of the plurality of participants, the public meeting information includes zero or more pages of annotations; 2) receiving a connection indication from a joining participant; 3) receiving joining meeting information from the joining participant; 4) comparing the public meeting information with the joining meeting information and generating a set of differences; and 5) selectively sending the set of differences to the joining participant or the plurality of participants or both the joining participant and the plurality of participants. The process of the present invention further includes the step of collecting private meeting information from a local participant in which the meeting manager is resident. The private meeting information is different from the public meeting information and the private meeting information is not accessible to participants of the plurality of conference participants other than the local participant.

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In the present invention, one and only one participant of the plurality of participants is assigned an arbitrator status, the arbitrator status being dynamically modifiable. The one participant is denoted as the arbitrator participant.

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