Is Corporate Computing Research Dead?
Roy Levin

Abstract: Over the past 50 years, computing research has engendered huge changes in our society. Although most research has been publicly funded, privately funded corporate research labs have produced a disproportionate number of the most widely used and essential innovations in computing. Nearly all of the once-great labs (and the companies that created them) are gone or transformed beyond recognition. In this talk, I examine the past successes of corporate computing research and the conventional wisdom that corporate computing research is dying. I also suggest how society might keep alive the mechanism that created so many foundational technologies of the software age.

Short bio: Roy Levin was a researcher and research manager for nearly four decades. Before retiring in 2014, he was Distinguished Engineer and Managing Director of Microsoft Research Silicon Valley, which he co-founded in 2001 and led for its entire 13-year life. The lab included approximately 65 researchers working chiefly in the area of distributed computing and operated in a highly collaborative style that embraced the technical spectrum from theory to practice. Before joining Microsoft, Levin was a founding member of the Digital (later Compaq) Systems Research Center in Palo Alto, California, and was its Director from 1996. During those years, he was a primary contributor and project leader for the Vesta software configuration management system and for the Topaz multi-processor programming environment and its micro-kernel operating system. From 1977 to 1984, Levin was a researcher at Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center, where he was a principal developer and project co-leader of Cedar, an experimental programming environment for high-performance workstations. He was also a developer of Grapevine, a landmark electronic mail system.

Levin received his Ph.D. in Computer Science from Carnegie-Mellon University in 1977 and his B.S. in Mathematics from Yale University. He is a Fellow of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and a former chair of Special Interest Group on Operating Systems (SIGOPS). He is author or co-author of approximately 25 technical papers.