The Distributed Computing Column

BY

Stefan Schmid

University of Vienna
Währinger Strasse 29, AT - 1090 Vienna, Austria
schmiste@gmail.com

In this issue of the distributed computing column, Alex Auvolat, Davide Frey, Michel Raynal, and Franęis Taïani revisit the basic problem of how to reliably transfer money. Interestingly, the authors show that a simple algorithm is sufficient to solve this problem, even in the presence of Byzantine processes.

This column further includes a summary of the PODC/DISC conference models proposed by the task force commissioned at the PODC 2020 business meeting, and presents and discusses the survey results. I hope it will be helpful and can serve as a basis for further discussions on this topic.

I would like to thank Alex and his co-authors as well as the PODC/DISC task force for their contribution to the EATCS Bulletin. Special thanks go to everyone who contributed to the conference model survey, also at the PODC business meeting and via Zulip.

Enjoy the new distributed computing column!

Money Transfer Made Simple: a Specification, a Generic Algorithm, and its Proof

Alex Auvolat[◇,†], Davide Frey[†], Michel Raynal[†,⋆], François Taïani[†]

[◇]École Normale Supérieure, Paris, France

[†]Univ Rennes, Inria, CNRS, IRISA, 35000 Rennes, France

[⋆]Department of Computing, Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Abstract

It has recently been shown that, contrarily to a common belief, money transfer in the presence of faulty (Byzantine) processes does not require strong agreement such as consensus. This article goes one step further: namely, it first proposes a non-sequential specification of the money-transfer object, and then presents a generic algorithm based on a simple FIFO order between each pair of processes that implements it. The genericity dimension lies in the underlying reliable broadcast abstraction which must be suited to the appropriate failure model. Interestingly, whatever the failure model, the money transfer algorithm only requires adding a single sequence number to its messages as control information. Moreover, as a side effect of the proposed algorithm, it follows that money transfer is a weaker problem than the construction of a safe/regular/atomic read/write register in the asynchronous message-passing crash-prone model.

Keywords: Asynchronous message-passing system, Byzantine process, Distributed computing, Efficiency, Fault tolerance, FIFO message order, Modularity, Money transfer, Process crash, Reliable broadcast, Simplicity.

1 Introduction

Short historical perspective Like field-area or interest-rate computations, money transfers have had a long history (see e.g., [21, 27]). Roughly speaking, when looking at money transfer in today's digital era, the issue consists in building a software object that associates an account with each user and provides two operations, one that allows a process to transfer money from one account to another and one that allows a process to read the current value of an account.

The main issue of money transfer lies in the fact that the transfer of an amount of money v by a user to another user is conditioned to the current value of the former user's account being at least v. A violation of this condition can lead to the problem of double spending (i.e., the use of the same money more than once), which occurs in the presence of dishonest processes. Another important issue of money transfer resides in the privacy associated with money accounts. This means that a full solution to money transfer must address two orthogonal issues: synchronization (to guarantee the consistency of the money accounts) and confidentiality/security (usually solved with cryptography techniques). Here, like in closely related work [14], we focus on synchronization.

Fully decentralized electronic money transfer was introduced in [25] with the *Bitcoin* cryptocurrency in which there is no central authority that controls the money exchanges issued by users. From a software point of view, Bitcoin adopts a peer-to-peer approach, while from an application point of view it seems to have been motivated by the 2008 subprime crisis [32].

To attain its goal Bitcoin introduced a specific underlying distributed software technology called *blockchain*, which can be seen as a specific distributed state-machine-replication technique, the aim of which is to provide its users with an object known as a concurrent *ledger*. Such an object is defined by two operations, one that appends a new item in such a way that, once added, the item cannot be removed, and a second operation that atomically reads the full list of items currently appended. Hence, a ledger builds a total order on the invocations of its operations. When looking at the synchronization power provided by a ledger in the presence of failures, measured with the consensus-number lens, it has been shown that the synchronization power of a ledger is $+\infty$ [13, 30]. In a very interesting way, recent work [14] has shown that, in a context where each account has a single owner who can spend the money currently in his/her account, the consensus number of the *money-transfer* concurrent object is 1. An owner is represented by a process in the following.

This is an important result, as it shows that the power of blockchain technology is much stronger (and consequently more costly) than necessary to implement money transfer[1]. To illustrate this discrepancy, considering a sequential specification of the money transfer object, the authors of [14] show first that, in a failure-prone shared-memory system, money transfer can be implemented on top of a snapshot object [1] (whose consensus number is 1, and consequently

[1]As far as we know, the fact that consensus is not necessary to implement money transfer was stated for the first time in [15].

can be implemented on top of read/write atomic registers). Then, they appropriately modify their shared-memory algorithm to obtain an algorithm that works in asynchronous failure-prone message-passing systems. To allow the processes to correctly validate the money transfers, the resulting algorithm demands them to capture the causality relation linking money transfers and requires each message to carry control information encoding the causal past of the money transfer it carries.

Content of the article The present article goes even further. It first presents a non-sequential specification of the money transfer object[2], and then shows that, contrarily to what is currently accepted, the implementation of a money transfer object does not require the explicit capture of the causality relation linking individual money transfers. To this end, we present a surprisingly simple yet efficient and generic money-transfer algorithm that relies on an underlying reliable-broadcast abstraction. It is efficient as it only requires a very small amount of meta-data in its messages: in addition to money-transfer data, the only control information carried by the messages of our algorithm is reduced to a single sequence number. It is generic in the sense that it can accommodate different failure models *with no modification*. More precisely, our algorithm inherits the fault-tolerance properties of its underlying reliable broadcast: it tolerates crashes if used with a crash-tolerant reliable broadcast, and Byzantine faults if used with a Byzantine-tolerant reliable broadcast.

Given an n-process system where at most t processes can be faulty, the proposed algorithm works for $t < n$ in the crash failure model, and $t < n/3$ in the Byzantine failure model. This has an interesting side effect on the distributed computability side. Namely, in the crash failure model, money transfer constitutes a weaker problem than the construction of a safe/regular/atomic read/write register (where "weaker" means that—unlike a read/write register—it does not require the "majority of non-faulty processes" assumption).

Roadmap The article consists of 7 sections. First, Section 2 introduces the distributed failure-prone computing models in which we are interested, and Section 3 provides a definition of money transfer suited to these computing models. Then, Section 4 presents a very simple generic money-transfer algorithm. Its instantiations and the associated proofs are presented in Section 5 for the crash failure model and in Section 6 for the Byzantine failure model. Finally, Section 7 concludes the article.[3]

[2]To our knowledge, this is the first non-sequential specification of the money transfer object proposed so far.

[3]Let us note that similar ideas have been developed concomitantly and independently in [10], which presents a money transfer system and its experimental evaluation.

2 Distributed Computing Models

2.1 Process failure model

Process model The system comprises a set of n sequential asynchronous processes, denoted $p_1, ..., p_n$[4]. Sequential means that a process invokes one operation at a time, and asynchronous means that each process proceeds at its own speed, which can vary arbitrarily and always remains unknown to the other processes.

Two process failure models are considered. The model parameter t denotes an upper bound on the number of processes that can be faulty in the considered model. Given an execution r (run) a process that commits failures in r is said to be faulty in r, otherwise it is non-faulty (or correct) in r.

Crash failure model In this model, processes may crash. A crash is a premature definitive halt. This means that, in the crash failure model, a process behaves correctly (i.e., executes its algorithm) until it possibly crashes. This model is denoted $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ (*Crash Asynchronous Message Passing*). When t is restricted not to bypass a bound $f(n)$, the corresponding restricted failure model is denoted $CAMP_{n,t}[t \leq f(n)]$.

Byzantine failure model In this model, processes can commit Byzantine failures [23, 28], and those that do so are said to be Byzantine. A Byzantine failure occurs when a process does not follow its algorithm. Hence a Byzantine process can stop prematurely, send erroneous messages, send different messages to distinct processes when it is assumed to send the same message, etc. Let us also observe that, while a Byzantine process can invoke an operation which generates application messages[5] it can also "simulate" this operation by sending fake implementation messages that give their receivers the illusion that they have been generated by a correct sender. However, we assume that there is no Sybil attack like most previous work on byzantine fault tolerance including [14].[6]

As previously, the notations $BAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ and $BAMP_{n,t}[t \leq f(n)]$ (*Byzantine Asynchronous Message Passing*) are used to refer to the corresponding Byzantine failure models.

[4]Hence the system we consider is static (according to the distributed computing community parlance) or permissioned (according to the blockchain community parlance).

[5]An *application* message is a message sent at the application level, while an *implementation* is low level message used to ensure the correct delivery of an application message.

[6]As an example, a Byzantine process can neither spawn new identities, nor assume the identity of existing processes.

2.2 Underlying complete point-to-point network

The set of processes communicate through an underlying message-passing point-to-point network in which there exists a bidirectional channel between any pair of processes. Hence, when a process receives a message, it knows which process sent this message. For simplicity, in writing the algorithms, we assume that a process can send messages to itself.

Each channel is reliable and asynchronous. Reliable means that a channel does not lose, duplicate, or corrupt messages. Asynchronous means that the transit delay of each message is finite but arbitrary. Moreover, in the case of the Byzantine failure model, a Byzantine process can read the content of the messages exchanged through the channels, but cannot modify their content.

To make our algorithm as generic and simple as possible, Section 4 does not present it in terms of low-level send/receive operations[7] but in terms of a high-level communication abstraction, called *reliable broadcast* (e.g., [7, 9, 16, 19, 30]). The definition of this communication abstraction appears in Section 5 for the crash failure model and Section 6 for the Byzantine failure model. It is important to note that the previously cited reliable broadcast algorithms do not use sequence numbers. They only use different types of implementation messages which can be encoded with two bits.

3 Money Transfer: a Formal Definition

Money transfer: operations From an abstract point of view, a money-transfer object can be seen as an abstract array $ACCOUNT[1..n]$ where $ACCOUNT[i]$ represents the current value of p_i's account. This object provides the processes with two operations denoted balance() and transfer(), whose semantics are defined below. The transfer by a process of the amount of money v to a process p_j is represented by the pair $\langle j, v \rangle$. Without loss of generality, we assume that a process does not transfer money to itself. It is assumed that each $ACCOUNT[i]$ is initialized to a non-negative value denoted $\texttt{init}[i]$. It is assumed the array $\texttt{init}[1..n]$ is initially known by all the processes.[8]

Informally, when p_i invokes balance(j) it obtains a value (as defined below) of $ACCOUNT[j]$, and when it invokes the transfer $\langle j, v \rangle$, the amount of money v is moved from $ACCOUNT[i]$ to $ACCOUNT[j]$. If the transfer succeeds, the operation returns `commit`, if it fails it returns `abort`.

[7] Actually the send and receive operations can be seen as "machine-level" instructions provided by the network.

[8] It is possible to initialize some accounts to negative values. In this case, we must assume $pos > neg$, where pos (resp., neg) is the sum of all the positive (resp., negative) initial values.

Histories The following notations and definitions are inspired from [2].

- A local execution history (or local history) of a process p_i, denoted L_i, is a sequence of operations balance() and transfer() issued by p_i. If an operation op1 precedes an operation op2 in L_i, we say that "op1 precedes op2 in process order", which is denoted op1 $\rightarrow_i$ op2.
- An execution history (or history) H is a set of n local histories, one per process, $H = (L_1, \cdots, L_n)$.
- A serialization S of a history H is a sequence that contains all the operations of H and respects the process order $\rightarrow_i$ of each process p_i.
- Given a history H and a process p_i, let $A_{i,T}(H)$ denote the history $(L'_1, ..., L'_n)$ such that
  - $L'_i = L_i$, and
  - For any $j \neq i$: L'_j contains only the transfer operations of p_j.

Notations

- An operation transfer(j, v) invoked by p_i is denoted $\mathsf{trf}_i(j, v)$.
- An invocation of balance(j) that returns the value v is denoted $\mathsf{blc}(j)/v$.
- Let H be a set of operations.
  - $\mathsf{plus}(j, H) = \Sigma_{\mathsf{trf}_k(j,v) \in H}\ v$ (total of the money given to p_j in H).
  - $\mathsf{minus}(j, H) = \Sigma_{\mathsf{trf}_j(k,v) \in H}\ v$ (total of the money given by p_j in H).
  - $\mathsf{acc}(j, H) = \mathtt{init}[j] + \mathsf{plus}(j, H) - \mathsf{minus}(j, H)$ (value of $ACCOUNT[j]$ according to H).

- Given a history H and a process p_i, let S_i be a serialization of $A_{i,T}(H)$ (hence, S_i respects the n process orders defined by H). Let $\rightarrow_{S_i}$ denote the total order defined by S_i.

Money-transfer-compliant serialization A serialization S_i of $A_{i,T}(H)$ is money-transfer compliant (MT-compliant) if:

- For any operation $\mathsf{trf}_j(k, v) \in S_i$, we have
$$v \leq \mathsf{acc}(j, \{\mathsf{op} \in S_i \mid \mathsf{op} \rightarrow_{S_i} \mathsf{trf}_j(k, v)\}), \text{ and}$$
- For any operation $\mathsf{blc}(j)/v \in S_i$, we have
$$v = \mathsf{acc}(j, \{\mathsf{op} \in S_i \mid \mathsf{op} \rightarrow_{S_i} \mathsf{blc}(j)/v\}).$$

MT-compliance is the key concept at the basis of the definition of a money-transfer object. It states that it is possible to associate each process p_i with a total order S_i in which (a) each of its invocations of balance(j) returns a value v equal to p_j's account's current value according to S_i, and (b) processes transfer only money that they have.

Let us observe that the common point among the serializations $S_1, ..., S_n$ lies in the fact that each process sees all the transfer operations of any other process p_j in the order they have been produced (as defined by L_j), and sees its own transfer and balance operations in the order it produced them (as defined by L_i).

Money transfer in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ Considering the $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ model, a money-transfer object is an object that provides the processes with balance() and transfer() operations and is such that, for each of its executions, represented by the corresponding history H, we have:

- All the operations invoked by correct processes terminate.
- For any correct process p_i, there is an MT-compliant serialization S_i of $A_{i,T}(H)$, and
- For any faulty process p_i, there is a history $H' = (L'_1, ..., L'_n)$ where (a) L'_j is a prefix of L_j for any $j \neq i$, and (b) $L'_i = L_i$, and there is an MT-compliant serialization of $A_{i,T}(H')$.

An algorithm implementing a money transfer object is correct in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ if it produces only executions as defined above. We then say that the algorithm is MT-compliant.

Money transfer in $BAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ The main differences between money transfer in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ and $BAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ lies in the fact that a faulty process can try to transfer money it does not have, and try to present different behaviors with respect to different correct processes. This means that, while the notion of a local history L_i is still meaningful for a non-Byzantine process, it is not for a Byzantine process. For a Byzantine process, we therefore define a *mock local history* for a process p_i as any sequence of transfer operations from p_i's account[9]. In this definition, the mock local history L_i associated with a Byzantine process p_i is not necessarily the local history it produced, it is only a history that it could have produced from the point of view of the correct processes. The correct processes implement a money-transfer object if they all behave in a manner consistent with the same set of mock local histories for the Byzantine processes. More precisely, we define a *mock* history associated with an execution on a money transfer object in $BAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ as $\tilde{H} = (\tilde{L}_1, ..., \tilde{L}_n)$ where:

$$\tilde{L}_j = \begin{cases} L_j \text{ if } p_j \text{ is correct,} \\ \text{a } \textit{mock local history} \text{ if } p_j \text{ is Byzantine.} \end{cases}$$

[9]Let us remind that the operations balance() issued by a Byzantine can return any value. So they are not considered in the mock histories associated with Byzantine processes.

Considering the $BAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ model, a money transfer object is such that, for each of its executions, there exists a *mock* history $\tilde{H}$ such that for any correct process p_i, there is an MT-compliant serialization S_i of $A_{i,T}(\tilde{H})$. An algorithm implementing such executions is said to be MT-compliant.

Concurrent vs sequential specification Let us notice that the previous specification considers money transfer as a concurrent object. More precisely and differently from previous specifications of the money transfer object, it does not consider it as a sequential object for which processes must agree on the very same total order on the operations they issue [17]. As a simple example, let us consider two processes p_i and p_j that independently issue the transfers $\mathsf{trf}_i(k, v)$ and $\mathsf{trf}_j(k, v')$ respectively. The proposed specification allows these transfers (and many others) to be seen in different order by different processes. As far as we know, this is the first specification of money transfer as a non-sequential object.

4 A Simple Generic Money Transfer Algorithm

This section presents a generic algorithm implementing a money transfer object. As already said, its generic dimension lies in the underlying reliable broadcast abstraction used to disseminate money transfers to the processes, which depends on the failure model.

4.1 Reliable broadcast

Reliable broadcast provides two operations denoted r_broadcast() and r_deliver(). Because a process is assumed to invoke reliable broadcast each time it issues a money transfer, we use a *multi-shot* reliable broadcast, that relies on *explicit sequence numbers* to distinguish between its different instances (more on this below). Following the parlance of [16] we use the following terminology: when a process invokes r_broadcast(sn, m), we say it "r-broadcasts the message m with sequence number sn", and when its invocation of r_deliver() returns it a pair (sn, m), we say it "r-delivers m with sequence number sn". While definitions of reliable broadcast suited to the crash failure model and the Byzantine failure model will be given in Section 5 and Section 6, respectively, we state their common properties below.

- Validity. This property states that there is no message creation. To this end, it relates the outputs (r-deliveries) to the inputs (r-broadcasts). Excluding malicious behaviors, a message that is r-delivered has been r-broadcast.
- Integrity. This property states that there is no message duplication.

- Termination-1. This property states that correct processes r-deliver what they broadcast.
- Termination-2. This property relates the sets of messages r-delivered by different processes.

The Termination properties ensure that all the correct processes r-deliver the same set of messages, and that this set includes at least all the messages that they r-broadcast.

As mentioned above, sequence numbers are used to identify different instances of the reliable broadcast. Instead of using an underlying FIFO-reliable broadcast in which sequence numbers would be hidden, we expose them in the input/output parameters of the r_broadcast() and r_deliver() operations, and handle their updates explicitly in our generic algorithm. This reification[10] allows us to capture explicitly the complete control related to message r-deliveries required by our algorithm. As we will see, it follows that the instantiations of the previous Integrity property (crash and Byzantine models) will explicitly refer to "upper layer" sequence numbers.

We insist on the fact that the reliable broadcast abstraction that the proposed algorithm depends on does not itself provide the FIFO ordering guarantee. It only uses sequence numbers to identify the different messages sent by a process. As explained in the next section, the proposed generic algorithm implements itself the required FIFO ordering property.

4.2 Generic money transfer algorithm: local data structures

As said in the previous section, `init`$[1..n]$ is an array of constants, known by all the processes, such that `init`$[k]$ is the initial value of p_k's account, and a transfer of the quantity v from a process p_i to a process p_k is represented by the pair $\langle k, v\rangle$. Each process p_i manages the following local variables:

- sn_i: integer variable, initialized to 0, used to generate the sequence numbers associated with the transfers issued by p_i (it is important to notice that the point-to-point FIFO order realized with the sequence numbers is the only "causality-related" control information used in the algorithm).
- $del_i[1..n]$: array initialized to $[0, \cdots, 0]$ such that $del_i[j]$ is the sequence number of the last transfer issued by p_j and locally processed by p_i.
- $account_i[1..n]$: array, initialized to `init`$[1..n]$, that is a local approximate representation of the abstract array $ACCOUNT[1..n]$, i.e., $account_i[j]$ is the value of p_j's account, as known by p_i.

[10]Reification is the process by which an implicit, hidden or internal information is explicitly exposed to a programmer.

While other local variables containing bookkeeping information can be added according to the application's needs, it is important to insist on the fact that the proposed algorithm needs only the three previous local variables (i.e., $(2n+1)$ local registers) to solve the synchronization issues that arise in fault-tolerant money transfer.

4.3 Generic money transfer algorithm: behavior of a process p_i

Algorithm 1 describes the behavior of a process p_i. When it invokes balance$_i(j)$, p_i returns the current value of $account_i[j]$ (line 1).

init: $account_i[1..n] \leftarrow$ `init`$[1..n]$; $sn_i \leftarrow 0$; $del_i[1..n] \leftarrow [0, \cdots, 0]$.

operation balance(j) **is**
(1) return($account[j]$).

operation transfer(j, v) **is**
(2) **if** ($v \leq account_i[i]$)
(3) **then** $sn_i \leftarrow sn_i + 1$; r_broadcast(sn_i, TRANSFER$\langle j, v\rangle$);
(4) wait ($del_i[i] = sn_i$); return(`commit`)
(5) **else** return(`abort`)
(6) **end if**.

when (sn,TRANSFER$\langle k, v\rangle$) **is** r_delivered **from** p_j **do**
(7) wait(($sn = del_i[j] + 1) \wedge (account_i[j] \geq v)$);
(8) $account_i[j] \leftarrow account_i[j] - v$; $account_i[k] \leftarrow account_i[k] + v$;
(9) $del_i[j] \leftarrow sn$.

Algorithm 1: Generic broadcast-based money transfer algorithm (code for p_i)

When it invokes transfer(j, v), p_i first checks if it has enough money in its account (line 2) and returns `abort` if it does not (line 5). If process p_i has enough money, it computes the next sequence number sn_i and r-broadcasts the pair (sn_i, TRANSFER$\langle j, v\rangle$) (line 3). Then p_i waits until it has locally processed this transfer (lines 7-9), and finally returns `commit`. Let us notice that the predicate at line 7 is always satisfied when p_i r-delivers a transfer message it has r-broadcast.

When p_i r-delivers a pair (sn, TRANSFER$\langle k, v\rangle$) from a process p_j, it does not process it immediately. Instead, p_i waits until (i) this is the next message it has to process from p_j (to implement FIFO ordering) and (ii) its local view of the money transfers to and from p_j (namely the current value of $account_i[j]$) allows this money transfer to occur (line 7). When this happens, p_i locally registers the transfer by moving the quantity v from $account_i[j]$ to $account_i[k]$ (line 8) and increases $del_i[j]$ (line 9).

5 Crash Failure Model: Instantiation and Proof

This section presents first the crash-tolerant reliable broadcast abstraction whose operations instantiate the r_broadcast() and r_deliver() operations used in the generic algorithm. Then, using the MT-compliance notion, it proves that Algorithm 1 combined with a crash-tolerant reliable broadcast implements a money transfer object in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$. It also shows that, in this model, money transfer is weaker than the construction of an atomic read/write register. Finally, it presents a simple weakening of the FIFO requirement that works in the $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ model.

5.1 Multi-shot reliable broadcast abstraction in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$

This communication abstraction, named CR-Broadcast, is defined by the two operations cr_broadcast() and cr_deliver(). Hence, we use the terminology "to cr-broadcast a message", and "to cr-deliver a message".

- CRB-Validity. If a process p_i cr-delivers a message with sequence number sn from a process p_j, then p_j cr-broadcast it with sequence number sn.
- CRB-Integrity. For each sequence number sn and sender p_j a process p_i cr-delivers at most one message with sequence number sn from p_j.
- CRB-Termination-1. If a correct process cr-broadcasts a message, it cr-delivers it.
- CRB-Termination-2. If a process cr-delivers a message from a (correct or faulty) process p_j, then all correct processes cr-deliver it.

CRB-Termination-1 and CRB-Termination-2 capture the "strong" reliability property of CR-Broadcast, namely: all the correct processes cr-deliver the same set S of messages, and this set includes at least the messages they cr-broadcast. Moreover, a faulty process cr-delivers a subset of S. Algorithms implementing the CR-Broadcast abstraction in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ are described in [16, 30].

5.2 Proof of the algorithm in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$

Lemma 1. *Any invocation of* balance() *or* transfer() *issued by a correct process terminates.*

Proof The fact that any invocation of *balance*() terminates follows immediately from the code of the operation.

When a process p_i invokes transfer(j, v), it r-broadcasts a message and, due to the CRB-Termination properties, p_i receives its own transfer message and the predicate (line 7) is necessarily satisfied. This is because (i) only p_i can transfer its own money, (ii) the wait statement of line 4 ensures the current invocation of transfer(j, v) does not return until the corresponding TRANSFER message is processed at lines 8-9, and (iii) the fact that $account_i[i]$ cannot decrease between the execution of line 3 and the one of line 7. It follows that p_i terminates its invocation of transfer(j, v). $\Box_{Lemma\ 1}$

The safety proof is more involved. It consists in showing that any execution satisfies MT-compliance as defined in Section 3.

Notation and definition

- Let $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v)$ denote the operation $\mathsf{trf}(k, v)$ issued by p_j with sequence number sn.
- We say a process p_i *processes* the transfer $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v)$ if, after it cr-delivered the associated message TRANSFER$\langle k, v\rangle$ with sequence number sn, p_j exits the wait statement at line 7 and executes the associated statements at lines 8-9. The moment at which these lines are executed is referred to as the *moment when the transfer is processed* by p_i. (These notions are related to the progress of processes.)
- If the message TRANSFER cr-broadcast by a process is cr-delivered by a correct process, we say that the transfer is *successful*. (Let us notice that a message cr-broadcast by a correct process is always successful.)

Lemma 2. *If a process p_i processes $\mathsf{trf}_\ell^{sn}(k, v)$, then any correct process processes it.*

Proof Let $m_1,\ m_2, ...$ be the sequence of transfers processed by p_i and let p_j be a correct process. We show by induction on z that, for all z, p_j processes all the messages $m_1,\ m_2, ..., m_z$.

Base case $z = 0$. As the sequence of transfers is empty, the proposition is trivially satisfied.

Induction. Taking $z \geq 0$, suppose p_j processed all the transfers $m_1,\ m_2, ..., m_z$. We have to show that p_j processes m_{z+1}. Note that $m_1,\ m_2, ..., m_z$ do not typically originate from the same sender, and are therefore normally processed by p_j in a different order than p_i, possibly mixed with other messages. This also applies to m_{z+1}. If m_{z+1} was processed by p_j before m_z, we are done. Otherwise there is a time τ at which p_j processed all the transfers $m_1,\ m_2, ..., m_z$ (case assumption), cr-delivered m_{z+1} (CBR-Termination-2 property), but has not yet processed m_{z+1}. Let $m_{z+1} = \mathsf{trf}_\ell^{sn}(k, v)$. At time τ, we have the following.

- On one side, $del_j[\ell] \leq sn - 1$ since messages are processed in FIFO order and m_{z+1} has not yet been processed. On the other side, $del_j[\ell] \geq sn - 1$ because either $sn = 1$ or $\mathsf{trf}_\ell^{sn-1}(-, -) \in m_1, ..., m_z$, where $\mathsf{trf}_\ell^{sn-1}(-, -)$ is the transfer issued by p_ℓ just before $m_{z+1} = \mathsf{trf}_\ell^{sn}(k, v)$ (otherwise p_i would not have processed m_{z+1} just after $m_1, ..., m_z$). Thus $del_j[\ell] = sn - 1$.

- Let us now shown that, at time τ, $account_j[\ell] \geq v$. To this end let $\mathsf{plus}_i^{z+1}(\ell)$ denote the money transferred to p_ℓ as seen by p_i just before p_i processes m_{z+1}, and $\mathsf{minus}_i^{z+1}(\ell)$ denote the money transferred from p_ℓ as seen by p_i just before p_i processes m_{z+1}. Similarly, let $\mathsf{plus}_j^{z+1}(\ell)$ denote the money transferred to p_ℓ as seen by p_j at time τ and $\mathsf{minus}_j^{z+1}(\ell)$ denote the money transferred from p_ℓ as seen by p_j at time τ. Let us consider the following sums:
  - On the side of the money transferred to p_ℓ as seen by p_j. Due to induction, all the transfers to p_ℓ included in $m_1, m_2, \ldots, m_z$ (and possibly more transfers to p_ℓ) have been processed by p_j, thus $\mathsf{plus}_j^{z+1}(\ell) \geq \Sigma_{\mathsf{trf}_{k'}(\ell,w)\in\{m_1,m_2,\ldots,m_z\}} w$ and, as p_i processed the messages in the order $m_1, ..., m_z, m_{z+1}$ (assumption), we have $\mathsf{plus}_i^{z+1}(\ell) = \Sigma_{\mathsf{trf}_{k'}(\ell,w)\in\{m_1,m_2,\ldots,m_z\}} w$. Hence, $\mathsf{plus}_j^{z+1}(\ell) \geq \mathsf{plus}_i^{z+1}(\ell)$.
  - On the side of the money transferred from p_ℓ as seen by p_j. Let us observe that p_j has processed all the transfers from p_ℓ with a sequence number smaller than sn and no transfer from p_ℓ with a sequence number greater than or equal to sn, thus we have $\mathsf{minus}_j^{z+1}(\ell) = \Sigma_{\mathsf{trf}_\ell(k',w)\in\{m_1,m_2,\ldots,m_z\}} w = \mathsf{minus}_i^{z+1}(\ell)$.

  Let $account_i^{z+1}[\ell]$ be the value of $account_i[\ell]$ just before p_i processes m_{z+1}, and $account_j^{z+1}[\ell]$ be the value of $account_j[\ell]$ at time τ. As $account_j^{z+1}[\ell] = \mathtt{init}[\ell] + \mathsf{plus}_j^{z+1}(\ell) - \mathsf{minus}_j^{z+1}(\ell)$ and $account_i^{z+1}[\ell] = \mathtt{init}[\ell] + \mathsf{plus}_i^{z+1}(\ell) - \mathsf{minus}_i^{z+1}(\ell)$, it follows that $account_j[\ell]$ is greater than or equal to the value of $account_i[\ell]$ just before p_i processes m_{z+1}, which was itself greater than or equal to v (otherwise p_i would not have processed m_{z+1} at that time). It follows that $account_j[\ell] \geq v$.

The two predicates of line 7 are therefore satisfied, and will remain so until m_{z+1} is processed (due to the FIFO order on transfers issued by p_ℓ), thus ensuring that process p_j processes the transfer m_{z+1}. $\square_{Lemma\ 2}$

Lemma 3. *If a process p_i issues a successful money transfer $\mathsf{trf}_i^{sn}(k, v)$ (i.e., it cr-broadcasts it in line 3), any correct process eventually cr-delivers and processes it.*

Proof When process p_i cr-broadcast money transfer $\mathsf{trf}_i^{sn}(k, v)$, the local predicate $(sn = del_i[i] + 1) \wedge (account_i[i] \geq v)$ was true at p_i. When p_i cr-delivers its own transfer message, the predicate is still true at line 7 and p_i processes its transfer (if p_i crashes after having cr-broadcast the transfer and before processing it, we extend its execution—without loss of correctness—by assuming it crashed just after processing the transfer). It follows from Lemma 2 that any correct process processes $\mathsf{trf}_i^{sn}(k, v)$. $\Box_{Lemma\ 3}$

Theorem 1. *Algorithm* 1 *instantiated with* CR-Broadcast *implements a money transfer object in the $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ system model, and ensures that all operations by correct processes terminate.*

Proof Lemma 1 proved that the invocations of the operations balance() and transfer() by the correct processes terminate. Let us now consider MT-compliance.

Considering any execution of the algorithm, captured as history $H = (L_1, ..., L_n)$, let us first consider a correct process p_i. Let S_i be the sequence of the following events happening at p_i (these events are "instantaneous" in the sense p_i is not interrupted when it produces each of them):

- the event $\mathsf{blc}(j)/v$ occurs when p_i invokes balance(j) and obtains v (line 1),
- and the event $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v)$ occurs when p_i processes the corresponding transfer (lines 8-9 executed without interruption).

We show that S_i is an MT-compliant serialization of $A_{i,T}(H)$. When considering the construction of S_i, we have the following:

- For all $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v) \in L_j$ we have that p_j cr-broadcast this transfer and that (sn, TRANSFER$\langle k, v\rangle$) was received by p_j and was therefore *successful*: it follows from Lemma 3 that p_i processes this money transfer, and consequently we have $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v) \in S_i$.
- For all $\mathsf{op1} = \mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v)$ and $\mathsf{op2} = \mathsf{trf}_j^{sn'}(k', v')$ in S_i (two transfers issued by p_j) such that $\mathsf{op1} \rightarrow_j \mathsf{op2}$, we have $sn < sn'$. Consequently p_i processes op1 before op2, and we have $\mathsf{op1} \rightarrow_{S_i} \mathsf{op2}$.
- For all pairs op1 and op2 belonging to L_i, their serialization order is the same in L_i and S_i.

It follows that S_i is a serialization of $A_{i,T}(H)$. Let us now show that S_i is MT-compliant.

- Case where the event in S_i is $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v)$. In this case we have $v \leq \mathsf{acc}(j, \{\mathsf{op} \in S_i \mid \mathsf{op} \rightarrow_{S_i} \mathsf{trf}_j(k, v)\}$ because this condition is directly encoded at p_i in the waiting predicate that precedes the processing of op.
- Case where the event in S_i is $\mathsf{blc}(j)/v$. In this case we have $v = \mathsf{acc}(j, \{\mathsf{op} \in S_i \mid \mathsf{op} \rightarrow_{S_i} \mathsf{blc}(j)/v\}$, because this is exactly the way how the returned value v is computed in the algorithm.

This terminates the proof for the correct processes.

For a process p_i that crashes, the sequence of money transfers from a process p_j that is processed by p_i is a prefix of the sequence of money transfers issued by p_j (this follows from the FIFO processing order, line 7). Hence, for each process p_i that crashes there is a history $H' = (L'_1, ..., L'_n)$ where L'_j is a prefix of L_j for each $j \neq i$ and $L'_i = L_i$, such that, following the same reasoning, the construction S_i given above is an MT-compliant serialization of $A_{i,T}(H')$, which concludes the proof of the theorem. $\Box_{Theorem\ 1}$

5.3 Money transfer vs read/write registers in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$

It is shown in [5] that it is impossible to implement an atomic read/write register in the distributed system model $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$, i.e., when, in addition to asynchrony, any number of processes may crash. On the positive side, several algorithms implementing such a register in $CAMP_{n,t}[t < n/2]$ have been proposed, each with its own features (see for example [4, 5, 24] to cite a few). An atomic read/write register can be built from safe or regular registers[11] [22, 29, 33]. Hence, as atomic registers, safe and regular registers cannot be built in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ (although they can in $CAMP_{n,t}[t < n/2]$). As $CAMP_{n,t}[t < n/2]$ is a more constrained model than $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$, it follows that, from a $CAMP_{n,t}$ computability point of view, the construction of a safe/regular/atomic read/write register is a stronger problem than money transfer.

5.4 Replacing FIFO by a weaker ordering in $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$

An interesting question is the following one: is FIFO ordering necessary to implement money transfer in the $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$ model? While we conjecture it is, it appears that, a small change in the specification of money transfer allows us to use a weakened FIFO order, as shown below.

Weakened money transfer specification The change in the specification presented in Section 3 concerns the definition of the serialisation S_i associated with each process p_i. In this modified version the serialization S_i associated with each process p_i is no longer required to respect the process order on the operations issued by p_j, $j \neq i$. This means that two different process p_i and p_k may observe the transfer() operations issued by a process p_j in different orders (which captures the fact that some transfer operations by a process p_j are commutative with respect to its current account).

[11] Safe and regular registers were introduced introduced in [22]. They have weaker specifications than atomic registers.

Modification of the algorithm Let k be a constant integer ≥ 1. Let $sn_i(j)$ be the highest sequence number such that all the transfer messages from p_j whose sequence numbers belong to $\{1, \cdots, .sn_i(j)\}$ have been cr-delivered and processed by a certain process p_i (i.e., lines 8-9 have been executed for these messages). Initially we have $sn_i(j) = 0$.

Let sn be the sequence number of a message cr-delivered by p_i from p_j. At line 7 the predicate $sn = del_i[j] + 1$ can be replaced by the predicate $sn \in \{sn_i(j) + 1, \cdots, sn_i(j) + k\}$. Let us notice that this predicate boils down to $sn = del_i[j] + 1$ when $k = 1$. More generally the set of sequence numbers $\{sn_i(j)+1, \cdots, sn_i(j)+k\}$ defines a sliding window for sequence numbers which allows the corresponding messages to be processed.

The important point here is the fact that messages can be processed in an order that does not respect their sending order as long as all the messages are processed, which is not guaranteed when $k = +\infty$. Assuming p_j issues an infinite number of transfers, if $k = +\infty$ it is possible that, while all these messages are cr-delivered by p_i, some of them are never processed at lines 8-9 (their processing being always delayed by other messages that arrive after them). The finiteness of the value k prevents this unfair message-processing order from occurring.

The proof of Section 5.2 must be appropriately adapted to show that this modification implements the weakened money-transfer specification.

6 Byzantine Failure Model: Instantiation and Proof

This section presents first the reliable broadcast abstraction whose operations instantiate the r_broadcast() and r_deliver() operations used in the generic algorithm. Then, it proves that the resulting algorithm correctly implements a money transfer object in $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3]$.

6.1 Reliable broadcast abstraction in $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3]$

The communication abstraction, denoted BR-Broadcast, was introduced in [7]. It is defined by two operations denoted br_broadcast() and br_deliver() (hence we use the terminology "br-broadcast a message" and "br-deliver a message"). The difference between this communication abstraction and CR-Broadcast lies in the nature of failures. Namely, as a Byzantine process can behave arbitrarily, CRB-Validity, CRB-Integrity, and CRB-Termination-2 cannot be ensured. As an example, it is not possible to ensure that if a Byzantine process br-delivers a message, all correct processes br-deliver it. BR-Broadcast is consequently defined by the following properties. Termination-1 is the same in both communication abstractions, while Integrity, Validity and Termination-2 consider only correct processes (the difference lies in the added constraint written in italics).

- BRB-Validity. If a *correct* process p_i br-delivers a message from a *correct* process p_j with sequence number sn, then p_j br-broadcast it with sequence number sn.
- BRB-Integrity. For each sequence number sn and sender p_j a *correct* process p_i br-delivers at most one message with sequence number sn from sender p_j.
- BRB-Termination-1. If a correct process br-broadcasts a message, it br-delivers it.
- BRB-Termination-2. If a *correct* process br-delivers a message from a (correct or faulty) process p_j, then all correct processes br-deliver it.

It is shown in [8, 30] that $t < n/3$ is a necessary requirement to implement BR-Broadcast. Several algorithms implementing this abstraction have been proposed. Among them, the one presented in [7] is the most famous. It works in the $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3]$ model, and requires three consecutive communication steps. The one presented in [19] works in the more constrained $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/5]$ model, but needs only two consecutive communication steps. These algorithms show a trade-off between optimal t-resilience and time-efficiency.

6.2 Proof of the algorithm in $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3]$

The proof has the same structure, and is nearly the same, as the one for the process-crash model presented in Section 5.2.

Notation and high-level intuition $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v)$ now denotes a money transfer (or the associated processing event by a process) that correct processes br-deliver from p_j with sequence number sn. If p_j is a correct process, this definition is the same as the one used in the model $CAMP_{n,t}[\emptyset]$. If p_j is Byzantine, TRANSFER messages from p_j do not necessarily correspond to actual transfer() invocations by p_j, but the BRB-Termination-2 property guarantees that all correct processes br-deliver the *same* set of TRANSFER messages (with the same sequence numbers), and therefore agree on how p_j's behavior should be interpreted. The reliable broadcast thus ensures a form of *weak agreement* among correct processes in spite of Byzantine failures. This weak agreement is what allows us to move almost seamlessly from a crash-failure model to a Byzantine model, with no change to the algorithm, and only a limited adaptation of its proof.

More concretely, Lemma 2 (for crash failures) becomes the next lemma whose proof is the same as for Lemma 2 in which the reference to the CBR-Termination-2 property is replaced by a reference to its BRB counterpart.

Lemma 4. *If a* correct *process p_i processes* $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v)$*, then any correct process processes it.*

Similarly, Lemma 3 turns into its Byzantine counterpart, lemma 5.

Lemma 5. *If a* correct *process p_i br-broadcasts a money transfer* $\mathsf{trf}_i^{sn}(k, v)$ *(line* 3*), any correct processes eventually br-delivers and processes it.*

Proof When a correct process p_i br-broadcasts a money transfer $\mathsf{trf}_i^{sn}(k, v)$, we have $(sn = del_i[i] + 1) \wedge (account_i[i] \geq v)$, thus when it br-delivers it the predicate of line 7 is satisfied. By Lemma 4, all the correct processes process this money transfer. $\square_{Lemma\ 5}$

Theorem 2. *Algorithm* 1 *instantiated with* BR-Broadcast *implements a money transfer object in the system $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3]$ model, and ensures that all operations by correct processes terminate.*

The model constraint $t < n/3$ is due only to the fact that Algorithm 1 uses BR-broadcast (for which $t < n/3$ is both necessary and sufficient). As the invocations of $\mathsf{balance}()$ by Byzantine processes may return arbitrary values and do not impact the correct processes, they are not required to appear in their local histories.

Proof The proof that the operations issued by the correct processes terminate is the same as in Lemma 1 where the CRB-Termination properties are replaced by their BRB-Termination counterparts.

To prove MT-compliance, let us first construct mock local histories for Byzantine processes: the mock local history L_i associated with a Byzantine process p_j is the sequence of money transfers from p_j that the correct processes br-deliver from p_j and that they process. (By Lemma 4 all correct processes process the same set of money transfers from p_j).

Let p_i be a correct process and S_i be the sequence of operations occurring at p_i defined in the same way as in the crash failure model. In this construction, the following properties are respected:

- For all, $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v) \in L_j$ then
  - if p_j is correct, it br-broadcast this money transfer and, due to Lemma 5, p_i processes it, hence $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v) \in S_i$.
  - if p_j is Byzantine, due to the definition of L_j (sequence of money transfers that correct processes br-delivers from p_j and process), we have $\mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v) \in S_i$.
- For all $\mathsf{op1} = \mathsf{trf}_j^{sn}(k, v)$ and $\mathsf{op2} = \mathsf{trf}_j^{sn'}(k', v')$ (two transfers in $L_j \subseteq S_i$) such that $\mathsf{op1} \rightarrow_j \mathsf{op2}$, we have $sn < sn'$, consequently p_i processes $\mathsf{op1}$ before $\mathsf{op2}$, and we have $\mathsf{op1} \rightarrow_{S_i} \mathsf{op2}$.

- For all both op1 and op2 belonging to L_i, their serialization order is the same in L_i as in S_i (same as for the crash case).

It follows that S_i is a serialization of $A_{i,T}(\tilde{H})$ where $\tilde{H} = (L_1, .., L_n)$, L_i being the sequence of its operations if p_i is correct, and a mock sequence of money transfers, if it is Byzantine. The same arguments that were used in the crash failure model can be used here to prove that S_i is MT-compliant. Since all correct processes observe the same mock sequence of operations L_j for any given Byzantine process p_j, it follows that the algorithm implements an MT-compliant money transfer object in $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3]$. $\square_{Theorem\ 2}$

6.3 Extending to incomplete Byzantine networks

An algorithm is described in [31] which simulates a fully connected (point-to-point) network on top of an asynchronous Byzantine message-passing system in which, while the underlying communication network is incomplete (not all the pairs of processes are connected by a channel), it is $(2t + 1)$-connected (i.e., any pair of processes is connected by $(2t + 1)$ disjoint paths[12]). Moreover, it is shown that this connectivity requirement is both necessary and sufficient.[13]

Hence, denoting $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3, (2t + 1)\text{-connected}]$ such a system model, this algorithm builds $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3]$ on top $BAMP_{n,t}[t < n/3, (2t+1)\text{-connected}]$ (both models have the same computability power). It follows that the previous money-transfer algorithm works in incomplete $(2t + 1)$-connected asynchronous Byzantine systems where $t < n/3$.

7 Conclusion

The article has revisited the synchronization side of the money-transfer problem in failure-prone asynchronous message-passing systems. It has presented a generic algorithm that solves money transfer in asynchronous message-passing systems where processes may experience failures. This algorithm uses an underlying reliable broadcast communication abstraction, which differs according to the type of failures (process crashes or Byzantine behaviors) that processes can experience.

[12] "Disjoint" means that, given any pair of processes p and q, any two paths connecting p and q share no process other than p and q. Actually, the $(2t + 1)$-connectivity is required only for any pair of correct processes (which are not known in advance).

[13] This algorithm is a simple extension to asynchronous systems of a result first established in [11] in the context of synchronous Byzantine systems.

In addition to its genericity (and modularity), the proposed algorithm is surprisingly simple[14] and particularly efficient (in addition to money-transfer data, each message generated by the algorithm only carries one sequence number). As a side effect, this algorithm has shown that, in the crash failure model, money transfer is a weaker problem than the construction of a read/write register. As far as the Byzantine failure model is concerned, we conjecture that $t < n/3$ is a necessary requirement for money transfer (as it is for the construction of a read/write register [18]).

Finally, it is worth noticing that this article adds one more member to the family of algorithms that strive to "unify" the crash failure model and the Byzantine failure model as studied in [6, 12, 20, 26].

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QUO VADISC? OUTCOMES OF THE PODC/DISC CONFERENCE MODEL SURVEY

Stefan Schmid

Abstract

At the ACM PODC 2020 business meeting and on Zulip, a task force was formed to propose options for changing the PODC/DISC deadline schedule and/or moving to a publication model based on journal-style reviewing. This article summarizes the models identified by the task force and their underlying rationales, and reports on the results of a recent survey among community members, conducted by the task force.

1 Introduction

The task force commissioned to explore possible alternative PODC/DISC conference and publication models consists of seven active members of the community:

1. Christian Cachin
2. Faith Ellen
3. Yuval Emek
4. Rachid Guerraoui
5. Christoph Lenzen (chair)
6. David Peleg
7. Jukka Suomela

In September 2020, the task force conducted an extensive survey in the community. The survey was announced on the PODC mailing list. Despite the relatively short time frame and the extensive survey (reading and responding to the specific questions took around one hour), 69 anonymous community members participated in the survey.

In this article, we first present and discuss the models the task force identified, and then report on the survey results. The article may serve as a basis for the upcoming community meeting at DISC (Oct 12 - 16).

2 The Models Suggested by the Task Force

This section reviews the current situation and the possible models, as identified by the task force.

2.1 The Current Situation

The task force survey focuses on the two main annual conferences:

1. PODC (under ACM), around July-August

2. DISC (under EATCS), around October

Publication practices of the community are currently centered around conference abstracts rather than journal papers. The task force identified the following potential shortcomings of the current situation:

- The spacing between PODC and DISC deadlines is imbalanced.

- The full versions of many papers never get published (and often are not written). The full versions of papers on arXiv are not peer-reviewed, which can make it problematic to build on top.

- In many schools, promotion and tenure committees treat conference papers as less important than journal papers. A lack of journal papers can negatively affect the career development of young researchers in the community.

- Acceptance decisions are not only a question of merit, but may also depend on the availability of slots.

- Randomness in the decision process can cause unpredictable publication delays for solid, but not outstanding papers. It may also result in authors being less willing to improve their rejected papers before resubmitting them.

2.2 Possible Alternative Models

The task force proposed three alternative models. The three suggested models all share the following properties:

- Unifying PODC and DISC into two annual conferences of equal standing, called The Summer Symposium on Principles of Distributed Computing (S-PODC) and The Winter Symposium on Principles of Distributed Computing (W-PODC). While the task force considers the specific names S-PODC and W-PODC as placeholders, the idea is that they should capture the focus on fundamental aspects of distributed computing systems. A new Society for Principles of Distributed Computing could be established to oversee the organization of the two conferences. In its most minimal form, the new society simply assumes the roles of the steering committees of PODC and DISC.
- Having 2 or 4 equi-spaced deadlines.

2.2.1 Model 1: Conference Reviewing

Summary: The first suggested model requires the smallest change from the current state of affairs. A comparative discussion about the relative advantages of having 2 or 4 deadlines will appear at the end of this section. The description below is for 4 deadlines; the 2-deadline variant is self-explanatory.
Details:

- Each conference is associated with two review cycles so that in total, we will have four equally spaced deadlines per year.
- Each conference is associated with one CFP that announces its two review cycles.
- Papers accepted in a review cycle associated with conference X are presented during conference X. (This presentation will be relatively short, 5-10 minutes per paper.) They are also included in the proceedings of conference X, which means that the proceedings include papers from two different review cycles.
- The authors of each accepted paper upload a manuscript and a pre-recorded video presentation of their work to the conference website shortly (a few weeks) after the notification.
  - Regular papers: manuscript = full version; video length 25 minutes
  - Brief announcements: the manuscript contains (at least) the submitted content; video length 10 minutes
- The proceedings of conference X are produced after the second review cycle associated with conference X (around the actual dates of the conference).

- The appointment of a PC chair for conference X means that he/she is appointed for the two review cycles associated with conference X.

To be determined:

- Regarding the appointment of (non-chair) PC members, the task force sees three alternatives:

  1. Each PC member serves on one review cycle; the entire PC (possibly excluding the chair) is replaced from one review cycle to the next. (This is relevant mainly for the 2-deadline model; with 4 deadlines, it might not work well.)
  2. Each PC member serves on the two review cycles that are associated with the same conference; the entire PC is replaced from one conference to the next.
  3. Each PC member serves on two review cycles; half of the PC is replaced from one review cycle to the next (a "rolling PC"). It is recommended that the appointment of PC members that serve under two PC chairs will be handled by both of them.

  Optionally, each submission may be associated with some PC members responsible for it, requiring PC members to remain active on all the submissions under their responsibility until the fate of these submissions is decided. This implies that submissions arriving on deadline X should preferably be assigned to new PC members who joined the PC on round X, to minimize the "overflow" of PC duty.

- Relations with ACM and EATCS: It needs to be determined if the community wants to stick with the current umbrella organizations. If so, one could associate the summer conference with ACM and the winter conference with EATCS (or vice versa). This means that the production of the proceedings of conference X will be handled by ACM/EATCS, depending on whether X is the summer or winter conference.

  – The task force suggests to have a unified format for the proceedings of the two conferences, but this may be difficult given that ACM insists on their own format. An effort needs to be made to ensure that the space bounds are more or less equivalent.

- Enforcing limitations on re-submissions: If the number of deadlines per year are doubled, one should consider enforcing certain limitations on re-submitting rejected papers. There are two alternatives (which could also be combined):

1. Hard limitation: e.g., a paper that has been rejected twice cannot be submitted again (to either of the two conferences).
2. Soft limitation: a submission of a previously rejected manuscript must be accompanied by a cover letter that includes the previous reviews and explains how they have been addressed — why is the currently submitted manuscript better than the previously rejected one(s)?
   - This rule could be applied to any submission that includes material from a previously rejected manuscript. This could be applied to resubmissions rejected from other venues too.

2.2.2 Model 2: Hybrid Conference+Journal Reviewing

The goal of Models 2 and 3 is to implement a transition of the community into a publication model based on journals rather than conference proceedings.

Summary: Model 1 augmented with the requirement that the full versions of all accepted conference papers have to be submitted for publication in the journal associated with the conferences soon after the respective conference.

Details:

- The conference CFP will state that the authors of accepted papers are also expected to submit their work to the Distributed Computing journal, max. X months after the conference presentation. The authors can also choose to publish in a different journal, as long as they do it in a timely manner.
- When the PC members accept an invitation to join the PC, they also agree to referee or find appropriate referees for the journal submissions for the papers they already handled in the conference. The PC members are committed to handle the first round of reviewing in max. X months and revision rounds in max. X months.
- The Distributed Computing journal follows its usual protocols and its own standards, and it can also freely use reviewers outside the PC. If the paper is not strong enough or good enough, it can get rejected.

To be determined:

- How to ensure that, for a short contribution, exactly the same text can serve as the "conference submission" and as the "journal submission". A possible solution would be to negotiate with the publishers to avoid copyright issues. The conference version could be a short abstract with a link to the full version.

- Do we expect that external reviewers of the conference papers will also help with journal reviews? Or do we expect that the PC members who used external reviewers for the conference papers will find new external reviewers for the journal submissions if needed?

2.2.3 Model 3: Journal Reviewing

Summary: This model is based on establishing a journal for the Society for Distributed Computing, called Transactions on DC (TDC), or some other suitable name, and requiring authors to submit a full paper, jointly to the conference and the journal. The journal will serve as the society's main archival medium, effectively replacing the proceedings in their current form (although we may still have thinner proceeding volumes, based on 1-2 page abstracts). Once a submission is accepted, it gets to be presented in the conference (specifically, the nearest one) as well as published in its full version in TDC.
Details:

- Authors are required to submit a full paper, which is evaluated thoroughly as in journals.

- To reduce the reviewing load, the reviews shall consist of two or three stages:

  – Stage 1 (quick evaluation): The PC (possibly using sub-reviewers) evaluates significance and interest (following PODC's current standards). This stage should take 3-4 weeks, and its outcome is either "reject" or "proceed to a full review". Typically, submissions that pass on to the next stage are likely to be accepted (except in rare situations such as an error or another serious problem).

  – Stage 2 (full review): The PC assigns referees who will go over the entire paper and verify it, including correctness. If the reviewers recommend acceptance (possibly subject to minor revisions), then the paper will enter the "accepted papers list" of the current PC. But the reviewers may recommend a major revision, in which case an additional stage is needed, and the paper will not be included in the current list of accepted papers.

  – Stage 3 (revision): If the reviewers recommend a major revision, the authors will be asked to revise it. The revised submission will be sent to the reviewers again, who will recommend either acceptance or rejection. When the paper is accepted, it will enter the "accepted papers list" of the current cycle.

- Each step (quick evaluation / full review / revision) will be given a strict time bound.
- Rejections, as well as "smooth" acceptances, are made within the time frame of a single review cycle. In contrast, in case of a revision, the entire process might take longer than 3 months, and thus span more than one review cycle.
- A submission made on some deadline X may end up in either of the two conferences, depending on how long it took to review / revise it until it is accepted. In other words, when authors make a submission on deadline X, they do not know which conference they will end up in. This has several implications. In particular:
  - The call for papers for some deadline X should be issued by the DC society jointly for both conferences.
  - Consecutive PC's affect each other. In particular, each PC passes on a "commitment" to the next PC, in the form of a collection of submissions that passed Stage 1+2 and are now under revision. In other words, each PC starts with two piles of submissions: "old" submissions, currently under revision, and "fresh" submissions.

To be determined:

- Should TDC be a full-fledged journal, and accept also other types of submissions, e.g., of full papers based on extended abstracts that have appeared in other theory conferences such as FOCS / STOC?
- What happens to Distributed Computing (DC), the current main journal of our community? Do we want DC to serve the role of TDC? Currently DC has limited volume, and it is perhaps slightly different in spirit and goals from the envisioned TDC.
- Who will run TDC? In the current model, our main journal (DC) is run by Springer-Verlag, and our proceedings are produced for us by ACM (for PODC) and Springer-Verlag resp. more recently LIPIcs (for DISC).

2.2.4 Discussion: 2 vs 4 Deadlines

All three models can work with 2 or 4 equi-spaced deadlines a year. The task force identified the following advantages of 2 deadlines:

- Simpler PC organization (separate PC for each conference, no need for staggering, fewer PC meetings per year).

- Might fit better with Model 3, where longer time could be needed to complete the evaluation of some submissions.

An advantage of 4 deadlines is:

- Shorter waiting from the time a paper is ready for submission until it is accepted.

2.3 Independent Methods

The task force considers the following changes useful regardless of whether the current system is continued or one of Models 1 to 3 is adopted.

- No excuses regarding full versions: they are being submitted as well (under all models), and will be archived in a public repository in case of acceptance. Updates are fine, but the original version is guaranteed to be available.
- Upload a recorded talk within a few weeks after acceptance, which is archived and published.
- Ask authors who submit papers to pledge to be available as subreviewers.
  - Suggestion: the submission process includes a mandatory "topic preferences" form (that each co-author must fill out).
  - May help with reliable and fast recruitment of reviewers, so the task force considers this particularly important when choosing Model 3 with 4 deadlines.

2.4 Relation with Publishers

The basic assumption is that the community should publish with gold open access. This means that there must be funds to pay for the production costs. Currently, with ACM, individuals who want open access for their paper pay for it directly; this is expensive (more than 1000 USD). LIPIcs currently publishes DISC proceedings with gold open access and the costs are much smaller than with ACM (less than 100 USD). However, LIPIcs is only an option for conference proceedings, not for a journal.

If there is an independent society, then cost may also be absorbed by that society and its members. For example, volunteers could run an instance of OJS (Open Journal Systems) and the society pays for minimal residual cost (i.e., a web server and backups). The IACR (`https://www.iacr.org`) currently uses this model for ToSC (`https://tocs.iacr.org`) and TCHES (`https://tches.iacr.org`).

An issue with the current situation of scientific publishing with gold open access is that it may introduce both labor cost (for work done by volunteers) and monetary cost (for work that cannot be done oneself). Such costs can be charged to authors and attendees (per paper or per conference), as currently done by DISC with LIPIcs. On the other hand, it could be charged to readers, with a paywall around the library, as currently done by Springer and by ACM (only those who pay for the online library can view). No matter which option is taken, it is usually in the researchers' interest to ensure that ownership of publications remains with them and that copyright is not given away to a commercial publisher.

2.5 Comparison Between the Models

The task force summarizes the relative pros and cons of the models from their perspective as follows. While some points were controversial, the following gives the overall impression. The term "Model 0" is used to refer to the current state of affairs.

2.5.1 Model 0 (status quo)

The main advantage the task force sees in favor of the current system is simply that there is no need for change. The perceived disadvantages identified by the panel are listed under "main shortcomings" at the beginning of the document.

2.5.2 Model 1 (conference reviewing) vs. Models 2 & 3 (journal reviewing)

Model 1 makes minimal changes, with the goal of recalibrating PODC and DISC deadlines to be equally spaced. As we currently perform conference reviews within 3 months, the 4 deadline version would spread out the reviewing more equally throughout the year, while reducing the (average) time between a paper being ready for submission and its publication. However, members of the program committee have work assigned to them for a longer period of time. Models 2 & 3, on the other hand, in addition seek to change the current approach to reviewing to be, in essence, that of a journal. The hope would be to have higher quality reviewing with all the associated improvements over the current system (see main shortcomings), at the expense of a higher review workload. Opinions regarding how much additional workload would actually be incurred varied, as there is also the hope of reducing the number of times papers are evaluated from scratch and/or resubmitted without substantial changes.

2.5.3 Model 2 vs. Model 3 (conference reviews first or immediate journal reviewing)

Model 2 proposes to have the journal submission follow the current conference reviewing and publication process. The idea is that it guarantees that a decision on (conference!) acceptance or rejection is taken within a fixed time bound. Accordingly, this model is of highest interest with 4 deadlines. In addition, there is an opportunity to improve on the original submission based on reflection and the feedback received at the conference. Model 2 appears to be more compatible with maintaining ties to ACM than Model 3. However, implementation issues relating to short papers whose journal versions are essentially identical to their conference versions might arise. There were concerns that Model 2 would cause an even higher reviewing load on the community, because accepted conference papers would receive journal reviews for modified versions after a time gap of several months.

The main idea of Model 3 is that we would not only have a thorough reviewing process, but acceptance decisions would be based on a full evaluation from the start. In contrast to Model 2, no separate, additional "conference style" reviews would be performed. However, an initial screening process is foreseen to avoid fully reviewing submissions that would not pass the bar assuming correctness. The possibility of not receiving a final decision within a single review cycle in case of a major revision is a disadvantage. However, it is an advantage that a paper requiring major revisions is not accepted prematurely.

With 4 deadlines, there is no more time than today for a conference review, so care has to be taken to not overload reviewers in Model 3. While 2 deadlines (rather than 4) could be considered to mitigate this issue, this would further add to the delay between papers being ready for submission and receiving a first acceptance notification. However, the task force agreed that Model 3 with 4 deadlines is feasible if (i) the community fully supports it and (ii) authors submitting papers are required to pledge to serve as subreviewers.

3 Results of the Survey

In September 2020, the task force shared a document with the contents above on Google Drive, and distributed a survey form via the PODC mailing list, asking for inputs from the members of the community. Although the survey was open only for a relatively short time period (September 15-24), to have the results ready for discussion at the DISC conference, and despite the non-trivial time investment required (according to the email by the task force, 60-90 minutes), a significant amount of input was received.

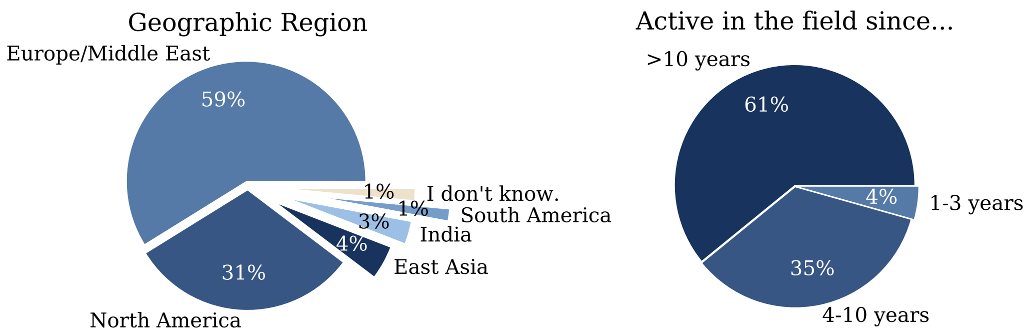


Figure 1: Left: Which geographic region do you feel most closely associated with? Right: How long have you been active in the field?

Let us start with some statistics. The survey was completed by 69 community members:

- 10 female, 50 male, 9 no answer or other
- 40 from Europe/Middle East, 21 from North America, 3 from East Asia, 2 from India, 1 from South America (see Figure 1 (left))
- 39 faculty members with tenure, 11 faculty members prior to tenure, 12 postdocs, 4 industrial researchers, 1 graduate student, and 2 others
- 11 participants had more than 20 PODC/DISC papers, 11 between 11 and 20, 29 between 4 and 10, and 16 between 1 and 3
- 61% of the participants have more than 10 years experience, 35% have 4-10 years experience, and only 4% have a shorter experience (see Figure 1 (right))

Regarding the popularity of the models, Figure 2 shows the feedback received on the question:

- For each model and number of deadlines combination, do you think the combination is good, bad, or neutral?

Especially Model 1 with 4 deadlines seems to receive interest. Also Model 2 with 4 deadlines and Model 3 with 2 deadlines receive good feedback, however, there are more concerns about the detailed implementation, as we also see in the individual text answers that some participants provided (see below for more details).

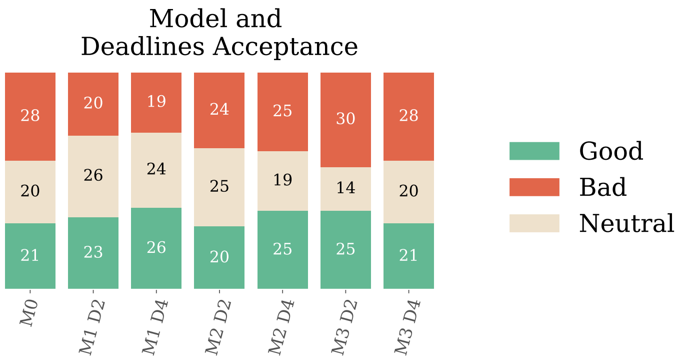
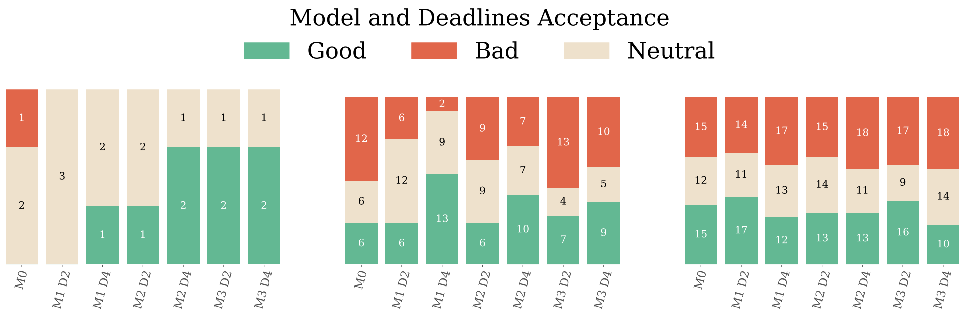


Figure 2: Model and deadline acceptance overview



(a) 1-3 years (b) 4-10 years (c) >10 years

Figure 3: For each model - #deadlines combination, do you think the combination is good, bad, or neutral?

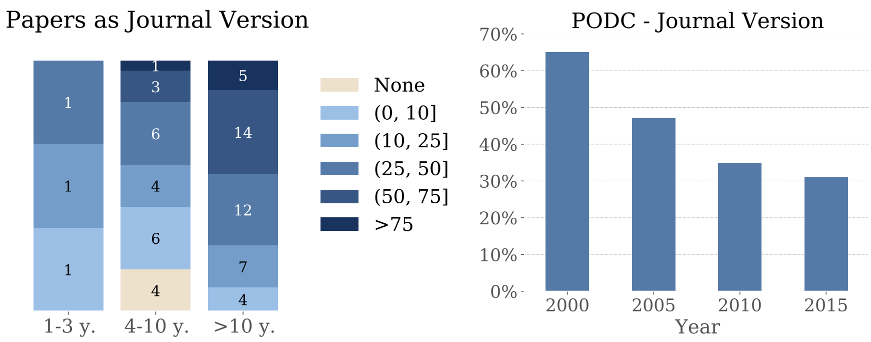


Figure 4: Left: Percentage of journal versions today. Right: PODC journal statistics.

Figure 3 shows the detailed evaluations of the models according to the seniority of the participant. Unfortunately, the number of junior participants is small, so conclusions are difficult, however, the preferences seem to differ across the age groups.

Regarding journal publications, the community was asked:

- Approximately what percentage of your conference papers have journal versions?

Figure 4 (left) shows the results, categorized again according to seniority. The figure confirms that only a small fraction of participants regularly publishes their contributions in journal versions. To complement this information, David Ilcinkas kindly shared with us his statistics on the proportion of PODC papers which were finally published in a journal: Figure 4 (right) shows the results for four specific years (2000, 2005, 2010, 2015), indicating a “dejournalization”.

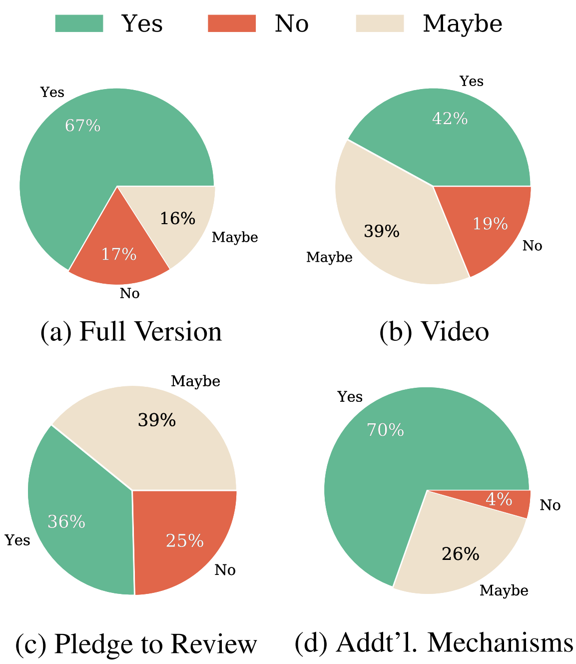
Figure 5 shows the input received regarding the questions:

- *Full version:* Should we require the submission of a full version that will be publicly archived (unless it has been publicly archived already) upon acceptance? The full version would remain confidential if the submission is not accepted.

- *Video:* Should authors be required to upload a video presentation within a few weeks after acceptance, which will be archived and published?

- *Pledge to review:* Should authors of submitted papers be asked to pledge that they will serve as reviewers (up to X reviews per submitted paper)?

- *Additional mechanisms:* Should we seek to develop additional mechanisms for incentivizing high review quality and improving load distribution? The



(a) Full Version (b) Video (c) Pledge to Review (d) Addt'l. Mechanisms

Figure 5: Model independent methods

> assumption here is that proposals would be worked out and reviewed by the community (if they cannot be tried out with low effort and risk) first accepted.

The figure suggests that there is a demand in the community to implement additional mechanisms to improve the review process, and developing mechanisms accordingly could be a priority. Also the requirement to submit full versions seems to find significant support. There are more than twice as many proponents of the idea to require a video than there are opponents. Also the idea to pledge to review finds more proponents than opponents, but it is clear that further discussions are required on how to implement this change.

4 Discussion

The participants were also given the opportunity to comment on the pros and cons in written form. Overall, many participants seems to agree that the review quality should be improved, that journal versions (or at least full arXiv versions) are often desirable, and that adjusting deadline can make sense. However, there are also valid concerns that these models may result in more work for the community.

The fact that Model 1 is popular may also be related to the various open questions that Models 2 and 3 raise. Judging from the individual answers, there is more uncertainty about these models, which is not unexpected, given the larger change and more open questions. For example, it is important to understand, e.g., the implications of a name change (e.g., on the conference ranking), how to best organize the live gatherings at the conference (should it be more than a “Highlights on" event?), how to enforce the specific rules (e.g., journal submissions), etc. As one participant pointed out, Model 3 may have the advantage that there are already similar examples where conferences have their own proceedings such as VLDB, or how OOPSLA, ICFP and POPL are linked to the PACMPL journal. Someone also pointed out that other communities (e.g., EMSOFT) are already using Model 2. Some participants also porpose intermediate models, e.g., a Model 1.5 where there are conference publications, but there are one or two rounds of rebuttals (orthogonal from the discussion of number of deadlines and their spacing).

It is clear that while there is a significant interest in the community in innovative models, many more discussions on the implementation details are needed, perhaps also considering to perform changes in multiple stages. The ongoing pandemic may naturally introduce additional models and I suggest to repeat a similar survey in the near future, hopefully with less time pressure and at a larger scale, also encouraging the participation of more junior researchers, which are under-represented in the evaluation above.

Acknowledgements

Kudos to David Ilcinkas for sharing with us his statistics on the PODC journal versions (Figure 4, right) and to Thomas Fenz for his help with the figures.