Distributed Transactions
Preliminaries

- Last topic: transactions in a single machine
- This topic: transactions across machines
- Distribution typically addresses two needs:
  - Split the work across multiple nodes
  - Provide more reliability by replication
- Focus of 2PC and 3PC is the first reason: splitting the work across multiple nodes
Failures

- What are the different classes/types of failures in a distributed system?
- What guarantees should we aim to provide in building fault-tolerant distributed systems?
For each distributed transaction T:
- one coordinator
- a set of participants

Coordinator knows participants; participants don’t necessarily know each other

Each process has access to a Distributed Transaction Log (DT Log) on stable storage
The setup

- Each process has an input value, vote: Yes, No
- Each process has to compute an output value decision: Commit, Abort
Example

- Transfer money from account X on one machine to account Y on another machine
Atomic Commit Specification

AC-1: All processes that reach a decision reach the same one.

AC-2: A process cannot reverse its decision after it has reached one.

AC-3: The Commit decision can only be reached if all processes vote Yes.

AC-4: If there are no failures and all processes vote Yes, then the decision will be Commit.

AC-5: If all failures are repaired and there are no more failures, then all processes will eventually decide.
2-Phase Commit

I. sends VOTE-REQ to all participants
2-Phase Commit

I. Coordinator $c$ sends VOTE-REQ to all participants

II. Participant $p_i$ sends $vote_i$ to Coordinator
   if $vote_i = NO$ then
   $decide_i := ABORT$
   $halt$
2-Phase Commit

Coordinator $c$

I. sends VOTE-REQ to all participants

II. sends $vote_i$ to Coordinator
   if $vote_i = \text{NO}$ then
     $decide_i := \text{ABORT}$
     halt

III. if (all votes YES) then
   $decide_c := \text{COMMIT}$
   send COMMIT to all
else
   $decide_c := \text{ABORT}$
   send ABORT to all who voted YES
halt

Participant $p_i$
II. sends $\text{vote}_i$ to Coordinator

- if $\text{vote}_i = \text{NO}$ then
  
  - $\text{decide}_i := \text{ABORT}$
  
  - $\text{halt}$

III. if (all votes YES) then

  - $\text{decide}_c := \text{COMMIT}$
  
  - send COMMIT to all

else

  - $\text{decide}_c := \text{ABORT}$
  
  - send ABORT to all who voted YES

$\text{halt}$

IV. if received COMMIT then

  - $\text{decide}_i := \text{COMMIT}$

else

  - $\text{decide}_i := \text{ABORT}$

$\text{halt}$

I. sends VOTE-REQ to all participants
How do we deal with different failures?
Processes are waiting on steps 2, 3, and 4

**Step 2**  $p_i$ is waiting for VOTE-REQ from coordinator

**Step 3**  Coordinator is waiting for vote from participants

**Step 4**  $p_i$ (who voted YES) is waiting for COMMIT or ABORT
Termination protocols

I. Wait for coordinator to recover
   • It always works, since the coordinator is never uncertain
   • may block recovering process unnecessarily

II. Ask other participants
Logging actions

1. When coord sends VOTE-REQ, it writes START-2PC to its DT Log

2. When $p_i$ is ready to vote YES,
   - writes YES to DT Log
   - sends YES to coord (writes also list of participants)

3. When $p_i$ is ready to vote NO, it writes ABORT to DT Log

4. When $c$ is ready to decide COMMIT, it writes COMMIT to DT Log before sending COMMIT to participants

5. When it is ready to decide ABORT, it writes ABORT to DT Log

6. After $p_i$ receives decision value, it writes it to DT Log
$p$ recovers

1. When coordinator sends VOTE-REQ, it writes START-2PC to its DT Log
2. When participant is ready to vote Yes, writes Yes to DT Log before sending yes to coordinator (writes also list of participants) When participant is ready to vote No, it writes ABORT to DT Log
3. When coordinator is ready to decide COMMIT, it writes COMMIT to DT Log before sending COMMIT to participants When coordinator is ready to decide ABORT, it writes ABORT to DT Log
4. After participant receives decision value, it writes it to DT Log

- if DT Log contains START-2PC, then $p = c$:
  - if DT Log contains a decision value, then decide accordingly
  - else decide ABORT
- otherwise, $p$ is a participant:
  - if DT Log contains a decision value, then decide accordingly
  - else if it does not contain a Yes vote, decide ABORT
  - else (Yes but no decision) run a termination protocol
What are the strengths/weaknesses of 2PC?
Key Insight for 3-PC

- Cannot abort unless we know that no one has committed
- We need an algorithm that lets us infer the state of failed nodes
  - Introduce an additional state that helps us in our reasoning
  - But start with the assumption that there are no communication failures
3-Phase Commit

Two approaches:

1. Focus only on site failures
   - Non-blocking, unless all sites fail
   - Timeout \(\equiv\) site at the other end failed
   - Communication failures can produce inconsistencies

2. Tolerate both site and communication failures
   - Partial failures can still cause blocking, but less often than in 2PC
Blocking and uncertainty

Why does uncertainty lead to blocking?

- An uncertain process does not know whether it can safely decide COMMIT or ABORT because some of the processes it cannot reach could have decided either

Non-blocking Property

If any operational process is uncertain, then no process has decided COMMIT
2PC Revisited

In U, both A and C are reachable!
In state PC, a process knows that it will commit unless it fails.
Coordinator Failure

- Elect new coordinator and have it collect the state of the system
- If any node is committed, then send commit messages to all other nodes
- If all nodes are uncertain, what should we do?
3PC: The Protocol

Dale Skeen (1982)

I. \(c\) sends VOTE-REQ to all participants.

II. When \(p_i\) receives a VOTE-REQ, it responds by sending a vote to \(c\)
    if \(vote_i = \text{No}\), then \(decide_i := \text{ABORT}\) and \(p_i\) halts.

III. \(c\) collects votes from all.
    if all votes are Yes, then \(c\) sends PRECOMMIT to all
    else \(decide_c := \text{ABORT}\); sends ABORT to all who voted Yes halts

IV. if \(p_i\) receives PRECOMMIT then it sends ACK to \(c\)

V. \(c\) collects ACKs from all.
    When all ACKs have been received, \(decide_c := \text{COMMIT}\);
    \(c\) sends COMMIT to all.

VI. When \(p_i\) receives COMMIT, \(p_i\) sets \(decide_i := \text{COMMIT}\) and halts.
Termination protocol: Process states

At any time while running 3 PC, each participant can be in exactly one of these 4 states:

- **Aborted**: Not voted, voted NO, received ABORT
- **Uncertain**: Voted YES, not received PRECOMMIT
- **Committable**: Received PRECOMMIT, not COMMIT
- **Committed**: Received COMMIT
Not all states are compatible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aborted</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Committable</th>
<th>Committed</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aborted</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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Failures

- Things to worry about:
  - timeouts: participant failure/coordinator failure
  - recovering participant
  - total failures
## Timeout Actions

Processes are waiting on steps 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Coordinator is waiting for vote from participants</td>
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<td>Step 4</td>
<td>$p_i$ waits for PRECOMMIT</td>
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<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Coordinator waits for ACKs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td>$p_i$ waits for COMMIT</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Exactly as in 2PC</td>
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<td>Step 4</td>
<td>$p_i$ waits for PRECOMMIT</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Run some Termination protocol</td>
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Termination protocol

- When $p_i$ times out, it starts an election protocol to elect a new coordinator.

- The new coordinator sends STATE-REQ to all processes that participated in the election.

- The new coordinator collects the states and follows a termination rule.

TR1. if some process decided ABORT, then?

TR2. if some process decided COMMIT, then?

TR3. if all processes that reported state are uncertain, then?

TR4. if some process is committable, but none committed, then?
Termination protocol

When $P_i$ times out, it starts an election protocol to elect a new coordinator.

The new coordinator sends STATE-REQ to all processes that participated in the election.

The new coordinator collects the states and follows a termination rule.

TR1. if some process decided ABORT, then
   decide ABORT
   send ABORT to all
   halt

TR2. if some process decided COMMIT, then
   decide COMMIT
   send COMMIT to all
   halt

TR3. if all processes that reported state are uncertain, then
   decide ABORT
   send ABORT to all
   halt

TR4. if some process is committable, but none committed, then
   send PRECOMMIT to uncertain processes
   wait for ACKs
   send COMMIT to all
   halt
Discussion

- What are the strengths/weaknesses of 3PC?