ACTA: A Framework for Specifying and Reasoning about Transaction Structure and Behavior

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Abstract

Recently, a number of extensions to the traditional transaction model have been proposed to support new information-intensive applications such as CAD/CAM and software development However, these extended models capture only a subset of interactions that can be found in such applications, and represent only some of the points within the spectrum of interactions possible in competitive and cooperative environments

ACTA is a formalizable framework developed for characterizing the whole spectrum of interactions The ACTA framework is *not* yet another transaction model, but is intended to unify the existing models ACTA allows for specifying the *structure* and the *behavior* of transactions as well as for reasoning about the concurrency and recovery properties of the transactions In ACTA, the semantics of interactions are expressed in terms of transactions' effects on the commit and abort of other transactions and on objects' state and concurrency status (i e , synchronization state) Its ability to capture the semantics of previously proposed transaction models is indicative of its generality The reasoning capabilities of this framework have also been tested by using the framework to study the properties of a new model that is derived by combining two existing transaction models

1 Introduction

The need to support *complex information systems* emerges from the demands of new and complex applications, such as CAD/CAM, software development environments, object-oriented databases, stock trading databases, and distributed operating systems These systems are typically distributed and object based, i e , designed in terms of an object-oriented paradigm The ability of transactions to mask the effects of concurrency and failures makes them appropriate building blocks for these complex systems Although powerful, the transaction model found in traditional database systems [5, 7] is found lacking in *functionality* and *efficiency* when used for these new applications Efficiency is of particular importance considering the throughput demands placed on these complex information systems In terms of functionality, traditional transactions were assumed to be short-lived and were targeted for competitive environments Activities in complex information systems tend to access many objects, involve lengthy computations, and are interactive, i e , pause for input from the user Even in those cases where activities with such characteristics can be modeled as traditional transactions, they degrade the system performance due to increased data contention, thus failing to meet the high throughput demands Furthermore, endless and collaborating activities which are often found in these systems, cannot be captured by traditional transactions due to serializability as the correctness requirement Therefore, the need to capture reactive (endless), open-ended (long-lived) and collaborative (interactive) activities found in the new applications suggests the need for more cooperative models Broadly speaking, whether a system is characterized as competitive or cooperative depends on how *interactions* among activities in the system are viewed In competitive environments, interactions are curtailed whereas they are promoted in cooperative environments

In order to fill this need for more flexible transaction models, various extensions to the traditional model have been proposed, referred to herein as *complex transactions*, which can support the implementation of efficient systems For example, Nested Transactions [11] have been proposed in the context of distributed languages to handle the problem of partial failures Nested Transactions support only hierarchical computations similar to the ones that result from procedure calls Recoverable Communicating Actions [18] which support arbitrary computation topologies, have been proposed in the context of distributed operating systems where interactions are more complex Cooperative Transactions [3], Split Transactions [14] and Transaction Groups [6, 17] have also been suggested for capturing the interactions found in the new applications Irrespective of how successful these extended transaction models are in supporting the systems that they were intended for, they merely represent points within the spectrum of interactions possible within competitive and cooperative environments Therefore, they can capture only a subset of the interactions to be found in any complex information system

While it is tempting to develop new transaction models that cover some of the remaining points in the spectrum, any such work will by necessity be ad hoc and not general What will be better is to study the nature of transactions

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as such and develop a conceptual framework in which it will be possible to specify the effects of complex transactions and then reason about their properties

We have developed such a comprehensive transaction framework, called *ACTA*[1], for characterizing the whole spectrum of interactions In ACTA, the semantics of interactions between transactions are expressed in terms of transactions' effects on each other and on objects that they access A transaction has two possible outcomes, namely, commit or abort Consequently the effects of one transaction on other transactions are classified as those *on the abort* of other transactions and those *on the commitment* of other transactions The effects of a transaction on the objects that it accesses are also categorized into two classes The effects of a transaction on the *state* of objects and the effects of a transaction on the *concurrency status*, i e , synchronization state, of objects (Henceforth, we refer to concurrency status as just *status*)

ACTA allows for specifying the *structure* and the *behavior* of transactions as well as for reasoning about the concurrency and recovery properties of the transactions *Structure* refers, for example, to the nesting structure of a transaction, and *behavior* refers to the operations invoked by a transaction

The ACTA framework is *not* yet another transaction model, but is intended to unify the existing models Its ability to capture the semantics of previously proposed transaction models is indicative of its generality The reasoning capabilities of this framework have also been tested by using the framework to study the properties of a new transaction model, called *Nested-Split Transactions*, that is derived by combining the Nested and Split Transaction models

In Section 2, we examine the characteristics of complex transactions In Section 3, we present ACTA, our proposed comprehensive transaction framework and discuss the intuition underlying the framework Section 4 illustrates the use of the framework by applying it to model four existing transactions models In the same section, the reasoning capabilities of the framework are demonstrated by studying the properties of the Nested-Split transaction model Section 5 concludes with a summary and discusses future steps

2 Complex Transactions: Definition and Issues

Traditional transactions are based on the notion of *atomicity* and thus are often referred to as *atomic transactions* Atomicity is characterized by two properties failure atomicity and serializability *Failure atomicity* means that either all or none of the transaction's operations are performed *Serializability* means that concurrent transactions execute without any interference as though they were executed in some serial order However, these properties combine several important notions such as

1 *Visibility*, referring to the ability of one transaction to see the results of another transaction *while* it is executing

2 *Permanence*, referring to the ability of a transaction to record its results in the database

3 *Recovery*, referring to the ability, in the event of failure, to take the database to some state that is considered correct

4 *Consistency*, referring to the correctness of the state of the database that a committed transaction produces

The flexibility of a given transaction model depends on the way these four notions are combined Thus, these notions have to be revisited in order to understand the properties of complex transactions and to decide on the mechanisms for supporting them For example, visibility does not always have to be curtailed, permanence need not require all the results to be recorded in the database, recovery does not imply the complete restoration of the state and consistency does not necessarily require serializability

Complex transactions have properties which relate to the above notions Generally, *complex transactions* can be said to consist of either a set of operations on objects or a set of complex transactions This recursive formulation implies that a complex transaction may exhibit a rich and complex internal structure In contrast, traditional transactions have a flat single level structure In this sense, the base case in this recursive definition of complex transactions is similar to a traditional transaction The simplest example of complex transactions is Nested Transactions [11]

Complex transactions are distinguishable from the *multilevel* transactions [12, 10, 1] first in that their internal structure is *explicit* and provided as a user facility, and second in that their component transactions are not necessarily *atomic* Multilevel transactions have an *implicit* hierarchical internal structure which is a result of transactions invoking operations on complex objects Thus, the operations are decomposable into sub-operations Both operations and sub-operations are considered atomic That is, for the user, a multilevel transaction is nothing but a set of atomic operations similar to a traditional transaction, and nesting is provided as a system facility

The way that component transactions are combined to form complex transactions reflects the semantics of the applications Such semantics can be exploited in designing *transaction specific concurrency control* and *transaction specific recovery* The idea is similar to the use of semantic information about the objects and their operations in designing *type specific concurrency control* to enhance concurrency within objects [2, 15, 9, 19]

Transaction specific concurrency control allows the definition of new weaker notions of conflicts among operations not possible with the information available only about objects and their types For instance, operations invoked by two transactions can be interleaved as if they commuted, if the semantics of the application allow the dependencies between the transactions to be ignored Clearly, transaction specific concurrency control might *not* achieve serializability but still preserves consistency This seems to be an attractive means for increasing the performance in a complex information system

Transaction specific recovery can be designed along the same lines to exploit the semantics of the application in order to minimize the effects of transaction failures Transaction specific recovery reduces the cost of recovery by tolerating

[1] ACTA means *actions* in Latin

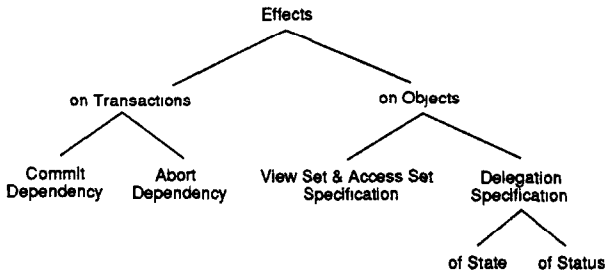


Figure 1 Dimensions of the ACTA framework

partial failures and by supporting both forward and backward recovery In the event of failure of transaction components, the failed portions can be isolated, allowing the rest of the transaction to proceed Failed portions of a transaction can be retried, compensated by attempting another alternative, or even ignored Furthermore, complex transactions naturally support user-controlled checkpointing since the boundaries of component transactions act as checkpoints

The above observations motivate us to address the following questions in our research

- *How do we capture the semantics of complex transactions?*
- *How can we reason about the concurrency and recovery properties of complex transactions?*

The ACTA framework described in the next section is our initial response to these questions As we shall see, this framework allows us to capture transaction properties as related to the dimensions of *(i) visibility, (ii) failure atomicity (recovery), (iii) permanence* and *(iv) consistency*

3 The ACTA Framework

The behavior of a transaction system is determined by the behavior of its active components and the interactions among these components The active components in our framework are *transactions,* inherently parallel activities, and the passive components are *objects,* abstract entities manipulated by transactions

Transactions may produce unexpected results if they interact indiscriminately A correctness criterion for transactions constrains these interactions to those that produce a result contained in a set of acceptable results In order to specify a correctness criterion that prevents some interactions from occurring while allowing others, we must be able to express these interactions Interactions among transactions are reflected in the effects they cause and thus, we can express them in terms of these effects We distinguish between transactions' effects on each other and transaction effects on the objects that they access This taxonomy of effects is captured in figure 1

These two types of effects as well as the formal means to specify them are described in Section 3 1 and 3 2 respectively The application of ACTA to various transaction models, in Section 4, should serve to clarify and illustrate the concepts underlying ACTA

3.1 Effects of Transactions on other Transactions

Dependencies provide a convenient way of specifying and reasoning about the behavior of concurrent transactions [8, 15] By examining the possible effects of interacting transactions on each other, it is possible to determine the dependencies that may develop between the transactions There are two possible dependencies that a transaction may develop on any other transaction *Commit-dependency* and *abort-dependency*

Commit-dependency and abort-dependency are collectively known as *completion dependencies* and are defined as follows

Commit-Dependency: If a transaction A develops a *commit-dependency* on another transaction B (denoted by $A \rightsquigarrow B$), then transaction A cannot commit until transaction B either commits or aborts This does not imply that if transaction B aborts, then transaction A should abort

Abort-Dependency· If a transaction A develops an *abort-dependency* on another transaction B (denoted[2] by $A \rightarrow B$), and if transaction B aborts, then transaction A should also abort This neither implies that if transaction B commits, then transaction A should commit, nor that if transaction A aborts, then transaction B should abort

Commit-dependencies and abort-dependencies impose a commit order which prevents transactions from prematurely committing, thereby preventing object inconsistencies, given that transactions preserve the consistency of the database when run in isolation Depending on a transaction model and its correctness notion, some dependency cycles may lead to inconsistencies and hence, they are prohibited, whereas other dependency cycles are accommodated In the latter case, if two transactions form a circular dependency involving the same type of completion dependency, then both have to commit or neither In the case that two transactions develop a circular dependency involving dependencies of different types, i e , one transaction has a commit-dependency on another transaction which has an abort-dependency on the first transaction, then the commitment of both transactions must be synchronized This does *not* imply that both transactions have to commit or neither as in the case above

Completion dependencies between transactions may be a direct result of the structural properties of the complex transaction formed by the interacting transactions, or may indirectly develop as a result of interactions of transactions over shared objects It is often necessary for dependencies induced by the structure of transactions to be qualified either to further strengthen them by attaching to them more restrictions, or to restrict the scope of their applicability by attaching conditions As an example of the former, abort-dependency can be restricted so that a transaction is not

[2] The specific direction of the arrows for commit and abort dependencies is chosen for readability reasons To reflect the required order of transactions' commitment, the arrows should be drawn in the opposite direction

allowed to develop an abort-dependency on more than one other transaction This stronger version of abort-dependency is called *exclusive-abort-dependency* (denoted $\stackrel{x}{\rightarrow}$) and is useful in controlling the expansion of a complex transaction As an example of restricting the scope of an abort-dependency, consider *weak-abort-dependency* where an abort-dependency between two transactions holds as long as *both* transactions are executing *Transitive-abort-dependency* (denoted by $\stackrel{*}{\rightarrow}$) is defined by the transitive closure of abort-dependencies A transaction A has a transitive-abort-dependency on every member of the set of transactions formed by the transitive closure of abort-dependencies starting from A *Transitive-commit-dependency* (denoted by $\stackrel{*}{\rightsquigarrow}$) is similarly defined

Dependencies formed by the interactions over a shared object are specified by the *compatibility table* associated with the object and encodes the object's synchronization properties In the traditional framework, a compatibility table is a simple a binary relation with a *yes* entry for (O_i, O_j) indicating that the operations O_i and O_j are compatible, i e , do *not conflict*, or a *no* entry indicating that the two operations are incompatible, i e , conflict In our case, an entry (O_i, O_j) could be a *condition* involving completion dependencies, operation arguments and results In particular, an entry could be *No-dependency*, i e , the standard *yes* entry, *Form-Abort-Dependency, Form-Commit-Dependency, Wait*, i e , the standard *no* entry, *Abort, Notify, Allow-if-Abort-Dependency-already-exists, Allow-if-Commit-Dependency-already-exists*, etc While the other entries are self-explanatory, a *Notify* entry corresponding to (O_i, O_j) implies that transaction invoking O_j should be notified of O_i's presence This generality allows the framework to capture different types of type-specific concurrency control discussed in the literature [15, 9, 2]

In general, in a complex transaction system, the completion of a transaction may not depend on a simple condition, such as the completion of another transaction, but may depend on a complex condition required to capture the interactions among the transactions in the system Thus, in general, the commit-dependency of a transaction A can be expressed as *A commits* $\Rightarrow$ *Condition*, which states that if A commits, then Condition is satisfied Similarly, the abort-dependency of A can be expressed as *Condition* $\Rightarrow$ *A aborts*, which states that if Condition is satisfied, then A is aborted

3.2 Effects of Transactions on Objects

Each object is characterized by its state and its status The *state* of an object is represented by its contents The state of an object changes when an operation invoked by a transaction modifies the contents of the object The *status* of an object is represented by the synchronization information associated with the object The status of an object changes when a transaction performs an operation on the object Part of the synchronization information is the compatibility table that specifies the concurrency properties of the object, i e the rules for accessing the object [15, 9, 2] In addition, our extensions to the compatibility table, discussed in the last section, allows the specification of the formation of completion dependencies when operations execute

Transactions' effects on objects are captured by the introduction of two sets, the *View Set* and the *Access Set*, and by the concept of *delegation*

Transactions' effects on objects can be restricted by limiting the number of objects accessible to them For this reason, every transaction is associated with a set of objects, called *View Set*, which contains all the objects potentially accessible to the transaction Rules for composing the View Set are determined by the specific transaction model Examples are given in Section 4

The effects of a transaction on objects are conditional upon the outcome of the transaction Objects already accessed by the transaction are contained in another set, called *Access Set* When an object in the View Set of a transaction is accessed by the transaction, the object becomes a member of the transaction's Access Set Objects in Access Set continue to be accessible to the transaction An object *ob* in the View Set of a transaction T_1 can be accessed by T_1 only if the concurrency control status of *ob* permits it For instance if *ob* is in the Access Set of another transaction T_2 and the compatibility table for *ob* indicates that the operation that T_1 uses to access *ob* is incompatible with the operation that T_2 used to access *ob* then T_1 will not be allowed to access *ob* and hence, *ob* does not become a member of the Access Set of T_1 In other words, status of an object with respect to a transaction depends on whether the object is in the View Set or Access Set of the transaction

When a transaction *aborts*, the state and the status of all objects in the transaction's Access Set are restored in its View Set When a transaction *commits*, the state of all objects in its Access Set is made persistent, i e , the changes are effected, in the View Set, while the status is restored in the View Set $AccessSet_T$ refers to the Access Set of a transaction T, and $ViewSet_T$ refers to the View Set of T

A transaction may *delegate* the responsibility for finalizing its effects on some of the objects in its Access Set to another transaction This is achieved by removing the delegated objects from the Access Set of the first transaction (*delegator*) and adding them to the Access Set of the second transaction (*delegatee*) That is, *delegation* represents the ability of a transaction to give up some of its objects which are then taken over by another transaction Delegation effectively broadens the visibility of the delegatee and it is useful in selectively making tentative or partial results as well as hints, such as, coordination information, accessible to other transactions

The notion of delegation defined thus far is related to one of the two dimensions of objects, namely, the state, and thus is called *delegation of state* There is another type of delegation related to the status of objects This type of delegation is referred to as *delegation of status* Delegation of status as opposed to delegation of state, implies that the changes done by the delegating transaction to the delegated objects are undone, before these objects are added to the Access Set of the delegatee Effectively, the delegation of status represents the ability of one transaction to annul the changes and relinquish control of the visibility of some of its objects to another transaction The notion of inheritance used in Nested Transactions is an instance of delegation Specifically, inheritance as proposed in [11] corresponds to the delegation of state when the delegator commits, whereas in [13] corresponds to the delegation of status when the delegator aborts and delegation of

state when the delegator commits $DelegateSet_{state}(T_1, T_2)$ and $DelegateSet_{status}(T_1, T_2)$ refers to the set of objects delegated by T_1 to T_2 Since delegation of state is the common form when we drop the subscript, we are referring to delegation of state

Another form of delegation is *limited delegation* which makes the changes to the delegated objects persistent in the View Set before adding them to the Access Set of the target transaction

Delegation is not only used in controlling the visibility of objects, but delegation in conjunction with commit and abort dependencies specifies the recovery properties of a transaction model

In cooperative environments, transactions (components) cooperate by having intersecting Access Sets and View Sets, by delegating objects to each other, or by *notifying* each other of their behavior By being able to capture these aspects of transactions, the ACTA framework is designed to be applicable to cooperative environments

4 Modeling Different Transaction Schemes

In this section, the semantics of four transaction models are specified using the ACTA framework These are Nested Transactions, Split Transactions, Recoverable Communicating Actions and Cooperative Transactions Because of space limitations, the characterization of Transaction Groups [6, 17] and Multi-Coloured Actions [16] are not included in this paper Also, the properties of a new transaction model resulting from the combination of Nested Transactions and Split Transactions are studied in order to demonstrate the usefulness of our framework in reasoning about the properties of existing and future transaction models

Throughout this section, the set DB stands for the database, the entity that has all the objects in the system The state of the objects in DB reflects the most recently committed state of the objects

4.1 Nested Transactions

In the Nested Transaction model [11], transactions are composed of subtransactions or child transactions designed to localize failures within a transaction and to exploit parallelism within transactions A subtransaction can be further decomposed into other subtransactions, and thus, the transaction may expand in a hierarchical manner Subtransactions execute atomically with respect to their parent and their siblings, and can abort independently without causing the abortion of the whole transaction However, if the parent transaction aborts, all its subtransactions have to abort The parent transaction cannot commit until all its subtransactions have terminated

A subtransaction can potentially access any object that is currently accessed by one of its ancestor transactions In addition, any object in DB is also accessible to the subtransaction When a subtransaction commits, its objects are made accessible to its parent transaction However, the effects on the objects are made persistent in DB only when the root transaction commits

Here is the characterization of Nested Transactions in the ACTA framework We use C to denote a child transaction of a parent transaction P

- Dependency Specification
  $\forall C \; C \xrightarrow{\pi} P$
  $\forall C \; P \rightsquigarrow C$

The abort-dependency of a child on its parent guarantees the abortion of the child transaction in case its parent aborts Furthermore, the exclusive-abort-dependency prohibits a child transaction from having more than one parent, this ensures the hierarchical structure of the nested transactions

The commit-dependency of the parent on its children guarantees that the parent does not commit before all its children have terminated

- View Set Specification
  $\forall C \; ViewSet_C = \{\cup AccessSet_A | C \xrightarrow{*} A\} \cup DB$

In our notation, $\cup$ is an *ordered union* More precisely, if $C = A \cup B$, then C contains all the elements of A and B as in a set union However, if there is an element in A duplicated in B, C contains the element from A We need this for the following reason Suppose an object *ob* in DB is modified by P and is then accessed by Q Then only the modified version of *ob* should be accessible to Q Note that this notion of versions is different from object versions maintained explicitly for application-dependent reasons We propose to capture the latter by viewing such versions as different objects Versions in the current situation exist only until the root transaction terminates

The ability of a subtransaction to access any object currently accessed by one of its ancestor transactions is expressed by defining the View Set of the subtransaction in terms of the Access Sets of its ancestor transactions The transitive-abort-dependency uniquely specifies the ancestors of a subtransaction

- Delegation Specification[3]
  Delegation occurs when C commits
  $\forall C \; DelegateSet_{state}(C, P) = AccessSet_C$

The delegation specification states that, at commit, the child transaction's objects are delegated to its parent transaction This effectively makes the effects of the committing child transaction selectively visible to its parent and to the parent's descendants (by the View Set specification above)

4.2 Split Transactions

In the Split Transaction model [14], it is possible for a transaction A to split into two transactions, B and C, where B is the original transaction B and C transactions may be *independent*, in which case they can commit or abort independently, or they may be *serial*, in which case B must commit in order for the C to commit Whether B and C transactions are independent or serial depends on the objects accessible to them

[3] In the case of [13] the delegation specification should state in addition Delegation occurs when C aborts, $\forall C \; DelegateSet_{status}(C, P) = AccessSet_C$

4.2.1 Independent Split Transactions

Here is the characterization of *independent* Split Transactions in the ACTA framework

- Delegation Specification
  Delegation occurs when A splits
  $AccessSet_B = AccessSet_A - DelegateSet(A, C)$
  $AccessSet_C = DelegateSet(A, C)$

The independence of the two transactions is guaranteed by having B and C operate on disjoint sets of objects Delegation leaves C the responsibility of making persistent all the changes made by A to delegated objects up to the split

4.2.2 Serial Split Transactions

Now we characterize *Serial* Split Transactions which have more complicated semantics than independent Split Transactions

- Dependency Specification
  $C \xrightarrow{x} B$

The abort-dependency guarantees that transaction C aborts if B aborts and that C's commitment is delayed until B commits The exclusive-abort-dependency prevents C from joining (see below) a third transaction[4] Note that this does not prevent transactions B and C from joining

- View Set Specification
  Split Transactions were proposed in the context of the Read-Write database model Hence, the View and Access sets of B and C can be specified in terms of the set of objects that they can read or write (e g , $ViewSet_B = ViewWrite_B \cup ViewRead_B$, and $AccessSet_B = ReadSet_B \cup WriteSet_B$)
  $\text{ViewWrite}_B = \text{ViewWrite}_A$
  $\text{ViewRead}_B = \text{ViewRead}_A$
  $\text{ViewWrite}_C = \{x | x \epsilon WriteSet_B \wedge C\_WriteLast(x)\} \cup DB$
  $\text{ViewRead}_C = \{x | x \epsilon WriteSet_B \wedge C\_CanRead(x)\} \cup DB$

WriteSet_B contains the objects that A has changed up to the split and may change after the split when executing as B That is, WriteSet_B is a subset of the Access Set of A The $C\_WriteLast$ specifies the objects that can be updated last by C Similarly, $C\_CanRead$ specifies the objects that C can read but they are not delegated to C

The ViewWrite_C (ViewRead_C) contains all the objects that C can potentially write (read) after the split In this way, some of the changes to the objects up to the time of the split become visible to C Not delegating these objects to C ensures that the changes to the objects up to the split are not lost if C aborts[5]

[4] This constraint can be removed if the *join* operation requires that the joint transaction develops the same dependencies as the joining transaction

[5] Furthermore, in this way, B can regain access to these objects after the abortion of C Note that this is not supported by the original notion of Split Transactions [14], although it might be appropriate for some applications

- Delegation Specification
  This delegation occurs when A splits
  $AccessSet_B = AccessSet_A - DelegateSet(A, C)$
  $AccessSet_C = DelegateSet(A, C)$

Any changes to objects in DelegateSet up to the split are left to C to be made persistent to the database

- Delegation Specification
  This *limited* delegation occurs when B commits
  $DelegateSet(B, C) = AccessSet_B \cap ViewSet_C$

B delegates limited responsibility of the objects to C that C could potentially access but C did not In this way, all the changes to these objects are made persistent to the database while C still has access to these objects

If B aborts then C is also aborted, given that C has an abort-dependency on B All the objects acquired by both transactions are restored to the system

By comparing the characterizations of the independent and serial split transaction in ACTA, one can infer that the source of the abort-dependency in the case of serial split transactions is due to the View Set Specification and in particular, to the information flow allowed by the View Set Specification A closer study of the View Set Specification reveals that in the case that C is not allowed to read any object that is not delegated to it or is not in the database (i e , $\text{ViewRead}_C = DB$), the abort-dependency of C on B can be substituted by a commit-dependency which avoids cascading aborts while still ensuring serial commitment of B and C

4.2.3 Joint Transactions

In the Split Transactions model, it is also possible for two transactions to join into one This is called the *joint* transaction The joint transaction is either of the original ones When the transactions join, they release their objects to the joint transaction

The characterization of Joint Transactions in the ACTA framework is straight forward

- Dependency Specification
  $A \xrightarrow{x} B$

- Delegation Specification
  Delegation occurs when A commits
  $DelegateSet(A, B) = AccessSet_A$

The abort-dependency effectively joins transactions A and B, and indicates that B is the Joint transaction which continues executing The exclusive-abort-dependency prevents A from joining a transaction other than B

The above characterization points to a variation of the Joint Transactions in which the delegation does not occur when A commits That is, A can continue its execution and can periodically *report* its results to B by delegating more objects to B We can call these transactions as *Reporting Transactions*

4.3 Nested-Split Transactions

In order to test the reasoning capabilities of the framework, we created a new model by combining the Nested and Split Transaction models presented in the previous two sections The framework was then used to check whether this new model retains the properties of the two original models

Note that, given a nested transaction, it is possible to split a leaf node, an internal node, or a root node The split nodes could execute independently or serially Figure 2 captures the effects for all possible combinations The dependencies shown follow from the specifications of dependencies for nested and split transactions In these figures a *dotted arrow* denotes a commit-dependency and a *solid arrow* denotes an abort-dependency

When a node, say C (figure 2b), splits into two subtransactions, say $C1$ and $C2$, where $C1$ is the original subtransaction C, the dependencies between subtransaction C and transaction A are assumed to hold between $C2$ and A Since both nested and split transactions involve exclusive-abort-dependencies (recall that exclusive-abort-dependency prevents a transaction from having an abort dependency on more than one other transaction), a node splitting may result in a subtransaction that has exclusive-abort-dependencies on two other subtransactions (figure 2b, After the Serial Split) Such inconsistencies may be resolved by means of consistency preserving rewrite rules In general, consistency preserving re-write rules are used to simplify the structure of a complex transaction by eliminating redundant dependencies Figure 2a shows four such rewrite rules of which *re-write 2* resolves the inconsistency mentioned above

After applying the rewrite rules (in these cases only rewrite 2 is applicable), we examine the remaining dependencies for each type of nested-split transaction to see if the resulting structure preserves the semantics of the Nested and Split transactions models We conclude that in only one case the properties of the two models are preserved This case involves the splitting of the leaf node into two independent subtransactions In all other cases the model either establishes dependencies which destroy the structure of the nested transactions or eliminates some of the dependencies required by the nested transactions For example, in figure 2b (After Applying Re-write Rule), the exclusive-abort-dependency of subtransaction $C2$ on subtransaction A is eliminated

Even if splitting of nodes is restricted only to the independent splitting of leaf nodes, nested-split transactions is a useful new transaction model in a cooperative environment Observe that an internal node becomes a leaf node any time that it has no active child subtransactions That is, in nested-split transactions, a node may split at any point after all its child subtransactions have terminated and before activating any new subtransactions For example, in figure 2c (Initial Nested Structure), when subtransaction D terminates, node C can be split into two independent subtransactions $C1$ and $C2$ as in figure 2b (After the Independent Split of C) $C1$ may continue the execution of C spawning new subtransactions, while $C2$ may commit delegating its objects to A Since all the objects accessible to A are potentially accessible to all of its descendants (by View Set Specification of nested transactions), the objects delegated to A by $C2$ are potentially accessible to B This effectively achieves cooperation between the original siblings C and B while they are still executing In nested transactions, two siblings cannot cooperate while both siblings are active, since subtransactions delegate their objects to their parent only at commit time Thus, nested-split transactions support higher level of visibility between subtransactions than nested transactions do

This exercise showed us the efficacy of the ACTA framework in determining the properties of new transaction models, in this case, one derived by combinating existing models

4.4 Recoverable Communicating Actions

In the context of long and cooperative transactions, the *Recoverable Communicating Actions (RCA)* model has been proposed to deal with the problem of non hierarchical computations [18] In this model, an action, the *sender*, is allowed to communicate with another action, the *receiver*, by exchanging objects, resulting in an *abort-dependency* of the receiver on the sender If the sender aborts then the receiver must abort as a result of the dependency

By developing abort-dependencies, RCAs form a *recoverable computation*, a self-contained task or activity which has the semantics of an atomic update For this reason, actions belonging to the same recoverable computation require synchronized commitment That is, even in the case of a sender which has no dependencies on any other action, the sender cannot commit independently However, partial failures are tolerated since an action may abort without aborting the action with which it has developed an abort-dependency In short, a recoverable computation can dynamically expand through the development of dependencies and shrink due to abortion of actions

Here is the characterization of RCAs in ACTA

- Dependency Specification
  $Receiver \rightarrow Sender$
  $Sender \rightsquigarrow Receiver$

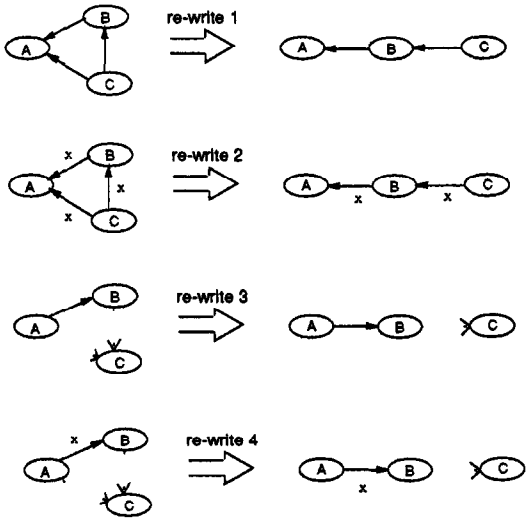
The circular dependency involving different completion dependencies between sender and receiver guarantees the required synchronized commitment of the sender and receiver actions

The abort-dependency guarantees that the effects of aborted actions are not reflected in the database Neither the abort nor the commit dependencies prevent an action from developing any new dependencies It is even possible for an action to be both a sender and a receiver at the same time In this manner, RCAs can produce non-hierarchical structures

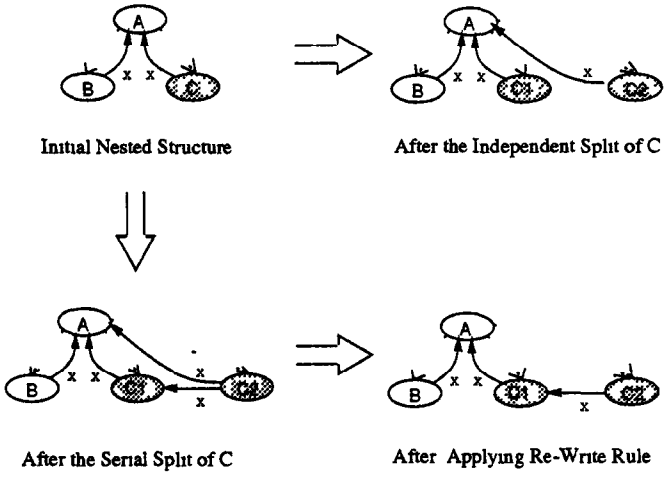
- View Set Specification
  $ViewSet_{Receiver} = \{x | Received(x)\} \cup DB$

Received(x) specifies that a sender transferred object x to the receiver, where, $x \in AccessSet_{sender}$

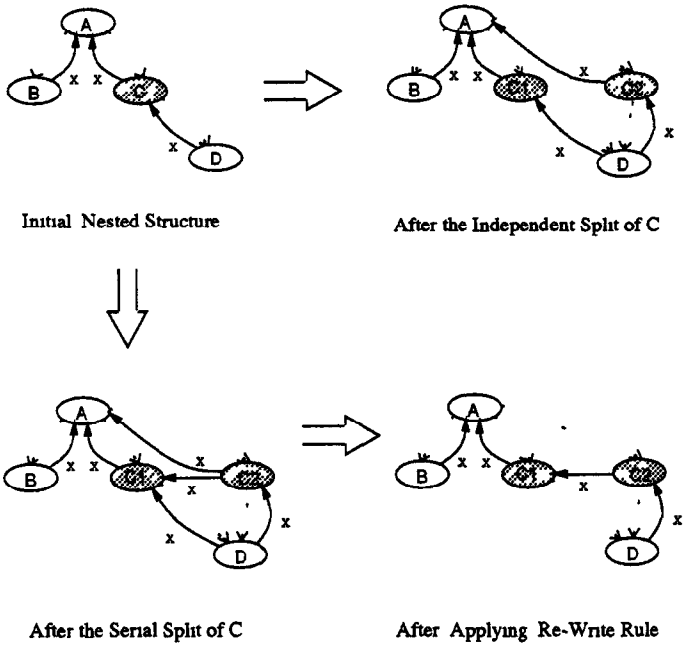
Given the complete characterization of Split and RCA models in ACTA, one can immediately observe that the two models involve different completion dependencies This difference is sufficient to demonstrate that one model does not subsume the other Another difference is that the notion of delegation does not exist in RCAs Just as in the case



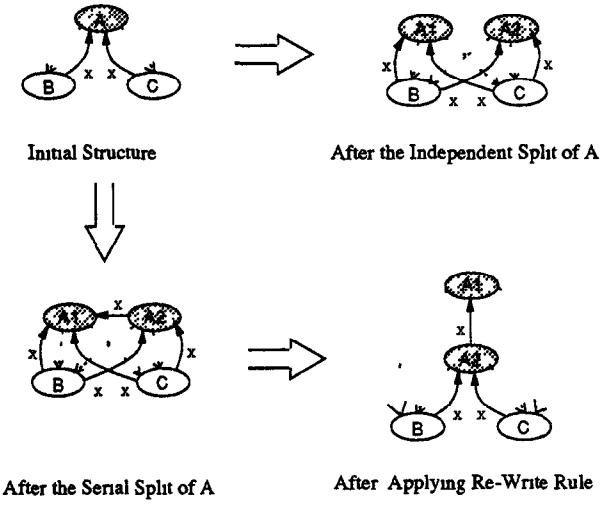
a. Semantics-preserving Re-Write Rules



b Splitting Leaf a Node



c Splitting an Internal Node



d. Splitting a Root Node

Figure 2 Splitting a Nested Transaction

of nested-split transactions, using ACTA is easy to demonstrate that in spite of these differences the two models are compatible, in the sense that it is possible to combine and use them

4.5 Cooperative Transactions

Cooperative Transactions [3] were proposed in the context of CAD/CAM and design applications supported by the checkin/checkout access date model In the Cooperative Transaction model, transactions are decomposed into subtransactions, each with its own semantics and types The model supports three distinct types of subtransactions *project* transactions are decomposed into cooperative transactions, *cooperative* transactions are composed of a set of subcontractor transactions, and *subcontractor* transactions may either have a structure similar to cooperative transactions in which case the *client* cooperative transaction acts as a local project transaction, or have the structure of an atomic transaction called *short* transactions

Cooperative transactions have a hierarchical structure similar to nested transactions, but they do not support object inheritance in the same manner as in nested transactions In cooperative transactions object flow is supported only between adjacent levels through intermediate *semi-public* or *subcontractor* databases This does not imply that the transactions are prevented from accessing objects in the database A semi-public database is similar to a subset of an Access Set in the ACTA framework

The characterization of cooperative transactions in the ACTA framework is very close to the one for nested transactions due to the similarities in their structures A Project transaction corresponds to the root or top transaction in the nested transaction model

For short, we use *coop* to denote a cooperative transaction and *contractor* to denote a subcontractor transaction We also use subscripts to denote the components or children transactions of a transaction For example, $short_{ij}$ refers to the jth child of the ith cooperative transaction which is of type short

- Dependency Specification
  $\forall i\ Coop_i \xrightarrow{x} Project$
  $\forall i\ Project \rightsquigarrow Coop_i$
  $\forall i,j\ Contractor_{ij} \xrightarrow{x} (client)\ Coop_i$
  $\forall i,j\ (client)\ Coop_i \rightsquigarrow Contractor_{ij}$
  $\forall i,j\ Short_{ij} \xrightarrow{x} Coop_i$
  $\forall i,j\ Coop_i \rightsquigarrow short_{ij}$

The hierarchical structure of cooperative transactions is expressed using the universally quantified completion dependencies

Cooperative transactions also support situations in which there is a partial ordering that constrains the acceptable orderings of subcontractor and short transactions executions These situations can be easily expressed via commit-dependencies in ACTA For example, if the 3rd subcontractor of the ith cooperative transaction should happen before the 4th one, these semantics can be specified as

$$Contractor_{i4} \rightsquigarrow Contractor_{i3}$$

- View Set Specification
  $\text{ViewSet}_{Project} = DB$
  $\text{ViewSet}_{Coop} = \{AccessSet_{Project} | Coop \xrightarrow{*} Project\} \cup DB$
  $\text{ViewSet}_{Short} = \{DesignersSet_{Coop} | Short \xrightarrow{*} Coop\} \cup DB$
  $\text{ViewSet}_{Contractor} = \{ContractorsSet_{Coop} | Contractor \xrightarrow{*} Coop\} \cup DB$
  $AccessSet_{Coop} = DesignersSet_{Coop} \cup ContractorsSet_{Coop}$
  $DesignersSet_{Coop} \cap ContractorsSet_{Coop} = \phi$

Objects in the DesignersSet can only be moved to ContractorsSet and vice versa by the cooperative transaction whose Access Set is formed by these sets

The View Set definitions of the short and subcontractor transactions specify that these transactions can only access objects currently accessed by their parent transaction The View Sets of the short and subcontractor transactions are further constrained to be the DesignersSet and ContractorsSet respectively That is, the View set of a short transaction is the DesignersSet, a subset of the Access Set of its parent cooperative transaction The View Set of a subcontractor transaction is the ContractorsSet, a subset of the Access Set of its parent cooperative transaction

- Delegation Specification
  Delegation occurs when a subtransaction commits
  $\forall i\ DelegateSet_{state}(Coop_i, Project) = AccessSet_{Coop_i}$
  $\forall i,j\ DelegateSet_{state}(Short_{ij}, Coop_i) = AccessSet_{Short_{ij}}$
  $\forall i,j\ DelegateSet_{state}(Contractor_{ij}, Coop_i) = AccessSet_{Contractor_{ij}}$
  Delegation occurs when a subtransaction aborts
  $\forall i\ DelegateSet_{status}(Coop_i, Project) = AccessSet_{Coop_i}$
  $\forall i,j\ DelegateSet_{status}(Short_{ij}, Coop_i) = AccessSet_{Short_{ij}}$
  $\forall i,j\ DelegateSet_{status}(Contractor_{ij}, Coop_i) = AccessSet_{Contractor_{ij}}$

As in the case of nested transactions, the delegation specification states that at commit, the child (cooperative, short, or subcontractor) transaction's objects are delegated to its parent (project, or cooperative) transaction However, in the case of short and subcontractor transactions the delegated objects are added to the respective DesignersSet and Contractorsset (by the View Set specification above) This effectively makes the effects of the committing child transaction selectively visible to its parent, and forces the parent's short transactions to cooperate through the objects contained in the *DesignersSet* and the parent's subcontractors to cooperate through objects in the *ContractorsSets*

In the case of abort, the child transaction's objects are delegated to its parent after the state changes done by the child on the objects are nullified

5 Conclusion

ACTA, the comprehensive transaction framework proposed in this paper, captures the spectrum of interactions among

transactions in competitive and cooperative environments Each point within the space of interactions is expressed in terms of transactions' effects on the commit and abort of other transactions and on objects' state and concurrency status (i e , synchronization state)

ACTA allows for specifying the *structure* and the *behavior* of transactions as well as for reasoning about the concurrency and recovery properties of the transactions The ACTA framework is *not* yet another transaction model, but is intended to unify the existing models Its ability to capture the semantics of previously proposed transaction models is indicative of its generality The reasoning capabilities of this framework have also been demonstrated by using the framework to study the properties of a new model that is derived by combining the Nested and Split transaction models

We are currently investigating an ACTA-based formalism that will allow us to precisely characterize the correctness properties of a set of transactions or a transaction model Such a model will, for example, allow us to determine whether or not the given model produces only serializable computations, and if not, whether the computations are *consistency preserving*, i e , whether the interactions in the computations do not conflict in such a manner as to produce object inconsistencies

In order to explore the practical impact of being able to develop new transaction models using this framework, we are also examining the development of a canonical model for implementing object managers and transaction managers to design type specific and transaction specific concurrency control and recovery mechanisms

Overall, we believe that our framework will lead to a better understanding of the nature of interactions between transactions and the effect of transactions in environments that require transaction models that are not supported well by the traditional transaction model Further, with the proposed framework, it should be possible to precisely specify the type of interactions and effects allowable in a particular application, and explore ways for achieving cooperation The concurrency and recovery properties of transactions in the given application can then be studied using the reasoning capabilities built into the framework Finally, by including an examination of the implementation mechanisms required to support complex transactions within its purview, our work also intends to provide answers concerning the increased complexity entailed by the improved flexibility in constructing complex transaction models

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