Distributed systems

Lecture 13: Vector clocks, consistent cuts, process groups, and distributed mutual exclusion

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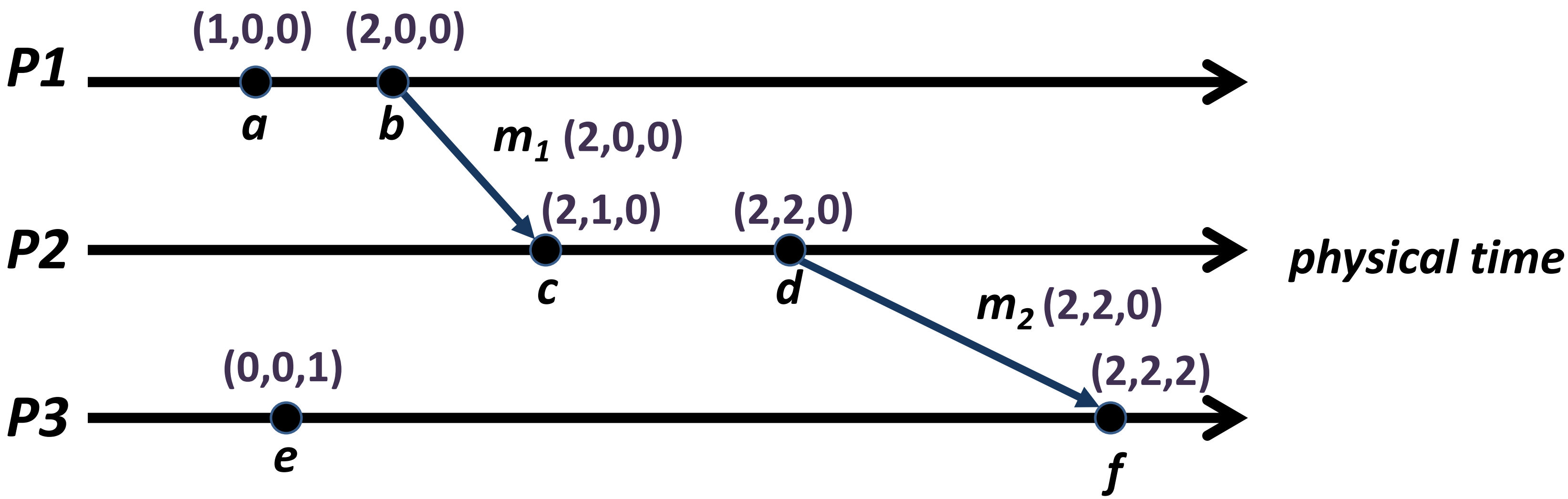
Last time

- Saw physical time can't be kept exactly in sync; instead use **logical clocks** to track ordering between events:
  - Defined ***a*** $\rightarrow$ ***b*** to mean '***a* happens-before *b***'
  - Easy inside single process, & use causal ordering (*send* $\rightarrow$ *receive*) to extend relation across processes
  - If $\mathbf{send_i(m_1)} \rightarrow \mathbf{send_j(m_2)}$ then $\mathbf{deliver_k(m_1)} \rightarrow \mathbf{deliver_k(m_2)}$
- **Lamport clocks, L(*e*)**: an integer
  - Increment to (**max** of (sender, receiver)) + 1 on receipt
  - But given **L(*a*)** < **L(*b*)**, order of ***a*** and ***b*** is unknown
- The obvious question arises: How can we extend logical time to work "in the other direction"?

Vector clocks

- With Lamport clocks, given **L(*a*)** and **L(*b*)**, we can't tell if $a \rightarrow b$ or $b \rightarrow a$ or $a \sim b$
- One solution is **vector clocks**:
  - An **ordered list of logical clocks**, one per-process
  - Each process $\mathbf{P_i}$ maintains $\mathbf{V_i[]}$, initially all zeroes
  - On a local event ***e***, $\mathbf{P_i}$ increments $\mathbf{V_i[i]}$
    - If the event is message send, new $\mathbf{V_i[]}$ copied into packet
  - If $\mathbf{P_i}$ receives a message from $\mathbf{P_j}$ then, for all $\mathbf{k}$ = 0, 1, …, it sets $\mathbf{V_i[k] := max(V_j[k], V_i[k])}$, and increments $\mathbf{V_i[i]}$
- Intuitively $\mathbf{V_i[k]}$ captures the number of events at process $\mathbf{P_k}$ that have been observed by $\mathbf{P_i}$

Vector clocks: example



- When **P2** receives $\mathbf{m_1}$, it **merges** entries from **P1**'s clock
  - choose the maximum value in each position
- Similarly when **P3** receives $\mathbf{m_2}$, it merges in **P2**'s clock
  - this incorporates the changes from **P1** that **P2** already saw
- Vector clocks ***explicitly track transitive causal order***: timestamp of ***f*** captures the history of ***a***, ***b***, ***c*** & ***d***

Using vector clocks for ordering

- Can compare vector clocks piecewise:
  - $\mathbf{V_i = V_j}$ iff $\mathbf{V_i[k] = V_j[k]}$ for $\mathbf{k} = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$
  - $\mathbf{V_i \le V_j}$ iff $\mathbf{V_i[k] \le V_j[k]}$ for $\mathbf{k} = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$
  - $\mathbf{V_i < V_j}$ iff $\mathbf{V_i \le V_j}$ and $\mathbf{V_i \ne V_j}$
  - $\mathbf{V_i \sim V_j}$ otherwise

e.g. [2,0,0] versus [0,0,1]

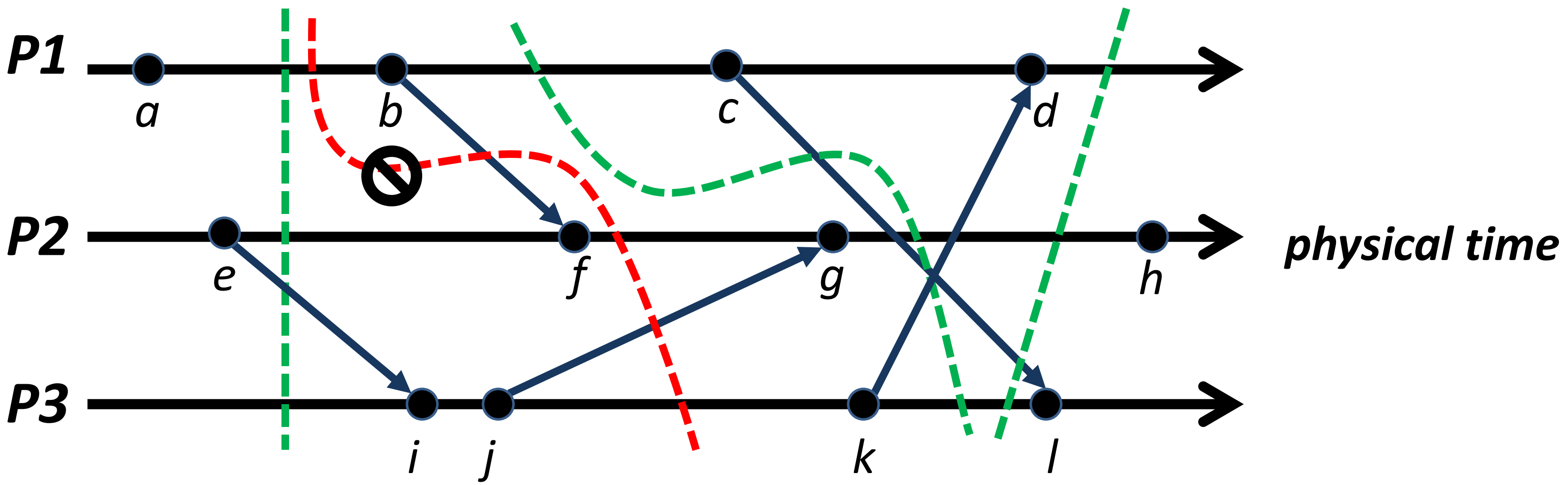
- For any two event timestamps **T(a)** and **T(b)**
  - if $a \rightarrow b$ then **T(*a*) < T(*b*)** ; **and**
  - if **T(*a*) < T(*b*)** then $a \rightarrow b$
- Hence can use timestamps to determine if there is a **causal ordering** between any two events
  - i.e. determine whether $a \rightarrow b$, $b \rightarrow a$, or $a \sim b$

Does this seem familiar? Recall **Time-Stamp Ordering** and **Optimistic Concurrency Control** for transactions

Consistent global state

- We have the notion of "***a*** happens-before ***b***" ($\boldsymbol{a} \rightarrow \boldsymbol{b}$) or "***a*** is concurrent with ***b***" ($\boldsymbol{a} \sim \boldsymbol{b}$)
- What about 'instantaneous' system-wide state?
  - distributed debugging, GC, deadlock detection, ...
- Chandy/Lamport introduced **consistent cuts**:
  - draw a (possibly wiggly) line across all processes
  - this is a consistent cut if the set of events (on the LHS) is closed under the happens-before relationship
  - i.e. if the cut includes event ***x***, then it also includes all events ***e*** which happened before ***x***
- In practical terms, this means every ***delivered*** message included in the cut was also ***sent*** within the cut

Consistent cuts: example



- Vertical cuts are always consistent (due to the way we draw these diagrams), but some curves are ok too:
  - providing we don't include any receive events without their corresponding send events
- Intuition is that a consistent cut *could* have occurred during execution (depending on scheduling etc)

Observing consistent cuts – **sketch**

We will skip this material in lecture and it is not examinable – but it is helpful in thinking about distributed algorithms:

- Chandy/Lamport Snapshot Algorithm (1985)
- Distributed algorithm to generate a **snapshot** of relevant system-wide state (e.g. all memory, locks held, …)
- Flood a special **marker message** **M** to all processes; causal order of flood defines the cut
- If $\mathbf{P_i}$ receives **M** from $\mathbf{P_j}$ and it has yet to snapshot:
  - It pauses all communication, takes local snapshot & sets $\mathbf{C_{ij}}$ to {}
  - Then sends **M** to all other processes $\mathbf{P_k}$ and starts recording $\mathbf{C_{ik}}$ = { *set of all post local snapshot messages received from* $\boldsymbol{P_k}$ }
- If $\mathbf{P_i}$ receives **M** from some $\mathbf{P_k}$ *after* taking snapshot
  - Stops recording $\mathbf{C_{ik}}$, and saves alongside local snapshot
- Global snapshot comprises all local snapshots & $\mathbf{C_{ij}}$
- Assumes reliable, in-order messages, & no failures

Process groups

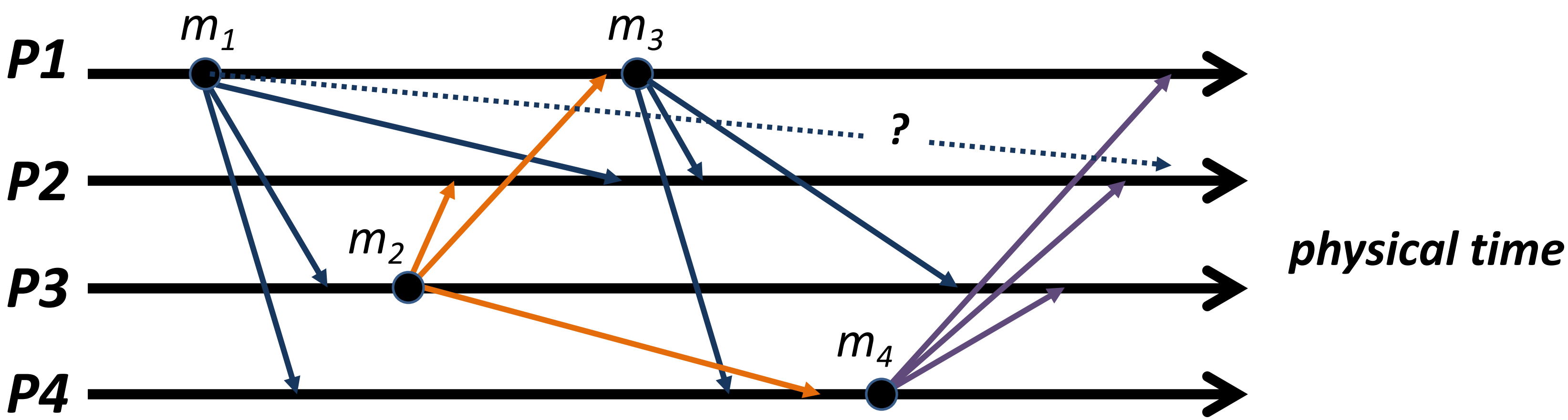
- **Process groups** are a key distributed-systems primitive:
  - Set of processes on some number of machines
  - Possible to **multicast** messages to all members
  - Allows fault-tolerant systems even if some processes fail
- Membership can be **fixed** or **dynamic**
  - If dynamic, have explicit `join()` and `leave()` primitives
- Groups can be **open** or **closed**:
  - Closed groups only allow messages from members
- Internally can be structured (e.g. coordinator and set of slaves), or symmetric (peer-to-peer)
  - Coordinator makes e.g. concurrent join/leave easier…
  - … but may require extra work to **elect** coordinator

When we use "**multicast**" in distributed systems, we mean something stronger than conventional network datagram multicasting – do not confuse them

Group communication: assumptions

- Assume we have ability to send a message to multiple (or all) members of a group
  - Don’t care if ‘true’ multicast (single packet sent, received by multiple recipients) or “netcast” (send set of messages, one to each recipient)
- Assume also that message delivery is **reliable**, and that messages arrive in **bounded time**
  - But may take different amounts of time to reach different recipients
- Assume (for now) that processes don’t crash
- What delivery **orderings** can we enforce?

FIFO ordering



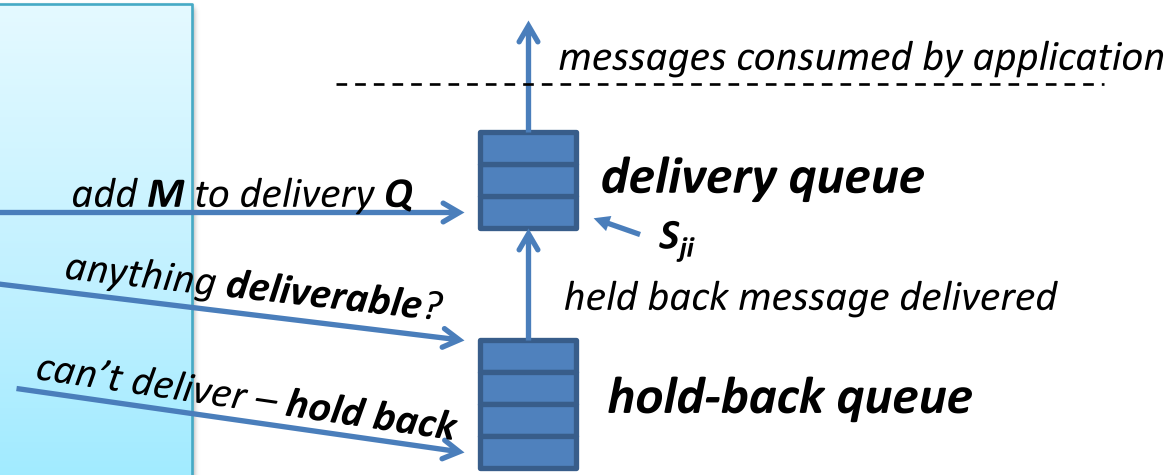
- With **FIFO ordering**, messages from process $\mathbf{P_i}$ must be received at each process $\mathbf{P_j}$ in the order they were sent
  - E.g. in the above, each receiver must see $\mathbf{m_1}$ before it sees $\mathbf{m_3}$
  - But other relative delivery orders are unconstrained – e.g., $\mathbf{m_1}$ vs $\mathbf{m_2}$, $\mathbf{m_2}$ vs. $\mathbf{m_4}$, etc.
- Looks easy, but is non-trivial on delays/retransmissions
  - E.g. what if message $\mathbf{m_1}$ to **P2** takes a loooong time?
- Receivers may need to **buffer** messages to ensure order
  - Must "hold back" $\mathbf{m_3}$ until $\mathbf{m_1}$ has been delivered to **P2**

Receiving versus delivering

- Group communication middleware provides extra features above ‘basic’ communication
  - e.g. providing reliability and/or ordering guarantees on top of IP multicast or netcast
- Assume that OS provides `receive()` primitive:
  - returns with a packet when one arrives on wire
- **Received** messages either delivered or held back:
  - **Delivered** means inserted into **delivery queue**
  - **Held back** means inserted into **hold-back queue**
  - Held back messages are delivered later as the result of the receipt of another message…

Implementing FIFO ordering

```
receive(M from Pi) {
  s = SeqNo(M);
  if (s == (Sji+1)) {
    deliver(M);
    s = flush(hbq);
    Sji = s;
  } else holdback(M);
}
```

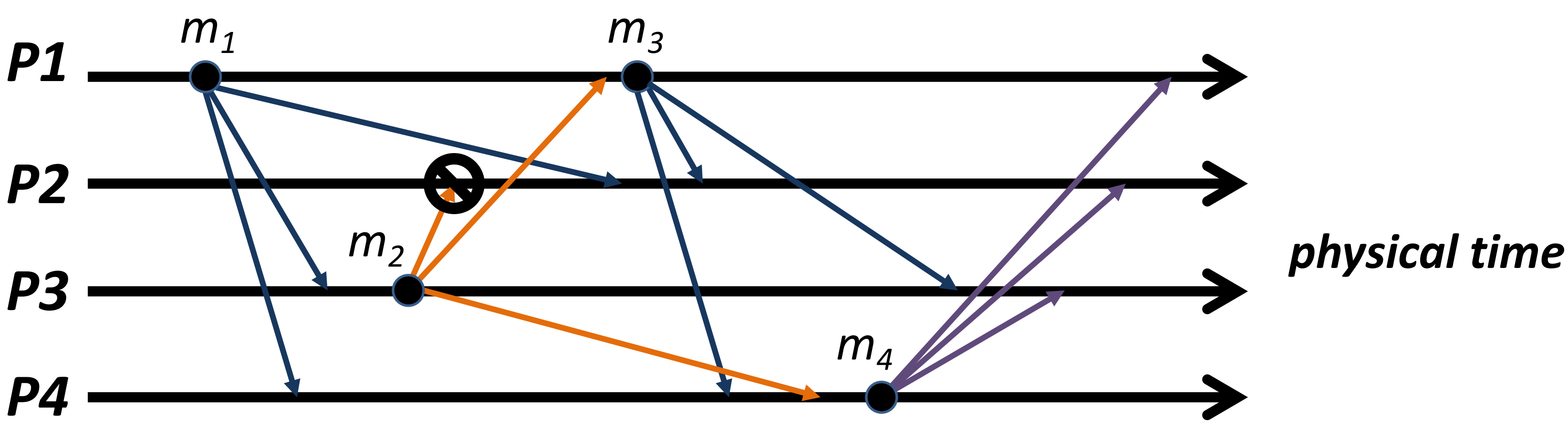


- Each process P_i maintains sequence number (SeqNo) S_i
- New messages sent by P_i include S_i, incremented after each send
  - Not including retransmissions, which retransmit with the same SeqNo!
- P_j maintains S_{ji}: the SeqNo of the last ***delivered*** message from P_i
  - If receive message from P_i with SeqNo ≠ (S_{ji}+1), **hold back**
  - When receive message with SeqNo = (S_{ji}+1), **enqueue for delivery**
  - Also **deliver consecutive messages** in hold-back queue (if present)
  - **Update S_{ji}**
- Apps. **receive** asynchronously as they read from delivery queue

Stronger orderings

- Can also implement FIFO ordering by just using a reliable FIFO transport like TCP/IP
- But the general 'receive versus deliver' model also allows us to provide **stronger** orderings:
  - **Causal ordering**: if event $multicast(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{m_1}) \rightarrow multicast(\mathbf{g}, \mathbf{m_2})$, then all processes will see $\mathbf{m_1}$ before $\mathbf{m_2}$
  - **Total ordering**: if any process delivers a message $\mathbf{m_1}$ before $\mathbf{m_2}$, then all processes will deliver $\mathbf{m_1}$ before $\mathbf{m_2}$
- Causal ordering implies FIFO ordering, since any two multicasts by the same process are related by $\rightarrow$
- Total ordering (as defined) does *not* imply FIFO (or causal) ordering, just says that all processes must agree
  - Sometimes want **FIFO-total** ordering (combines the two)

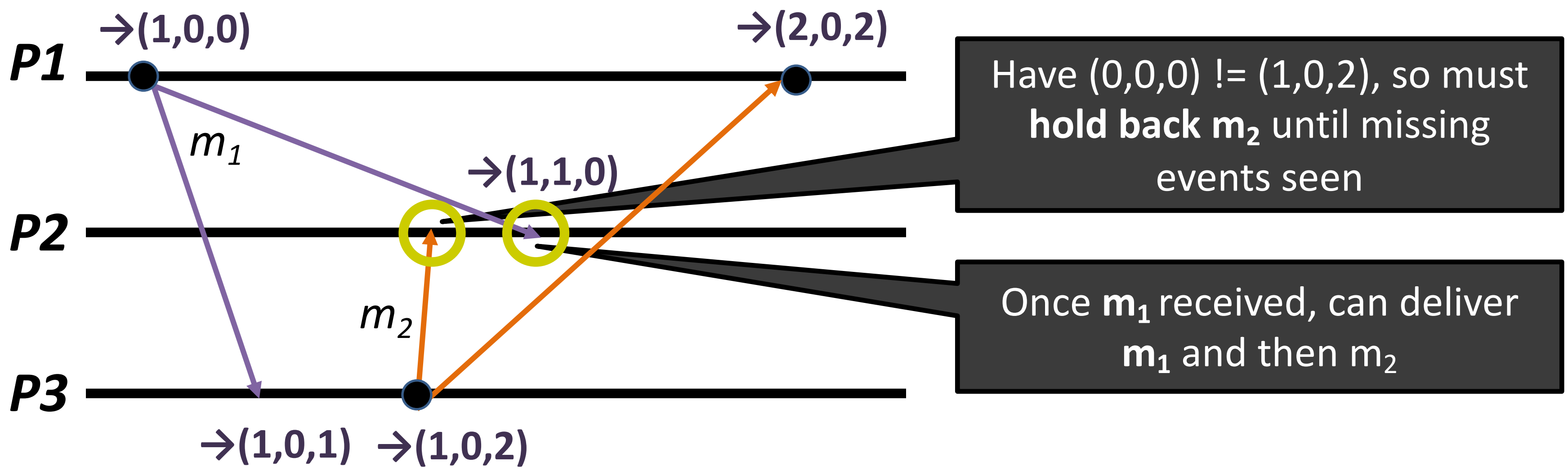
Causal ordering



- Same example as before, but causal ordering requires:
  (*a*) everyone must see $\mathbf{m_1}$ before $\mathbf{m_3}$ (as with FIFO), **and**
  (*b*) everyone must see $\mathbf{m_1}$ before $\mathbf{m_2}$ (due to happens-before)
- Is this ok?
  - No! $\mathbf{m_1} \rightarrow \mathbf{m_2}$, but **P2** sees $\mathbf{m_2}$ before $\mathbf{m_1}$
  - To be correct, must hold back (delay) delivery of $\mathbf{m_2}$ at **P2**
  - But how do we know this?

Implementing causal ordering

- Turns out this is pretty easy!
  - Start with receive algorithm for FIFO multicast…
  - and replace sequence numbers with vector clocks



- Some care needed with dynamic groups

Total ordering

- Sometimes we want all processes to see exactly the same, FIFO, sequence of messages
  - particularly for **state machine replication** (see later)
- One way is to have a **‘can send’ token**:
  - Token passed round-robin between processes
  - Only process with token can send (if they want)
- Or use a **dedicated sequencer process**
  - Other processes ask for **global sequence no**. (GSN), and then send with this in packet
  - Use FIFO ordering algorithm, but on GSNs
- Can also build **non-FIFO** total-order multicast by having processes generate GSNs themselves and resolving ties

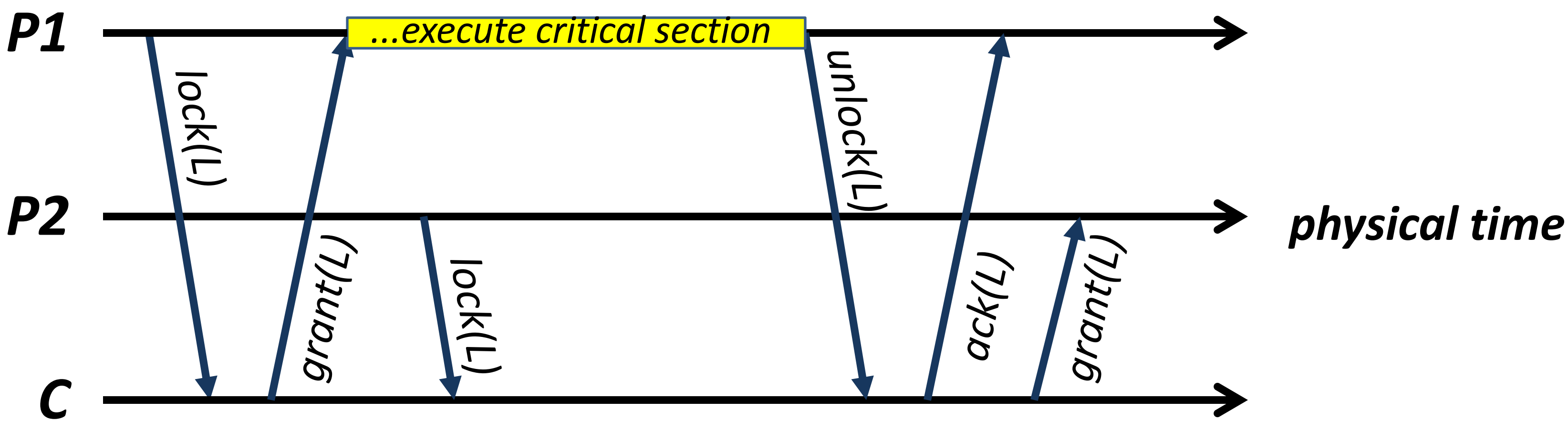
Ordering and asynchrony

- FIFO ordering allows quite a lot of **asynchrony**
  - E.g. any process can delay sending a message until it has a batch (to improve performance)
  - Or can just tolerate variable and/or long delays
- Causal ordering also allows some asynchrony
  - But must be careful queues don't grow too large!
- Traditional total-order multicast not so good:
  - Since every message delivery transitively depends on every other one, delays holds up the entire system
  - Instead tend to an (almost) synchronous model, but this performs poorly, particularly over the wide area ;-)
  - Some clever work on **virtual synchrony** (for the interested)
    - Key insight: allow applications to define ordering operator(s)

Distributed mutual exclusion

- In first part of course, saw need to coordinate concurrent processes / threads
  - In particular considered how to ensure **mutual exclusion**: allow only 1 thread in a critical section
- A variety of schemes possible:
  - test-and-set locks; semaphores; monitors; active objects
- But most of these ultimately rely on hardware support (atomic operations, or disabling interrupts…)
  - not available across an entire distributed system
- Assuming we have some shared distributed resources, how can we provide mutual exclusion in this case?

Solution #1: central lock server

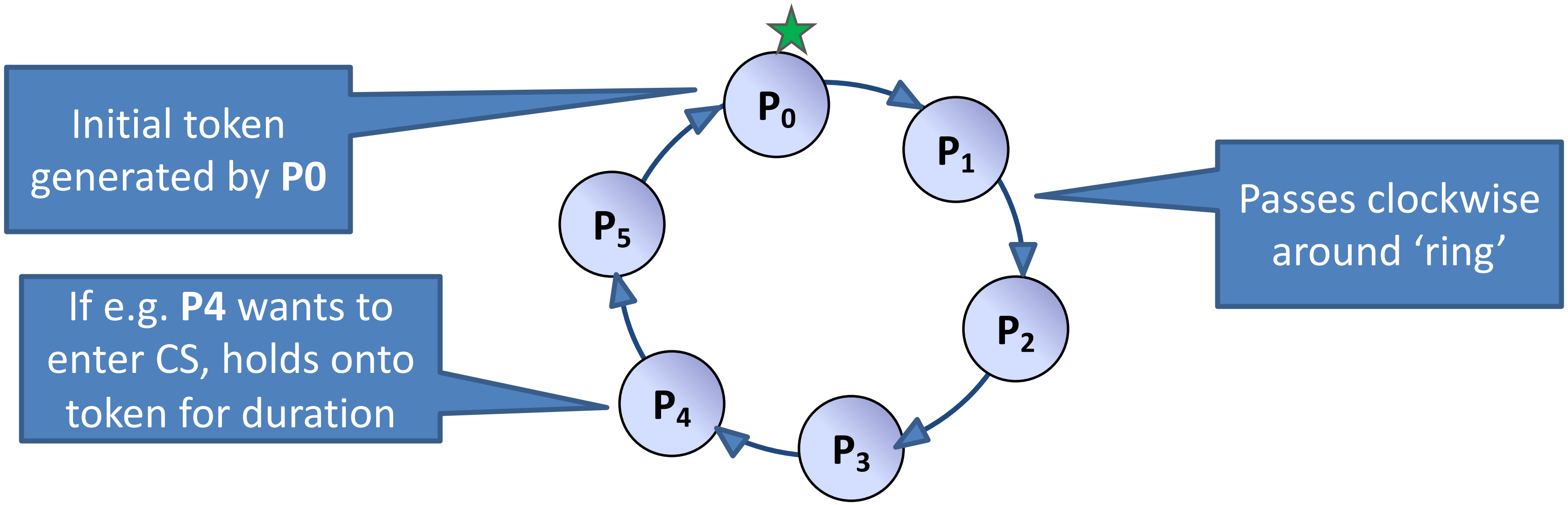


- Nominate one process C as coordinator
  - If **P**$_i$ wants to enter critical section, simply sends ***lock*** message to **C**, and waits for a reply
  - If resource free, **C** replies to **P**$_i$ with a ***grant*** message; otherwise **C** adds **P**$_i$ to a wait queue
  - When finished, P$_i$ sends ***unlock*** message to **C**
  - **C** sends ***grant*** message to first process in wait queue

Central lock server: pros and cons

- Central lock server has some good properties:
  - **Simple** to understand and verify
  - **Live** (providing delays are bounded, and no failure)
  - **Fair** (if queue is fair, e.g. FIFO), and easily supports priorities if we want them
  - **Decent performance**: lock acquire takes one round-trip, and release is 'free' with asynchronous messages
- But **C** can become a performance bottleneck…
- … and can't distinguish crash of **C** from long wait
  - can add additional messages, at some cost

Solution #2: token passing



- Avoid central bottleneck
- Arrange processes in a logical ring
  - Each process knows its predecessor & successor
  - Single token passes continuously around ring
  - Can only enter critical section when possess token; pass token on when finished (or if don't need to enter critical section)

Token passing: pros and cons

- Several advantages:
  - Simple to understand: only 1 process ever has token => mutual exclusion guaranteed by construction
  - No central server bottleneck
  - Liveness guaranteed (in the absence of failure)
  - So-so performance (between 0 and N messages until a waiting process enters, 1 message to leave)
- But:
  - Doesn’t guarantee fairness (FIFO order)
  - If a process crashes must repair ring (route around)
  - And worse: may need to regenerate token – tricky!
- And constant network traffic: an advantage???

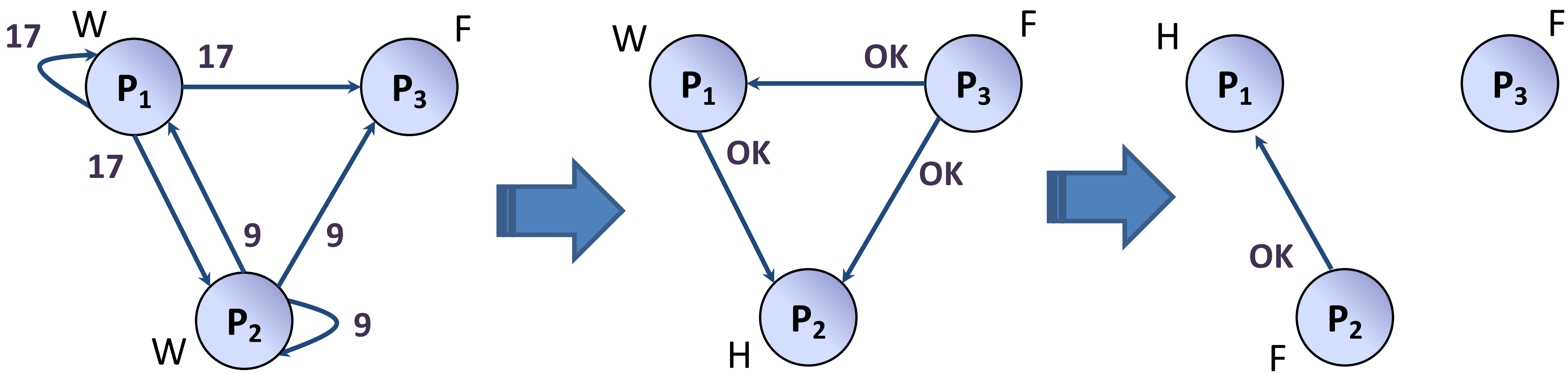
Solution #3: Totally ordered multicast

- Scheme due to Ricart & Agrawala (1981)
- Consider **N** processes, where each process maintains local variable **state** which is one of { FREE, WANT, HELD }
- **Invariant**: At most one process is in HELD state at a time.
- To obtain lock, a process $\mathbf{P_i}$ sets **state** := WANT, and then multicasts lock request to all other processes
- When a process $\mathbf{P_j}$ receives a request from $\mathbf{P_i}$:
  - If $\mathbf{P_j}$'s local state is FREE, then $\mathbf{P_j}$ replies immediately with OK
  - If $\mathbf{P_j}$'s local state is HELD, $\mathbf{P_j}$ queues the request to reply later
- A requesting process $\mathbf{P_i}$ waits for OK from **N-1** processes
  - Once received, sets **state** := HELD, and enters critical section
  - Once done, sets **state** := FREE, & replies to any queued requests
- What about **concurrent requests**?
  - By **concurrent** we mean: $\mathbf{P_j}$ is already in the WANT state when it receives a request from $\mathbf{P_i}$

Handling concurrent requests

- Need to decide upon a **total order**:
  - Each process maintains a Lamport timestamp, $\mathbf{T_i}$
  - Processes put current $\mathbf{T_i}$ into request message
  - Insufficient on its own (recall that Lamport timestamps can be identical) => use **process ID** (or similar) to break ties
  - Note: may not be "fair" as the same process always "wins"
- Hence if a process $\mathbf{P_j}$ receives a request from $\mathbf{P_i}$ and $\mathbf{P_j}$ is also acquiring the lock (i.e. $\mathbf{P_j}$'s local state is WANT)
  - If $(\mathbf{T_j}, \mathbf{P_j}) < (\mathbf{T_i}, \mathbf{P_i})$ then queue request from $\mathbf{P_i}$
  - Otherwise, reply with OK, and continue waiting
- Note that using the total order ensures **correctness**, but not **fairness** (i.e. no FIFO ordering)
  - Q: can we fix this by using vector clocks?

Totally ordered multicast: example



- Imagine **P1** and **P2** simultaneously try to acquire lock…
  - Both set **state** to WANT, and both send multicast message
  - Assume that timestamps are **17** (for **P1**) and **9** (for **P2**)
- P3 has no interest (**state** is FREE), so replies Ok to both
- **9** < **17**: **P1** replies OK; **P2** stays quiet & enqueues **P1**
- **P2** enters the critical section and executes…
- and when done, replies to **P1** (to enter critical section)

Additional details

- Completely decentralized solution ... but:
  - Lots of messages (1 multicast + **N-1** unicast)
  - OK for most recent holder to re-enter CS without any messages
- Variant scheme (Lamport) - **multicast for total ordering**
  - Processes each maintain (and collectively agree on) an **ordered queue of requests and ACKs**, relying on **total ordering**
  - To enter, process $\mathbf{P_i}$ multicasts **request(P_i, T_i)** [same as before]
  - On receipt of a message, $\mathbf{P_j}$ replies with an **ack(P_j,T_j)** unless **request(P_j, T_j)** is currently first in the queue and $\mathbf{P_j}$ is waiting for $\mathbf{P_i}$ to ACK
  - Processes add all requests and ACKs to the queue in order
  - If process $\mathbf{P_i}$ sees their request is earliest and ACK'd by all, can enter CS … and when done, multicasts a **release(P_i, T_i)** message
  - When $\mathbf{P_j}$ receives release, removes $\mathbf{P_i}$'s request from queue
  - If $\mathbf{P_j}$'s request is now earliest in queue, can enter CS…
- Both Ricart & Agrawala and Lamport's scheme have **N** points of failure: doomed if *any* process dies :-(

Summary + next time

- Vector clocks
- Consistent global state + consistent cuts
- Process groups and reliable multicast
- Implementing order
- Distributed mutual exclusion

- Leader elections and distributed consensus
- Distributed transactions and commit protocols
- Replication and consistency