

# Seat assignment with the social distancing

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## Abstract

Social distancing, a non-pharmaceutical way to contain the spread of an infectious disease, has been broadly recognized and practiced. In this paper, we consider the seat assignment problem with social distancing when encountering deterministic, stochastic and dynamic demands.

In a pandemic, the government may issue a minimum physical distance between people, which must be respected in the seating assignment. The problem is further complicated by the existence of groups of guests who will be seated together. To achieve such a goal, we provide an optimal seat assignment with given rows of seats and demands of groups.

We also develop a scenario-based method to obtain a seat assignment with stochastic demands of groups. In business, the group arrives dynamically, we give the method both with and without stochastic information.

With these results, we provide a guideline for policies related to seat utilization rate.

Keywords: Social distancing, Cutting stock problem, Combinatorial optimization, COVID-19.

## 1 Introduction

Social distancing, a non-pharmaceutical way to contain the spread of Social distancing, a physical way to control the spread of infectious disease, has been broadly recognized and practiced. As a result, extensive research has emerged on social distancing concerning its effectiveness and impact. What lags is operational guidance for implementation, an issue particularly critical to social distance measures of which the implementation involves operations details. One typical example is how to make social distancing ensured seating plans.

We will start by considering the seating plan with a given set of seats. In a pandemic, the government may issue a minimum physical distance between people, which must be implemented in the seating plan. The problem is further complicated by the existence of groups of guests who will be seated together. To achieve such a goal, we develop a mechanism for seat planning, which includes a model to characterize the riskiness of a seating plan, and a solution approach to make the tradeoff between seat utilization rate and the associated risk of infection.

In this paper, we are interested in finding a way to implement a seating plan with social distancing constraints instead of solving the IP model directly. After knowing the group portfolio structure, we can obtain the minimum number of seat rows inspired by the cutting stock problem. And we can formulate the corresponding model with a given number of rows to maximize the capacity.

Our main contributions are summarized as follows.

First, this paper is the first attempt to consider how to arrange the seat assignment with social distancing under dynamic arrivals. Most literature on social distancing in seat assignments highlights the importance of social distance in controlling the virus's spread and focuses too much on the model. There is not much work on the operational significance behind the social distance [1] [4]. Recently, some scholars studied the effects of social distance on health and economics, mainly in aircraft [8] [5]. Especially, our study provides another perspective to help the government adopt a mechanism for setting seat assignments to protect people in the post-pandemic era.

Second, we establish the deterministic model to analyze the effects of social distancing. The column generation method is used to obtain the minimal number of rows. When the demand is known, we can solve the IP model directly because of the medium size of this problem. Then we consider the stochastic demand situation when the demands of different group types are random. With the aid of two-stage stochastic programming, we use Benders decomposition methods to obtain the optimal linear solution. Then we develop several possible integral solutions from linear solutions according to the traits of our problem.

Third, to solve the dynamic demand situation, we apply the result of a scenario-based problem. We generate scenarios from multinomial distribution and use nested policy to decide whether to accept or reject each group arrival.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The following section reviews relevant literature. We describe the motivating problem in Section 3. In Section 4, we establish the model and analyze its properties. Section 5 demonstrates the dynamic form and its property. Section 6 gives the results. The conclusions are shown in Section 7.

## 2 Literature Review

[6] gives the well-known initial compact formulation.

[9] carries out the computational experiments with a lot of randomly generated instances of the one-dimensional cutting stock problem.

It is challenging to consider all the possible realizations; thus, it is practicable to use discrete distributions with a finite number of scenarios to approximate the random demands. This procedure is often called scenario generation.

Some papers consider obtaining a set of scenarios that realistically represents the distributions of the random parameters but is not too large. [3] [2] [7]

Another process to reduce the calculation is called scenario reduction. It tries to approximate the original scenario set with a smaller subset that retains essential features.

Every time we can regenerate the scenario based on the realized demands. (Use the conditional distribution or the truncated distribution)

Suppose that the groups arrive from small to large according to their size. Once a larger group comes, the smaller one will never appear again.

When a new group arrives (suppose we have accepted  $n$  groups with the same size), we accept or reject it according to the supply (when  $n + 1 < \text{supply}$ , we accept it), then update the scenario set according to the truncated distribution. We can obtain a new supply with the new probability and scenario set.

With the conclusion of section , we know how to reject a request. Once we reject one group, we will reject all groups of the same size.

### 3 Problem Formulation

In this section, we give the description of the problem, then present the deterministic and stochastic formalution.

#### 3.1 Problem Description

Consider a set of groups, each consisting of no more than  $m$  people, to be assigned to a set of seats. These groups are denoted by a demand vector,  $\mathbf{d} = (d_1, \dots, d_m)$ . Each element,  $d_i, 1 \leq i \leq m$ , indicates the number of  $i$ -th group type containing  $i$  people. For illustration, we consider the layout as  $N$  rows, each row with  $S_j$  seats,  $j = 1, \dots, N$ . Let  $x_{ij}$  indicate the number of group type  $i$  placed in row  $j$ . Then  $\sum_{j=1}^N x_{ij}$  indicates the supply for  $i$ -th group type.

According to the epidemic prevention requirements, the customers from the same group can sit together, while different groups should sit with social distancing. Suppose that each group has to leave one seat to maintain social distancing from the adjacent groups and different rows have no effect on each other, i.e., a person from one group can sit directly behind a person from another group.

To implement the social distancing in the seat assignment, we add one to the original size of each group as the new size of the group and one dummy seat to each row. Take  $s_i = i + 1$ ,  $L_j = S_j + 1$ ,  $s_i$  is the new size of group type  $i$  and  $L_j$  is the length of row  $j$ .

Then we can illustrate the seat assignment for one row below.



Figure 1: Problem Conversion

On the left side, the blue squares stand for the empty seats as the social distancing. The orange squares represent the seats sat by the groups. On the right side, one dummy seat is added at the end of the row. The orange squares surrounded by the red line are the seats taken by groups.

In this way, the social distancing will be integrated by solving this new seat assignment problem.

#### 3.2 Deterministic Model

When the demand is known in advance, to accommodate as many as people possible in the fixed rows, the deterministic model can be shown below:

$$\begin{aligned}
& \max \quad \sum_{j=1}^N \sum_{i=1}^m (s_i - 1)x_{ij} \\
& \text{s.t.} \quad \sum_{i=1}^m s_i x_{ij} \leq L_j, j = 1, \dots, N \\
& \quad \sum_{j=1}^N x_{ij} \leq d_i, i = 1, \dots, m \\
& \quad x_{ij} \geq 0, \text{ integer } i = 1, \dots, m, j = 1, \dots, N.
\end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

This Integer Programming is a special case of the Multiple Knapsack Problem. The solution to the linear relaxation of Problem (1) can be obtained easily because the ratio of value to capacity,  $\frac{s_i-1}{s_i}, 1 \leq i \leq m$ , is monotone in group type. Its has the form  $(0, \dots, x, d_k, \dots, d_m)$  based on the principle of placing large groups whenever possible.

### 3.3 Two-stage Scenario-based Stochastic Programming

Now suppose the demand is stochastic, following some unknown distribution. The stochastic information can be obtained from scenarios through historical data. As mentioned above, the objective is to give a seat assignment that can place as many groups as possible. Then we propose a two-stage scenario-based stochastic programming.

Consider the decision maker who has to assign the seats in two consecutive stages. The seat assignment and demand take place in the first and second stages, respectively. The first stage involves the initial seat assignment denoted by decision variables  $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{Z}_+^{m \times N}$ . These variables are scenario-independent and each component  $x_{i,j}$  stands for the number of group type  $i$  in row  $j$ .

Because the demand is unknown when the seat assignment is planned, there is no way to expect that the supply in the first stage can meet the demand exactly. Fortunately, we can find some remedies in practice, for example, seats of 5 can be assigned to a group of 4 with one empty seat as social distance. However, the decision maker will confront seats shortage or excess without these measures. Therefore, to deal with possible demands, the wait-and-see measures (called recourses) should be considered in planning seat assignment.

Regarding the nature of the obtained information, we assume that there are  $S$  possible scenarios and that the true demand is only revealed after  $\mathbf{x}$  is chosen. Use  $\omega$  to index the different scenarios, each scenario  $\omega \in \Omega, \Omega = \{1, 2, \dots, S\}$  corresponds to a particular realization of the demand vector,  $\mathbf{D}_\omega = (d_{1\omega}, d_{2\omega}, \dots, d_{m,\omega})$ . Let  $p_\omega$  denote the probability of any scenario  $\omega$ , which we assume to be positive.

In the second stage, the second-stage scenario-dependent decision variable,  $\mathbf{y}$ , is to be chosen. It includes two vectors of decisions,  $\mathbf{y}^+ \in \mathbb{Z}_+^{m \times S}$  and  $\mathbf{y}^- \in \mathbb{Z}_+^{m \times S}$ . Each component of  $\mathbf{y}^+$ ,  $y_{i\omega}^+$ , represents the number of holding  $i$ -th groups, which is positive when the supply is larger than the actual demand, zero otherwise. Similarly,  $y_{i\omega}^-$  represents the number of short groups, which is positive when the supply is less than the actual demand and zero otherwise.

Considering that the group can take the seats assigned to the larger group type, we assume that

the holding group type  $i$  can be utilized by the smaller group type  $j < i$  in order of size. That is, the holding group type  $i$  can be taken by group type  $j = i - 2$  after group type  $j = i - 1$  is satisfied.

Then we have the deterministic equivalent form of the scenario-based stochastic programming:

$$\begin{aligned}
\max \quad & E_\omega \left[ \sum_{i=1}^{m-1} (s_i - 1) \left( \sum_{j=1}^N x_{ij} + y_{i+1,\omega}^+ - y_{i\omega}^+ \right) + (s_m - 1) \left( \sum_{j=1}^N x_{mj} - y_{m\omega}^+ \right) \right] \\
\text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{j=1}^N x_{ij} - y_{i\omega}^+ + y_{i+1,\omega}^+ + y_{i\omega}^- = d_{i\omega}, \quad i = 1, \dots, m-1, \omega \in \Omega \\
& \sum_{j=1}^N x_{ij} - y_{i\omega}^+ + y_{i\omega}^- = d_{i\omega}, \quad i = m, \omega \in \Omega \\
& \sum_{i=1}^m s_i x_{ij} \leq L_j, j = 1, \dots, N \\
& y_{i\omega}^+, y_{i\omega}^- \in \mathbb{Z}_+, \quad i \in I, \omega \in \Omega \\
& x_{ij} \in \mathbb{Z}_+, \quad i = 1, \dots, m, j = 1, \dots, N.
\end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

The objective function contains two parts, the number of the largest group size that can be accommodated is  $\sum_{j=1}^N x_{mj} - y_{m\omega}^+$ . The number of group size  $i$  that can be accommodated is  $\sum_{j=1}^N x_{ij} + y_{i+1,\omega}^+ - y_{i\omega}^+$ .

Reformulate the objective function,

$$\begin{aligned}
& E_\omega \left[ \sum_{i=1}^{m-1} (s_i - 1) \left( \sum_{j=1}^N x_{ij} + y_{i+1,\omega}^+ - y_{i\omega}^+ \right) + (s_m - 1) \left( \sum_{j=1}^N x_{mj} - y_{m\omega}^+ \right) \right] \\
&= \sum_{j=1}^N \sum_{i=1}^m (s_i - 1) x_{ij} - \sum_{\omega=1}^S p_\omega \left( \sum_{i=1}^m (s_i - 1) y_{i\omega}^+ - \sum_{i=1}^{m-1} (s_i - 1) y_{i+1,\omega}^+ \right) \\
&= \sum_{j=1}^N \sum_{i=1}^m (s_i - 1) x_{ij} - \sum_{\omega=1}^S p_\omega \left( (s_1 - 1) y_{1\omega}^+ + \sum_{i=2}^m (s_i - s_{i-1}) y_{i\omega}^+ \right)
\end{aligned}$$

Plug in  $s_i = i + 1$ , the objective function is  $\sum_{j=1}^N \sum_{i=1}^m i x_{ij} - \sum_{\omega=1}^S p_\omega \sum_{i=1}^m y_{i\omega}^+$ .

Let  $\mathbf{s} = (s_1, \dots, s_m)$ ,  $\mathbf{L} = (L_1, \dots, L_N)$  where  $s_i$  is the size of seats taken by group type  $i$  and  $L_j$  is the length of row  $j$  as we defined above. Then the row length constraint can be expressed as  $\mathbf{s}\mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{L}$ .

The linear constraints associated with scenarios can be written in a matrix form as

$$\mathbf{x}\mathbf{1} + \mathbf{V}\mathbf{y}_\omega = \mathbf{d}_\omega, \omega \in \Omega,$$

where  $\mathbf{1}$  is the 1-vector of size  $N$ ,  $\mathbf{V} = [\mathbf{W} \ \mathbf{I}]$ .

$$\mathbf{W} = \begin{bmatrix} -1 & 1 & \dots & 0 \\ & \ddots & \ddots & \vdots \\ & & & 1 \\ 0 & & & -1 \end{bmatrix}_{m \times m}$$

and  $\mathbf{I}$  is the identity matrix. For each scenario  $\omega \in \Omega$ ,

$$\mathbf{y}_\omega = \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{y}_\omega^+ \\ \mathbf{y}_\omega^- \end{bmatrix}, \mathbf{y}_\omega^+ = \begin{bmatrix} y_{1\omega}^+ & y_{2\omega}^+ & \cdots & y_{m\omega}^+ \end{bmatrix}^T, \mathbf{y}_\omega^- = \begin{bmatrix} y_{1\omega}^- & y_{2\omega}^- & \cdots & y_{m\omega}^- \end{bmatrix}^T.$$

As we can find, this deterministic equivalent form is a large-scale problem even if the number of possible scenarios  $\Omega$  is moderate. However, the structured constraints allow us to simplify the problem by using a decomposition approach.

Let  $c'\mathbf{x} = \sum_{j=1}^N \sum_{i=1}^m ix_{ij}$ ,  $f'y_\omega = -\sum_{i=1}^m y_{i\omega}^+$ . Then the formulation (2) can be expressed as below,

$$\begin{aligned} \max \quad & c'\mathbf{x} + z(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \mathbf{sx} \leq \mathbf{L} \\ & \mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{Z}_+^{m \times N}, \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

where  $z(\mathbf{x})$  is the recourse function defined as

$$z(\mathbf{x}) := E(z_\omega(\mathbf{x})) = \sum_{\omega \in \Omega} p_\omega z_\omega(\mathbf{x}),$$

and for each scenario  $\omega \in \Omega$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} z_\omega(\mathbf{x}) := \max \quad & f'\mathbf{y}_\omega \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \mathbf{x}\mathbf{1} + \mathbf{V}\mathbf{y}_\omega = \mathbf{d}_\omega \\ & \mathbf{y}_\omega \geq 0. \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

Here  $E$  is the expectation with respect to the scenario set. Problem (4) stands for the second-stage problem and  $z_\omega(\mathbf{x})$  is the optimal value of problem (4), together with the convention  $z_\omega(x) = \infty$  if the problem is infeasible.

It is difficult to solve the above problem directly, we can relax problem (3) to stochastic linear programming firstly. In section 4, we obtain an optimal linear solution by decomposition approach and generate a near-optimal seat assignment.

## 4 Solve The Two-stage Problem

### 4.1 Solve The Second Stage Problem

Consider a  $\mathbf{x}$  such that  $\mathbf{sx} \leq \mathbf{L}$  and  $\mathbf{x} \geq 0$  and suppose that this represents our seat assignment for the first stage decisions. Once  $\mathbf{x}$  is fixed, the optimal second stage decisions  $\mathbf{y}_\omega$  can be determined by solving problem (4) for each  $\omega$ .

To solve this problem, we should only consider that  $\mathbf{x}$  for which  $z_\omega(\mathbf{x})$  are all finite. Notice that the feasible region of the dual of problem (4) does not depend on  $x$ . We can form its dual problem, which is

$$\begin{aligned}
\min \quad & \alpha'_{\omega}(\mathbf{d}_{\omega} - \mathbf{x}\mathbf{1}) \\
\text{s.t.} \quad & \alpha'_{\omega}\mathbf{V} \geq f'
\end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

Let  $P = \{\alpha | \alpha'V \geq f'\}$ . We assume that  $P$  is nonempty and has at least one extreme point. Then, either the dual problem (5) has an optimal solution and  $z_{\omega}(x)$  is finite, or the primal problem (4) is infeasible and  $z_{\omega}(x) = \infty$ .

Let  $\mathcal{O}$  be the set of all extreme points of  $P$  and  $\mathcal{F}$  be the set of all extreme rays of  $P$ . Then  $z_{\omega} > -\infty$  if and only if  $(\alpha^k)'(\mathbf{d}_{\omega} - \mathbf{x}\mathbf{1}) \geq 0, \alpha^k \in \mathcal{F}$ , which stands for the feasibility cut.

**Lemma 1.** *The feasible region of problem (5),  $P$ , is bounded. In addition, all the extreme points of  $P$  are integral.*

(Proof of lemma 1). Notice that  $V = (W, I)$ ,  $W$  is a totally unimodular matrix. Then, we have  $\alpha'W \geq -\bar{s}, \alpha'I \geq 0$ . Thus, the feasible region is bounded. Further more,  $\bar{s}_i = s_i - s_{i-1}, s_0 = 1$  are integral, so the extreme points are all integral.  $\square$

Because the feasible region is bounded, then feasibility cuts are not needed. Let  $z_{\omega}$  be the lower bound of  $z_{\omega}(x)$  such that  $(\alpha^k)'(\mathbf{d}_{\omega} - \mathbf{x}\mathbf{1}) \geq z_{\omega}, \alpha^k \in \mathcal{O}$ , which is the optimality cut.

**Corollary 1.** *Only the optimality cuts,  $\alpha'(\mathbf{d}_{\omega} - \mathbf{x}\mathbf{1}) \geq z_{\omega}$ , will be included in the decomposition approach.*

**Corollary 2.** *When  $s_i = i + 1, f' = [-1, 0], V = (W, I)$ , we have  $\alpha'W \geq -1, \alpha'I \geq 0$ . Thus, it is easy to find that the feasible region is bounded, i.e.,  $P$  does not contain any extreme rays. Furthermore, let  $\alpha_0 = 0$ , then we have  $0 \leq \alpha_i \leq \alpha_{i-1} + 1, i = 1, \dots, m$ .*

**Corollary 3.** *The optimal value of the problem (4),  $z_{\omega}(x)$ , is finite and will be attained at extreme points of the set  $P$ . Thus, we have  $z_{\omega}(x) = \min_{\alpha^j \in \mathcal{O}} (\alpha^j)'(\mathbf{d}_{\omega} - \mathbf{x}\mathbf{1})$ .*

When we are given  $x^*$ , the demand that can be satisfied by the assignment is  $\mathbf{x}^*\mathbf{1} = \mathbf{d}_0 = (d_{1,0}, \dots, d_{m,0})$ . Then plug them in the subproblem (4), we can obtain the value of  $y_{i\omega}$  recursively:

$$\begin{aligned}
y_{m\omega}^- &= (d_{m\omega} - d_{m0})^+ \\
y_{m\omega}^+ &= (d_{m0} - d_{m\omega})^+ \\
y_{i\omega}^- &= (d_{i\omega} - d_{i0} - y_{i+1,\omega}^+)^+, i = 1, \dots, m-1 \\
y_{i\omega}^+ &= (d_{i0} - d_{i\omega} + y_{i+1,\omega}^+)^+, i = 1, \dots, m-1
\end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

The optimal value for scenario  $\omega$  can be obtained by  $f'y_{\omega}$ , then we need to find the dual optimal solution.

**Theorem 1.** *The optimal solutions to problem (5) are given by*

$$\begin{aligned}
\alpha_{i\omega} &= 0, i = 1, \dots, m \quad \text{if } y_{i\omega}^- > 0 \\
\alpha_{i\omega} &= \alpha_{i-1,\omega} + 1, i = 1, \dots, m \quad \text{if } y_{i\omega}^+ > 0
\end{aligned} \tag{7}$$



For some  $i$ , when  $y_{i\omega}^+ = 0$  and  $y_{i\omega}^- = 0$ ,  $(d_{i0} - d_{i\omega} + y_{i+1,\omega}^+) = 0$ ,  $d_{i\omega} - d_{i0} = y_{i+1,\omega}^+ \geq 0$ . If  $y_{i+1,\omega}^+ > 0$ ,  $\alpha_{i\omega} = 0$ ; if  $y_{i+1,\omega}^+ = 0$ ,  $0 \leq \alpha_{i\omega} \leq \alpha_{i-1,\omega} + 1$ .

(Proof of Theorem 1). According to the complementary relaxation property, when  $d_{i\omega} > d_{i0} \Rightarrow y_{i\omega}^- > 0$ , then  $\alpha_{i\omega} = 0$  for all  $i$ ; when  $d_{i\omega} < d_{i0} \Rightarrow y_{i\omega}^+ > 0$ , then  $\alpha_{i\omega} = \alpha_{i-1,\omega} + 1, i = 1, \dots, m$ .

When  $d_{i\omega} = d_{i0}$ , we can find that  $\alpha_{i\omega} = \alpha_{i-1,\omega} + 1$  will minimize the objective function.

Let  $\Delta d = d_\omega - d_0$ , then the elements in  $\Delta d$  will be a negative integer, positive integer and zero. Only the negative element will affect the objective function. The larger the value of  $\alpha$  associated with a negative integer is, the smaller the objective function will be. Thus, let  $\alpha_{i\omega} = \alpha_{i-1,\omega} + 1$  when  $d_{i\omega} = d_{i0}$  can obtain the minimized objective function.  $\square$

We can use the forward method, calculating from  $\alpha_{1\omega}$  to  $\alpha_{m\omega}$ , to obtain the value of  $\alpha_\omega$  instead of solving linear programming.

## 4.2 Delayed Constraint Generation

Benders decomposition works with only a subset of those exponentially many constraints and adds more constraints iteratively until the optimal solution of Benders Master Problem(BMP) is attained. This procedure is known as delayed constraint generation.

Use the characterization of  $z_\omega(x)$  in the problem (3) and take into account the optimality cut, we can conclude the BMP will have the form:

$$\begin{aligned}
\max \quad & c'x + \sum_{\omega \in \Omega} p_\omega z_\omega \\
\text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^m s_i x_{ij} \leq L_j, j = 1, \dots, N \\
& (\alpha^k)'(\mathbf{d}_\omega - \mathbf{x}\mathbf{1}) \geq z_\omega, \alpha^k \in \mathcal{O}, \forall \omega \\
& \mathbf{x} \geq 0
\end{aligned} \tag{8}$$

When substituting  $\mathcal{O}$  with its subset,  $\mathcal{O}^t$ , the problem (8) becomes the Restricted Benders Master Problem(RBMP).

To determine the initial  $\mathcal{O}^t$ , we have the following lemma.

**Lemma 2.** RBMP is always bounded with at least any one optimality cut for each scenario.

(Proof of lemma 2). Suppose we have one extreme point  $\alpha^\omega$  for each scenario. Then we have the following problem.

$$\begin{aligned}
\max \quad & c'x + \sum_{\omega \in \Omega} p_\omega z_\omega \\
\text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^m s_i x_{ij} \leq L_j, j = 1, \dots, N \\
& (\alpha^\omega)' \mathbf{d}_\omega \geq (\alpha^\omega)' \mathbf{x}\mathbf{1} + z_\omega, \forall \omega \\
& \mathbf{x} \geq 0
\end{aligned} \tag{9}$$

Problem (9) reaches its maximum when  $(\alpha^\omega)' \mathbf{d}_\omega = (\alpha^\omega)' \mathbf{x} \mathbf{1} + z_\omega, \forall \omega$ . Substitute  $z_\omega$  with these equations, we have

$$\begin{aligned} \max \quad & c'x - \sum_{\omega} p_{\omega}(\alpha^{\omega})' \mathbf{x} \mathbf{1} + \sum_{\omega} p_{\omega}(\alpha^{\omega})' \mathbf{d}_{\omega} \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^m s_i x_{ij} \leq L_j, j = 1, \dots, N \\ & \mathbf{x} \geq 0 \end{aligned} \tag{10}$$

Notice that  $\mathbf{x}$  is bounded by  $\mathbf{L}$ , then the problem (9) is bounded. Adding more optimality cuts will not make the optimal value larger. Thus, RBMP is bounded.  $\square$

Given the initial  $\mathcal{O}^t$ , we can have the solution  $\mathbf{x}_0$  and  $\mathbf{z}^0 = (z_1^0, \dots, z_S^0)$ . Then  $c' \mathbf{x}_0 + \sum_{\omega \in \Omega} p_{\omega} z_{\omega}^0$  is an upper bound of problem (8).

When  $\mathbf{x}_0$  is given, the optimal solution,  $\alpha_{\omega}^1$ , to problem (5) can be obtained according to Theorem 1.  $z_{\omega}^{(0)} = \alpha_{\omega}^1(d_{\omega} - \mathbf{x}_0 \mathbf{1})$  and  $(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{z}^{(0)})$  is a feasible solution to problem (8) because it satisfies all the constraints. Thus,  $c' \mathbf{x}_0 + \sum_{\omega \in \Omega} p_{\omega} z_{\omega}^{(0)}$  is a lower bound of problem (8).

If for every scenario, the optimal value of the corresponding problem (5) is larger than or equal to  $z_{\omega}^0$ , all constraints are satisfied, we have an optimal solution,  $(x_0, z_{\omega}^0)$ , to the BMP. Otherwise, add one new constraint,  $(\alpha_{\omega}^1)'(\mathbf{d}_{\omega} - \mathbf{x} \mathbf{1}) \geq z_{\omega}$ , to RBMP.

The steps of the algorithm are described as below,

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**Algorithm 1** The benders decomposition algorithm

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**Step 1.** Solve LP (9) with all  $\alpha_{\omega}^0 = \mathbf{0}$  for each scenario. Then, obtain the solution  $(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{z}^0)$ .

**Step 2.** Set the upper bound  $UB = c' \mathbf{x}_0 + \sum_{\omega \in \Omega} p_{\omega} z_{\omega}^0$ .

**Step 3.** For  $x_0$ , we can obtain  $\alpha_{\omega}^1$  and  $z_{\omega}^{(0)}$  for each scenario, set the lower bound  $LB = c' x_0 + \sum_{\omega \in \Omega} p_{\omega} z_{\omega}^{(0)}$

**Step 4.** For each  $\omega$ , if  $(\alpha_{\omega}^1)'(\mathbf{d}_{\omega} - \mathbf{x}_0 \mathbf{1}) < z_{\omega}^0$ , add one new constraint,  $(\alpha_{\omega}^1)'(\mathbf{d}_{\omega} - \mathbf{x} \mathbf{1}) \geq z_{\omega}$ , to RBMP.

**Step 5.** Solve the updated RBMP, obtain a new solution  $(x_1, z^1)$  and update UB.

**Step 6.** Repeat step 3 until  $UB - LB < \epsilon$ . (In our case, UB converges.)

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**Remark 1.** From the lemma 2, we can set  $\alpha_{\omega}^0 = \mathbf{0}$  initially in Step 1.

**Remark 2.** Notice that only constraints are added in each iteration, thus LB and UB are both monotone. Then we can use  $UB - LB < \epsilon$  to terminate the algorithm in Step 6.

After the algorithm terminates, we obtain the optimal  $\mathbf{x}^*$ . The demand that can be satisfied by the arrangement is  $\mathbf{x}^* \mathbf{1} = d_0 = (d_{1,0}, \dots, d_{m,0})$ . Then we can obtain the value of  $y_{i\omega}$  from equation (6).

We show the results of Benders and IP in the section 6.2.

### 4.3 Obtain The Near-optimal Seat Assignment

The stochastic model only gives a fractional solution; its objective is to obtain the maximal number of people served, not the optimal seat assignment. It will not provide an appropriate solution when the number of arriving people in the scenarios is way less than the number of total seats because it does not utilize all the empty seats. Thus, we make some changes to obtain the near-optimal seat assignment.

If we need to consider the lower bound of demand, which represents the groups that must be allocated seats, we can add a new constraint  $\sum_{j=1}^N x_{ij} \geq d_i^l, i = 1, \dots, m$  in problem (1),  $d_i^l$  is the number of group type  $i$  we have placed.

When a lower or upper bound is not needed, the corresponding constraint can be removed. Because the ratio of value to capacity is monotone for the size of groups, the solver can quickly solve this deterministic formulation without many branching operations.

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**Algorithm 2** Near-optimal seat assignment algorithm

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**Step 1.** Obtain the solution from stochastic linear programming by benders decomposition.

**Step 2.** Aggregate the solution to the supply for each group type.

**Step 3.** Set the supply as the upper bound of demand in problem (1). The lower bound is not included.

**Step 4.** Aggregate the solution from Step 3 to a supply for each group type.

**Step 5.** Obtain the near-optimal assignment from (1) by setting the supply in Step 4 as the lower bound.

---

**Remark 3.** *Step 3 can give a feasible integer supply. In Step 5, problem (1) with this supply as the lower bound can always give an integer solution. Thus, we can obtain the near-optimal seat assignment by solving stochastic programming once and deterministic programming twice.*

## 5 Dynamic Demand

We also study the dynamic seating plan problem, which is more suitable for commercial use. In this situation, customers come dynamically and the seating plan needs to be made without knowing the number and composition of future customers.

It becomes a sequential stochastic optimization problem where conventional methods fall into the curse of dimensionality due to many seating plan combinations. To avoid this complexity, we develop an approach that aims directly at the final seating plans. As stated above, we can obtain such a seating plan from stochastic programming. However, it only gives the initial seat assignment without handling the dynamic situation. To further know how to make decisions when the group arrives dynamically, we discuss two different dynamic situations in the following section.

## 5.1 Dynamic Demand Situations

Generally speaking, there are two ways to purchase tickets for concerts or movies: no seat selection when booking and seat selection when booking. We consider the following dynamic demand situations, ticket reservation without seat selection and seat assignment before arrival.

For reservations without seat selection, the seat assignment will not be made immediately, decision-maker only needs to reject or accept each request during the making-reservation stage. After the reservation deadline, the seat layout information will be informed to the customers before admission. For example, singing concert venues have more seats and higher demand for tickets, organizers usually do not take the approach of determining the seats at the time of booking, but not provide seat information, and then inform customers of the seat information after the overall seat layout is determined.

For seat assignment before arrival, the specific procedure will be changed under the requirement of social distancing. The seat assignment will be arranged before the groups book the tickets, the groups only need to choose the corresponding-size seats when booking tickets. For example, movie theaters or small concert have relatively few seats, the attendance rate is usually low enough to allow free selection of seats directly online. The early seat planning can satisfy the requirement of social distancing and also save costs without changing seat allocation. The seat assignment could remain for one day because the same film genre will attract the same feature of different group types.

## 5.2 Mapping sequences to scenarios by discrete periods

We can use stochastic information to generate scenarios integrated from arrival sequences. Suppose there are  $T$  independent periods; at most, one group will arrive in each period.

There are  $J$  different group types(including the group with no people). Let  $\mathbf{y}$  be a discrete random variable indicating the number of people in the group. Let  $\mathbf{p}$  be the vector probability, where  $p(y = j) = p_j$ ,  $j = 0, 1, \dots, J - 1$  and  $\sum_j p_j = 1$ . Then a sequence can be expressed as  $\{y_1, y_2, \dots, y_T\}$ . (It can be modeled as a multinomial distribution,  $p(\mathbf{Y} | \mathbf{p}) = \prod_{j=0}^{J-1} p_j^{N_j}$ ).

Let  $N_j = \sum_t I(y_t = j)$ , i.e., the count number of times group type  $j$  arrives during  $T$  periods. Then the set of counts  $N_j$  (scenarios) follows a multinomial distribution,

$$p(N_0, \dots, N_{J-1} | \mathbf{p}) = \frac{T!}{N_0! \dots N_{J-1}!} \prod_{j=0}^{J-1} p_j^{N_j}, T = \sum_{j=0}^{J-1} N_j$$

It is clear that the number of different sequences is  $J^T$ . The number of different scenarios is  $O(T^{J-1})$  which can be obtained by the following DP.

Use  $D(T, J)$  to denote the number of scenarios, which equals the number of different solutions to  $x_1 + \dots + x_J = T, \mathbf{x} \geq 0$ . Then, we know the recurrence relation  $D(T, J) = \sum_{i=0}^T D(i, J-1)$  and boundary condition,  $D(i, 1) = 1$ . So we have  $D(T, 2) = T + 1$ ,  $D(T, 3) = \frac{(T+2)(T+1)}{2}$ ,  $D(T, J) = O(T^{J-1})$ .

The number of scenarios is too large to enumerate all possible cases. Thus, we choose to sample some sequences from the multinomial distribution.

Remark: this approach still works under the assumption that time is continuous.

### 5.3 Nested Policy with Given Supply

Once we obtain a solution from the stochastic programming, we need to follow some basic rules to assign the seats.

- When the supply of one arriving group is enough, we will accept the group directly.
- When the supply of one arriving group is 0, the demand can be satisfied by only one larger-size supply.
- When one group is accepted to occupy the larger-size seats, the rest empty seat(s) can be reserved for the future demand.

We can assign the seats to the corresponding-size group. But when a group comes while the corresponding supply is 0, should we give this group to the larger-size seats? Now we demonstrate the nested policy for this problem.

Suppose we accept a group of  $i$  to take over  $j$ -size seats. In that case, the expected served people is  $i + (j - i - 1)P(D_{j-i-1} \geq x_{j-i-1} + 1)$ , where  $i < j$ ,  $P(D_i \geq x_i)$  is the probability of that the expected demand of group type  $i$  in the following periods is no less than  $x_i$ , the remaining supply of group type  $i$ .

When a group of  $i$  occupies  $j$ -size seats,  $(j - i - 1)$  seats can be provided for one group of  $j - i - 1$  with one seat of social distancing. Thus, the term,  $P(D_{j-i-1} \geq x_{j-i-1} + 1)$ , indicates the probability that the demand of group type  $(j - i - 1)$  in the future is no less than its current remaining supply plus 1. If  $j - i - 1 = 0$ , then this term equals 0.

Similarly, when the expected demand of a group of  $j$  in the future is no less than its remaining supply currently, we would reject a group of  $i$ , the expected served people is  $jP(D_j \geq x_j)$ .

Let  $d(i, j)$  be the difference of expected served people between acceptance and rejection on group  $i$  occupying  $j$ -size seats. Then  $d(i, j) = i + (j - i - 1)P(D_{j-i-1} \geq x_{j-i-1} + 1) - jP(D_j \geq x_j)$ ,  $j > i$ .

One intuitive decision is to choose the largest difference. We can obtain  $d(i, j) = jP(D_j \leq x_j - 1) - (j - i - 1)P(D_{j-i-1} \leq x_{j-i-1}) - 1$  after reformulating. Let  $F_j(x; T)$  be the cumulative distribution function of the number of arrival groups  $D_j$  in  $T$  periods. Then  $F_j(x; T_r) = P(D_j \leq x)$ , and  $D_j$  follows a binomial distribution  $B(T_r, p_j)$ , where  $T_r$  is the number of remaining periods.

Thus,  $d(i, j) = jF_j(x_j - 1; T) - (j - i - 1)F_{j-i-1}(x_{j-i-1}; T) - 1$ . For all  $j > i$ , find the largest  $d(i, j)$ , denoted as  $d(i, j^*)$ .

If  $d(i, j^*) > 0$ , we will place the group  $i$  in  $j^*$ -size seats. Otherwise, reject the group.

The algorithm is shown below:

---

**Algorithm 3** Nested policy under given supply

---

- Step 1.** Obtain a supply,  $\mathbf{X}^0 = [x_1, \dots, x_J]$ , from the stochastic programming.
- Step 2.** For the arrival group type  $i$  at period  $T'$ , if  $x_i > 0$ , accept it. Let  $x_i = x_i - 1$ . Go to step 4.
- Step 3.** If  $x_i = 0$ , find  $d(i, j^*)$ . If  $d(i, j^*) > 0$ , accept group type  $i$ . Set  $x_{j^*} = x_{j^*} - 1$ . Let  $x_{j-i-1} = x_{j-i-1} + 1$  when  $j - i - 1 > 0$ . If  $d(i, j^*) \leq 0$ , reject group type  $i$ .
- Step 4.** If  $T' \leq T$ , move to next period, set  $T' = T' + 1$ , go to step 2. Otherwise, terminate this algorithm.
- 

We show the results of Benders and IP under nested policy in section 6.2.

## 5.4 Dynamic Situation with Stochastic Information

In this section, we will present methods to assign seats with stochastic information.

### 5.4.1 Ticket Reservation without Seat Selection

We develop a DP-based method by relaxing all rows to one row with the same capacity. Suppose there always exists one seat assignment under the total capacity. Then we can use DP to make the decision in each period.

$$V(S, T) = \sum_{i \in N} p_i \max\{[V((S - s_i - 1), T - 1) + s_i], V(S, T - 1)\}$$

After obtaining the pre-accepted sequence, we still need to check whether this sequence is feasible for the seat assignment. In most cases, it is feasible. That is the reason why we use relaxation. When it is not feasible, we should delete the group one by one from the last arrival of the sequence until it is feasible. In practice, we reject the request in the pre-accepted sequence until we cannot find a feasible seat assignment.

### 5.4.2 Seat Assignment before Arrivals

The stochastic seat assignment(SSA) method can give a seat assignment before the group arrivals. The specific procedures are demonstrated in the above sections. The brief steps are shown below:

---

**Algorithm 4** Stochastic seat assignment method

---

- Step 1.** Obtain a linear solution from stochastic programming (8).
- Step 2.** Obtain the near-optimal integral solution from deterministic model with lower and upper bounds.
- Step 3.** Accept or reject group arrivals according to the nested policy in section 5.3.
-

## 5.5 Benchmark

The benchmarks for the above two situations are described below.

### 5.5.1 FCFS

For ticket reservation without seat selection, the intuitive but trivial method will be on a first-come-first-served basis. Relax all rows to one row with the total number of seats. For the arrival sequence, find the target arrival when the number of seats taken by the preceding arrivals does not exceed the capacity. Then we obtain a new sub-sequence, including the arrivals from the first to the target and a possible arrival. For the convenience of calculation, we check the feasibility of constructing a seat assignment from the end of the sub-sequence. When it is not feasible for the seat assignment, we should delete the group one by one from this sub-sequence until a feasible seat assignment is found. In reality, we need to check the feasibility one group by one.

### 5.5.2 Largest Patterns Planning

For each row, we choose the patterns from  $I_1$ . Accept the group such that the largest pattern can be maintained. When the arrival cannot be assigned in the planning patterns from  $I_1$ , we can change the largest pattern to a second largest pattern according to the coming arrival.

---

**Algorithm 5** Method by using the largest patterns

---

**Step 1.** Generate the largest pattern by the greedy way for each row.

**Step 2.** Denote the minimal and maximal size of group in the pattern of row  $i$  as  $\min_i$  and  $\max_i$ .

**Step 3.** For the arrival with the size of  $a$  in period  $t$ , if there exists  $i$  such that  $\min_i + \max_i \geq a$  and  $a > \min_i$ , accept this arrival at row  $i$ , go to step 5; otherwise, go to step 4.

**Step 4.** Find a maximal group of seats to accept this arrival, otherwise, reject this arrival.

**Step 5.** Move to the next period. Repeat step 3.

---

Step 2: the pattern will have the same loss by these procedures. ( $\min_i$  can be 0.) (Can we use the partial information?)

This method can be used without stochastic information. The performance will improve when the total demand can construct the largest patterns for all rows.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Deterministic Model

The integer programming (1) can be solved quickly because of the monotone ratio.

## 6.2 Benders Decomposition versus IP

The running times of solving IP directly and using Benders decomposition are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Running time of Decomposition and IP

# of scenarios	demands	running time of IP(s)	Benders (s)	# of rows	# of groups	# of seats
1000	(150, 350)	5.1	0.13	30	8	(21, 50)
5000		28.73	0.47	30	8	
10000		66.81	0.91	30	8	
50000		925.17	4.3	30	8	
1000	(1000, 2000)	5.88	0.29	200	8	(21, 50)
5000		30.0	0.62	200	8	
10000		64.41	1.09	200	8	
50000		365.57	4.56	200	8	
1000	(150, 250)	17.15	0.18	30	16	(41, 60)
5000		105.2	0.67	30	16	
10000		260.88	1.28	30	16	
50000		3873.16	6.18	30	16	

The parameters in the columns of the table are the number of scenarios, the range of demands, running time of integer programming, running time of Benders decomposition method, the number of rows, the number of group types and the number of seats for each row, respectively.

Take the first experiment as an example, the scenarios of demands are generated from (150, 350) randomly, the number of seats for each row is generated from (21, 50) randomly.

## 6.3 Near-optimal Solution versus IP Solution under Nested Policy

Then, we will show the near-optimal seat assignment has a close performance with IP when considering nested policy.

Table 2: Results of Decomposition and IP under nested policy

# samples	T	probabilities	# rows	people served by decomposition	people served by IP
1000	45	[0.4,0.4,0.1,0.1]	8	85.30	85.3
1000	50	[0.4,0.4,0.1,0.1]	8	97.32	97.32
1000	55	[0.4,0.4,0.1,0.1]	8	102.40	102.40
1000	60	[0.4,0.4,0.1,0.1]	8	106.70	NA
1000	65	[0.4,0.4,0.1,0.1]	8	108.84	108.84
1000	35	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	8	87.16	87.08
1000	40	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	8	101.32	101.24
1000	45	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	8	110.62	110.52
1000	50	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	8	115.46	NA
1000	55	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	8	117.06	117.26
5000	300	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	30	749.76	749.76
5000	350	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	30	866.02	866.42
5000	400	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	30	889.02	889.44
5000	450	[0.25,0.25,0.25,0.25]	30	916.16	916.66

Each entry of people served is the average of 50 instances. IP will spend more than 2 hours in some instances, as 'NA' showed in the table. The number of seats is 20 when the number of rows is 8, the number of seats is 40 when the number of rows is 30.



We can find that the people served by Benders decomposition and IP under nested policy are close. But obtaining the near-optimal seat assignment will be faster.

## 6.4 Different Probabilities

We discuss the effect of different probabilities in this sub-section. Suppose that the group of up to 4 can sit together. Then we have  $E(D) = (p_1 * 1 + p_2 * 2 + p_3 * 3 + p_4 * 4)T$ . Let  $c = p_1 * 1 + p_2 * 2 + p_3 * 3 + p_4 * 4$ . Choose  $T(E(D)/c)$  such that the supply is near the demand. Then we compare the number of people served under different values of  $c$ .

Sample  $p_1, p_2, p_3$  from 0.05 to 0.95 with increment of 0.5. The number of rows is 10, and the number of seats for each row is 21 (including one dummy seat). The number of periods is 200. The number of people served with respect to the value of  $c$  is shown below:

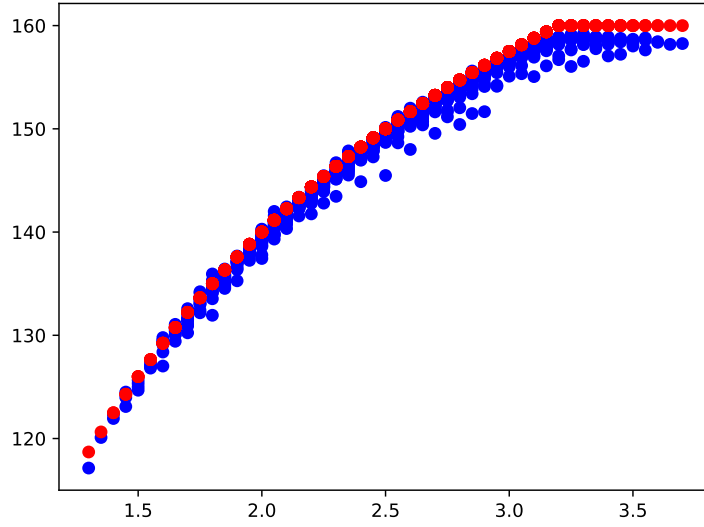


Figure 2: The number of people served versus  $c$

Each blue point stands for the average number of people of 50 instances. Each red point stands for the expected number of people.

Suppose we accept  $D_a$  people with  $T$  arrivals and the sum of  $D_a$  and  $T$  is equal to the total number of seats. Then the occupancy rate is  $\frac{c * T}{(c+1) * T} = \frac{c}{c+1} \cdot (D_a = c * T)$

$\frac{c}{c+1}$  is the estimation of occupancy rate when there are full patterns for all rows.

The number of people served is near  $\frac{c}{c+1} * 210$  on average. (Red points showed in the figure.)

Why some blue points are far from the red points?

Explanation: For the case of probability  $[0.05, 0.05, 0.85, 0.05]$  ( $c = 2.9$ ), the demand can be  $[4, 1, 45, 2]$  or  $[2, 2, 47, 1]$ . We cannot construct all full patterns for every row. It violates the assumption, thus in this case there is a large gap between blue point and red point.

We can find that 160 is the upper bound of the number of people served.

If the largest pattern is assigned for each row, then the occupancy rate is  $\frac{16}{21}$ . The maximal number of people can be served is  $210 * \frac{16}{21} = 160$ .

Let  $E(D) = 150$ .

Two experiments: When  $E(D) = 2.5T$ , which means on average 2.5 people arrive for each group.

$T = 75$ , the number of rows is 9, the number of seats each row is 25.

Probabilities:  $p_1 = p_3 + 2p_4$ .  $p_3$  is from 0.05 to 0.45 with step size of 0.1.  $p_4$  is from 0.05 to 0.3 with step size of 0.05.

When  $E(D) = 2T$ , which means on average 2 people arrive for each group.

$T = 60$ , the number of rows is 10, the number of seats each row is 21.

Probabilities:  $2p_2 + 4p_3 + 6p_4 = 3$ .  $p_2$  is from 0.05 to 0.95 with step size of 0.1.  $p_3$  is from 0.05 to 0.75 with step size of 0.1.

## 6.5 Different Periods

Discuss the effect of the number of periods:

Parameters:  $T = 10-100$ , step size =1.

The expected number of period: 60 The expected number of demand(people): 150 Number of rows: 10 Number of seats each row: 21 Probabilities: [0.25, 0.25, 0.25, 0.25].

Parameters:  $T = 30-120$ , step size =1.

The expected number of period: 72 The expected number of demand(people): 137 Number of rows: 10 Number of seats each row: 21 Probabilities: [0.4, 0.4, 0.1, 0.1]

We can find that the difference between the number of accepted people and the number of total people will increase with the period.

Probability 1: [0.25, 0.25, 0.25, 0.25], Probability 2: [0.4, 0.4, 0.1, 0.1]

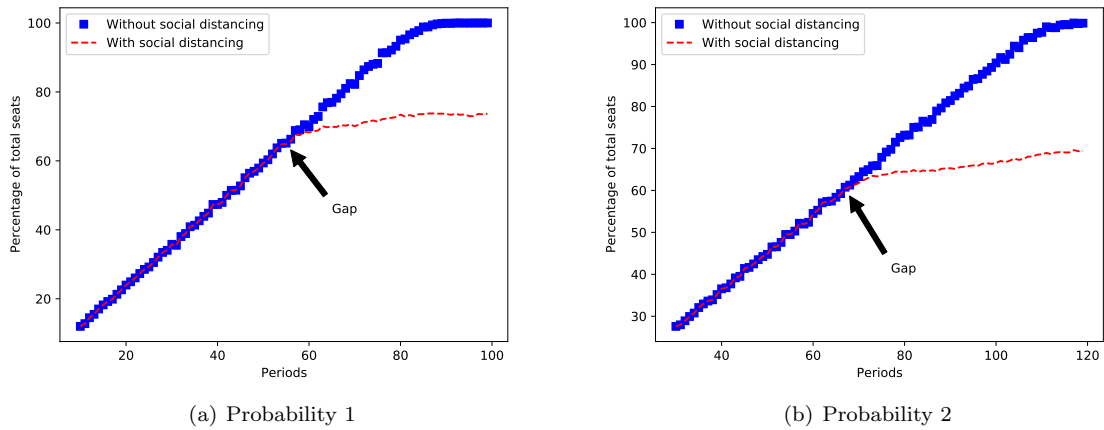


Figure 3: The number of people served versus periods

There are three stages,

First stage: the capacity is sufficient. The social distancing will not cause any effect.

Second stage: the gap is becoming larger as  $T$  increases.

Third stage: As  $T$  continues to increase, the gap will converge when the capacity is limited.

The gap point represents

The government can give how much attendance should be set.

## 6.6 Group of Different Sizes

## 6.7 Measurement

Suppose a real scenario with a fixed sequence,  $s^r$ . Solving the following program can obtain the optimal value,  $V_{s^r}$ . (Offline)

Then the difference is  $V_{s^r}$  - our result.

WS(the value under wait-and-see policy with all possible scenarios)

EVPI(Expected Value of Perfect Information) = WS - the value of deterministic equivalent form

Regret.

Several things need to do:

What is greedy result like?

Why does period run so slowly?

Revise lemma

lack of the traits

## 7 Extension

### 7.1 Obtain Minimum Number of Rows to Cover Demand

To find the minimum number of rows to satisfy the demand, we can formulate this problem as a cutting stock problem form and use the column generation method to obtain an approximate solution.

Similar to the concept of pattern in the CSP, let the  $k$ -th placing pattern of a line of seats with length  $S$  into some of the  $m$  group types be denoted as a vector  $(t_1^k, t_2^k, \dots, t_m^k)$ . Here,  $t_i^k$  represents the number of times group type  $i$  is placed in the  $k$ -th placing pattern. For a pattern  $(t_1^k, t_2^k, \dots, t_m^k)$  to be feasible, it must satisfy:  $\sum_{i=1}^m t_i^k s_i \leq S$ , where  $s_i$  is the size of group type  $i$ . Denote by  $K$  the current number of placing patterns.

This problem is to decide how to place a total number of group type  $i$  at least  $d_i$  times, from all the available placing patterns, so that the total number of rows of seats used is minimized.

Immediately we have the master problem:

$$\begin{aligned} \min \quad & \sum_{k \in K} x_k \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{k \in K} t_i^k x_k \geq d_i \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, m \\ & x_k \geq 0, \text{ integer} \quad \text{for } k \in K, \dots, K. \end{aligned}$$

If  $K$  includes all possible patterns, we can obtain the optimal solution by solving the corresponding IP. But it is clear that the patterns will be numerous, considering all possible patterns will be time-consuming.

Thus, we need to consider the linear relaxation of the master problem, and the optimal dual variable vector  $\lambda$ . Using  $\lambda$  as the value assigned to each group type  $i$ , the next problem is to find a feasible pattern  $(y_1, y_2, \dots, y_m)$  that maximizes the product of  $\lambda$  and  $y$ .

Then the corresponding sub-problem is:

$$\begin{aligned} \max \quad & \sum_{i=1}^m \lambda_i y_i \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^m w_i y_i \leq S \\ & y_i \geq 0, \text{ integer} \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, m. \end{aligned}$$

This is a knapsack problem, its solution will be used as an additional pattern in the master problem. We should continue to add new pattern until all reduced costs are nonnegative. Then we have an optimal solution to the original linear programming problem.

But note that column generation method cannot guarantee an optimal solution. If we want to reach the optimal solution, we should tackle with the integer formulation.

$$\begin{aligned}
& \min \sum_{k \in K}^K y_k \\
& \sum_{k=1}^K x_{ik} \geq d_i \quad i = 1, \dots, n \\
& \sum_{i=1}^n a_i x_{ik} \leq S y_k \quad k = 1, \dots, K \\
& y_k \in \{0, 1\} \quad k = 1, \dots, K \\
& x_{ik} \geq 0 \text{ and integer } i = 1, \dots, n; k = 1, \dots, K
\end{aligned} \tag{11}$$

$y_k = 1$  if line  $k$  is used and 0 otherwise,  $x_{ik}$  is the number of times group  $i$  is placed in row  $k$ , and  $K$  is the upper bound on the number of the rows needed.

## 7.2 Online booking

The groups can select the seats arbitrarily but with some constraints.

When the customers book the tickets, they will be asked how many seats they are going to book at first. Then we give the possible row numbers for their selection. Finally we give the seat number for their choice.

The second step is based on the other choices of reserved groups, we need to check which rows in the seat assignment include the corresponding-size seats.

In third step, we need to check whether the chosen number destroys the pattern of the row. Use subset sum problem to check every position in the row.

### 7.2.1 Mapping Sequences to Scenarios by Continuous Time

When the time is continuous, we only need to count the number of different group types, the method will be the same.

For the nonhomogeneous Poisson process,  $N_i(T) \sim \text{Poisson}(\int_0^T p_i(s)\lambda(s)ds)$ . If the Poisson process is homogeneous,  $N_i \sim \text{Poisson}(\lambda p_i T)$  during the interval  $[0, T]$ . Then for a realization of the Poisson process, we can still apply the method in Section 5.2.

## 7.3 How to give a balanced seat assignment

Notice we only give the solution of how to assign seats for each row, but the order is not fixed.

In order to obtain a balanced seat assignment, we use a greedy way to place the seats.

Sort each row by the number of people. Then place the smallest one in row 1, place the largest one in row 2, the second smallest one in row 3 and so on.

For each row, sort the groups in an ascending/descending order. In a similar way.

## 7.4 Property

Although the solver can solve this problem easily, the analyses on the property of the solution to this problem can help us generate a method for the dynamic situation.

At first, we consider the types of pattern, which refers to the seat assignment for each row. For each pattern  $k$ , we use  $\alpha_k, \beta_k$  to indicate the number of groups and the left seat, respectively. Denote by  $l(k) = \alpha_k + \beta_k - 1$  the loss for pattern  $k$ . The loss represents the number of people lost compared to the situation without social distancing.

Let  $I_1$  be the set of patterns with the minimal loss. Then we call the patterns from  $I_1$  are largest. Similarly, the patterns from  $I_2$  are the second largest, so forth and so on. The patterns with zero left seat are called full patterns. We use the descending form  $(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_k)$  to represent a pattern, where  $t_i$  is the new group size.

**Example 1.** *The length of one row is  $S = 21$  and the new size of groups be  $L = [2, 3, 4, 5]$ . Then these patterns,  $(5, 5, 5, 5, 1)$ ,  $(5, 4, 4, 4, 4)$ ,  $(5, 5, 5, 3, 3)$ , belong to  $I_1$ . The demand is  $[10, 12, 9, 8]_d$ .*

To represent a pattern with a fixed length of form, we can use a  $(m+1)$ -dimensional vector with  $m$  group types. The aggregated form can be expressed as  $[n_0, n_1, \dots, n_m]$ , where  $n_i$  is the number of  $i$ -th group type,  $i = 1, \dots, m$ .  $n_0$  is the number of left seat, its value can only be 0, 1 because two or more left seats will be assigned to groups. Thus the pattern,  $[1, 0, 0, 0, 4]$ , is not full because there is one left seat.

Suppose  $u$  is the size of the largest group allowed, all possible seats can be assigned are the consecutive integers from 2 to  $u$ , i.e.,  $[2, 3, \dots, u]$ . Then we can use the following greedy way to generate the largest pattern. Select the maximal group size,  $u$ , as many as possible and the left space is assigned to the group with the corresponding size. Let  $S = u \cdot q + r$ , where  $q$  is the number of times  $u$  selected. When  $r > 0$ , there are  $d[0][u-r][q+1]$  largest patterns with the same loss of  $q$ . When  $r = 0$ , there is only one possible largest pattern.

Use dynamic programming to solve.  $d[k][i][j]$  indicates the number of assignment of using  $i$  capacity to allocate  $j$  units,  $k$  is the number of capacity allocated on the last unit. In our case,  $u-r$  is the capacity need to be allocated,  $q+1$  is the number of units which corresponds to the groups. Notice that we only consider the number of combinations, so we fix the allocation in ascending order, which means the allocation in current unit should be no less than the last unit.

The number of largest patterns equals the number of different schemes that allocate  $u-r$  on  $q+1$  units, i.e.,  $d[0][u-r][q+1]$ .

The recurrence relation is  $d[k][i][j] = \sum_{t=k}^{i-k} d[t][i-k][j-1]$ . When  $i < k$ ,  $d[k][i][j] = 0$ ; when  $i \geq k$ ,  $d[k][i][1] = 1$ .

**Lemma 3.** *The seat assignment made up of the largest patterns is optimal.*

This lemma holds because we cannot find a better solution occupying more seats.

When the demand is so large that the largest patterns can be generated in all rows, an optimal seat assignment can be obtained.

**Proposition 1.** *Let  $k^* = \arg \max_{k \in I_1} \min_i \{\lfloor \frac{d_i}{b_i^k} \rfloor\}$ . When  $N \leq \max_{k \in I_1} \min_i \{\lfloor \frac{d_i}{b_i^k} \rfloor\}$ , the optimal seat assignment can be constructed by repeating pattern  $k^*$   $N$  times.  $N$  is the number of rows,  $d_i$  is the number of  $i$ -th group type,  $i = 1, 2, \dots, m$ ,  $b_i^k$  is the number of group type  $i$  placed in pattern  $k$ .*

Use the above example 1 to explain. Take  $(5, 5, 5, 5)$ ,  $(5, 4, 4, 4, 4)$ ,  $(5, 5, 4, 4, 3)$  as the alternative patterns, denoted by pattern 1, 2, 3 respectively. When  $k = 1, 2, 3$ ,  $\min_i \{\lfloor \frac{d_i}{b_i^k} \rfloor\}$  will be 2, 3, 5, thus  $k^* = 3$ . So when  $N \leq 5$ , we can select the pattern  $(5, 5, 4, 4, 3)$  five times to construct the optimal seat assignment.

**Proposition 2.** *We can construct a seat assignment in the following way. Every time we can select one pattern from  $I_1$ , then minus the corresponding number of group types from demand and update demand. Repeat this procedure until we cannot generate a largest pattern. If the number of generated patterns is no less than the number of rows, this assignment is optimal.*



## 8 Conclusion

We mainly focus on how to provide a way to ...

In our study, we stressed....

Our main results show that ...

Moreover, our analysis provides managerial guidance on how to place the seats under the background of pandemic.

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## Proof

(Theorem 1).	□
(Lemma 1).	□
(Lemma 2).	□
(Theorem 2).	□
(Theorem 2).	□
(Theorem 3).	□
(Theorem 4).	□
(Theorem 5).	□
(Theorem 6).	□
(Lemma 2).	□
(Theorem 7).	□
(Lemma 4).	□