

COMP512 - Distributed Systems

Deliverable III

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1 Introduction

This third deliverable is the culmination of the implementation of a distributed reservation system. The main features of our system are:

- The middleware and three resource managers are independent and can be executed on different machines;
- The client, middleware and resource managers communicate through the Java RMI protocol;
- Data items are protected by a smart lock manager;
- Data in the resource managers is persisted to disk using a shadowing scheme;
- The system implements a two-phase commit protocol that makes it resilient to crashes;
- The client and resource managers have been extended to allow crashing at predefined points;
- A smart set of Makefile rules allow the different parts of the system to be started with minimal hassle.

This report will discuss these features, the general architecture of the system, the implementation issues that were encountered during development and the solutions we put in place, the performance characteristics of the application and some diagrams showing how the system handles different scenarios.

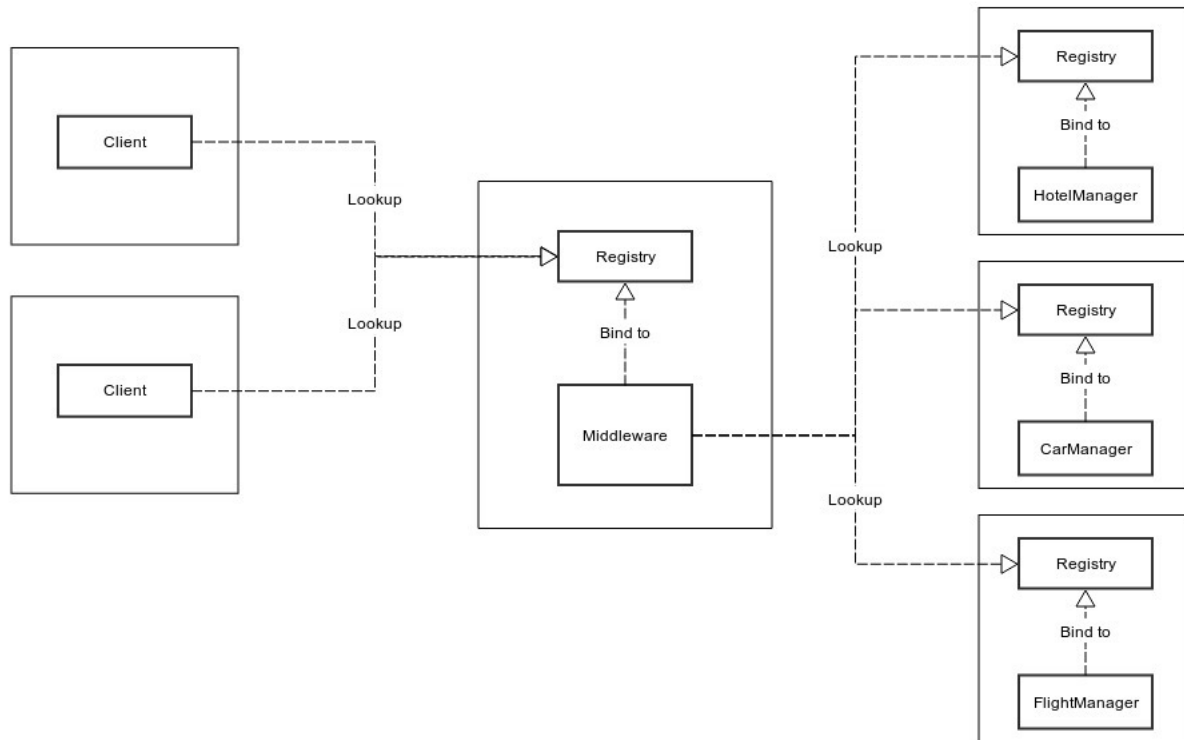
2 RMI

All interactions between the different software components is done through the Java RMI protocol. Figure 1 illustrates how the different components and registries are linked. (One detail that is not shown in this diagram is that for recovery purpose, resource managers can obtain a reference to the middleware. More information on this case is available in the *Two-Phase Commit* section.)

The middleware and the resource managers each have their own, separate registries. The clients obtain a reference to the middleware by querying the middleware's registry and the middleware obtains references to the three resource managers by querying their respective registries. When executing the system, it is important to first start the resource managers, then the middleware and finally the clients.

For more information concerning the RMI architectural design, please consult deliverable I's report.

Figure 1: RMI System Architecture



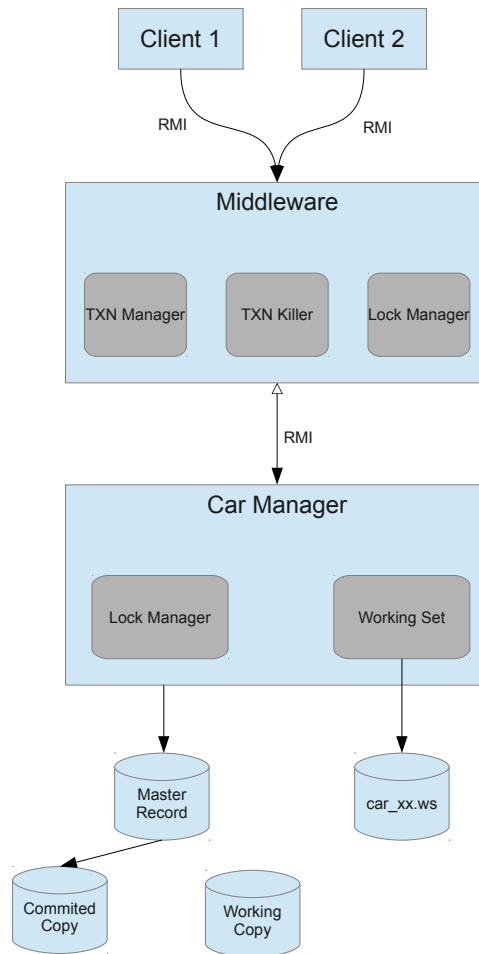
3 Architecture

In this section, we will give a general overview of the application's architecture. We will also describe the details of some components that we feel deserve further explanations.

3.1 Overview

Figure 2 shows the high-level architecture of the application. To keep the diagram light, we've included only a single resource manager.

Figure 2: Global architecture



Although it is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, we will take the liberty of explaining a few details that may not be evident from the diagram alone.

- The double RMI arrow link between the middleware and the resource manager is meant to convey that the resource manager does not always know about the middleware; only when it needs to recover from a crash do we give it a reference to the middleware, so that it can perform a query to know how what to do with transactions inside the persistent working set.
- The *car_xx.ws* file is created during the first phase of the two-phase commit (in the *prepare* method) and is deleted at the end of the second phase. It contains a copy of the resource manager's working set.
- The data items of the resource manager are persisted in two files: *cardb.0* or *cardb.1*. A third file, the

master record *cardb.mr*, contains a link to the currently committed copy of the database. All these files are located in */tmp/Group5/*.

- The middleware contains a lock manager because it handles the customer data items; we've omitted the data persistence entities in the figure to keep the diagram simpler.

3.2 Working Set

The *WorkingSet* class allows a transaction to perform different actions without writing directly into the RMs' hash tables. Each resource manager (including the middleware) has one working set. A *WorkingSet* maintains three hash maps:

- A table mapping transaction IDs to a vector of commands;
- A table mapping transaction IDs to an item description;
- A table mapping an item description to the new, modified state of the item.

As a client performs write actions on a data item, a symbolic representation of those commands is appended to the first hash table, and the state of the object's copy in the third hash table is updated. Reads return values from the third hash table.

Once the client commits his transaction, the commands are executed sequentially, thus modifying the state of the object inside the RM. When a transaction is aborted, the entries for the transaction ID are simply dropped from the hash tables.

The two types of commands we store are:

- *CommandPut* describing a write/modify action in a RM's hash table;
- *CommandDelete* describing a delete action in a RM's hash table.

3.3 Transaction manager

The Transaction Manager is a singleton object that is in charge of transactions. Notably, it is in charge of the two-phase commit protocol.

The transaction manager maintains multiple hash tables:

- A table mapping transaction IDs to their two-phase commit status (NOTCOMMITTED, PHASE1, or PHASE2);
- A table mapping transaction IDs to a vector of the resource managers that they are involved with;
- A table mapping transaction IDs to their last action time (used for killing idle transactions);
- A table mapping transaction IDs to whether they should be committed or aborted.

During the two-phase commit process, the transaction manager is marshalled to disk to allow transactions to resume their commit process should the middleware crash and recover. After the two-phase commit, the transaction manager copy on disk is deleted.

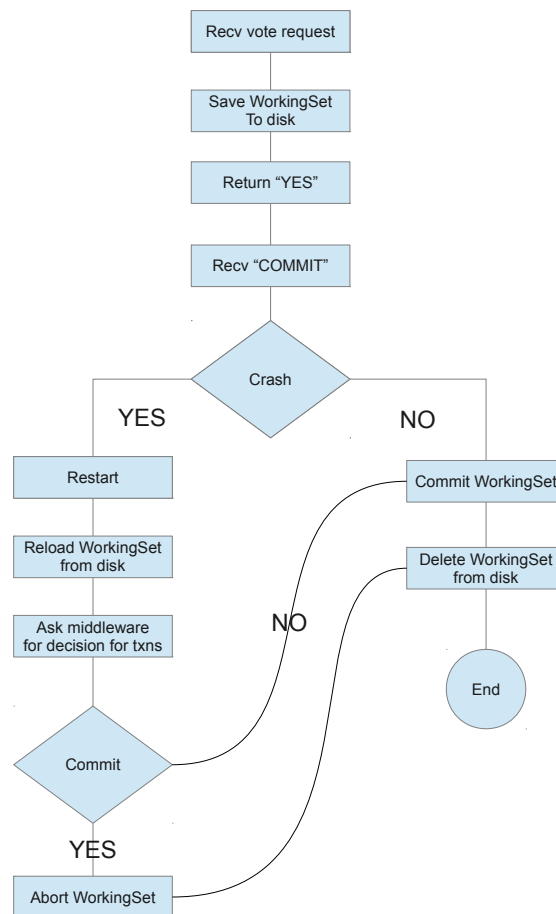
3.4 Transaction killer

In a separate thread, we run a transaction killer, a singleton object that inspects the time-to-live values of the active transactions. If a thread has been idle for more than a predefined number of seconds, the thread will be aborted.

4 Two-Phase Commit

As in the architecture section, figure 3 shows with a high-level flow diagram of how a two-phase commit proceeds from the point of view of a resource manager.

Figure 3: Two-phase commit



4.1 The Happy Path

In the ideal scenario, without any failures, the two-phase commit procedure goes like this:

- A client asks to commit its transaction.
- The middleware receives this command and sends a vote request (*prepare*) to all resource managers involved in this transaction, asking if they can commit or not.
- All the resource managers write their working set to disk and give a positive response to the middleware.
- Since all resource managers responded affirmatively, the middleware sends a message to perform the commit operation.
- The resource managers apply the commands in their working sets to the data items.
- The working set copy on disk is deleted.
- The modified hash table is written to into the working copy and the master record is updated.

4.2 Crash at a participant

When a participant (i.e. a resource manager) crashes, either its working set has been saved to disk (e.g. */tmp/Group5/car_123.ws*) or it hasn't. If the working set doesn't exist, no recovery is possible and the transaction will be aborted.

If the working set exists on disk, we load it into memory, and we initiate the recovery procedure. When a resource manager is started in recovery mode, it has a reference to the middleware, and will ask it what to do (i.e. abort or commit) with every transaction in the working set. Once the recovery procedure is completed, the resource manager works as usual.

Here we describe what happens at different crash sites for a participant:

- **Crash before saving working set:** no recovery is possible for this participant, and other participants in the transaction are instructed to abort.
- **Crash after saving working set:** when the resource manager restarts, it'll query the middleware to know what to do with the transactions. Because the RM hadn't sent its response, the middleware aborted the whole transaction, and thus the resource manager will abort.
- **Crash after sending response:** the resource manager will query the middleware, and the middleware will tell it whether it has to commit or abort the transaction.

4.3 Crash at the middleware

Dealing with crashes in the middleware is a lot trickier than in a resource manager, because it is the central hub of the whole application. Clients lose their links to the middleware during a crash, and those links cannot be restored (the middleware doesn't know about clients) automatically. Clients need to reconnect to be able to work again.

We handle crashes of the middleware during the two-phase commit procedures in two scenarios.

The first scenario corresponds roughly to the first phase of the two-phase commit; if the middleware crashes at anytime during that phase (e.g. before sending vote requests, when some vote requests have returned, when all vote requests have returned, etc.), during its recovery procedure the middleware will send the vote request again. On the resource manager side, the working set file will be overwritten (no problem) and the response will be sent again.

The second scenario is when a decision has been taken (i.e. to commit or to abort). If the middleware crashes during that time, during recovery, it'll re-send the decision to all the resource managers. Again, on the resource manager side, the effect of receiving a duplicate decision is benign; if the transaction had already been processed, the new decision will be ignored, otherwise it'll be processed.

4.4 Information on recovery

When a resource manager crashes and comes back up, it needs to query the transaction manager through the middleware to know how to handle the transactions in its working set. As we saw in the *RMI* section, resource managers do not have a reference to the middleware, so how can they request that information?

One solution we considered was to have a watchdog process that would periodically send a ping to the resource managers asking them if they were interested in information on some transactions. Keeping track of who needed which information would be difficult, and sending all the information to every resource manager would be wasteful. We therefore rejected this approach.

Instead, we elected to give a direct RMI reference to the middleware when a resource manager boots in recovery mode. This makes it fast, easy and direct to obtain the information about the transactions.

5 Implementation difficulties

5.1 The handling of customers

Customers are handled inside the middleware; because the *ItemManager* interface doesn't map well to customers, the middleware does not implement that interface. Consequently, customers cannot be handled by the same code that handles the other resource managers. This causes code to be duplicated in many places to handle customers properly.

Also, because the middleware has more responsibilities than the resource managers, extra code must often be added. Combined together, this makes the code brittle and hard to modify.

5.2 Internal vs. external modifications

When we had to add new functionality (e.g. lock managers), we applied the modifications directly inside the methods that already existed. While this works and is relatively simple in principle, adding more and more responsibilities to a single method makes them harder to reason about, harder to test thoroughly and

the primary task that a method performs is clouded by the extra tasks that are interleaved into the body of the function must perform and the relevant error handling.

Perhaps a better approach would have been to use the decorator pattern to better separate the tasks into different classes so that the original code could have been left unmodified. However, due to the uncertainty that such a design could be realized in a timely fashion, we've opted to go for the simpler, but messier design.

5.3 Code duplication

Because the resource manager doesn't inherit from a superclass, but implement an interface (which by definition cannot contain any implementation), we found ourselves copy/pasting a lot of code that we might have normally handled by writing a method in the parent class.

5.4 Crashing the resource managers

Crashing the resource managers proved a bit tricky when they were in recovery mode; since they had a reference to the middleware, they had a running non-daemon thread that prevented them the JVM from exiting, even when calling *System.exit()*. We found the solution (quite by accident) online where a blogger recommended using the *Runtime.getRuntime().exit()* call to exit even when RMI references were involved. This fixed our problem.

5.5 Unit testing

This application is nigh impossible to test automatically this software; bringing up the whole system, populating the system with data, making managers interact in different orders, testing each individual feature and each combination of features, etc. would be harder and longer than doing manual checking.

6 Performance evaluation

(Note: the following performance evaluation have been performed without the code for two-phase commit.)

6.1 Single client

We evaluated the marginal performance of the system by executing read, write and read/write operations on a single RM and on all three RMs. We also ended transactions with both commits and aborts. Because the times to execute a single command were so low, we executed 50 commands in total in each transaction. The average latencies of 1000 measures are given below in milliseconds.

	1 RM	3 RMs
Read + Commit	5.189131	6.955100
Read + Abort	5.434654	7.042538
Write + Commit	12.987475	10.064491
Write + Abort	12.985847	10.060301
Read/Write + Commit	7.466607	9.073547
Read/Write + Abort	7.465912	9.209547

A few surprising facts emerge from these figures:

- When only writes are concerned, accessing the 3 RMs is faster than accessing only one.
- Though they have more work to perform (i.e. executing the buffered commands), the commit transactions are usually a little faster than the abort transactions.

A fact that can only be observed by looking at the raw data is how the system gets faster as more commands are sent to the system; the first few transactions execute in 30ms before reaching numbers usually below 10ms. We attribute this to the Java JIT that warms up and starts optimizing the RM methods after they've been ran a sufficient number of times.

6.2 Multiple clients

For our performance evaluation, we used the following parameters:

- A fixed number of clients was selected (5, 10, 25, 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1000)
- A sleep interval (in milliseconds) between commands was selected (1000, 500, 250, 100, 50, 10)

For every combination of parameters, the following process was executed:

1. The servers were started with empty hash tables.
2. The RMs were populated with 1000 cities (for cars and hotels), 1000 flights and 1000 customers.
3. Random commands were executed and committed by the clients for 60 seconds.
4. The latency times were recorded in a file.

The tests were ran on a Intel i7-3770S 3.10GHz. To obtain times that reflected the performance of the application, the server, RMs and clients were all running on the same machine. We took the arithmetic average of the latencies and obtained the chart below. From this chart, we can make a few observations:

- The number of clients has a bigger impact on performance than the delay between commands
- The latency time does not grow linearly with the number of clients.

Also, not apparent in the chart, the number of deadlocks increased sharply as the number of clients increased, which is to be expected as more clients will randomly select the same resource to access.

Finally a chart showing the cumulative distribution function of the latency times is shown.

