

# The Reliable Multicast Library (RML) and Tangram II Whiteboard Developer Documentation

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## 1 Introduction

The main goal of this article is to explain some topics about what a programmer needs to know in order to make source code changes in the Reliable Multicast Library (RML) and in the Tangram II Whiteboard. We will also give comments about problems found and the solutions adopted while developing the RML and the Tangram II [1] Whiteboard tool - including references to books, newsgroups or articles that may be useful for the interested readers. In the following section we will take a look at general characteristics of IP multicast. Then, the reliable multicast approach used in the implemented RML will be describe. We will introduce the library, and show a sample program that makes use of it - a chat. After that, a more complex example - the Tangram II Whiteboard (TGWB). In the Appendix, we will describe the operating system interprocess communication (IPC) resources that which have been used.

## 2 IP Multicast

### 2.1 Introduction

Quoting from the Multicast HOWTO [2]: "... multicast is a need ... Well, at least in some scenarios. If you have information (a lot of information, usually) that should be transmitted to various (but usually not all) hosts over an internet, then Multicast is the answer. One common situation in which it is used is when distributing real time audio and video to the set of hosts which have joined a distributed conference.

Multicast is much like radio or TV in the sense that only those who have tuned their receivers (by selecting a particular frequency they are interested on) receive the information. That is: you hear the channel you are interested in, but not the others."

#### 2.1.1 Multicast Addressing

The range of IP addresses is divided into "classes" based on the high order bits of a 32 bits IP address:

| 0  | 31 | Address Range:              |
|--|----|-----------------------------|
| + - +-----+<br>  0   <i>Class A Address</i>                  |    | 0.0.0.0 - 127.255.255.255   |
| + - +-----+<br>+ - +-----+<br>  1 0   <i>Class B Address</i> |    | 128.0.0.0 - 191.255.255.255 |
| + - +-----+<br>+ - +-----+                                   |    |                             |

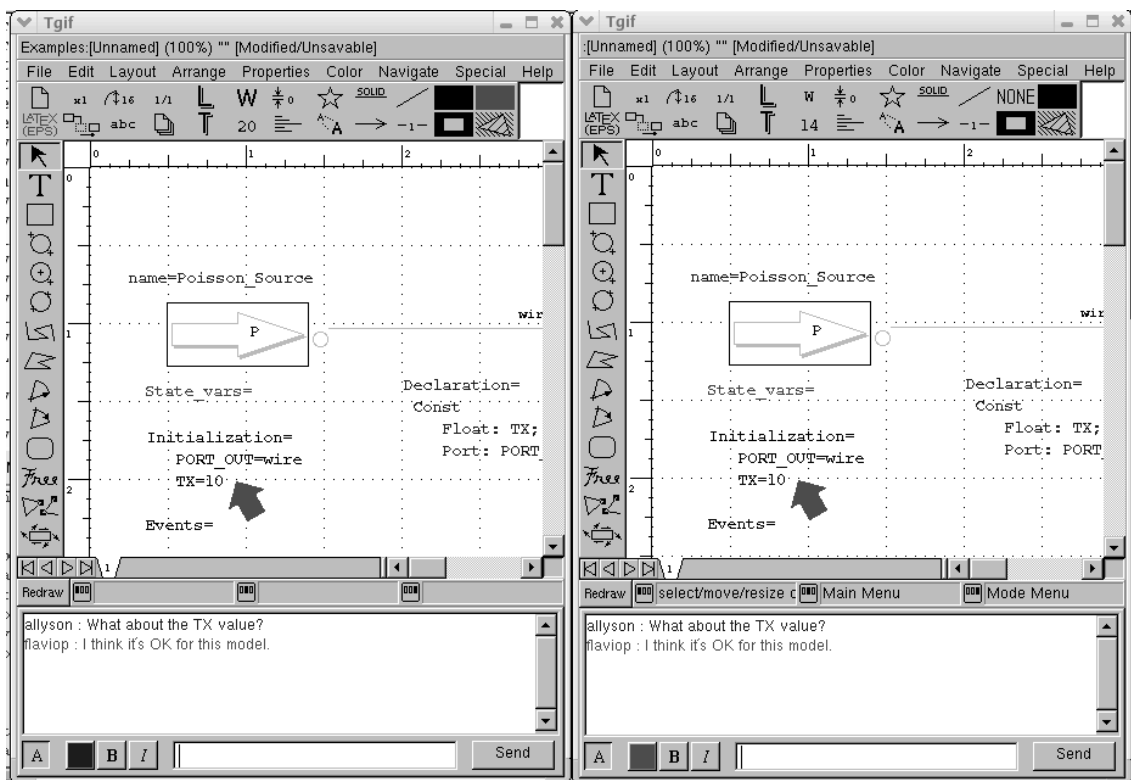


Figure 1: TGWB Screenshot

```

/1 1 0/   Class C Address   /   192.0.0.0 - 223.255.255.255
+-+--+-----+
+-+--+-----+
/1 1 1 0/ MULTICAST Address /   224.0.0.0 - 239.255.255.255
+-+--+-----+
+-+--+-----+
/1 1 1 1 0/   Reserved     /   240.0.0.0 - 247.255.255.255
+-+--+-----+

```

The multicast addresses start with “1110”. Among the multicast addresses, the remaining 28 bits identify the multicast group. There are some special addresses that should not be used by common applications:

| Address    | Function                               |
|------------|--|
| 224.0.0.1  | All hosts in the LAN                   |
| 224.0.0.2  | All routers in the LAN                 |
| 224.0.0.4  | All routers DVMRP in the LAN           |
| 224.0.0.5  | All routers OSPF in the LAN            |
| 224.0.0.6  | All routers OSPF designated in the LAN |
| 224.0.0.13 | All the PIM routers in the LAN         |

Table 1: Multicast special addresses

The interval from 224.0.0.0 to 224.0.0.255 is reserved to local purposes (local administrative tasks) - to see some of these address purposes, refer to table 1. Similarly, the interval from 239.0.0.0 to 239.255.255.255 is also reserved for administrative tasks - but not necessarily local tasks. So, the interval that may be used by general multicast applications is from 225.0.0.0 to 238.255.255.255.

### 2.1.2 Multicast Group

A multicast group is composed by the set of hosts in a network which share data via multicast. This group is identified by a multicast address. When a host sends a packet to the multicast address, this packet is received by all the multicast group members. The transmission of a packet from one sender to multiple receivers is accomplished by a single send operation. A single packet is sent from the sender host - there is no need to send multiple copies of this packet, as would be needed if unicast were used.

The receivers may join and leave the multicast group in a dynamic way. The network devices, specially the routers, have to determine which of their interfaces have a multicast member connected to them.

### 2.1.3 Levels of conformance

Hosts can be in three different levels of conformance with the Multicast specification, according to the requirements they meet:

- **Level 0** is the "no support for IP Multicasting" level. Lots of hosts and routers in the Internet are in this state, as multicast support is not mandatory in IPv4 (it is, however, in IPv6). Not too much explanation is needed here: hosts in this level can neither send nor receive multicast packets. They must ignore the ones sent by other multicast hosts.
- **Level 1** is the "support for sending but not receiving multicast IP datagrams" level. Thus, note that it is not necessary to join a multicast group to be able to send datagrams to it. Very few additions are needed in the IP module to make a "Level 0" host "Level 1-compliant".

- **Level 2** is the "full support for IP multicasting" level. Level 2 hosts must be able to both send and receive multicast traffic. They must know the way to join and leave multicast groups and to propagate this information to multicast routers. Thus, they must include an Internet Group Management Protocol (IGMP) implementation in their TCP/IP stack.

The Multicast Reliable Library was developed considering that the hosts are in level 2 of conformance.

#### 2.1.4 Some benefits of Multicast

Some benefits of multicast over unicast are presented below[18]:

1. Optimized use of the network - the intelligent use of the network resources avoids unnecessary replication of data. So, the links are better used, through a better architecture of data distribution.
2. Distributed application support - the multicast technology is directly focused on distributed applications. Multimedia applications like distance learning and video conferencing may be used in the network in an efficient way.
3. Scalability - services that use multicast can be accessed by many hosts, and may accept new members at any time.
4. Availability of the network resources - congestion is reduced, because no replicated data is sent through a single link in the network, so the availability of the network resources is increased.

## 2.2 Configuration under Linux

This section will not explain multicast configuration in details. We just want to give some tips needed to set up a basic system in a local network area. If you want further information see the Multicast HOWTO [2]. Multicast transmission through different networks is more complex and you must have routers with multicast support between those networks.

### 2.2.1 Does your system have support for IP Multicast?

Some configurations are needed to use IP Multicast. First of all, the network cards have to be enabled to receive multicast data. Most network cards modules automatically set the MULTICAST flag. In GNU/Linux systems, you can check whether your network interface has multicast support by typing the following command:

```
ifconfig -a
```

An ifconfig output example follows:

```
eth0
Link encap:Ethernet HWaddr 00:50:BF:06:89:47
inet addr:192.168.1.2 Bcast:192.168.1.255 Mask:255.255.255.0
UP BROADCAST RUNNING MULTICAST MTU:1500 Metric:1
RX packets:12438583 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 frame:0
TX packets:6498370 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 carrier:0
collisions:0 txqueuelen:100
RX bytes:1100375580 (1049.3 Mb)
TX bytes:2158372342 (2058.3 Mb)
Interrupt:10 Base address:0x7000
lo
```

```
Link encap:Local Loopback
inet addr:127.0.0.1 Mask:255.0.0.0
UP LOOPBACK RUNNING MTU:16436 Metric:1
RX packets:8361666 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 frame:0
TX packets:8361666 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 carrier:0
collisions:0 txqueuelen:0
RX bytes:1830657956 (1745.8 Mb)
TX bytes:1830657956 (1745.8 Mb)
```

Note the MULTICAST flag at **eth0**. That flag is missed at **lo** (the loopback interface). You must have root privileges to enable the MULTICAST flag. To enable that flag you have to issue the following command:

```
ifconfig <interface_name> multicast
```

Where **interface\_name** must be replaced by the name of the interface you want to set the MULTICAST flag. This may be useful if you want to enable multicast on a **lo** interface because that allows you to do some tests using multicast transmission even if you don't have any real network interface. The next step is to set up the route that the multicast packets will follow. To add this route, as root user, issue the following command:

```
route add -net 224.0.0.0 netmask 240.0.0.0 dev <interface_name>
```

Where **interface\_name** must be replaced by the name of the interface to which you want to send the multicast packets. Again, if you are testing on a single machine this interface will be the **lo**. To test your configuration try:

```
ping 224.0.0.1
```

Every machine in your local network that has multicast enabled should answer this ping.

## 3 Reliable Multicast

### 3.1 Introduction

Multicast is supported by the transport layer through the UDP protocol. As each packet may get a different path from source to destiny, packets may come out of order at the receiver host. To solve this problem, it is necessary to have a packet ordering algorithm. Besides the problem of ordering, there is also the possibility of packet loss. This loss makes the protocol unreliable. To solve these problems, which are directly related to the UDP protocol, it is necessary to create an application-level mechanism to guarantee the reliable transmission of data.

There are some ways to implement the reliable multicast mechanism. For instance, the responsibility of recovering loss packets can be directed to the receiver or the sender of the data.

Here, we will describe three classes of reliable multicast protocols, according to [FIXME]:

1. Sender Initiated Approach - based on confirmations (acknowledgments or ACKs) sent by receivers and processed by the senders;
2. Receiver Initiated Approach - the receiver detects the loss of packets. The receiver sends negative acknowledgments (NACKs) to the sender via a unicast connection. The sender replies with retransmissions.
3. Enhanced Receiver Initiated Approach - the receiver detects the loss of packets. The receiver sends negative acknowledgments (NACKs) to the group via a multicast connection.

### 3.1.1 Sender Initiated Approach

Every time a member receives a packet he sends a confirmation (ACK) to the sender. The sender maintains a list of all the group members. When the sender sends a packet, he starts a timer for that packet, and waits for ACKs from the group members. As soon as the timer expires, if the sender haven't received an ACK from some member, this packet is retransmitted. The timer is then restarted.

#### Advantages and disadvantages

The main advantage of this approach is that when the sender receives a confirmation (ACK), he is sure that the packet was in fact received. The main disadvantage of this approach is that for each data packet sent, the sender will receive an ACK from each receiver of the multicast session, which may cause congestion.

#### Summary

1. every time the sender transmits or retransmits a data packet he starts a timer for this packet and wait for the ACKs from the receivers;
2. every time the receiver receives a data packet he sends a confirmation (ACK) to the sender in a unicast connection.

### 3.1.2 Receiver Initiated Approach

In this approach, the receiver has the responsibility of detecting the packet losses. When the receiver doesn't receive a data packet, he sends a negative acknowledgment (NACK) to the sender, via a unicast connection. The sender will retransmit the data packet when he receives a NACK.

The packet loss is detected when a receiver receives a packet with sequence number (sn)  $i + 1$  without having received the packet with sn  $i$ . For instance, if the receiver receives packets with sn 0, 1 and 3, he will know that packet with sn 2 was lost.

#### Advantages and disadvantages

In general, the loss probability of a packet is smaller than the success probability. So, few NACK packets will be sent through the network. The disadvantage of this approach is that just the sender of the message will be notified that a packet was lost, and only he may retransmit the data packet.

#### Summary

1. every time the receiver detects a packet loss he sends a negative acknowledgment (NACK) to the sender, via a unicast connection, and starts a timer to wait for a retransmission.
2. every time the sender receives a NACK packet he sends a retransmission to the group via multicast connection.

### 3.1.3 Enhanced Receiver Initiated Approach

That's a variation of the receiver initiated approach. When a loss is detected, a timer is scheduled. If the timer expires and a NACK for that packet has not been received, the receiver multicasts the request message to the group. If a NACK was received before the timer has expired, the receiver will not send the request message, because he knows that a retransmission request has already been sent by some other member.

## Advantages and disadvantages

The advantage of this approach is that it limits the number of NACKs which will be sent through the network. The disadvantage is that when the loss probability is high, there will be many NACK packets in the network. Each member of the group will receive all the NACKs sent. This may consume a lot of processing time.

## Summary

1. every time the receiver detects a packet loss, he starts a timer to send a NACK packet.
  - (a) If he receives a NACK for the same packet which was lost, the transmission of the NACK is canceled (NACK suppression).
  - (b) Else, when the timer expires, he sends a NACK via multicast to the group.

In both cases, another timer is started, in order to wait for retransmissions. If a retransmission is received, this timer is canceled, and there is nothing else to be done. The data was finally successfully received with success. Else, the timer to send a NACK packet is restarted. We go back to item 1.

2. every time a member receives a NACK packet, he schedules the retransmission of the requested packet.

## 4 The Reliable Multicast Library (RML)

In this section we will describe how the Reliable Multicast Library works. In section 4.1, definitions will be given. In section 4.2 the mechanisms of how new members join and leave the group will be explained. Then, we will describe how lost packets are recovered in section 4.3. In section 4.4 we show the implementation of the Event List. Finally, we summarize the RML messages and actions in section 4.5.

### 4.1 Definitions

Before starting the description of the RML protocol, it is important to define some terms that will be used:

- **Multicast Session:** a multicast session is the period of time when a multicast group is active. A multicast group is active if we have at least one member on it.
- **ACK:** a special packet, the acknowledgment (ACK) packet, is used to confirm the receiving of data. For instance, in the TCP protocol, the sender always waits for confirmations sent by the receivers via ACKs.
- **NACK:** a special packet, the negative acknowledgment (NACK) packet, is used to inform that data was lost. If a receiver finds out that data was lost, he may send NACKs to the sender in order to advertise this problem, and request retransmissions.
- **Timers:** the time that a member waits in order to execute a specific action (event). This time may be random, with an uniform or exponential distribution.
- **Event List:** list containing all the events that will be executed. When the timer for a specific event expires, this event is removed from the event list and then executed.
- **Cache:** structure maintained by the multicast members which stores the last messages received from every member of the multicast session.

## 4.2 Multicast Session Members Management

May anyone join a multicast session at any time? What does a new member need to get in order to become a member of a multicast session? What about the exit procedure? If a member wants to leave the group, may he go away immediately? Or should he wait a bit before exiting? This section will answer these questions.

Let's start with the join procedure. If every member of the multicast group entered the session always at the same time, the join procedure would be very simple. The problem is that, in practice, a new member may want to join the session a long time after the session has started. If that happens, this member may not be able to get into a consistent state just requesting retransmissions to the older members of the group. That's because the size of the cache of the other members of the group is finite. The data requested by the new member may not be any more in the cache of the older members.

During a session, each member maintains a certain quantity of data in his own cache. When this cache gets full, new data replaces the oldest. If a new member enters the group a long time after the session has started, it may happen that he won't be able to receive the older data, since it has been replaced in all the current members' caches.

For some applications, that may not be a problem. But for drawing applications, such as the TGWB, in which there is a dependency between the data, this problem must be regarded with attention. For instance, the first message received by a member, in a drawing tool, may instruct the application that a rectangle must be drawn. In the future, another message may instruct that the color of this same rectangle must be changed. Thus, the later command only may be executed after the first one has already been executed. In other words, it makes no sense to try to change a color of an inexistent rectangle.

In order to solve this problem the following mechanism was implemented: when a new member wants to enter the group, he gets, via TCP, the current state of the multicast session from an older member. The current state is composed by all the elements that this member must have in order to join the group, including the cache of the older member.

In more details, when a new member wants to join the group, he sends a "join request" message to the multicast group, starts a timer and waits for an "accept" message. This "accept" message will contain information (address and port) of a member of the group. The new member will connect, via TCP, to this member and get his current state. Then, this new member may be considered a member of the group, as the others. If this timer expires before the new member receives an "accept" message, he considers himself the first member of the group.

When an old member of the group receives a "join request" message, he starts another timer, waiting to send an "accept" message. If an "accept" message is received before the timer expires, this member suppresses his transmission, and stops his timer. Otherwise, if the timer expires, he sends the "accept" message. This mechanism minimizes the number of "accept" messages sent by the old members of the group, since when one member detects that another one has already sent an "accept", he cancels his own transmission.

To see more details about how this mechanism of joining the group is implemented, please consult the subsection titled "Thread 5 - Current State Server Thread", in section 7.1.

Now, let's see what happens when a member wants to leave the group. Suppose a member wants to leave the group. First, he sends a "leave group" message to all the members of the group to advertise his intention. Then, he starts a timer and when this timer expires, the member in fact leaves the group. During this latency period, he is still able to send eventual retransmissions. When the other members of the group receive the "leave group" message, they turn off the "active" bit in their cache related to the member who sent the "leave group" message.

## 4.3 Loss Detection and Data Recovery

Every data message transmitted by the protocol is identified by its sequence number. When a data message is received from the application to be transmitted for the multicast group, a header



is added to indicate the proper sequence number (sn). Afterward the data message is transmitted for the group.

#### 4.3.1 The Cache Structure

Every member has a cache structure where he stores some information about the members, this cache has an entry for each member of the multicast session. In the figure 2 we can see the cache structure. Each cache entry has some fields that we will describe below:

- **number\_of\_nodes:** number of data packets received from the member
- **active:** indicates whether a member is currently active in the multicast session
- **first:** a pointer to the first packet of the packet list - the packet list stores the last data packets received from the member
- **sm\_info:** is a structure composed by *member\_id* and *member\_status*

The structure *sm\_info*, as described, is composed by:

- **member\_id:** member identification structure composed by the member IP address and the process ID (PID)
- **member\_status:** is a structure that stores the current member status, e.g., the first and the last sn received

Finally, *member\_status* is composed by:

- **first\_rcv:** the sequence number (sn) of the first packet received from the member
- **last\_rcv:** the sn of the last packet received from the member
- **last\_seq\_rcv:** the sn of of the last in-order packet received from the member
- **last\_identified:** the greatest sn of the member packet list
- **window\_size:** the maximum size of the NACK window, i.e, the maximum number of NACKs that we can send in a specific time
- **window\_mask:** it is an array to identify the sn of the lost packets. Where 1 means that we are going to send a NACK for that packet and 2 means that we are waiting for the retransmission for that packet
- **window\_ini:** the position of the smallest sn represented in the *window\_mask*.
- **nak\_list:** the list of NACKs that have been sent. This list controls the number of NACKs sent by each sn.

#### 4.3.2 Loss Detection

When a member of the multicast group receives a data packet, he checks the packet sequence number and the sender identification. Then, the member tries to match the sender identification with some *member\_id* in his cache. If he is successful in that matching, the sender is already in the cache. Otherwise a node for the new member must be inserted in the cache. After that, the member has to check whether or not the received packet is in sequence.

If the sequence number (sn) is in order, i.e.,  $sn = last\_seq\_rcv + 1$ , the packet is inserted in the cache and passed to the application. If the sequence number is not in sequence, the member has found out that packets were lost - a gap was detected. Detected the loss, it is necessary to execute

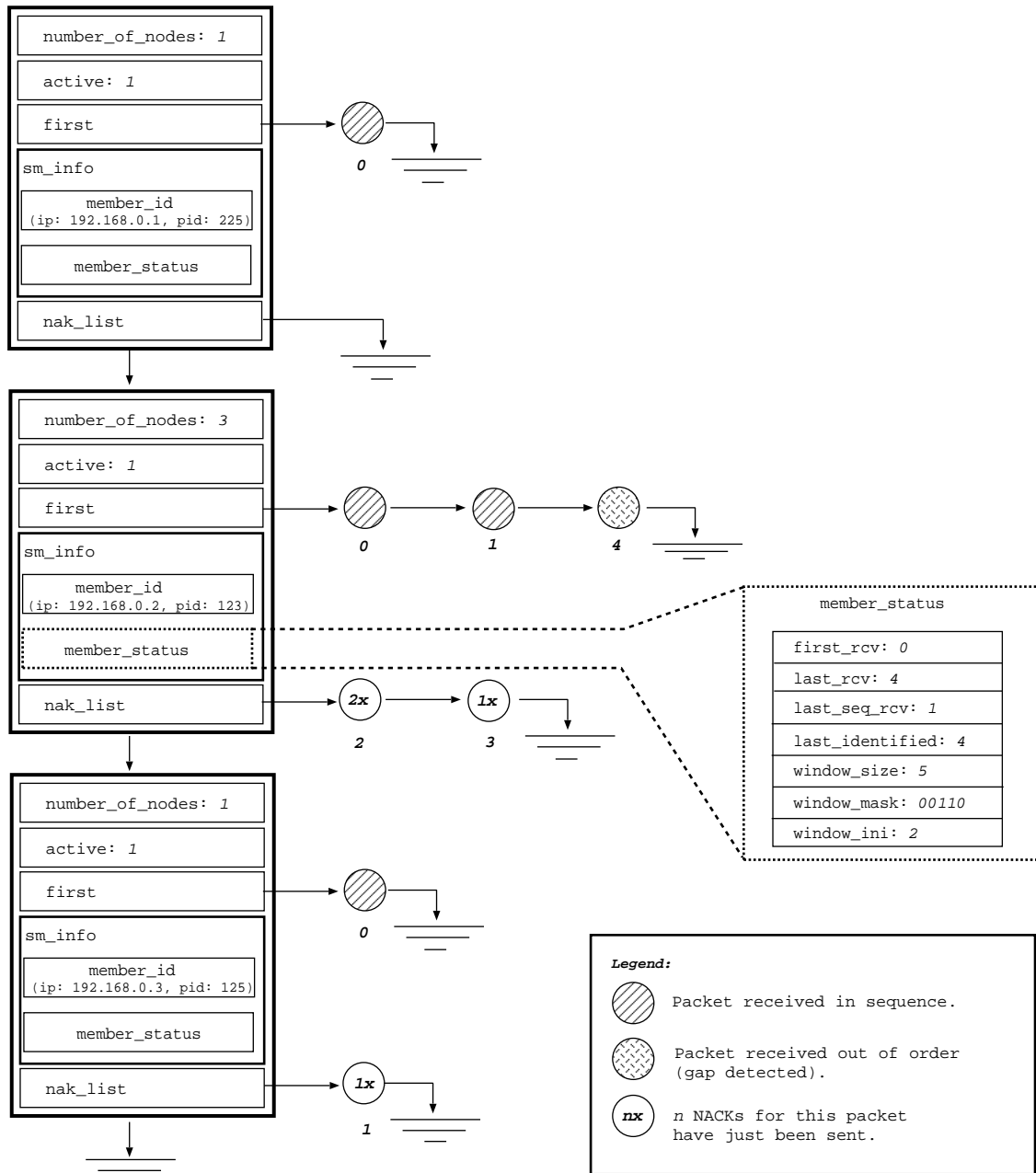


Figure 2: RML Cache structure

the procedures for recovering the lost packets. The data packet received out of order is inserted and kept in the cache. It will be released to the application after all lost data have been recovered.

The recovery procedure consists of requesting retransmissions for the lost data packets, in other words, to send NACK messages for the multicast group. For instance, as it can be seen in figure 2, if the losses of data packets 2 and 3 were detected, then the member is supposed to send requests for retransmission of those data packets. Any member of the multicast session that has the requested data is able to retransmit it. In that way, the retransmission responsibility is distributed.

The loss detection discussed before can fail when the lost packet is the last packet transmitted by the sender. Suppose that a member A has sent his last data packet with  $sn=10$  and that member B has lost that packet. Member B is unable to detect the loss until he receives a new data packet from member A. But we have supposed that A will not send new packets. In that situation, there must be another way of detecting the loss. To solve that problem, members send a “refresh message” periodically indicating the  $sn$  of the last packet sent. When a member receives the “refresh message”, he is able to identify the lost packets and to start the recovering procedures. In our example, member B would receive a “refresh message” from member A and then would be able to detect and recover the lost packet.

### 4.3.3 Sending NACKs

Suppose a scenario where a member of the multicast group sends a data packet to the other members, and all the other members lose that packet. Now, suppose that a NACK packet is sent by every member immediately after the loss is detected. That action may cause an unnecessary traffic in the network. That problem is called NACK implosion[19]. One solution is to wait for a random time  $T_{nack}$  before sending a NACK message. As other members of the multicast group might have lost the same data message, and considering that  $T_{nack}$  is random, there will be a member who will choose a smaller timer and send the NACK message before the others. If before  $T_{nack}$  expires the member receives a NACK message or a retransmission of the lost data, the transmission of the NACK message will be canceled. So, if we choose an efficient way to determine  $T_{nack}$  we will have a great probability of suppressing the sending of duplicated NACK messages through the network.

Besides the implosion of NACKs, another problem that may happen related to the sending of NACK messages is that the member may request more data than he is able to handle. In fact, this two problems are similar to the ones faced in the unicast case. The congestion control, used in the TCP, is implemented in order to avoid network congestion. The flow control, also used in the TCP, tries to get rid of the buffer overflow in the client application. More information about TCP mechanisms can be found in chapter 3 of [4]. As described in the last paragraph, the NACK suppression algorithm tries to solve a problem analog to the one solved by the congestion control in the unicast case. In that way, the congestion control and NACK suppression algorithm attempt to avoid a network core congestion while the unicast and multicast flow control attempt to prevent the overflow that may happen at the network hosts (end systems) buffers. RML implements a simple flow control: the amount of NACKs sent should not exceed the amount of data that the member expecting this packets may process at once.

Two possible scenarios for flow control are illustrated in figure 3. Suppose that packets with  $sn$  from 0 to 8 were transmitted by the sender. Those packets were lost by the receiver. The receiver detects the loss when he receives a refresh message from the sender. Then there are two ways of dealing with that loss. The first approach, which we call *Naive Approach*, is, in fact, an approach with no flow control. The problem with this approach is that the receiver will send a large amount of NACK messages and it may happen that the amount of retransmission received in response to those NACKs may be greater than the cache space available. Thus, old data packets, that have not already been sent to the application, will be replaced by new ones. In figure 3 the packet with  $sn$  0 was lost. The receiver has a cache with five slots. It may be seen that data packets from 1 to 5 were first stored in the cache. Note that those packets were not sent to the application because the packet with  $sn$  0 is missed. Then, packets from 6 to 8 were received and replaced packets 1, 2

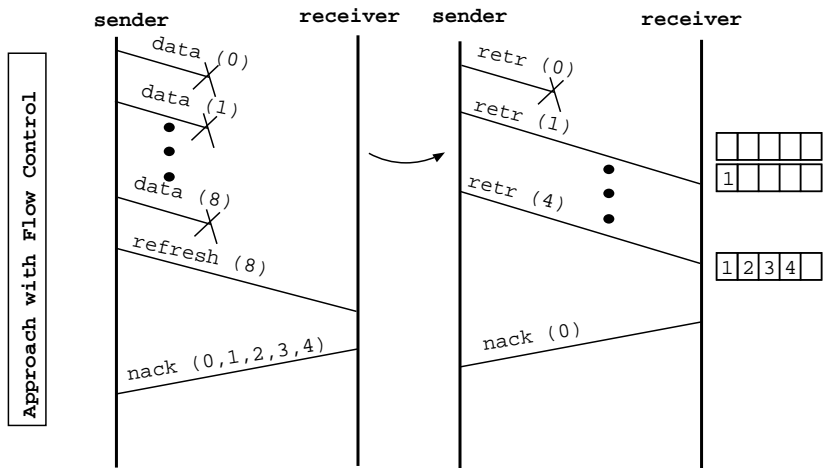
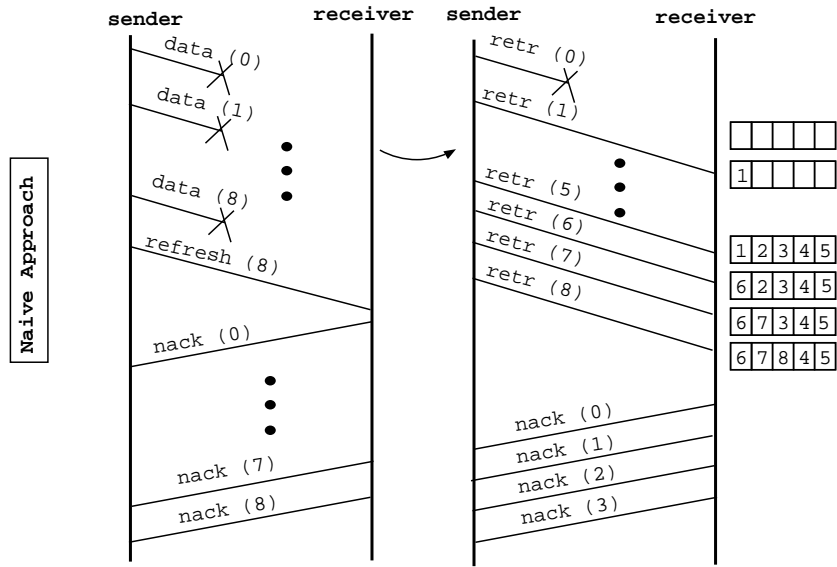


Figure 3: RML Flow Control

and 3. After that, the receiver must send NACKs to recover packets from 0 to 3. We can see that it is not useful to replace packets that have not already been sent to the application.

In the second approach, which we call *Flow Control Approach*, when a loss is detected the receiver only send NACKs for a certain amount of packets, i.e., the amount he is able to handle. In addition, the receiver requests those retransmissions in only one NACK message. Note in figure 3 that the first NACK sent requests retransmissions for packets with sn 0 to 4 because there were five free slots in the cache. The second NACK requests only the retransmission of packet 0 because there was only one free slot in the cache at that time. Using the Flow Control Approach two NACKs were sent, while in the Naive Approach they were thirteen.

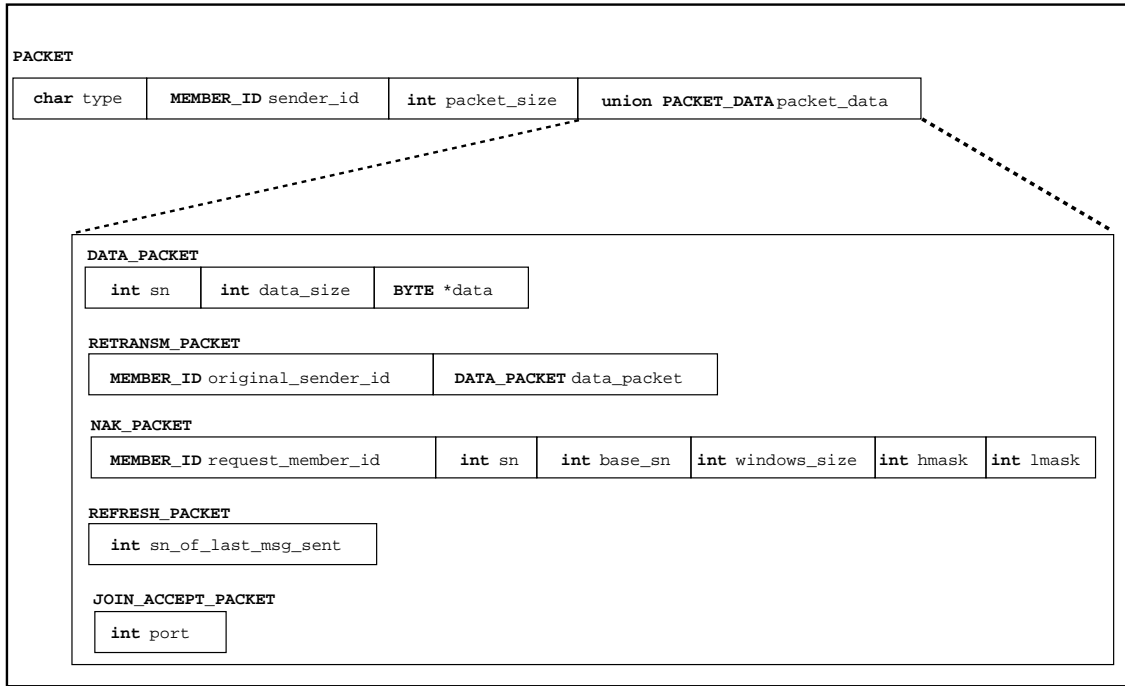


Figure 4: RML Packet Types

The RML uses the *window\_mask*, *window\_size* and *window\_ini* parameters to bound the NACK transmission. The *window\_size* has a value of 64, i.e., we can request at most 64 re-transmissions per NACK message. The *window\_size* value was chosen just for implementation purposes. With that value we can represent the *window\_mask* using only two integers in the NACK packets, as shown in figure 5. The *window\_ini* points to the first position in the *window\_mask* array. The NACK packet is mounted using those parameters. In figure 4, there is a description of the packet structures used in RML. The NACK packet is composed by a set of fields, among them we have :

- **base\_sn**: the value of the sn of the first NACK in the *window\_mask*
- **window\_size**: the value of *window\_size* of the cache, default is 64
- **hmask**: an integer that represents the higher part of the NACK mask
- **lmask**: an integer that represents the lower part of the NACK mask

Suppose a NACK message from member M has arrived with *base\_sn=5*, *window\_size=64*, *hmask=1* and *lmask=3*. To find out which retransmission has been requested by member M we have to translate *hmask* and *lmask* to their binary representation. This translation is shown in

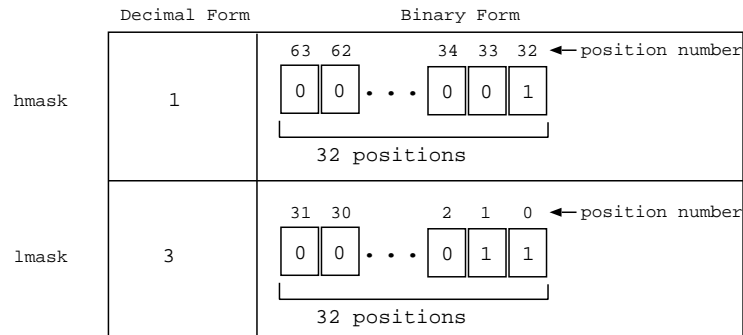


Figure 5: RML NACK mask

figure 5. The requests can be identified using the position of the bits with value of 1 plus the *base\_sn*. In our scenario, the requests are for the packets with sn 5 (0+5), 6 (1+5) and 37 (32+5).

After sending a NACK message, the member waits for a retransmission during a random period of time, called *Twait*. If the requested retransmission is not received after *Twait* units of time, a new NACK message is sent. The maximum number of NACKs is limited by the *MAX\_NAK* parameter, which the user may set in the *rmcast.config* file (see section 5.3 to learn about RML configuration). If *MAX\_NAK* is reached, i.e., a data packet couldn't be recovered - the application is then suspended.

#### 4.3.4 Data Retransmission

In the RML each member maintains in his cache the last *N* data packets he has received from other members. Thus, any member of the multicast group is able to answer to a request for retransmission of the last *N* messages he has received from each other member. This mechanism distributes the responsibility of retransmission among all the members of the multicast session, but it may create a lot of traffic if every member answers to a NACK message. As was explained in section 4.3.3, we use random timers to avoid this traffic problem.

Suppose a member A receives a NACK message from member B regarding a specific lost packet P from member C. If the packet P is stored in A's cache, then member A schedules a random timer *Tret* to wait before sending a retransmission. There are two situations that may occur before *Tret* timed out:

1. a retransmission of the packet P is received: the A's retransmission is aborted because another member has already answered the request.
2. a NACK message regarding the same packet P is received: the NACK message is ignored because the retransmission is already scheduled.

If *Tret* expires and neither (1) nor (2) has occurred, then the retransmission is sent.

#### 4.4 The Event List

A common activity of the reliable multicast library (RML) is to schedule an event to happen some time in the future. Almost every action that is taken by the RML is not executed immediately when it is requested. Instead, events are scheduled in order to perform the tasks. When a loss of packets is detected, for example, an event is scheduled to send a negative acknowledgment (NACK) after a certain period of time. If, before the timeout, the member receives a retransmission of the lost packet or if the member receives a NACK for the considered packet, then the sending of the NACK is canceled. In the last case, the sending of the NACK is suppressed because another member has just sent the NACK. In order to reduce the network traffic, a member just sends a

message after waiting to see if this message was just sent by another member. The key point here is to keep the work distributed but avoiding redundancy.

The event list of the Reliable Multicast Protocol is an implementation of a conventional delta list [20]. The list is a chain of event nodes. The event nodes are stored in increasing order of when the event occurs. Each event node contains the information needed to execute the event - the event type, described below, and some other information, depending on the event type - as well as the time in the future that the event should take place. The time stored in each event is relative to the preceding event. For example, suppose there are five events scheduled for 4, 6, 6, 13 and 17 time units in the future. This would result in the event list illustrated in figure 6. Notice that the third event record contains a 0 because it occurs 0 time units after the second event.

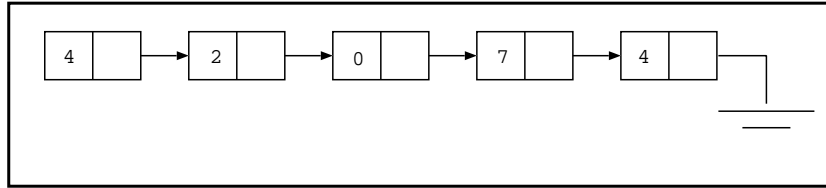


Figure 6: RML Event List - a simple example

The first event node is the next one that will be executed. When an event is inserted at the head of the list, an operating system alarm signal is scheduled to fire after the time indicated at the header node of the list. When the alarm fires, the event node is processed and removed. All the subsequent events that have time of 0 are also executed and removed. Then the alarm is restarted.

To schedule a new event, the event manager walks down the list and inserts a record for the new event in the appropriate location, being careful to adjust the relative time of both the new and the event immediately following the new event. Deleting an event from the event list is implemented in an analogous way.

The event nodes are divided into five types:

- NAK\_SND\_WAIT- used to schedule a sending of a negative acknowledgment;
- RET\_RCV\_WAIT- used to wait for retransmissions;
- RET\_SND\_WAIT- created to schedule a sending of a retransmission;
- REF\_SND\_WAIT- used to schedule a refresh;
- LEV\_GRP\_WAIT- specifies the time between a user requests to go away from the group and the actual moment when the user leaves the group.

Suppose there is one NAK\_SND\_WAIT event scheduled for 4 time units in the future, in order to send a NACK to a packet initially sent by member M1. Suppose also that there is one REF\_SND\_WAIT scheduled for 6 time units in the future, and a RET\_SND\_WAIT for 17 time units in the future. This retransmission refers to packet 4 of member M2. This would result in the event list illustrated in figure 7. Note that the NAK\_SND\_WAIT event node contains a pointer to the cache entry of member M1. The cache entry of M1 will contain the information about what packets from member M1 were lost. When the event NAK\_SND\_WAIT fires, searching the cache we will find out which packets of member M1 were lost, and then send a NACK message to request these packets. On the other hand, the REF\_SND\_WAIT does not require any other information. Finally, the RET\_SND\_WAIT schedules a retransmission, and to identify the message to be retransmitted we need both the member id of the message and its sequence number.

Figure 8 depicts how the different events are handled.

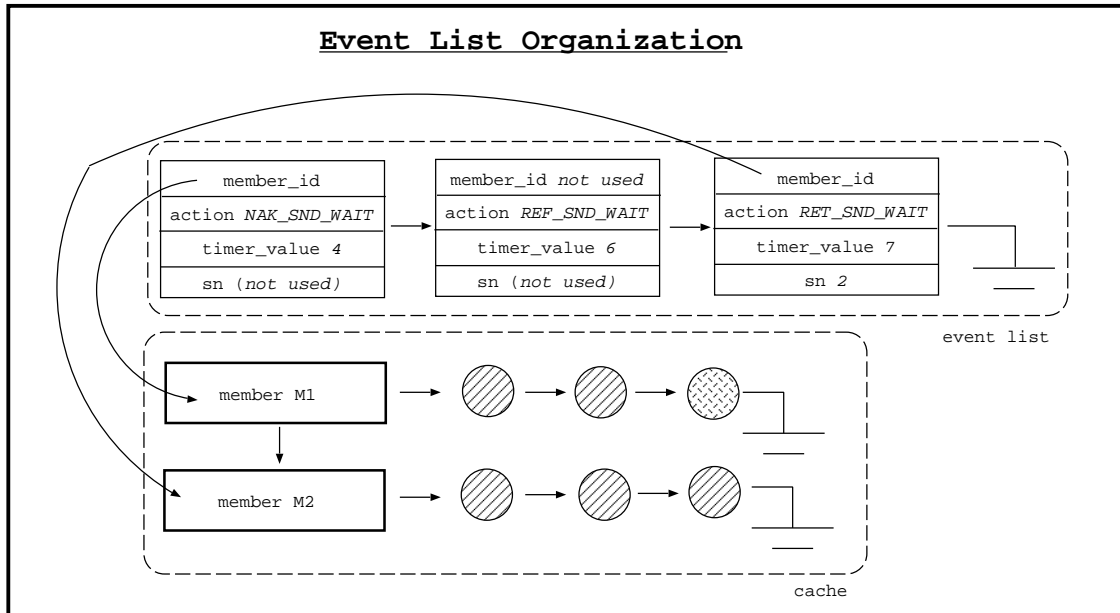


Figure 7: RML Event List - a more detailed example

## 4.5 RML log generation

The RML offers the option of log generation. The log file name is configured through the LOG\_FILE option (see section 5.3 for further information about RML parameters configuration). The file will be created at the current directory and the host name and process ID will be appended to the file name provided in the LOG\_FILE option. Suppose LOG\_FILE=log and the application that uses the RML is called from the /tmp directory at the machine01. Then, the log file name will be /tmp/log.machine01.137, where 137 is the process ID of the application.

A log file sample is showed below:

```

host: receiverhost
ip: 192.168.1.2
pid: 18348
-----
time snd/rcv/loss type sender_ip sender_pid requested_ip requested_pid sn [{base_sn} {win_size} {hmask} {lmask}]
-----
51800783466 L RF 192.168.1.1 13893 -1
51808642569 L DT 192.168.1.1 13893 0
51810314729 S RF 192.168.1.2 18348 -1
51829942926 R DT 192.168.1.1 13893 48
51829947209 S NK 192.168.1.2 18348 192.168.1.1 13893 -1 64 29280 235372671

```

The header of the log file is composed by the host name, ip address and process ID. Then a short description of the log structure is presented. After that, each line describe a packet that was received or sent by the member. The fields are:

- **time:** indicates the time when the packet was received or sent
- **snd/rcv/loss:** indicates if the packet was sent (S), received (R) or received but lost because of loss simulation (L).
- **type:** indicates the packet type, i.e., NACK(NK), data(DT), retransmission(RT), refresh(RF), join accept(JA), join request(JR), leave group(LG) and unknown(UN).
- **sender\_ip:** indicates the IP address of the sender
- **sender\_pid:** indicates the process ID of the sender



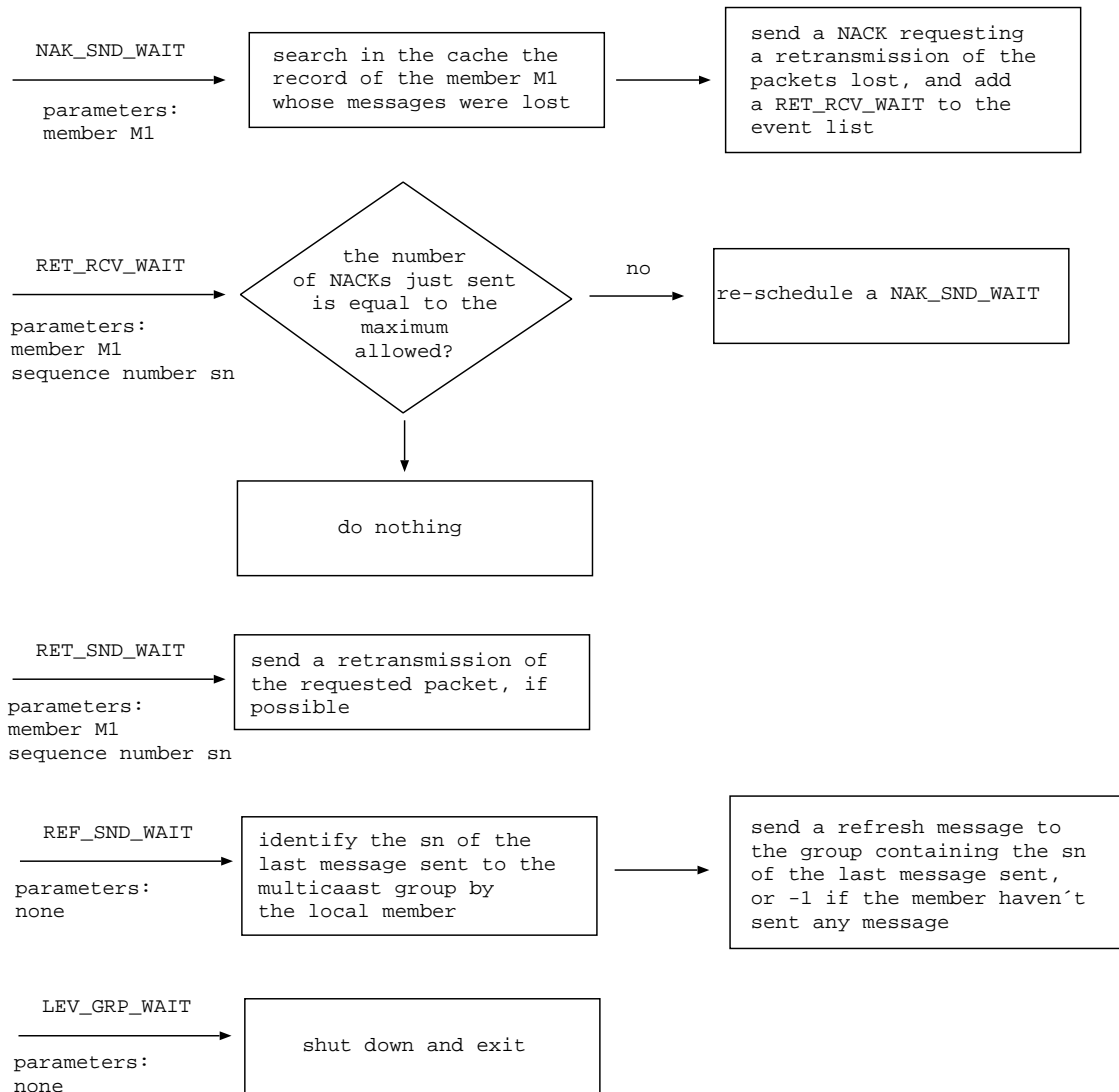


Figure 8: RML Event Handlers

- **requested\_ip:** this field appears when a NACK or a retransmission packet is received. If the NACK is requesting the retransmission from packets sent by member C, this field indicates C's IP address.
- **requested\_pid:** this field only appears when a NACK or a retransmission packet is received. If the NACK is requesting the retransmission from packets sent by member C, this field indicates C's process ID.
- **sn:** this field has different meanings depending on the packet type. When the packet is data or retransmission, this field indicates the sequence number of the packet. When the packet is a refresh message, this field indicates the sequence number of the last data packet sent by the member identified by sender\_ip and sender\_pid. This field does not appear for the remaining packet types.
- **base sn:** indicates the value of the sequence number of the first retransmission requested in the NACK packet.
- **win size:** indicates the window size of the NACK packet
- **hmask:** an integer that represents the higher part of the NACK mask
- **lmask:** an integer that represents the lower part of the NACK mask

There is a simple shell script, called `rmcastplot.bash`, that can be used to generate statistics and plots from the RML log files. If you run `rmcastplot.bash` with no arguments it will show a short help:

```
-----
Usage:
rmcastplot.bash <max_num_pack_sent> <xyrange> <member1.log> <member2.log> [awk_script_dir] [tgif|png]

max_num_pack_sent:  maximum number of sent packets
xyrange:           [XMIN:XMAX][YMIN:YMAX] gnuplot style
member1.log:       full path to member log
member2_log:       full path to member log
awk_script_dir:   optional parameter. Full path to directory where rmlog.awk script is found
tgif or png:      optional parameter. Changes gnuplot output to generate Tgif files or PNG files
-----
```

Suppose there are two members using an RML based application. They generate two log files: `log.senderhost.13893` and `log.receiverhost.18348`. For instance, `rmcastplot.bash` script can be executed with the following line command:

```
rmcastplot.bash 100 [0:15][0:5] log.senderhost.13893 log.receiverhost.18348
```

The script outputs some statistics at the standard input:

```
-----
Member 1 Name:  senderhost
Member 1 IP:   192.168.1.1
Member 1 PID:  13893
Member 2 Name:  receiverhost
Member 2 IP:   192.168.1.2
Member 2 PID:  18348
-----
Data related to
```

```

log.senderhost.13893 -> 192.168.1.2:18348
-----
Data sent:      101
Data received from 192.168.1.2:18348  1
NACKs sent:    0
NACKs received from 192.168.1.2:18348  5
Refresh sent:  9
Refresh received from 192.168.1.2:18348 16
Retrans sent:  51
Retrans received from 192.168.1.2:18348 0
Total simulated loss: 0
Data loss with simulation from 192.168.1.2:18348 0
NACKs lost by simulation from 192.168.1.2:18348 0
Refresh lost by simulation from 192.168.1.2:18348 0
Retrans lost by simulation from 192.168.1.2:18348 0
Packets identified: 517
-----

Data related to
log.receiverhost.18348 -> 192.168.1.1:13893
-----
Data sent:      1
Data received from 192.168.1.1:13893  65
NACKs sent:    5
NACKs received from 192.168.1.1:13893  0
Refresh sent:  7
Refresh received from 192.168.1.1:13893 11
Retrans sent:  0
Retrans received from 192.168.1.1:13893 36
Total simulated loss: 54
Data loss with simulation from 192.168.1.1:13893 36
NACKs lost by simulation from 192.168.1.1:13893 0
Refresh lost by simulation from 192.168.1.1:13893 3
Retrans lost by simulation from 192.168.1.1:13893 15
Packets identified: 453
-----

```

Besides those statistics, if you have gnuplot[21] installed in your system, some plots will be generated. One of those plots is showed in figure 9.

## 4.6 Summary

Figure 10 summarizes the RML behavior on receiving each packet type.

## 5 A simple example: the chat program

In this section we will describe a simple chat application that uses the RML. We hope that this simple example may be used to show how to develop an application based on our RML.

### 5.1 Minimal requirements to create an Reliable Multicast based application

The development of a Reliable Multicast application has some requirements as follow:

- A multicast enabled environment (see section 2 to learn about that);
- The Reliable Multicast Library - the librmcast.a file;
- The Reliable Multicast Header - the rmcast.h file;
- C language develop environment - gcc, make, c libraries etc.

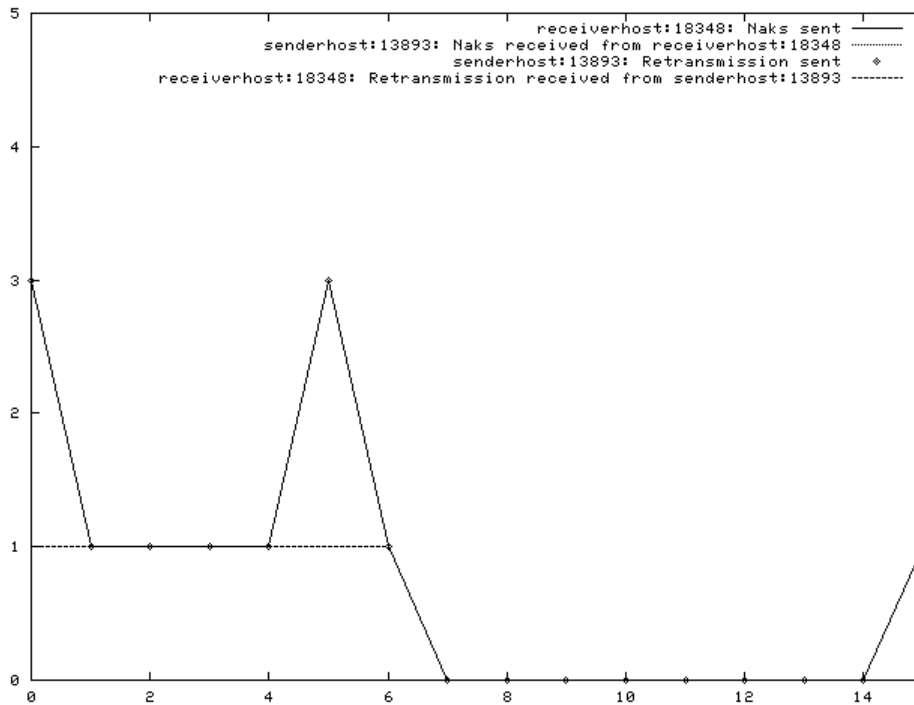


Figure 9: Log plotted with the `rmcastplot.bash` script

## 5.2 Getting and installing the Reliable Multicast Library

To get the Reliable Multicast Library do the following:

1. Download the RML source code from our project page at <http://www.land.ufrj.br/tools/rmcast>
2. Gunzip and untar the package. After that the `RelMulticast` directory will be created.
3. Change to `RelMulticast` directory.
4. Type `make` and see if the `librmcast.a` is compiled without errors. This may be flawless for most users.

To compile an application with `librmcast.a` you should use the following options with `gcc`:

```
-I<rmcast.h_directory> -L<librmcast.a_directory> -lrmcast
```

For instance, we have an application called `rmchat` in the `examples/rmchat` directory, to compile that application we should issue the command:

```
gcc rmchat.c -I../.. -L../.. -lpthread -lm -lrmcast -o rmchat
```

Inside the `RelMulticast` directory you will find some useful files such as `README`, `INSTALL` etc. Those files contain the most updated instructions to compile the RML, please take a look at them.

## 5.3 The Reliable Multicast Library configuration

There are two ways for an application to customize the Reliable Multicast Library options:

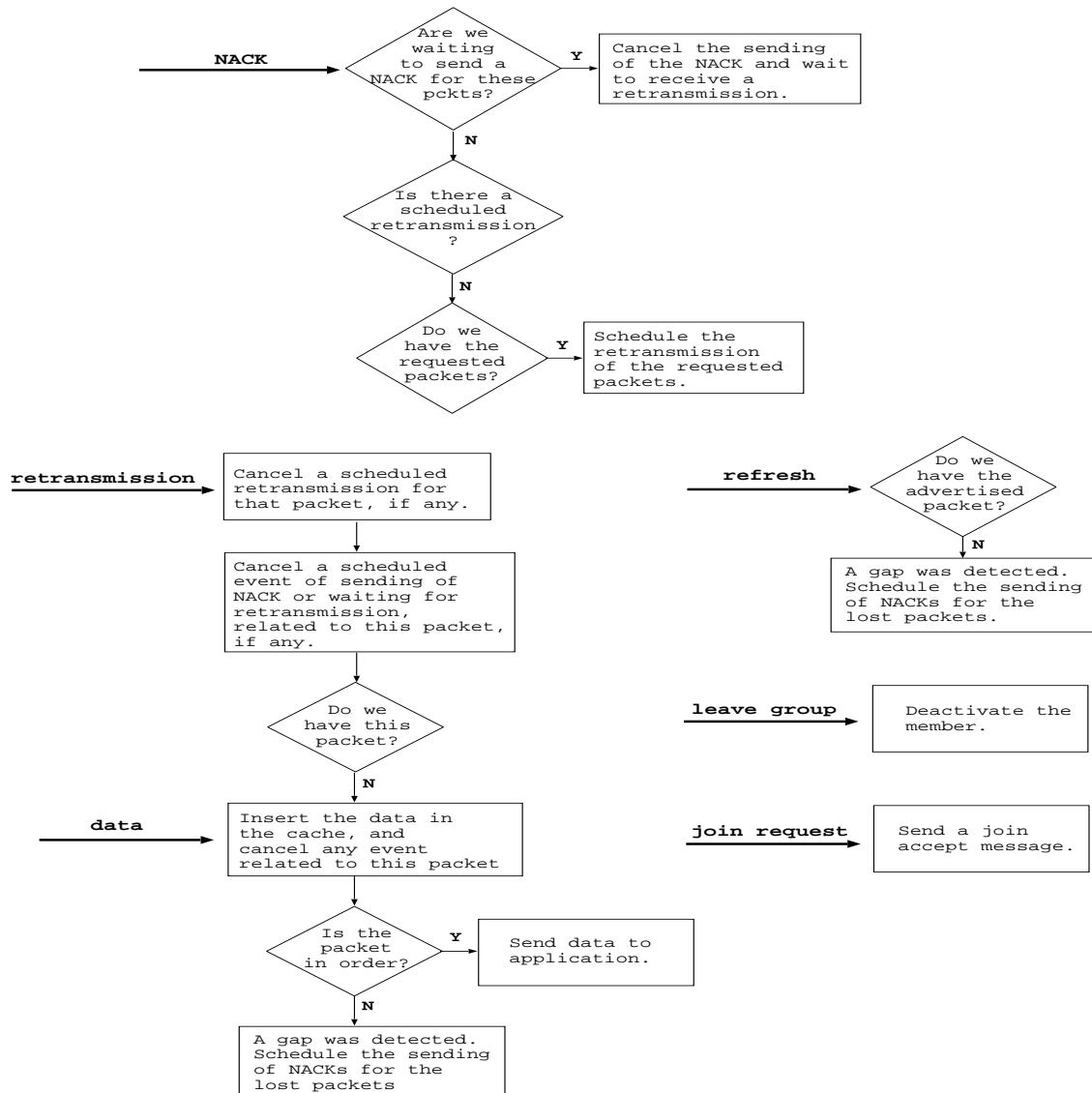


Figure 10: Actions taken on receiving each packet type

1. Calling the `RM_setOption(int OPTION_ID, void *OPTION_VALUE)` function, where:

`OPTION_ID`: indicates what option you want to set. You can find the option list in the `rmcast.h` header file.

`OPTION_VALUE`: the value you want to set the option to

**Example:**

```
...
/* Setting REFRESH_TIMER */
int refresh_timer=10;

RM_setOption(REFRESH_TIMER,(void *) refresh_timer);
...
```

2. Calling `RM_readConfigFile(char *filename)`. This function will tell the Reliable Multicast Library to read the user's options from `filename`.

**Example:**

```
...
/* Read the config file from /etc/rmcast.config */
char config_file[50];

strcpy(config_file,"/etc/rmcast.config");

RM_readConfigFile(config_file);
...
```

NOTE: There is a constant, `RM_USE_CURRENT_CONFIG`, that can replace functions parameters. In those situations, the `RM_USE_CURRENT_CONFIG` will indicate that the current values (which may have been set either by calling `RM_setOption` or `RM_readConfigFile`) must be used. For instance, when we call the `RM_joinGroup()` function we are supposed to pass as parameters the IP Multicast address and port number. If we have already read those options from `rmcast.config` file, just replace the parameters with the `RM_USE_CURRENT_CONFIG` constant.

The `rmcast.config` file contain some options that can be customized by the users. A `rmcast.config` file example follows (lines beginning with a `"#"` are comments):

```
#Reliable Multicast Library configuration file
#Reliable Multicast Library version
RM_VERSION=1.0

#Transmission mode: 0 multicast (default), 1 unicast
TRANSMISSION_MODE=0

#Multicast or Unicast IP address to send data (destination IP)
DEST_IP=225.1.2.3

#Multicast or Unicast port to send data (destination port)
DEST_PORT=5000

#Time to live for the packets setting (1 indicates local network)
TTL=1

#Inter-packet sleep timer - timer between transmissions of packets
#( in microseconds)
MICROSLEEP=10
```

```

#Log file path - NULL disable logging (default)
LOG_FILE=NULL

#Random Timers Distribution: 0 uniform 1 exponential
TIMER_DISTRIBUTION=0

#Lower bound for timer generation (in milliseconds)
TIMER_LOWER=200

#Upper bound for timer generation (in milliseconds)
TIMER_UPPER=1000

#Max number of naks that can be sent for each packet. 100 (default)
MAX_NAK=100

# We will be able to retransmit the last MAX_MEMBER_CACHE_SIZE
# packets from each member of the multicast group, i.e., we will store the
# last MAX_MEMBER_CACHE_SIZE PACKETS from each member
# of the multicast group in the cache. 4000 (default)
#
# WARNING: if you set MAX_MEMBER_CACHE_SIZE to low values
# the protocol may fail!!
#
MAX_MEMBER_CACHE_SIZE=4000

#Enable support for new users 1 enabled (default), 0 disabled
NEW_USER_SUPPORT=0

#Show transmission statistics: 0 disabled (default) 1 enabled
STATISTICS=0

#Time between sending of refresh messages (seconds)
REFRESH_TIMER=10

#Loss simulation: 0 disabled (default) any float number > 0 enabled

# A note about loss simulation:
# When loss simulation is enabled (LOSS_PROB > 0) we always loose
# the first 10 received packets, and the first received data packet -
# that is, the first burst of received packets.
# After that, packets are lost according to LOSS_PROB.
# Example: LOSS_PROB=30
# The first 10 received packets will be lost.
# Then, 30% of the packets will be lost
LOSS_PROB=0

# Time to wait, in microseconds, before leaving the multicast group.
LEAVE_GROUP_WAIT_TIME = 5000000

# Size of the buffer of the receiver host
# (maximum size of a message that may be processed by
# the receiver host).
RCV_BUFFER_SIZE = 10000

```

To retrieve the current value of an option from the RML you must call the `RM_getOption(int OPTION, void *OPTION_VALUE)` function.

## 5.4 The Reliable Multicast Chat (rmchat) application

This is a simple chat application and was written just for testing the RML. The fully commented source code can be found in the examples/rmchat directory. You can compile the program by typing `make` in that directory.

### 5.4.1 The program

Every user that initiates the program is prompted for a username - this username will be the users identity in the group. After that they will receive all the messages from every user already connected to the chat group (if any). You can also type messages in the prompt and send them to the group by pressing the return key. Note that there is no need for a chat server because we are using multicast. Users must know the IP address and port to join the chat group. You can set this address and port through the `rmcast.config` file as we have seen in the previous section.

We have implemented only two simple commands in the `rmchat`:

1. **send** - by typing **send** on the prompt you will be asked for the number of packets to send to the group. This command was implemented to perform simple tests with the application.
2. **exit** - this command is used to terminate the application.

#### 5.4.2 Source code comments

This section is supposed to be read along with the source code of `rmchat`, available at `examples/rmchat/rmchat.c`.

The very first thing we have to do when we are writing an application is to include the `rmcast.h` header file. Next we define `BUFSIZE` - the maximum message size. We also declare an integer global variable to identify the socket we will use to send and receive data.

The following step is to read the configuration file, calling the `RM_readConfigFile` function. Then, we have to initialize the RML calling the `RM_initialize` function. After that we join the multicast group calling the `RM_joinGroup` function. At this point we are using the `RM_USE_CURRENT_CONFIG` as discussed in section 4.3. The `RM_joinGroup` function returns the socket identifier that we will need to send and receive data from the network.

Interactive network applications are supposed to simultaneously receive and send data through the network. To implement that feature we usually create separated threads to deal with those tasks. In the `rmchat` we have created, calling the `pthread_create` function, the **Receive thread** to receive packets from the network, while the main thread will get the user messages and will send them to the multicast group.

You can easily see in the Receive thread code that there is a loop where we just call `RM_recv` function to retrieve data from the network. The data received is then showed on the screen.

In the main program we are reading the messages typed by the user and checking whether they are a command or a simple message. If it is a simple message, we just call the `RM_sendto` function to send the data to the multicast group. Otherwise, if the `exit` command is issued, we break the loop and prepare to terminate the application. We use the `RM_getOption` to retrieve the current IP address and port from the RML just to report it to the user. In addition we cancel the Receive thread using the `pthread_cancel()` function.

Finally we call the `RM_leaveGroup` function to finish the RML and our program. This function is VERY IMPORTANT because it cleans up the system resources that we were using such as the message queue. See section 7.3 for further information on message queues. Again, we recommend that you take a look at the source code to better understand the application.

### 5.5 RML functions quick reference

In this section will go through the user functions available in the Reliable Multicast Library.

- `RM_readConfigFile(char *filename)` - read the configuration file identified by *filename*. See section 4.3 for the config file format and options.
- `RM_setOption(int opt, void *optvalue)` - set the option identified by *opt* with the value in *optvalue*. You can use `setOption` to set the RML instead of reading the config file.
- `RM_getOption(int opt, void *optvalue)` - returns the current value *optvalue* of the option identified by *opt*.
- `RM_initialize(void)` - initializes the RML structures
- `RM_getCurStatus(char *group, int port, CurStatus *c)` - get the current status from a member of the multicast group.
- `RM_sendCurStatus(int connfd, char *buff, int bufsize)` - send the current status to a new member of the multicast group.



- **RM\_joinGroup(char \*group, int port)** - join the multicast group identified by the IP address in *group* and the port in *port*. Returns the socket identifier that will be used in the **RM\_sendto** and **RM\_recv** functions.
- **RM\_sendto(int socket, void \*buffer, int bufsize)** - sends up to *bufsize* bytes of data from *buffer* using the socket identifier *socket*. Returns 1 on success and 0 if an error occurs.
- **RM\_recv(int socket, void \*buffer, int bufsize)** - receives up to *bufsize* bytes of data, and stores them into *buffer* using the socket identifier *socket*. Returns the number of bytes received on success and -1 when an error occurs.
- **RM\_leaveGroup(int sock, char \* group)** - sends a message indicating that we are leaving the multicast group identified by *group*, cleans all the system resources being used and closes the socket identified by *socket*. You must call this function before terminating the application. Returns 1 on success and 0 on failure.

## 6 A more advanced application: the Tangram II Whiteboard

### 6.1 About Tangram II Whiteboard (TGWB)

Quoting from the tgif manual, “tgif (Tangram2 Graphic Interface Facility) is a Xlib based interactive 2-D drawing facility under X11”. The tgif tool is a powerful vector based drawing tool. The user draws objects, i.e., rectangles, lines, circles and splines, over a drawing area. Objects may be transformed - for instance, rotated, translated and flipped. New objects may be constructed by grouping other objects.

In the next section, we will describe a whiteboard tool which was developed over tgif - TGWB (Tangram II Whiteboard). The tgwb allows simultaneous modifications in drawings by users in a group. It is a versatile multicast distributed tool.

### 6.2 Getting and installing TGWB

To get the TGWB, follow the steps below:

1. get tgif at <http://bourbon.usc.edu:8001/tgif/>
2. read the README.tgwb file and follow the instructions described there.

### 6.3 What features make TGWB different

There are two main points that make the TGWB application different from the previously described chat.

At a given time, a user may want to send to the group huge amounts of data (for example, a screenshot). This message must be segmented into smaller packets before being sent to the group (note that, for simplicity, in the chat application we were assuming that the user would not send very large amounts of data in the messages). One of the reasons segmentation is needed is the fact that there is a maximum segment size which network routers support. To see other reason for doing segmentation, the interested read should consult chapter 1 of [4]. Figure 11 presents the TGWB layers.

A second feature that makes the TWGB tool different from the chat is the fact that we need to assure global consistency among the users of the TGWB tool. Imagine that two users change the color of a rectangle at the same time: user A changes the color of the rectangle to red, and B to blue. What must user C see? A blue or a red rectangle? What about A and B? This problem, and others, are solved using a “total ordering mechanism”, which is based in the use of the undo/redo commands (rollback-recovery strategy). Consult [11] for a complete explanation about this subject.

## 6.4 The life cycle of a packet in the TGWB

The packets life cycle begins when a user draws an object over the tgif drawing area. As mentioned above, an object may be a circle, a rectangle, a text box or any other drawing primitive described on the tgif manual. Please, see tgif man pages, tgif FAQ [3] and tgif tutorial for more information about tgif.

Now, the object must be delivered to the members of the multicast group. This is done via the RML functions. However, before being delivered the object is first divided into segments - see the *Segment()* call in *wb.c*. The segment size is chosen in a way that the more common objects (rectangles, circles and text boxes) fit in one segment and, at the same time, the maximum transfer unit (MTU) is greater than the segment size.

All the RML functions available for the applications have the *RM\_* prefix. So, in order to send a tgif object to the network, *RM\_sendto()* is called, passing as parameters the multicast destination group and the object data. You may see the definition of the function *SendWBData()* in *wb.c*. The *RM\_sendto()* function (and all the other functions that may be called by an application) is defined in the *rmcast.c* file. *RM\_sendto()* calls *rmcastSendPackets()*, which is defined in *rminternals.c*, and that in turns makes a *sendto(2)* system call (the number two between parenthesis refers to the section two of man of *sendto* - to see the man info, type `man 2 sendto` at the Linux prompt. Please, note that this number may vary according to the operating system).

In general, the functions defined in *rmcast.c* call functions defined in *rminternals.c*. Then, functions in *rminternals.c* make system calls. Concerning the syntax, note that the functions in *rmcast.c* have the prefix “*RM\_*” and the functions in *rminternals.c* have the prefix “*rmcast*”.

At this point we have segmented the object data into packets, appended all needed headers and the packet was sent. That’s what happens at the sender side. Now, let’s see the receiver side.

All the members of the multicast group, communicating among themselves using the TGWB, receive messages from all the other members. At the application level, the *RM\_recv()* function is used to get messages in order, without gaps, from the other members of the group. The *RM\_recv()* function makes a *msgrcv(2)* system call to get messages from a message queue. Note that this is an exception to the general explanation given two paragraphs above. Read the following section in order to get more information about how the message queue works, and why it is used here.

When a packet arrives from the network, the *recvfrom(2)* system call is responsible for receiving it. We make a *recvfrom(2)* system call in the *rmcastReceivePackets()* function, defined in *rminternals.c*. The received message is then processed, inserted in the cache and, if it is in fact the expected message, we put it in the message queue. The message queue was the interprocess communication mechanism that we have chosen in order to store the in-order without-gaps messages that will be read by the application.

Figure 12 show the Tangram II Whiteboard architecture.

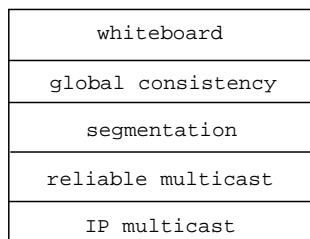


Figure 11: TGWB Layers

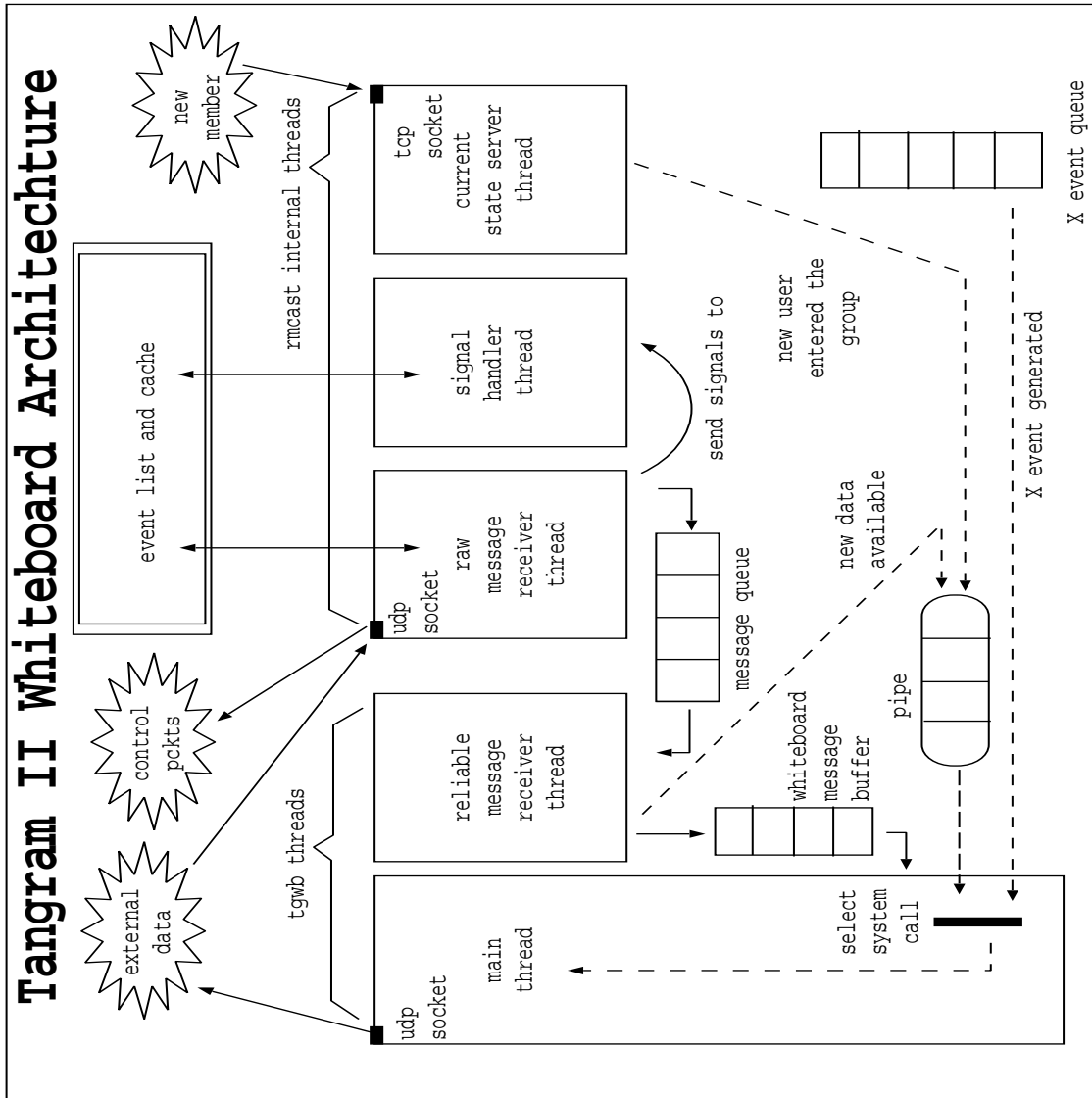


Figure 12: TGWB Architecture

## 7 More about the Tangram II Whiteboard

### 7.1 The TGWB threads

UNIX/Linux offers a lot of interprocess communication mechanisms. If you run `tgwb` under Linux, and type `ps -aux | grep tgwb`, you will probably see something like:

```
[anonymous@salinas anonymous]$ ps -aux | grep tgwb
anonymous 2820 1.7 0.8 12780 1992 pts/4 S 16:25 tgwb
anonymous 2821 0.1 0.8 12780 1992 pts/4 S 16:25 tgwb
anonymous 2822 0.0 0.8 12780 1992 pts/4 S 16:25 tgwb
anonymous 2823 0.0 0.8 12780 1992 pts/4 S 16:25 tgwb
anonymous 2824 0.0 0.8 12780 1992 pts/4 S 16:25 tgwb
anonymous 2825 0.0 0.8 12780 1992 pts/4 S 16:25 tgwb
anonymous 2827 1.0 0.2 1700 592 pts/4 S 16:25 grep tgwb
```

We see here that `tgwb` generates six processes. That's because under Linux the `pthread` library generates one process per thread (please, see Appendix), plus one extra thread, which corresponds to the "thread manager". We will briefly describe the first five threads generated by TGWB - the last one, the "thread manager" is created internally by Linux Threads to handle thread creation and termination [5].

thread 1. responsible for receiving ordered, without gaps messages - that is, reliable messages;  
thread 2. responsible for receiving possible out of order, with gaps messages - that is, messages from the network;

thread 3. responsible for (a) processing the local user actions, such as drawing objects and writing texts, (b) processing remote user commands which arrive from the message queue and (c) sending local commands to the other users. That is the "main" thread;

thread 4. responsible for signal handling. We will call this thread the "signal handler" thread;  
thread 5. responsible for sending the current state, via TCP, to the new users who eventually would like to join the group. We will call this thread as the "current state server" thread.

These threads, and the relations between them, are represented in figure 12.

#### Thread 1 - Reliable messages receiver thread

This thread, implemented in the `tgwb`, stays in a loop waiting for reliable messages. When a reliable message is received, it is inserted in a buffer, and also an 'a' is written into a pipe. This 'a' will signal the main thread that there is data available from the network.

#### Thread 2 - Raw messages receiver thread

Implemented under the RML, this thread is responsible for receiving raw data from the network. Depending on the type of the message (for instance, data, negative acknowledgment and refresh messages) we take the appropriate actions. Please, see section 4.3 for more details about this.

#### Thread 3 - Main thread

This thread is implemented in the TGWB `mainloop.c` file. This thread remains sleeping until it is wakened up by one of the following events:

- (1) an X event is generated by the local user;
- (2) a "reliable message" arrives from the network.

Lets start by (1). When an user drags the mouse in order to draw an object this event is inserted in the X event-list. This list is managed by the X-server using a FIFO policy. As soon as the mentioned user command gets on the top of this list, the command is executed and sent to the other members of the group.

Now, let's analyze (2). A pipe is used to perform the communication between the main thread and the "reliable messages receiver thread". When a "reliable message" arrives from the network an 'a' character is written in the pipe by the "reliable messages receiver thread". The main thread then reads this 'a' from the pipe, and the command received from the network is locally processed.

At this point it's interesting to talk a little about the history of tgwb. In former versions of TGWB, we made a busy wait loop in order to wait for events from both the local user and the network, that is, a busy wait for (1) and (2). That is not efficient, and when someone call the command `top`, from the shell prompt, TGWB usually appears as the first element of the list, consuming near 100% of the CPU cycles. To solve this problem, we introduced the use of pipes [9] in the mainloop of TGWB.

Please, refer to figure 13 for a scheme of the TGWB mainloop. The mainloop of TGWB waits for (1) or (2) calling:

```
status = select(nfds, &fdset, NULL, NULL, &timeout);
```

When we get (1), `XNextEvent(mainDisplay, pXEvent)` is called, and the X event generated by the local user is processed. When we get (2), `SendCommandToSelf(CMDID_DATA_IN_MBUFF, 0)` is called, and the "reliable message" which arrived from the network is processed. Besides (1) and (2), the main thread may also get a request for packing the tgwb current state. When we receive 'c' via the pipe, which signals this request, we call `HandleNewUserRequest()` and the request is attended. Our approach to solve this problem is discussed at session 7.2.

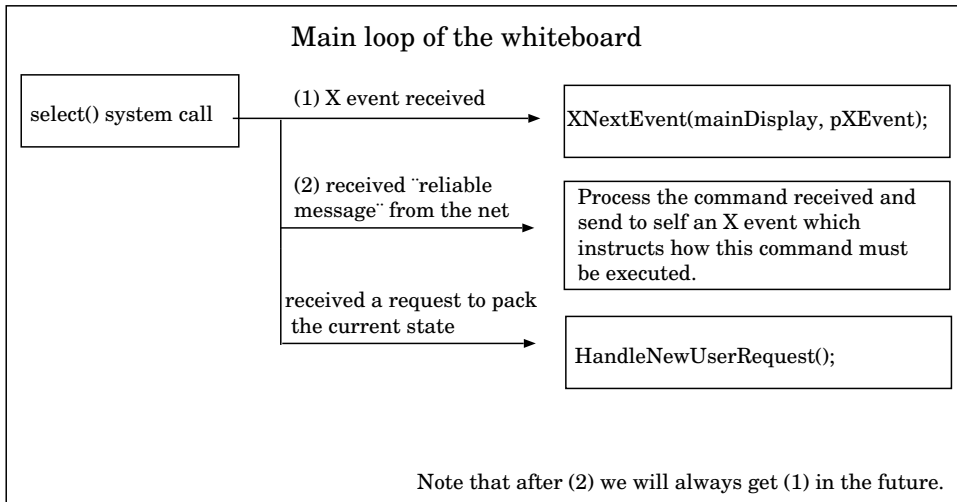


Figure 13: TGWB mainloop routine

## Thread 4 - Signal handler thread

We will give a brief explanation about the difference between synchronous and asynchronous signals. As signal handling is a very broad topic, please refer to [8][10] for more details. Signals may be generated synchronously or asynchronously. A synchronous (sync) signal pertains to a specific action in the program, and is delivered (unless blocked) during that action. Errors generate signals synchronously, and so do explicit requests by a process to generate a signal for that same process.

Asynchronous (async) signals are generated by events outside the control of the process that receives them. These signals arrive at unpredictable times during execution. External events generate signals asynchronously, and so do explicit requests that apply to some other process.

A given type of signal is either typically synchronous or typically asynchronous. For example, signals for errors are typically synchronous because errors generate signals synchronously. But any type of signal can be generated synchronously or asynchronously with an explicit request.

In the Reliable Multicast Library, a dedicated thread was created to wait for all the generated signals. Such a thread just loops on a sigwait subroutine call and handles the signals. That is a typical schema for programs that handle signals with threads [6] and an example can be found at [7]. That kind of procedure handles the signals synchronously because this is the safest programming style.

## Thread 5 - Current State Server Thread

This thread is responsible for the so called “support for new members” in the RML. In other words, this thread is responsible for provisioning to new members the capacity for joining a TGWB session at any time.

Suppose that a new member A wants to join the multicast group. This member will try to get the “current state” of the group, and just after that he will enter. In more details, we follow the steps below:

- (1) First, member A send a packet of type JOIN\_REQUEST to the group.
- (2) Then, member A waits for an JOIN\_ACCEPT packet from any member of the group.

If member A doesn't receive any message, and gets a timeout, he will start to send/receive packets to/from the multicast group as he was the first member in that TGWB session.

- (3) When a JOIN\_ACCEPT packet is received from a member B, member A will try to connect to B via TCP, and retrieve his “current state”. After receiving the current state, A will make a call to RM\_joinGroup() and at this moment member A becomes an actual member of the group. It implies that besides being able to talk with the other members of the group, member A is promoted to a “current state server”.

A “current state server” is a server that waits for connections in a specific port, and when a new client connects to this port, the “current state server” provides the “current state” to this client.

## 7.2 Solving the busy wait problem

Processes (and threads), during its execution time, may be in several operating states. Among the states, we will focus on the two extreme ones: busy wait, when the process occupies almost 100% of the CPU, or sleeping, when it practically does not use system resources. See chapter 3 of [10] for more details about process (and threads) states.

In former versions of tgwb, the mainloop of the program worked using busy wait. In tgwb version 4.1.40, if we ran tgwb and typed “top” at the Linux shell prompt, we would get:

```
PID    %CPU %MEM TIME COMMAND
27490  81.3  2.5  0:26 tgwb
```

Note that tgwb was occupying 81.3% of the CPU time. And this occurred even when we were not drawing or writing anything on the canvas - the simple fact of opening the tgwb was responsible for that. We started trying to solve the problem using the *select(2)* system call. Using *select(2)* we would be able to “sleep” waiting for data to arrive either from the network or from commands sent by the local user. Instead of having something like:

```
while(1)
{
    if ( data received from the network )
        do this;
    else if ( there is an X event to be processed )
        do that;
    else
        do nothing;
```

```
}
```

We would like to get:

```
while(1)
{
    select (...); /* sleep waiting for data from the network
                  or for an X event */
    if ( data received from the network )
        do this;
    else if ( there is an X event to be processed )
        do that;
}
```

First we tried to do this by making the “reliable messages receiver thread” write a character into a conventional file when a message arrived from the networking, and the select would watch the file to see if characters become available for reading. The select would return if there were some character on the file or there were an pending X event. The problem is that select() doesn’t work with conventional files. After finding out this problem, instead of using conventional files we started working with a pipe. An important reference that we used was [17].

Follows below a piece of a message from William Cheng, who is the tgif’s main developer :

Basically, you create a pipe to send notification characters to yourself! So, when tgvb starts, a pipe is created and its 2 endpoints (file descriptors) are stored in an array. In GetAnXEvent(), you need to do a select() call. This call will wait for 3 conditions: (1) an X events has arrived; (2) the pipe contains some data; and (3) a timeout has occurred. The timeout is there just case something goes wrong. I would set a very large timeout, for example, 15 seconds.

In ReceivePacket(), instead of calling SendCommandToSelf(), it should write 1 byte to the pipe! That’s it!

In GetAnXEvent(), if select() returns with the pipe having some data, you should read 1 bytes and then calls SendCommandToSelf().

(Well, calling HandleDataInMBuff() directly would be fine too.)

Note that we call the *SendCommadToSelf()* function when we receive a command from the network. This function, which is also called in menu.c, is used to put X events in the X internal queue. Using this functionality, when we receive a data from the network it is processed and then the resulting action is put in the X queue, and then treated as any other X event.

Now, if we run tgvb and type “top” at the Linux shell prompt, we get:

```
PID %CPU %MEM TIME COMMAND
26919 0.0 0.6 0:00 bash
27049 0.0 0.7 0:00 tgvb
27050 0.0 0.7 0:00 tgvb
27051 0.0 0.7 0:00 tgvb
27052 0.0 0.7 0:00 tgvb
27053 0.0 0.7 0:00 tgvb
```

Note that the %CPU (percentage of total CPU time) of tgvb now is almost 0.

## 8 Appendix - Interprocess Communication Resources

In order to implement the reliable multicast library we have used a lot of interprocess communication resources. The operating system and interprocess communication resources used were:

1. threads;
2. mutexes;
3. message queues;
4. pipes;
5. sockets (TCP and UDP);
6. signals.

We will give here a brief introduction to these topics. The interested reader should consult [12, 13].

## 8.1 Threads

When we have a lot of tasks to do, we try to do different tasks at the same time. This tasks are the human analogy to what threads are for computer programs. In our Reliable Multicast Library (RML) we have used mainly the following pthread system calls:

- pthread\_create
- pthread\_join
- pthread\_exit

To get more info about pthreads, please refer to the man pages of this functions, and [5, 14, 15]

## 8.2 Mutexes

In order to synchronize threads we have to use mutexes. We can't, for example, change the value of a variable at two distinct points at the same time because this may generate an inconsistency. In the RML, we used the system calls:

- pthread\_mutex\_lock
- pthread\_mutex\_unlock

in order to protect some critical points of the program - mainly the ones that work with the cache and the event list, which are the global structures accessed by more than one thread.

## 8.3 Message Queues

The message queues are a first in first out (FIFO) operating system mechanism that are used to pass data between different thread/processes. They are an important IPC mechanism. Among the message queue functions used, we may focus:

- msgget - int msgget ( key\_t key, int msgflg )
- msgctl - int msgctl ( int msqid, int cmd, struct msqid\_ds \*buf )
- msgsnd - int msgsnd ( int msqid, struct msgbuf \*msgp, size\_t msgsz, int msgflg )
- msgrcv - ssize\_t msgrcv ( int msqid, struct msgbuf \*msgp, size\_t msgsz, long msgtyp, int msgflg )



The first important concept to understand is the concept of a “key”. Keys are numbers used to identify an IPC resource in UNIX, in an analogy to the fact that file names are used to identify files. It’s the key that allows that an IPC resource be shared between different threads and processes, similarly to the fact that the file names allow that a file be referenced by any program running in the operating system.

The function *msgget* receives as first parameter a key, and return an identifier for the object which is analogous to the “file descriptor” in the case of files. The last parameter, *msgflg*, must be set to `IPC_CREAT` when we want to create a new object. It’s necessary to make a logical OR of `IPC_CREAT` with the values of table 2 depending on the permissions wanted for the created object.

| octal value | meaning                                     |
|-------------|---|
| 0400        | read permitted for the owner of the object  |
| 0200        | write permitted for the owner of the object |
| 0040        | read permitted for the group                |
| 0020        | write permitted for the group               |
| 0004        | read permitted for all                      |
| 0002        | write permitted for all                     |

Table 2: Message queue permissions

The functions *msgsnd* and *msgrcv* are used to send/receive messages to/from the queue. The *msgctl* function is used to set control properties of the queue. Please, refer to the man pages of this functions for more details about them.

## 8.4 Pipes

The pipes, as the message queues, are used to transmit data between processes/threads. The difference between pipes and message queues is that pipes work with characters (we write/read characters to/from the pipe) while message queues work with messages of variable sizes.

The main pipe system call used was:

- pipe

## 8.5 Sockets

Sockets are IPC mechanisms that may be used to send/receive messages between two hosts. Please, consult [16] in order to get more information about sockets.

## 8.6 Signals

Please, see the comments about the “signal handler thread”, in section 7.1.

## References

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