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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Zhou, ZhangBing; Bhiri, Sami; Shu, Lei; Vasiliu, Laurentiu; Hauswirth, Manfred</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Publication Date</strong></td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publisher</strong></td>
<td>IEEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item record</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/701">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/701</a></td>
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A Scenario-View Based Approach to Analyze External Behavior of Web Services for Supporting Mediated Service Interactions

Zhangbing Zhou, Sami Bhiri, Lei Shu, Laurentiu Vasiiliu and Manfred Hauswirth
Digital Enterprise Research Institute, National University of Ireland at Galway, Ireland
{firstname.lastname}@deri.org

Kaizhu Huang
Computer Science and Engineering Dept, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
kzhuang@cse.cuhk.edu.hk

Abstract

Web service interactions have triggered the initiative to identify and solve mismatches from a behavioral aspect. Current approaches are limited since they mainly focus on control-flow but largely ignore data-flow. In this paper, we propose an approach to automatically generate scenarios and views for describing external behavior of Web services, i.e., the public process, considering both control-flow and data-flow. We define a scenario as a set of complete execution paths for a public process. Data dependencies are presented as a dependency graph, which is optimized into a minimal dependency graph. Then, a view is generated to describe a scenario for analysis purposes, and external behavior of a Web service is described as a finite set of views. Our approach is very useful for service modelers and users to better understand the external behavior of Web services, to identify and solve mismatches from a behavioral aspect, and thus to facilitate Web service interactions.

1. Introduction

A Web service interaction can be described as a flow of messages, which contain a set of data, exchanged among Web services. Because of the inherent autonomy and heterogeneity of Web services, messages are often different in format and granularity, and public processes [7] are often diverse in activities and messages in terms of form and sequence. Thus, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find two Web services that are completely compatible [3] from either functional, or behavioral, or both aspects, and a Web service interaction is normally carried out with the help of data or process mediators [7]. A service interaction with the help of mediators is called as a mediated service interaction. Since many methods, e.g. [6, 8, 12], have analyzed Web services from a functional aspect, we focus on a behavioral aspect. Since the internal implementation of Web services does not contribute to the analysis of service interactions, we focus on external behavior of Web services, which is typically described by a public process from control-flow and data-flow aspects [7]. Current methods for facilitating service interactions, e.g. [20, 21, 23], focus on control-flow and largely ignore data-flow, and are limited to identify and solve behavioral mismatches among Web services. They are insufficient to support mediated service interactions. Thus, from the perspective of supporting mediated service interactions, what is external behavior of Web services considering both control-flow and data-flow?

Current approaches for analyzing external behavior of Web services include: Control-flow based methods [9, 18] focus on control-flow and largely ignore data-flow. Dependency based methods [13, 22] analyze dependencies from data, control and other aspects. View based methods [4, 16, 24] investigate the relation of private and public processes from a control-flow aspect. Thus, current approaches focus on either a control-flow or a data-flow aspect and are limited to answer our question. An improved approach is necessary to analyze external behavior of Web services for supporting mediated service interactions.

To address these problems, we present a novel approach including: (1) We generate all scenarios for a public process. A scenario is a set of complete execution paths [3] for a public process. (2) Data dependencies are represented by a data dependency graph, which presents a finite set of mandatory or optional data dependencies in a public process or a scenario. However, a data dependency is redundant and can be safely removed if it is implicitly specified by other data dependencies. A minimal data dependency graph is generated where there are no redundant data dependencies. (3) We propose three reduction rules to identify and remove unnecessary control dependencies specified by...
sequence, And and Loop blocks in a scenario. (4) With the help of a minimal data dependency graph, we generate a view for a scenario by applying three reduction rules recursively. A public process can be described as a finite set of scenarios. A scenario has a corresponding view representing this scenario for analysis purposes. External behavior of a Web service can be described as a finite set of views.

As far as we know, our scenario-view based approach is the first study to analyze external behavior of Web services considering both control-flow and data-flow. Its immediate benefits include: (1) it can help service modelers and users for a better understanding on external behavior of Web services, and (2) it can provide valuable instructions for facilitating Web service creation or evolution. In addition, it is the base for (3) checking compatibility of Web services from a behavioral aspect, (4) identifying behavioral mismatches among Web services and generating process mediators, and (5) facilitating mediated service interactions.

Here is the outline of this paper. A motivating example is presented in Section 2. A definition and graphical notations for a public process are shown in Section 3. Afterwards, scenarios are generated for a public process, data dependencies are discussed, and a view is generated for a scenario in Section 4, 5 and 6. Finally, related work is discussed and a conclusion is made in Section 7 and 8.

2. A motivating example

Figure 1-a and 1-b show the public processes of two Web services for a toy shop and a requestor, which want to interact for achieving a goal: buying toys. The public processes can be coded in BPEL4WS [1], and a definition of public processes are presented in Section 3. The pricing strategy of the toy shop is flexible: a discount is applied at the children day if the requestor is a child, or a normal price otherwise. Thus, the toy shop expects toy items and customer information before deciding the price although customer information is optional for pricing. Due to the privacy concern, the requestor expects the price firstly. If the price is acceptable, he/she pays and provides customer information for delivery purposes. We assume that no heterogeneity exists at a data level, since it is out of the focus of this paper and much research has been conducted at this aspect [14].

From a control-flow aspect, since the toy shop expects customer information and then provides the price, and the requestor expects the price and then provides customer information, they cannot carry out a direct service interaction.

Current approaches for checking compatibility of workflows, e.g. [3, 11, 17, 21], are based on control-flow and assume that the toy shop and the requestor are incompatible. Current approaches for process mediation, e.g. [2, 5, 15], aim to identify and solve behavioral mismatches from a control-flow aspect. They regard this kind of mismatches as unresolvable [5, 7] and this interaction should fail.

However, if there is a process mediator in the middle considering both control-flow and data-flow, the toy shop and the requestor can carry out an interaction successfully. Since the pricing strategy of the toy shop is flexible, it can give a normal price if it is notified by the process mediator that the requestor will not provide customer information before receiving the price. Thus, the messages exchanged between the toy shop and the requestor can form a mediated service interaction leading from their Start nodes to their End nodes. Figure 2 shows how this mediated service interaction is carried out. For simplicity, the activities which do not contribute to this interaction are not presented.

This example indicates that current approaches, which check behavioral compatibility at a control-flow level, can support direct service interactions only. Current process mediators aim to solve behavioral mismatches at a control-flow level, and are limited to support mediated service interactions. Their major shortcomings are:

- Generally, only a part of activities in a public process will involve in a given interaction. A concept: scenario, is introduced to represent a complete execution path for a public process. A further discussion on how to generate all scenarios for a public process is presented in Section 4.
- Current approaches for process mediation and behavioral compatibility are control-flow based, while data-flow is largely ignored although data-flow is implicitly specified in a public process. To apply data-flow for supporting mediated service interactions, a concept: data dependency graph, is introduced to represent data-flow of a public process or a scenario. A further discussion on data-flow is shown in Section 5.
- Current approaches assume that the activities in a public process or a scenario must be executed following the order specified by its control-flow. In real applications, the execution order of some activities may be
changed if there are no mandatory data dependencies among them. A concept: checkpoint, is introduced to represent a finite set of contiguous activities that can be executed in any order, and another concept: view, for a sequence of checkpoints in a scenario. A further discussion on how to generate a view for a scenario is presented in Section 6.

3. Modeling a public process

Below we give a definition for a public process in which messages and guard functions are the first-class elements.

**Definition 1 (Public Process).** A public process $p$ is the five-tuple $(MSG, ACT, CNT, GRD, ARC)$, where $MSG=\{msg\}$ is a finite set of messages, $ACT=\{act\}$ is a finite set of activities for sending or receiving messages, $CNT=\{Start, Failure, End, Xor\text{-}Split, Xor\text{-}Join, And\text{-}Split, And\text{-}Join\}$ are control elements, $GRD=\{grd\}$ is a finite set of guard functions, and $ARC=\{arc\}$ is a finite set of arcs that connect activities and control elements.

We follow [3] for the function $Polarity(msg)$ to specify whether a message is received if $Polarity(msg)=R$ or sent if $Polarity(msg)=S$. For simplicity but without loss of generality, we assume that a message contains one data. Both activities and control elements are the nodes in a public process. We model a public process as a structured workflow [10]. Figure 3-a to 3-f shows six basic graphical notations for modeling a public process. These notations are supported by JGraphPad, based on which our prototype is implemented. Six ordering structures: sequence, $And$-$Split$/Join, $Xor$-$Split$/Join and $Loop$ are defined by WfMC. $And$-$Split$/Join and $Xor$-$Split$/Join can be modeled directly by Figure 3-e and 3-f. Sequence and $Loop$ are complex structures and can be modeled by our basic notations as shown in Figure 3-g and 3-h.

4. Generating scenarios for a public process

A $Xor$ block in a public process is a sub-process delimited by a $Xor$-$Split$ with its $Xor$-$Join$. Only one path can

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be enabled in a given execution depending on the status of
guard functions. Branch control elements are used for two
purposes: specifying an exclusive relation or modeling a loop. In this section, only Branch control elements that con-
tribute to exclusive relations are considered. Similarly, after
a Branch control element, only one of its branches can be
enabled in a given execution. Exclusive paths or branches
are called as alternative paths to each other. A finite set of
scenarios can be generated for a public process where each
scenario includes only one alternative path in a Xor block
or after a Branch control element.

Regarding to other control elements in a public process,
such as And blocks and Branch control elements for model-
ing loops, since either none or all of their activities will
be executed in a given execution, they are inherited by one
or several scenarios. However, these activities may be ex-
ecuted following different orders in different executions.
This suggests that a scenario may include several complete
execution paths.

Definition 2 (Scenario). A scenario sce is a set of
complete execution paths for a public process p, which
is defined by the five-tuple (MSG_sce, ACT_sce, CNT_sce,
GRD_sce, ARC_sce) generated from those of p. For any node
in a scenario except Start, Failure/End, And_Split, And_Join,
and Branch control elements for modeling loops, it has only
one entering and one leaving edge.

There are two scenarios for the toy shop service, and Fig-
ure 2-a shows one of them. There are two scenarios for the requestor service, and Figure 2-b shows one of them.

5. Optimizing data dependencies into a mini-
mal data dependency graph

Data dependencies of a public process can be extracted
from its specification in terms of a BPEL process [13].
We record data dependencies as mandatory or optional. A
mandatory data dependency means that it must be held
during execution phases. An example is "R: Toy Items" to "S:
Price" in Figure 2-a. An optional data dependency means
that it may, or may not, be held during execution phases.
An example is "R: Customer Information" to "S: Price" in
Figure 2-a. All data dependencies in a public process form
a directed, connected, and acyclic graph, where nodes are
the data and directed links indicate the dependency relations
among data.

Definition 3 (Data Dependency Graph). A data de-
pendency graph dg for a public process (MSG, ACT, CNT,
GRD, ARC) is a directed, connected, and acyclic graph,
which is defined by the two-tuple (DAT_ADG, DE_dg), where
DAT_ADG = \{data\} is a finite set of data generated from
MSG, which are the nodes in this graph. DE_dg = DE_dg^{(M)} \cup
DE_dg^{(O)} a finite set of edges, which are the direct links in
this graph specifying the dependency relations among data.
DE_dg^{(M)} is for mandatory dependencies, and DE_dg^{(O)} is for
optional dependencies.

A data dependency graph defines a finite set of partial-
order relations for data. These relations are asymmetric,
irreflexive and transitive. One data is regarded as manda-
tory (or optionally) dependent on another data if (1) a di-
rect link, which specifies a mandatory (or optional) depen-
dency relation, connects them (called directly dependent),
or (2) several direct links, all of which are mandatory (or
optional) dependency relations, form a path leading from
one data to another (called indirectly dependent). It is pos-
sible that a data is both mandatory and optional dependent
on another data. This suggests that a data dependency
can be represented as a finite set of mandatorily or option-
ally dependent relations. A data dependency graph is called
functionally equivalent to another data dependency graph
if any mandatory or optional dependency relation in one
graph can exist in another graph directly or indirectly. In
a data dependency graph, some dependencies may impose
same dependent relations. If any mandatory (or optional)
dependency relation cannot be specified by other mandato-
ry (or optional) dependency relations, a data dependency
graph is called minimal.

Definition 4 (Minimal Data Dependency Graph). A
minimal data dependency graph dg_{min}: (DAT_{A_{min}},
DE_{min}) is generated from a data dependency graph (DATA,
DE), where DAT_{A_{min}} = DATA, DE_{min} ⊆ DE, and
(DAT_{A_{min}}, DE_{min}) is functionally equivalent to (DATA,
DE), but ∀ de ∈ DE_{min}: (DAT_{A_{min}}, (DE_{min} − {de})) is
not functionally equivalent to (DATA, DE).

Figure 4 shows a data dependency graph for the toy shop,
where the edge O2 shows an optional dependency. A data
dependency graph of a scenario is generated from that of a
public process by removing (1) data that are not related to
this scenario and (2) edges if an edge connects to any data
that is not related to this scenario. In Figure 4, a data depen-
dency graph for a scenario shown in Figure 2-a is marked
with one or two *, and its minimal data dependency graph

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**Figure 4. (Minimal) data dependency graphs for the toy shop service and its scenario**
is marked with **.

6. Generating a view for a scenario

In this section, we firstly introduce the concepts of checkpoint and view. Then, we propose three reduction rules to identify and remove redundant control dependencies in a scenario, and thus to generate checkpoints. Finally, we propose our genView algorithm to generate a view for a scenario using reduction rules recursively with the help of a minimal data dependency graph.

6.1. What is a view?

Before introducing the concept of view, we present a related concept: checkpoint.

Definition 5 (Checkpoint). A checkpoint cp includes a finite set of contiguous activities in a scenario in which data dependencies among them are not mandatory. A checkpoint is defined by the four-tuple (label, ACT, DATA, GRD), where label for its label. ACT for activities, DATA for required data, and GRD for guard functions, are generated from those of the scenario.

Required data can be generated with the help of the minimal data dependency graph of a scenario. For example, M1 in Figure 4 suggests that the data: "R: Toy Items", is required for "S: Price". However, since the data dependency O2 for "R: Customer Information" and "S: Price" is optional, "R: Customer Information" is not required for "S: Price". Table 1 shows six checkpoints for the scenario shown in Figure 2-a.

Table 1. Checkpoints for the scenario shown in Figure 2-a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>label</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>DATA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cp0</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cp1</td>
<td>Receive Toy Items Receive Cust. Info.</td>
<td>data(Receive Toy Items)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cp2</td>
<td>Pick Price</td>
<td>data(Pick Price)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cp3</td>
<td>Receive Payment</td>
<td>data(Receive Cust. Info.) data(Receive Payment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cp4</td>
<td>Invoke Delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cpf</td>
<td>End</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definition 6 (View for a Scenario). A view vw for a scenario (MSGsce, ACTsce, CNTsce, GRDsce, ARCsce) is the five-tuple (MSGvw, CP, cp0, cpf, DEvw), where MSGvw = MSGsce, CP = {cp} is a finite set of checkpoints, cp0 is the initial checkpoint, and cpf is the final one, while DEvw = {de} is a finite set of direct links connecting checkpoints to specify data dependencies among them.

A checkpoint is a point in a view in which the verification is conducted for analysis purposes.

6.2. Reduction rules

Control-flow structures of a scenario specify execution orders of activities. However, the execution of some activities may not follow these orders. An example is "R: Toy Items" and "R: Customer Information" in Figure 2-a since they are not data dependent on each other. Thus, in this section, three reduction rules are presented to identify and remove redundant control dependencies specified by Sequence, And and Loop blocks. Since only one alternate path is enabled for a Xor block and a Branch control element that specifies an exclusive relation, they are functionally equivalent to Sequences.

We follow previous report [19] for the function: fold, for replacing several contiguous nodes by a single node. Data dependencies and guard functions of these nodes are inherited by the folded node. We call a folded node a virtual node, which is shown as a rectangle with dashed lines afterwards. Three reduction rules introduced in this section can be applied to a scenario recursively until no (virtual) nodes can be folded into a virtual node anymore.

Figure 5. Reduction rules for Sequences

Rule 1 (Sequence). A sequence of activities are folded into a virtual node if data dependencies among them are not mandatory.

This rule is shown by Figure 5. Sequence in Figure 5-a indicates that Act1 should be executed before Act2. It is actually a control dependency: Act1 should happen before Act2. However, this control dependency is inappropriate if Act2 is not data dependent on Act1. An example for this rule is the activities "R: Toy Items" and "R: Customer Information" in Figure 2-a.

Figure 6. Reduction rules for And blocks
Rule 2 (And). An And block with its And_Split and And_Join is folded into (1) a virtual node if all activities in each path can be folded into a virtual node or (2) a sequence of virtual nodes otherwise.

An And block indicates that all its paths should be executed in parallel. However, there are no control and data dependencies among activities of different paths. This means that an And block can be converted into a sequence of activities as shown in Figure 6-c.

The rule for And block is presented by Figure 6-a and 6-b. Figure 6-a shows a case that, for any path in an And block, all nodes can be folded into one virtual node. This And block can be folded into a single virtual node. An example is the And block: "S: Payment" and "S: Customer Information", shown in Figure 2-b.

Another case is shown in Figure 6-b. At least one of its paths has more than one activity with mandatory data dependencies among them. Thus, at least one path cannot be folded into a virtual node. This And block can be translated into a sequence of virtual nodes.

Figure 7. Reduction rules for Loop blocks

Rule 3 (Loop). A Loop block is folded into (1) a virtual node if the Loop body can be folded into a virtual node or (2) a sequence of virtual nodes otherwise. Guard functions are defined in the last virtual node for specifying the exit conditions of the Loop block. There are possibly multiple instances for a virtual node during execution phases.

This rule is shown by Figure 7. A Loop block iterates over one or several nodes until its exit conditions are satisfied, but it doesn’t iterate forever in real situations. As suggested by [21], a Loop block can be simulated as a sequence of at most N repetitions of the Loop body, where N depends on a given execution. As shown in Figure 7-a, if all nodes in a Loop body can be folded into one virtual node, this Loop block can be simulated as a single virtual node. Guard functions are defined in this virtual node to specify the exit conditions of this Loop block.

Another case is shown in Figure 7-b. If data dependencies are mandatory and thus a Loop body cannot be folded into one virtual node, the Loop block can only be simulated as a sequence of virtual nodes as shown by Figure 7-b-(ii). Since n is nondeterministic for analysis purposes, we transfer the sequence from Figure 7-b-(ii) to Figure 7-b-(iii) for facilitating the analysis of the Loop block. However, the sequences shown by 7-b-(ii) and Figure 7-b-(iii) are not semantically equivalent. Figure 7-b-(ii) specifies dependencies for (1) Act2-i and Act1-(i+1), (2) Act1-i and Act1-(i+1), and (3) Act2-i and Act2-(i+1). In Figure 7-b-(iii), the first kind of dependencies is preserved, but the latter two are lost. However, the latter two are implicitly satisfied in Figure 7-b-(iii) if the exit conditions of the Loop block are satisfied. Thus, it is reasonable to analyze the Loop block following the sequence as shown in Figure 7-b-(iii).

6.3. Generating a view for a scenario

We propose our genView algorithm to generate a view for a scenario, which applies three reduction rules upon a scenario recursively until no (virtual) nodes can be folded into a virtual node anymore (line 3-9). Afterwards, checkpoints are generated (line 11) and a view is derived (line 10-14). The time complexity of this algorithm is O(n^2), where n is the number of nodes in a scenario, because in the worst case, two (virtual) nodes can be folded into one virtual node at each iteration. This procedure repeats until there are three nodes left, in which one for the initial and another for the final checkpoints. A view for a scenario includes a sequence of checkpoints leading from its initial checkpoint to its final checkpoint.

7. Related work

Related work can be categorized into three types: control-flow, dependency, and view based analysis.

Control-flow based analysis. In [18], the authors recognized that different parts in a process model are often not equally important. Thus, they checked process similarity in terms of typical behaviors, which are typical executions extracted from an event log. This method does not fit for new processes where no event logs can be used for identifying their typical behaviors. Another work [9] presented a framework for supporting workflow intelligence and quality improvement using workcases generated from a workflow, and execution cases discovered from event logs. The workcase is a concept similar to our scenario. In Summary, control-flow is the focus, and data dependencies are largely ignored. These approaches contribute to the generation of scenarios for a workflow only.

Dependency based analysis. Dependency, which specifies an ordering and synchronization relation between activities, is an important and well-studied method for program analysis and optimization. However, few studies have applied dependency for workflow analysis. One work is [22] which proposed data, control, service and cooperation dependencies for describing constraints in a business process. All dependencies are optimized into a minimal dependency
Algorithm 1: genView

\begin{verbatim}
begin
  MSG_vuv ← MSG_sce; sce_cur ← sce; do ← false
  while do = false do
    do ← true
  \end{verbatim}

set for supporting high concurrency and minimal maintenance cost. Control dependencies in this work are functionally equivalent to our guard functions. [13] proposed to extract data dependencies from BPEL processes. These work benefits much to our analysis of dependency graphs. However, the authors did not consider possible conflicts among different kinds of dependencies. For the sake of autonomy and privacy, service and cooperation dependencies may not be available. This effort may unfit for Web service domain.

View based analysis. A process view is an abstract process to support interaction, security, and privacy. A view [4] was proposed to support cross-organizational workflow execution. Workflows and resources can be partially visible to potential partners and thus provide a powerful method for inter-organizational workflow configuration. This view is similar to the public process. Based on the tracking structure of a relative workflow model, a view [24] was proposed to perform workflow tracking across organizational boundaries. Different views can be generated for different organizations based on a pre-existing collaborative business process. This work follows a top-down approach and is not suitable for Web service domain. Another view [16] aimed to selectively hide the details of private processes, to support state-oriented communication, and to facilitate cross-organizational workflow execution. Two types of interactions are supported: unmediated and mediated. A mediator presented in this paper is not designed to solve possible mismatches, but to route messages among processes. It actually acts like a gateway or a message broker. Therefore, a view based approach is promising to support cross-organizational workflow cooperation. However, they investigate more to the relation of public and private processes, rather than to what a public process is.

Taken together, current approaches are helpful for answering our question to some extent but cannot provide a complete solution. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first effort to integrate these three aspects to analyze external behavior of Web services for supporting mediated service interactions.

8. Conclusion and future work

We have discussed that current approaches of checking behavioral compatibility and process mediation are limited to support mediated service interactions, because they mainly focus on control-flow but largely ignore data-flow. We have proposed a scenario-view based approach to analyze external behavior of Web services considering both control-flow and data-flow. A scenario is a set of complete execution paths for a public process. Data dependencies of a public process or a scenario are presented as a data dependency graph, which is optimized into a minimal data dependency graph. A view, which is a sequence of checkpoints, is generated to represent a scenario for analysis purposes. External behavior of a Web service can be described as a finite set of views for supporting mediated service interactions.
This study is our first step towards the support of mediated service interactions, where we check compatibility of Web services from a behavioral aspect. In this direction, we are taking this work further to identify behavioral mismatches and to generate process mediators for solving these behavioral mismatches among Web services, and thus to facilitate mediated service interactions.

Acknowledgments

The work presented in this paper was supported (in part) by the EU funded TripCom Specific Targeted Research Project under Grant No. FP6-027324, and (in part) by the Lion project supported by Science Foundation Ireland under Grant No. SFI/02/CE1/I131.

We thank Brahmananda Sapkota, Hak Lae Kim, Ke Ning and Xia Wang for their valuable comments.

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