

We call the system self-stabilizing if and only if regardless of the initial state and regardless of the privilege selected for the next move, always at least one privilege will be present and the system is guaranteed to find itself in a legitimate state after a finite number of moves. For a long time it has been an open question whether non-trivial (e.g. all states legitimate is considered trivial) self-stabilizing systems could exist. It is not directly obvious whether the local moves can assure convergence towards satisfaction of such a global criterion; the non-determinacy of the privilege selected is an added complication. The question is settled by each of the following three constructs. For brevity's sake the heuristics that lead me to find them the proofs that they satisfy the requirements have been omitted and --to quote Douglas T. Ross's comment on an earlier draft-- "the appreciation is left as an exercise for the reader".

In all three solutions I consider $N+1$ machines, numbered from 0 through N . In order to avoid avoidable subscripts I shall use for machine nr. i :

- L: to refer to the state of its lefthand neighbour, machine nr. $(i+1) \bmod (N+1)$,
- S: to refer to the state of itself, machine nr. i ,
- R: to refer to the state of its righthand neighbour, machine nr. $(i+1) \bmod (N+1)$.

In other words, we confine ourselves to machines placed in a ring; machine nr. 0 will also be called "the bottom machine", machine nr. N will also be called "the top machine". For the legitimate states we have chosen those states in which exactly one privilege is present. In describing the designs we shall use the format: "if privilege then corresponding move f_i ".

Solution with K -state machines ($K \geq N$).

Here each machine state is represented by an integer value S , satisfying $0 \leq S < K$. For each machine, one privilege is defined, viz.

for the bottom machine: if $L = S$ then $S := (S + 1) \bmod K$ f_i

for the other machines: if $L \neq S$ then $S := L$ f_i .

Solution with four-state machines.

Here each machine state is represented by two booleans x_S and u_S . For the bottom machine $u_S = \text{true}$ by definition, for the top machine $u_S = \text{false}$ by definition: these two machines are therefore only two-state machines.

The privileges are defined as follows:

for the bottom machine: if $xS = xR$ and non upR then $xS := \text{non } xS$ fi
 for the top machine: if $xS \neq xL$ then $xS := \text{non } xS$ fi
 for the other machines: if $xS \neq xL$ then $xS := \text{non } xS$; $upS := \text{true}$ fi;
if $xS = xR$ and upS and non upR then $upS := \text{false}$ fi .

The four-state machines may enjoy two privileges. The neighbour relation between bottom and top machine is not exploited; we may merge them into a single machine which is then also a four-state machine for which also two privileges have been defined.

Solution with three-state machines.

Here each machine state is represented by an integer value S , satisfying $0 \leq S < 3$. The privileges are defined as follows:

for the bottom machine: if $(S + 1) \bmod 3 = R$ then $S := (S - 1) \bmod 3$ fi
 for the top machine: if $L = R$ and $(L + 1) \bmod 3 \neq S$ then $S := (L + 1) \bmod 3$ fi
 for the other machines: if $(S + 1) \bmod 3 = L$ then $S := L$ fi;
if $(S + 1) \bmod 3 = R$ then $S := R$ fi .

Again the machines $nr.i$ with $0 < i < N$ may enjoy two privileges, the neighbour relation between bottom and top machine has been exploited.

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