Constraints Specification in Attribute Based Access Control

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ABSTRACT

Recently, attribute based access control (ABAC) has received considerable attention from the security community for its policy flexibility and dynamic decision making capabilities. In ABAC, authorization decisions are made based on various attributes of entities involved in the access (e.g., users, subjects, objects, context, etc.). In an ABAC system, a proper attribute assignment to different entities is necessary for ensuring appropriate access. Should be constrained much like user-role assignments are constrained in Role-Based Access Control. Although considerable research has been conducted on ABAC, so far constraints specification on attribute assignment to entities has not been well-studied in the literature. In this paper, we propose an attribute-based constraints specification language (ABCL) for expressing a variety of constraints on values that different attributes of various entities in the system can take. ABCL can be used to specify constraints on a single attribute or across multiple attributes of a particular entity. Furthermore, constraints on attributes assignment across multiple entities (e.g., attributes of different users) can also be specified. We show that ABCL can specify several well-known constraint policies including separation of duty and cardinality policies. We demonstrate the usefulness of ABCL in different usage scenarios including banking and cloud computing domains. We also discuss enforcement of ABCL constraints and its performance.

Keywords: Attributes, Constraints, Policy, Access Control, Specification, Security, Policy Language, Cloud Computing

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, attribute based access control (ABAC) has been emerging as a flexible form of access control due to its policy-neutral nature (that is, an ability to express different kinds of access control policies including DAC, MAC and RBAC) and dynamic decision making capabilities. Generally, ABAC regulates permissions of users or subjects to access system resources dynamically based on associated authorization rules with a particular permission. A user is able to exercise a permission on an object if the attributes of the user’s subject and the object have a configuration satisfying the authorization rule specified for that permission. Hence, proper attribute assignment to these entities is crucially important in an ABAC system for preventing unintended accesses.

In this paper, we focus on constraint specifications on attribute assignment to the entities in an ABAC based system as a mechanism to determine which entity should get which attribute values. By entities, we refer to users, subjects and objects which are common in access control systems. A user is an abstraction of human being, a subject is an instantiation of a user and can refer to a particular session much like in RBAC and an object is a resource in the system. In general, constraints are an important and powerful mechanism for laying out higher-level access control policies of an organization. While ABAC is policy-neutral, it is also complex to manage. Thus it should have proper constraint specification and enforcement mechanisms in order to effectively configure required access control policies for an organization.

Constraint specification in ABAC is more complex than that in RBAC since there are multiple attributes (unlike a single role attribute in RBAC) and attributes can take different structures (e.g., atomic or single-valued attributes such as security-clearance and bank-balance and set-valued attributes such as role and group). Constraints may exist amongst different values of a set-valued attribute (e.g. mutual exclusion on group memberships) and also on values across different attributes. For instance, suppose that an organization wants only their vice-presidents to get both a top-secret clearance and membership in their board-members email group. The ABAC system should have mechanisms to specify such constraints. In this case, there are three attributes for each user namely role, clearance and group. If the role attribute of a user is not ‘vice-president’, then
the user’s clearance and group attributes cannot take the value of ‘top-secret’ and ‘board-member-emails’ respectively. Note that these constraints are not concerned about users’ access to objects directly. Instead, they focus on high-level requirements that a security architect would specify, which may indirectly translate into enabling or disabling certain accesses.

This is much like separation of duty constraints in RBAC such as a particular employee cannot take both ‘programmer’ and ‘tester’ roles for the same project. Such a constraint eventually prevents the employee from simultaneously working on both developing and testing code for the same project.

In general, the more expressive power a model has, the harder it is (if at all possible) to carry out many types of security analysis. It has already been shown that the safety problem of an ABAC system with infinite value domain of attributes is undecidable. Nevertheless, ABAC is the leading mechanism that overcomes the limitations of discretionary access control (DAC), mandatory access control (MAC), and role-based access control (RBAC). NIST recognizes that ABAC allows an unprecedented amount of flexibility and security that makes it a suitable choice for large and federated enterprises over existing access control mechanisms. Given that ABAC is known to be hard to analyze, constraint specification on attribute values is a powerful means to ensure that essential high-level access control requirements are met in a system that utilizes ABAC.

Our Contributions. We develop an attribute based constraint specification language (ABCL) for specifying constraints on attribute assignments. ABCL provides a mechanism to represent different kinds of conflicting relations amongst attributes in a system in the form of relation-sets. Relation-sets contain different attribute values and ABCL expressions specify constraints on attribute assignments based on these values. There is considerable literature, such as [7, 11, 14, 16, 21, 25, 27], on the utility of attributes in managing various aspects of security in a system. Our work is the first investigation on how attributes can express many types of constraints including those that can be expressed using the role-based constraint language (RCL-2000) and those supported by the NIST standard RBAC model. We demonstrate the usefulness of ABCL in different usage scenarios such as in banking and cloud computing application domains. We also discuss enforcement of ABCL constraints and its performance. We also discuss ABCL enforcement and its performance.

II RELATED WORK

Attribute Based Access Control. There is a sizable literature on ABAC in general. Damiani et al [7] described a framework for ABAC in open environments. Wang et al [27] proposed a framework that models an ABAC system using logic programming with set constraints of a computable set theory. The Flexible access control system [14] can specify various ABAC policies and provide a language that permits the specification of general constraints on authorizations. Yuan et al [28] described ABAC in the aspects of authorization architecture for web services. Lang et al [16] provided informal configuration of DAC, MAC, and RBAC through ABAC in the context of grid computing. These authors seek to develop an access control system either for open systems such as web, Internet, etc., or to overcome the limitations of conventional access control models by utilizing attributes. Park et al [18] categorized attributes according to their mutability during execution of operations and developed a mechanism in which attributes of entities can be updated as a side-effect of an access. More recently, Jin et al [15] proposed an attribute based access control model in which they provide an authorization policy specification language and formal framework using which DAC, MAC and RBAC policies can be expressed. These works focus on ABAC in general and not much on attribute constraints in ABAC.

Constraints. Several authors have focussed on issues in constraints specification in access control systems primarily in RBAC. Constraints in RBAC are often characterized as static separation of duty (SSOD) and dynamic separation of duty (DSOD). These two issues date back to the late 1980’s [6, 22]. A number of attempts initiated afterwards to identify numerous forms of SSOD and DSOD policies [8, 26] and to specify them formally [10, 13] in RBAC systems. The RCL-2000 language for specifying these policies in a comprehensive way was proposed by Ahn et al [1, 14]. More recently, Jin et al [15] proposed an attribute based access control model in which they provide an authorization policy specification language.

1 Several aspects of ABCL have been inspired by RCL-2000, including the use of conflict sets and the oneelement (OE) and allother (AO) operators. By dealing with attributes in general rather than just a single attribute of ‘role’, it will become evident that ABCL goes well beyond RCL in many aspects.
that could also specify constraints on attribute assignment. However, their constraints specification focuses on what values the attributes of subjects and objects may take given that users are currently assigned with particular attribute values. This is much like constraints on what roles can be activated in a user’s session in RBAC given that a user is pre-assigned to a set of roles. Thus, prior work does not address ABAC constraints comprehensively. In this paper, we will show that ABCL can specify various types of constraints for configuring several of these RBAC constraints, including those expressible by RCL-2000 [1].

Attribute Based Encryption. This body of literature concerns cryptographic enforcement mechanisms for attribute based access control systems. Sahani et al [21] introduced the concept of Attribute Based Encryption (ABE) in which an encrypted ciphertext is associated with a set of attributes, and the private key of a user reflects an access policy over attributes. The user can decrypt if the ciphertext’s attributes satisfy the key’s policy. Goyel et al [11] improved expressibility of ABE which supports any monotonic access formula and Ostrovsky [17] enhanced it by including non-monotonic formulas. Several other works examine different ABE schemes.

This paper builds on our preliminary work on attribute based constraint specification language [3]. In [3], we described the basic structure and functionalities of ABCL. In this paper, we extensively discuss ABCL structure including enforcement complexities and performance evaluation. We also discuss the expressiveness of ABCL by configuring a number of well-known RBAC constraints as well as several security requirements in different security domains.

III MOTIVATION AND SCOPE

Attributes can capture identities, security clearances and classifications, roles, as well as location, time, strength of authentication, etc. As such ABAC supplements and subsumes rather than supplants currently dominant access control models including DAC, MAC and RBAC. Figure 1 shows a typical ABAC model structure that contains users (U), subjects (S), objects (O) and different permissions (P). There are also user attributes (UA), subject attributes (SA) and object attributes (OA) associated with users, subjects and objects respectively. A subject is the representation of a user’s particular interaction with the system. Each permission is associated with an attribute-based authorization policy that determines whether a subject should get that permission on an object. An authorization policy compares the necessary subject and object attributes to make an authorization decision. Hence, proper attribute assignment to the entities is crucially important in ABAC.

As discussed in related work, recently, an ABAC model called $ABAC_{\alpha}$ [15] proposed a policy specification language that could specify policies for authorizing a permission as well as constraints on attribute assignment. The constraints of $ABAC_{\alpha}$ are shown in the top row of figure 1(horizontal solid lines with a single arrow-head). These constraints apply to values a subject attribute may take when the subject is created, based on its owning user’s attributes, or an object attribute may get when the object is created or operated-on by a subject. $ABAC_{\alpha}$ constraints apply only when specific events such as a user modifying a subject’s attributes occur. In other words they are event specific. They relate the user attributes to the subject or the subject to the object depending on the event in question. ABCL constraints, on the other hand, are event independent and are to be uniformly enforced no matter what event is causing an attribute value to change. They are specified as restrictions on a single set-valued attribute or restrictions on values of different attributes of the same entity. ABCL constraints are depicted in the top row of figure 1 as arcs with a single arrow-head.

The central concept in ABCL is conflicting relations on attribute values which can be used to express notions such as mutual exclusion, preconditions, and obligations, amongst attribute values. For instance, suppose a banking organization utilizes a set-valued user (customer) attribute called benefit whose allowed values are \{‘bf1’, ‘bf2’, ..., ‘bf6’\}. Say that the bank wants to specify the following constraints: (a) a client cannot get both benefits ‘bf1’ and ‘bf2’, (b) a client cannot get more than 2 benefits from the subset \{‘bf1’, ‘bf3’, ‘bf4’\}, and (c) in order to get ‘bf6’ the client first needs to get ‘bf3’. Here, the first policy represents a mutual exclusion conflict between ‘bf1’ and ‘bf2’, the second one is a cardinality constraint on mutual exclusion and the last one is an example of a precondition constraint. A number of other conflicts among attributes may also exist.
Figure 2: Attributes Relationship Hierarchy

Figure 2 gives a hierarchical classification of the attribute conflict-relationships based on two parameters: the number of entities and the number of attributes of concern in a conflict relation. For example, each constraint in level 0 is concerned with conflicts among values of a single user attribute and it applies to each user independently. Level 1 allows constraints across different attributes of a single user. In level 2, constraints evaluate conflicting values of each attribute individually but across multiple users and in level 3 it can be across different attributes across multiple users. For instance, in the previous banking example, if a constraint restricts both benefits ‘bf1’ and ‘bf2’ from offering to a client simultaneously, the constraint falls in level 0. Section V-4 shows examples of several other constraints those fall in different levels of the relationship hierarchy. Again, further discussion of this hierarchical model and corresponding ABCL based functional requirements is given in section IV-5.

In the following sections, we present ABCL formalization and discuss them for user attributes in an ABAC model. However, ABCL is capable of expressing attribute assignment constraints of other entities as well, e.g., subject and objects. Without the loss of generality, we focus exclusively on user attributes in this paper.

IV ATTRIBUTE BASED CONSTRAINT LANGUAGE (ABCL)

We now formally present the elements of ABCL. ABCL consists of three basic components: the attributes of different entities in an ABAC model, a few basic sets and functions to capture different relationships amongst attributes, and a language for specifying constraints using basic sets and functions.

1 BASIC COMPONENTS OF THE ABCL MODEL

For the purpose of this paper, we use the basic framework of the ABAC model as a representative ABAC model for ABCL. However, note that ABCL is not tailored for ABAC and can be similarly applied to other ABAC models.
In order to specify these two types of conflict, **ABCL** facilitates the specification of two type of sets that may contain conflicting values for single and cross-attribute conflicts respectively and a formal language for precisely specifying constraints based on these conflicts. We discuss these sets in this subsection and the language in the following.

### 2 BASIC SETS AND FUNCTIONS OF **ABCL**

Attribute conflict can occur in several ways. **ABCL** recognizes two types of conflict: values that have conflict with other values of the same attribute (referred to as single-attribute conflict) and values having conflict with the values of other attributes (cross-attribute conflict). Note that single-attribute conflict is applicable only for set-valued attributes (e.g. mutual-exclusive roles) while cross-attribute conflict applies to both atomic and set-valued attributes.

In order to specify these two types of conflict, **ABCL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Derived Functions from Basic <strong>ABAC</strong> Sets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For each att ∈ UA and attType(att)=set there are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zero or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribute Set U,att = {avset1, avset2, ..., avsetn}, where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avseti = (attval, limit) in which attval ∈ Range(att) and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ≤ limit ≤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Attribute Set U,Aatt,Rattset = {attfun1, ..., attfunm}, where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attfuni (att) = (attval, limit) in which att ∈ Aattset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>∪ Rattset and (attval ∈ Range(att)) if attType(att)=set or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attval ∈ Range(att) if attType(att)=atomic and 0 ≤ limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 1 and 2 in table 3 provide the mechanism for declaring sets for single-attribute and cross-attribute conflicts respectively. As shown in item 1, each **Attribute Set** contains a set of values of an attribute that may have a particular type of conflict (mutual exclusion, precondition, inclusion, obligation, etc.). A separate **Attribute Set** for each such conflict could be specified. As previously mentioned, the semantics of the constraints stated with respect to an **Attribute Set** will be discussed in the next subsection. Each element of an **Attribute Set** is an ordered pair (attval, limit) where attval contains the values that have some form of conflict and limit specifies the cardinality, that is the number of values in attval for which the conflict applies. The interpretation of limit could also be different, e.g. at least, exactly, at most, etc. The **Attribute Set** declaration and initialization for the banking example of section III are as follows (the syntax for these expressions is shown in table 4).

### Table 3: Declared **ABCL** Conflict Sets

1. **Expression for declaring sets that represent conflicts among the values of a single attribute**
   - For each att ∈ UA and attType(att)=set there are zero or more
     - Attribute Set U,att = \{avset_1, avset_2, ..., avset_n\}, where
       - avset_i = (attval, limit) in which attval ∈ \(2^{\text{Range}(att)}\) and
       - 1 ≤ limit ≤ |attval|
   - Cross-Attribute Set U,Aatt,Rattset = \{attfun_1, ..., attfun_m\}, where
     - attfun_i (att) = (attval, limit) in which att ∈ Aattset ∪ Rattset and
       - (attval ∈ \(2^{\text{Range}(att)}\)) if attType(att)=set or
       - attval ∈ \(\text{Range}(att)\) if attType(att)=atomic and
       - 0 ≤ limit ≤ |attval|

2. **Expression for declaring sets that represent value conflicts across multiple attributes**
   - For each Aattset ⊆ UA and Rattset ⊆ UA there is zero or more
     - Cross-Attribute Set U,Aatt,Rattset = \{attfun_1, ..., attfun_m\}, where
       - attfun_i (att) = (attval, limit) in which att ∈ Aattset ∪ Rattset and
         - (attval ∈ \(2^{\text{Range}(att)}\)) if attType(att)=set or
         - attval ∈ \(\text{Range}(att)\) if attType(att)=atomic and
         - 0 ≤ limit ≤ |attval|

3. **Expression for declaring sets that represent value conflicts across multiple attributes**
   - For each Aattset ⊆ UA and Rattset ⊆ UA there is zero or more
     - Cross-Attribute Set U,Aatt,Rattset = \{attfun_1, ..., attfun_m\}, where
       - attfun_i (att) = (attval, limit) in which att ∈ Aattset ∪ Rattset and
         - (attval ∈ \(2^{\text{Range}(att)}\)) if attType(att)=set or
         - attval ∈ \(\text{Range}(att)\) if attType(att)=atomic and
         - 0 ≤ limit ≤ |attval|

For specifying **ABCL** constraints, we specify additional derived functions for convenience. For each attribute, we define **assignedEntities**, \(U, att\) (table 2) that identifies the set of users that are assigned a particular value of that attribute. Similar functions can also be declared for subjects and objects.
Table 4: Syntax of Language

Declaration of the Attribute_Set and Cross_Attribute_Set:

\[
\text{<attribute_set_declaration> ::= <attribute_set_type> <set_identifier>}
\]
\[
\text{<attribute_set_type> ::= Attribute_Set,<attname> | Attribute_Set,<attname> | Attribute_SetO,<attname>}
\]
\[
\text{<cross_attribute_set_type> ::= Cross_Attribute_Set,<attname>,<Rattset> | Cross_Attribute_Set,<attname>,<Rattset>}
\]
\[
\text{<Rattset> ::= \{<attname>, <attname>\} | \{<attname>, <attname>\} | \{<attname>, <attname>\}}
\]
\[
\text{<attname> ::= <letter> | <set_identifier><letter> | <set_identifier><digit>}
\]
\[
\text{<digit> ::= 0|1|2|3|4|5|6|7|8|9}
\]
\[
\text{<letter> ::= a|b|c|...|y|z|A|B|C|...|X|Y|Z}
\]

Constraint Expressions:

\[
\text{<statement> ::= <statement> <connective> <statement> | <expression>}
\]
\[
\text{<expression> ::= <token> <atomiccompare> <token> | <token> <atomiccompare> <size>}
\]
\[
\text{<token> ::= <token> <setoperator> <term> | <term> | <term> | <term>}
\]
\[
\text{<term> ::= <function> (<term>) | <attributefun> (<term>) | OE (<relationsets>).<item>}
\]
\[
\text{OE (<term>) | OE (<set>) | AO (<term>) | AO (<set>) | <attval>}
\]
\[
\text{<connective> ::= \& | \Rightarrow}
\]
\[
\text{<setoperator> ::= \in | \cup | \cap | \notin}
\]
\[
\text{<atomiccompare> ::= + | < | > | \geq | \neq | =}
\]
\[
\text{<size> ::= U | S | O}
\]
\[
\text{<relationsets> ::= <set_identifier>}
\]
\[
\text{<attname> ::= u\_a | u\_b | \ldots | u\_y | s\_a | s\_b | \ldots | s\_y | o\_a | \ldots | o\_z}
\]
\[
\text{<attval> ::= \{u\_a\_val_1, u\_a\_val_2, \ldots, s\_a\_val_1, s\_a\_val_2, \ldots, o\_a\_val_1, \ldots, o\_a\_val_2\}}
\]
\[
\text{<size> ::= \varnothing | 1 | \ldots | N}
\]
\[
\text{<item> ::= limit \attval \attfun[<attname>].limit| \attfun[<attname>].\attval}
\]
\[
\text{<attributefun> ::= u\_a | u\_b | \ldots | u\_z | s\_a | s\_b | \ldots | s\_y | o\_a | \ldots | o\_z}
\]
\[
\text{<function> ::= SubCreator | assignedEntitiesU,<attname> | assignedEntitiesS,<attname> | assignedEntitiesO,<attname>}
\]

Among the values of benefit and felony, these relations are represented as another type of relation-set called Cross_Attribute_Set which is formally defined in Table 3 item 2. Each Cross_Attribute_Set is declared for two arbitrary sets of user attributes which are determined at declaration time. These two sets of attributes are represented as Aattset and Rattset and combination of certain values of the attributes in Aattset as a group has specific type of conflicts with certain values of each attribute in Rattset. In other words, values of the attributes of Aattset together restrict the values of each attribute in Rattset. Each element of a Cross_Attribute_Set is a function called attfun that returns the values of the attributes of Aattset and Rattset as an ordered pair (attval, limit) where attval represents the values and limit is the cardinality. Cross_Attribute_Set declaration and initialization for the banking example are as follows (the syntax is shown in table 4).

Cross_Attribute_Set1,Aattset,Rattset UMECFB

Here, Aattset = \{felony\} and Rattset = \{benefit\}

UMECFB = \{attfun1\} where

\[
\text{attfun1(felony)} = (\text{attval, limit})
\]

where attval = \{‘fl’; ‘fl’\} and limit = 1

\[
\text{attfun1(benefit)} = (\text{attval, limit})
\]

where attval = \{‘bf1’\} and limit = 0

Using the set above, one can state if at least one value from \{‘fl1’; ‘fl2’\} is assigned to felony of a user, ‘bf1’ should not be assigned to benefit of that user.

ABCL also has two nondeterministic functions, onelement and allother. The onelement(X) returns one element \(x_i\) from set \(X\) and in a constraint expression it is written as OE(X). Multiple occurrences of OE(X) in a single ABCL expression selects the same element \(x_i\) from \(X\). The allother(X) returns a subset of elements from \(X\) by taking out one element with OE(X). We usually write allother as AO. These two functions are related by context, because for any set \(S\), \{OE(S)\} U AO(S) = S, and at the same time, neither is a deterministic function. An example use of OE is as follows.
Requirement: No user can get more than three benefits.
Expression: $|\text{benefit}(\text{OE}(U))| \leq 3$

$\text{OE}(U)$ means a single user from $U$ and $\text{benefit}(\text{OE}(U))$ returns all benefits that are assigned to that user. This expression ensures that a single user cannot have more than three benefits. Later, we will see how $\text{AO}$ is used in an $\text{ABCL}$ expression.

3 SYNTAX OF $\text{ABCL}$

The syntax of $\text{ABCL}$ is defined by the grammar in table 4 in Backus Normal Form (BNF). The grammar contains declaration syntax for both type of relation-sets $\text{Attribute\_Set}$ and $\text{Cross\_Attribute\_Set}$ and syntax for constraint expressions.

4 $\text{ABCL}$ ENFORCEMENT

Algorithm 1 User Attribute Assignment
1: procedure AssignAttributeToUser($u$, att, attval)
2: if $u \in U$ and att $\in U$ and attval $\in \text{Range(att)}$ then
3: att($u$) $\leftarrow$ att($u$) $\cup$ attval
4: for all cnst $\in \text{ConsExprSet}$ do
5: if Evaluate(cnst) $=$ false then
6: att($u$) $\leftarrow$ att($u$) $\cup$ attval
7: end if
8: end for
9: Return false
10: end procedure

$\text{ABCL}$ constraints are enforced during each attribute assignment to a user as shown in algorithm 1. Here, inputs of the assignment procedure are a user ($u$), attribute name (att) and the value (attval) that needs to be assigned to $u$. The output is true/false with true indicating the requested attribute value can be assigned. The algorithm temporarily assigns attval to $u$ and calls the Evaluate function for each constraint expression in $\text{ConsExprSet}$ to check whether or not the assignment would satisfy the constraint. The Evaluate function evaluates each constraint which is simply a logical formula. If any of the constraints is not satisfied, the attval assignment is not allowed and the function returns false. Otherwise, the function returns true and attval is assigned to $u$. $\text{ConsExprSet}$ contains all $\text{ABCL}$ constraints for the user attributes. Similar to RCL-2000 [1], $\text{ABCL}$ constraints are represented in the form of restricted first order predicate logic ($\text{RFOPL}$) expressions for enforcement. $\text{RFOPL}$ is a restricted version of FOPL that contains only universal quantifiers ($\forall$) where in each expression $\forall$ comes first followed by the predicates. The following is an example of an $\text{ABCL}$ constraint and corresponding $\text{RFOPL}$ expression:

$\text{ABCL}$ Expression: $\text{id} (\text{OE}(U)) \neq \text{id} (\text{OE}(\text{AO}(U)))$

$\text{RFOPL}$ Expression: $\forall u_1 \in U$, $\forall u_2 \in U - u_1$: $\text{id}(u_1) \neq \text{id}(u_2)$

Here, $\text{OE}(U)$ and $\text{OE}(\text{AO}(U))$ is converted to $\forall u_1 \in U \text{ and } \forall u_2 \in U - u_1$ in $\text{RFOPL}$ expression. The general structure of a converted $\text{RFOPL}$ expression from $\text{ABCL}$ is as follows:
1) The expression has a (possibly empty) sequence of universal quantifiers as a left prefix, and these are the only quantifiers.
2) The quantifier part will be followed by a predicate separated by a colon (:) (i.e., universal quantifier part : predicate).
3) The predicate has no free variables or constant symbols. All variables are declared in the quantifier part (e.g., $\forall u \in U$, $\forall cben \in \text{MutualExclusiveBenefit}$, $\forall r \in \text{role}(u)$).
4) Predicate follows all rules in the syntax of $\text{ABCL}$ except the term syntax in table 4. The syntax for term in $\text{RFOPL}$ is as follows in which an element is a variable in quantifier part:

$\text{<term>} ::= \text{<function> } \text{<element>} \mid \text{<attributefun> } \text{<element>} \mid \text{element.}<\text{item}> \mid \text{<set>-<element}> \mid \text{<attval>}$

A loop is created for each quantifier to traverse respective elements and the parser parses predicates of the expression. The following section discusses the $\text{ABCL}$ enforcement complexity.

5 CONSTRAINTS HIERARCHY AND ENFORCEMENT COMPLEXITY

We discuss the enforcement complexity of the $\text{ABCL}$ constraints of each level in attribute conflict-relationship hierarchy.

Level 0 (Single User, Single Attribute): In this level, the system neither contains cross attribute relations nor constraints evaluating those relations. The system needs a set of users ($U$), $\text{Attribute\_Set}$ and functionality to evaluate properties of each user separately (OE). Here, a constraint enforcement complexity is $O(N \times M \times P)$ where $N$ is the number of users, $M$ is the number of elements in respective $\text{Attribute\_Set}$ and $P$ is number of predicates in the expression and their retrieval cost which depends on what data structure has been used.

Level 1 (Single User, Multiple Attributes): Conflict-relations among values across attributes are identified
and maintained and constraints are applied to each user separately. Besides the functionalities of relationship level 0, Cross_Attribute_Sets are needed in this level. The enforcement complexity is $O(N \times (M+O) \times P)$ where $N$ is the number of users, $M$ and $O$ size of Attribute_Set and Cross_Attribute_Set respectively, and $P$ is number of predicates and their retrieval cost.

**Level 2** (Multiple Users, Single Attribute): Constraints are developed based on conflict-relations among values of an attribute and should apply to a set of users combinely. The function $AO$ is required in a constraint expression besides $OE$ for enforcing constraints across different users. The complexity here is $O(N^2 \times M \times P)$. Note that, constraints in this level enable dynamic separation of attribute values across subjects of a single user. For instance, a constraint might say that two subjects of a user cannot get ‘president’ role simultaneously.

**Level 3** (Multiple Users, Multiple Attributes): In this level, all type of constraints can be generated. The complexity is $O(N^2 \times (M+O) \times P)$ and it can specify both single attribute and cross attribute conflicts and enforce within or across users.

V **ABCL USE CASES**

We first show an ABCL instantiation for representing constraints in RBAC system. Then, we present an extensive case study in which a large set of ABCL expressions is generated to capture various access control requirements of a banking organization. Finally, we discuss several security requirements that cloud consumers should consider while running their virtual machines in an Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) public cloud and also provide ABCL specifications for these requirements.

1 **RBAC CONSTRAINTS (RCL-2000 AND NIST-RBAC SOD)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute Name</th>
<th>attType</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$UA$</td>
<td>role</td>
<td>set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SA$</td>
<td>activerole</td>
<td>set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$OA$</td>
<td>permittedrole</td>
<td>set</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Attributes of User, Subject and Object in RBAC

Table 6: Constraint Specification for RBAC SSOD and DSOD

1. **Attribute_Sets Declaration:**

   $Attribute_Set_{U,role}$ ConflictRoles
   
   $ConflictRoles = \{\text{avset}_1, \text{avset}_2, ...\}$ where $\text{avset}_i = (\text{attval}_i, \text{limit})$ where $\text{attval}_i \in \text{Range}(\text{role})$ and $\text{limit} = 1$ (for RCL-2000) or $1 \leq \text{limit} \leq \text{attval}_i$ (for NIST-RBAC)

   $Attribute_Set_{S,activerole}$ ConflictActiveRoles
   
   $ConflictActiveRoles = \{\text{avset}_1, \text{avset}_2, \text{avset}_3, ...\}$ where $\text{avset}_i = (\text{attval}_i, \text{limit})$ where $\text{attval}_i \in \text{Range}(\text{activerole})$ and $\text{limit} = 1$ (for RCL-2000) or $1 \leq \text{limit} \leq \text{attval}_i$ (for NIST-RBAC)

2. **ABCL Expression for SSOD of RCL-2000 and NIST-RBAC**

   **Requirement 1:** No user should be assigned to two roles which are in conflict with each other.

   **Expression:**
   
   $OE(ConflictRoles).attval \cap role(\text{OE}(U)) \leq OE(\text{ConflictRoles}).\text{limit}$

3. **ABCL Expression for DSOD of RCL-2000 and NIST-RBAC**

   **Requirement 1:** A Subject of a user cannot activate roles having conflict with each other.

   **Expression:**
   
   $OE(ConflictActiveRoles).attval \cap activerole(\text{OE}(S)) \leq OE(\text{ConflictActiveRoles}).\text{limit}$

   **Requirement 2:** Subjects of a user cannot activate roles having conflict with each other.

   **Expression:**
   
   $SubCreator(\text{OE}(S)) \Rightarrow [(\text{activerole}(\text{OE}(S)) \cap OE(\text{ConflictActiveRoles}).attval) \cup (\text{activerole}(\text{OE}(AO(S))) \cap OE(\text{ConflictActiveRoles}).attval) \leq OE(\text{ConflictActiveRoles}).\text{limit}$

In RBAC, users create sessions in which they activate certain roles to perform particular tasks. The main constraints in RBAC concerns static and dynamic separation of duty (termed SSOD and DSOD respectively). SSOD is applied on role assignment to users and DSOD is for role activations within or across sessions of a user. An ABAC model could be configured to enforce RBAC by defining only one attribute called role for users, subjects and objects as shown in Table 5. Here, a subject is synonymous to a session in RBAC. Hence, SSOD is applied during a user’s role attribute assignment and DSOD for activerole assignment to subjects by their owners.
Table 6 shows the ABCL expressions for SSOD and DSOD constraints proposed in two well-known RBAC constraint specifications: role based constraint language (RCL-2000) [1] and constraints of NIST-RBAC [9]. RCL-2000 has a set called conflicted role (CR) in which each element of CR is a set of roles having conflict with each other. Here, SSOD and DSOD are maintained by allowing no more than one role assigned to users or activated in any user session respectively from each set element of CR. RCL-2000 also provides a constraint specification language for generating various constraints.

NIST-RBAC includes a cardinality metric with each set element that allows variable number of roles from each conflicted set instead of always allowing only one. In table 6, two instantiations of Attribute_Set, ConflictRoles and ConflictActiveRoles are declared in order to represent conflicted values of role and active-role attributes. Each set element of these sets is an ordered pair (attset, limit) where attset is the conflicted values and limit is the cardinality.

Items 2 and 3 of table 6 shows ABCL constraint expressions for SSOD and DSOD respectively that capture both RCL-2000 and NIST-RBAC requirements. Similar to conflict role-set, RCL-2000 also has a set CU representing different set of conflicting users. ABCL can generalize the concept of conflicting users by introducing a user attribute ucType that represents different types of user conflict. Therefore, instead of identifying each conflicted user and creating a conflict set like CU, the values of ucType determine the conflict group a user belongs to and restrict user-role assignment accordingly.

2 SECURITY POLICY SPECIFICATIONS FOR BANKING ORGANIZATIONS

We present ABCL constraints for several high-level security requirements in a banking organization. Due to the space limitation, we only show constraints for user attribute management in this context. In a banking organization, let us consider a finite set of existing users (U) in which a user is a human being and could be of different types, e.g. client, junior employee.

Table 7 shows different user attributes, their types and ranges in this system. Each user is assigned an attribute id which is a unique identifier. Attribute uType represents the type of a user and orgType represents the organization a user belongs to. There is a role attribute representing various job descriptions of a user such as ‘customer’, ‘cashier’, etc. The bank might provide a number of benefits i.e. bonus, cash back rate, etc, to the customers which is represented by the benefit attribute. Attribute felony represents if the user has any felony record and loan and cCard represent granted loans and credit cards to a user respectively. Suppose that the banking authority wishes to specify the following security policy requirements for user attribute management. The ABCL formalism for these requirements are given in Appendix 1. We also show the conflict-relationship level of each of these constraints.

Req# 1: A user can get at most 5 benefits. (Relationship lev.0)
Req# 2: A user cannot hold the ‘president’ and ‘vice-president’ roles simultaneously. (Lev.0)
Req# 3: A user cannot get both benefits ‘bf1’ and ‘bf2’. (Lev.0)
Req# 4: A user can get at most 5 loans and cCards. (Lev.1)
Req# 5: If a user has felony records ‘fl1’ and ‘fl2’, she cannot get more than one benefit from {bf1, bf2, bf3}. (Lev.1)
Req# 6: If a user is a ‘client’, she cannot get certain roles, e.g. ‘cashier’, ‘manager’. (Lev.1)
Req# 7: No more than 12 users can get a ‘car’ loan. (Lev.2)
Req# 8: ids of two users cannot get the same value. (Lev.2)
Req# 9: If a user has felony ‘fl1’ and belongs to ‘org1’, no users from ‘org1’ can get benefit ‘bf1’. (Lev.3)

3 SECURITY POLICY SPECIFICATION FOR IAAS PUBLIC CLOUD

In an IaaS public cloud, virtual machines (VMs) are provided by a service provider to its clients where the physical servers are shared by multiple clients. Hence, a client VM could be compromised by at least four different types of personnel: (1) malicious adminis-
trative users (admin) of the cloud provider, (2) malicious VMs of a competing client (tenant), (3) client’s own admins, and (4) outsiders from the cloud system. Threats relevant to 3 and 4 are conventional security issues for which well-known protection mechanisms already exists, e.g. firewall, conventional access control policies. Since, threats 1 and 2 are more specific to IaaS public cloud environments, we aim to specify ABCL constraints for mitigating these threats. In an IaaS public cloud, a provider’s admins maliciously or unintentionally may abuse their privileges to compromise consumer’s confidential data. Cloud service providers claim that they are aware of this issue and they have the mitigation mechanisms such as zero tolerance policy and isolating physical access to servers. However, zero tolerance policy is useful only after an attack has occurred. Also, several attacks including stealing of cleartext passwords, private keys, etc. by a malicious admin do not require any physical access 20. Bleikertz et al 4 proposed a privilege management process for cloud admins by proposing three different administrative roles, i.e. hardware-maintenance, remote-maintenance, and security-team, for requiring separation of duties. An admin with remote-maintenance role only has access and responsibility to maintain the servers that run client VMs. However, this mechanism cannot restrict certain administrative actions including restricting same admin from accessing VMs from competing tenants in multi-tenant public cloud. Competing tenants are organizations with conflict of interests, e.g. business competitors, conflicting departments of an organization. Thus, access to the VMs of the competing tenants by same admin might cause (un)intentional critical information flows from one VM to another. Again, a malicious VM of a competing tenant might also launch attack. Ristenpart et al 19 showed a side-channel attack is possible when VMs are co-located on the same server. Berger et al 2 mentioned other attacks, e.g. denial-of-service, could also be initiated by a malicious VM towards other VMs sharing same cloud resources, e.g. hosts, network. Hence, a cloud consumer should demand several security policies from the IaaS cloud providers, e.g. isolate physical location of their VMs from competing tenants VMs, restrict administrative privileges, etc. Below we enumerate several such issues, including those addressed by 2. We categorize them as admin privilege management and VM resources management in IaaS cloud.

A. Security issues related to the VM resources management

1) A consumer tenant wants its high sensitive VMs not be co-located on the same physical server where VMs of its competing tenants reside.

2) A tenant does not want its VMs to connect to a network (VLAN) to which VMs from competing tenants are connected.

3) A group of tenants collaborate together, thus, they want their collaboration-purposed VMs to reside in same server for utilizing several issues, e.g. performance, security, etc.

4) Collaborating tenants wants their VMs to connect to the same network so that they can securely share information.

5) Some VMs of a tenant might require to exchange highly critical data for some reasons. Thus, they need to reside on same physical sever to utilize internal process communication.

6) A tenant wants highly sensitive VMs to reside in different servers so that any kind of service interruption or security issues on that server may only cause partial disruptions.

7) A tenant allows its less sensitive VMs to reside on the same server where VMs of a competing tenant reside. However, during maintenance, these VMs need to be migrated to a server that does not contain any VMs from the competing tenants.

B. Security issues on the admins’ privileges management

1) A tenant does not allow the same admin to access their sensitive VMs if she has access to the competing tenant VMs.

2) In general, an admin cannot maintain more than n tenants.

3) A tenant cannot be managed by more than one sessions (subjects) of an admin simultaneously.

4) An admin cannot access more than n VMs of a tenant simultaneously (e.g. in the same session) for protecting possible aggregation of the critical information.

Appendix 2 shows a set of ABCL constraints for configuring these security issues, eventually, which is a mitigation strategy for the threats a tenant might face from the malicious tenants or provider’s admins. Presently, trust relationship between the cloud providers and clients play a central role on a service level agreement which is nothing but a written contract without proper mechanisms for enforcing these security requirements. ABCL can reduce this trust dependence in which clients can explicitly mention and enforce their security requirements. At the same time, the providers could provide these guarantees as a value-added service by implementing ABCL in their system.
VI PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

In this section, we present experiments aimed at evaluating the performance of our ABCL enforcement algorithm during attribute assignment (discussed in section IV-C). The experiments were conducted on a machine having the following configuration: 2.40GHz with 2GB RAM running a Windows 7 enterprise OS and JDK 1.7. As shown in section IV-C, ABCL constraints are represented as RFOPL expressions for enforcement during attribute assignments to a user and each universal quantifier of an expression generates a loop for traversing respective elements and checks if the constraint holds for those elements.

Here, an element could be a member of the user set (U) or a declared relation-set and the required time for a constraint enforcement during a user attribute assignment depends on the size of these sets.

Simulation scenario: We define three user attributes: att1, att2, and att3 where att1 and att2 are atomic and att3 set valued. We enforce the following two constraints during an attribute assignment to a user (shown in RFOPL format):

1) \( \forall u_1 \in U, \forall u_2 \in U-u_1, \forall ele \in MUatt1: \text{att1}(u_1) \in ele.attval \land \text{att1}(u_2) \in ele.attval \Rightarrow \text{att2}(u_1) \neq \text{att2}(u_2) \).

2) \( \forall u \in U, \forall ele \in MUatt3: \mid \text{att3}(u) \cap ele.attval \mid \leq ele.limit \).

Here, MUatt1 and MUatt3 contain mutual exclusive (ME) values of att1 and att3. Expression 1 says if att1 of two users contains ME values then they can get the same att2 values and expression 2 says a user cannot get ME att3 values. In experiment 1, we compare the required time of our enforcement algorithm when the number of users increase. We vary the number from 50 to 500 users with an increase of 50 at each step and check the required time for an attribute assignment to a user. We separately enforce these two constraints and check the timing. Note that, the size of both MUatt1 and MUatt3 are fixed to 5 elements, hence, execution time varies for the first two quantifiers in constraint 1 and the first quantifier of constraint 2. Figure 4(A) shows the results where constraint 1 takes more time as it applies to multiple users (falls in level 1 of the conflict-relationship hierarchy) while constraint 2 applies to every user separately (falls in level 0). Enforcement time for constraint 1 is 0.3s for 50 users with comparison to 1.27s for 500 users. And, for constraint 2 it is 0.109s to 0.3937s.

Therefore, this process is scalable for a large set of users. In experiment 2, we verify the timing when the number of constraints increase while the total number of users are fixed to 500. Here, all constraints are similar to the constraint 1 which belongs to the hierarchical level 1, thus, applies across users. Figure 4(B) shows the required enforcement time when number of constraints increases from 5 to 30 which is only a 1.84s increase. In experiment 3, we analyze when the elements of a relation-set increases. Here, we enforce constraint 1 with number of users fixed to 500. Therefore, the required time varies only for the 3rd quantifier which depends on the size of MUatt1. Figure 4(C) shows the enforcement time where number of elements in MUatt1 increases from 5 to 30. This causes an increase of 0.91s which is negligible, hence, it proves that the ABCL enforcement algorithm is scalable.

VII CONCLUSION

Relationship constraints among attributes is an important factor for attribute assignment in ABAC. We have developed ABCL for specifying these constraints on attribute assignments. We identified conflict-relationship hierarchy of an attribute based on the functional requirements and complexities to represent these constraint relations. We have shown ABCL configurations for several RBAC constraints that show its relevance in traditional contexts. ABCL configurations for a banking organization provides its expressiveness for generating various constraints for fulfilling an organization’s security requirements. Finally, we have shown ABCL can formally specify constraints in cloud IaaS. In the future, we plan to implement and test ABCL in the OpenStack cloud.

Acknowledgement. This work is partially supported by the NSF (CNS-1111925) and AFOSR MURI grants (FA9550-08-1-0265).
References


Appendix 1. Formal ABCL Specification for Banking Organization

Table 8: Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute Set Declaration and Initialization:</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribute Set ( U ), benefit UMEBenefit</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMEBenefit={avset(_1), avset(_2)}</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>avset(_1)={(bf_1), (bf_2)}, 1}</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>avset(_2)={(bf_3), (bf_4), (bf_5)}, 2}</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribute Set ( U ), role UMERole</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMERole={avset(_1)}</td>
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<tr>
<td>avset(_1)={(\text{president}), (\text{vice-president})}, 1}</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Cross Attribute Set Declaration and Initialization:

Cross Attribute Set \( U \), (\text{uType}, role) UMECTR
UMECTR=[attfun\(_1\), attfun\(_2\)]
attfun\(_1\)\((\text{uType})\)=\{\(\text{client}\)\}, 1\}
attfun\(_1\)\((\text{role})\)=\{\(\text{cashier}\), \(\text{manager}\), \(\text{president}\), \(\text{vice-presidential}\)\}, 0\}

Cross Attribute Set \( U \), (\text{felony}, (\text{benefit}) UMECFB
UMECFB=[attfun\(_1\), attfun\(_2\)]
attfun\(_1\)\((\text{felony})\)=\{\(\text{fl}\_1\), \(\text{fl}\_2\)\}, 2\}
attfun\(_1\)\((\text{benefit})\)=\{\(\text{bf}\_1\), \(\text{bf}\_2\), \(\text{bf}\_3\)\}, 1\}
attfun\(_2\)\((\text{benefit})\)=\{\(\text{bf}\_2\)\}, 0\}

Cross Attribute Set \( U \), (\text{felony}, role) UMECFB
UMECFB=[attfun\(_1\), attfun\(_2\)]
attfun\(_1\)\((\text{felony})\)=\{\(\text{fl}\_1\)\}, 1\}
attfun\(_1\)\((\text{orgType})\)=\{\(\text{org1}\)\}, 1\}
attfun\(_2\)\((\text{benefit})\)=\{\(\text{bf}\_1\)\}, 0\}

Table 8 shows declaration and initialization of the ABCL sets for representing necessary relations among attributes for specifying security policies given in section V. [2]

Table 9 shows sets of administrative users \( U \) and subjects \( S \) where each subject belongs to a particular administrative user. In this system, objects are virtual machines (VM) which are represented as a set \( O \). Table 9 shows user, subject, and object attributes, their types and ranges and the descriptions of their purpose. The declaration and initialization of the required ABCL sets are shown in table 10.

Appendix 2. ABCL Specification for Public IaaS Cloud

In this section, we presents ABCL constraints specification for the security requirements of a public IaaS cloud system which is given in section V. [3]

There are sets of administrative users \( U \) and subjects \( S \) where each subject belongs to a particular administrative user. In this system, objects are virtual machines (VM) which are represented as a set \( O \). Table 9 shows user, subject, and object attributes, their types and ranges and the descriptions of their purpose. The declaration and initialization of the required ABCL sets are shown in table 10.

In SMETnt, OConsTnt and OMETnt contain values of otnt having mutual exclusive and consistency conflicts respectively. ABCL constraints for the policies of section V. [3] are as follows:

A. VM resource management Constraints

Req# 1: High sensitive VMs of a tenant cannot reside on same server that contains VMs from competing tenants

\[ \text{Exp:} \neg\text{sensitivity}(\text{OE}(O))=\text{high} \land \neg\text{otnt}(\text{OE}(O)) \in \text{OE}(\text{OMETnt}), \text{attval} \land \text{otnt}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O))) \in \text{OE}(\text{OMETnt}), \text{attval} \Rightarrow \neg\text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \land \neg\text{server}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O))) \]

Req# 2: VMs of cooperative tenants reside on same server.

\[ \text{Exp:} \neg\text{otnt}(\text{OE}(O)) \in \text{OE}(\text{OConsTnt}), \text{attval} \land \text{otnt}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O))) \in \text{OE}(\text{OConsTnt}), \text{attval} \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \land \neg\text{server}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O))) \]

Req# 3: Similar purpose VMs reside in same server.

\[ \text{Exp:} \neg\text{otnt}(\text{OE}(O))=\text{otnt}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O))) \land \neg\text{purposerType}(\text{OE}(O)) \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \land \neg\text{server}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O))) \]

Req# 4: High sensitive VMs of tenants are located to different servers.

\[ \text{Exp:} \neg\text{sensitivity}(\text{OE}(O))=\text{high} \land \neg\text{otnt}(\text{OE}(O)) \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \land \neg\text{server}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O))) \]

Req# 5: Less sensitive VM of a tenant cannot reside in same server of a competing tenant during maintenance.

\[ \text{Exp:} \neg\text{status}(\text{OE}(O))=\text{'maintenance'} \land \neg\text{sensitivity}(\text{OE}(O))=\text{low} \land \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \Rightarrow \text{server}(\text{OE}(O)) \land \neg\text{server}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O))) \]

Req# 6: |OE(UMECTR)(\text{uType}).\text{attset} \land \text{role}(\text{OE}(U))| \leq \text{OE}(UMECTR)(\text{uType}).\text{limit} \Rightarrow |\text{OE}(UMECTR)(\text{role}).\text{attset} \land \text{benefit}(\text{OE}(U))| \leq \text{OE}(UMECTR)(\text{role}).\text{limit} \]

Req# 7: |\text{assignedEntities}| \leq 12

Req# 8: \text{id}(\text{OE}(U)) \neq \text{id}(\text{OE}(\text{AO}(O)))
Table 9: Attributes

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Table 10: ABCL Sets Declaration and Initialization:

1. Attribute_Set Declaration and Initialization:

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2. Cross_Attribute_Set Declaration and Initialization:

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