Scheduling independent stochastic tasks on heterogeneous cloud platforms
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To cite this version:
Yiqin Gao, Louis-Claude Canon, Yves Robert, Frédéric Vivien. Scheduling independent stochastic tasks on heterogeneous cloud platforms. IEEE Cluster 2019 - International Conference on Cluster Computing, Sep 2019, Albuquerque, United States. pp.1-11, 10.1109/CLUSTER.2019.8891048 . hal-02271675

HAL Id: hal-02271675
https://inria.hal.science/hal-02271675
Submitted on 27 Aug 2019

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Abstract—This work introduces scheduling strategies to maximize the expected number of independent tasks that can be executed on a cloud platform within a given budget and under a deadline constraint. The cloud platform is composed of several types of virtual machines (VMs), where each type has a unit execution cost that depends upon its characteristics. The amount of budget spent during the execution of a task on a given VM is the product of its execution length by the unit execution cost of that VM. The execution lengths of tasks follow a variety of standard probability distributions (exponential, uniform, half-normal, etc.), which is known beforehand and whose mean and standard deviation both depend upon the VM type. Finally, there is a global available budget and a deadline constraint, and the goal is to successfully execute as many tasks as possible before the deadline is reached or the budget is exhausted (whichever comes first). On each VM, the scheduler can decide at any instant to interrupt the execution of a (long) running task and to launch a new one, but the budget already spent for the interrupted task is lost. The main questions are which VMs to enroll, and whether and when to interrupt tasks that have been executing for some time. We assess the complexity of the problem by showing its NP-complete and providing a 2-approximation for the asymptotic case where budget and deadline both tend to infinity. Then we introduce several heuristics and compare their performance by running an extensive set of simulations.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the following problem: given a cloud platform and a bag of stochastic tasks, how to maximize the number of successful task executions, given a budget and a deadline. The cloud platform is composed of several Virtual Machine (VM) types, each with a different unit cost and computing capacity. The execution time of the tasks follows a different probability distribution on each VM type, in order to account for their different performance. For instance, the expectation of the distribution of task durations on a given VM can be inversely proportional to the raw speed of that VM, while the standard deviation can account for the interplay between task profiles and VM parameters, such as memory usage, communication pattern, etc. In the paper, we use an extensive set of widely used distributions, namely exponential, uniform, half-normal, lognormal, gamma, inverse-gamma and Weibull distributions.

This task model assumes that some tasks may not be executed in the end. In fact, there are three cases: (i) some tasks are launched and reach completion, meaning that they are successfully executed; (ii) some tasks are launched but they are interrupted before completion, meaning that their execution has failed; and (iii) some tasks are not launched at all. The objective is to maximize the number of successful tasks, given the deadline and budget constraints. This scheduling problem naturally arises with many applications in the context of information retrieval (see Section II for a detailed discussion). Informally, the goal is to extract as much information as possible, by launching analysis tasks whose execution time strongly depends upon the nature of the data sample being processed. A typical example is a set of image files, whose processing times heavily depend upon the elements that are present (or not) within each image. Not all data samples must be processed, but the larger the number of data samples successfully processed, the more accurate the analysis.

Furthermore, this task model is closely related to imprecise computations [2], [13], [27], particularly in the context of real-time computations. In imprecise computations, it is not necessary for all tasks to be completely processed to obtain a meaningful result. Most often, tasks in imprecise computations are divided into a mandatory and an optional part: while the execution of all mandatory parts is necessary, the execution of optional parts is decided by the user. Often, the user has not the time or the budget to execute all optional parts, and she must select which ones to execute. Our work perfectly corresponds to optimizing the processing of the optional parts. Among domains where tasks may have optional parts (or where some tasks may be entirely optional), one can cite recognition and mining applications [32], robotic systems [23], speech processing [16]; and [26] also cites multimedia processing, planning, artificial intelligence, and database systems. In these applications, the processing times of the optional parts are heavily data-dependent, hence the need to estimate them via a probability distribution.

With a single VM, the problem is to decide whether, and when, to interrupt a long-lasting task, with the hope to launch a new one that would execute faster. Of course this is a risky decision, because: (i) the time and budget already spent to execute the current task will be lost if it gets interrupted; and (ii) there is no guarantee that the new task will complete faster than the interrupted one. This problem was studied in our previous work [9], which showed that there exists an optimal threshold at which each running task should be interrupted. Interrupting each yet unsuccessful task when it reaches this optimal cutting threshold is shown to maximize the expected success rate on the VM, i.e., the average number of tasks...
successfully executed per time unit. This cutting threshold
depends upon the probability distribution of task execution
times and is computed numerically.

With several VMs of different types, the problem becomes
dramatically more complicated, because we have to decide
how many VMs to enroll, and of which type. In addition to
success rate, the unit cost of the VM plays an important role.
In fact, the key parameter is the yield, defined as the ratio of
the success rate over the unit cost: it gives the expected number
of successful tasks per budget unit. Intuitively, one would like
to sort available VMs by non-decreasing yields, and greedily
enroll them in this order. With this greedy algorithm, there re-
 mains to determine how many VMs to enroll. We show how to
determine this number and call Greedy the resulting greedy
algorithm with the optimal number of VMs. Unfortunately,
Greedy is not optimal. In fact, we show that the problem
to decide which VM to enroll is NP-complete, but we also
show that Greedy is guaranteed to be a 2-approximation.
These results lay the foundation for the complexity of the
problem with several VMs. On the practical side, we compare
Greedy with a variety of other heuristics, using an extensive
set of simulations, and observe that it always achieve a close-
to-optimal performance, which makes it the heuristic of choice
for the target optimization problem.

The main contributions of this work are the following:
• We provide several theoretical results (NP-completeness,
 approximation algorithm Greedy and performance lower bound) for the problem instance with large budget
and deadline. These results show the difficulty of the opt-
imization problem under study, and lay the foundations
for its analysis;
• We compare the performance of Greedy to that of
several heuristics for the general problem with arbitrary
deadline and budget values, and for all the probability
distributions mentioned above. Not only Greedy is
superior to the other heuristics, but its performance is very
close to the lower bound on most instances. Altogether,
Greedy provides a robust approach to the problem.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section II
surveys related work. We detail the framework and objective
in Section III, and recall prior strategies for interrupting tasks on
a given VM in Section IV. We provide complexity results (NP-
completeness and 2-approximation algorithm) in Section V.
We compare these heuristics in Section VI, assessing their
performance for an extensive set of simulation parameters.
Finally, we provide concluding remarks and directions for
future work in Section VII.

II. RELATED WORK

This work falls under the scope of cloud computing since it
targets the execution of sets of independent tasks on a cloud
platform under deadline and budget constraints. However,
because we do not assume to know in advance the exact
execution time of tasks (we are in a non-clairvoyant setting
and know only its distribution), this work is also closely related
to the scheduling of bags of tasks. We survey both topics in
Sections II-A and II-B. Finally, in Section II-C, we survey task
models that are closely related to our model.

A. Cloud computing

There exists a huge literature on cloud computing, and
several surveys review this collection of work [4], [37], [38].
Singh and Chana published a recent survey devoted solely to
cloud resource provisioning [37], that is, the decision of which
resources should be enrolled to perform the computations.
Resource provisioning is often a separate phase from resource
scheduling. Resource scheduling decides which computations
should be processed by each of the enrolled resources and in
which order they should be performed.

Resource provisioning and scheduling are key steps to the
efficient execution of workflows on cloud platforms. The
multi-objective scheduling problem that consists in meeting
deadlines and either respecting a budget or minimizing the
cost (or energy) has been extensively studied for deterministic
workflows [1], [3], [6], [7], [14], [20], [29], [30], [41], but
has received much less attention in a stochastic context.
Indeed, most of the studies assume a clairvoyant setting: the
resource provisioning and task scheduling mechanisms know
in advance, and accurately, the execution time of all tasks.
A handful of additional studies also consider that tasks may
fail [28], [36]. Among these articles, Pooda et al. [36] differ
as they assume that tasks have uncertain execution times.
However, they assume they know these execution times with a
rather good accuracy (the standard deviation of the uncertainty
is 10% of the expected execution time). They are thus dealing
with uncertainties rather than a true non-clairvoyant setting.
The work in [8] targets stochastic tasks but is limited to taking
static decisions (no task interruption).

Some works are limited to a particular type of application
like MapReduce [24], [39]. For instance, Tian and Chen [39]
consider MapReduce programs and can either minimize the
financial cost while matching a deadline or minimize the
execution time while enforcing a given budget.

Our task model applies to compute-bound tasks because
we do not account for communication times and instead
assume that they are negligible in front of computation times.
However, we refine the classical deterministic model by adding
stochasticity to task execution times.

B. Bags of tasks

A bag of tasks is an application comprising a set of
independent tasks sharing some common characteristics: ei-
ther all tasks have the same execution time or they are
instances coming from a same distribution. Several works
devoted to bag-of-tasks processing explicitly target cloud
computing [22], [35]. Some of them consider the classical
clairvoyant model [22] (while [12] targets a non-clairvoyant
setting). A group of authors including Oprescu and Kiellmann
have published several studies focusing on budget-constrained
makespan minimization in a non clairvoyant settings [33–
[35]. They do not assume they know the distribution of
execution times but try to learn it on the fly [33], [34].
This work differs from ours as these authors do not consider deadlines. For instance, in [35], the objective is to try to complete all tasks, possibly using replication on faster VMs, and, in case the proposed solution fails to achieve this goal, to complete as many tasks as possible. The implied assumption is that all tasks can be completed within the budget. We implicitly assume the opposite: there are too many tasks to complete all of them by the deadline, and therefore we attempt to complete as many as possible; we avoid replication, which would be a waste of resources.

Vecchiola et al. [40] consider a single application comprising independent tasks with deadlines but without any budget constraints. In their model, tasks are supposed to have different execution times but they only consider the average execution time of tasks rather than its probability distribution (this is left for future work); moreover, they do not report on the amount of deadline violations. Mao et al. [31] consider both deadline and budget constrained provisioning and assume they know the tasks execution times up to some small variation (the largest standard deviation of a task execution time is at most 20% of its expected execution time). Hence, this work is more related to scheduling under uncertainties than to nonclairvoyant scheduling.

C. Task model

Our task model assumes that some tasks may not be executed. This model is very closely related to imprecise computations [2, 13, 27]. Furthermore, this task model also corresponds to the overload case of [5] where jobs can be skipped or aborted. Another, related model, is that of anytime tasks [25] where a task can be interrupted at any time, with the assumption that the longer the running, the higher the quality of its output. Such a model requires a function relating the time spent to a notion of reward. Finally, we note that the general problem related to interrupting tasks falls into the scope of optimal stopping, the theory that consists in selecting a date to take an action, in order to optimize a reward [17].

Altogether, the present study appears to be unique because it uses a semi non-clairvoyant framework and assumes an overall deadline in addition to a budget constraint. Our previous work [9] had the same setting but was limited to identical VMs, while the key problem studied in the paper is the selection of an efficient set of VMs among those available in the target cloud platform.

III. PROBLEM DEFINITION

This section details the framework and the scheduling objective. See Table I for a summary of main notations.

A. Platform and tasks

We aim at scheduling a set of independent stochastic tasks all available at time zero on a cloud platform. The cloud platform is composed of a set of different VMs, each with their own characteristics. In the abstract formulation of the problem, there is a set $P = \{VM_1, VM_2, \ldots, VM_M\}$ of $M$ VMs. Each VM has a unit cost: $c_i$ is the amount of budget spent per unit of time for executing a task on VM$_i$. The execution time of a task on VM$_i$ obeys a probability distribution $D_i$, which is known beforehand and chosen as a probability distribution whose mean and standard deviation both depend on the characteristics of VM$_i$. The rationale for such a framework is the following. First, we assume that task execution times are data-dependent, as is the case in many applications (see Section II), and therefore exhibit stochastic behaviors which can be nicely modeled by a probability distribution. Second, task execution times cannot be easily encapsulated as a mere function of the number of cores of their host VM, because many parameters such as memory usage and communication patterns must be taken into account. Therefore, it would not make sense to consider a unique probability distribution and simply scale it by a unique parameter, say the number of cores of each VM, to induce actual execution times on that VM. Instead, we use a different probability distribution for each VM, with values of mean and standard deviation accounting for heterogeneity sources. It makes sense to assume that the mean $\mu_i$ of $D_i$, which is the expectation of execution times on VM$_i$, is somewhat related to the number of cores $nbcores_i$ of VM$_i$. In the experimental section (Section VI), we explore scenarios where mean values $\mu_i$ are inversely proportional to core counts $nbcores_i$, but we vary standard deviations $\sigma_i$ to account for a wide range of heterogeneity degrees. We report results for a variety of standard probability distributions (exponential, uniform, half-normal, lognormal, gamma, inverse-gamma and Weibull). Finally, in many experimental cloud platforms, there is only a reduced set of different VM types, with several available identical VMs per type. We let $k$ be the number of types and $m_j$ be the number of available VMs for type $j$, where $\sum_{j=1}^{k} m_j = M$.

B. Constraints and optimization objective

The user has a limited budget $b$ and an execution deadline $d$. The optimization problem is to select a subset of VMs and to maximize the expected number of tasks that can be successfully completed on these VMs before the deadline is
reached or the totality of the budget is spent. More precisely, the optimization problem \( \text{Opt}(\mathcal{P}, b, d) \) is the following:

- Decide which VMs to launch: it can be any subset of \( \mathcal{P} \);
- Each VM in \( \mathcal{P} \) executes tasks continuously, as soon as it is started and until the deadline or the budget is exceeded, whichever comes first;
- At any time and on each VM, decide whether to interrupt the task that is currently executing and launch a new one: each task can be deleted by the scheduler at any time before completion;
- The execution of each task is non-preemptive. In a non-preemptive execution, interrupted tasks cannot be re-launched, and the time/budget spent computing until interruption is completely lost.

IV. Cutting threshold

In this section, we discuss scheduling strategies that decide to interrupt a task when its execution time reaches a given threshold. Consider a given VM and a continuous distribution \( D \) for execution times on that VM, with expected value \( \mu \) and standard deviation \( \sigma \). We start with some classical strategies:

- **MeanVariance**\( (x) \) is the family of heuristics that interrupt a task as soon as its execution time reaches \( \mu + x\sigma \), where \( x \) is some constant (positive or negative).
- **Quantile**\( (x) \) is the family of heuristics that interrupt a task when its execution time reaches the \( x \)-quantile of the distribution \( D \), with \( 0 \leq x \leq 1 \).
- **NeverInterrupt** is the baseline heuristic that never interrupts tasks; more precisely, to avoid outliers, **NeverInterrupt** interrupts a task when its execution reaches 100 times the mean value of the distribution.

Our previous work [9] introduced the \textsc{OptRatio} heuristic which works as follows: Let \( F(x) \) be the cumulative distribution function and \( f(x) \) its probability density function of \( D \). \textsc{OptRatio} interrupts all (unsuccessful) tasks at time

\[
\ell_{\text{max}} = \arg \max_l S(l) \text{ where } S(l) = \frac{F(l)}{\int_0^l xf(x)dx + l(1 - F(l))}.
\]

The idea behind \textsc{OptRatio} is that it maximizes (asymptotically) the ratio \( S(l) \) of the probability of success (namely \( F(l) \)) to the expected execution time spent for a single task, when each task is interrupted at time \( l \) (i.e., \( \int_0^l xf(x)dx \) for the cases when the task terminates sooner than \( l \) and \( \int_0^\infty l f(x)dx = l(1 - F(l)) \) otherwise). \textsc{OptRatio} has been shown to perform very well for a wide range of budget and deadline values [9].

For most distributions, we cannot compute \( \ell_{\text{max}} \) analytically, but we provide a program [10] to compute it numerically. For example, take a lognormal \((\alpha, \beta)\) distribution: when \( \mu = 1 \) and \( \sigma = 3 \) we find \( \ell_{\text{max}} \approx 0.1 \). We prove the following characterization of \( \ell_{\text{max}} \) for exponential and uniform distributions (see the extended version [19] for the proof):

**Proposition 1.** For the distribution \( \exp(\lambda) \), \( S(l) = \lambda = \frac{1}{\mu} \) for all values of \( l \), and \( \ell_{\text{max}} \) can be chosen arbitrarily (interrupt tasks at any time). For the distribution uniform\((a, b)\), \( \ell_{\text{max}} = b \) and \( S(\ell_{\text{max}}) = \frac{1}{a + b} = \frac{1}{\mu} \) (never interrupt tasks).

V. Complexity results

In this section, we present complexity results with several VMs, assuming large budget and deadline values. We start by formulating the asymptotic optimization problem in Section V-A. We assess its complexity in Section V-B. Then we introduce a greedy polynomial heuristic in Section V-C, and show that it is a 2-approximation.

A. Problem instance with \( b = Kd \)

Consider a given VM \( V_M_i \in \mathcal{P} \). Given the distribution \( D_i \) of task execution times on \( V_M_i \), we choose a cutting threshold \( \ell_i^{\text{cut}} \) at which to interrupt tasks, using any of methods in Section IV (for instance, we take \( \ell_i^{\text{cut}} = \ell_i^{\text{max}} \)), the value computed for \textsc{OptRatio}. We then derive the (asymptotic) success rate \( S_i \) (average number of successful tasks per unit time) and the yield \( \gamma_i = \frac{c_i}{\ell_i^{\text{max}}} \) (average number of successful tasks per cost unit), where \( c_i \) is the unit cost of \( V_M_i \). The asymptotic behavior of \( V_M_i \) is characterized by these two parameters. With several VMs, if there is no deadline, the best solution is to use a single VM, namely the one with highest yield \( \gamma_i \). Introducing a deadline makes parallelism unavoidable, and raises the question of selecting which VMs to enroll. In the following, we assume that budget and deadline are proportional: \( b = Kd \) for some constant \( K \geq 1 \), and aim at deriving asymptotic results when \( b \) tends to infinity under that constraint. Intuitively, \( K \) represents the total cost per time unit available until deadline \( d \), hence the potential parallelism that can be achieved.

Now assume that we enroll a subset \( Q = \{V_M_i, i \in Q\} \) of VMs from \( \mathcal{P} \). Here, \( Q \) simply represents the subset of \( \{1, 2, \ldots, M\} \) that records the indices of enrolled VMs. These VMs will work continuously until the budget is exhausted or the deadline has been reached, whichever comes first. If the VMs in \( Q \) work for a duration \( t \), the total budget spent is\n
\[
t = \min\left(\frac{b}{\sum_{i \in Q} c_i}, \frac{b}{\max(K, \sum_{i \in Q} c_i)}\right).
\]

Asymptotically, each VM\( _i \), with \( i \in Q \), is successfully executing \( S_i \) task per unit time, hence the total yield of subset \( Q \) is

\[
\gamma^{\text{tot}} = \frac{\sum_{i \in Q} S_i}{\max(K, \sum_{i \in Q} c_i)}.
\]

We are ready to define the asymptotic optimization problem (when \( b \) tends to infinity) with several VMs:

**Definition 1 (OptHetero).** Given the set \( \mathcal{P} \) of available VMs and the constraint \( b = Kd \), determine the subset \( Q \) of \( \mathcal{P} \) so that the value of \( \gamma^{\text{tot}} \) in Equation (2) is maximized.
B. NP-completeness

In this section, we show that the decision problem associated to the asymptotic problem \textsc{OptHetero} is NP-complete. For simplicity, we use the same name for the decision and optimization problems.

**Theorem 1.** \textsc{OptHetero} is NP-complete.

**Proof.** The decision problem is the following: given the set \( \mathcal{P} \) of available VMs and the constraint \( b = Kd \), and given a bound on the total yield \( Z \), can we find a subset \( Q \) of \( \mathcal{P} \) with total yield \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} \geq Z \)? The problem obviously belongs to the class NP, a certificate being the subset of enrolled VMs, whose yield can be computed in linear time. For the completeness, we make a reduction from \textsc{SubsetSum}, a well-known NP-complete problem [21]. Consider an instance \( I_1 \) of \textsc{SubsetSum}: given \( n \) positive integers \( a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_n \) and a target \( T \), can we find a subset \( J \) of \( \{1, 2, \ldots, n\} \) such that \( \sum_{i\in J} a_i = T \)? We build the following instance \( I_2 \) of \textsc{OptHetero}: a platform \( \mathcal{P} \) with \( M = n + 1 \) VMs, budget/deadline constraint \( b = Kd \) where \( K = T + 1 \). VM characteristics are the following:

- \( \text{VM}_i \), for \( 1 \leq i \leq n \), has success rate \( S_i = Ka_i \) and unit cost \( c_i = a_i \);
- \( \text{VM}_{n+1} \) has success rate \( S_{n+1} = 2K \) and unit cost \( c_{n+1} = 1 \).

Finally, the bound on total yield is \( Z = K + 1 \). The size of \( I_2 \) is clearly polynomial (and even linear) in the size of \( I_1 \). We now show that \( I_2 \) has a solution if and only if \( I_2 \) has a solution. Assume first that \( I_2 \) has a solution, i.e., a subset \( J \) with \( \sum_{i\in J} a_i = T \). If we enroll all VMs whose index is in \( J \) plus \( \text{VM}_{n+1} \), we obtain the total yield

\[
\gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{\sum_{i\in J} Ka_i + 2K}{\max(K, \sum_{i\in J} a_i + 1)} = \frac{KT + 2K}{\max(K, T + 1)} = K + 1.
\]

Hence, a solution to \( I_2 \).

Assume now that \( I_2 \) has a solution, i.e., an index subset \( Q \) with total yield \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} \geq Z = K + 1 \). If the last VM is not enrolled, i.e., if \( n + 1 \notin Q \), then \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{\sum_{i\in Q} Ka_i}{\max(K, \sum_{i\in Q} a_i)} \leq K \), a contradiction. Hence, necessarily \( n + 1 \in Q \). Let \( J = Q \setminus \{n + 1\} \), we are going to show that \( J \) is a solution of \( I_1 \). We know that

\[
\gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{\sum_{i\in J} Ka_i + 2K}{\max(K, \sum_{i\in J} a_i + 1)} \geq K + 1.
\]

Let \( U = \sum_{i\in J} a_i \). If \( U \geq K \) then \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{KU + 2K}{U + 1} = K + \frac{KU}{U + 1} < K + 1 \), a contradiction. If \( U \leq K - 2 \) then \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{KU + 2K}{U} = U + 2 < K + 1 \), a contradiction. Hence, \( U = K - 1 = T \), and \( J \) is a solution to \( I_1 \). This concludes the proof. \( \square \)

C. Greedy heuristic

The \textsc{OptHetero} problem is similar to a knapsack problem, and a natural heuristic is to enroll VMs with highest yield first. Table II shows a little example with a platform \( \mathcal{P} \) consisting of \( M = 5 \) VMs. We use \( K = 5 \) in the example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VM</th>
<th>Success rate</th>
<th>Unit cost</th>
<th>Yield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VM1</td>
<td>S1 = 10</td>
<td>c1 = 1</td>
<td>Y1 = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VM2</td>
<td>S2 = 6.2</td>
<td>c2 = 3</td>
<td>Y2 ≈ 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VM3</td>
<td>S3 = 8</td>
<td>c3 = 4</td>
<td>Y3 = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VM4</td>
<td>S4 = 6</td>
<td>c4 = 4</td>
<td>Y4 = 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VM5</td>
<td>S5 = 4</td>
<td>c4 = 4</td>
<td>Y5 = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table II, VMs are ordered by non-decreasing yield, so the greedy heuristic selects VM1 first, then VM2, etc. The performance achieved is the following:

- Using only VM1: \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{10}{\max(5,1)} = 2 \);
- Using VM1 and VM2: \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{10+6.2}{\max(5,1,3)} = 3.24 \);
- Using VM1, VM2 and VM3: \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{10+6.2+8}{\max(5,1,3,4)} = 3.025 \);
- Using VM1, VM2, VM3 and VM4: \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{10+6.2+8+6}{\max(5,1,3,4,4)} \approx 2.5167 \);
- Using all five VMs: \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{10+6.2+8+6+4+4}{\max(5,1,3,4,4,4)} \approx 2.1375 \).

In the example, the best choice is to use only VM1 and VM2, for a total yield \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = 3.24 \). In the following, we characterize how many VMs should be chosen. Finally, note that in the example, the optimal solution is to use only VM1 and VM3, for a total yield \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} = \frac{10+8}{5} = 3.6 \).

**Proposition 2.** Consider a platform \( \mathcal{P} \) with \( M \) VMs ordered by non-increasing yields and with the constraint \( b = Kd \). The total yield \( \gamma_{\text{tot}} \) achieved by the greedy heuristic is maximum when enrolling either the first \( i^* - 1 \) VMs or the first \( i^* \) VMs, whichever has the higher total yield, where \( i^* \) is the smallest index such that \( \sum_{i=1}^{i^*} c_i > K \).

In other words, the greedy heuristic should enroll VMs until their cumulated cost exceeds \( K \), and then the best solution is either using all theses VMs or using all of them except the last one. In the example of Table II, we have \( i^* = 3 \) and the best solution is with the first two VMs. We let \textsc{Greedy} denote the greedy heuristic which enrolls the optimal number of VMs. Note that when two different VMs have the same yield, we rank them and use the one with lowest unit cost first, which is better for scenarios where the budget is limited.

**Proof.** For \( 1 \leq i \leq M \), we consider the first \( i \) VMs and define

- the cumulated success rate \( S_{i}^{\text{tot}} = \sum_{j=1}^{i} S_j \);
- the cumulated cost \( C_{i}^{\text{tot}} = \sum_{j=1}^{i} c_j \);
- the cumulated success/cost ratio \( R_i = \frac{S_i^{\text{tot}}}{C_{i}^{\text{tot}}} \).

Now the total yield achieved with the first \( i \) VMs is \( \gamma_{i}^{\text{tot}} = \min \left( R_i, \frac{S_i^{\text{tot}}}{K} \right) \). Note that \( i^* \) is the smallest index \( i \) such that \( C_{i}^{\text{tot}} \geq K \). First we observe that the \( R_i \) are non-increasing. This is because VMs are ordered by ratio \( \frac{S_i}{c_i} \). We easily check that

\[
\frac{S_1}{c_1} \geq \frac{S_2}{c_2} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \frac{S_1}{c_1} \geq \frac{S_1 + S_2 - S_2}{c_1 + c_2} = \frac{S_2}{c_2}
\]
and the result follows by induction.
For $i \geq i^*$, we have $Y_{i}^{\text{tot}} = \mathcal{R}_{i} \leq \mathcal{R}_{i^*} = Y_{i^*}^{\text{tot}}$. For $i \leq i^* - 1$, we have $Y_{i}^{\text{tot}} = \frac{S_{i}^{\text{tot}}}{K} \leq \frac{S_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K} = Y_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}$. This concludes the proof.

In order to show that the performance of GREEDY is within a factor two of the optimal, we define the FRACOPTHETERO fractional version of the OPTHETERO problem. The only difference between FRACOPTHETERO and OPTHETERO is that each VM enrolled at the beginning can now be stopped at any time before the deadline or the exhaustion of the budget. For FRACOPTHETERO, the total yield is

$$Y_{\text{frac}}^{\text{tot}} = \sum_{j \in \mathcal{P}} S_{j} t_{j}$$

(3)

where $t_{j}$ is the running time of VM$_{j}$. Formally:

**Definition 2 (FRACOPTHETERO).** Given the set $\mathcal{P}$ of available VMs and the constraint $b = Kd$, determine $t_{j}$, which is the running time of the $j$-th VM in $\mathcal{P}$, so that the value of $Y_{\text{frac}}^{\text{tot}}$ in Equation (3) is maximized ($t_{j}$ is null if we do not use the $j$-th VM). Each VM$_{j}$ in $\mathcal{P}$ obeys the OPTRATIO strategy and interrupts all tasks at time $\tau_{j}^{\text{max}}$, with expected success rate $S_{j}$.

For this problem, the following variant of the greedy algorithm is optimal:

**Proposition 3.** Consider a platform $\mathcal{P}$ with $M$ VMs ordered by non-increasing yields and with the constraint $b = Kd$. An optimal solution for FRACOPTHETERO is obtained by enrolling the first $i^* - 1$ VMs until the deadline and enrolling the $i^*$-th VM to exhaust the rest of the budget, where $i^*$ is the smallest index such that $\sum_{i=1}^{i^*} c_{i} > K$.

**Proof.** For the proof, we assume that $i^*$ does exist, otherwise all VMs are enrolled until the deadline, which is optimal. Let $t_{j}^{\text{opt}}$ denote the running time of VM$_{j}$ in the optimal solution, and $t_{b}$ its running time in the greedy algorithm. If an optimal solution is not making the greedy choice, there exists an index $i$ such that $t_{i}^{\text{opt}} > t_{b}$. Because the greedy algorithm uses the first $i^* - 1$ VMs until the deadline, we have $i \geq i^*$. Also, because the budget is exhausted by the greedy algorithm (from the existence of $i^*$), there must exist an index $j$ such that $t_{j}^{\text{opt}} < t_{b}$. Since the greedy algorithm does not use VMs of index $k \geq i^* + 1$, we have $j \leq i^*$, hence $j < i$. With the ordering method in the greedy algorithm, we can conclude that $Y_{i} < Y_{j}$. Then in the optimal solution, we re-distribute the amount of budget $\beta = \min \{(t_{j} - t_{j}^{\text{max}})c_{j}, (t_{j}^{\text{max}} - t_{j})c_{j}\}$ from VM$_{j}$ to VM$_{j}$. The first term of $\beta$ guarantees that, after the re-distribution, VM$_{j}$ spends not more budget than its does in the greedy algorithm. After the re-distribution, the yield of the optimal solution is increased by a nonnegative value $\frac{\beta(t_{j} - Y_{j})}{b}$. If $Y_{i} < Y_{j}$, this contradicts the optimality. Otherwise, each VM$_{k}$, where $j \leq k \leq i$ has same yield (because of the ordering method of the greedy algorithm); then the optimal solution and the greedy algorithm have same global yield. This concludes the proof.

Let $Y_{\text{max}}$ be the highest yield for OPTHETERO, and $Y_{\text{opt-frac}}$ be the highest yield for FRACOPTHETERO problem. From Proposition 3, we know that $Y_{\text{opt-frac}}$ is achieved by the greedy algorithm, which is given by

$$Y_{\text{opt-frac}} = \frac{S_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K} + \left(1 - \frac{C_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K}\right) S_{i^*}.$$  

(4)

**Proposition 4.** GREEDY is a 2-approximation algorithm for OPTHETERO.

**Proof.** We need to prove that: $Y_{\text{max}}^{\text{greedy}} \geq \frac{1}{2} Y_{\text{opt}}$. We have

$$Y_{\text{max}}^{\text{greedy}} = \max(Y_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}, Y_{i^*}^{\text{tot}}) = \max\left(\frac{S_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K}, \frac{S_{i^*}^{\text{tot}}}{C_{i^*}}\right).$$

Similarly to the proof of Proposition 2, we can easily prove by induction that $\frac{S_{i}^{\text{tot}}}{C_{i}} \geq \frac{S_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{C_{i^*}}$. As $0 \leq 1 - \frac{C_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K} \leq 1$, we have $\frac{S_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K} \geq \left(1 - \frac{C_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K}\right) S_{i^*}$. We derive:

$$Y_{\text{max}}^{\text{greedy}} \geq \max\left(\frac{S_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K}, \left(1 - \frac{C_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K}\right) S_{i^*}\right) \geq \frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{S_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K} + \left(1 - \frac{C_{i^* - 1}^{\text{tot}}}{K}\right) S_{i^*}\right]$$

$$= \frac{1}{2} Y_{\text{opt-frac}} \geq \frac{1}{2} Y_{\text{opt}}.$$

**VI. Experiments**

This section assesses the performance of several strategies to interrupt executing tasks and to choose the number and types of VMs to enroll for a given budget and deadline. The algorithms are implemented in R and the related code, data and analysis are publicly available in [18].

**A. VMs selection heuristics**

As we have different types and numbers of VMs, we aim at finding the optimal subset to be enrolled. This is especially true when we do not have enough budget to let the VM with highest yield run until the deadline. In order to achieve this goal, we compare several methods for choosing VMs. They differ in their criteria to order the VMs and then greedily select the VMs in that order. Each method comes in two versions: the limited (ltd) version enrolls the first $i^* - 1$ VMs, where $i^*$ is the smallest index such that $\sum_{i=1}^{i^*} c_{i} > K$; the refined version selects the best total yield when either using $i^* - 1$ VMs, as in the limited version, or using $i^*$ VMs. This choice has objective to show the improvement of the last step on results. Here are the three orderings:

- **EXPECT** and **EXPECTED** (computation-speed based methods): VMs are sorted by increasing expected value of computation time.
- **COST** and **COST** (cost-per-time-unit based methods): VMs are sorted by increasing unit cost.
- **GREEDY** and **GREEDY** (yield methods): VMs are sorted by decreasing yield. GREEDY is indeed the greedy algorithm of Section V.C.
In addition, we assess the absolute performance of each method by comparing with Fractional, which is the yield achieved by the solution to the fractional problem FracOpt-Hetero (see Proposition 3). Indeed, the value of Fractional is an upper bound to the performance, which is not always tight; we use it as a reference.

### B. Parameters

In the following experiments, all platforms are composed of 10 VMs from each of six VM types, for a total of \( M = 60 \) VMs. In other words, \( k = 6 \) and \( m_j = 10 \) for \( 1 \leq j \leq 10 \).

Each VM type is characterized by a unit cost and a distribution that determines the execution time of each task. Type \( j \) VMs have average speed \( s_j = 2^{j-1} \) (i.e., \( s_j \in \{1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32\} \)). These values correspond to normalized speeds in realistic platforms such as Amazon EC2\(^1\) or Google Cloud\(^2\) and are correlated to the number of cores in the VMs. The unit cost of a VM is proportional to its average speed: \( c_j = s_j \).

Other scenarios, with different values of \( m_j \), and with unit costs increasing faster than average speeds, are available in the extended version [19].

The second VM characteristic is the distribution of the execution times, which follow standard probability distributions. The heterogeneity of a scheduling problem instance has several meanings (for instance, both tasks and machines heterogeneity are studied in [11]). In our case, we consider the heterogeneity of the execution time and the heterogeneity of the resource. For all tested distributions, the expectation of execution times is fixed as the inverse of the VM speed, which determines the first type of heterogeneity. For the second type, we control the variation of the Coefficient of Variation (CV), which is defined as the ratio of standard deviation over expectation. Similar CVs for all VMs lead to a low variability heterogeneity: execution times varies similarly on all VMs. On the contrary, different CVs mean that execution times are closer to their expectations on some VMs than on others. For instance, two distributions with expectations 1 and 2 and the same CV 1 have expectation heterogeneity but no variability heterogeneity. This is the opposite with distributions both with expectation 1 and with CVs 1 and 2.

This second type of heterogeneity is controlled by parameter \( x_{CV} \). Of course for exponential and half-normal distributions, \( x_{CV} \) are set as follows: \( x_{CV} = 3 \). For each distribution, we have \( 8 \) budget values of \( m_j \), and with unit costs increasing faster than average speeds, are available in the extended version [19].

The numbers of successes are reported in boxplots, each of which consists of a bold line for the median, a box for the quartiles, whiskers that extend at most to 1.5 times the interquartile range from the box and additional points for outliers. Due to lack of space, we cannot present all results, which are available in the extended version [19]. Instead, we start with a summary table covering all distributions, and then focus on lognormal distributions.

### Table III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordering</th>
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<th>Median</th>
<th>Q10%</th>
<th>Q90%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GREEDY</td>
<td>0.9977</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0.9973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### C. Result synthesis for all distributions

In Table III, OptRatio is chosen as cutting threshold heuristic on each VM. We use \( b = 630 \) (hence \( \beta = 1 \)) and \( x_{CV} = 3 \). For each distribution, we have 6 values of \( d \). For exponential and half-normal, the standard deviation is given when we select the mean, so we run only one platform configuration. For the other five probability distributions (lognormal, uniform, gamma, inverse-gamma and Weibull), we draw 100 platform configurations, as mentioned above. Each configuration is run 10 times, which leads to a total of 30,120 experiments. Now, for each heuristic, we proceed as follows: for each experiment, we record the ratio of the number of successful tasks achieved by FracOpt-Hetero (hence \( K = 630^{1-i} \)) for \( 0 \leq i \leq 5 \). This leads to 6 deadline values following a geometric progression between two extreme cases \( d = b \) and \( d = \beta \). The first case is when the deadline is sufficiently large to exhaust the entire budget by selecting any single VM. The second case is when the deadline is so tight that all VMs must be used to exhaust the budget. Altogether, we have 8 budget and 6 deadline values, hence 48 configurations. For each configuration, each strategy is run 10 times on 100 randomly drawn platform instances (the mean of the distribution is fixed, and we draw the value of the standard deviation as discussed above, except for exponential and half-normal distributions).

The values of \( \beta \) vary for each VM, \( \beta \in \{0.01, 0.05, 0.1, 1, 2, 5, 8, 10\} \). For each budget value, we vary the deadline as \( d = \beta 630^i \) (hence \( K = 630^{1-i} \)) for \( 0 \leq i \leq 5 \). This leads to 6 deadline values following a geometric progression between two extreme cases \( d = b \) and \( d = \beta \). The first case is when the deadline is sufficiently large to exhaust the entire budget by selecting any single VM. The second case is when the deadline is so tight that all VMs must be used to exhaust the budget. Altogether, we have 8 budget and 6 deadline values, hence 48 configurations. For each configuration, each strategy is run 10 times on 100 randomly drawn platform instances (the mean of the distribution is fixed, and we draw the value of the standard deviation as discussed above, except for exponential and half-normal distributions).

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1https://aws.amazon.com/ec2/pricing-on-demand/?nc1=h_ls
2https://cloud.google.com/compute/pricing
3630 represents the budget required to enroll all 60 VMs for one time unit.
discard each VM for which there is not enough budget to run until the deadline, they are at risk of wasting a big fraction of the budget and then produce a bad, even null result. Indeed, there is a large difference between the mean and median values for the limited versions, showing that there are many results close to 0. Results for the 90% quantile are good for all heuristics, and even larger than 1, while FRATIONAL represents an asymptotic upper bound. Here is the explanation: a sixth of experiments are for \( d = 1 \). In this case, all the heuristics enroll all the 60 VMs to execute tasks. As the execution time of a task is randomly drawn, some heuristics can have a better result than FRATIONAL.

D. Lognormal distribution

In this section, we focus on lognormal distributions and further study the impact of several parameters. A lognormal distribution is a natural candidate to model task execution times, because it has been advocated to model file sizes \([15]\), and task costs could naturally obey this distribution too. Moreover, the lognormal distribution is positive, it has a tail that extends to infinity and the logarithm of the data values are normally distributed.

For a lognormal \((\alpha, \beta)\) distribution, the density is
\[
 f(x) = \frac{1}{x \beta \sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{\log(x) - \alpha}{\beta} \right)^2} \quad \text{for } x \in [0, \infty)
\]
and the mean is \( \mu = e^\alpha + \frac{\beta^2}{2} \) and the standard deviation is \( \sigma = e^\alpha + \frac{\beta^2}{2} \sqrt{e^{2\alpha} - 1} \). To ensure a given expected value \( \mu \) and standard deviation \( \sigma \), we set
\[
 \alpha = \log(\mu) - \log(\sigma^2/\mu^2 + 1)/2 \quad \text{and} \quad \beta = \sqrt{\log(\sigma^2/\mu^2 + 1)}.
\]

1) Cutting threshold heuristics: First, we compare the performance of the different cutting threshold heuristics in Figure 1. We report results for \( b = 630 \) and the 6 corresponding deadline values. We can find that, for lognormal distribution, OPTRATIO, QUANTILE \((0.1)\) and QUANTILE \((0.2)\) have usually better results than others. This is because the threshold calculated by OPTRATIO is usually between \(10^{-1}\) and \(10^{-3}\) in our case and the threshold provided by QUANTILE \((0.1)\) and QUANTILE \((0.2)\) is closer to this value than other heuristics. The results confirm the observations made with homogeneous machines \([9]\): OPTRATIO achieves the best success rate, and is significantly better than the baseline NEVERINTERRUPT. This leads to choose OPTRATIO as the cutting threshold heuristic in all the following experiments.

2) Varying budget and deadline values: Figure 2 reports results for the 48 \((b, d)\) pairs. We make several observations.

First, when \( K \) is fixed, multiplying \( b \) and \( d \) by a value \( \beta > 1 \) only changes the absolute value of the result (there is a proportional relationship between \( \beta \) and the number of successful tasks), but the global outcome remains the same: the same machines are chosen, and the ratio of the results of each heuristic over FRATIONAL is not modified. This shows that, for a lognormal distribution with \( \mu \) and \( \sigma \) chosen as in our experiment, \( \beta = 1 \) is enough to simulate a problem instance with large \( b \) and \( d \) values. In the following experiment, we keep \( b = 630 \) and vary \( x_{CV} \).

4We need larger values of \( b \) to reach steady-state for exponential and half-normal distributions, see \([19]\).
### VII. Conclusion

In this paper, we have dealt with the problem of scheduling stochastic tasks on a cloud platform under both deadline and budget constraints. On each enrolled VM, we use several cutting threshold heuristics to decide when to interrupt tasks. The main difficulty is to select the best subset of VMs so as to maximize the expected number of tasks that are successfully executed. We have assessed the complexity of this resource selection optimization problem, showing that it is NP-hard, and also designing GREEDY, a greedy algorithm whose performance is proved to be a 2-approximation. GREEDY sorts the VMs by non-decreasing yield and then determines the optimal number of VMs to enroll when considering them in this order. On the practical side, we have conducted an extensive set of experiments, with several standard probability distributions for task execution times. These experiments show that GREEDY significantly outperforms other approaches based on simple heuristics, and reaches an absolute performance close to the upper bound established in the paper.

This work can be continued along three main directions, to extend the pricing model with more complex scenarios, and to better account for execution times. The first direction consists in considering start-up costs (which would limit the number of enrolled VMs), or non-constant costs that depend upon the time and day, or upon the load of the cloud platform. For the second direction, multimodal distributions have been advocated to model job, file and object sizes [15]. Similarly to the lognormal distribution, such distributions represent ideal candidates to study the corresponding yield. Finally, in a fully non-clairvoyant version of the problem, the distribution of job execution times must be learned on the fly, by sampling observed runtimes of the tasks in order to update a statistical model.

**Acknowledgements:** The work of Yiqin Gao was supported by the LABEX MILYON (ANR-10-LABX-0070) of Université de Lyon, within the program “Investissements d'Avenir” (ANR-11-IDEX-0007) operated by the French National Research Agency (ANR).
Figure 2. Number of successfully executed tasks for resource selection heuristics with OptRatio, $m_j = 10$, $M = 60$, $c_j = s_j$. Execution times follow a lognormal distribution with $x_{CV} = 3$.

Figure 3. Number of successfully executed tasks for resource selection heuristics with OptRatio, $m_j = 10$, $M = 60$, $c_j = s_j$, $b = 630$ and $d \approx 13.2$. Execution times follow a lognormal distribution with $x_{CV}$ varying.