

Modular Orchestration Engine for Event-Driven Chargeback Processing: Transforming Sequential Dispute Resolution into Parallelized Workflows

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 31 March 2026

Accepted: 06 April 2026

ABSTRACT

For many years, the way payment processing systems handle chargebacks has followed a traditional, step-by-step method that creates delays, compliance risks, and inflexibility. In a world of increasing digital payment volumes and growing consumer familiarity with the right to dispute related to payment transactions, these challenges translate to quantifiable exposure and inferior processing efficiency. This article explains a flexible system for handling chargeback disputes using a modern setup that reacts to events, which uses clearly defined rules to automatically manage different steps in the chargeback process at the same time. The engine also includes a publish-subscribe event bus, a rule evaluation layer based on directed acyclic graphs, and an action execution layer that utilizes circuit breakers and adaptive backpressure. The solution includes a visual workflow configuration user interface that allows dispute operations specialists to change decisioning logic without developer intervention, simulation tools, and role-based governance. This setup allows for faster processing, better handling of delays, flexible scaling during busy times, and better meeting of deadlines, helping financial institutions respond more quickly to changing rules, competition, and customer needs in payments.

Keywords: Event-Driven Architecture, Chargeback Orchestration, Declarative Rule Graphs, Payment Dispute Processing, Workflow Automation.

1. Structural Deficiencies of Sequential Chargeback Workflows

Historically, chargeback processing has been conducted using an entirely linear state machine: the next step in the process (intake, stance categorization, investigation assignment, evidence gathering, representation, and resolution) only begins once the previous step has been completed. This model was sufficient when chargeback volumes were low prior to the explosion of e-commerce and digital payments. In other words, in scaled payment ecosystems, this sequential model is a structural liability, not an asset. The major inefficiency of such linear chargeback pipelines is the time spent in inactive queue states, waiting for human or automated system intervention. This is an intrinsic property of sequential pipelines, in that every stage introduces delays prior to starting on the next stage of investigatory work. The lifecycle of an online payment transaction illustrates this. Even a simple transaction has multiple dependencies (payment gateways, issuing bank, acquiring bank, card networks), and every dependency is a potential point where the movement of the transaction's processing can be stopped for some time (e.g., the point where the transaction is being passed between dependencies).

In addition to wasting time, sequential systems force any actions with no logical constraint between them to be executed sequentially. For example, the moment of dispute intake could mark the start of getting

transaction metadata, contacting the cardholder, and requesting documentation from the merchant. In a linear pipeline, all actors must be synchronized and wait for each other. This requirement is especially important as the modern payment ecosystem is complicated and tangled, as a single disputable transaction may involve payment processors, card scheme networks, digital wallet providers, and multiple banks that independently verify and document [1].

In the case of increased demand, the issue of queue depth amplification worsens, however. Studies on the real-time payment infrastructure have demonstrated that transaction volumes in payment systems are periodic and variable, such that for excellent performance, payment systems must be always-on with dynamic resource allocation for processing [2]. In contrast, sequential workflows have less built-in flexibility; once transactions back up due to a spike in dispute volumes (often seen in high-spend commercial periods), processing time can become non-linearly longer to resolve disputes in the backlog. The corollary is that a conflict resolution service that operates appropriately under steady-state conditions will degrade, in a predictable manner, under real-world variability. The financial organization that operates serial systems is, consequently, subject to throughput constraints, which will not be broken in a steady state by spending on either staff or hardware.

2. Compliance Risk and Financial Exposure in Card Dispute Processing

The costs associated with card payment fraud are not evenly spread, creating asymmetric incentives (and disincentives) that make it difficult to coordinate the dispute process. For example, card issuers bore 59 percent of total card fraud losses in the US, which were estimated to be worth \$3.718 billion in 2006. Merchants collectively bear the remaining 41 percent [3]. The way losses are shared shows how responsibility is divided in the payment system, as financial institutions take on more risk for transactions where the card is physically present. The merchants bear the brunt of the loss exposure for card-not-present transactions.

The burden of fraud losses falls heaviest on internet/mail order/telephone order merchants. Although point-of-sale merchants suffer the largest dollar amount of payment card fraud losses, card-not-present merchants experience the largest proportion of fraud losses relative to the volume of sales they conduct [3]. Because neither the authenticity of the card nor the actual possession of the card was verifiable at the point of sale, instances of these transaction types are most vulnerable to chargeback requests and other forms of dispute.

The increasing occurrence of data breach-driven fraud was also reflected by the increasing percentage of banks that reported payment fraud losses as a result of data breaches, increasing from 22 percent in 2006 to 43 percent in 2008, a percentage that suggests that breaches are becoming a growing portion of the fraud loss [3]. With payment details for sale on the dark web (credit card details being sold online for between \$0.85 and \$30 per record at the time), this number of downstream fraudulent transactions to reconcile and eliminate also multiplies [3].

Gaining card acceptance also introduces costs. Commercial card acceptance requires costly supporting networks. In competitive retail markets, merchants, confronted with steep acceptance costs, cannot pass these costs onto customers who pay with a credit card [4]. Therefore, loss costs associated with disputes are additional costs for the merchant, added to the cost of card acceptance, and the residual fraud losses after the issuer guarantee for card-not-present transactions. Institutions that are issuers bear additional exposure to loss in proportion to the number of disputes they process in this manner and in proportion to the number of transactions and the geographical dispersion of their card-accepting merchants.

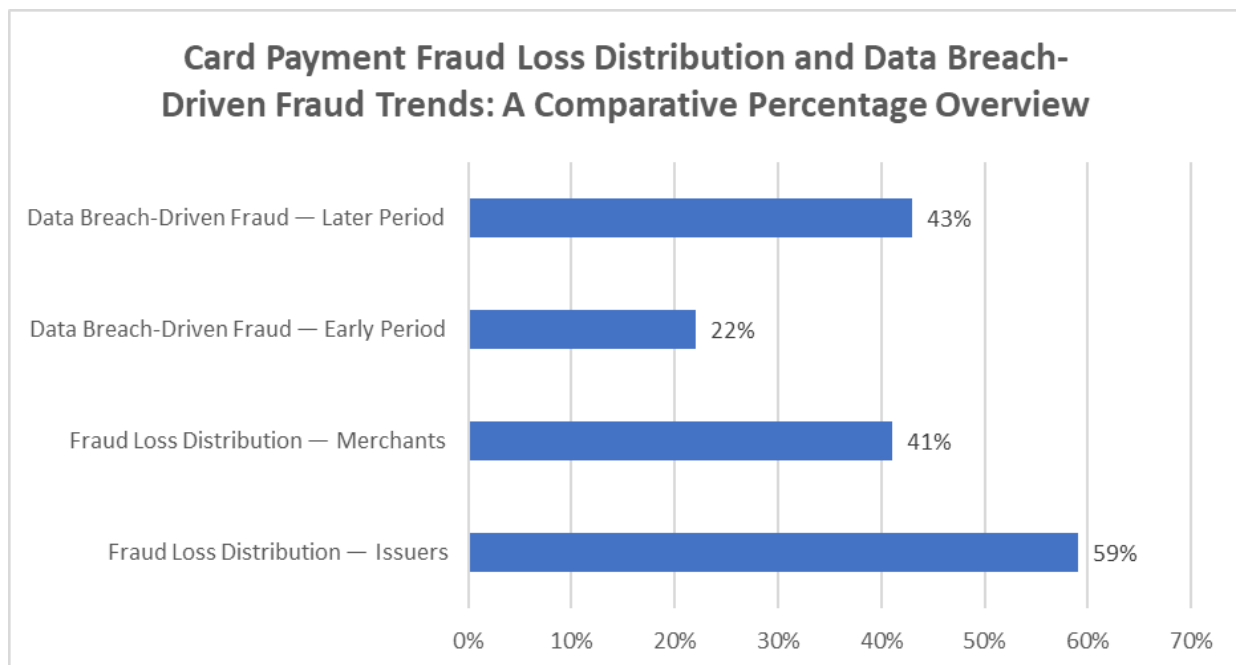


Fig 1: Fraud Liability Allocation and Breach-Attributed Loss Growth in U.S. Card Payment Processing [3, 4]

3. Event-Driven Architecture as a Dispute Orchestration Paradigm

Event-driven architecture focuses on how the system reacts to individual, relevant changes in state over a sequence of states, rather than how it transitions through a series of states. For chargeback processing, it means regarding each important action, like a dispute filed, merchant response, evidence upload, or deadline reached, as an event that can drive multiple automations in parallel. [6] Switching from a step-by-step process to one that reacts to events helps eliminate the forced order of tasks and leads to a completely different way of performing.

The orchestration engine is architected as a set of three interdependent components modeled on common messaging architecture patterns [5]. The event channel is the messaging backbone of the architecture. It consists of an event routing layer, which receives dispute-related events from source systems and forwards them to registered consumers based on event type or context. The rule evaluation layer determines for each incoming event which declarative processing rules apply and which downstream reactions to trigger. The execution layer (also known as the third layer) implements the Event-Driven Consumer pattern [5] and triggers actions while dealing with concurrency concerns, dependencies, and error handling. Similar to the Pipes and Filters design, this layer keeps different tasks separate so that each part can develop and expand on its own, something that can't happen in large, single systems.

One defining feature of this event model is its rich context. Besides its state identifier, each event also carries timing details (e.g., deadline proximity), dispute details (e.g., reason code and transaction details), and historical details deriving from previous events between the same two parties. This lets powerful rule evaluations occur without expensive database access or searches by the external system when it is critical to react in real time. Rule thresholds can be used in a similar way to how notability rules were applied in commercial EDA systems, such as marking expensive transactions that go over a certain limit or raising the priority of events if a process hasn't sent a heartbeat signal in 15 minutes.

Complex event processing extends this idea of matching a pattern of coalescing events to the dimensions of time as well as context. For example, a fraud detection rule may match certain patterns of transactions for a particular cardholder (for example, finding transactions in several different locations within a 10-minute period) and, when they occur, trigger appropriate actions at the account level [6]. The traversal of the rules for every dispute is logged, creating an audit trail that can be referred to for regulatory compliance and analysis.

The declarative nature of rule specification also allows the operational architecture to be accessible to dispute operations staff. They can define rules using simple terms like "reason codes," "merchant category groups," "evidence types," and "deadline thresholds" instead of complicated programming language, making it easier for them to focus on their decision-making without worrying about how it's built. One of the major advantages of this architecture, in terms of operation, is visual editability [5][6].

Concept / Component	Description	Role in Chargeback Processing
Event-Driven Architecture (EDA)	A system design paradigm that reacts to discrete state changes (events) rather than transitioning through a fixed sequence of stages.	Treats dispute actions (filed, merchant response, evidence upload, deadline) as independent events driving parallel automations, eliminating artificial sequencing.
Event Routing Layer (Event Bus)	Messaging backbone that receives dispute-related events from source systems and forwards them to registered consumers based on event type or context.	Acts as the central communication channel, ensuring each event reaches the correct rule engine subscribers without tight coupling between components.
Rule Evaluation Layer	Determines which declarative processing rules apply to each incoming event and identifies which downstream reactions to trigger.	Evaluates dispute-specific conditions (reason codes, thresholds, deadlines) to route each event to appropriate automated responses.
Execution Layer (Event-Driven Consumer)	Implements the Event-Driven Consumer pattern to trigger actions while managing concurrency, dependencies, and error handling.	The system executes parallel downstream actions for each dispute event, ensuring reliability and gracefully handling any failures.
Rich Contextual Event Payloads	Each event carries not just a state identifier but also timing details (deadline proximity), dispute details (reason code, transaction data), and historical party interaction data.	This feature enables real-time rule evaluation without the need for costly external database lookups, thereby supporting time-sensitive chargeback decisions.
Rule Threshold Application	Conditional logic applied to events to flag or escalate based on predefined criteria (e.g., high-value transactions, missed heartbeat signals within 15 minutes).	This system facilitates the automated prioritization of disputes, enabling the escalation of high-value or time-critical cases without the need for manual intervention.
Complex Event Processing (CEP)	The system uses a pattern-matching technique to correlate multiple events across time and context, enabling the detection of meaningful composite	The system identifies fraud patterns, such as transactions occurring across multiple locations within a 10-minute timeframe, and

	occurrences.	automatically initiates dispute actions at the account level.
Audit Trail via Rule Traversal Logging	Every rule path traversed for each dispute event is recorded in a structured log.	This system facilitates the reporting of regulatory compliance and allows for the post-hoc operational analysis of the logic involved in dispute decisioning.
Declarative Rule Specification	The rules are defined using domain-familiar concepts such as reason codes, merchant categories, evidence types, and deadlines, instead of using programming constructs.	This approach empowers the dispute operations staff to independently configure and modify the decisioning logic, eliminating the need for developer intervention.
Pipes and Filters Pattern (Separation of Concerns)	Architectural pattern where each processing component handles a distinct function, and components scale independently.	This pattern allows for the horizontal scaling of individual layers such as the event bus, rule engine, and execution, all without the need to redesign the monolithic system.

Table 1: Key Concepts in Event-Driven Architecture for Chargeback Dispute Orchestration [5, 6]

4. System Architecture and Component Design

The event bus uses the publish-subscribe pattern as a messaging system with topic-based addressability. Events are published to topics according to their semantic type. Rule engine instances subscribe to topics according to the rule domains defined in their rule base. Not computing these values avoids unnecessary computation, particularly for high-volume disputes over a limited domain. Other production distributed messaging systems at a similar scale provide reasonable evidence that this architecture is feasible. For example, the Kafka system achieves consumer throughput of ~22,000 messages/second per consumer (more than 4 times a customary messaging system), with an end-to-end pipeline latency of ~10 seconds on LinkedIn production scale. The stored message durability mechanism does support the audit trail and error recovery requirements, as it waits for explicit acknowledgment from all subscribers. To ensure the order of events in each dispute, partition keys derived from dispute identifiers are used to guarantee serial processing of events belonging to that dispute.

Placed between source publishers and the rule engine, the event enrichment pipelines add contextual metadata to raw events deployed on the event bus. Source system events generated by the core banking systems, network interface systems, and document management systems come in a variety of formats and are published to the data bus as-is. The raw events can be improved with historical dispute, cardholder contact, fraud, and regulatory overlay information. Efficient infrastructure can help minimize the cost of adding context to these events. Systems such as Kafka have lower per-event overhead, 9 bytes per message on average versus 144 bytes per message in most implementations of Java Message Service, which means 70% lower message storage costs without a commensurate increase in storage infrastructure [7].

The rule engine filters rules at runtime to make sure that only applicable rules are evaluated for the conditions, improving performance in high-throughput scenarios. The action execution framework wraps the execution of triggered actions with error and retry handling as well as observability. Circuit breaker patterns are a way to deal with external dependencies such that the failure does not cascade to other parts of the system. A systematic resilience study shows that the combination of bounded retries and a circuit

breaker performs considerably better than either one on its own. Evaluation with various forms of exponential backoff and a latency spike in downstream systems shows that without jitter the P99 latency is 2600 ms with a 17% error rate, but with jitter the latency is 1400 ms with a 6% error rate. Coupling with a circuit breaker adds 1100 ms and 3%, but adaptive backpressure in the execution layer achieves a 15% increase in processing throughput over bursty dispute intake scenarios [8]. Long-running activities integrate via asynchronous callback mechanisms that allow the engine to handle additional events while waiting for human review workflows or evidence compilations to finish.

Component	Function	Key Metric / Detail
Publish-Subscribe Event Bus	Routes events by semantic type to relevant rule engine subscribers, avoiding unnecessary computation.	Topic-based addressability; selective, domain-specific delivery.
Kafka Messaging Infrastructure	High-throughput event delivery with durable storage for audit trail and error recovery.	~22,000 msg/sec per consumer; ~10s end-to-end latency; 9 vs. 144 bytes/msg (JMS)—70% storage savings.
Partition Keys (Event Ordering)	Ensures serial processing of events within a dispute while allowing cross-dispute parallelism.	Keys derived from dispute identifiers prevent race conditions.
Event Enrichment Pipeline	Appends historical, fraud, and regulatory metadata to raw events before rule evaluation.	Eliminates external lookups at rule evaluation time; normalizes heterogeneous source formats.
Runtime Rule Filtering	Evaluates only contextually applicable rules per event, reducing computational overhead.	Improves throughput in high-volume dispute scenarios.
Circuit Breaker + Bounded Retries	Isolates failing dependencies; prevents cascading failures across the system.	A combined approach outperforms either pattern alone in resilience benchmarks.
Exponential Backoff with Jitter	Randomized retry delays reduce thundering herd effects during downstream latency spikes.	Without jitter: P99 = 2,600 ms, 17% error rate. With jitter: P99 = 1,400 ms, 6% error rate.
Adaptive Backpressure	Regulates execution rate dynamically based on downstream capacity during dispute volume surges.	15% throughput increase over bursty intake scenarios.
Asynchronous Callbacks	Keeps the engine non-blocking during long-running tasks such as human review or evidence compilation.	Maximizes concurrency by decoupling slow workflows from core orchestration.

Table 2: System Architecture and Component Design – Key Components [7, 8]

5. Visual Workflow Configuration and Governance

To democratize the flow configuration, domain experts must be able to make changes to decisioning logic through an intuitive representation of the decisioning rule graph structure in language familiar to dispute operations personnel. Such a visual graph editor will represent rule graphs as flowchart-like diagrams, allowing for direct manipulation of rule graph structure with drag-and-drop placement of decision nodes and edges, clicking to configure rule nodes, and drawing edges to define relationships. For standard GUI-based environments, productivity improvements of 50% to 500% over text-based development processes have been reported, showing the superior efficiency of task-specific visual environments over general-purpose command-centric environments [9].

The form design is context-sensitive, with condition building allowing only alternatives that are valid in the scope of the dispute type selected and of the decisioning context being configured. The system validates the decisioning configuration during editing to prevent the saving of invalid configurations, such as cycles in the directed graph, unreachable terminal nodes, or referencing undefined condition elements. Pre-activation simulation is a tool that allows operations staff to test proposed rule changes against past populations of disputes without impacting on-production traffic. The workflow allows both processing rules to be displayed side-by-side to show any behavior changes [9]. Statistical simulation can be further used to project population impacts, identifying potential bottlenecks before operational implementation. Governance mechanisms ensure configurational accessibility does not weaken operational oversight. Role-based access control defines viewer, editor, and approver roles. Regardless of whether the change was made by an administrator or someone else, all changes to workflows needed approval from an approver. In the 28 organizations studied, access control requirements were mostly driven by the need to centrally control permissions in accordance with organizational protection profiles, rather than administrative discretion [10]. An entire version history with audit trails of the identity, timestamp, and stated justification of each change is retained to allow easy rollbacks to previous versions of rules in the event that enablement of newly written rules produces adverse operational effects. For organizations using formal change management processes, the orchestration engine provides activation holds until external approval workflows are complete. This integrates visual workflow management with governance.

Feature	Function	Key Metric / Detail
Visual Graph Editor	Represents rule graphs as flowchart-like diagrams with drag-and-drop nodes and edges, enabling domain experts to modify decisioning logic without developer involvement.	GUI-based environments yield 50%–500% productivity improvement over text-based development.
Context-Sensitive Form Design	Restricts condition-building options to only valid alternatives based on the selected dispute type and decisioning context.	Prevents invalid configurations such as graph cycles, unreachable terminal nodes, and undefined condition references.
Pre-Activation Simulation	Tests proposed rule changes against historical dispute populations without affecting live production traffic.	Side-by-side rule comparison and statistical projection identify bottlenecks before deployment.
Role-Based Access Control (RBAC)	Defines viewer, editor, and approver roles; all workflow changes require approver sign-off regardless of who initiates them.	Across 28 organizations, access control was driven by centralized permission governance, not administrative discretion.
Audit Trail and	Retains full change history with	Supports regulatory compliance

Version History	identity, timestamp, and justification for every modification, enabling rollback to prior rule versions.	and operational recovery from adverse rule changes.
Activation Holds for Change Management	Delays rule activation until external approval workflows are completed for organizations with formal change management processes.	Integrates visual workflow configurability with enterprise governance requirements.

Table 3: Visual Workflow Configuration and Governance—Key Features [9, 10]

6. Performance, Scalability, and Operational Implications

Compared to equivalent sequential implementations of the event-driven parallelization model, the architecture is consistently shown to outperform sequential implementations in steady state and surge conditions, and to a greater extent in more complex disputes involving higher numbers of evidence gathering and communications operations, the cases that stress linear pipelines the most. The latency compression that the architecture provides is its main advantage: sequential architectures generally present long-tail processing distributions, with the contention at multiple wait states causing a multiplicative accumulation of latencies, while the parallel model provides a compressive distribution, bettering both mean and worst-case performance.

Our horizontal scalability experiments with partition load balance show linear throughput scaling to support event processing throughput large enough to accommodate the largest dispute processors during seasonal spikes[11]. It also shows how load-based auto-scaling policies, based on queue depths, can proactively scale to volume spikes while adhering to latency tolerances. With continuous delivery pipelines, a later version of a service can be deployed to production in seconds, enabling organizations to respond quickly to fluctuations in demand [12].

The event-driven model increases resource utilization efficiency. Sequential, batch-oriented systems have a sawtooth pattern in resource utilization, resulting in a low average infrastructure utilization. If 53% of the cost of a data center is electricity and cooling [13], then continuous parallel execution, with a higher average utilization, is a lot cheaper for the same level of throughput. Additionally, cloud-based elastic infrastructure benefits from economies of scale. This typically achieves a 5-7x lower cost per unit of resource than a customarily provisioned system [14]. Streaming processing patterns in disputes reduce the per-dispute memory footprint, allowing higher levels of concurrency per unit of hardware.

Beyond performance metrics, dispute economics are improved by reduced per-dispute handling costs achieved through process improvements and efficient use of people and infrastructure, as well as shifts towards analytical work and relationship management as transactions and tasks become automated.[15,16] Furthermore, the configurable architecture gives institutions the ability to absorb regulatory change and competitive pressure by offering the ability to adapt easily, and the elastic scaling avoids over-provisioning and 'guessing' infrastructure requirements, as is the case for projects under customary resourcing models, where only 50% of the infrastructure provisioned for a project is ultimately used by year three [17]. That money can then be put towards continuous process improvement.

Conclusion

This shift enables event-driven orchestration to replace the customary sequential pipeline in the chargeback lifecycle of financial institutions with a parallelized and rule-governed process model that can respond to every important event in a dispute. The lifecycle's decisioning logic is decomposed into declarative rule graphs that can be traversed concurrently across multiple interdependent action streams,

eliminating the wait states between stages of the lifecycle that dominate dispute processing times. The publish-subscribe event bus, rich contextual event payloads, and resilient execution architecture provide predictable capacity and performance both in steady-state and during peak loads. Real-time deadline compliance is continuously monitored, replacing the latency of batch-mode compliance assurance. Visual workflow-based configuration empowers domain experts to rapidly iterate decisioning logic to replace legacy programming, reducing the cycle time from many months to days; institutional business knowledge is readily translated into operational activity. Increasing complexity within the payment ecosystem is driven by the expanding number of real-time payment systems and broadening scope and scale of regulatory initiatives. The configurable and elastic foundation of the orchestration model will drive sustained operational excellence and differentiation within financial institutions as the pace of change for resolving disputes accelerates.

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