

METROLOGY TARGETS AND METHODS WITH OBLIQUE PERIODIC STRUCTURES

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/617,086 filed on January 12, 2018, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention relates to the field of metrology, and more particularly, to metrology target design.

2. DISCUSSION OF RELATED ART

[0003] U.S. Patent No. 6,921,916, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, discloses overlay mark for determining the relative position between two or more successive layers of a substrate or between two or more separately generated patterns on a single layer of a substrate; and U.S. Patent Publication No. 2007/0008533, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, discloses overlay targets having flexible symmetry characteristics and metrology techniques for measuring the overlay error between two or more successive layers of such targets.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The following is a simplified summary providing an initial understanding of the invention. The summary does not necessarily identify key elements nor limits the scope of the invention, but merely serves as an introduction to the following description.

[0005] One aspect of the present invention provides a metrology target comprising a plurality of periodic structures and produced by a lithography tool having orthogonal production axes X and Y, wherein at least one of the periodic structures is oblique with respect to axes X and Y.

[0006] These, additional, and/or other aspects and/or advantages of the present invention are set forth in the detailed description which follows; possibly inferable from the detailed description; and/or learnable by practice of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] For a better understanding of embodiments of the invention and to show how the same may be carried into effect, reference will now be made, purely by way of example, to the accompanying drawings in which like numerals designate corresponding elements or sections throughout.

[0008] In the accompanying drawings:

[0009] **Figures 1A-1E** are high-level schematic illustrations of one layer of a device (**Figure 1A**) and prior art approaches (**Figures 1B-1E**) for providing overlay metrology targets to measure overlay between different layers or features of devices **80**.

[0010] **Figures 2A, 2B and 3-5** are high-level schematic illustrations of metrology targets, periodic structures and elements thereof, according to some embodiments of the invention.

[0011] **Figure 6B** is a high-level schematic illustration of a metrology target, according to some embodiments of the invention, compared with prior art target illustrated schematically in **Figure 6A**.

[0012] **Figures 7A, 7B and 7C** are high-level schematic illustrations segmentations edge configurations, according to some embodiments of the invention

[0013] **Figure 8** is a high-level flowchart illustrating a method, according to some embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0014] In the following description, various aspects of the present invention are described. For purposes of explanation, specific configurations and details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will also be apparent to one skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without the specific details presented herein. Furthermore, well known features may have been omitted or simplified in order not to obscure the present invention. With specific reference to the drawings, it is stressed that the particulars shown are by way of example and for purposes

of illustrative discussion of the present invention only, and are presented in the cause of providing what is believed to be the most useful and readily understood description of the principles and conceptual aspects of the invention. In this regard, no attempt is made to show structural details of the invention in more detail than is necessary for a fundamental understanding of the invention, the description taken with the drawings making apparent to those skilled in the art how the several forms of the invention may be embodied in practice.

[0015] Before at least one embodiment of the invention is explained in detail, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of construction and the arrangement of the components set forth in the following description or illustrated in the drawings. The invention is applicable to other embodiments that may be practiced or carried out in various ways as well as to combinations of the disclosed embodiments. Also, it is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein are for the purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting.

[0016] Unless specifically stated otherwise, as apparent from the following discussions, it is appreciated that throughout the specification discussions utilizing terms such as "processing", "computing", "calculating", "determining", "enhancing", "deriving" or the like, refer to the action and/or processes of a computer or computing system, or similar electronic computing device, that manipulates and/or transforms data represented as physical, such as electronic, quantities within the computing system's registers and/or memories into other data similarly represented as physical quantities within the computing system's memories, registers or other such information storage, transmission or display devices. In certain embodiments, illumination technology may comprise, electromagnetic radiation in some range, e.g., the infrared range, the visual range, ultraviolet or even shorter wave radiation such as x rays, and possibly even particle beams.

[0017] Embodiments of the present invention provide efficient and economical methods and mechanism for process compatible designs for measurement tilted semiconductor devices and thereby provide improvements to the technological field of metrology and semiconductor production. New overlay mark designs and algorithmic approaches for process compatible designs are provided - for reduction of overlay measurement inaccuracy.

[0018] In certain embodiments, metrology targets, design methods and measurement methods thereof are provided with periodic structure(s) which are oblique with respect to orthogonal production axes X and Y of the lithography tool – enabling more accurate overlay measurements of devices having diagonal (oblique, tilted) elements such as DRAM devices. One or more oblique periodic structure(s) may be used to provide one- or two-dimensional signals, with respect to one or more layers, possibly providing overlay measurements for multiple steps applied to one layer. The oblique periodic structure(s) may be used to modify current metrology target designs (e.g., imaging targets and/or scatterometry targets) or to design new targets, and measurement algorithms may be adjusted respectively to derive signals from the oblique periodic structure(s) and/or to provide pre-processed images thereof. The disclosed targets are process compatible and reflect more accurately the device overlays with respect to various process steps.

[0019] **Figures 1A-1E** are high-level schematic illustrations of one layer of a device **80** (**Figure 1A**) and prior art approaches (**Figures 1B-1E**) for providing overlay metrology targets **90** to measure overlay between different layers or features of devices **80**.

[0020] **Figure 1A** illustrates schematically structural characteristics of many modern semiconductor devices, e.g., DRAM (dynamic random-access memory) devices, namely that they have at least one layer which is aligned at a specified tilt to the regular Cartesian coordinates of the lithography tool, such as a scanner having X and Y axes (for example, having a tilt of 22° to X).

[0021] On-device optically based overlay (OVL) metrology is unachievable at this moment since the design rule pitches are unresolved by modern optical technology for both Imaging and SCOL (scatterometry based) OVL tools. Instead of it, OVL measurement is performed on specially designed “proxy” metrology targets which have typical scales (pitches) which are larger than a hundred nanometers, in contrast of typical device pitches of few 10nm or less. Moreover, standard targets are aligned by the X-Y directions only.

[0022] **Figures 1B-1E** demonstrate prior art approaches to measure the misalignments of device layers with tilted structures using standard XY aligned target, such as designing the XY aligned target with device-like segmentation (e.g., a periodic target with periodic structures having obliquely segmented elements, possibly at minimal design rule pitch) – illustrated schematically in **Figure 1B**, or - designing segmented targets (possibly at

minimal design rule pitch) which do not resemble the devices in the tilt – illustrated schematically in **Figures 1C-1E** – for example **Figure 1C** illustrates schematically segmentation perpendicularly to the periodic structures' elements and along the periodic structure measurement direction, **Figure 1D** illustrates schematically segmentation parallel to the periodic structures' elements and perpendicularly to the periodic structure measurement direction, and **Figure 1E** illustrates schematically segmented two-dimensional two-layered imaging targets. It is noted that the prior art targets **90**, as well as the following disclosed targets are illustrated schematically, showing partial sections of otherwise fully designed targets with respect to the dimensions and extent of the periodic structures.

[0023] However, a main difficulty is that none of the prior art target designs is process compatible (or even well printed), symmetric and has device-like behavior, particularly with respect to the tilted structures. For example, targets **90** designed according to the principles illustrated in **Figure 1B, 1C and 1D** typically yield overlay values which do not reflect well the overlay of the device and have heavy printability problems (targets **90** illustrated in **Figures 1B and 1C** have worse printability than targets **90** illustrated in **Figure 1D**). Similar difficulties arise using an extended design, illustrated schematically in **Figure 1E**, which may be composed from elements illustrated in **Figures 1B-1D**. Segmented two-dimensional two-layered imaging targets **90** may comprise inner X and inner Y periodic structures **95X, 95Y**, outer X and outer Y periodic structures **95X', 95Y'**, collectively denoted periodic structures **95**. In particular, such structures are typically defined by the constraints that (i) Outer X periodic structure **95X'** is orthogonal to Outer Y periodic structure **95Y'**; (ii) Inner X periodic structure **95X** is orthogonal to Inner Y periodic structure **95Y**; (iii) Outer X periodic structure **95X'** is parallel to Inner X periodic structure **95X**; and (i) Outer Y periodic structure **95Y'** is parallel to Inner Y periodic structure **95Y**.

[0024] In contrast to the prior art, disclosed below are targets **100** and methods **200** which resolve the difficulties related to the measurability and process compatibility of prior art targets, and also reflect the misregistration which the devices with tilted structures encounter. The following approaches provide modifications applicable to both imaging and scatterometry overlay target designs, and the presented examples are schematic and non-

limiting. In disclosed targets **100**, at least one periodic structure and/or at least one layer is not aligned along the X and Y directions and are applicable to either: (i) measure only one direction (illustrated schematically as direction M in **Figures 4 and 5**), which unrelated to the Scanner X or tool X direction, and may reflect the tilt of the device structures – In this direction, Outer and Inner structures are parallel (Outer M is parallel to Inner M); or measure the vector of overlay between the layers (possibly, layers may be produced from two consecutive processes, like lines in one direction and a cut into another direction), requiring two directions denoted as directions M and N in **Figures 2A and 2B**, then we need only require that corresponding Outer periodic structures are not parallel to each other and that corresponding Inner periodic structures are not parallel to each other - denoted schematically in **Figure 2A** as Outer M (first pair of gratings) not parallel to Outer N (second pair of gratings), and Inner M' (first pair of gratings) not parallel to Inner N' (second pair of gratings). It is noted that while some non-parallel relations are illustrated as being perpendicular – this selection of angles is presented for explanatory purposes only, and is not limiting. It is noted that the description above provides a non-limiting example, and may be implemented along similar lines for different target types, such as, for example, multilayer targets, targets with assist features on the same and other layers, and also the targets which produce the measurement signal using various methods, such as direct imaging, Moiré effect imaging, scatterometry etc.

[0025] It is noted that disclosed target design principles may be applied to Moiré-effect-based targets. e.g., as disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 10,101,592, incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

[0026] **Figures 2A, 2B and 3-5** are high-level schematic illustrations of metrology targets **100**, periodic structures **110** and elements **120** thereof, according to some embodiments of the invention. While in **Figures 2A, 2B and 3-5** some elements **120** of periodic structures **100** (and elements **97** of periodic structures **95**) are illustrated as whole bars, in various embodiments elements **120** (and **97**) may be segmented in various directions (e.g., along or across the respective measurement direction, or obliquely, see e.g., **Figures 7A-7C** below). While in **Figures 2A, 2B and 3-5** some elements **120** of periodic structures **100** (and elements **97** of periodic structures **95**) are illustrated as segmented bars, in various

embodiments elements **120** (and **97**) may be unsegmented or segmented in a different direction.

[0027] Metrology targets **100** may comprise a plurality of periodic structures **110**, each having recurring elements **120** (illustrated explicitly in **Figure 2A**) and be produced by a lithography tool (e.g., scanner, not shown) having orthogonal production axes X and Y. At least one of the periodic structures is oblique (diagonal) with respect to axes X and Y. For example, in **Figure 2A**, periodic structures **95X**, **95Y**, corresponding to the inner X and inner Y periodic structures of imaging target **90** illustrated in **Figure 1E**, are also part of metrology targets **100**, while outer X and outer Y periodic structures **95X'**, **95Y'** of imaging target **90** illustrated in **Figure 1E**, are replaced by oblique periodic structures **110X**, **110Y** at angles α and β , respectively to the X axis – possibly to correspond to the angle(s) of semiconductor devices produced by the lithography tool. In certain embodiments, periodic structures **110X**, **110Y** may be orthogonal to each other (e.g., $\beta = \alpha - 90^\circ$), e.g., be oblique with respect to axes X and Y and periodic along two non-parallel directions (e.g., orthogonal directions). Oblique periodic structures **110X**, **110Y** are denoted collectively as oblique periodic structures **110**. It is noted that in various embodiments, at least two of the periodic structures may be placed side-by-side.

[0028] In certain embodiments, oblique periodic structures **110** may form angles of between 20° and 70° respect to corresponding axes X and Y (and/or tilted axes X' and Y' in case target **110** is tilted as in **Figure 2B**).

[0029] Metrology targets **100** may comprise two, three or more layers, and oblique periodic structures **110** may be designed in one or more of the layers. Metrology targets **100** may comprise one, two, or possibly more measurement directions, and oblique periodic structures **110** may be designed in one or more of the measurement directions. In certain embodiments, different oblique periodic structures **110** may be of one, two or more types, e.g., differing in pitch and/or CD (critical dimension). For example, **Figures 2A** and **2B** illustrate schematically metrology targets **100** with different oblique periodic structures **110X**, **110Y** along two measurement directions in one layer, and **Figures 4** and **5** illustrate schematically metrology targets **100** with different oblique periodic structures **110A**, **110B** along one measurement direction in two layers. Various embodiments comprise same and/or different oblique periodic structures **110** in any combination of measurement

directions and layers, depending e.g., on the corresponding device designs. Oblique periodic structures **110A**, **110B** are denoted collectively as oblique periodic structures **110**. [0030] Concerning periodic structure illustrated schematically in **Figure 3**, it is noted that such structures may be applied as any part of any fully-designed target **100**, emphasizing that any of the disclosed periodic structures may be printed in non-rectangular shapes (possibly with any number of sides), possibly relating to the available real estate. The two corresponding periodic structures may be rotationally symmetric (by 180° rotations) with respect to each other, e.g., to allow TIS (tool induced shift) error measurement and reduction.

[0031] As illustrated in **Figures 2A** and **2B**, metrology targets **100** may be tilted with respect to the X and Y axes of the lithography tool, e.g., to be designed along axes X' and Y'. It is noted that while prior art targets **90**, as illustrated e.g., in **Figure 1E**, may be tilted as whole targets, disclosed metrology targets **100** comprise oblique periodic structure(s) **110** with respect to the tilted axes X' and Y' as well, and have the direction of periodicity (along which the respective pitch is measured) oblique with respect to the tiled axes as well. In certain embodiments, disclosed metrology targets **100** may have at least two non-orthogonal measurement directions, e.g., one corresponding to periodic structures **95** and another one corresponding to periodic structures **110**.

[0032] In certain embodiments, with respect to any of the target types, oblique periodic structures **110** may be set to fill rectangles with sides along the X and Y axes, as illustrated e.g., in **Figures 2A** and **4**. In certain embodiments, oblique periodic structures **110** may be set to fill rectangles with sides along the tilted X' and Y' axes, as illustrated e.g., in **Figure 2B**.

[0033] In certain embodiments, with respect to any of the target types, oblique periodic structures **110** may be set to fill convex quadrilateral(s) **115** (or, possibly, shapes with more than four sides), as illustrated e.g., in **Figures 3** and **5**, designed according to available wafer real estate.

[0034] In certain embodiments, with respect to any of the target types, oblique periodic structures **110** may be set to fill any specified space designed according to available wafer real estate.

[0035] In certain embodiments, e.g., if the rotational symmetry is not required, targets **100** may comprise a single periodic structure **110** per measurement direction and per layer instead of a pair of periodic structures **110** per measurement direction and per layer illustrated above.

[0036] In various embodiments, targets **100** may comprise at least one intermediate layer having assist features between two of the periodic structures. The assist features may be oblique with respect to axes X and Y.

[0037] **Figure 6B** is a high-level schematic illustration of metrology target **100**, according to some embodiments of the invention, compared with prior art target **90** illustrated schematically in **Figure 6A**. In certain embodiments, metrology target **100** may be configured as a SEM (scanning electron microscopy) target (e.g., a CDSEM, critical dimension scanning electron microscopy, target) and/or as an imaging target, having two partly overlapping, alternating periodic structures **110A**, **110B** (indicated collectively as oblique periodic structures **110**) which are both oblique with respect to the X axis (at an angle indicated as α).

[0038] **Figures 7A-7C** are high-level schematic illustrations segmentations edge configurations, according to some embodiments of the invention. It is noted that the segmentation illustrated in **7B** may cause printability problems, which may be solved by the segmentation illustrated in **Figure 7C** and **Figure 7A**.

[0039] In certain embodiments, oblique periodic structures **110** may be segmented, as illustrated schematically in **Figure 7A-7C**, with elements **120** of periodic structures **110** being segmented to sub-elements **130** at a smaller pitch (denoted in **Figure 7A-7C** as “segmentation pitch”), e.g., closer or similar to the device pitch. For example, the pitch of the segmentation may be e.g., one fifth or less of the pitch of corresponding periodic structure **110** (denoted in **Figure 7A-7C** as “pitch”).

[0040] In certain embodiments, the segmentation may be two dimensional.

[0041] **Figures 7A-7C** illustrate schematically initial designs of segmented oblique elements **120** in oblique periodic structures **110**, carried out, e.g., using the customer design rule direction and using for example customer design rule for the segmentation – to ensure printability, with oblique periodic structure **110** having the required pitch, e.g., for imaging measurements. It is noted that in any of the disclosed designs, the spaces on mask may be

filled with parallel SARF (sub resolution assist features), which are not shown herein to maintain clarity, and which improve the printability of targets designs **100**.

[0042] It is noted that the terms “line” and “space”, either on wafer or on the lithographic mask is used for ease of explanations and does not limit the scope of the invention. In particular, elements designated herein as lines and spaces may be constructed from various types of structures which may fill the respective lines and/or spaces, similarly or in different manners across the target. For example, spaces between different gratings as the periodic structures may be filled differently (with different type(s) of elements) than spaces within the grating.

[0043] In certain embodiments, sub-elements **130** (the segments of elements **120**) are optimized for the specified illumination conditions to avoid or minimize printability issues. For example, the edges may be optimized by the standard techniques, like OPC (optical proximity correction), CMP (chemical mechanical planarization) assist, etc. Specifically, in case of tilted dipole illumination, segmentations designed according to the principles illustrated in **Figure 7A** and **Figure 7C** is expected to cause less printability issues than segmentation illustrated in **Figure 7B**.

[0044] It is noted that while in semiconductor device design the exact configuration of the edges of device structures is less critical, metrology measurements of disclosed metrology targets **100** are sensitive to the details of segment edges and may be degraded by non-uniform production of segment edges. Accordingly, the inventors suggest designing symmetric edges (as illustrated with respect to the long axis of ellipse **135**) rather than asymmetric edges (as illustrated with respect to the long axis of ellipse **93**).

[0045] In various embodiments, a range of measurement algorithms may be used to extract the metrology measurements, such as algorithms described in U.S. Patent No. 6,921,916 and U.S. Patent Publication No. 2007/0008533, incorporated herein by reference, and modifications thereof, as well as other algorithms such as 2D fit, correlation, etc., to find the required misregistration.

[0046] For example, the following non-limiting measurement algorithm may be used to measure targets **100** configured as imaging targets. First, image processing may be used to rotate captured images of targets **100**, possibly with additional re-pixelization, to bring each pair of periodic structures **110** (e.g., Inner left and Inner right) to be parallel to the X or Y

direction of the original target (e.g., corresponding to X and Y of lithography tool or to tilted X' and Y', see **Figures 2A** and **2B** respectively). From the images, the centre of symmetry of each pair of periodic structures **110** may be derived, from which the X and Y centres of symmetry of the Inner and Outer structures may be calculated, and the vector between the centres of symmetry of the Inner and Outer structures provides the overlay. Clearly, any one- or two-dimensional measurement algorithm may be modified accordingly to provide metrology measurements of disclosed targets **100**.

[0047] In various embodiments, other algorithms such as the following non-limiting example may be used. Taking as example periodic structure **110** illustrated in **Figure 3** (e.g., as part of extended targets **100**) – the image (or partial image) of each periodic structure **110** in target **100** may be captured, the periodic model (class of functions) in the corresponding direction M may be chosen to be a sum of cosines and sines in direction M with periods P, 2P, 3P, ..., nP (P being the Pitch) and chosen to be constant in the orthogonal direction N. The number of periods n may be chosen so that the $n+1^{\text{th}}$ harmonic is either irrelevant to the optical system or is empirically known to be smaller than the noise level (including the higher harmonics above $n+1$). The one-dimensional signal may be derived by projecting the chosen periodic model to the M direction to yield a one-dimensional signal, which can then be processed as in regular overlay algorithms using one-dimensional signal per periodic structure (as described e.g., in U.S. Patent No. 6,921,916 and U.S. Patent Publication No. 2007/0008533, incorporated herein by reference, and other sources).

[0048] In certain embodiments, several periodic structures **110** may be designed in one layer, e.g., representing multiple process step applied to that layer, such as a production step and a cut step, possibly one or both being tilted with respect to the axes of the lithography tool (X, Y). For example, a produced layer may be regular (along X or Y axis) while a cut layer may be diagonal – requiring oblique periodic structures **110** to provide metrology measurements thereof.

[0049] It is emphasized that disclosed targets **100** may be of any type, and disclosed target design principles may be applicable to a wide range of metrology targets **100**. Moreover, it is noted that the invention is not limited to specific metrology tools, techniques or target types. For example, targets **100** may be one-dimensional or two-dimensional targets,

imaging targets, scatterometric targets of any type or moiré effect based targets, of any form or type, possessing the oblique periodic structure as part of their design.

[0050] **Figure 8** is a high-level flowchart illustrating a method **200**, according to some embodiments of the invention. The method stages may be carried out with respect to metrology targets **100** described above, which may optionally be configured to implement method **200**. Method **200** may be at least partially implemented by at least one computer processor, e.g., in a metrology module. Certain embodiments comprise computer program products comprising a computer readable storage medium having computer readable program embodied therewith and configured to carry out the relevant stages of method **200**. Certain embodiments comprise target design files of respective targets designed by embodiments of method **200**. Method **200** may comprise the following stages, irrespective of their order.

[0051] Certain embodiments comprise target design methods **200** comprising identifying, in a device design, oblique structures with respect to the axes X and Y (stage **205**) and designing the at least one oblique periodic structure of the metrology target at a same layer and at a same angle to the axes X and Y as the identified oblique structures (stage **210**).

[0052] Certain embodiments comprise target design methods **200** comprising configuring at least one periodic structure of a metrology target, which is produced by a lithography tool having orthogonal production axes X and Y, to be oblique with respect to axes X and Y (stage **220**).

[0053] In certain embodiments, method **200** may further comprise segmenting elements of the periodic structure(s) to approach or reach the minimal design rule pitch (stage **230**) and possibly designing the segments to be rectangular, with perpendicular edges (stage **235**).

[0054] In certain embodiments, method **200** may further comprise designing any of imaging, SEM (scanning electron microscopy) and/or scatterometry targets accordingly (stage **240**) and adjusting the respective measurement algorithms to utilize the oblique periodic structures (stage **250**). For example, in certain embodiments, method **200** may comprise applying image processing and possibly re-pixelization to prepare images of targets with oblique periodic structures to analysis by corresponding metrology algorithms (stage **255**) and/or applying a corresponding model, projected on the oblique measurement

direction, to derive one dimensional signals of corresponding periodic structures and using them for the overlay derivation (stage 257).

[0055] It is noted that disclosed methods may be applied to any type of metrology targets and may be implemented using any metrology tool technique. For example, methods 200 may be applied to integrate oblique periodic structure(s) as part of the design in any of: one-dimensional or one-dimensional targets, imaging targets, scatterometry targets of any type and/or Moiré-effect-based targets.

[0056] Advantageously, disclosed targets 100 and method 200 provide overlay measurements which express accurately the device overlay, e.g., providing the pattern placement error (PPE) and etch placement error (EPE) of target 100 to be very close to the errors of the minimal design rule dense device features. Moreover, disclosed targets 100 and method 200 enable measurement of diagonal (oblique) periodic structures, such as one- or two-dimensional measurements of target structures with non-orthogonal periodic structures in one or more layers - each of the previous and current layer(s) may comprise one or more oblique periodic structures 110. Disclosed targets are process compatible and closely correspond device production performance. Adjustment of segment edges of segmented elements of the oblique periodic structures 110 may further enhance the measurement accuracy, possibly with respect to the used illumination (e.g., dipole illumination, optionally rotated).

[0057] Aspects of the present invention are described above with reference to flowchart illustrations and/or portion diagrams of methods, apparatus (systems) and computer program products according to embodiments of the invention. It will be understood that each portion of the flowchart illustrations and/or portion diagrams, and combinations of portions in the flowchart illustrations and/or portion diagrams, can be implemented by computer program instructions. These computer program instructions may be provided to a processor of a general-purpose computer, special purpose computer, or other programmable data processing apparatus to produce a machine, such that the instructions, which execute via the processor of the computer or other programmable data processing apparatus, create means for implementing the functions/acts specified in the flowchart and/or portion diagram or portions thereof.

[0058] These computer program instructions may also be stored in a computer readable medium that can direct a computer, other programmable data processing apparatus, or other devices to function in a particular manner, such that the instructions stored in the computer readable medium produce an article of manufacture including instructions which implement the function/act specified in the flowchart and/or portion diagram or portions thereof.

[0059] The computer program instructions may also be loaded onto a computer, other programmable data processing apparatus, or other devices to cause a series of operational steps to be performed on the computer, other programmable apparatus or other devices to produce a computer implemented process such that the instructions which execute on the computer or other programmable apparatus provide processes for implementing the functions/acts specified in the flowchart and/or portion diagram or portions thereof.

[0060] The aforementioned flowchart and diagrams illustrate the architecture, functionality, and operation of possible implementations of systems, methods and computer program products according to various embodiments of the present invention. In this regard, each portion in the flowchart or portion diagrams may represent a module, segment, or portion of code, which comprises one or more executable instructions for implementing the specified logical function(s). It should also be noted that, in some alternative implementations, the functions noted in the portion may occur out of the order noted in the figures. For example, two portions shown in succession may, in fact, be executed substantially concurrently, or the portions may sometimes be executed in the reverse order, depending upon the functionality involved. It will also be noted that each portion of the portion diagrams and/or flowchart illustration, and combinations of portions in the portion diagrams and/or flowchart illustration, can be implemented by special purpose hardware-based systems that perform the specified functions or acts, or combinations of special purpose hardware and computer instructions.

[0061] In the above description, an embodiment is an example or implementation of the invention. The various appearances of "one embodiment", "an embodiment", "certain embodiments" or "some embodiments" do not necessarily all refer to the same embodiments. Although various features of the invention may be described in the context of a single embodiment, the features may also be provided separately or in any suitable

combination. Conversely, although the invention may be described herein in the context of separate embodiments for clarity, the invention may also be implemented in a single embodiment. Certain embodiments of the invention may include features from different embodiments disclosed above, and certain embodiments may incorporate elements from other embodiments disclosed above. The disclosure of elements of the invention in the context of a specific embodiment is not to be taken as limiting their use in the specific embodiment alone. Furthermore, it is to be understood that the invention can be carried out or practiced in various ways and that the invention can be implemented in certain embodiments other than the ones outlined in the description above.

[0062] The invention is not limited to those diagrams or to the corresponding descriptions. For example, flow need not move through each illustrated box or state, or in exactly the same order as illustrated and described. Meanings of technical and scientific terms used herein are to be commonly understood as by one of ordinary skill in the art to which the invention belongs, unless otherwise defined. While the invention has been described with respect to a limited number of embodiments, these should not be construed as limitations on the scope of the invention, but rather as exemplifications of some of the preferred embodiments. Other possible variations, modifications, and applications are also within the scope of the invention. Accordingly, the scope of the invention should not be limited by what has thus far been described, but by the appended claims and their legal equivalents.