

The Organizational Implementation of Information Systems: Towards a New Theory

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Abstract

We intuitively refer to the term planning as the deliberation process that chooses and organizes actions by anticipating their expected effects. This deliberation aims at satisfying some pre-defined requirements and achieving some pre-stated objectives. The intuition is that actions are executed in a given domain. They make the domain evolve and change its state. For instance, in a robot navigation domain, an action moving the robot changes its position; in the case of a microprocessor, an instruction can be viewed as an action that changes the value of the registers; a web service for booking flights can receive a message with a flight reservation confirmation, and this is an action that changes its state. The deliberation process can organize actions in different ways. For instance, moving a robot to a given room and then to the corridor is an example of a sequential organization of actions; executing an instruction depending on the result of the execution of a previous one is an example of a conditional combination of actions; requesting for a flight reservation until a seat is available is an example of an iterative combination. Actions are organized and combined with the aim to satisfy some requirements on the evolution of the domain. An example of a requirement for a mobile robot is that of “reaching a given room”, while a requirement for a flight service can be that

of “never exceeding a given number of overbooking”. Automated Planning is the area of Artificial Intelligence that studies this deliberation process computationally. Its aim is to support the planning activity by reasoning on conceptual models, i.e., abstract and formal representations of the domain, of the effects and the combinations of actions, and of the requirements to be satisfied and the objectives to be achieved. The conceptual model of the domain in which actions are executed is called the planning domain, combinations of actions are called plans, and the requirements to be satisfied are called goals. Intuitively, given a planning domain and a goal, a planning problem consists in determining a plan that satisfies the goal in a given domain. The framework is defined along the three main components of the planning problem: domains, plans, and goals.

Domains

We allow for nondeterministic domains, i.e., domains in which actions may have different effects, and it is impossible to know at planning time which of the different possible outcomes will actually take place. We also allow for partial observability. It models the fact that in some situations the state of the domain cannot be completely observed, and thus cannot be uniquely determined. A model with partial observability includes the special cases of full observability, where the state can be completely observed and thus uniquely determined, and that of null

observability, where no observation is ever possible at run time.

Plans

We define plans where the action to be executed in a given state can depend on available information about the history of previous execution steps. The definition is general enough to include sequential plans, i.e., plans that are simply sequences of actions, conditional plans, i.e., plans that can choose a different action depending on the current situation at execution time, iterative plans that can execute actions until a situation occurs. We can have plans that depend on a finite number of execution steps (finite-memory plans), as well as plans that do not depend on the previous execution steps (memory-less plans). In general, plan executions result in trees (called execution trees) whose nodes correspond to states of the domain.

Our framework is general enough to represent a relevant and significant set of planning problems. Classical planning can be modeled with deterministic domains, plans that are sequences of actions, and reachability goals. In addition, our framework is well suited for modeling certain forms of planning under uncertainty and incomplete information, which are being recently addressed in the research literature and are relevant to several real-world applications. Indeed, nondeterministic domains model uncertainty in action effects, while partial observability models uncertainty in observations. For instance, the so-called conformant planning can be modeled with nondeterministic domains, null observability, sequential plans, and reachability goals. Contingent planning can be modeled with nondeterministic domains, conditional plans, and

reachability goals. Planning for temporally extended goals can be modeled with nondeterministic domains, history dependent plans, and goals that represent desired evolutions of the domain.

Related Work

The use of interfaces is well known across several programming languages and software programming concepts, downloaded components. For a mission critical system it is important to ensure the safety and reliability of the host system over which these safety mechanisms have been implemented. There are several issues in the way components become faulty, one of the most common being cyber attacks. One possible scenario is that the components may be altered or replaced with malicious content while they are still in transit over a network. To ensure that the components are received in the form they have been sent is our goal while downloading (note that this is not a way of ensuring the credibility of the source from which these components are downloaded). As noted earlier, traditional approaches on detecting vulnerability would simply block or prevent the faulty component from executing in the host environment. This is not the solution to our problem, as mission-critical systems cannot afford complete blocking of components which were probably from a credible source but affected by malicious content during their transit (over a network, etc). The whole concept of survivability hinges on the basis of providing the system with capabilities to continue execution of the component after faulty parts have been successfully removed (or rendered harmless) by providing good recovery

schemes. Thus the focus is on improved accuracy in detection and recovery of malicious components—a must for effective survivability. The dynamic testing strategies described below are collectively termed as Multiple Aspect Testing due to the nature of the testing itself—a multifunctional and extendible approach designed to achieve more of such accuracy in detection and recovery.

In large mission-critical systems where speed and performance is a vital concern, it is best to filter potentially malicious content even before the system proceeds to test for

such content. As a first level of filtering in our system, we can have the system download multiple copies of each component required by the host machine (preferably onto multiple parallel machines or servers) and check for coherence in their content by comparing certain parameters. Thus for every component N we have several downloads, say N_1 , N_2 , N_3 and N_4 . Each of these components are checked for parameters such as component size, last modified time, number of modules contained in each, source information, etc., and a comparison is made between each of them to check for coherence or matches in the values for each mentioned parameter. Now, if component N_4 does not match the properties of the other downloaded component copies N_1 , N_2 and N_3 , then since the latter form a majority—in this case, 75%, we can discard N_4 by assuming

that it may be a component whose contents may have been modified over the network during its transit. The percentage of acceptance here, which we call acceptance threshold, was 75%, as we saw already, but this could vary based on the

criticality of the system. For example, an extremely critical system would have an acceptance threshold of 90%, requiring nine out of every ten component copies to hit concurrency in the parameter values (thus consequently increasing the number of copies downloaded for each component download). It is extremely important to note that although the valid components are

accepted in this case, they are far from being allowed to execute in the host machine, because this technique does nothing to establish the validity of the source site. Thus, one or more of the accepted components can be marked in this case for further testing as described below.

Establishing Source Credibility

The acceptance threshold can be used to obtain statistics on the credibility of the sites from which the components are being downloaded. For example, if a particular site consistently produces low acceptance rates, then the problem may not just be with the network-based attacks. The components emanating from the source site itself may be implemented within inconsistencies and malicious content for some copies of each

component copy sent. Thus, we can define a critical acceptance threshold here that is a value below which a source site would be marked not trustworthy, and all further downloads from this site would be blocked. Thus the system would have to consistently incorporate decision-making based on past experience as well.

Automated planning

Automated Planning (AP) is the branch of Artificial Intelligence that studies the computational synthesis of ordered sets of actions that perform a given task. AP appeared in the late '50s as the result of studies into state-space search, theorem proving and control theory to solve the practical needs of robotics and automatic deduction. The Stanford Institute Problem Solver STRIPS (Fikes and Nilsson, 1971), developed to be the planning component for controlling the autonomous robot Shakey (Nilsson, 1984), perfectly illustrates the interaction of these influences. From the days of Shakey to now, AP has produced

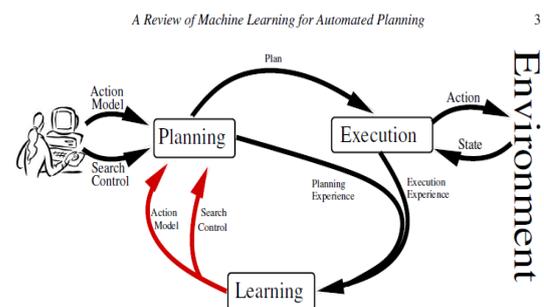
accepted standards for representing planning tasks and efficient algorithms for solving them (Ghallabet al., 2004). In the last decade AP systems have been successfully applied to real world problems

such as planning space missions (Nayak et al., 1999), managing fire extinctions (Castillo et al., 2006) or controlling underwater vehicles (Bellingham and Rajan, 2007). Despite these successful examples, the application of AP systems to real world problems is still complicated, mainly because of two knowledge definition problems:

Automated planners require an accurate description of the planning task. These descriptions include a model of the actions that can be carried out in the environment, a specification of the state of the environment and the goals to achieve. In the real world, the execution of an action may result in numerous outcomes, the knowledge of the state of the environment may be partial and the goals may not be completely defined. Generating exact definitions of the planning tasks in

advance is unfeasible for most real-world problems.

Off-the-shelf planners often fail to scale-up or yield good quality solutions. Usually, the search for a solution plan in AP is a PSPACE-complete problem (Bylander, 1991, 1994). Current state-of-the-art planners try to cope with this complexity through reachability analysis by (1) grounding actions and (2) performing a search process guided by domain-independent heuristics. Nevertheless, when the number of objects is large, the resulting ground search trees cannot be traversed in a reasonable time. Moreover, where heuristics are



poorly informed –like in the case of some domains with strong subgoals interactions– this kind of analysis is misleading. Domain-specific search control knowledge has been shown to improve the scalability of planners in these situations (Bacchus and Kabanza, 2000; Nau et al., 2003). Defining search control knowledge is usually more difficult than defining the planning task because it requires expertise, not only in the task to solve, but also in the planning algorithm.

AP aims to produce solvers that are effective when faced with different classes of problems. AP produces solvers that exploit environment dynamics models to reason on different tasks in different environments. An AP task is defined by

two elements: The domain, that consists of the set of states of the environment S together with the set of actions A that indicates the transitions between these states. The problem, that consists of the set of facts $s_0 \subseteq S$ that indicates the initial state of the environment and the set of facts $G \subseteq S$ that indicates the goals of the AP task. A solution to an AP task is a sequence of actions $a_1; \dots; a_n$. This sequence of actions corresponds to a sequence of state transitions $s_0; \dots; s_n$ such that a_i is applicable in state s_{i-1} and produces state s_i , s_n is a goal state; that is $G \subseteq s_n$. The cost of the solution is the sum of the action costs. A solution is considered optimal when it minimizes the expression $\sum_{i=1}^n \text{cost}(a_i)$.

Specifying accurate action models to address AP tasks in the real world is a complex exercise. Even in traditionally easy-to-code planning domains—like Blocksworld—it is hard to specify the actions' potential outcomes when the environment is non-deterministic. In extreme cases, like planning for the autonomous control of a Mars Rover (Bresina et al., 2005) or an underwater vehicle (McGann et al., 2008), this knowledge cannot be specified because it is as of yet unknown. In these situations, the success of the AP systems fully depends on the skills of the experts who define the action model. With the aim of assisting experts, the planning community is developing systems for the acquisition, validation and maintenance of AP models. ML seems to be a useful tool for these systems to automate the extraction and organization of knowledge from examples of plans, execution traces or user preferences. When the AP task is accurately defined, it looks like it should be easy to tackle by searching for a path

in a state-transition graph, a well-studied problem. However, in AP this state-transition graph often becomes so large that search is intractable. The complexity of the algorithms to solve this type of problems grows with the number of states, which is exponential in the number of problem variables (number of objects and predicates of the problem). Prior to the mid '90s, planners were unable to synthesize plans with more than ten actions in an acceptable amount of time. In the late 90's, a significant scale-up in planning took place due to the appearance of the reachability planning graph (Blum and Furst, 1995). This discovery allowed for the development of powerful domain independent heuristics (Hoffmann and Nebel, 2001a; Bonet and Geffner, 2001) that were computable in polynomial time. Recent discoveries—such as the automatic extraction of search landmarks (Porteous and Sebastia, 2004) and the automatic construction of symbolic Pattern Data Bases (Edelkamp, 2002) improve planners' speed and quality performance. Planners using these advances can often synthesize one hundred action plans in seconds, yet scalability limitations are still present in AP and even well-studied domains—like the Blocks world—become challenging for planners when there is a relatively large number of objects. On the one hand, current domain-independent heuristics are expensive to compute. This effect is more evident in domains where heuristics are misleading. In these domains planners spend most of their planning time computing useless node evaluations. On the other hand, given that these domain independent techniques are based on action grounding, the planners' search trees become intractable when the number of problem objects and/or

action parameters reaches a certain size. These problems make Domain-independent planners' application to various real problems difficult. Logistics applications need to handle hundreds of objects at the same time as hundreds of vehicles and locations (Florez et al., 2010) which makes computing evaluation functions in every search node unfeasible. In this case, ML has a role to play in capturing useful control knowledge skipped by the domain-independent techniques.

Learning Planning Action Models

AP algorithms reason about correct and complete action models that indicate the state-transitions of the world. Building planning action models from scratch is difficult and time-consuming, even for AP experts. An alternative approach is to use ML so people do not have to hand-code the action models. This section reviews ML techniques for the automatic definition of action models for AP. The review classifies the techniques by the stochasticity of the actions effects and by the observability of the state of the environment.

1. Action effects. In many planning tasks deterministic world dynamics cannot be assumed. This is the case with planning domains that include stochastic procedures such as the toggling of a coin or the rolling of a dice, or non-deterministic outcomes, such as robot navigation in the real world.
2. State observability. In many planning tasks handling a complete and exact description of the state of the environment is inconceivable. Parts of the current state may be confused or missing due to sensors' failures or to their inability to completely sense the world. For example, when controlling a robot in the real world. Accordingly, we defined four

categories for AP modelling: deterministic actions in fully observable environments; deterministic actions in partially observable environments; stochastic actions in fully observable environments; and stochastic actions in partially observable environments. Despite the fact that other classifications are possible—like for instance by grouping according to the learning target (preconditions, effects, conditions of effects, probabilities of outcomes,) we believe this one is useful for planning purposes because each class corresponds to a different planning paradigm. The classification of the planning action modelling systems by giving some example implementations. This table does not intend to be an exhaustive enumeration so the systems in the table are just a sample. The rest of the section describes the systems belonging to each of the four categories in detail.

The Learning Task

1. Knowledge representation. In terms of AP, the suitable languages for representing deterministic actions are the languages defined for classical planning. The Planning Domain Definition Language (PDDL) (Fox and Long, 2003; Thiébaux et al., 2005; Gerevini et al., 2009b) is the standard representation language for classical planning. It was created as the planning input language for the International Planning Competition (IPC1) to standardize the planning representation languages and facilitating comparative analysis of diverse planning systems. Although several of the systems reviewed in this paper use other representation languages, we have used PDDL to illustrate our examples. A PDDL action consists of a tuple

MODEL	FEATURES		IMPLEMENTATIONS
	Strengths	Weakness	
Deterministic effects Full state observability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning complexity is theoretically bounded • Efficient planning algorithms • Complete coverage of the learning examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor expressiveness 	LIVE (Shen and Simon, 1989), EXPO (Gil, 1992), OBSERVER (Wang, 1994)
Deterministic effects Partial state observability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete coverage of the learning examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor expressiveness • Inefficient planning algorithms 	ARMS (Yang et al., 2007), (Amir and Chang, 2008), (Mourão et al., 2008), LOCM (Cresswell et al., 2009)
Probabilistic effects Full state observability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich expressiveness • Efficient planning algorithms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-existent online learning 	(Oates and Cohen, 1996), TRAIL (Benson, 1997), LOPE (García-Martínez and Borrajo, 2000), (Pasula et al., 2007), PELA (Jiménez et al., 2008)
Probabilistic effects Partial state observability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich Expressiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High planning and learning complexity 	(Yoon and Kambhampati, 2007)

Implementations of systems for planning action modelling

<head(a),pre(a),eff(a)> where, head(a) is the head of action a containing the action name and the list of typed parameters,pre(a) is the set of action preconditions. This set represents the facts that needs to be true for the application of action a and,eff(a) is the set of action effects. This set includes the facts that are no longer true after the application of action a (known as del effects and represented by del(a)) and the facts made true by the application of action a (known as add effects and represented by add(a)).

Implementations

The LIVE system (Shen and Simon, 1989) was an extension of the General Problem Solver (GPS) framework (Ernst and Newell, 1969) with a learning component. LIVE alternated problem solving with model learning to automatically define operators. The decision about when to alternate depended on surprises, that is situations where an action effects violated its predicted model. EXPO (Gil, 1992) generated plans with the PRODIGY system (Minton, 1988), monitored the plans execution, detected differences in the predicted and the observed states and constructed a set of specific hypotheses to fix those differences. Then the EXPO

filtered the hypotheses heuristically. OBSERVER (Wang, 1994) learned operators by monitoring expert agents and applying the version spaces algorithm (Mitchell, 1997) to the observations. When the system already had an operator representation, the preconditions were updated by removing facts that were not present in the new observation's pre-state; the effects were augmented by adding facts that were in the observation's delta-state. All of these early works were based on direct liftings of the observed states. They also benefit from

experience beyond simple interaction with the environment such as exploratory plans or external teachers, but none provided a theoretical justification for this second source of knowledge. The work recently reported in (Walsh and Littman, 2008) succeeds in bounding the number of interactions the learner must complete to learn the preconditions and effects of a STRIPS action model. This work shows that learning STRIPS operators from pure interaction with the environment, can require an exponential number of samples, but that limiting the size of the precondition lists enable sample-efficient learning (polynomial in the number of

actions and predicates of the domain). The work also proves that efficient learning is also possible without this limit if an agent has access to an external teacher that can provide solution traces on demand. In the review we focused on learning STRIPS-like action models but others systems have tried to learn more expressive action models for deterministic planning in fully observable environments. Examples would include the learning of conditional costs for AP actions (Jess Lanchas and Borrajo, 2007) or the learning of conditional effects with quantifiers (Zhuo et al., 2008).

Conclusions

Today encouraged by the applications of AP to real-world problems and the maturity of relational learning, there is a renewed interest in learning for planning. In 2005 the International Competition on Knowledge Engineering for Planning Systems (ICKEPS) began and in 2008 a learning track was opened at IPC. Workshops on planning and learning have taken place periodically at the International Conference on Automated Planning and Scheduling. ML seems to be once again one of the solutions to the challenges of AP. In the paper we focused on two of AP's challenges: defining effective AP action models and defining search control knowledge to improve the planners performance. For the first challenge, we reviewed systems that learned action models with diverse forms of preconditions and effects. These systems generally present learning algorithms that are effective when the appropriate learning examples are collected although it is still not clear how to automatically collect good sets of learning examples in AP. When learning results in

imperfect action models, there are few mechanisms for diagnosing the flaws of the models or algorithms to robustly plan with them. For the second challenge, we reviewed different forms of search control knowledge to improve off-the-shelf planners. This kind of knowledge has been shown to boost the performance of planners in particular domains. Learning effective search control knowledge over a collection of domains is still challenging since different planning domains may present very different structures. We also reviewed learning search control for HTN planners which is a more expressive form of control knowledge that uses a different planning paradigm based on domain-specific problem decomposition. In this planning paradigm, search control knowledge and action models are not separated in the domain theory's definition.

The paper also reviewed techniques for RRL, a form of RL that, like AP, uses predicate logic to represent states and actions. Though current RRL techniques can solve relational tasks, they are focused on achieving a particular set of goals and present generalization limitations in comparison with learning for AP techniques. Furthermore, they have problems collecting significant experience for complex tasks like the ones traditionally addressed in AP, where achieving a particular goal may undo previously satisfied goals.

The application and combination of new ML algorithms for AP is still an open issue. ML is constantly producing new learning algorithms with potential applications for AP. In the case of relational learning AP has only benefited from algorithms for classification and regression but existing

relational learning algorithms cover almost all machine learning tasks. Algorithms for relational clustering or for inferring association rules (Raedt, 2008) have still not been explored in AP. ML algorithms for propositional data can be adapted to the relational setting used in AP (Mourao et al., 2010). Another example of applying new ML algorithms to AP is the use of kernel functions to effectively match planning instances (Serina, 2010). Despite all this new ML technology, learning algorithms present biases that affect the learning process. Research in ML for AP can take up new research directions to study the combination of different learning algorithms to reduce the negative effect of a given algorithm bias. This review focused on learning two inputs of the AP process, the action model and knowledge for search control. There is a full set of techniques that aim to capture information about the third input to the AP process, the problem. Plan recognition techniques (Charniak and Goldman, 1993; Bui et al., 2002) try to infer an agent's goals and plans by observing the agent's actions. The plan recognition task traditionally assumes there is a library with the space of possible plans to be recognized but recent works do not require the use of this library. These works (Ramírez and Geffner, 2009; Ramírez and Geffner, 2010) can also compute the goals that account for the observed examples using slightly modified planning algorithms. Further studies are needed to analyze the relationship of plan recognition techniques with the learning techniques for AP reviewed in this paper.

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