Deliberate Cooperation In Service-Oriented Environments: Dynamic Transactional Workflows For Web Services

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(Computer Science)

by

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Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

(David John Paul)
Dedicated to my mother. You showed me the path but let me make my own way.
Acknowledgements

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

John Donne

The city of Newcastle has a lot to offer. Large enough to have most modern conveniences available, but small enough not to have completely lost its village feel, the city combines the coastal lifestyle (including some of the most beautiful beaches in the world) with the industrial contrast that its mining history ensures. It has been my home; I can offer it no greater compliment or thanks. Of course, a location on its own, no matter how beautiful, cannot provide the support necessary for a long-term project such as this dissertation. For that, people are needed, and I’ve been fortunate enough to have had the guidance, support, and presence of some truly wonderful people, all of whom deserve my acknowledgement and my thanks.

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# Contents

1 Introduction 1

1.1 Cooperation In Service-Oriented Systems 2
1.2 Motivation 3
1.3 Research Objectives 5
1.4 Problem Definition 7
1.5 Research Questions 7
1.6 Research Methodology 8
1.7 Structure Of The Thesis 9
1.8 Contributions 10

2 Background Information 11

2.1 Service-Oriented Systems 11
2.1.1 Similar Systems 12
2.1.2 Web Services 15
2.2 Transactions 20
2.2.1 Ensuring ACID properties 21
2.2.2 More Complex Transaction Models 24
2.2.3 Multidatabase Transactions 26
2.3 Summary 31

3 Service Composition In The Web Environment 32

3.1 Requirements Of A Service Composition Platform 33
3.1.1 Service Discovery 34
3.1.2 Uniform Information Exchange Infrastructure 35
3.1.3 Adaptiveness 35
## CONTENTS

3.1.4 Other Requirements ........................................ 36

3.2 Transactions In The Web Services Environment ............ 37
   3.2.1 Web Services Transactions Standards .................. 37
   3.2.2 Advanced Transaction Models ......................... 41

3.3 Orchestration And Choreography ............................. 51
   3.3.1 Orchestration ........................................... 52
   3.3.2 Choreography .......................................... 53

3.4 Summary ..................................................... 54

4 Dynamic Contracts For Web Services Transactions 56
   4.1 Provider Contracts ......................................... 58
      4.1.1 Possible Interactions ................................. 59
      4.1.2 Offering A Transactional Contract .................... 64
   4.2 Combining Contracts ...................................... 67
      4.2.1 The Client’s Transaction ............................... 67
      4.2.2 Initial Stages ......................................... 68
      4.2.3 Processing The Transaction ............................. 69
   4.3 Interaction Protocol ....................................... 71
      4.3.1 The Negotiation Protocol .............................. 73
      4.3.2 Contract Format ....................................... 75
      4.3.3 The Transaction Protocol ............................... 80
      4.3.4 Time Outs ............................................ 85
   4.4 Linking With Existing Services ............................. 86
      4.4.1 Backwards Compatibility ............................... 86
   4.5 Evaluation ................................................ 87
   4.6 Summary .................................................. 88

5 A Formal Model Of The Dynamic Transaction System 90
   5.1 Offering Dynamic Transaction Support ..................... 91
      5.1.1 Tracking The Current State Of A Provider’s Resources .... 92
      5.1.2 Determining The Available Levels Of Transaction Support .... 94
   5.2 Using Transactional Guarantees ............................ 95
      5.2.1 Describing A Client’s Workflow ....................... 96
### CONTENTS

5.2.2 Determining A Client’s Next Action ........................................ 107
5.2.3 Reasoning With Incomplete Information .............................. 115
5.3 Negotiating Transaction Levels ................................................. 116
  5.3.1 A Provider Negotiation Strategy ........................................ 117
  5.3.2 Client Negotiation Strategies ........................................... 118
5.4 Summary ................................................................. 118

6 Simulating The Dynamic Transaction System ............................... 120
  6.1 The Web Services Transactions Simulator .............................. 121
    6.1.1 Simulating Messages .................................................. 123
    6.1.2 Simulating Timing .................................................... 124
  6.2 Simulating Participants ................................................... 125
    6.2.1 Simulating Providers ................................................ 125
    6.2.2 Simulating Clients .................................................. 127
  6.3 Input For The Simulator .................................................. 129
  6.4 Interpreting The Simulator’s Output ................................... 130
  6.5 Summary ................................................................. 130

7 Validation .............................................................................. 132
  7.1 The Need For Non-Traditional Transaction Schemes .................... 132
    7.1.1 Scenario Description .................................................. 133
    7.1.2 Results ................................................................. 134
  7.2 Supporting Dynamic Transaction Levels .................................. 136
    7.2.1 Scenario Description ................................................ 137
    7.2.2 Results ................................................................. 139
  7.3 Summary ................................................................. 143

8 Conclusion ........................................................................ 145
  8.1 Research Questions ......................................................... 146
    8.1.1 Research Question 1 ................................................... 146
    8.1.2 Research Question 2 ................................................... 147
    8.1.3 Research Question 3 ................................................... 148
    8.1.4 Research Question 4 ................................................... 149
CONTENTS

8.1.5 Research Question 5 ................................................. 149
8.2 Future Directions ......................................................... 151

A Specification Of Transaction Description Language .................. 153
A.1 Notational Conventions And Terminology .............................. 153
A.2 Description ..................................................................... 154
A.3 Core Element Set ............................................................. 154
A.3.1 General Structure ......................................................... 154
A.3.2 Workflows .................................................................... 156
A.3.3 Transaction Details ....................................................... 158
A.4 TDL Normative Schema .................................................... 163

B Specification Of Transaction Protocol ................................. 166
B.1 Protocols ......................................................................... 166
B.1.1 Agreement Coordination Protocols ................................. 166

Bibliography ........................................................................ 229
Abstract

The only thing that will redeem mankind is cooperation.

*Bertrand Russell*

Modern society is complex and, in order to achieve desired goals, individuals must work together. Cooperation between parties can either be accidental, forced, or deliberate. Deliberate cooperation occurs when individuals realise that a successful outcome is more likely when they team up with others to achieve common goals. This thesis presents a method to support deliberate cooperation in service-oriented architectures. In such an environment, deliberate cooperation can be provided through improved transaction support.

Service-oriented architectures are based on the concept of services. Providers advertise the services that they offer and clients send requests for the services to be performed without needing to understand the intricate details of how the outcomes are achieved. Clients often require services from multiple unrelated providers in order to achieve their goals, but current systems make it difficult to combine these services in such a way that the client is guaranteed an acceptable outcome. Further, the existing standards are not always flexible enough to allow service providers to always offer their desired level of transaction support.

This thesis presents a method that allows service providers to dynamically alter the level of transaction support they offer for their services. This approach is more flexible than current approaches for Web Services transactions, and ensures that providers are always able to offer a level of support for cooperation with which they are comfortable. A formal system is also presented that allows clients to use the transactional guarantees offered by providers to reason about service compositions and ensure that client workflows always end in an acceptable state.
To augment these theoretical results, a Web Services transactions simulator has been developed. By simulating transaction flow rather than service flow, this allows the dynamic transaction scheme described in this thesis to be compared with more traditional Web Services transactions. Results indicate that support for dynamic transactional workflows can provide an overall benefit for both clients and service providers, and the simulator allows detailed study of how changes to the transactional behaviour of participants affects the outcome of particular scenarios.