Multi-Agent Systems Coursework Report

Abstract

This project uses agents to tackle a computing problem involving the supply chain of creating and selling mobile phones, where agents handle the roles of parts supplying, phone manufacturing and customers who order and buy the phones. The project implements a 100-day simulation of this agent supply chain, with a focus on the performance of the manufacturer agent, of which there is only one within the system. The system is then experimented with, to test hypotheses based on how the system will perform.

Introduction

This project tackles the “smartphone supply chain problem”, a computing problem focused on the automation of the manufacture and sales of mobile phones. The problem takes place from the perspective of a mobile phone manufacturer, who needs to buy parts from their suppliers, take orders from customers and then construct telephones based upon their orders with the parts in stock. The crux of the problem is maximising profits and minimising squandered time through the use of computing solutions. This is important in the current market due to the ongoing “arms race” to automate every part of the supply chain, allowing businesses to be more efficient in their processing with the aim of landing higher net profits. The automation allows for a reduction in unnecessary staff as well as improving the efficiency and accuracy of tasks, such as finding parts at the best price from suppliers, at the cost of the lump sum development cost of a system to undergo the process.

There are various potential approaches to tackling the automation, however the one of interest with this project is using multi-agent systems. Groves, Collins, Gini and Ketter (2014) explore the idea of utilising agents for use within supply chain management. They suggest that agents can be very effectively utilised under the right market environments. They present the idea using their own set of agents with various simulated market conditions. They conclude that although their simulated market conditions did not match that of any real-world markets, valuable insights were gained to suggest strong potential of agents having usage within real-world market environments.

Model design

Agent role identification:

Manufacturer - The “main” agent within the system, of which there will only be one at any given time. This agent is tasked with receiving orders from customer agents, ordering parts from supplier agents, and optimising time and cost efficiency by planning how to tackle each order, and which suppliers to buy which parts from. This agent calculates all profits made and deducts all costs for parts and part storage to calculate net profit. A maximum of 50 ordered phones can be made within a single simulated day. When a customer’s order is received, a total due date is provided for the order, if this date is not met, a penalty is also incurred.

Customer - Within the system, there will be three customer agents by default, which can be changed with a variable. For every day simulated within the system, each customer will generate one order per day. Each order will consist of only one type of phone (each having all the same parts) which will be randomly generated each day, in a random quantity, which is also randomised per day.

Supplier - There will be two suppliers within the system by default, each with their own inventory and parameters. The first supplier stocks every part required by the manufacturer and delivers ordered parts the next day. The second supplier only has around half of the parts that the manufacturer needs and takes four days to deliver, however the stocked parts are massively discounted in comparison to the first supplier.

Ontology justification:

The ontology used for the design of the system can be found within *Appendix 1*. The ontology can be broken down into three sections.

First is the “phone part” section, this is used to define what a part is, what parts there are, and what variations of each part are available. For example, within the system there are only two types of battery, 2000 and 3000 mAh variations, therefore the ontology shows specifically only those two types of battery.

The second section of the ontology is the “order” section, which breaks down what any single order from a single customer will contain. The things found here are the “phone type”, which is the design specification of the type of phone being ordered, since only one type of phone is ordered at a time, the “number of devices”, which is the amount of phones of the single type within the order, and the “due date”, being the randomised date to which the order is due before late fees are applied.

The third and final section of the ontology is the sales chain, a section which shows which members of the supply chain sell to whom. It shows suppliers, who each have a name, a list of phone parts and a delivery time associated to them, selling to the manufacturer. It then shows the manufacturer, who in this system has exactly three customers and two suppliers associated with them, as well as having a list of orders, selling to a customer. The customer is the end of this sales chain, with each customer having a name and a list of orders they’ve made. In the case of the order lists held by both the manufacturer and by each customer, no minimum boundary is set, since both can have zero orders currently active at a given time.

Agent communication protocols:

The sequence diagram and ACL protocols created at this stage of the project can be seen within *Appendix 2*. It should be noted that the red text on the ACL protocols is space for a variable which depends on what the agents are requesting.

The customer element of the sequence diagram is broken into four interactions. The first is the customer generating an order and sending it to the manufacturer, the second and third are both receiving responses to their order (accepted or rejected), and lastly the manufacturer returning a message to inform the customer the order is completed. It should be noted that the customer creating the order is always the start of the process shown in the diagram, and them receiving their order is always the end. In the full system, this will run three times per day, one for each customer in the system.

The manufacturer element of the sequence diagram runs as a single interaction. This is because although parts will be ordered to replace those used, the order will still be attempted to be completed with parts currently stored in the warehouse. During the process of working on building the order, the manufacturer will always attempt to order parts to replace those used, since there is no benefit to ordering parts in bulk.

The supplier is also a single interaction, being to receive an order, confirm the order, prepare the order, then complete and send the order. The manufacturer can potentially order from two different suppliers at a time, depending on if the system determines ordering from both to be more beneficial than ordering from only one. The supplier has no rejection state in this system since the environment is unchanging, where suppliers each have an unlimited amount of stock for each of their items.

There is no fail state for the phones being built since the system also doesn’t have the capacity to fail in such a way, only taking longer than intended, which incurs a “late fee”.

Model implementation

Agents:

Within my implementation, there are four total agent types. There are the three agent types expected by the specification, being Manufacturer, Customer and Supplier, as well as a fourth agent type, “SystemTicker”, which is tasked with synchronising each of the other agents in the system with the simulated 100-day cycle.

SystemTicker implements one behaviour, “SynchroniseAgents”, which is used to keep each of the agents on track. Whenever a new day begins within the system, it sends out a “new day” message to each active agent it can find. This can be seen in *figure 1* of *appendix 3*. After sending “new day” messages to each of the agents, it awaits “done” responses from each of them. This can be seen in *figure 2* of *appendix 3*. Lastly, if the simulation has run for 100 days, instead of sending a “new day” message, the agent will send a “terminate” message to each of the other agents. This can be seen in *figure 3* of *appendix 3*.

All agents aside from SystemTicker each have one main Cyclic behaviour named “AwaitTicker”, which relies on the SystemTicker telling them a day has started so they can each get along with their daily activities (or terminate if that is what is sent instead). This can be seen in *figure 4* of *appendix 3*. Each of the AwaitTicker behaviours also ends with a oneshot sub behaviour named “EndDay”, which handles the response of “done” to go back to SystemTicker to iterate the days once each agent has sent “done”. This can be seen in *figure 5* of *appendix 3*.

Customer implements six sub behaviours, each of the oneshot type. The first of these is “PrepareOrder”, a behaviour which calls a local method used to generate a single new order, to be used as that agent’s order for the day, applying each of the mathematical functions supplied in the coursework specification document. The next is “FindManufacturer”, a behaviour which locates the manufacturer agent for later use through the use of “DFService.search”. This can be seen in *figure 6* of *appendix 3*. Next is “SendOrder”, used to send the generated order to the located manufacturer. This can be seen in *figure 7* of *appendix 3*. Next is “AwaitResponse”, the behaviour tasked with receiving the acception or rejection of the order from the manufacturer. This can be seen in *figure 8* of *appendix 3*. Next is “DeliveryReceived”, used handle a delivery being received if one is sent. This can be seen in *figure 9* of *appendix 3*. Last is the EndDay behaviour required to function in the system.

Manufacturer implements six oneshot sub behaviours of its own. First is “NewDay”, a basic behaviour used to change days used to track when orders are due and receive any deliveries scheduled to be delivered on the current day. Next is “AwaitOrders”, another simple behaviour used to receive orders sent by each customer. This is followed by “DecideOrder”, which implements the strategy described in the “Design of manufacturer agent control strategy” section. “OrderParts” follows next, which locates “Supplier1” the supplier used for all order made with the control strategy implemented, then orders parts. The ordering can be seen in *figure 10* of *appendix 3*. “AssembleAndShipPhones” is next and is the other half of the control strategy. Lastly is the expected “EndDay” behaviour.

Last is Supplier, which implements two sub behaviours. First is “HandleRequests”, which receives all incoming parts requests, then responds to them with a generated invoice. This can be seen in *figure 11* of *appendix 3*. The other behaviour is the standard “EndDay” behaviour.

Ontology:

The ontology was expanded to five parts for the implementation. There are two concepts. First is “PhoneSpecification”, used to get 1 type of each part used together to make a phone. Second is “PartsList”, a list of each part type as an integer, implemented by manufacturer to store currentStock and requiredStock as singular variables. The other three parts are all predicates. “Order” uses PhoneSpecification alongside variables for each of the other elements of an order such as price per unit and quantity. It is used to send an order from a Customer to the Manufacturer. It can be seen in use in *figure 12* of *appendix 3*. Next is “PartsRequest”, implemented by Manufacturer to send an order to Suppliers. It implements a parts list as well as the Manufacturer’s Agent ID. It can be seen in use in *figure 13* of *appendix 3*. Lastly is “PartsInvoice”, sent back from the Supplier to the Manufacturer upon receiving a request for parts. The Invoice contains a list of parts that can be supplied by the supplier, alongside the price and date till delivery of the parts. It can be seen in use in *figure 14* of *appendix 3*.

Constraints:

Design of manufacturer agent control strategy

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Experimental results

Hypothesis: As the number of customers increase, so to does the chance of higher quality orders being received, meaning more profits will be earned. This will be tested using a range of 1-6 agents, each tested 25 times where the output Total Earnings after 100 simulated days will be taken as a metric. The agents tested with go no higher than 6 due to a noticeable drop in the performance of the simulation (each day takes multiple seconds to complete, when compared to the almost instantaneous day cycle of a lower amount of agents in the system) when 7 or more agents are used when running on the computer which all of the testing is done on.

Conclusions

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References

Groves, W., Collins, J., Gini, M., & Ketter, W. (2014). Agent-assisted supply chain management: Analysis and lessons learned. *Decision Support Systems, 57*(1), 274-284. doi:10.1016/j.dss.2013.09.006

Appendix 1: ontology

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

Appendix 2: communication protocols

A close up of a map

Description automatically generated

Appendix 3: source code

ACLMessage tick = **new** ACLMessage(ACLMessage.***INFORM***);

tick.setContent("new day");

**for** (AID agent : allAgents) {

tick.addReceiver(agent);

}

myAgent.send(tick);

Figure 1: - “new day” message to all agents.

MessageTemplate mt = MessageTemplate.*MatchContent*("done");

ACLMessage msg = myAgent.receive(mt);

**if** (msg != **null**) {

finishedMessages++;

**if** (finishedMessages >= allAgents.size()) {

step++;

}

}

**else** {

block();

}

Figure 2: - Awaiting “done” responses.

**if** (currentDay == ***simulationDays***) {

ACLMessage msg = **new** ACLMessage(ACLMessage.***INFORM***);

msg.setContent("terminate");

**for** (AID agent : allAgents) {

msg.addReceiver(agent);

}

myAgent.send(msg);

myAgent.doDelete();

}

Figure 3: - “terminate” message being sent to all agents.

MessageTemplate mt = MessageTemplate.*or*(MessageTemplate.*MatchContent*("new ” +

“day"), MessageTemplate.*MatchContent*("terminate"));

ACLMessage msg = myAgent.receive(mt);

**if** (msg != **null**) {

**if** (systemTicker == **null**) {

systemTicker = msg.getSender();

}

**if** (msg.getContent().equals("new day")) {

//Do Daily SubBehaviours.

}

**else** {

//Do anything that needs done before agent deletion.

myAgent.doDelete();

}

}

**else** {

block();

}

Figure 4: - General AwaitTicker behaviour.

ACLMessage msg = **new** ACLMessage(ACLMessage.***INFORM***);

msg.addReceiver(systemTicker);

msg.setContent("done");

myAgent.send(msg);

Figure 5: - “done” response.

DFAgentDescription manufacturerTemplate = **new** DFAgentDescription();

ServiceDescription sd = **new** ServiceDescription();

sd.setType("manufacturer");

manufacturerTemplate.addServices(sd);

//Since there SHOULD only be one Manufacturer in the system, only the first //found active manufacturer will be recorded.

**try** {

DFAgentDescription[] manufacturers = DFService.*search*(myAgent,

manufacturerTemplate);

manufacturer = manufacturers[0].getName();

}

**catch** (FIPAException e) {

e.printStackTrace();

}

Figure 6: - Code used to locate manufacturer for later use.

ACLMessage thisOrder = **new** ACLMessage(ACLMessage.***REQUEST***);

thisOrder.addReceiver(manufacturer);

thisOrder.setLanguage(codec.getName());

thisOrder.setOntology(ontology.getName());

**try** {

getContentManager().fillContent(thisOrder, order);

send(thisOrder);

}

**catch** (CodecException ce) {

ce.printStackTrace();

}

**catch** (OntologyException oe) {

oe.printStackTrace();

}

Figure 7: - Sending generated order to manufacturer.

**while**(!response){

MessageTemplate mt;

ACLMessage msg;

mt = MessageTemplate.*MatchPerformative*(ACLMessage.***AGREE***);

msg = receive(mt);

**if** (msg != **null**) {

**if** (msg.getContent().equals("order confirm")) {

System.***out***.println(getAID().getLocalName()+

": My Order was Accepted!");

response = **true**;

}

}

mt = MessageTemplate.*MatchPerformative*(ACLMessage.***REFUSE***);

msg = receive(mt);

**if** (msg != **null**) {

**if** (msg.getContent().equals("order refuse")) {

System.***out***.println(getAID().getLocalName()+

": My Order was Rejected...");

response = **true**;

}

}

}

Figure 8: - Handling for order being accepted or rejected.

MessageTemplate mt = MessageTemplate.*MatchPerformative*(ACLMessage.***INFORM***);

ACLMessage msg = receive(mt);

**if** (msg != **null**) {

**if** (msg.getContent().equals("order completed")) {

System.***out***.println(getAID().getLocalName()+

": One of my orders has been delivered!");

}

}

Figure 9: - Handling for an order being received.

ACLMessage partsOrder = **new** ACLMessage(ACLMessage.***REQUEST***);

partsOrder.addReceiver(supplier1);

partsOrder.setLanguage(codec.getName());

partsOrder.setOntology(ontology.getName());

PartsRequest content = **new** PartsRequest();

content.setManufacturer(getAID());

content.setParts(requiredStock);

**try** {

getContentManager().fillContent(partsOrder, content);

send(partsOrder);

MessageTemplate mt = MessageTemplate.*MatchPerformative*(ACLMessage.***AGREE***);

ACLMessage msg = receive(mt);

**if** (msg != **null**) {

**try** {

PartsInvoice invoice = (PartsInvoice)

getContentManager().extractContent(msg);

pendingDelivery.add(invoice);

todaysProfit -= invoice.getCost();

partsConfirmed = **true**;

requiredStock = **new** PartsList();

}

**catch** (CodecException ce) {

ce.printStackTrace();

}

**catch** (OntologyException oe) {

oe.printStackTrace();

}

}

**else** {

block();

}

Figure 10: - Sending a parts request and receiving a response.

MessageTemplate mt = MessageTemplate.*MatchPerformative*(ACLMessage.***REQUEST***);

ACLMessage msg = receive(mt);

**if** (msg != **null**) {

**try** {

PartsRequest request = (PartsRequest)

getContentManager().extractContent(msg);

AID manufacturer = request.getManufacturer();

PartsList requestedParts = request.getParts();

PartsList invoiceParts = **new** PartsList();

**int** totalCost = 0;

//Generate invoice content

PartsInvoice invoice = **new** PartsInvoice();

invoice.setDueDays(deliveryDays);

invoice.setCost(totalCost);

invoice.setParts(invoiceParts);

ACLMessage confirmOrder = **new** ACLMessage(ACLMessage.***AGREE***);

confirmOrder.addReceiver(manufacturer);

confirmOrder.setLanguage(codec.getName());

confirmOrder.setOntology(ontology.getName());

**try** {

getContentManager().fillContent(confirmOrder, invoice);

send(confirmOrder);

}

**catch** (CodecException ce) {

ce.printStackTrace();

}

**catch** (OntologyException oe) {

oe.printStackTrace();

}

Figure 11: - Receive parts request then respond with an invoice.

Figure 12: - “Order” in use for generating an order to be sent to the manufacturer.

**private** Order generateOrder() {

//Create instance of Order class.

Order thisOrder = **new** Order();

//Name of Customer Ordering

thisOrder.setCustomer(getAID());

//Specification of phones being ordered

thisOrder.setPhone(generatePhone());

//Quantity of specified phone being requested.

thisOrder.setQuantity((**int**) Math.*floor*(1 + (50\*Math.*random*())));

//Price of each phone specified.

thisOrder.setPrice((**int**) Math.*floor*(100 + (500\*Math.*random*())));

//Number of days till order is due.

thisOrder.setDays((**int**) Math.*floor*(1 + (10\*Math.*random*())));

//Penalty for late order delivery.

thisOrder.setPenalty(thisOrder.getQuantity() \* ((**int**) Math.*floor*(1 +

(50\*Math.*random*()))));

//Return Order.

**return** thisOrder;

}

PartsRequest content = **new** PartsRequest();

content.setManufacturer(getAID());

content.setParts(requiredStock);

Figure 13: - Creating a “PartsRequest” to be sent to the supplier (requiredStock is an instance of PartsList).

Figure 14: - Creating a “PartsInvoice” to be sent to the manufacturer as a response.

AID manufacturer = request.getManufacturer();

PartsList requestedParts = request.getParts();

PartsList invoiceParts = **new** PartsList();

**int** totalCost = 0;

//If the items requested are stocked by the supplier, add them to the invoice.

**for** (**int** i = 0; i < stock.length; i++) {

**if** (stock[i].equals("5\" Screen")){

invoiceParts.setScreen\_5inch(requestedParts.getScreen\_5inch());

totalCost += prices[i] \* requestedParts.getScreen\_5inch();

}

**else** **if** (stock[i].equals("7\" Screen")) {

invoiceParts.setScreen\_7inch(requestedParts.getScreen\_7inch());

totalCost += prices[i] \* requestedParts.getScreen\_7inch();

}

**else** **if** (stock[i].equals("64Gb Storage")) {

invoiceParts.setStorage\_64Gb(requestedParts.getStorage\_64Gb());

totalCost += prices[i] \* requestedParts.getStorage\_64Gb();

}

**else** **if** (stock[i].equals("256Gb Storage")) {

invoiceParts.setStorage\_256Gb(requestedParts.getStorage\_256Gb());

totalCost += prices[i] \* requestedParts.getStorage\_256Gb();

}

**else** **if** (stock[i].equals("4Gb RAM")) {

invoiceParts.setRAM\_4Gb(requestedParts.getRAM\_4Gb());

totalCost += prices[i] \* requestedParts.getRAM\_4Gb();

}

**else** **if** (stock[i].equals("8Gb RAM")) {

invoiceParts.setRAM\_8Gb(requestedParts.getRAM\_8Gb());

totalCost += prices[i] \* requestedParts.getRAM\_8Gb();

}

**else** **if** (stock[i].equals("2000mAh Battery")) {

invoiceParts.setBattery\_2000mAh

(requestedParts.getBattery\_2000mAh());

totalCost += prices[i] \* requestedParts.getBattery\_2000mAh();

}

**else** **if** (stock[i].equals("3000mAh Battery")) {

invoiceParts.setBattery\_3000mAh

(requestedParts.getBattery\_3000mAh());

totalCost += prices[i] \* requestedParts.getBattery\_3000mAh();

}

}

PartsInvoice invoice = **new** PartsInvoice();

invoice.setDueDays(deliveryDays);

invoice.setCost(totalCost);

invoice.setParts(invoiceParts);