Constraint Programming Methodology

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What we want to introduce

- How does a Constraint Model fit into a bigger system

- Interaction with stakeholders

- You define what the problem is

- 12 Steps to success

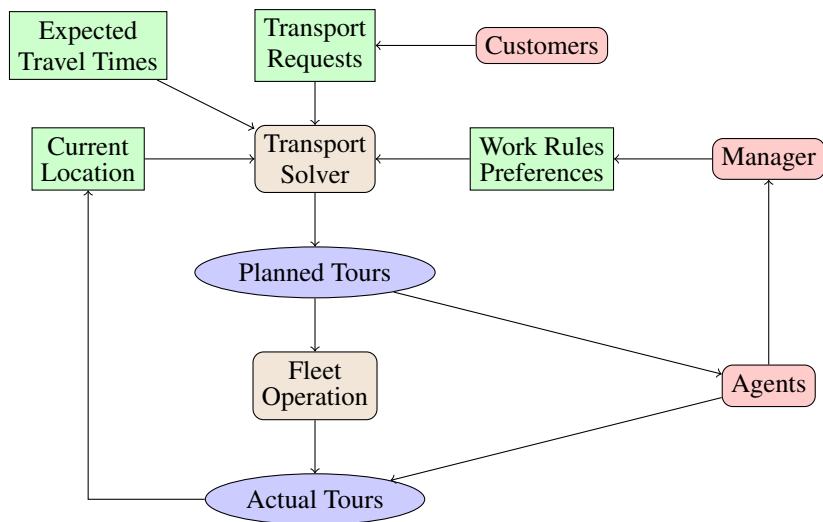# 1   The Bigger Picture

CP Model is Part of a Larger System

- Where do data come from?

- Control over data

- Generated plan

- Externalized representation of constraints

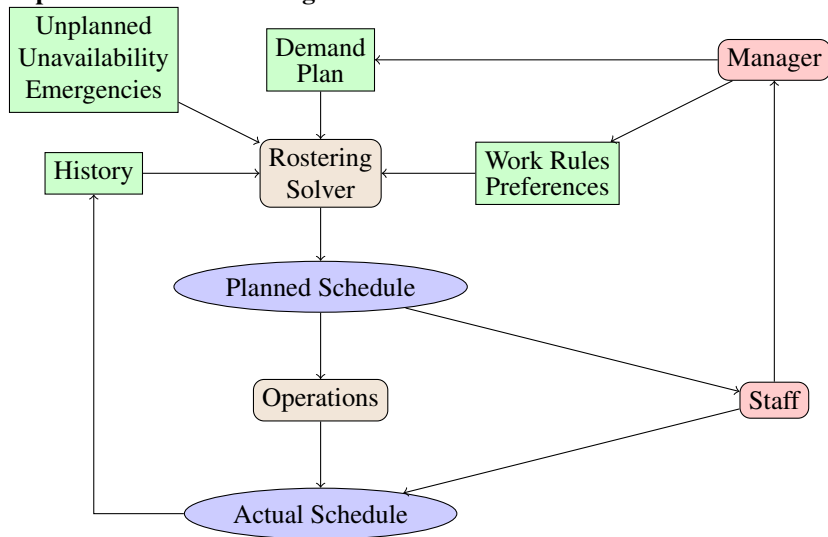- Implementation of plan

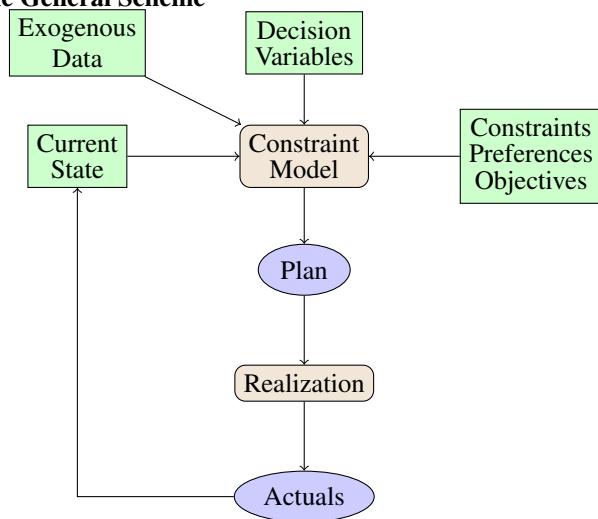- Feedback from previous runs

Example: Datacenter Management
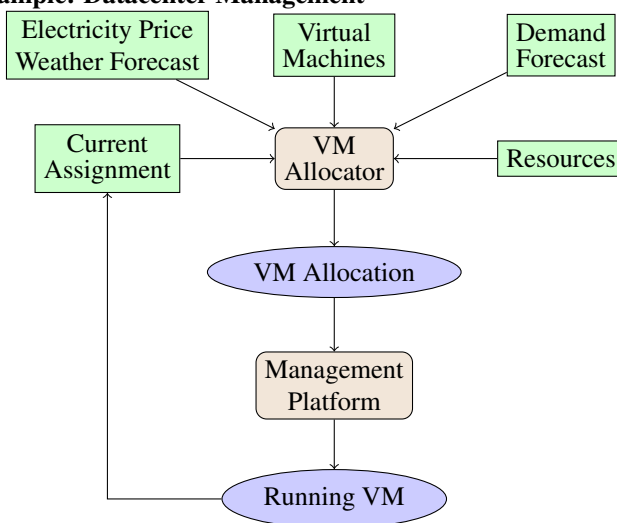
Example: Transport

Example: Personnel Rostering

The General Scheme

Key Questions: How? Who? When? Where?

- (How is work done?)

- Who performs work?

- When is it performed?

- (Where is it performed?)

2 12 Steps to Success

Step 1: Literature Review

- Which problem are other people solving?

- What are the favourite tecniques, why?

- What tools are used?

- Learn the domain specific language

Step 2: Description of Problem

- Clearly defined use cases, ranked by importance

- Textual description of problem before math

- Important: Involve all stakeholders

- Important: Identify champions and their benefits

- State what is outside the scope

Step 3: Example Data and Solution

- Best is years of existing data and solutions

- Important: Set with manageable problem size

- Independent checker of solutions

- Possible: Trivial problem example for manual exploration

Step 4: Visualizing Results

- Develop before solver

- Visualize existing solutions

- Perhaps end-users have existing visualizations

- Generic views for classes of problems (global constraints)

- Helps to understand poor performance

- Also: Compute KPI (Key Performance Indicators)

Example Dashboard: Patient Waitlists
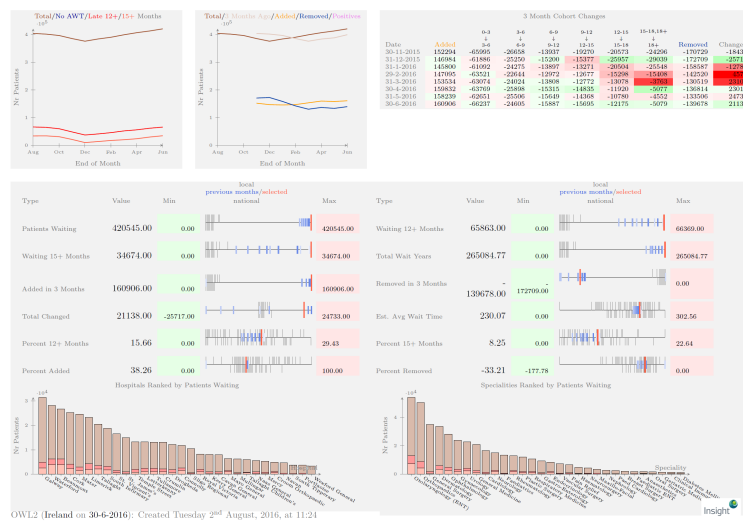
Step 5: Implement Core Model

- One constraint type at a time
- Start with finding feasible, good solutions
- Find lower/upper bounds to estimate solution quality
- Start with basic search strategy

Step 6: Feedback from Domain Experts

- Are you solving the right problem?
- Are all stakeholders happy with solution and objectives?

Step 7: Study Obvious Alternatives

- If you have time (PhD students have time)
- Is there a straight-forward MIP/SAT model of problem?
- Do they work on small scale, large scale problems?
- Can you come up with good, feasible heuristics?

Step 8: Solve Integration Issues

- Not too early, time wasted if solver does not work
- Not too late, without integration solver is just a demonstrator

Step 9: Performance Engineering

- Problem specific search strategies
- Parallelism
- Improved model
- Improved solver
- Parameter tuning

Step 10: Fight Feature Creep

- If it works, then people want more

- Not in first release

- Implement core use case, nothing more

- Exception: Allow all constraints to be optional

Step 11: Improve Stability

- What is really required?

- Remove experimental code

- How far can we push model?

- Code review against model description
    - Allow changes in description

Step 12: Tell the World

- Dozens of good CP applications hidden from view

- Consider writing application paper
    - Involve end-users and stakeholders
    - Describe problem from their perspective
    - If possible, publish data set and constraint description
- Submit instances to solver competitions
    - Other people will work on improved performance of your model
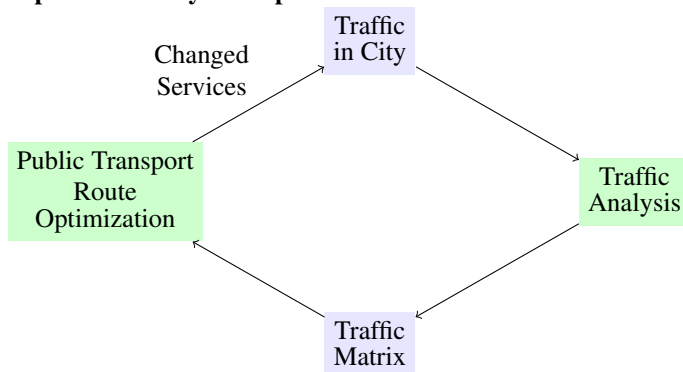
3 Constraints in an Uncertain World

The ICON Loop
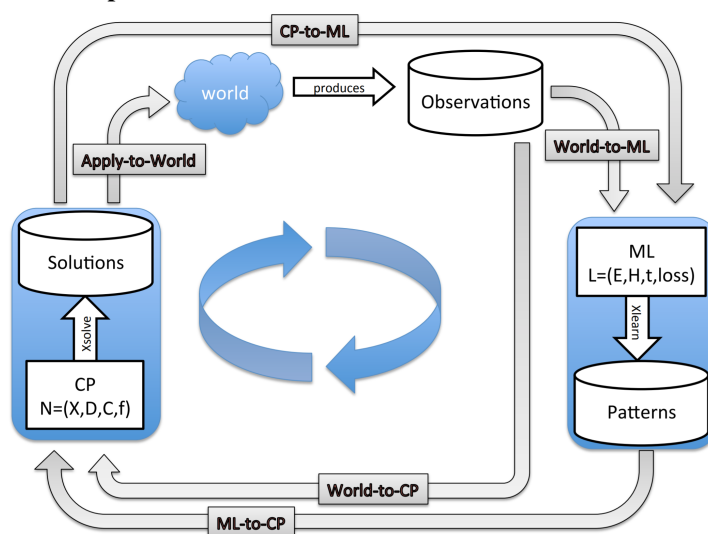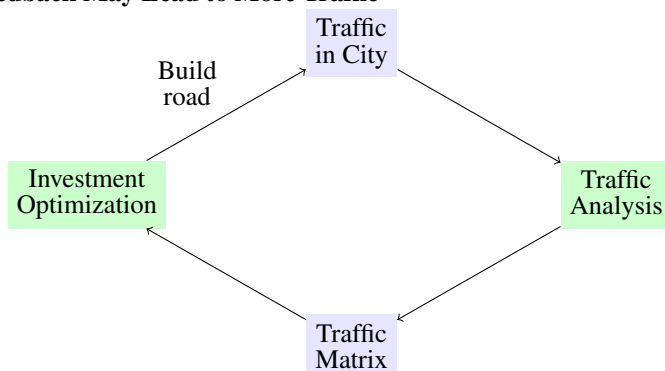
A Blueprint for Interaction

- Developed in the European ICON project

- Partners KU Leuven, Montpellier, Pisa, UCC

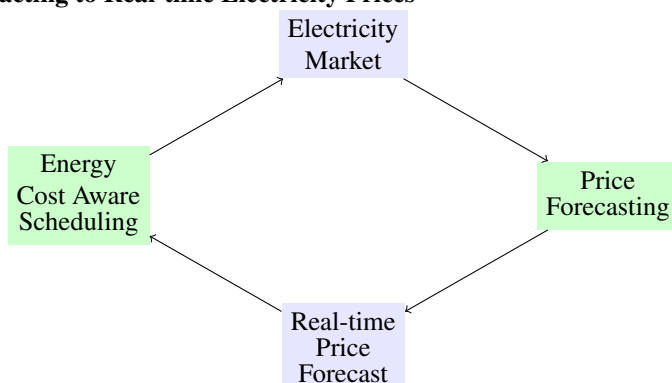- Ways of combining Machine Learning with CP

Example: Intra-City Transport

```
                    Traffic
                    in City
        Changed
        Services
                                    Traffic
   Public Transport                 Analysis
       Route
    Optimization
                    Traffic
                    Matrix
```

- Optimization only as good as data feeding into it

Feedback May Lead to More Traffic

```
                    Traffic
                    in City
        Build
        road
                                    Traffic
    Investment                      Analysis
   Optimization
                    Traffic
                    Matrix
```

- The "world" reacts to changes

- That may be difficult to predict

Reacting to Real-time Electricity Prices

```
                    Electricity
                    Market
     Energy
   Cost Aware                       Price
   Scheduling                       Forecasting
                    Real-time
                    Price
                    Forecast
```
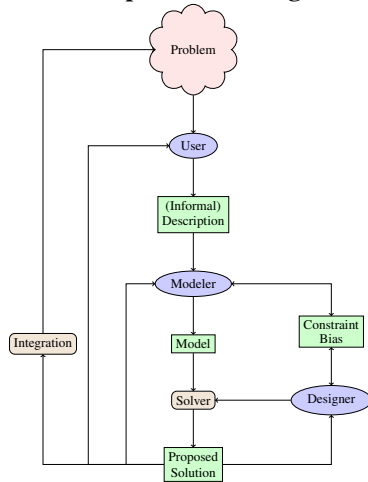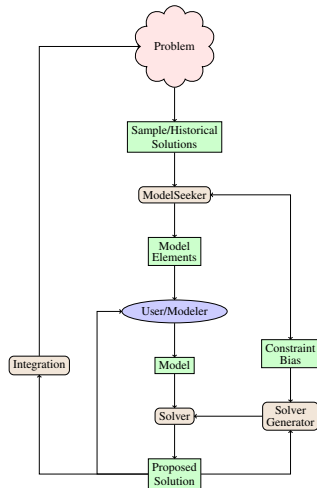
- Good way to optimize cost individually

- May lead to oscillation if everybody does it

4 There is no "The Model"

Feedback Loops in Modelling

The Future: Automated Modelling

5 Conclusion

Points to Remember

- A CP application is part of a larger system

- CP Model is rarely cause of project failure

    - No clear champion

    - No clear use case

    - Data not available/data quality

- Every problem is different, you decide what to model

- Understand the interaction between tools and problem