Workflow Management Systems
Workflow Management Systems

• **Workflow management** is the automated **coordination**, **control** and **communication** of work, both of people and computers, in the context of **organizational processes**, through the execution of software in a **network** of computers whose order of execution is controlled by a computerized **representation** of the business processes.

• **Workflow management system**: “a system that defines, creates and manages the execution of workflows through the use of software, running on one or more workflow engines, which is able to interpret the process definition, interact with workflow participants and, where required, invoke IT tools and applications” [WFM Coalition]
Anatomy of Workflow Management

Relationships between concepts

Business Process
- Is defined in a Process Definition
- Is managed by a Workflow Management System
- Composed of Sub-Processes and Activities
  - Activities: Manual Activities and Automated Activities
  - Which may be or during execution are represented by

Sub-Processes
- Composed of Activities

Process Definition
- (a representation of what is intended to happen)

Workflow Management System
- (controls automated aspects of the business process via)
- Used to manage and create Process Instances
- Include one or more Activity Instances
  - Which include Work Items and Invoked Applications
  - Work Items: (tasks allocated to a workflow participant)
  - Invoked Applications: (computer tools/applications used to support an activity)
Workflow Management Issues

Business Process Analysis, Modeling & Definition

Process Definition

Workflow Enactment Service

Applications & IT Tools

Process Design & Definition

Build Time

Run Time

Process Instantiation & Control

Interactions with Users & Application Tools

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Workflow Management Issues

- Executable application code
- Enactment Service/ Run-time Support

Business Process Modeling/ Reengineering (BPM/R)

Workflow model & specification language
Conceptual Architecture (system components)

**PM Toolkit**
- process specification
  - process view
  - org. view
- process analysis
- re-engineering
- quality advising
- ...

**WF Development Toolkit**
- graphical workflow design
- testing
- simulation
- animation

**WF Enactment Service (run-time system and tools)**
- scheduling
- task manager/interfaces
- processing entities
- monitoring
- tracking
- reporting
- ...

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WFMS Features

- Monitoring, tracking, auditing, reporting
- Authorization; Security
- Interoperability
- Multiple computing platforms and communications infrastructures
- Load balancing
- Versioning and life-cycle
- Scalability: Partly distributed enactment service (multiple server support); Fully distributed enactment service
- Cloud support
WFMS Features

Workflow Management System

- Graphical Representation
- Form Modelling
- Role Based Accessibility
- User Reassignment
- Cloud Omnipresence
- Report Generation
- Document Integration
- SLA Indication
- Workflow Pattern Flexibility
- Email Notification
Process Analysis

- **Purpose:** To ensure that the right people understand the necessary facts about an organizational process.

- **Objectives:**
  - shared understanding
  - trigger model (event-driven)

- **How to:**
  - Who to talk to? (roles)
  - What do you do? (activities)
  - What prompts you to do it? (triggers)
  - Follow links, and repeat.

- **Using:** interviews (time consuming, rich secondary information), meetings (quick, obscure social process)
Example: Complaint Procedure

customer | repres’ive | inspector | manager | librarian
---|---|---|---|---

deliver complaint → reject

filing a complaint → analyze

consent

approve

negotiate solution → summarize

negotiate satisfaction

ackn.

execute solution

ackn.

log
Basic Model Components

- **Workflow** (process) class (schema) to model a(n) (business / organizational) process
- **Task**, activity or step
- Task coordination / linking or **Control flow** (serial / parallel-resync/list/queues/network, rules/triggers, dependencies / conditions)
- **Data flow** or sharing (explicit passing, shared data, common variables)
- Processing entities: **Users** --roles and authorization, **worklists**; Information Systems
Workflow Modelling

- Workflows deal with (parts of) business processes, also called cases or scenarios
  - e.g., an insurance claim, a loan application
- Similar cases belong to the same case type
- Each case has a unique identity
- Cases have a limited lifetime: from the point in time the case was submitted, to the point its processing has been completed
- At any point during its lifetime, a case has a state comprising:
  - the values of the relevant attributes
  - the conditions that have been fulfilled
  - the content of the case
Workflow Modelling

- Workflows are structured in **tasks**
  - a task is a logical **unit** of work
  - regarded as **indivisible** or **atomic** (either executed in full or if its execution is stopped, a rollback to the previous state takes place)
- Tasks are distinguished into
  - **manual**: performed by humans without IT support
  - **automatic**: performed without human intervention
  - **semi-automatic**: involve both humans and application programs
Application/Automatic Tasks

- Application tasks involve
  - scripts for terminal emulation to remote systems
  - Web services
  - application programs/systems providing data manipulation (filters)
  - predefined interfaces to legacy application systems
  - stored procedure calls
  - client programs or servers invoking other servers
  - database transactions
Workflow Modelling

- Tasks refer to generic pieces of work and not to performing a particular activity for a specific case
- Task ≈ work item
- Activity ≈ task execution for particular case
- A process specifies the way in which a particular category of cases should be carried out and in what order. A process can be viewed as a procedure for a particular case type.
- Different cases can be handled using a single process
- A process is made up of tasks and conditions and may include sub-processes
- Complex processes can be structured hierarchically
- Each process has a beginning and an end which mark the initiation and completion of a case.
Workflow Modelling

- Workflow **scheduling** or **routing**: basic constructs
  - **sequential task execution**: implies a dependency between tasks that follow one another; the result of one task is input to the next
  - **parallel task execution**: tasks that need to be executed simultaneously without the result of one affecting the other. Parallel tasks are initiated using an **AND-split** and later resynchronized using an **AND-join**
  - **selective routing**: choice between two or more tasks (depending upon specific properties of the case). Choice also known as an **OR-split**. Alternative paths are reunited using an **OR-join**.
  - **iteration**: performing a particular task a number of times
Types of Processing Entities

- humans (may appear as a GUI; may use document/image processing systems and applications)
- script interpreters and compilers (for processing scripts and application programs)
- (legacy) application systems
- servers in client-server and transaction processing systems
- DBMSs
Additional Modelling Features

- Tasks: non-transactional, transactional
- Execution environment / infrastructure / configuration: execution location, interfaces
- Deadlines
- Exception Handling (Error Handling, Recovery) specification
Workflow Modelling & Analysis

- Workflow enactment
  - the enactment of work items is triggered by resources (human or automated), an external event or a time signal
- Workflow modelling and analysis must be carried out formally
  - forces precise definitions avoiding ambiguities, uncertainties and contradictions (contrary to many semi-formal diagrammatic techniques)
  - formalisms can be used to reason about processes (e.g., whether a case is successfully completed after a period of time, whether “liveness” or “safety” properties are maintained etc.)
Workflow (Specification) Analysis

“A clear theoretical basis and correctness criteria must be established which enable the runtime system to efficiently reason about the correctness of a requested change …”

- Types of Analysis
  - Validation - interactive simulation (Are we building the right product?)
  - Verification (establishing correctness of a workflow) - advanced analysis techniques (Are we building the product right?)
  - Performance Analysis - throughput etc.
Correctness Criteria

- **Structural properties**
  - Control flow, Data flow, Temporal constraints
  - Reachability, Termination, Deadlocks, Data inconsistency, Missing input data

- **Other Workflow characteristics**
  - Reassignment of task to agents
  - Changes in organizational schema
  - Access to external databases
Formal Basis for Models

- High level Petri nets
- State and Activity charts
- Temporal logic
- Process Algebra
- Graph based models
- Rules

But there are limitations wrt to what is modeled using formal models. Often limited to workflow maps/graphs, inter-task dependencies.
Petri Nets

- a formalism for modeling and analyzing workflows
  - devised by Carl Petri (1962) as a tool for process modeling and analysis
- processes can be described graphically and in addition they possess a mathematical foundation
- A Petri Net (PN) consists of places and transitions denoted by circles and rectangles respectively
  - E.g., the claim processing PN may have the places claim, under consideration and ready and the transitions record, pay and send letter
- places and transitions are connected by directed edges (place $\rightarrow$ transition, transition $\rightarrow$ place, but not between places or transitions)
Petri Nets

- A place $p$ is called an **input** place for a transition $t$ if there is an edge from $p$ to $t$.
- A place $p$ is called an **output** place for a transition $t$ if there is an edge from $t$ to $p$.
- Places may contain **tokens** (denoted by black dots).
- Although the structure of a PN is fixed, the distribution of tokens among the places may change.
- The **state** of a PN is indicated by the distribution of tokens in the places of the net.
- Firing a transition results in tokens moving from input places to output places.
Petri Nets

- Example:

The state may be represented as the vector (3,0,0)
Petri Nets

- A transition may fire if it is enabled, i.e., there exists at least one token in each of its input places.
- When a transition fires, one token is removed from each input place and one token is added to the output place.
- Tokens are consumed from input places and produced at output places.

![Petri Net Diagram]

- claim
- under consideration
- pay
- record
- ready
- send letter
Petri Nets

After transition record fires

- **Claim**
- **Record**
- **Pay**
- **Send Letter**
- **Ready**
- **Under consideration**

After transition pay fires

- **Claim**
- **Record**
- **Pay**
- **Send Letter**
- **Ready**
- **Under consideration**
Petri Nets

- When a transition fires, the process shifts from one state to another
- Transitions represent event occurrences, operations, transformations etc. and are the **active** components of a P.N.
- Places are **passive**: they cannot change the state of the net; they represent particular conditions
- Tokens represent objects (physical, informational etc.)
- More than one case can be in progress simultaneously in a PN
- A PN can also be used to describe repetitive processes
Petri Nets

- **Example**: a traffic light process for crossing a street

![Petri Net Diagram]

- **States**:
  - red
  - yellow
  - green

- **Transitions**:
  - yr (red to yellow)
  - rg (yellow to red)
  - gy (green to yellow)
Petri Nets

- Example: two traffic light processes for crossing two 1-way streets
  - Requirement: one of the two must always be red
Petri Nets

- Apart from the graphical notation provided by PNs, one must be able to determine that the process modeled will operate safely.
  - we will study analysis techniques later in the course
- PNs may become too large and difficult to use. Several extensions have been proposed:
  - Colored Petri Nets
  - Temporal Petri Nets
  - Hierarchical Petri Nets
... collectively referred to as high-level Petri Nets
The Weaknesses of Traditional Petri Nets

- Their primary aim is to represent the dynamic aspects of system behavior and because of this they do not have anything other than very simple capacity to represent entities of the domain of application.
- Data representation is limited to tokens which are indistinguishable from each other.
- Clearly this is inadequate for representing IT systems.

Source: http://www.dit.ie/computing/
Colored Petri Nets

- Colored Petri Nets combine the strength of Petri nets with the strength of programming languages.
- Petri nets provide the primitives for the description of the synchronisation of concurrent processes, while programming languages provide the primitives for the definition of data types and the manipulation of data values.
Colored Petri Nets

- In classic PN tokens found in the same place are by definition indistinguishable.
- There is a need to represent different aspects or attributes of objects.
- In colored PN each token has a value or color.
- Transitions that fire produce tokens whose values depend on the values of the tokens consumed.
- The number of tokens produced by a transition also depends on the values of the tokens consumed.
- This provides a greater flexibility in representing different cases of processes.
- Like traditional Petri Nets Colored Petri Nets consist of Places, Transitions, connected by Arcs (forming a bi-partite graph).
- They are a combination of text and graphics.
Colored Petri Nets

- **Example:** Dealing with technical faults in a product department
  - faults are categorized
  - if they cannot be corrected right away, a repair takes place and it is tested yielding three possible results:
    1. Fault has been corrected
    2. Further repair is required
    3. Faulty component must be replaced
  - A token value represents relevant properties of the fault that needs to be dealt with and this value is retained throughout the tokens’ trajectory in the net
Colored Petri Nets

- An output place may not receive a token: depending on the transition categorize, a fault will be either solved or a repair will be needed.
- Transition test may produce a token in one of 3 possible places.
Colored Petri Nets

- In colored PN, conditions can be set for the values of tokens to be consumed.
- A transition is only enabled if there is a token at each of its input places and the preconditions for firing the transition are met.
- Preconditions are logical expressions referring to the values of tokens.
  - E.g., the transition categorize may have the precondition “the value of the token to be consumed from the place fault must contain a valid component id.”
  - In this case, a fault missing a valid id will not be categorized (transition not fired; remain in the place fault).
Colored Petri Nets

- Preconditions can also be used to synchronize tokens, i.e., to specify that a transition will fire only if a particular combination of tokens can be consumed.

- **Example:** car assembly process

  - When a transition fires the number of input tokens must be equal to the number of incoming arrows.
  - A precondition must specify that tokens can only be consumed in a certain combination (and not at random).
Colored Petri Nets

- The examples show that not all the required information can be represented graphically.

- For each transition, we need to specify:
  - the **precondition** for firing the transition (if one exists)
  - the **number of tokens produced** in each output place when the transition fires
  - the **values of the tokens produced**

- This information can be specified as **text** (pseudo-code) or as a **subroutine** in a programming language or as a **formal specification**
Places

- *Places are specified with* the following inscriptions:
  - *Name* (for identification).
  - *Color set* (specifying the type of tokens which may reside on the place).
  - *Initial marking* (multi-set of token colors)
Transitions

- Each *transition* has the following inscriptions:
  - *Name* (for identification).
  - *Guard* (boolean expression containing some of the variables).
Arcs

- Each arc has the following inscriptions:
  - *Arc expression* (containing some of the variables).
  - When the arc expression is evaluated it yields a multi-set of token colors.
Example

P1 -> X

2Integers@3
2Integers@8

T1

X = X + 1

Add
X > 5

P2
Marking

- Place P2 is empty.
- The marking at P1 consists of 2 tokens of type integer whose value is 3 and 2 tokens of type integer whose value is 8.
- On T1 is the guard $X > 5$. This is a barrier to T1 happening, in that T1 will only pass if the assignment to X under the occurrence in question is greater than 5.
- As we will see these guards on transitions will play an important part in representing the barriers to the performance of activities.
The Arc Expression

- On the arc between P1 and T1 is the atomic expression consisting of a variable X to which may be bound one of the input tokens in P1. Such a binding is called an occurrence.

- The expression on the output arc from T1 to P2 represents the state change which takes place across transition T1. In this example it embodies an increment of 1 on the variable X.
Guards on the expression

- The expression $X > 5$ at transition T1 is known as a guard and must be satisfied by the incoming token values.
- If the incoming tokens do not satisfy the guard then the transition cannot happen.
- In the case $X$ has value 8 which is $> 5$, the transition can take place.
Example

\[ X = 1 \text{ INT@ 8} \]

\[ 2 \text{ INT@ 8} \]
\[ 2 \text{ INT@ 5} \]

\[ X + 3 \]

\[ X > 5 \text{ True} \]

\[ * \]
Example – after firing transition

- Initial states:
  - P1: 2 INT@ 8, 2 INT@ 5
  - X

- Transition:
  - T1
  - X = 8 + 3
  - X > 5

- Final states:
  - P2: 1 INT@ 11*

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Occurrence

- The passage of tokens across transitions from place to place through this process of binding, satisfying guards and modifying data is called an occurrence.
- The occurrence will be blocked if the guard is not satisfied by the incoming tokens.
- So if an input token with value 5 was bound to X then the transition could not occur.
- The guard is a barrier to the transition happening.
Temporally-extended Petri Nets

- Often, there is a need to specify expected process completion time and other information related to the timing of transitions in a PN.
- Classic PN do not allow modeling time.
- In temporally-extended PN, tokens have a timestamp in addition to a value. The timestamp represents the time from which the token is available for consumption.
- Transition enabling time: earliest moment at which all its input places contain sufficient available tokens.
- Tokens are consumed in a first-in-first-out fashion.
- The transition with the earliest enabling time fires first. If more than one have the same enabling time, one is chosen randomly.
Temporally-extended Petri Nets

- Firing of a transition may affect the enabling time of other transitions
- Produced tokens have timestamp equal to or greater than the transition firing time
- There may be a delay that depends on the transition and the values of the tokens consumed
- The delay may be constant (could be 0) or may be decided randomly
- Transition firing is taken to be instantaneous
Temperally-extended Petri Nets

- **Example**: synchronized traffic lights

rg1 enabling time = 0 = rg2 enabling time

If rg1 is chosen a token will be produced at green1 with delay 25, at yellow1 with delay 30 and at red1 and X with delay 60; rg2 will fire...
Hierarchical Petri Nets

- Classic, colored or temporally-extended PN have a flat structure resulting in a single, possibly extensive and complex net.
- Often processes are structured hierarchically, and can be modeled by networks containing sub-networks (sub-processes)
- This provides the ability to refine processes rather than regard them as non-decomposable.
- Graphically, non-atomic sub-processes are represented as doubly-arrowed rectangles
Hierarchical Petri Nets

- fault
- categorize
- solved
- reeds
- repair
- test
- replace
- start
- ntr
- trace
- nch
- change
- ne
- end
- free

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Hierarchical Petri Nets

- PNs can be structured hierarchically using a bottom-up or top-down approach
  - **Top-down decomposition** starts with high-level processes that are gradually decomposed into sub-processes; at the lowest level, processes consist only of transitions and places
  - **Bottom-up synthesis** starts with elementary components that are combined into larger processes
- Complex processes are rarely non-hierarchical, hence a divide and conquer strategy is needed.
- Reuse of (sub-) processes is also possible (e.g., when a recurring process is included)
References

- “Workflow Management: Models, methods and systems” by van der Aalst and van Hee
- Workflow Management Coalition (http://www.wfmc.org/)
- Coloured Petri Nets (http://www.cs.au.dk/~cpnbook/)
- Animated examples: https://www.informatik.uni-hamburg.de/TGI/PetriNets/introductions/aalst/
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KJjKY8k9Lk