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An Overview of Multi-Robot Systems That Employ Distributed Intelligence

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Abstract

This article gives a brief introduction to the ideas underlying distributed intelligence and the reasons why this field deserves further attention. We continue to classify common DIS systems based on the interactions they often exhibit since the nature of the interaction is important to the solution paradigm. Here, we introduce three widely used distributed intelligence paradigms and illustrate their use in multi-robot systems. Bio-inspired, organizational and social, and knowledge-based, ontological are some examples of such frameworks. Next, we look at the problem of task distribution, which crops up often in multi-robot systems, and show how the approach to tackling it varies substantially depending on the paradigm used. We draw the conclusion that the paradigms are not interchangeable and that selecting the appropriate one is context-specific. More study is needed to aid system designers in selecting the most appropriate abstraction (or paradigm) for a given task.

Introduction

distributed intelligence that may be found all across a system The term "distributed intelligence" is used to describe systems in which individual agents work together to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, understand language and ideas, and learn. When used in this sense, "entity" may refer to anything having intelligence, including humans, robots, computers, programs, and hardware. Many people in such settings are concerned with certain aspects of the whole. Because of our social nature, we're all accustomed to collaborating with others who have different perspectives. Members of corporate management teams may have positions such as chief executive officer, chief operating officer, chief financial officer, chief information officer, and so on. Oncology patient care teams include of medical oncologists, surgical oncologists, plastic and reconstructive surgeons, pathologists, and other specialists in relevant disciplines. Distributed intelligence is also used by the military, most notably by special forces. A-Teams.

refine your abilities in the fields of military, technology, medicine, and communication. Catapult crew, landing signal officers, ordnance men, plane handlers, etc. are all examples of specialized groups that may be found on a military aircraft carrier. Evidently, humans have come to appreciate these teams for their ability to quickly and efficiently complete complex tasks by combining the efforts of specialists who work well together. Developing software agents, robots, sensors, computers, and even people and animals (like search and rescue dogs) that can work together as successfully as human teams is the objective of distributed intelligence in computer science and related fields. Urban search and rescue, military network-centric operations, gaming technologies and simulation, computer security, transportation and logistics, and many other concerns might all benefit greatly from the implementation of such a system.

Distributed Intelligence and Its Domain

Researchers are finding a wide variety of paradigms that might be used to successfully implement distributed intelligence. Some forms of distributed intelligence are not suited to the aforementioned paradigms. Therefore, it is crucial to learn about the diverse forms of dispersed intelligence that might emerge in distinct contexts. The different possible interactions between entities in a distributed intelligence system may be used to get a better knowledge of the domain space. We find it useful to consider interactions along three axes, as shown in Figure 2: the nature of the objectives involved, whether or not the entities involved are aware of one another, and whether or not the entity's activities contribute to the success of the team as a whole. Systems are categorised based on whether or not their constituent parts pursue separate or common objectives. The systems are classified into two groups, aware and unaware, along the dimension of awareness of others. In this sense, "conscious" refers to a capacity for an entity to reflect on the behaviour and motivations of its teammates. Although non-aware robots may detect the presence of nearby objects and adjust their position accordingly, for example, they are unable to reason about their colleagues' intentions or anticipate their next moves. The notion of stigmergy, in which things communicate with one another without exchanging direct messages, underlies the operation of many "un aware" systems. Finally, we classify systems into those in which a person's activities contribute to the success of the group as a whole (yes) and those in which they do not (no) (no). A floor-cleaning robot, as part of a team of floor-cleaning robots, is an example of an entity whose activities further the aims of others. The floor cleaning efforts of one robot assist the other robots in the team avoid having to clean the same area twice. It is clear that these divisions of the domain space are approximations, yet we nevertheless find them useful for learning about the most common interactions in real-world scenarios. This subspace is a representation of the many interactions that may be found in distributed intelligence systems. The following are typical methods of communication:

- Collective
- Cooperative
- Collaborative
- Coordinative

In the following paragraphs we describe these types of interactions in more detail. Perhaps the simplest type of interaction is the collective interaction, in which entities are not aware of other entities on the team, yet they do share goals, and their actions are beneficial to their teammates. An example of this type of intraction in multi-robot systems is the swarm robotics work of many researchers (e.g., (McClurkin 2004; Matara's 1995; Kube & Zhang 1993)). This work focuses on creating systems of robots that can perform biologically-relevant activities such as searching for food, travelling in large groups, herding livestock, maintaining a formation, and so forth. When combined with a greater number of robots, the global aim is generally realised as an emergent aspect of the local interactions, with the robots in these systems often performing relatively basic local control rules. The second kind of interaction is cooperative interaction, which occurs when the involved entities are aware of one another, have similar objectives, and take steps that benefit their teammates. For example, in multi-robot systems, robots could cooperate to move a box (e.g., (Gerkey & Matari'c 2002)), clean up a jobsite (e.g., (Parker 1998)), conduct a search and rescue operation (e.g., (Murphy 2000)), or even explore distant planets (e.g., (Stroup et al., 2006)). In such setups, robots may need to coordinate their use of the shared workspace so that they don't impede one another's progress toward the system's overarching aim. However, the robots' efforts are mostly concentrated on collaborating to accomplish a shared objective.

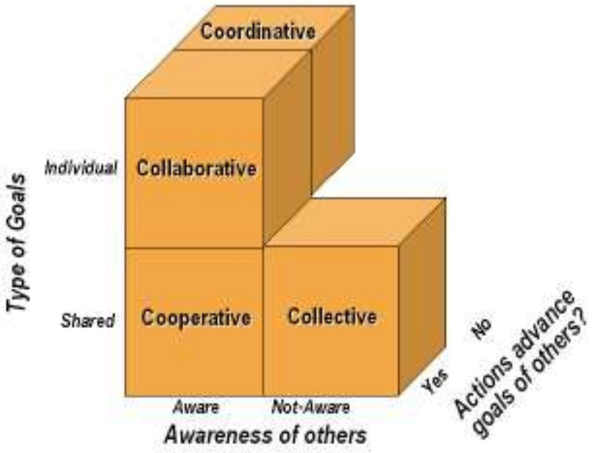


Figure 1: Categorization of types of interactions in systems of distributed intelligence.

Robots with their own objectives, who are aware of their colleagues, and whose activities contribute to the success of the team's overall objectives provide a third form of interaction in distributed intelligence systems. Collaborative refers to the subset of the domain space in which entities cooperate to attain their separate but compatible objectives. In this context, we distinguish between the cooperative do main space and the ability of entities to work together to assist others in better achieving their own objectives. We are used to seeing cooperation in human research teams, where each individual has their own area of specialty that contributes to the group's success. While everyone on the team is working toward the same common goal—completing their assigned portion of the research—their efforts will be amplified by the synergistic effect of working with others who bring unique perspectives to the table. Most of these partnerships are also cooperative, and any group may become cooperative by shifting its focus to the bigger picture and revaluating its aims. Collaborative teamwork may be shown by a collection of robots working together to achieve individual goals.

In the event that a robot's sensors prevent it from reaching its destination, it may be able to collaborate with other robots to achieve its objectives by pooling its resources and enhancing the sensory capabilities of each member. Alliances like this have been shown in (Parker & Tang 2006; Vig & Adams 2006). When it comes to distributed intelligence, coordinative interaction is the fourth and last form of interaction. Entities in such systems are aware of one another, but they are not working toward a shared objective, and their activities are not conducive to the success of the team as a whole. These conflicts often arise when many robots are working in the same area. Coordination among the robots is essential if they are to cause the least possible disruption to one another. In these contexts, it is not uncommon to use multi-robot route planning (e.g., (Kloser& Hutchinson 2006; Guo & Parker 2002)) or traffic control (e.g., (Asama et al. 1991; Yuta & Pre mute 1992; Wang 1991)) approaches. Besides, we might have added a third dimension to our domain space to classify systems according to whether they (1) help other entities achieve their objectives, (2) don't influence other entities' ability to achieve their goals, or (3) hurt other entities' ability to achieve their goals. This would allow us to design a novel kind of interaction in which the participants all operate in accordance with their own self-interest, are aware of one another, and yet impede progress toward the objectives of the other participants. This is the essence of the antagonistic sphere, where entities conspire against one another. Many researchers have devoted time and energy to this question in the context of multi robot systems, specifically in the context of multi robot soccer (see, for example, (Kitano et al. 1997; Browning et al. 2005; Veloso, Stone, & Han 1999; Stone & Veloso 1999)). There is no denying the military utility of this kind of cooperation.

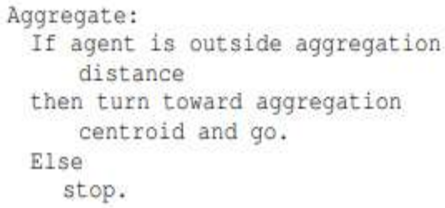
Models for Decentralized Intelligence

There are as many different models for creating distributed intelligence as there are different forms of interactions in systems based on distributed intelligence. Each paradigm provides a distinct level of abstraction over the issue space, allowing the system designer to gain insight into effective approaches to solving the challenge. Whether it's the structure of ant colony or human community, these models often draw parallels. Paradigms may be useful tools, but they aren't universally applicable across all interaction dynamics. This section provides an overview of many prevalent distributed intelligence models, with a special emphasis on how they apply to systems with several robots. It is important to keep in mind that a key difficulty shared by all of these paradigms is figuring out how to bring about global coherence via the local interaction of things. Different levels of issue abstraction reveal complementary approaches to resolving this difficulty.

Three commonly used paradigms for building systems of distributed intelligence include:

- Bioinspired, emergent swarms' paradigm,
- Organizational and social paradigms, and
- Knowledge-based, ontological, and semantic paradigms.

We discussed concepts of the bioinspired, emergent swarms' paradigm in the previous section, as part of the description of collective interactions. In this paradigm, the need for communication between entities is greatly reduced by assuming the ability of the entities to sense relevant information in their local environments (i.e., staggery). The application requirements in these problems allow for simple action protocols, or control rules, that are identical on each entity, and that lead to the desired group behaviour. An example local control rule under this paradigm that can cause all the agents/robots to aggregate (as in a swarm) is



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Aggregate:
  If agent is outside aggregation
      distance
  then turn toward aggregation
      centroid and go.
  Else
     stop.
```

This is an effective paradigm for applications that need the same work to be done in a decentralised environment, where the job doesn't need sophisticated entity-entity interactions and all entities are generic. Both the inverse issue, where we want to derive the local control rules given a desired global behaviour, and the former problem, where we want to anticipate the global behaviour given a set of local control rules, provide formidable research problems. Flocking, schooling, foraging, chaining, searching, sorting, herding, aggregation, condensation, dispersion, confinement, formations, harvesting, deployment, and coverage are just some of the geographically dispersed applications that might benefit from this paradigm. However, more complicated frameworks for solving various kinds of interactions are needed.

Task Assignment in a Multi-Robot Environment: Competing Models

After looking at three different approaches to distributed intelligence systems, we'll quickly contrast how each deal with a typical problem in multi-robot setups: dividing up the work. As was discussed before, job allocation is a common problem in multi-robot applications when the team's goal is broken down into individual tasks. Various robots can tackle different tasks, and vice versa. While it is possible to work on independent activities at the same time, dependent tasks must be completed in a sequential order that accounts for their interdependencies. Once the list of jobs is defined, the next step is to find the optimal way to assign robots to jobs so as to maximise some objective function. This is the issue of dividing up work. As previously shown by Gerkey and Matara’s (2004), optimum solutions to the broad work allocation issue are NP-hard. As a result, approximations that are acceptable in practise are often used as solutions to this issue. Consider the multi-robot work allocation problem, and how each of the above paradigms might approach it. To begin, a large number of identical robots would normally be assumed by the bioinspired method of work allocation. Any robot that is nearby and aware of the need of completing a job might volunteer to do so (i.e., the task is allocated to that robot). Robots may utilise staggery to figure out what to do without resorting to direct communication. If a robot fails, it may be swapped out for another one. All robots should follow this idea for best results. Second, much as we discussed before for multi-robot soccer, roles might be used to organise the distribution of tasks. Robots choose positions that are most suited to their capabilities, and each duty includes a number of distinct responsibilities. In this context, robots may have a wide range of sensing, computing, and effector skills; they need not be standardised.

The market-based approach to allocation was also proposed as a different organisational strategy. With these methods, robots negotiate for jobs by openly discussing their capabilities and offering bids based on their predicted contributions. Typically, assignments are established by giving each job to the most efficient robot possible. The Contract Net Protocol (Smith, 1980) is foundational here because it was the first to tackle the issue of how agents might negotiate to collectively accomplish a set of tasks. The M+ architecture was the first to use a market-based method for the purpose of locating tasks for many robots (Botelho & Alami 1999). In the M+ method, each robot makes its own strategy to complete its objective. Next, they employ social norms that allow for the gradual merging of plans as they negotiate with other team members to gradually adjust their activities to best serve the team as a whole. Last but not least, the knowledge-based method is used for work distribution in multi-robot teams by modelling colleague skills. Among the many potential variants is the ALLIANCE technique (Parker, 1998), in which robots simulate the capacity of team members to carry out the duties of the system by watching team member performance and collecting important task quality information, such as the time to task completion. These models are then used by the robots to decide which jobs would be best for the team as a whole. The selection of assigned tasks in this method does not need open dialogue. The use of trained models of teammate skills opens the door to other methods. These job allocation examples show that there are numerous possible solutions to a given issue in multi-robot systems, depending on the abstraction paradigm used. Benefits and drawbacks of each paradigm vary depending on the context. The appropriate paradigm depends on the specific limitations and needs of the application at hand.

Conclusions

In this article, we've introduced several key concepts in distributed intelligence and discussed the many possible interactions between distributed systems as well as some of the most popular approaches to achieving distributed intelligence. We have utilised examples from the area of multi-robot systems to show, compare, and contrast the various interactions and paradigms in order to better understand the difficulties. The takeaway from these debates is that the appropriate paradigm for a given problem depends on the specifics of the application at hand. We also point out that different robot paradigms may be used concurrently in complex systems. An organisational paradigm can be used to define roles for the high-level abstraction, a knowledge-based approach can be taken to multi-robot mapping, a knowledge-based modelling approach can be taken to mobile network deployment, and a bio-inspired approach can be taken when creating a mobile sensor network (Howard, Parker, &Sukhumi, 2006). The task of system designers is to develop and use paradigms that are tailored to the unique requirements of each application.

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