Mining Goal Refinement Patterns: Distilling Know-How from Data

By Metta Santiputri

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Abstract. Goal models play an important role by providing a hierarchic representation of stakeholder intent, and by providing a representation of lower-level subgoals that must be achieved to enable the achievement of higher-level goals. A goal model can be viewed as a composition of a number of *goal refinement patterns* that relate parent goals to subgoals. In this paper, we offer a means for mining these patterns from enterprise event logs and a technique to leverage vector representations of words and phrases to compose these patterns to obtain complete goal models. The resulting machinery can be quiote powerful in its ability to mine *know-how* or *constitutive norms*. We offer an empirical evaluation using both real-life and synthetic datasets.

Keywords: Goal model mining · Goal refinement · Know-how

1 Introduction

Goal models play a critical role in requirements engineering, by providing a hierarchic representation of statements of stakeholder intent, with goals higher in the hierarchy (parent goals) related to goals lower in the hierarchy (sub-goals) via AND- or OR-refinement links. Goal models encode important knowledge about feasible, available alternatives for realizing stakeholder intent represented at varying levels of abstraction. A number of prominent frameworks leverage goal models, including KAOS [8], i* [25] and Tropos [4].

There is a growing realization that data analytics (this term being liberally interpreted to denote a broad repertoire of machine learning, data mining and natural language processing techniques) have an important role to play in software engineering in general, and requirements engineering in particular. In that spirit, this paper addresses the question: *can enterprise goal models be mined*

H.C. Mayr et al. (Eds.): ER 2017, LNCS 10650, pp. 69–76, 2017.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69904-2_6

from readily available enterprise data? It is useful to distinguish, at this point, the exercise of mining *goal models* from the exercise of mining *goals*. That latter problem is arguably more difficult, since user goals or stakeholder intent are often never manifested in enterprise data, and are often not explicitly articulated either. Knowledge about how a goal might be refined into lower-level sub-goals is a different matter altogether. Goal refinements that have been deployed before (either explicitly or implicitly) are ultimately manifested in operational data. Our intent in this paper is to leverage data of this form.

Mining goal models adds value in a number of ways. *First*, it offers a way around the *model acquisition bottleneck* (where the high investments associated with careful modeling often prevents businesses from leveraging the full value of goal modeling). While our approach does not guarantee that all models mined will be correct and accurate, it does ensure that the goal models (or model fragments) that are mined can be quickly deployed with minimal editing (the requirement for oversight and editing by analysts remains). Overall, the approach improves the productivity of modelers/analysts; instead of starting with a "blank sheet", our machinery generates "first draft" models or model fragments that can be composed to obtain usable models. *Second*, our approach could potentially improve model quality, by mining execution histories from which "undesirable" executions have been filtered out. *Third*, model *anti-patterns* can be mined from "undesirable" execution data. *Fourth*, this machinery can be used for *goal conformance* checking.

Goal models can also be viewed as statements of *know-how*, where an AND-decomposition provides the know-how for achieving a parent goal by satisfying a set of sub-goals. Mining know-how patterns is independently useful. In particular, it permits us to use goal models as *effectors*, where a goal model is used to specify the desired state of the enterprise while decomposition via a sequence of know-how patterns enables us to identify the operational interventions which would help realize the desired state of the enterprise.

AND-refinement patterns can also be viewed as *constitutive norms* [3]. A constitutive norms specifies how the act of achieving conditions c_1, c_2, c_n *counts as* achieving condition c (we can also, without loss of generality, replace conditions with goals or actions). For instance, the acts of putting a tea bag in a cup followed by puring hot water into the cup *counts as* making tea. The account we offer in this paper can thus be also viewed as an account of constitutive norm mining.

We address two problems in this paper. First, we address the *goal refinement pattern mining problem*, where a goal refinement pattern is of the form $sg_1, sg_2, \ldots sg_n \rightarrow G$ where G is the parent goal while each sg_i is a sub-goal, and where the statement is that the act of achieving each sub-goal conjointly leads to the achievement of the parent goal. These latter are referred to as AND-refinement patterns, and are the main focus of this paper (OR-refinement patterns can be mined via small variants of the techniques discussed here, but a full discussion is omitted due to space constraints). Second, we address the problem of composing individual goal refinement patterns into *goal trees* (more

generally goal graphs) which describe not only how a goal is refined into subgoals, but also how these subgoals can be further refined into sub-subgoals and so on.

We present the general approach in Sect. 2. The identification of goal refinement patterns involves mining event logs (partitioned by levels of abstraction) that leverage *temporal correlation patterns* between goals and subgoals (recall that an *event log* is a collection of time-stamped events). The composition of goal refinement patterns relies on matching subgoal in one refinement pattern with the parent goal of another such pattern - we use word2vec [20] to identify *semantic similarity* between words and phrases that appear in the goals and subgoals for this purpose. We briefly summarize the empirical evaluation contained in the full version of the paper in Sect. 3, and position this proposal in the context of related work in Sect. 4.

2 General Approach

Temporal correlation patterns relating goals and subgoals: A goal and its subgoals are typically related via *temporal correlation patterns* which impose temporal constraints on the achievement of the parent goal relative to the achievement of the subgoals. One such pattern (and the one we will leverage in the empirical evaluation in this paper) requires that event denoting the achievement of the parent goal occur immediately or soon, after the events denoting the achievement of the subgoals (the event denoting the making of a cup of tea occurs immediately after the events denoting the placing of a teabag in a cup and the pouring of hot water into the cup). We shall call these *sequential correlations*. Other examples of temporal correlation patterns leverage relations from Allen's Interval Algebra [2]. In some settings, we might require the interval over which each subgoal is achieved be included entirely (using the **during** relationship from the Interval Algebra) in the interval over which the parent goal is achieved. In some settings it might make sense to relate these intervals using the **meets, finishes** or **is equal to** relations from Interval Algebra.

Mining goal refinement patterns from multi-layered event logs: Independent of which temporal correlation pattern applies in a given setting, it is critical that the input event logs are partitioned into layers based on different levels of abstraction. A key assumption underpinning this proposal is that events denoting the achievement of parent goals appear in a log of more abstract events, while events denoting the achievement of subgoals appear in logs of more refined (or lower-level) events. In other words, we assume a hierarchy of levels $L_1, L_2, \ldots$ such that L_i is always at a higher level of abstraction than L_{i+1}. The idea is that goal refinement always occurs between goals manifested by events in adjacent levels in this hierarchy. The key question to address now is: How do we obtain this partitioning/hierarchy? Possible strategies include:

- Leveraging part-whole relationships between objects: We know that a photo, a front page, an embedded chip, a visa or an expiry date are parts of a more

abstract object called a passport. Any event involving the passport photo, or a visa etc. will belong to a lower level in the hierarchy than any event involving the passport.
- Leveraging the source of the data: We know that any event from a process log is likely to be lower in an abstraction hierarchy than any event in a message log. Similarly, events that manifest in the IT infrastructure are typically lower in abstraction than events that involve applications, which in turn are lower level than events concerning business services.
- Leveraging the organizational hierarchy: We know that events associated with roles lower in the organizational hierarchy will likely be lower in the abstraction hierarchy than events associated with roles higher in the organizational hierarchy. The intuition is that employees in a business unit are usually tasked with achieving lower-level goals than the manager of that business unit. Indeed, the goals of the manager rely on the achievement of the subgoals that the employees in that unit are tasked to achieve. The employee-level goals can thus be viewed as AND-refinements of the manager-level goals.

With the abstraction hierarchy of events thus obtained, our task in now to mine (temporal) sequential correlations between events in adjacent levels of the abstraction hierarchy. Thus a passport photo check, a passport validity check, a visa check and a passport stamping event would be followed soon after by a higher-level event indicating that an immigration check has been completed. We would expect to see this pattern repeated frequently. If this frequency meets a user-specified threshold, we conclude that it is indicative of a goal refinement pattern.

Composing goal refinement patterns: The challenge in composing goal refinement patterns to obtain goal models (or goal trees) is the difficulty in relating semantically similar, but syntactically highly distinct, specifications of goals and subgoals. For instance, a subgoal might be represented in natural language as: *log labour hours for billing*. Quite separately, we might find a mined goal refinement pattern for a parent goal represented textually as: *track technician time for charging the customer*. Human intuition suggests that these two goals are semantically quite similar, and any available know-how for the latter would also be useful for the former. Our strategy is to use a state-of-the-art machinery for vector encoding of words and phrases, called *word2vec* [5] which is effective in identifying semantic similarity. Word2vec learns vector representations of words and phrases such that semantically similar ones are projected in close proximity to each other in the vector space. Given a pair of phrases, word2vec returns a real-valued measure of semantic similarity (the higher the value, the more similar the phrases are). By setting an appropriate threshold for the similarity measure (this will require domain-specific tuning), we can connect a phrase describing a subgoal in one goal refinement pattern with a phrase describing a parent goal in another goal refinement pattern.

3 Evaluation

In this section, we briefly summarize the empirical evaluation results presented in the full version of the paper.

Two distinct strategies were evaluated: (1) Sequential pattern mining for leveraging temporal correlations patterns (specifically sequential correlation patterns) between goals andsub-goals and (2) word2vec for evaluating goal-subgoal similarity.

Two distinct datasets were used for the evaluation:

- A synthetic dataset consisting of an event log of a telephone repair process[1]
- A real-life dataset consisting of data from the BPI Challenge 2015 (BPIC'15)[2] which features building permit application process in five Dutch municipalities from year 2010 until 2015.

The BIDE+ algorithm was used for sequential pattern mining.

The evaluation using Google's pre-trained word2vec model was particularly interesting [20]. Word2vec includes word vectors for a vocabulary of 3 million words and phrases that has been trained on approximately 100 billion words from a Google News dataset. Although for this evaluation, we used a pre-trained model, training a model with a smaller but more targeted and domain-specific corpora is not hard. We have done this but have not achieved results thus far that surpass the results we have obtained using the pre-trained model. We took the goal refinement patterns obtained in the evaluation using the phone repair scenario described above (8 in total), and extended these with a repertoire of 40 additional goal refinement patterns (this was necessary to be able to further refine the sub-goals initially obtained from the mining of a 2-level event log.

The Word2Vec metric tends to place two words close to each other if they are semantically similar. We found, for instance, that 'Print repair receipt for the customer' and 'Print customer service repair order' have a high similarity score even though the phrases use different vocabulary to explain the same subgoal. The notion of similarity used here is just cosine distance (dot product of vectors). It is closer to 1 if the phrases are semantically similar. For two completely dissimilar phrases, the similarity is closer to 0. For instance, update issue status to "in repair" and "dissemble the phone components" refer to two very different goals and are very far apart semantically thus receiving a score of 0.130887. In some cases like'log labor hours for billing' and'Track technician time for charging the customer' the score is neither too high nor too low. We can use a certain threshold e.g. (0.60) to filter cases where we not fully confident of a semantic match.

Overall, the results of the empirical evaluation (contained in the full version of the paper and ommitted here due to space constraints) suggest that the combination of techniques proposed here provide a promising basis for goal model mining.

[1] http://www.processmining.org/_media/tutorial/repairexample.zip.
[2] https://www.win.tue.nl/bpi/doku.php?id=2015:challenge.

4 Related Work

A considerable amount of research has been reported applying data mining techniques in requirements engineering. Zawawy et al. have proposed a root-cause analysis framework [26] that mines natively generated log data to establish the relationship between a requirement and the pre- and post-conditions associated with that requirement. In [13], the authors have proposed techniques for mining dependencies from message logs and task-dependency correlations from process logs. There have been very interesting industrial and commercial applications of mining requirements from event logs. Formal verification of control systems have been performed by mining temporal requirements from simulation traces [16]. REQAnalytics [10], proposed by Garcia and Paiva, mines the usage statistics of a website and provides a roadmap for the evolution of the website's requirements specification. ACon [17] is another data mining technique that tries to address the inconsistencies that affect the contextual requirements of a system at runtime.

Sequential pattern mining has been frequently used for extracting statistically relevant patterns or sequences of values in data sets. StrProM [15], for instance, uses the Heuristics Miner algorithm to generate prefix-trees from the data stream and continuously prunes these trees to extract sequences of events. Sohrabi and Ghods use bit-wise compression techniques to represent the data sequence as a 3-dimensional array and extract frequently occurring patterns from this compressed array [23]. Hassani et al. have proposed the PIVOTMiner [14] which considers activities as interval-based events rather than the conventional single-point events. Some researchers have also tried to improve the legacy sequential mining algorithm PrefixSpan (like [5,21]). Sequential pattern mining has also been used in interesting applications that range from detecting user behavior from online surveys to mining electronic medical records and inferring the efficacy of medicines [24]. A detailed survey of sequential pattern mining algorithms is available in [1].

Previously workflow logs used to be mined for extracting the control flow within an organization and, hence, extensively used for developing process models. Schönig and his group have proposed a framework to extract the organisational structure of business processes by mining human resource allocation information from event logs [22].

Also in prior work, non-functional requirements have been extracted from text [7].

5 Conclusion

The ability to mine goal models has important implications for requirements engineering, as well as a wide variety of other settings that benefit from goal modeling. The machinery that we present can therefore provide useful directions for future research and development. This machinery can also be used to mine know-how which can support enterprise innovation strategies in significant

ways. The empirical evaluation presented in the paper is preliminary in nature, but provides evidence that suggests that there is merit in pursuing this general approach. This work can be extended in a number of interesting ways. For instance, evidence of goal update in operational data could be used to reverse engineer goal models from data using intuitions from belief revision [6,11] or belief merging [18,19]. Viewing softgoals as optimization objectives (as has been done in [9]) could provide the basis for correlating goals and softgoals. Techniques for discovering process designs from legacy artefacts [12] could form the basis for an alternative approach to mining goal models.

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