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Knowledge Management with Multi-Agent System in BI Systems Integration

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1. Introduction

There is a growing recognition in the business community about the importance of knowledge as a critical resource for enterprises. The purpose of knowledge management is to help enterprises create, derive, share and use knowledge more effectively to achieve better decisions, increase of competitiveness and fewer errors. In order to run business effectively an enterprise needs more and more information about competitors, partners, customers, and also employees as well as information about market conditions, future trends, government policies and much more. There are several products and technologies available on the market that support advanced Business Process Management (BPM) and advanced decision support. Enterprises expect these applications to support wide range of functionalities – analyses of customer profiles, building and analysing business strategies, developing customer-specific products, carrying out targeted marketing and predicting sales trends. Amount of documents in the Web, enterprise data repositories, and public document management systems with documents they persist are all growing. This huge amount of data is managed in some extent, but knowledge workers, managers, and executives still have to spend much of their working time reading dozens of various types of electronic documents spread over several sources in process of making decisions. There is just too much information to digest in a daily life. The tremendous amount of documents that is still growing has far exceeded the human ability for comprehension without intelligent tools. Different applications within information systems (IS) that support wide range of functionalities need to be integrated in order to provide the appropriate level of information support. One of the prominent approaches for IS integration is the use of ontologies and Multi-Agent Systems (Fuentes, Carbo et al. 2006; Soo, Lin et al. 2006).

The approach presented in this chapter is targeted towards using ontologies for several tasks, where emphasis is on using business rules (BR) approach for interoperability between business user and IS. By introduction of BR approach business users do not have to be fully familiar with the technology to manipulate the common understanding of a problem domain in a form of ontology and therefore enabling agents to execute defined analyses models. The use of ontologies in MAS environment enables agents to share a common set of concepts about contexts, user profiles, products and other domain elements while interacting with each other. Agents can exploit the existing reasoning mechanisms to infer

high-level unknown contexts from known contexts, to make decisions and to adapt to the environment, current status, and personal setting of the user. The purpose of this chapter is to present integration of several information resources for Decision Support in Enterprises using agent-oriented approach based on ontologies. The goal of our research is to minimize the gap between business users and agents as special type of application systems that perform tasks in their behalf. The intention was to apply BR approach for ontology manipulation in MAS. Ontology used in our Multi-Agent System for Decision Support in Enterprises (DSS-MAS) was divided into task and domain ontologies while business users were enabled to manipulate them directly in a user friendly environment without requirement of detailed technical knowledge.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. First we present some background in the following section 2 with emphasis on agents, ontologies and related work with clear definition of the problem and proposal for solution. Next, in section 3, we introduce our case study of integrated Multi-Agent environment from the domain of mobile communications with emphasis on architecture and the roles of agents and ontologies. The case study is focused in one of the mobile operators and furthermore oriented to supply and demand of mobile phones. After presentation of system architecture and decomposition of ontology of every agent from DSS-MAS will be presented in detail. Details of case study implementation will be given in section 4. Finally the last section 5 presents conclusions.

2. Multi-agent systems and ontologies

Multi-Agent Systems (MAS) offer a new dimension for cooperation and coordination in an enterprise. The MAS paradigm provides a suitable architecture for a design and implementation of integrated IS. With agent-based technology a support for complex IS development is introduced by natural decomposition, abstraction and flexibility of management for organisational structure changes (Kishore, Zhang et al. 2006). The MAS consists of a collection of autonomous agents that can define their own goals and actions and can interact and collaborate through communication means. In a MAS environment, agents work collectively to solve specific enterprises' problems. MAS provide an effective platform for coordination and cooperation among multiple functional units in an enterprise. The research on agents and MAS has been on the rise over the last two decades. The stream of research on IS and enterprise integration (Lei, Motta et al. 2002; Kang & Han 2003; Tewari, Youll et al. 2003) makes the MAS paradigm appropriate platform for integrative decision support within IS. Similarities between the agent in the MAS paradigm and the human actor in business organisations in terms of their characteristics and coordination lead us to a conceptualisation where agents in MAS are used to represent actors in human organizations.

Today, semantic technologies based on **ontologies** and inference are considered as a promising means towards the development of the Semantic Web (Davies, Studer et al. 2006). In the field of Computer Science and Information Technology (IT) in general ontology has become popular as a paradigm for knowledge representation in Artificial Intelligence (AI), by providing a methodology for easier development of interoperable and reusable knowledge bases (KB). The most popular definition, from an AI perspective, is given in

(Gruber 1993) as follows: “An ontology is an explicit specification of a conceptualization”, where a conceptualization is an abstract, simplified view of the world that we wish to represent for some purpose. Ontologies can be considered as conceptual schemata, intended to represent knowledge in the most formal and reusable way possible. Formal ontologies are represented in logical formalisms, such as OWL, which allow automatic inferencing over them. An important role of ontologies is to serve as schemata or intelligent views over information resources. Thus they can be used for indexing, querying, and reference purposes over non-ontological datasets and systems, such as databases, document and catalogue management systems. Because ontological languages have a formal semantics, ontologies allow a wider interpretation of data that is inference of facts which are not explicitly stated. In this way, they can improve the interoperability of the conceptualization behind them, their coverage of arbitrary datasets. Ontology can formally be defined as specific sort of knowledge base and can be characterized as comprising a 4-tuple (Davies, Studer et al. 2006):

$$O = \langle C, R, I, A \rangle \quad (1)$$

Where C is set of classes representing *concepts* we wish to reason about in the given domain (Offer, Finding, Phone, Customer etc.). R is set of *relations* holding between those classes (Message hasRecipient Actor). I is a set of *instances*, where each instance can be an instance of one or more classes and can be linked to other instances by relations (Nokia isA PhoneBrand; Finding309 hasValue 11,23). A is a set of *axioms* (If a new customer buys Nokia E71, promotional discount of 10% should be offered). It is widely recommended that knowledge bases, containing concrete data (instance data or ABox) are always encoded with respect to ontologies, which encapsulate a general conceptual model of some domain knowledge, thus allowing easier sharing and reuse of KBs.

3. Related work

Decision support systems (DSS) have evolved significantly and there have been many influences from technological and organizational developments (Shim, Warkentin et al. 2002). DSS once utilized more limited database, modelling, and user interface functionality, but technological innovations enabled more powerful DSS functionality. DSS once supported individual decision makers, but later DSS technologies are applied to workgroups or teams, especially virtual teams. The advent of the Web has enabled inter-organizational DSS and has given rise to numerous new applications of existing technology as well as many new decision support technologies themselves. Internet facilitates access to data, information and knowledge sources, but at the same time, it threatens to cognitively overload the decision makers. Authors in (Vahidov & Kersten 2004) claim that internet technologies require a new type of decision support that provides tighter integration and higher degree of direct interaction with the problem domain. Based on that they propose a generic architecture where dynamic and highly complex electronic environments DSS's should be situated in the problem domain. Chen et al. conducted an interesting research about integrated interactive environment for knowledge discovery from heterogeneous data resources (Chen, Zhu et al. 2001). Their work is grounded on acquiring, collecting, and extracting relevant information from multiple data sources, and then forming meaningful

knowledge patterns. The proposed system employs common DW¹ and OLAP² techniques to form integrated data repository and generate database queries over large data collections from various distinct data resources.

Regarding the domain of DW and OLAP analyses research has dealt with Document Warehousing (Tseng & Chou 2006) where extensive semantic information about the documents is available but still not fully employed as in traditional DW. The use of ontologies was found useful as a common interpretation basis for data and metadata. Furthermore research has extended to Web DW (Marotta, Motz et al. 2002) with the emphasis on managing the volatile and dynamic nature of Web sources. Utilization of ontologies is also addressed in Information Retrieval (IR) where it has been used for fuzzy tagging of data from the Web (Buche, Dibie-Barthelemy et al. 2006; Macias & Castells 2007), query construction tool in semi-automatic ontology mapping (Suomela & Kekalainen 2006) and semantic based retrieval of information from the World Wide Web (Shan, Jun et al. 2003; Garces, Olivas et al. 2006). Use of ontologies in DM has also been considered in (Bernaras, Laresgoiti et al. 1996; Zhou, Booker et al. 2002; Singh, Vajirkar et al. 2003; Cao, Chao et al. 2004) where ontology was used for representation of context awareness and handling semantics inconsistencies.

Several approaches (Tewari, Youll et al. 2003; Rivest, Bedard et al. 2005; Kishore, Zhang et al. 2006; Soo, Lin et al. 2006) deal with agent support for integration and decision support. Research in (Kishore, Zhang et al. 2006) showed that MAS paradigm provides an excellent approach for modelling and implementing integrated business IS. Authors within that research proposed a conceptual framework for MAS based integrative business IS. Results from other research in (Tewari, Youll et al. 2003; Rivest, Bedard et al. 2005) also deal with merging of data within DW, but they put more emphasis on geospatial component and location-sensitive information. Some promising results were also found in (Soo, Lin et al. 2006), where authors propose a cooperative MAS platform to support the invention process based on the patent document analysis. The platform allows the invention process to be carried out through the cooperation and coordination among software agents delegated by the various domain experts in the complex industrial R&D environment.

In context of domain knowledge representation ontology has been widely used for data, application and information integration (Qiu 2006). Jovanović in (Jovanović & Gašević 2005) concludes that the need for knowledge sharing and interoperable KBs exists and the key element for achieving interoperability are domain ontologies. In that approach XSLT³ transformation is used to enable knowledge interoperability. Furthermore some attempts have also been made towards ontology programming in dedicated languages such as Go! (Clark & McCabe 2006) that is distinguished from OWL-like languages where stress is on logic and object oriented programming. Authors in (Vasilecas & Bugaite 2006; Lavbič, Lajovic et al. 2010) use ontologies for ontology based IS development. Another work presented in (Fuentes, Carbo et al. 2006) uses heterogeneous domain ontology for location based IS in a MAS framework with the emphasis on context-aware MAS. They propose a

¹ Data Warehouse (DW)

² OnLine Analytical Processing (OLAP)

³ XSLT (XSL Transformations) is a declarative, XML-based language used for the transformation of XML documents into other XML documents.

global ontology to let agents work with heterogeneous domains using a wireless network and the intention is to provide customization about different environment services based on user location and profile. An important aspect is also continuous evaluation of developed ontologies that authors deal with in (Lavbič & Krisper 2010).

4. Problem and proposal for solution

The review of related work presented in previous section pointed out that modern DSS's changed quite substantially especially with the advent of the Web and availability of extensive information in online repositories. For managing complexity and integration issues with decision support many approaches relied on MAS paradigm and used ontologies as knowledge representation mechanism. The existing approaches mainly focused on either supporting existing business processes or improving decision support at some level of detail or integration of several structured resources to achieve better decision support. To our knowledge none of the approaches addressed the problem of enriching data from internal data sources with unstructured data found on internet. The interactivity of reviewed solutions is also limited; meaning that business users are usually limited to small set of parameters they can define to alter default behaviour of the system. These user requirements are usually entered directly into the system and no abstraction layers are provided as in business rules managements systems (BRMS) to enable users without technical skills to manipulate the content.

This chapter introduces a novel approach in integration of unstructured information found in the Web with information available in several internal data sources (e.g. database, DW, ERP⁴ etc.). For implementation purposes MAS paradigm with agents was used, mainly because related work pointed out that is a very appropriate solution for integration of business IS. One of the reasons to choose agents is also modelling notion where business users and agents are modelled in a very similar manner. Problem of interaction between human actors and computer programs is also addressed by introduction of ontologies as knowledge representation mechanism. The approach presented in this chapter is targeted towards using ontologies for several tasks, where emphasis is on using BR approach to ensure interoperability between business user and IS. Not only that ontology is used by every agent to represent the interpretation of a problem domain but also for communication between agents and business users. The use of ontologies in MAS enables agents to share a common set of facts used in user profiles, products and other domain elements, while interacting with each other. With exploiting reasoning mechanisms new knowledge can be derived from known facts and improve the KB. To simplify this communication template system based on BR was introduced to enable users with less technical skills manipulation of knowledge within the system and control behaviour of individual agent. The approach will be further explained in the following section 3. The case study presented in this chapter is from the domain of mobile telecommunications and in section 4 is presented in detail with the impact it has on improving decision support within enterprise. In the domain of mobile communications that was used for case study we had to define several tasks in DSS-MAS, needed for decision support – OLAP analyses, DM, IR, context and profile definition, notification etc.

⁴ Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)

5. DSS-MAS

5.1 DSS-MAS architecture

DSS-MAS that we propose in this chapter is introduced in Fig. 1. The case study presented in this chapter is from the domain of mobile telecommunications and is based on business environment and information resources from one of the mobile operators. DSS-MAS is situated in the environment of several existing systems, like Data Mining Decision Support System (DMDSS), or DW and various resources available outside of an enterprise on the World Wide Web.

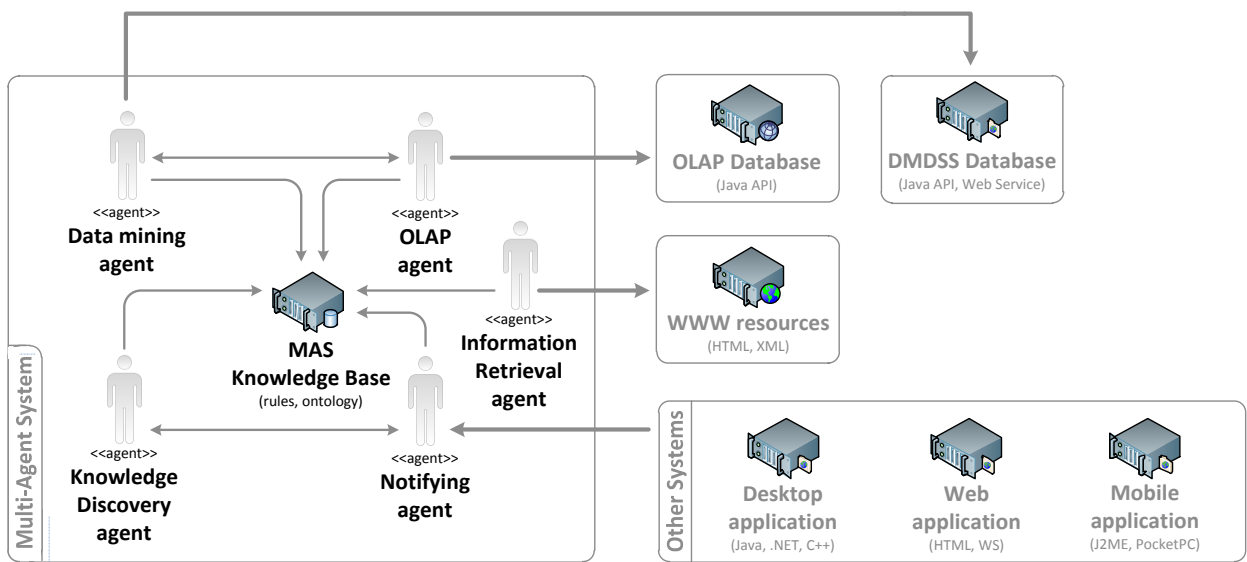


Fig. 1. Architecture of MAS used for Decision Support in Enterprises.

Global goal that agents in DSS-MAS should achieve is to support decision making process while using existing systems for business analysis and employing information from environment where enterprise resides. To support this goal DSS-MAS includes several agent roles that are as following: **Data Mining Agent (DMA)**, **OLAP Agent (OLAPA)**, **Information Retrieval Agent (IRA)**, **Knowledge Discovery Agent (KDA)**, **Notifying Agent (NA)** and **Mobile Agent (MA)**. Ontologies are used as a main interconnection object for domain knowledge representation, agent-to-agent communication and most important for agent-to-business user communication. An important element of an environment is the World Wide Web, where agents play information retrieval role for the purpose of decision making. The information retrieved is saved in a KB and available for further employment for Data Mining (DM) and DW analyses. After all information from internal and external sources is gathered it is then furthermore considered by KDA, where inference over several task ontologies used by individual agents (DMA, OLAPA, IRA etc.) is performed. Moreover the sub goal of DSS-MAS is delivering of the right information at the right time and to the

right users. The system needs to be context aware and consider the relevant features of the business, i.e. context information such as time, location, and user preferences (Liao, Xu et al. 2005). Business users in DSS-MAS are able to employ agents to perform tasks on their behalf. For example, managers in enterprises have to request reports from their systems – OLAP or from transactional databases, and managers have to review reports every appointed period of time (day, week, month etc.). This task of information acquisition is predecessor for decision making and is more or less straightforward – business user sends a request for analyses and reviews the content according to some Key Performance Indicators (KPI). KPI is simply a measure of performance and is commonly used in enterprises to evaluate how successful they. In DSS-MAS tasks like this are automated and user participation is reduced as much as possible. An initial analysis model (e.g. OLAP or DM) has to be captured in the ontology by business users, while execution and optimisation is left for agents. Business users first define initial parameters for analyses to be performed, while agents perform these analyses and recommend improvements. When some action is required from business user, he is notified and has the ability to act or change rules of agent's execution.

To enable these functionalities we introduce ontologies as a mediation mechanism for knowledge exchange between actors (agents and business users) that cooperate in DSS-MAS. The following section will present the structure and organization of ontologies we have used for the case study.

5.2 The role of ontology

According to (Guarino 1998) ontology can be structured into different sub-ontologies – upper ontology, domain ontology, task ontology and the application ontology. Following similar guidelines we have defined upper ontology named **Common ontology** and combined domain and task ontologies in **Notifying ontology**, **Information retrieval ontology**, **Data Mining and Warehousing ontology** (see Fig. 2). The proposed clustering of ontologies is based on the common understanding of the problem domain being defined in Common ontology. Every agent has its own interpretation of a KB, which is a specialization of a Common ontology with detail definition of knowledge required by individual agent. Common ontology is limited to abstract concepts and it covers reusable dimensions, which are primarily used by KDA. Task ontologies specify concepts of notification, IR, DM and DW. Mobile communications in our case is the domain of all task ontologies and the emphasis is on supply and demand of mobile phones. As already mentioned we used in our research the knowledge management approach where every agent has knowledge about its own problem domain. In this case whenever new facts about the common knowledge are discovered, which might be of interest for other agents, they are updated to the common ontology.

The role of ontology in our approach is therefore twofold: (a) knowledge representation mechanism used by agents and (b) common understanding of problem domain used for communication between business users and agents by utilizing business rules manipulation with introduced templates (see section 4.2).

Fig. 2 shows an excerpt from intersection of several ontologies used in our case study. This part of ontology clearly defines the common elements being used for communication

between agents and business users (domain specific elements such as phones, new phones and customers, all described with domain specific characteristics). A part of OLAP elements needed for conducting OLAP analyses is also presented. Ontology also presents notification with taxonomy of various warning levels and business users classification by organizational unit and decision making level.

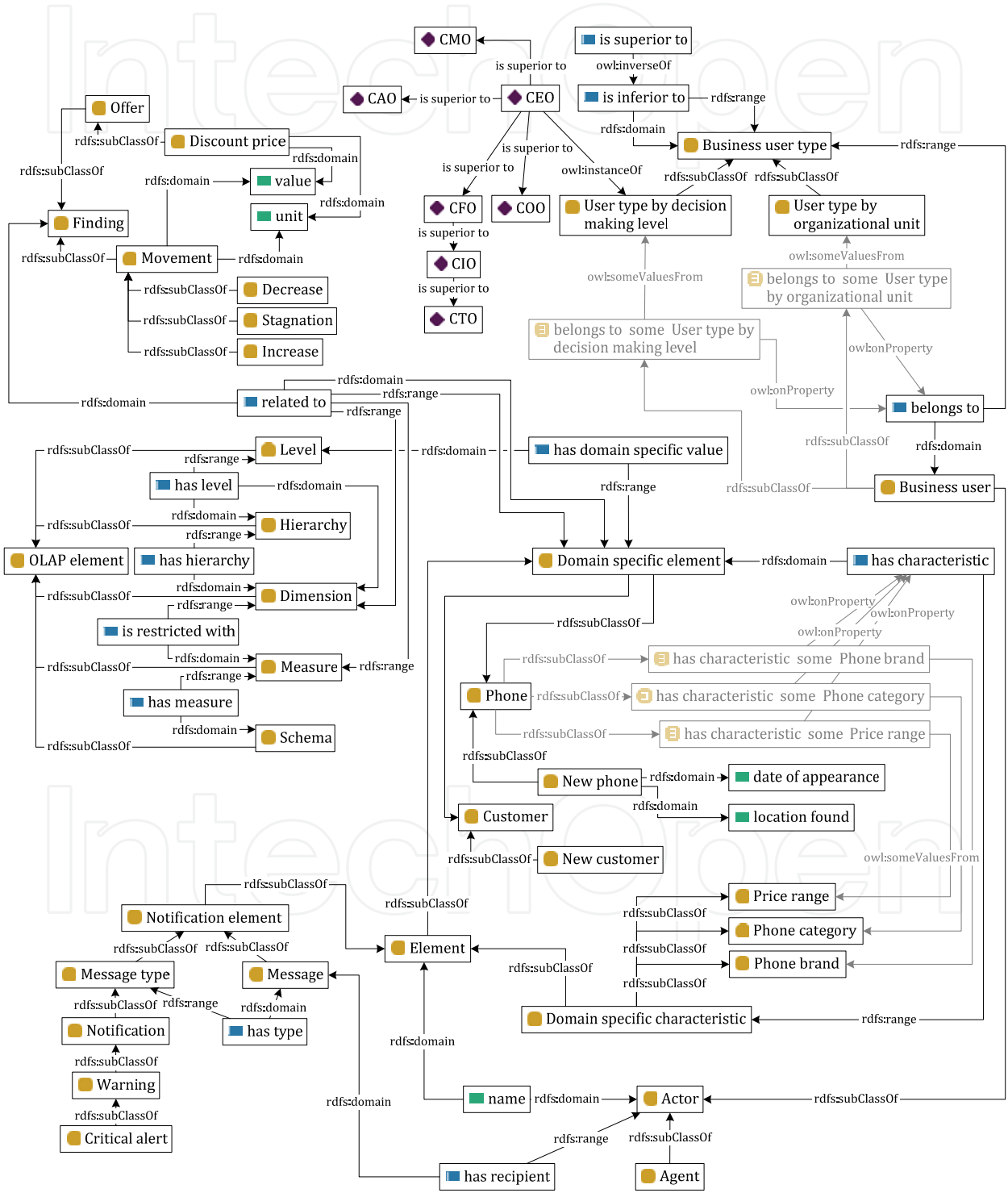


Fig. 2. Excerpt from intersection of several ontologies used in our case study.

5.3 The role of agents

Our case study uses domain of mobile telecommunications as a platform where we focus on the sales of mobile phones and their accessories. Manipulation with internal data storage is handled by two types of agents - OLAPA and DMA. They both have distinct tasks but still share common goal - periodically or on demand autonomously execute analyses models. Business users at first define these models and describe them with all required parameters (e.g. search for anomalies in sales of Nokia phones in last month period). The information about the execution is stored in the ontology (based on business user preferences) or is requested by another agent of the system. Business user preferences in this context define the execution parameters about the analysis, for example the period at which the analysis is performed (e.g. perform analysis every other day at 13:00). OLAPA has on first hand straightforward task of performing OLAP analyses on behalf of an agent or a business user and reporting its findings back to the requesting entity and all other entities that should be informed, according to the business policy. Nevertheless OLAPA does much more - after each execution it prepares the report for business user based on findings - movements and KPIs. If certain finding is substantially different from finding obtained in previous case further analysis is performed to discover the reason of change by drilling down (more detailed) or up (less detailed) the hierarchies and levels.

By acquiring the knowledge in ontology we enable business users to change the behaviour of agents with changing the ontology using graphical user interface. This interface incorporates all logical restrictions defined in ontology and does not allow users to enter unacceptable values and the most important is that it does not require technical knowledge from users. Previous experiences we obtained have shown that business users have great difficulties especially with setting the parameters required to run DM and DW analyses models, and so user interface really has to be friendly and intuitive. In our approach this issue was solved by introducing the architecture depicted in the next chapter at Fig. 3 and using templates as further discussed in section 4.

Nowadays Web-based information retrieval systems are widely distributed and deeply analysed from different points of view. The main objective of all of such systems is to help users to retrieve information they really need (obviously as quickly as it is possible) (Garces, Olivas et al. 2006). While the techniques regarding DW, multi-dimensional models, OLAP, or even ad-hoc reports have served enterprises well, they do not completely address the full scope of existing problems. It is believed that, for the business intelligence (BI) of an enterprise, only about 20% of information can be extracted from formatted data stored in relational databases (Tseng & Chou 2006). The remaining 80% of information is hidden in unstructured or semi-structured documents. This is because the most prevalent medium for expressing information and knowledge is text. For instance, market survey reports, project status reports, meeting records, customer complaints, e-mails, patent application sheets, and advertisements of competitors now are all recorded in documents. For that reason in DSS-MAS we introduced IRA for retrieval of data mainly from the World Wide Web. The tasks that IRA performs in presented case study can be grouped into three categories:

- identification of new online shops,
- analysis of mobile phones presented online and
- extending Data Warehouse with information found online.

First two tasks are concerned about the supply of mobile phones at various online shops worldwide. Identification of new online shops is conducted with web crawling and the use of several existing services on the Internet, such as Google, Froogle and Bing. Not only these internet resources are managed through ontology, but also rules for text extraction are defined as rules which make all domain knowledge available in IR ontology and not encoded in agent itself. More details about implementation of DSS-MAS case study can be found in section 4. Furthermore every shop found online is analysed to identify unique patterns for searching phones. Using these search patterns IRA is searching through online shops and determines phones with their market prices and stores this information into IR ontology to be available for further knowledge inference by KDA. Information of found phones is used to determine new market trends, enable price comparison between competitors, facilitate possible inclusion in enterprise's sales program etc. One of the tasks that IRA also performs is extending DW with information found online. While business users performs OLAP analyses, they deal with only internal information about the business, but in process of decision making other resources also have to be examined, e.g. news about the suppliers and competitors, opinions about certain products and organisations etc. IRA therefore scans the DW dimension data (through hierarchies and levels) from DW dimensional schema and uses this information for searching several internet resources (news archives, forums, stock changes, Google trends etc.). When users review OLAP reports these data from the Internet is also displayed according to their restrictions in dimensions. For example, when business user are making decision whether to increase support to Nokia or Sony Ericsson phones it only has reports about sales of selected brand names from their market program. Using our approach the user is provided with additional data that is found online and what will make decision better founded.

KDA is important element of DSS-MAS since it consolidates all findings from IR, DM and DW and furthermore delivers derived findings to NA. To employ inference capabilities over several ontologies the enterprises' BR are essential. While business concepts are captured in ontology, these concepts further have to be restricted to define specific meaning. Generally BR are prepared by business users and also some parts of BR in enterprises tend to change frequently; therefore we introduced architecture (see Fig. 3) for BR management (further discussion in section 4). Findings of KDA are presented as instances of **Domain-specific-element** and **Findings** classes (see ontology in Fig. 2).

As it can be seen from Fig. 1 NA represents an interface to DSS-MAS for all external applications and business users. The main role of NA is the information dissemination by simply delivering the right information at the right time to the right users. While in vast majority of today's applications users have to request the information using so called "pull model" in our approach we implemented the "push model", where information is proactively delivered by agents to the user without a specific request. This is achieved by making system context aware and considering the relevant features of the business, i.e. context information such as time, location, position in the organisational hierarchy etc.

All knowledge about notification is defined in Notifying ontology, where every user has his own context defined and the position within organisation across two dimensions – organisational unit (e.g. Marketing, Sales, Human resources etc.) and decision making level (e.g. Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Information Officer (CIO), Chief Financial Officer

(CFO), Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), Chief Analytics Officer (CAO) etc.). According to that position rules for delivery of several message types are defined. These message types range from Notification to Warning and Critical alert. Each message also addresses the domain of specific organisational unit, e.g. when a new mobile phone is found online at competitor's website, CMO and CAO have to be notified. Organisational structure, as part of Notifying ontology, also defines that both CMO and CAO are inferior to CEO therefore he is also notified, but only in a case of a Critical alert. According to the business user profile, notification can be sent using several technologies from Windows Alert, e-mail, Really Simple Syndication (RSS), Short Message Service (SMS) etc. These notification types are also ordered by priority for each business user and according to this type the content is also adapted.

Mobile agent is an example of an application that can reside on a mobile device (e.g. Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), mobile phone etc.) and uses resources of DSS-MAS through NA. The typical use case includes sending mobile agent across network to DSS-MAS, where all needed information according to owner context is collected and then the mobile agent is returned back to originating location on a mobile device and presents the collected data to business user. When the process of acquiring data is in progress, business user does not have to be connected to the network, he can just wait offline until mobile agent is ready to return with the findings.

In the following section details about the case study implementation will be presented with technologies used, templates for business rules acquisition and presentation of one specific scenario from case study.

6. Case study implementation and discussion

6.1 Technology

The selected language for ontology presentation is OWL DL (Russomanno & Kothari 2004), since it offers the highest level of semantic expressiveness for selected case study and is one of the most widely used and standardised ontology language nowadays that has extensive support in different ontology manipulation tools. Besides OWL logical restrictions, Semantic Web Rule Language (SWRL) rules were also used due to its human readable syntax and support for business rules oriented approach to knowledge management (Horrocks, Patel-Schneider et al. 2005). SWRL rules are stored as OWL individuals and are described by OWL classes contained in the SWRL ontology. The use of SWRL enables storing schema, individuals and rules in a single component, which makes management much easier. SWRL rule form in a combination with templates that is introduced in the following subsection 4.2 is very suitable for knowledge formalization by business users that do not have extensive technical knowledge.

The user interface for ontology manipulation for business users is based on Protégé editor (Stanford Medical Informatics 2006) and SWRL Tab (Stanford Medical Informatics 2006) for Protégé. It enables entering OWL individuals and SWRL rules where a step further is made towards using templates for entering information (see Fig. 3). At the execution level KAON2 inference engine is used to enable inference capabilities. Due to limitation of *SHIQ(D)* subset of OWL-DL and *DL-safe* subset of SWRL language, before inference is conducted, semantic validation takes place to ensure that all preconditions are met. We

selected FIPA⁵ compliant MAS platform JADE⁶ in DSS-MAS because it offers broad range of functionalities and is most widely used platform. This is due very good support and availability of agent framework, where a lot of common agents’ tasks are already implemented (i.e. agent communication at the syntax level, agent management, migration of agents etc.). For Mobile Agent implementation an add-on JADE-LEAP⁷ was used to support the mobility of agents.

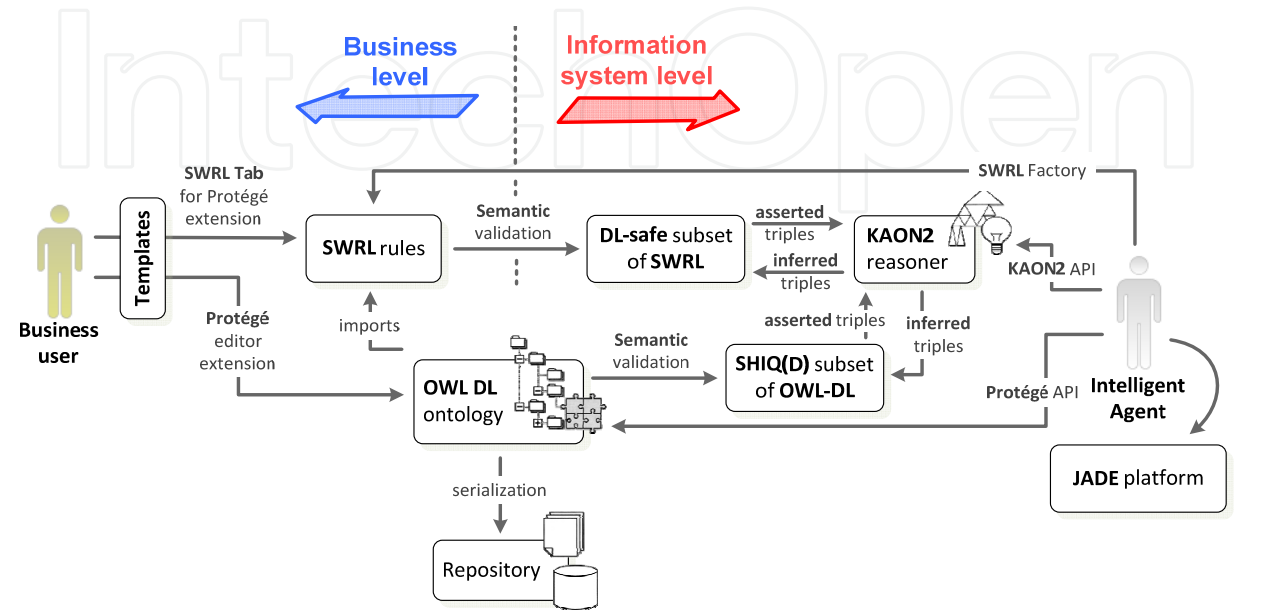


Fig. 3. Prototype of selected case study.

6.2 Mediation with BR templates

Using templates with ontology, business logic is excluded from the actual software code whereas the majority of data for templates is acquired from ontology axioms and natural language descriptions in ontology, while other templates are prepared by users with technical knowledge. The main goal of using mediation with BR templates is to enable acquiring knowledge from actual knowledge holders i.e. business users and enable transformation of this high-level knowledge into information system level, where this data together with concepts from business vocabulary can be directly used for inference purposes and bring added value without any further programming by technically educated users.

When acquiring new knowledge into the system from business users, the process always starts with focusing on concepts of business vocabulary that are persisted in a form of ontology. Users can freely traverse through this information space, select concepts and further manipulate all related information within the selected context. Altering and adding new information is all time limited to formal definition of concepts that is defined in ontology. For easier manipulation business user is aided with template and business vocabulary, so BR building process is simplified as it will presented in detail in the following section.

⁵ Foundation for Intelligent Physical Agents (FIPA)

⁶ Java Agent DEvelopment Framework (JADE)

⁷ Java Agent Development Environment-Lightweight Extensible Agent Platform (JADE-LEAP)

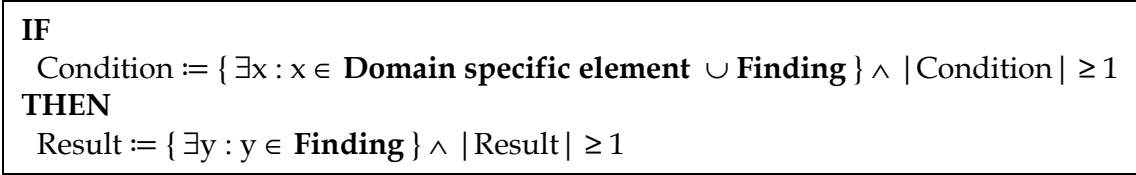


Fig. 4. BR template for general finding definition.

Fig. 4 presents an example of BR template that is used for definition of aggregation of findings or domain specific elements. The user interface that is available is directly linked to ontology, where constraints on classes, properties and individuals are considered in real-time. This approach allows to minimize the risk of entering wrong constraints. The DSS-MAS system supports entering of new statements in several forms from simple IF-THEN form to decision table or decision tree.

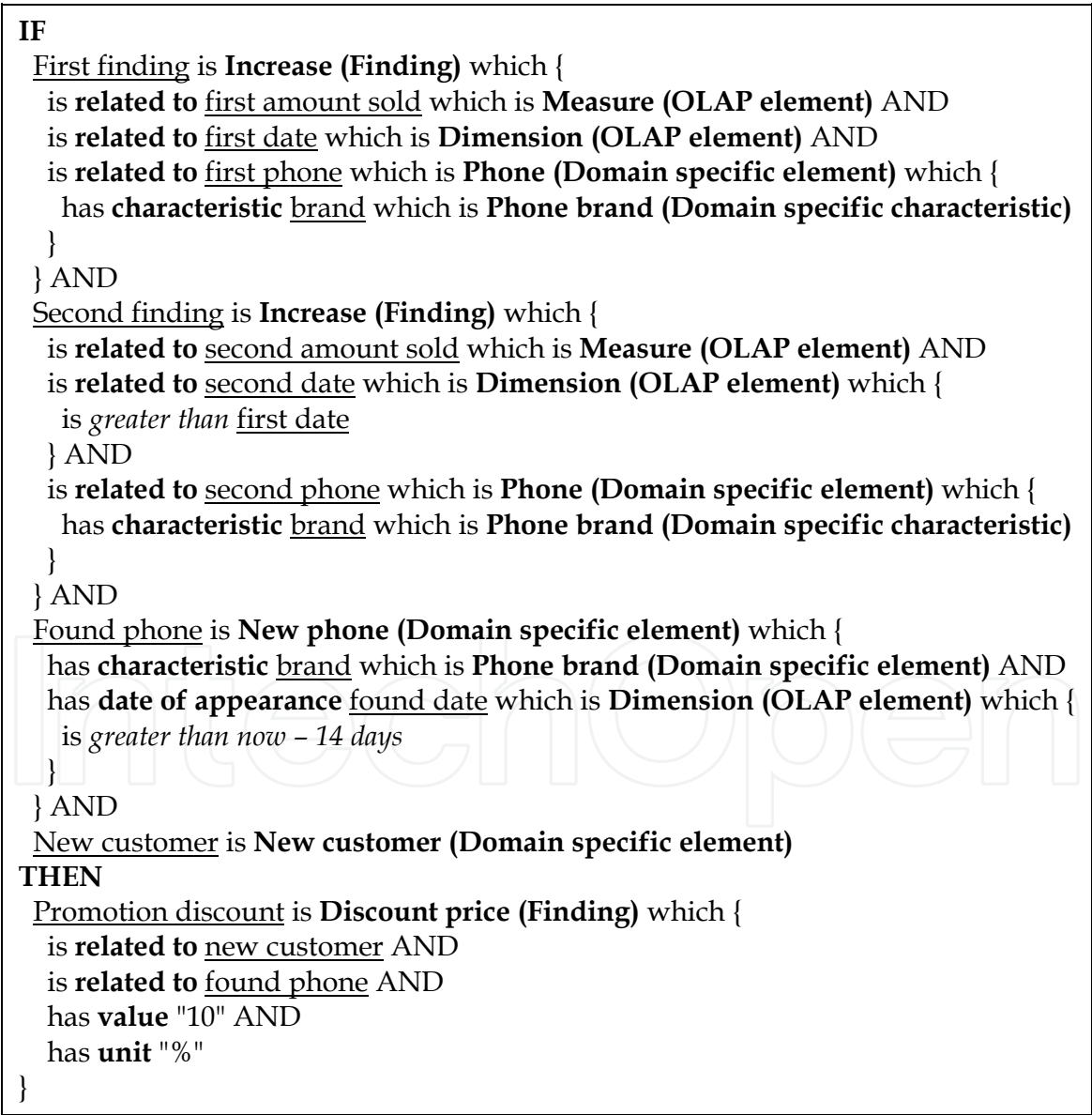


Fig. 5. Example of a rule, developed by using template.

The following example in Fig. 5 represents a BR that states: *If there exist two consequent increases of sold phones of the same phone brand and a new phone of this phone brand was found online within last 2 weeks, then offer a promotion discount of 10% on this new phone to all new customers.*

When constraint presented at Fig. 5 is transformed to execution form at information system level, standardized SWRL and OWL languages are used to enable reusability (see Fig. 6). By this transformation a rule is produced that can be directly used in the inference engine to produce results in a form of inferred triples that are presented to the user.

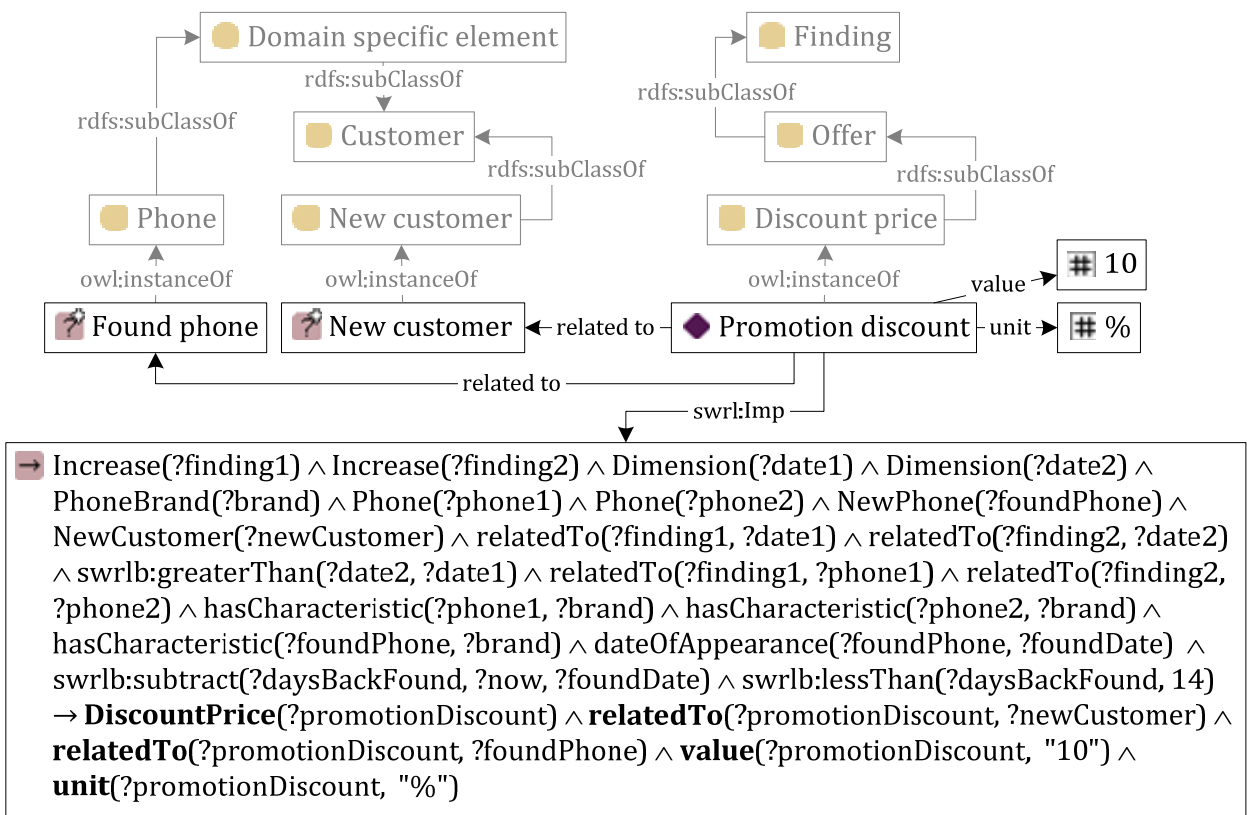


Fig. 6. Constraint presented in ontology in SWRL and OWL syntax.

6.3 Case study

One of the most common cases of using DSS-MAS system is combing information found online with BI reports (DW, DM, IR etc.) developed on internal data in enterprise DW. Fig. 7 presents one of this scenario.

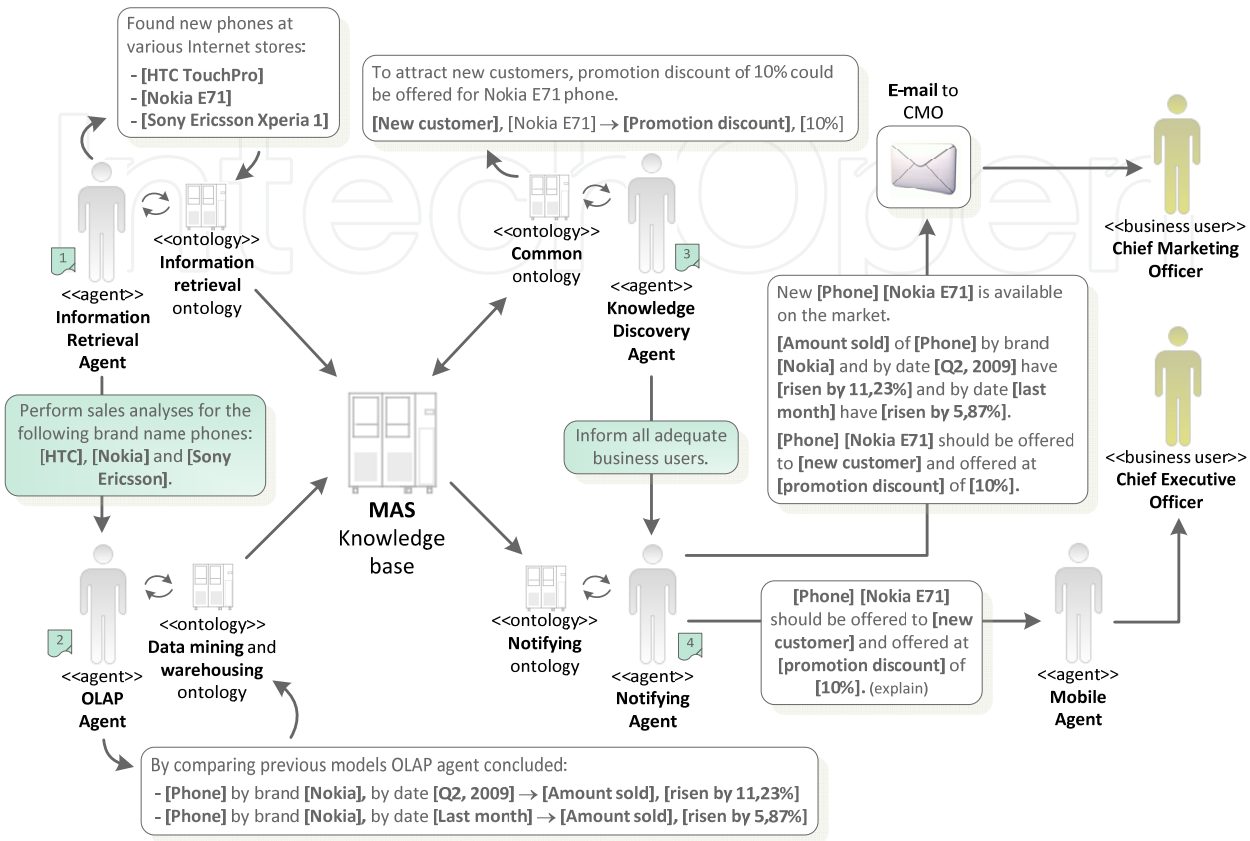


Fig. 7. Case study of using DSS-MAS in mobile phone domain.

Scenario presented at Fig. 7 is triggered by results of IRA activity, when three new mobile phones: HTC TouchPro, Nokia E71 and Sony Ericsson Xperia 1 are found by IRA at online mobile shops. According to the execution policy from Common ontology, OLAPA is notified with a request to rebuild all DW reports where brands of identified phones can be found in dimension elements. After running OLAP on Sales schema with constrains of Nokia brand in Phone dimension and last year in Date dimension OLAPA creates a report as depicted in Fig. 8.

[Phone] by brand [Nokia], by date [Q2, 2009] → [Amount sold], [risen by 11,23%]
[Phone] by brand [Nokia], by date [Last month] → [Amount sold], [risen by 5,87%]

Fig. 8. Business Intelligence findings.

At the information system level the first finding is represented as an excerpt from ontology and is depicted in Fig. 9.

The CEO uses a Mobile Agent on his mobile device and is also notified by a truncated message with new finding, while explanation is available upon request.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed DSS-MAS where internal and external data is integrated using agent-oriented approach and ontologies as a common understanding of a problem domain and for communication between business users and agents. Agents were used due to their mentalistic notions for modelling, similarities between the agent in the MAS paradigm and the human actor in business organisations, and also possibilities for the use of ontologies as means of agents' internal knowledge base representation. The external information from the Web was integrated by IRA agent with the data in organisation's DW and after applying BR new knowledge was derived by employing agents' inference capabilities. Tasks like information retrieval from competitors, creating and reviewing OLAP reports are autonomously performed by agents, while business users have control over their execution through manipulation of knowledge base. The research also emphasized agent-to-business user communication and trying to minimize that gap. This was accomplished by introducing different views on ontologies for business user and agent. While agents dealt with formal description of business concepts, logical constraints and rules, business user had simplified view of formal description of knowledge. User is able to manipulate with ontology through templates, where little technical knowledge is required. The role of the mediation mechanism is then to transform these business level concepts into formal specification at the level of information system.

Presented approach was verified and implemented using a case study from the domain of mobile telecommunications, where the aim was to provide the knowledge worker an intelligent analysis platform that enhances decision making process. The application domain was reduced to its sub domain dedicated for supply and analysis of demand of mobile phones in one of the mobile operators. DW system is constructed from several heterogeneous data sources where majority of those sources are internal to the enterprise. Our approach added information found on the Web (i.e. competitors' offers, stock rates etc.) to these internal data sources and improved the decision support process within the enterprise. The proposed approach also addressed business users and their communication with the system which was simplified by using templates to define some business requirements that were transformed into analyses models (OLAP, DW etc.), automatically performed by agents which reported results back to users in charge. The case study presented in the chapter was implemented in Java and using mainly open source technologies.

8. Future work

It should be noted that some limitations related to our approach do exist. One of the concerns is associated with performance issues. When amount of data used for reasoning grows the overall performance of the system declines and additional mechanism are required to achieve expected results. There are several on-going research activities about reasoning on the Semantic Web that deal with formal models and their applicability. The results of that research would be greatly beneficial to our approach.

The mechanism of BR templates used in our approach is aimed to bridging the gap between business users and information systems. Templates are used to enable business users without extensive technical knowledge to formalize their expert knowledge about selected problem domain and therefore enable agent to act autonomously on their behalf. This separation of business and information system level proved useful but further research is needed in finding more innovative ways for expressing BR templates and defining more templates. The use of NLP⁸ can provide additional aid to business users in semi-automatic acquisition of business rules from documentation.

The role of IRA is to extend DW with information online and by doing that it employs general purpose search engines, custom defined online stores etc. Future work will focus on extending the variety of sources included in our system, especially by integration with DBpedia⁹ and Freebase¹⁰. One of the coming tasks is also integration of selected subsets of data with Linked Data and contributing in connecting distributed data across the Web.

Our approach was verified on a case study from the domain of mobile telecommunications, but the results can be easily applied to various problem domains as the architecture of DSS-MAS is modular with clear separation of layers. This enables us to syntactically and semantically integrate internal structured data with external data that is mainly in unstructured form.

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⁸ Natural Language Processing (NLP)

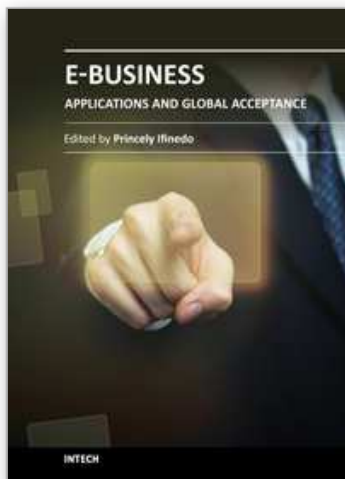
⁹ DBpedia (<http://dbpedia.org>) extracts structured information from Wikipedia.

¹⁰ Freebase (<http://www.freebase.com>) is an open, Creative Commons licensed repository of structured data.

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E-Business - Applications and Global Acceptance

Edited by Prof. Princely Ifinedo

ISBN 978-953-51-0081-2

Hard cover, 136 pages

Publisher InTech

Published online 10, February, 2012

Published in print edition February, 2012

E-Business - Applications and Global Acceptance is a collection of well-written papers that employ empirical and theoretical/conceptual approaches to highlight insights on the global acceptance of electronic business (e-business) and other useful applications and conceptualizations in the area. As our knowledge of the e-business phenomenon continues to mature and evolve, it is pertinent that new insights and information be made available. This edited book is published against such a backdrop. In essence, this book seeks to provide value to both e-business researchers and practitioners, with information sourced from differing regions of the world. The diversity in the sources of insights is welcome and this edited book covers a wide range of interesting, topical, and timely issues dealing with the acceptance of e-business applications or systems, business processes integration and management, the extension of e-business concepts to not-for-profit (nonprofit) organizations, and the construction of a service innovation model. Without a doubt, this book will be a comprehensive reference point for knowledge seekers who want to understand emerging conceptualizations, processes, and behaviors in the e-business domain.

How to reference

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Dejan Lavbič (2012). Knowledge Management with Multi-Agent System in BI Systems Integration, E-Business - Applications and Global Acceptance, Prof. Princely Ifinedo (Ed.), ISBN: 978-953-51-0081-2, InTech, Available from: <http://www.intechopen.com/books/e-business-applications-and-global-acceptance/knowledge-management-with-multi-agent-system-in-bi-systems-integration>

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