OWLSGOV: An Owl-S Based Framework for E-Government Services

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Abstract. The development of e-Government services becomes a big challenge of many countries of the world. However, in a distributed environment such as the e-government area, different interactions are made between heterogeneous systems. Therefore, a system that enables developing, integrating, discovering and executing these services is necessary. For this purpose, we present in this paper an approach for developing efficiently the e-government services based on semantic web services (SWS) technology and Multi-Agent Systems (MAS). In fact, the SWS enrich web services with semantic information (meaning) to facilitate the discovery, integration, composition and execution of services. The MAS enable building an environment in which the public administrations can publish their services, users (e.g. citizens) can express their needs and services can be discovered. In this paper, we present our framework for semantic description of e-government services based on SWS and on OWL-S framework in particular. We present as well the architecture of a MAS, which allows improving the dynamic usage processes of e-government services such as integration and discovery.

Keywords: Semantic web services, e-Government, OWL-S, Multi-Agent Systems (MAS).

1 Introduction

The e-government (electronic government) area aims offering services to citizens. Indeed, the objective of this area is to provide e-services in an integrated, transparent, and efficient manner according to the needs and expectations of business

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and citizens. Currently, many e-services are delivered separately by several public administrations. However, these services are developed without taking into account the multiplicity of concepts, services, business rules and actors involved in administrative proceedings. That has resulted in difficulties for integrating these services and cooperating between involved actors. To overcome these problems, we are interested in improving the description of public services by using semantic technologies; in particular, semantic web services (SWS) [4]. The SWS are the composition of two technologies: Semantic Web [3] and Web Services. In fact, this technology enriches the web services description by additional semantic information, which enables improving the automation level of usage processes of services such as integration, discovery and composition.

Although, the added value of the application of SWS technology in e-government area, our comparative study of numerous researches and projects applying these technologies, has shown that there are still potential problems that must be addressee such as interoperability and integration issues of SWS. Therefore, an e-government solution based on SWS requires:

- good identification and description of SWS through an enhanced framework for semantic description of public services;
- high automation level of different services tasks for cooperating efficiently between providers and users through intelligent mechanisms and tools.

For this purpose, we present in this paper a framework for developing e-government services. In this context, we have developed a system for managing these services. Our system is based on intelligent agents for discovering and integrating the e-government services.

Our framework of SWS is based on a semantic meta-model that represents multiples types of e-government knowledge such as : public services, domain concepts manipulated by these services, usage situations of services, and the relationships between them that we called service usage contexts [5]. The last both knowledge "usage situations" and "usage contexts" represent a cognitive semantic about services. Thus, our meta-model enables developing an e-government knowledge model shared between involved actors, ensures understanding and interpretation of these concepts in a unified manner, and facilitates the research, integration, discovery, and dynamic composition of services required for an e-government process. For this purpose, in our work, we have used OWL-S (Ontology Web Language for Services) framework [13], a set of referenced models, ontologies, and conceptual structures (CSs) [18]. OWL-S ontology enables semantic description of services and CSs enables modeling the service usage situations and contexts of public services. In addition, we have enriched OWL-S by additional elements for describing the governmental features of public services (e.g. legal and organizational). As result, we have built up an e-Government service ontology: OwlsGov.

Furthermore, we have developed an intelligent system for discovering and integrating dynamically the *OwlsGov* services. The architecture of this system is

composed of a set of layers which allow users to express their requests, to discover and to perform the required services and public authorities to develop and manage their proper services and domain ontologies. To implement this architecture, we have used numerous semantic technologies such as: Pellet [16] for semantic reasoning about OwlsGov services descriptions and domain ontologies and JADE [7] for implementing the intelligent agents. We have indeed developed a set of agents which permit integrating and discovering the public services taking into account their usage situations and contexts. These agents enable thus to build a multi agent system (MAS) in which users and providers can interact easily. Moreover these agents can integrate and discover public services taking into account their usage situations and contexts.

The rest of this article is organized as follows: we present, in section 2, our OwlsGov ontology, next in section 3 and 4; we present respectively our architecture for developing, discovering service, etc. In order to show the feasibility of our architecture, we present in section 5 an application in the context of the e-customs area. Finally, in the last section, we conclude and present our future work.

2 OwlsGov Ontology

Based on our comparative study of SWS frameworks [10], we have chosen to develop our OwlsGov ontology as an extension of OWL-S ontology. We have added various extensions to this ontology in order to represent the specific governmental features and the service usage situations and contexts ontology. In the next, we first give an overview of OWL-S ontology (Section 2.1) before detailing our OwlsGov ontology (Section 2.2). For services development, we have developed an appropriate methodology (Section 2.3).

2.1 OWL-S Ontology

We have adopted OWL-S Ontology to describe the public services semantics for many reasons: First, it is a very popular language, second, it is built on OWL "Ontology Web Language" which is a recommendation of W3C, and third it is characterized by its flexibility to be adapted and finally, it fits best the fact that public services are often business process through its process model. Furthermore, OWL-S proposes an upper ontology that provides three kind of knowledge about service namely: "ServiceProfile", "ServiceModel", and "ServiceGrounding" the first is characterized by the question "What does the service provide", the answer presents the service functionality and other non functional properties. The second element is characterized by the question "How does service work", the answer describes the Service behavioral aspect. The third is characterized by the question "How to access to service"; the answer gives the concrete service that supports Service [13].

2.2 OwlsGov Ontology

Our approach aims to develop a semantic model for e-government domain without changing the core ontology of OWL-S as shown in figure 1. For this purpose, we have developed first our specific conceptual model for public services [8]. It consists of "GovService", "GovServiceProfile" and "GovServiceProcess" that extend respectively the OWL-S elements: Service, Profile and Process. Consequently, we have incorporated the specificities of e-government domain through using some available metadata and ontologies developed within other projects [17]. For example, we have used "vcard Ontology" for semantic description of persons and addresses. We also used "LegalOntology" and "OrganizationalOntology" developed within OntoGov project.



Fig. 1 OwlsGov Conceptual Model

We have enriched the both elements: *GovService* and *GovServiceProfile* by a set of concepts and relations.

Since "the OWL-S Profile allows the description of a host of properties that are used to describe features of the service" [13], we decided to integrate the both extensions, LegalEntity and Organization, which are governmental properties in GovServiceProfile. Indeed, the LegalEntity concept specifies the legislative characteristics that govern a public service and the Organization concept specifies the organizational structure that manages a public service. These both concepts are specified in separate ontologies, LegalOntology and OrganizationalOntology. The concepts of these ontologies will be instantiated according to the specific regulations and resources, employees and roles of each public administration. To link these concepts to GovServiceProfile of a particular service, we have added two relationships hasLegal and hasOrganization, as shown in figure 1.

On the other hand, *GovService* element enhances the three types of OWL-S knowledge (profile, process, and grounding) by a cognitive knowledge. To integrate this type of knowledge, we have added two concepts, **MetaService** and **SitCtx.**

- **MetaService** is an abstraction of the common knowledge of several services. As example, we consider the calculation services of duties and taxes of e-Customs domain such as VAT and Import Duty (ID) calculation service. Both service share similar functionalities (static) such as their inputs (ex. tax rate) and outputs (ex. amount) but they differ in their dynamic functionalities or applied regulations (e.g. the ID is applied to take into account the country from which commodities are imported).
- SitCtx describes the different possible situations (Sit) of a service and their usage contexts (Ctx). To explain this, we consider the example of "Customs Clearance of Goods process". This process can have several situations depending on the type of imported "Commodity" such as "Vehicles" or "Animals". Both processes integrate different services from different public administrations as follow: the customs clearance of vehicle integrates services of transport administration (e.g. vehicle registration) while the customs clearance of animals integrates services of agriculture administration (e.g. sanitary control).

To associate these concepts to their *GovService*, we have added two relationships **hasSitCtx** and **hasMetaService**, as shown in figure 1. We note that, the **SitCtx** knowledge is specified through an external ontology and we have used conceptual structure [18] and conceptual graph [19] to implement this ontology. The technical detail of this part is beyond the scope of this paper.

2.3 OwlsGov Development Methodology

We have developed a methodology for SWS development. [10, 11], which consists of five steps as follow, cf. Figure 2:



Fig. 2 OwlsGov development methodology

- **Step 1:** Requirements Capture is to identify the different types of user (e.g., citizens, businesses, employees and managers of the administrations); needs and required information and services.
- Step 2: the Required Ontologies Development is to develop the necessary ontologies such as: domain ontology (CustomsOntology), legal and organizational ontology;

- Step 3: Technical Specification Identification consists of developing the OWL-S services with their technical functionalities according to OwlsGov model. We note that, our approach is not limited to OWL-S ontology specification. Indeed, we can use other SWS ontologies.
- Step 4: "Governmental Features Identification" is to instantiate the legal and organizational ontologies by each PA with their own governmental characteristics and then to enrich the developed services by these characteristics;
- Step 5: "Service Usage Situations and Contexts" is to develop and enrich OwlsGov services with their appropriate SitCtx ontologies.

Until now, we have presented our approach for semantic description of egovernment services through OwlsGov. Next, we present an intelligent system for discovering and integrating dynamically theses *OwlsGov* services.

3 OwlsGov Management System Architecture

The architecture, shown in Figure 3, represents our OwlsGov Management System (OwlsGovMS). It aims to facilitate the development, the publication, the retrieval and the discovery tasks of e-government services as *OwlsGov* service descriptions. This architecture integrates different types of providers such as public administrations and other organisms. For achieving a specific user task, this architecture supports a set of ontologies that describe the domain concepts and services (OwlsGov) and a set of mechanisms for achieving a specific user request or publishing and integrating services of public administrations.

To build the OwlsGovMS system, we have used the three layers proposed by DIP (Data, Information and Process Integration) project for SWS [6] as follow: User Application layer or front office, Service Provider layer or back-office and the Middleware layer or broker as shown in Figure 2. We detail these layers in the following sub-sections.

Service Provider Layer: This layer composed, in most cases, of public administrations (PA) which develop their own services according to *OwlsGov* ontology model. For this purpose, we propose two approaches for developing PA OwlsGov services, Bottom-up and Top-down. In the first approach, OwlsGov services are developed from the existing web services and in the second approach, services are developed from scratch. In both cases, the services provider must follow the methodology presented in previous section. We note that, the majority of existing web portals of public administration are developed as e-services which are not primarily web services. So, we propose to adapt them to be accessed as web services using auxiliary software agents.

To simplify the development task of *OwlsGov* services, we have implemented a graphical editor and defined a set of tools for developing and updating the associated domain ontologies.



Fig. 3 OwlsGov Management System Architecture

Middleware Layer: The middleware is the core of this architecture and represents the component that connects the back office to the front office. It provides the necessary intelligent functionalities for integrating, cooperating and discovering services. It contains also of a set of repositories for ontologies storage. The interactions between the different middleware components are implemented through a multi agents system (MAS). This latter is composed of agents such as *Client Agent* for query processing, *Discovery Agent* for matching between a given requests and OwlsGov services, and *Integration Agent* for services processing and classification, etc.

User Application Layer: The last layer is represented through a web application through which users can express their queries. This layer consists of several graphical interfaces, which allow collecting the appropriate information for improving service discovery process. To this end, in our system, we have developed a Client Agent for capturing, processing and sending information to the middleware, and then displaying the results (required services and information) in a user graphical interface.

4 OwlsGovMS Implementation

The prototype proposed consists in the implementation of OwlsGovMS architecture. It is based on a set of software components and ontologies, as shown in figure 4. We used the eclipse development environment [20], JADE (Java Agent DEvelopment Framework [7] for implementing agents, PDE (Plugin Development Environment) for implementing a plug-in application for OwlsGov services development. Based on this development environment, we have developed the both levels, **Presentation** and **Service**, which enable the implementation of the whole functionalities of OwlsGovMS architecture.



Fig. 4 OwlsGovMS Implementation, dashed arrows indicate (use) and black arrows indicate a composition

4.1 Presentation Level

This level implements the main functionalities that will be used by of the "User Application Layer" and "Service Provider Layer" of the architecture. It proposes different graphical editors and user interfaces that will be used in by both: public administrations and users. Public administration, represented as service providers, use these interface to develop their own ontologies and *OwlsGov* descriptions. Users, represented by the Application layer of OwlsGovMS architecture, can submit their request through these interfaces. Thus, the Presentation level consists of two main parts: the first part is developed based on plug-in technology, we call it **OwlsGovPlugin.** The second part is developed as a Graphical User Interface for agents' execution.

OwlsGovPlugin is developed as an eclipse Plug-in and uses OWL-S API [14], OWLS Composer [15], etc. It consists of a set of packages as follows:

- "actions" package consists of a set of action such as *ConvertWSDL* that transforms a WSDL descriptions of web services to OWL-S descriptions. To create services from scratch, there is a *CreateService* action. To generate automatically a first version of SitCtx ontology from OwlsGov descriptions, there is a *GenerateSitCtx* action and so on.
- "Generator" package contains all required classes for generating OWL-S ontologies and ontologies SitCtx.
- "editors" package contains editors and various pages that allow to edit the technical specification, governmental features and the usage situations/contexts of OwlsGov services. This package uses the classes defined in both packages generator and actions.

- "wizards" package contains the wizards pages that assist the developers for developing a new *OwlsGov* service.
- "owls-diagram" package of OWLS Composer provides tools to build a static composition plan. We use it to enrich *OwlsGovPlugin* by additional actions such as *GenerateComposition* and runComposition.
- "owls" package provide the main technical functionalities.

IntegrationGUI and **DiscoveryGUI** interfaces are developed based on AminePlatform interface. **DiscoveryGUI** is a GUI service discovery agent and uses the SitCtx ontologies. This interface is a sub class *of IntegrateDefinitionFrame*, which allows introducing a user query, executing the discovery agent, displaying the result to user, and finally selecting the required services. **IntegrationGUI** is the interface that allows integrating a new service using his *SitCtx* ontology in a specific Service Integration Ontology (SIO).

4.2 Service Level

The second layer implements the main functionalities of the architecture "**Middleware Layer**" and provides the whole needed services for interact with the middleware components, with the user application, and with the providers. We have identified two types of services. The first kinds of services are related to the development of the OwlsGov services: **OwlsGovCore** manage the OwlsGov attributes; **GovSpecManager** maintains the governmental characteristics; **SitCtxGenerator** is the interface that generates the SitCtx from its OwlsGov description. The second kinds of services represent the MAS part of our OwlsGovMS, in which every agent has a specific frame that displays information about it such as names, actions, and messages. In this paper, we limited to DiscoveryAgent and IntegrationAgent.

DiscoveryAgent is agent that plays the role of an intermediate between a client agent and service agent. It executes the matchmaking algorithm based on the SitCtx ontologies of services as a first stage of discovery process and then based on their technical specification as the second stage. This agent is developed using the dynamic interference process of AminePlatform. **IntegrationAgent** applies an integration algorithm of a new service using the same process. Thus, each IntegrationAgent, according to the service usage, integrates the new service into an appropriate SIO ontology. Thus, this agent can call the DiscoveryAgent to find the similar services of the new service and then integrate it to the SIO of these similar services.

4.3 Semantic API

The use of semantic ontologies required appropriate semantic API. In this context, numerous tools and semantic java API are developed in literature. To minimize

the cost and the time of development we have reused some of them. We present briefly these tools and semantic API with a brief explanation about how we used them in the context of our work.

- **OWL-S API [14]** is a Java API developed by Mindswap to create, read, write, and execute the OWL-S services descriptions. We use this API to implement the OwlsGov conceptual model. According to this model, we have used the three Interfaces namely, *OwlsService, OwlsProfile* and *OwlsProcess* to implement respectively the *GovService, GovServiceProfile* and *GovServiceProcess*, and then we have enriched them with additional extensions of OwlsGov model such as: Organization, Legal, SitCtx and MetaService.
- **OWL-S Composer** [15] is an eclipse plug-in developed by FORMAS (Research Group on Semantic Applications and Formalisms) in Federal University of Bahia. Its main functionalities are the discovery of similar SWS; the composition of SWS under eclipse in a graphic and visual manner. It consists of four plug-ins namely Owls_3.0.0, Diagram, Editor and Edit. We have used mainly the Diagram plug-in to help the developers to construct a static composition of services in case of administrative procedures.
- **OWL-API** is a Java API to create, manipulate and serialize OWL ontologies. We used this API to exploit in particular the domain ontologies such as the Legal and Organizational concepts that manage a given OwlsGov service and the SitCtx associated to it and so on.
- **Pellet [16]:** is an open source OWL Reasoner for OWL ontology-based data management applications. We have used it for multiple purposes such as: connecting to a specific OwlsGov service ontology through a graphical user editor that loads information about this service (e.g. inputs/outputs). We have also used Pellet for implementing the discovery process.
- AminePlatform [1]: is an open Java platform to create, edit and modify ontology. This platform provides graphical interfaces for a direct interaction with users and a set of API for java programming. In the context of our work, we have used some of its classes such as: *Ontology*, CG (Conceptual Graph) and CS (Conceptual Structures) to develop the SitCtx ontology of OwlsGov service; the *MemoryBasedInferences* class for services integration, and *AmineJadeMAS* to develop a discovery agent that uses the SitCtx for discovering services.
- **OWL-S Discovery [2]** is a tool developed for OWL-S services discovery. It uses a hybrid algorithm of two-step (functional and structural). We use this tool to implement the second step of the discovery process. To this end, we have added the owlsDiscovey.jar API to the *OwlsGovMS* Classpath.

5 E-Customs Case Study

Among the main activities of e-Customs area is allowing the "home use" of imported commodities. The scenario of goods customs clearance (GCC) is complex

and composes of a set of information about commodities, taxation and required administrative documents, which must be specified to facilitate administrative procedures of customs clearance to citizens. For this purpose, we have applied our **OwlsGovMS** for developing semantically, data, and services in this area.

The GCC process as shown in figure 5 is shared between a set of involved PAs, such as Customs Administration (e.g. duties and taxes), Agriculture (e.g. clearance of Animals), and Transport (e.g. clearance of Vehicle). CCG is composed of various services such as "CommodityClassification", "RequiredDocument", "ServiceControl" and "ComputeTax". Each service describes one task of the CCG process: "CommodityClassification" for retrieving products codes, "ComputeTax" for calculating D&T, "RequiredDocument" for researching the list of documents as well as their responsible administrations, and "ServiceControl" for commodities control according to involved PA.



Fig. 5 OwlsGovMS Goods Customs Clearance case study

We have used **OwlsGovMS** to implement the e-Customs services. The detail specification of this case study is given in our work [12]. In this paper, we focus only on *CommodityClassification* service that enables getting a commodity code from a given user request. We illustrate in figure 6 how we use **OwlsGovPlugin** editors to develop this service. The "*GovSpecOntology Tab*" enables to specify the domain ontology that is « *CustomsOntology* ». This latter is developed within our work to represent the e-Customs knowledge base. *CommodityClassification* service is managed by "CustomsAdministration" and governed by CustomsLaw. The "*Owls Upper ontology Tab*" enables to specify the functional features of this

service such as Commodity as the service input and Classification as the output. The "*Usage Sit/Ctx Ontology Tab*" enables to specify how CommodityClassification is used through modeling its relationships and situations (Sit#).

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Fig. 6 OwlsGovMS/OwlsGovPlugin for CommodityClassification service

To illustrate the **DiscoveryAgent**, we consider a user request that is looking for the code classification of a good of an animal type: "what is the classification of Animal?" This request is captured through a user interface and then processed automatically by the OwlsGovMS system. Figure 7 illustrates the execution of discovery process through GUI interfaces.



Fig. 7 OwlsGovMS/DiscoveryAgent execution

6 Conclusion

For an e-Government solution based on SWS technology, we have presented in this article a framework for semantic description of public services, the OwlsGov ontology. We have presented as well a system for developing and managing these services that we have called OwlsGovMS. To implement this architecture, we have identified and used several semantic technologies and tools such as ontologies, OWL-S ontology, multi-agent systems, etc. Thus, for the achievement of data and services interoperability, this system offers various components for an efficient use of these ontologies.

As result of this work, we have developed a "graphical user interfaces", which can assist the public administrations for the development of their own services and information. OwlsGovMS enable as well developing an e-government portal which assists users to search and discovering the required services.

As part of future works, we aim to use our model to develop business processes, taking into account the different interpretations and understandings from different perspectives of users. For that, we aim to enhance the existing "LifeEvent" model for citizens or Business-Episode model for enterprise through using our dynamic discovery and integration agents. These models will be used to integrate, discover and compose services according to user's point of view in a specific domain application such as e-Customs domain.

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