OCLGraph : Exploiting Object Structure in a Plan Graph Algorithm

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Abstract. In this paper we discuss and describe preliminary results of integrating two strands of planning research - that of using plan graphs to speed up planning, and that of using object representations to better represent planning domain models. To this end we have designed and implemented OCL-graph, a plan generator which builds and searches an object-centred plan graph, extended to deal with conditional effects.

1 Introduction

This paper describes work that is part of a continuing effort to evaluate the impact of modelling planning domains in an object-centred way, using a family of planning-oriented domain modelling languages known as OCL [10]. The benefit is seen as twofold: (a) to improve the planning knowledge acquisition and validation process (b) to improve and clarify the plan generation process in planning systems. With regard to (b), it is our belief that certain obstacles and problems that researchers into planning algorithms encounter can be alleviated using a rich, planning-oriented knowledge representation language.

The object-centred language OCL, and more recently the hierarchical version OCL_h [8, 9], have their roots in the 'sort abstraction' ideas used in the domain pre-processing work of [12]. OCL is primarily aimed as a high level language for planning domain modelling, the main feature distinguishing it from STRIPS-languages being that models are structured in terms of objects, rather than literals. It aims to allow modellers to more easily capture and reason about planner domain encodings independent of planning architecture, and to help in the validation and maintenance of domain models. On the other hand, OCL retains all the flexibility of a STRIPS-like encoding. The rationale behind OCL has been sustained by the experience of those applying planning technology. For example, the developers of the planner aboard Deep Space 1 [11] stress the need to develop clean, planner-independent languages that can be used to build and statically validate domain models.

In this paper we seek to tie up the advantages in creating a domain model in OCL with the use of a particularly successful form of plan generation using a plan graph algorithm called Graphplan [2]. The plan graph has been used as the basis for many experimental planning systems, and was the the basis of most of the planners in the AIPS-98 planning competition. This paper describes our investigation into the use of an *object-centred plan graph* in a Graphplan-like planning algorithm. Parallel work [9, 6] is investigating the use of OCL in traditional plan-space search algorithms. The current effort is therefore part of a larger project to implement many of the best regarded planning algorithms in a manner both to process planning problems expressed in OCL and to develop the algorithms in a manner to take advantage where possible of the additional information content of OCL models.

After introducing the reader to OCL and Graphplan, we detail the design of a planner which draws from Graphplan in algorithmic details, and from OCL for its representation. We argue that the 'object-graph' algorithm embedded in OCL-graph is conceptually simpler than the corresponding literal-based algorithm. Also we have extended the algorithm to deal with conditional effects using a strategy similar to that used by [7] and to the factored expansion strategy described by [1].

Our results suggest that the use of OCL (i) simplifies the plan graph: proposition levels become object levels where it is implicit that an object can only be in one 'substate' at one time (ii) simplifies the detection of 'mutex' relations and (iii) provides a surprisingly natural way of dealing with conditional effects. Finally, our initial implementations using tests from standard toy benchmark domains suggest that there may be costs as well as benefits involved in using a rich domain model with existing planning technology.

2 Foundations of OCL

2.1 Overview

In OCL the world is populated with objects each of which exists in one of a well defined set of states (called 'substates'), where these substates are characterised by predicates. On this view an operator may, if the objects in the problem domain are in some minimal set of substates, bring about changes to the objects in the problem domain. The application of an operator will result in some of the objects in the domain moving from one substate to another. In addition to describing the operators in the problem domain OCL provides information on the objects, their object class hierarchy and the permissible states that the objects may be in. The main advantage of the OCL conception of planning problems to algorithms is that they do not need to treat propositions as fully independent entities rather they now belong to collections that can be manipulated as a whole. So instead of dealing with propositions the algorithms deal with objects (typically fewer objects than propositions). This is a type of abstraction which we believe most naturally co-insides with domain structure. It provides opportunities to improve on existing planning algorithms by adapting them to operate at the object level rather than the propositional level.

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2.2 Basic Formulation

A domain modeller using OCL aims to construct a model of the domain in terms of objects, a sort hierarchy, predicate definitions, substate class definitions, invariants, and operators. Predicates and objects are classed as dynamic or static as appropriate - dynamic predicates are those which may have a changing truth value throughout the course of plan execution, and dynamic objects (grouped into dynamic sorts) are each associated with a changeable state. Each object belongs to a unique *primitive sort* s, where members of s all behave the same under operator application. In what follows we will explain those parts of OCL sufficient for the rest of the paper, the interested reader is referred to the bibliography for more information.

An 'object description' in a planning world is specified by a triple (s, i, ss), where i is the object's identifier, s is the objects *primitive sort* and ss is its $substate$ - a set of ground dynamic predicates which all $refer$ to i. All predicates in ss are asserted to be true under a locally closed world assumption.

As a running example we will use a version of the Briefcase World, as this is simple and has been used in [1] as the basis of their discussion on the implementation of conditional effects in 'Graph Plan'. Note that, however, this does not illustrate the full benefits of an OCL encoding as the briefcase world is structurally simple. Dynamic objects in a briefcase world could be of sort bag (identifiers briefcase,suitcase,..) or of sort thing (identifiers cheque,dictionary,suit,..), and static objects may be of sort location (identifiers home,office ..). Two examples of objects description are

```
(thing,cheque,[at_thing(cheque,home),
         inside(cheque,briefcase),
         fits_in(cheque,briefcase)])
(bag,briefcase,[at_bag(briefcase,home)])
```

A **world state** is a complete set of object descriptions for all the dynamic objects in the planning application, and is usefully viewed as a total mapping between object identifiers and their corresponding substates, as an identifier is allowed to be associated with exactly one substate. States are constrained by **invariants**. These define the truth value of static predicates and the relationships between dynamic predicates. In particular they are used to record inconsistency constraints. A world state that satisfies the invariants is called well-formed.

For each sort s, the domain modeller groups a sort's substates together, specifying each group with a set of predicates called a **substate class definition**. They form a complete, disjoint covering of the space of substates for objects of s. When fully ground, a substate class definition forms a legal substate. To ensure that any legal ground instantiation of a substate class definition gives a legal substate, definitions usually contain static predicates. The substate class definitions for the dynamic sorts $thing$ and bag in the briefcase world are:

```
substate_classes(thing,
   [at_thing(Thing,Location),
    inside(Thing,Bag),fits_in(Thing,Bag)],
   [at_thing(Thing,Location),outside(Thing)])
substate_classes(bag,
   [at_bag(Bag,Location)])
```

meaning that a thing can only be either at a location and in a bag that it fits into or that it is at a location but is not in any bag, and a bag must be positioned at a location. If i is a variable or an object identifier of sort s, and se is a set of predicates, then (s, i, se) is called an **object expression** if there is a legal substitution t such that $i_t = j$ and $se_t \subseteq ss$, for at least one object description (s, j, ss). The third component of an object expression is thus called a substate expression. Also, we define an **object class expression** (s, i, ce) to be an object description that may contain variables and static predicates in ce. When ground therefore, an object class expression becomes a valid object description if the static predicates it may contain are true in the domain model.

A **planning task** is defined by a well-formed world state, and a goal consisting of any legal mapping of object identifiers to substate expressions i.e. a goal is a set of object expressions with distinct objects identifiers.

2.3 Operator Representation

An **object transition** is an expression of the form $(s, i, se \Rightarrow ce)$ where i is a dynamic object identifier or a variable of sort s, and se and ce are such that (s, i, se) is an object expression and (s, i, ce) is an object class expression. If cc is an object transition, then we use the notation $cc.lhs$ and $cc.rhs$ to refer to se and ce respectively.

An action in a domain is represented by operator schema O with the following components: $O.id$, an operator's identifier; $O.prev$, the prevail condition consisting of a set of object expressions; $O.nec$, the set of necessary object transitions; and $O.cond$, the set of (conditional) object transitions. Each expression in $O.prev$ must be true before execution of O, and will remain true throughout operator execution. In the briefcase world we have operators put_in, take_out and move. The put_in operator will have a prevail section which allows us to specify that the bag is at a location L but this does not change as a result of applying the operator. The necessary section specifies that the thing must be at the same location as the bag and must be outside all containers prior to the application of the operator but as a result of applying the operator the thing will now be inside the bag but still at the same location. The operator can be specified as follows:

```
operator(put_in(T,B),
     % prevail
     [(bag,B,[at_bag(B,L)])
     ],
     % necessary
     [(thing,T,[at_thing(T,L),outside(T)]
                =>
               [at_thing(T,L),inside(T,B),
                fits_in(T,B)])
     ],
     % conditional
     [ ])
```

We define O.Pre to be the preconditions of O, i.e. the set of object expressions in $O.prev$ and the set of left hand sides of $O.nec$. Hence put_in.Pre is [at_bag(B,L), at_thing(T,L), outside(T)]. If O is ground we can define O.Rhs to be the set of $substates$ in the right hand sides of $O.nec$.

The definition of the move operator illustrates the specification of a conditional transition. In the example the conditional transition asserts that if any 'thing' is at the same location as the bag (A) and is inside the bag then it changes state to being at location (B) the new location of the bag and remains inside the bag. Where there is more than one transition in a conditional section they form a disjunction. The move operator is defined as follows:

```
operator(move(X,A,B),
% prevail
[],
% necessary
[(bag,X,[at_bag(X,A),ne(A,B)]
         =>
        [at_bag(X,B)])
],
% conditional
[(thing,T,[at_thing(T,A),inside(T,X),
            fits_in(T,X)]
           =>
         [at_thing(T,B),inside(T,X),
            fits_in(T,X)])
])
```

3 The Graphplan System

Graphplan [2] has proved to be one of the fastest plan generation algorithms working with a traditional STRIPS-like planning representation. Since its introduction a number of authors have proposed amendments with a view to improving the efficiency of the algorithm further e.g. [5]. Here we give only a very brief review of the algorithm, given the amount of published literature already using it. Graphplan works by building a plan-graph representing all possible plans creatable from the initial state by application of the available operators. If we consider the set of propositions true in the initial state as being at level 1 in our plan-graph then at level 2 will exist the set of all operations that are applicable, i.e. have their preconditions fulfilled by the propositions of level 1. At level 3 will be the set of propositions made true by the application of the operators of level 2. This process continues by developing the graph in exactly the same manner to additional levels. In the developing graph we record the application of operators as links that connect the propositions of the adjacent odd numbered levels. This process of moving from one level of propositions to the next supported by the application of operators is augmented by the application to every proposition at level *n* with a special operator *no-op* that renders the proposition true at level *n + 2*. This forward development of the graph faces a problem in that clearly in all proposition levels other than level 1 there may be propositions that cannot be jointly true. In the briefcase world the bag 'briefcase' cannot be at home and at the office. Likewise in a link layer actions may be mutually exclusive. The actions of moving the briefcase home and the action of moving it to the office cannot be simultaneously undertaken. We think of each proposition level as recording what potentially might be true at the same instant. We think of each link layer as recording the operations that might consistently be applied in parallel or where no commitment to ordering is required. The inconsistencies within a layer are recorded within Graphplan by augmenting the graph further by noting these mutually exclusive relations both between operations in the link layers and by recording mutually exclusive relations at the proposition layers. The development of the graph in this way from one proposition layer to the next mediated by a link layer constitutes the forwards phase of Graphplan.

To complete Graphplan a backwards search phase is required to find if a legal plan that satisfies the goal condition has been generated. This backwards phase is undertaken after the generation of each proposition layer, and starts by first searching the new proposition layer to see if all the propositions of the goal state are supported at this level. If they are not then the backward phase can be terminated and the next forwards phase started. If the goals are all present then the goal propositions must be checked to ensure that there are no recorded mutual exclusions between any of them. The backwards phase continues finding a set of operations that support these propositions and are themselves mutually consistent then recursively checking the preconditions of those operations in the same manner at the level two below. This process continues until we have regressed to the propositions of level 1 which by definition must be consistent with one another. If at any layer we find that the chosen set of operators are not mutually consistent then we must backtrack and see if an alternative set of operations can be chosen to support the same set of propositions. In this way Graphplan will continue interleaving its forwards and backwards phases to find an optimally parallel short legal plan, if one exists.

3.1 Conditional Effects in Graphplan

Since the original description of Graphplan a number of authors have described algorithms to extend Graphplan to allow the processing of conditional effects [7, 1]. In their paper Anderson Smith and Weld argue that the relatively simple approach of expanding the conditional effects section into all combinations of possible groundings is not feasible in cases dealing with significant numbers of possible groundings. They propose instead what they call a 'factored expansion approach'. Their approach requires that a operator with conditional effects be composed of clauses, one for the non-conditional component of the STRIPS operator and one for each grounding of the conditional clause conjoined with the non conditional element. The resulting $move - briefcase$ operator with the cheque and the dictionary is as follows:

```
move-briefcase (?loc ?new)
  :effect
    (when (and (at briefcase ?loc)
               (location ?new)
               (not (= ?loc ?new)))
          (and (at briefcase ?new)
               (not (at briefcase ?loc))))
    (when (and (at briefcase ?loc)
               (location ?new)
               (not (= ?loc ?new))
               (in cheque briefcase))
          (and (at cheque ?new)
               (not (at cheque ?loc))))
    (when (and (at briefcase ?loc)
               (location ?new)
               (not (= ?loc ?new))
               (in dictionary briefcase))
          (and (at dictionary ?new)
               (not (at dictionary ?loc))))
```

A consequence of this approach is that each of the elements becomes a semi-independent rule which can be fired separately which results in a requirement for more complex processing of mutex relations during the search phases of the Graphplan algorithm.

The approach we take in OCLGraph is similar to that of both Anderson et al and Koehler et al [1, 7], in that when we ground the operators the result will have one clause (object transition) in the conditional effects section for each object for which the grounding of the conditional effects clause is consistent with the necessary and prevailing sections of the operator. The growth of the number of clauses in the conditional effects section as a result of grounding is linear. It is bounded by the number of objects in the problem domain of the correct object sort. We will delay further discussion until we have presented the OCLGraph algorithm.

4 The Object Graph

4.1 OCL Input

We will assume that the domain model is input using a restricted from of OCL to coincide with the input language specified in reference [2], but extended to deal with conditional effects. In particular, OCL operator schemas are translated to a ground set. The conditional element is expanded to include all consistent groundings of the conditional element. During the grounding which is done as a preprocessor step, static predicates are used to ensure consistent groundings. For example the static information about which objects fit in the briefcase and which objects fit in the suitcase is used to ensure that a conditional transition for moving the 'suit' which does not fit in the briefcase is not generated. The ground operators to move the briefcase in a world containing a cheque a dictionary and a suit from home to the office expands to:

```
operator(move(briefcase, home, office),
  % Prevail
  [],
  % Necessary
  [(bag,briefcase,
         [at_bag(briefcase, home)]
         =>
         [at_bag(briefcase, office)])
   ],
   % Conditional
   [
   (thing,cheque,
         [at_thing(cheque, home),
          inside(cheque, briefcase)]
         =>
         [at_thing(cheque, office),
          inside(cheque, briefcase)]),
   (thing,dictionary,
         [at_thing(dictionary, home),
          inside(dictionary, briefcase)]
         =>
         [at_thing(dictionary, office),
          inside(dictionary, briefcase)])
   ] )
```

A problem input to OCLGraph is defined by an initial state (a total mapping between dynamic object identifiers and substates) and a goal condition (a mapping between object identifiers and ground substate expressions).

4.2 Building Up the Graph

We build an 'OCL-graph' in the spirit of Graphplan by first substituting the idea of a proposition level with what we call an 'object level', defined as a (total) mapping (called $level(n)$ where n is odd) between the set of object identifiers $O\text{-}ids$ and the partitioned set of all possible substates for that object:

level(n) : O-ids $\Rightarrow$ Table

where Table is a set of substates partitioned by the substate class definitions. The intuitive idea is that if an object situation (s,i,ss) is potentially reachable at level n through the execution of operators then ss will be somewhere in the (partitioned) set 'level(n)[i]'.

Two immediate consequences of this representation are that:

(a) The size of every object level in a plan graph is always fixed as the number of objects in the initial state, although the size of the range sets of this map generally increases to the point where all legal substates for the objects, as defined in the substate class definition, are in the range.

(b) In a literal-based Graphplan any subset of the propositions at each propositional level can form a goal set which is potentially satisfiable. For example in the briefcase world, the set {in_thing(cheque,briefcase), at_thing(cheque,home),outside(cheque)} would be acceptable in principle, but would be found to be inconsistent through operator back chaining. OCL restricts goal sets to a set of $legal$ object expressions - hence the above expression would not be allowed as the cheque's substate expression is not well formed (it is not a specialisation of either one of *thing's* two substate classes).

4.2.1 *Example*

To create level(n+2) from level(n), we copy over the old mapping (this parallels the use of 'no-ops' in reference [2]) and add new substates to level(n+2)'s range if they are created by operator application at level(n+1). Consider the briefcase world with only two locations (home (h) and office (o)) and two things (cheque (c) and dictionary (d)). In the initial state b, c and d are all at home, c is inside b and d is not inside a bag. Then the development from the initial state in level 1 to level 3 is as follows:

```
level(1)[c] =
   {partition 1:[at_thing(c,h),inside(c,b)}
level(1)[d] =
   {partition 1:[at_thing(d,h),outside(d)]}
level(1)[b] =
   {partition 1:[at_bag(b,h)]}

level(3)[c] =
   {partition 1:[at_thing(c,h),inside(c,b)],
                [at_thing(c,o),inside(c,b)],
    partition 2:[at_thing(c,h),outside(c)]}
level(3)[d] =
   {partition 1:[at_thing(d,h),outside(d)],
    partition 2:[at_thing(d,h),inside(d,b)]}
level(3)[b] =
   {partition 1:[at_bag(b,h)],
                [at_bag(b,o)]}
```

The operators applicable at level 2 are take_out(c,b), put_in(d,b), and move(b,h,o), with the conditional effect of moving the cheque from home to the office.

4.3 Links

Definition of 'contains' If SE is a set of ground object expressions, n is odd, then $contains(level(n), SE)$ is true iff for each (s,i,se) in SE, there is a substate ss $\in$ level(n)[i] such that se $\subseteq$ ss.

An operator is applicable to level(n) if contains(level(n),O.Pre) is true, where O.Pre are the operator's preconditions as defined above. For example, contains(level(3),[at_bag(b,o)]) is true. Note that O.Pre excludes any elements for the operators conditional effects.

Definition of Links Assume operator O is applicable at level(n). Then a link $lk(O, i, ss, mode)$ is stored in level(n+1) if either (a) O $changes$ i's substate to ss or (b) (s,i,se) ∈ O.prev, ss ∈ level(n)[i] and se ⊆ ss or (c) O is a no-op preserving ss from level(n)[i] to level(n+2)[i]. We record $mode$ as either 'change', 'prevail' or 'no-op' depending on each of the cases (a) - (c).

In the running example we therefore store the following:

```
level(3)[c] =
   {partition 1:[at_thing(c,h),outside(c)],
    partition 2:[at_thing(c,h),inside(c,b)]}
level(3)[d] =
   {partition 1:[at_thing(d,h),outside(d)],
    partition 2:[at_thing(d,h),inside(d,b)]}
level(3)[b] =
   {partition 1:[at_bag(b,h)],
                [at_bag(b,o)]}

level(2) =
{lk(no-op-1,c,
      [at_thing(c,h),inside(c,b)], no-op),
 lk(take_out(c,b),c,
      [at_thing(c,h),outside(c)],change),
 lk(take_out(c,b),b,[at_bag(b,h)],prevail),
 lk(no-op-2,d,
      [at_thing(d,h),outside(d)],no-op),
 lk(put_in(d,b),d,
      [at_thing(d,h),inside(d,b)],change),
 lk(put_in(d,b),b,[at_bag(b,h)],prevail),
 lk(no-op-3,b,[at_bag(b,h)],no-op),
 lk(move(b,h,o),b,[at_bag(b,o)],change)}
```

To process the conditional effects in the forwards phase of the algorithm, new links and object substates at level $n + 2$ are added as follows:

Definition of Conditional Links For each conditional effect transition cc in an applicable operator O at level $n + 1$, if
∃ ss ∈ level(n): cc.lhs ⊆ ss
then add $cc.rhs$ to level $n + 2$ and add link lk(O,i,cc.rhs,cond) to level(n+1) (hence the link here is labelled 'cond').

For the briefcase this adds a new substate to $level(3)[c]$ and adds a new link to record the application of the effect as follows:

```
level(3)[c] =
   {partition 1:[at_thing(c,h),outside(c)],
    partition 2:[at_thing(c,h),inside(c,b)],
                [at_thing(c,o),inside(c,b)]}

lk(move(b,h,o),c,
   [at_thing(c,o),inside(c,b)],cond)}.
```

We have applied one of the conditional elements in the 'move' operator. In applying such conditional elements we only consider operators that have already been applied, that is operators that have their prevailing and necessary preconditions fulfilled at that level, these operators already have their necessary effects and links recorded as described above.

4.4 Mutual Exclusions in OCLGraph

The forward development of the plan graph spreads in the manner described above. It is checked, however, by the use of mutual exclusion conditions on both operators and substates in the object levels. Blum and Furst's 'Interference' statement ([2], section 2.2) is paraphrased as follows: 'If either of actions O1 and O2 deletes a precondition or Add-Effect of the other, they are mutually exclusive at that level. Secondly if actions O1 and O2 have preconditions which are recorded as mutually exclusive then they are mutually exclusive' The idea is then to check each operator at each level against all the others, resulting in a set of binary mutual exclusions.

We exploit the structure of OCL to give the following definition:

General Rule for Operator Mutex Formation For each object identifier i in the object level(n+2), two distinct operators O1 and O2 are mutually exclusive if lk(O1,i,ss1,mode1) and lk(O2,i,ss2,mode2) are links recorded in level(n+1).

In other words, if two operators support the same object then they are mutually exclusive to one another.

The rationale is as follows: if operators O1 and O2 change or rely on the same object being in a particular substate, then they would in general interfere with each other. There are, however, some exceptions to the general rule above. Firstly, if ss1 = ss2, then at least one of mode1 or mode2 must be "change". If ss1 = ss2 and no mode is "change", then it does not follow that O1 and O2 are mutually exclusive. In practice we say O1 and O2 conflict if there is a reference to different substates of the same object in the preconditions or necessary effects of the operators. Secondly if mode1 = cond or mode2 = cond then we do not add the conflict at this stage as the conditional effect may not be used in the final plan even though the operator is. We do not in the forwards development of the graph detect if the firing of one element in an operator will force the firing of another. This is contrary to the practice of [1].

The case made by [1] for the need to record such induced mutexes derives from two cases.

- If two components of an operator are such that the preconditions of one of the components cannot be logically met without meeting the preconditions of the second component then we need to record that component one will be mutexed with all the operators component two is mutex with.
- The second case is harder to paraphrase but essentially if component one can fire and due to absence of other information the only way component two could fail to fire is if component one did not fire then again we can deduce that one forces two and should be mutexed with the operators two is mutexed with.

In OCL the first of the cases cannot arise as each element of an operator will refer to a different object and hence the preconditions for a conditional transition to fire cannot be contained in the other elements of the operator. The second case can arise. For example in the briefcase world if at level one the cheque is inside the briefcase, and we move it, then the cheque will also move. There is no other possibility as no other possible state of the cheque is recorded at this level. At later levels other states of the cheque will also be recorded and hence there will not be the same guarantee that moving the briefcase moves the cheque.

We could search for such cases but they are just a special case of a conditional effect being forced as a result of the interplay of the preconditions of a set of operators at a given level. We could not deal with the general case in the forward phase of graph development as the set of operators will be dependent on the choices made in identifying a candidate valid plan. We therefore leave the backwards search phase of the planner to take care of potential conflicts arising from such conditional effects.

Employing this method to the example above, the mutexes turn out to be:

```
mutex(2) = {
{ no-op-1, take_out(c,b)},
{ no-op-2, put_in(d,b)},
{ move(b,h,o), no-op-3 },
{ move(b,h,o), take_out(c,b) },
{ move(b,h,o), put_in(d,b) } }
```

The mutex that we miss by delaying consideration of conditional effects is `{move(b,h,o), no-op-1}` . That is we cannot move the briefcase from home to the office with the cheque inside and simultaneous leave the cheque inside the briefcase at home. Note that the exceptions to the general mutex rule rule collapses the mutex formed by considering the 'briefcase' to binary mutexes.

Mutual exclusion conditions on object levels: In the original Graphplan description, two propositions p1 and p2 were mutually exclusive if all operators creating proposition p1 were exclusive of operators for creating p2. In the OCL formulation, we have two object class expressions (s,i,ce1) and (s,j,ce2) are mutually exclusive if

- for i <> j, for any operator O that supports ce1 and operator O1 that supports ce2, O and O1 are mutually exclusive (as defined by the binary mutexes described above)
- for i = j, ce1 and ce2 cannot be satisfied by a common ground substate

The first condition is similar to the original idea. The second arises from the fact that an object cannot be in two substates at the same level.

5 The OCL-graph Algorithm

5.1 Forwards Phase

Figure 1 shows the overall algorithm. Line 1 initialises the first level in the plan graph using the initial state. If the goals are not trivially achieved (Line 3), the algorithm builds two new levels, a new object level (n+2) and a link level (n+1) First in Line 7 the object states of level n are copied to level n+2 and the no-ops links added (note each no-op is given a unique identifier no-op-X). Following the addition of the no-ops, the code in the internal loop (Lines 8 to 23) applies the domain operators initially without reference to their conditional effects and the new object level is augmented and appropriate links added (lines 11,to 15). Following the application of an operator each transition of the operator's conditional effects is considered and if its preconditions are met and do not conflict with the preconditions of the prevail and necessary section it is applied and the appropriate substates and links added to the corresponding levels. (lines 16 to 20) After the loop adding all new substates to level n+2 and all links to level n+1 completes, operator mutex sets are built and added to level $n + 1$ in Line 24.

5.2 Backwards Phase

Figure 2 details the definitions of 'ACHIEVE' which has overall control of the backwards search for a valid plan. ACHIEVE searches for

algorithm OCL-graph
In O-ids : Object identifiers; I : O-ids ⇒ Substates, Ops : Ground Operators, G : Goals
Out P : Parallel Plan
Types level(n) (n odd) is a map O-ids ⇒ Table, level(n) (n even) is a set of links
Types mutex(n) is a set of operator sets

```
1. ∀ i ∈ O-ids: level(1)[i] = {I[i]}
2. n := 1;
3. ACHIEVE(G,1, P) ;
4. while (P = null) do
5.    level(n+2) := level(n);
6.    links(n+1) := { };mutex(n+1) = { };
7.    ∀ i ∈ O-ids: ∀ ss ∈ level(n+2)[i] :
        add lk(no-op-X, i, ss, no-op) to level(n+1);
8.    ∀ O ∈ Ops do:
9.      if contains(level(n), O.Pre) then
10.       if not MUTEX(O.Pre,n) then
11.         ∀(s,i,ss) ∈ O.rhs: add ss to level(n+2)[i],
12.           add lk(O,i,ss,change) to level(n+1);
13.         ∀ (s,i,se) ∈ O.prev:
14.           if se ⊆ ss & ss ∈ level(n+2)[i]
15.           then add lk(O,i,ss,prevail) to level(n+1);
16.         ∀ cc ∈ O.cond:
17.           if contains(level(n),cc.lhs) &
                not MUTEX(Pre ∩ cc.lhs)
18.           then add cc.rhs to level(n+2)[cc.i];
19.           add lk(O,cc.i,cc.rhs,cond), to level(n+1);
20.           end if
21.       end if
22.     end if
23.   end for;
24.   calcuate all binary mutexes and add to mutex(n+1)
25.   n := n+2;
26.   if contains(G,level(n)) then ACHIEVE(G, n, P);
27. end while
28. end.
```

Figure 1. An Outline of the Object-Graph Planning Algorithm

a consistent operator set Y to achieve the goal set G, and if it finds one first calls COND_PRECONDITIONS to determine which conditional effects of the operators in set Y are required to achieve G and adds the preconditions of those elements to the necessary and prevailing preconditions of the operators Y. ACHIEVE then recursively calls itself at level(n-2) with the set of preconditions of Y as the new goals to achieve. The definition of consistent in Line 6 is left open ended, and depends on whether mutexes are stored concerning substates, as well as checking to see whether a goal expression is well formed with respect to the substate class definitions. The current OCL-graph implementation does not memoize substate mutexes, but this is a subject for on-going research.

The strategy for selecting conditional effects is shown in Figure 3. In line 1 we determine which substate expressions of the Goal state have not been supported by the necessary or $no-op$ effects of the chosen operator set O, these are the substate expressions that must

```
procedure ACHIEVE(SS : set of substate expressions, n : odd integer, P : plan );
Global levels, mutexes
Out a parallel plan P;

1. if n = 1 & contains(level(1), SS) then P = { }
2. elseif n = 1 and not contains(level(1),SS) then
3.    P = null
4. else
5.    P' = null;
6.    choose Y := a consistent set of operators that
      achieve a set of substates containing SS;
7.    while(Y <> null & P' = null) do
8.       Y' := union of all the operators necessary
         and prevailing preconditions in Y;
9.       Y" := {};
10.      while(Y" <> null & P' = null) do
11.         Y" := COND_PRECONDITIONS(SS,Y,n)
12.         if Y" <> null then
13.            ACHIEVE({Y'∪Y"},n-2,P')
14.      end while
15.      if not(P' = null) then
16.         P := append(P',Y)
17.      else
18.         systematically generate another choice for Y
19.      end if
20.   end while
21. end if
22. end.
```

Figure 2. Achieve Procedure for the Object-Graph Algorithm

be supported by the conditional effects. Line 2 selects a set of those transitions from the conditional effects of the operators O that satisfies the unfulfilled goals SS'. The procedure then iterates on the selected set of transitions if any to check their consistency. To check the consistency of a selection we first determine those conditional effect transitions contained in the operator set O which are not needed to support the goal (Spare). We then check that the preconditions of each of the 'Required' transitions is consistent with the main preconditions of the selected operator set O and that none of the Spare conditional effects would if they are fired by the preconditions already required conflict with the outcomes of the operators selected. If these conditions are met we have successfully chosen the conditional effects needed and simple return them otherwise we must see if an alternative set of conditional effect elements can be generated to meet the requirement.

The primary method for determining that a set of object states are consistent is the function 'MUTEX'. Figure 4 It does the checking very simply, by trying to find a set of consistent operators at the level below which add these substate expressions. Operator sets are consistent if no two operators in the set are mutually exclusive.

```
function COND_PRECONDITIONS(SS : goal set,
O : operator set, n : odd integer): set of substate expressions
Global levels,mutexes

1. SS' := {SS - {se : se ∈ O.rhs}};
2. Required := a set of conditional elements from
      O.COND that achieve a set of substates
      containing SS';
3. while Required <> null do
4.    Spare := {O.COND - Required};
5.    if not MUTEX({O.Pre ∪ Required.lhs},n) &
6.       ∀ cc ∈ Spare
7.          if cc.lhs satisfied in {O.Pre ∪ Required.lhs} then
               not cc.rhs conflicts with
               {O.rhs ∪ Required.rhs}
8.    then
9.       return Required;
10.   else
11.      Required := choose new set from O.COND
            that achieves the set of substates containing SS'
12.   end if
13. end while
14. return null;
15. end.
```

Figure 3. Selection Conditional Effect Elements for Plan Inclusion

```
function MUTEX(SS : set of substate expressions, n : odd integer): boolean
Global levels, mutexes

1. if n = 1 & contains(level(1), SS) then
2.    MUTEX := false
3. else if n = 1 and not(I contains SS) then
4.    MUTEX := true
5. else if ∃ Y, a set of operators that achieve a set
      of substates containing SS, and
      no two operators in Y are mutexed then
6.    MUTEX := false
7. else MUTEX := true
8. end.
```

Figure 4. Detecting mutex relations in a set of Object Substates

6 Implementation

To try and establish the benefits of using OCL in a Graphplan like algorithm we initially created two separate distinct planners, implemented in Sicstus Prolog. The first, though it could process OCL descriptions of planning domains, made no attempt to benefit from the structure. Rather it was used to simply extract the elements of the standard STRIPS style operators. This implementation was designed to form our base measure for conducting experiments in an attempt to investigate the advantages in utilising the structures inherent in OCL. We refer to this implementation of Graphplan as ‘vanilla’ Graphplan. The second implementation “OCLGraph” tries to fully exploit the structure of OCL. Though the results derived from these implementations were encouraging they are not reliable as an objective comparison of the underlying algorithms. To try and rectify this position we are currently developing a new version of OCLGraph in Lisp with a view to comparing its performance against other public domain versions of Graphplan. In particular “Sensory GraphPlan” [3] is ideal for this purpose as it provides a clean faithful implementation of Graphplan but also encorporates extensions to deal with conditional effects.

7 Empirical Results

Tests have been carried out on a number of the standard ‘toy’ domains, such as the Rocket, Robot and Flat Tyre world and the Briefcase world for conditional effects. The tests have involved comparing times of the vanilla version of Graphplan against the Prolog OCL version and comparing times of “Sensory” Graphplan with the Lisp version of OCLGraph.

The results of our tests are problematic in that a clear speed up is indicated when we compare the Prolog version of OCLGraph with our own vanilla version of Graphplan and on the most favourable problems this can be by as much as 100 fold. However these results are not replicated when we compare the Lisp version of OCLGraph with “Sensory Graphplan”. In this case the results mostly indicate no significant difference but with some problems our OCLGraph performed slower by an order of magnitude. The problems where our software was performing worse than “Sensory Graphplan” were in examples where the goal state was generated at a relatively early level in the progress of the forwards phase of the algorithm but where a legal plan was not generated until several levels deeper into the graph expansion. This happens in examples such as tasks in the “Flat Tyre World” where the tools have to be returned to the “boot”, their initial state, after being used to fix the tyre.

Clearly more work needs to be done with the code to ensure the faithfulness in the implementations. That the code produces the expected results is not sufficient guarantee that the algorithms are accurately implemented. The relatively poor results with our Lisp implementation may result from fewer mutexes being recorded in the forward search than should be. A problem of this nature would degrade performance but not prevent the eventual production of the correct answer.

8 Analysis

We would expect the performance of a Graphplan-like algorithm to be influenced primarily by control of the branching factor of the graph. The factors influencing the degree of branching are:

- The most obvious factor is the creation of mutex relations during the forwards phase of the graph expansion. The identification of substate class definitions at domain design time in OCL provides the algorithm builder with inexpensive methods for identifying mutex relations between predicates referring to the same object. However though OCL makes it easier to find mutexes it is not clear that mutexes are found that would not be found in standard Graphplan.
- In OCL versions of Graphplan the branching factor relating to an action should be reduced by the fact that propositions are grouped together into substate descriptions of specific objects. In a backwards search for a legal plan if we have selected an action as a candidate for inclusion in the plan we need to check the producers of each of the substates of the objects referred to in the action. In the non-OCL version we need to check the producers of each of the separate propositions referred to in the preconditions of the action. For example if we want to add to a candidate plan a *move* action in the “Briefcase World” in the OCL version we need to consider the producer of the briefcase and that of each object in the briefcase. In a situation with two objects in the briefcase we have three producers to include at the next lower level. In the non-OCL version we need to check the producer of the proposition describing the *briefcase’s* location and for each object in the briefcase we need to check the producer of the proposition stating the location of the object and the proposition stating that the object is in the briefcase and potentially the static predicate that the object fits in the briefcase. Again with two objects in the briefcase we need to check one producer for the briefcase but three for each of the two objects in the briefcase. The fan out from the non-OCL version thus seems significantly greater than the fan out from the OCL version.
- Another way the OCL formulation of Graphplan helps control search manifests itself when dealing with conditional effects. As detailed in [7], the backwards search needs to take account of the unwanted firing of conditional effects, which would interfere with the achievement of the plan goals. In OCLGraph as objects can only be in one substate at a time we don’t need to both check that (a) an object is in some desired substate, required for the achievement of the goal and (b) that it is not in some other substate to prevent the firing of an unwanted conditional effect.
- The grouping of propositions into descriptions of object states as done in OCL in some circumstances increases the branching factor of the graph by introducing more action instantiations at a given level of the graph than is done in the standard version of the algorithm. This problem is best described with the aid of an example. Consider enhancing the description of objects in the “Briefcase World” to allow us to record states of the objects. For example we might want to record whether or not the suit is “clean” or “dirty”. In which case we might augment state descriptions of objects by introducing a predicate $state(Object, Property)$. Such predicates are then added to all state descriptions of objects. Such a change would have no impact on how the move operator is described in the STRIPS style representations used by the standard Graphplan algorithm nor would it make any difference to the number of move operations applicable at any level in the graph. The state of any of the objects, as described above would be unaffected by the *move* operator and would be deemed to persist. In an OCL version of the *move* operator there would be both a change to its representation and potentially to the number of applicable move operations at a level in the graph. In the representation of the OCL version of the operator we would need to refer to the state of the object being moved as the right-hand-side of a transition must fully specify the resulting state of the object concerned. This would have the consequence that at some levels of the graph we would generate one move operator to move a “clean” suit from the office to home and another operator to move a “dirty” suit. There is no such duplication in the traditional Graphplan algorithm.

It would seem then that the extra structure of the OCL representation pulls in both directions. Both allows us in some circumstances to reduce the branching factor of the graph and in other circumstances increases it.

9 Conclusions

In this paper we have illustrated how a graph-based algorithm can be extended to more structured representations of planning domains. We have argued that there is potential for efficiency gains though there are also threats. Our analysis and experimentation is not yet at a sufficiently mature stage to accurately determine the extent of the trade off between the competing factors. Our design of the Object-Graph algorithm has uncovered various ways in which the extra information content of OCL can be used to make the graph-based algorithm more efficient but we have not been able to remove the potential threats to efficiency, though this may be possible in a hierarchical formulation of Graphplan.

There are many avenues for future work. First we would like to extend the experimental base to cover cases with a greater diversity of graph sizes, and to experiment with more interesting domains possessing more structure. Secondly, there is a need to analyse the computational complexity of the OCL-based algorithm in greater depth, and compare it with the original. Thirdly, we need to extend the algorithm to be able to accept the full OCL language, and to improve the algorithm so that it uses yet more of the extra information given in an OCL model. For example, domain invariants typically found in an OCL model often read as mutex constraints on a pair of substates. Finally, improvements to the basic algorithm such as dependency directed backtracking [4] have not been implemented but there is no reason to expect that they would not be equally applicable to our version of the algorithm.

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