Platys: A Framework for Supporting Context-Aware Personal Agents

(Demonstration)

Pradeep K. Murukannaiah, Ricard Fogues, and Munindar P. Singh
Department of Computer Science
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695-8206, USA
{pmuruka,rlopezf,singh}@ncsu.edu

ABSTRACT

A context-aware personal agent (CPA) adapts to the changing contexts of its user. Platys is an agent-oriented software engineering (AOSE) framework that supports the development and execution of CPAs. Specifically, the framework (1) facilitates modeling a CPA via cognitive constructs, simplifying development, and (2) delegates the concerns of context elicitation (from end users) and acquisition (from sensors) to a middleware, enhancing reusability and user experience as a user employs multiple CPAs.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
D.2.1 [Software Engineering]: Requirements and Specifications—Tools

Keywords
Middleware; Context; Personal agent

1. INTRODUCTION

A context-aware personal agent (CPA) relies upon knowing its user’s context, loosely referring to the user’s whereabouts, actions, and interactions. CPAs arise in application domains such as healthcare, entertainment, and smart (physical or virtual) environments. Despite a growing body of research on context-aware computing [1], there is little practical support for systematically developing a CPA and putting it to use.

We describe and demonstrate Platys, a framework that supports both development and execution of CPAs. Platys treats context as a cognitive construct in par with other cognitive constructs such as agents, and their goals and plans. Platys facilitates CPA development on the principled foundation of agent-oriented software engineering (AOSE) [2, 3, 5]. Figure 1 shows the major components of the Platys framework, which supports CPAs as follows.

Development: Platys modeler assists a developer in modeling a CPA via cognitive constructs and derive a high-level specification. In doing so, the developer can systematically follow an AOSE methodology. From the high-level specification, the modeler generates context acquisition code, which can be executed on a target platform.

Execution: Platys middleware provides runtime support for CPAs. Specifically, it hides from a CPA the nuances of reasoning about high-level context abstractions from low-level sensor data. Also, the middleware elicits a subjective context model from an end user and reuses it across CPAs (governing privacy policies), potentially enhancing the overall user experience (of employing CPAs).

2. PLATYS MODELER

Platys modeler is a tool for graphical modeling of a CPA. In addition to primitives such as goals, plans, and dependencies, Platys modeler supports contextual beliefs as a means of supporting runtime adaption. Specifically, Platys modeler supports the primitives described by the Xipho methodology [3]. Figure 2 shows an example model of Ringer Manager Agent (RMA), a CPA that automatically configures the ringer mode of a user’s smart phone.

Model validation: Platys modeler validates CPA models. Specifically, Platys verifies that conflicting goals, and de-
Platys middleware performs the following tasks.

**Provides an API** for CPAs to query a user’s context at the desired levels of abstraction (e.g., RMA needs to know if a user is busy). Instead of periodically polling the middleware, a CPA registers a callback with middleware, providing a stub the middleware can execute to invoke the CPA’s contextual capability (e.g., set as loud). Figure 3b shows a screenshot from a middleware instance showing a CPA’s capabilities and desired context abstractions.

**Learns to recognize contexts** from low-level sensor data. Platys seeks to learn a user’s contexts in a user-centric manner (contextual beliefs, e.g., busy and quiet, are inherently subjective). The middleware elicits context labels from each end user as shown in Figure 3a. Further, the middleware employs active learning [4] for eliciting context labels, requiring a user to label only those contexts that the middleware is least confident of predicting (from historical sensor data and labels) correctly.

4. TECHNOLOGY

Platys modeler is an Eclipse plugin built on the Eclipse Graphical Modeling Framework (GMF). The plugin contains a graphical editor and the model validator. A stand alone Java module is used to auto-generate executable code (stubs in Android Interface Definition Language).

Platys middleware is implemented for (1) Android devices, where it runs as a service, and (2) personal computers, where it runs as an Apache daemon (requires Java; platform independent). The middleware instances communicate asynchronously via an application-private Dropbox folder (using Dropbox API), transparent to the user. The middleware employs GPS, Accelerometer, WiFi and Bluetooth sensors, and data from user interactions (email, text, and call logs). The reasoner employs Weka for machine learning. Importantly, the middleware is privacy preserving in that it does not require the user to reveal sensor data or context labels to a third party.

Acknowledgments

We thank the National Science Foundation for partial support under grant 0910868.

5. REFERENCES


