Business Processes Modelling

MPB (6 cfu, 295AA)

Roberto Bruni

http://www.di.unipi.it/~bruni

25 - Simulation
We overview some principles for the quantitative simulation of business processes

Ch.7 of Fundamental of Business Process Management. M. Dumas et al. (inspired by slides available at https://courses.cs.ut.ee/2014/bpm/)
Simulation

Process simulation is the most popular and widely supported technique for quantitative analysis of process models.

It is a very flexible analysis technique.
It is applicable to almost any workflow.
It is accessible to people without mathematical background.
What is simulation?

It boils down to **computer-aided, repeated execution** of paths in the reachability graph.

A large number of hypothetical instances of the process are generated and executed step-by-step; the produced output can include logs as well as statistics about (average) cycle/waiting times and resource utilization.
Resource allocation
Resource management

In a process we can indicate:
which tasks need to be performed,
the order in which they must be carried out,
who should do them

The way in which work items are allocated to resources
(people, machines) is very important to the efficiency and
effectiveness of the workflow
The basic characteristic of a resource is that it is able to carry out particular tasks. We assume each resource is uniquely identifiable and has capacity one, i.e., each resource can work on no more than one activity at any given time.
Resource classification

Each task can be performed only by certain resources (e.g., in a bank, a teller is not allowed to grant a mortgage)

Which resources are able to carry out which task?
It is impracticable to indicate them one by one in the process (staff can change)

We classify them using resource classes
1) classification based on functional properties (roles)
2) classification based on the position in the organization (groups or organizational units)
Examples

Roles (skill, competence, qualification):
counter-staff, travel-agent, assessor, printer, administrator,
chief-executive, senior-doctor

Groups (department, office, team):
sales-department, purchasing-department,
development-team, Avana-branch

The same resource can belong to more roles and groups
Classification diagram

A classification diagram shows which resources belong to each class and group.

We can list resource ids and enclose them in vertical blue boxes that represent groups and in horizontal red boxes that represent roles.
Classification diagram: example

Roles

- Secretary
- Manager
- Sales clerk
- Office worker
Classification diagram: example
Classification diagram: example

Eindhoven
- Alice
  - Dina
  - Kevin
  - Lee

Amsterdam
- Bob
  - Elena
  - Frank
  - Mario
- Carl
  - Jan
  - Nick

Roles: Secretary, Manager, Sales clerk, Office worker

Groups: Purchase, Sales
Classification diagram: example

Groups

Nick is a **Sales clerk** and an **Office worker**. He works in the **Sales** group and in the **Amsterdam** group.
Resource management

Resource management rules:
tell how to map work onto resources

Each task executed by a resource is labelled
with one role and one group
(allowed resources must lie in the intersection)
Example: Car Damage

• An insurance company uses the following procedure for the processing of the claims
• Every claim, reported by a customer, is registered
• After the registration, the claim is classified
• There are two categories: simple and complex claims.
  • For simple claims two tasks need to be executed: check insurance and phone garage. These tasks are independent of each other.
  • The complex claims require three tasks: check insurance, check damage history and phone garage. These tasks need to be executed sequentially in the order specified.
• After executing the two/three tasks a decision is taken with two possible outcomes: OK (positive) or NOK (negative).
• If the decision is positive, then insurance company will pay.
• In any event, the insurance company sends a letter to the customer.
Example: Car Damage
Example: Car Damage

- An insurance company uses the following procedure for the processing of the claims.
- Every claim, reported by a customer, is registered by an employee of department CD.
- After the registration, the claim is classified by a claim handler (CH) of rank A or B within CD.
- There are two categories: simple and complex claims.
  - For simple claims two tasks need to be executed: check insurance and phone garage. These tasks are independent of each other.
  - The complex claims require three tasks: check insurance, check damage history and phone garage. These tasks need to be executed sequentially in the order specified.
- Both for the simple and complex claims, the tasks are done by employees of department CD. After executing the two/three tasks a decision is made by a claim handler of rank A and has two possible outcomes: OK (positive) or NOK (negative).
- If the decision is positive, then insurance company will pay. An employee of the finance department handles the payment.
- In any event, the insurance company sends a letter to the customer. An employee of the department CD writes this letter.
Example: Car Damage

The following roles are identified:

- Employee (E)
- Claim handler (CH)
- Claim handler A (CHA)
- Claim handler B (CHB)

The following groups are identified:

- Car Damages Department (CD)
- Finance Department (FN)
Example: Car Damage
Example: Car Damage

[Diagram of a process flowchart with nodes labeled 'begin', 'register', 'classify', 'check insurance', 'check history', 'phone garage', 'pay', 'decide', 'OK', 'NOK', 'send letter', and 'end'.]
Capacity plan

The staff may vary according to seasonal factors (vacation, illness, leaving the company)

The capacity plan shows what resources are needed for a period of time

If we have a forecast of the supply of new cases, then the capacity requirement can be estimated
Example
Example
Example
Example
Example

**Parameters**
- Observation period: 8.0 hour(s)
- Arrivals per period (λ): 50.0
- Loop termination threshold (c): 0.001

**Capacity requirements per task**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Service time</th>
<th>Items/case</th>
<th>Time/case</th>
<th>Items/period</th>
<th>Time/period</th>
<th>Group / Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>contact client (t2)</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>500.00</td>
<td>500.00 Complaints/Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact departmen...</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>750.00</td>
<td>750.00 Complaints/Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assess (t5)</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>1111.10</td>
<td>1111.10 Complaints/Assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pay (t6)</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>350.00</td>
<td>350.00 Finance/Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>send letter (t7)</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>375.00</td>
<td>375.00 Complaints/Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61.72</td>
<td></td>
<td>3085.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Capacity requirements per resource class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource class</th>
<th>Aggregate time</th>
<th>Min. number of resource objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>350.00</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>1974.99</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints</td>
<td>2736.10</td>
<td>7.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessor</td>
<td>1111.10</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average resource utilization: 80%

The unfolded net has 69 nodes. The relative deviation is (estimated): +0.0%
Process simulation
System: parameters

For each **task**:  
the probability distribution for the processing time  
other performance attributes (e.g., cost, value)  
the set of resources able to perform the task

For each **(XOR) split**:
branching probability of every outgoing arc

For each **resource class/group**:
the number of resources in the pool,  
other performance attributes (e.g., hourly cost)
Task duration: fixed

Fixed:
the processing time is relatively constant

rare when humans are involved,
common for automated tasks
(e.g., automatic report generation)
Task duration

(Negative) Exponential distribution:
applicable when the processing time is most often around a mean value, but sometimes considerably longer (e.g., assess insurance claim)

parameter: rate $\lambda$

probability density function: $f(x) = \begin{cases} \lambda e^{-\lambda x} & x \geq 0 \\ 0 & x < 0 \end{cases}$

cumulative distribution function: $F(x) = \begin{cases} 1 - e^{\lambda x} & x \geq 0 \\ 0 & x < 0 \end{cases}$

mean value: $\frac{1}{\lambda}$
Task duration

Exponential distribution:

\[ f(x) \]

\[ F(x) \]
Task duration

Normal distribution:
applicable when the processing time is around a given average and the deviation around this value is symmetric (e.g., paper-form check)

parameters: mean value $\mu$, standard deviation $\sigma$

probability density function: $f(x) = \frac{1}{\sigma \sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{(x-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}}$

cumulative distribution function: $\Phi(x) = \frac{1}{\sigma \sqrt{2\pi}} \int_{-\infty}^{x} e^{-\frac{(t-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}} dt$
Task duration

Normal distribution:
applicable when the processing time is around a given average and the deviation around this value is symmetric (e.g., paper-form check)

parameters: mean value $\mu=0$, standard deviation $\sigma=1$

probability density function: $f(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{x^2}{2}}$

cumulative distribution function: $\Phi(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}} \int_{-\infty}^{x} e^{-\frac{t^2}{2}} dt$

(standard normal distribution $\mu=0$, $\sigma=1$)
Task duration

Normal distribution:

\[ f(x) \]

\[ \Phi(x) \]
Task duration: estimate

How to estimate the parameters?

Informed guess: interviews with stakeholders

sampling: collect sample data from real executions

logs import: allowed by some tools
(this functionality is called simulation input analysis)
Simulation: other inputs

Inter-arrival times and mean arrival rate
(e.g., exponential distribution, normal distribution)

Lapse of time of the simulation

Either:
end date and time of the simulation; or
real-time duration of the simulation; or
number of process instances to be simulated.
Simulation: execution

The tasks are not actually executed

When a task is ready to be executed a so-called work item is created and the simulator first tries to find a resource to which it can assign this work item

If no resource is available the work item is put in waiting mode

Once a resource is assigned to a work item, the simulator determines the duration of the activity by drawing a random number according to a probability distribution
Simulation: execution

Once the duration has been determined, the work item is put in sleeping mode for that duration (to simulate the execution of the task)

Once the time interval has passed (according to the simulation’s clock), the work is completed and the resource that was assigned to it is available again

Simulators exploit smart algorithms to complete the simulation as fast as possible: thousands of process instances can be simulated in matter of seconds
Simulation: execution

For each work item created during a simulation, the simulator records the identifier of the resource that was assigned to this instance as well as three time-stamps:

- the time when the task was **ready** to be executed
- the time when it was (assigned to a resource and) **started**
- the time when the task was **completed**

Thanks to the collected data, the simulator can compute the **average waiting time** for each task (important to identify bottlenecks in the process)

It can also compute the **total amount of time** during which a resource is **busy** handling work items and its **resource utilization** (the average percentage of time that it is busy)
BIMP

http://bimp.cs.ut.ee
BIMP

BIMP is a free, simple online simulator of BPMN models.

1. Upload BPMN2.0 models created with BPMN-compliant tools

2. Create a simulation scenario including parameters such as: the number of process instances to be simulated; their arrival rates; the number, types and timetables of resources; branching probabilities; the duration and fixed cost of each task (uniform, normal and exponential distributions for durations are supported). The (parameters of the) simulation scenario can be saved.

3. Run the simulation
BIMP: output

A dashboard is eventually displayed that includes:

**Cost information**: total cost of the scenario, min, average and max costs of individual process instance and a diagram of the process instance cost distribution.

**Bottlenecks**: If resources are not sufficient to handle the scenario, then tasks will queue, causing high waiting times and cycle times. A diagram shows the distribution of waiting times.

**Resource utilization**: Average utilization percentage of each resource.

**Cycle times (process duration)**: Total cycle time of the scenario, and diagrams about duration and cycle time distribution.

Simulation logs can be exported in MXML format and then imported in the ProM toolset for more detailed analysis.
Example: Credit application
Example: Credit application

#3 Clerks (cost 25€/h)  #3 Credit officers (cost 25€/h)  System

Working hours: monday/friday, 9:00/17:00
Example: Credit application

Inter-arrival time:
exp(30')

norm(20',4')

norm(10',2')

norm(10',2')

norm(10',2')

fix(0')
Example: Credit application
Example:
Credit application

Always assign names to items that follow any decision gateway: BIMP use those names to indicate branching probabilities.
Example: Credit application
Example: Credit application

Simulation Results

General information
Completed process instances 1500
Total cost 62174.5 EUR
Total simulation time 19 weeks

Process waiting times

- 0 s - 8.7 m
- 8.7 m - 17.5 m
- 17.5 m - 26.2 m
- 26.2 m - 34.9 m
- 34.9 m - 43.7 m
- 43.7 m - 52.4 m
- 52.4 m - 1 h
- 1 h - 1.2 h
- 1.2 h - 1.3 h
- 1.3 h - 1.5 h
Example: Credit application
Example: Credit application
Example:
Credit application
Example: Credit application

**Simulation Results**

**General information**
- Completed process instances 1500
- Total cost 62174.5 EUR
- Total simulation time 19 weeks

**Task costs and waiting times**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task name</th>
<th>Average cost</th>
<th>Average waiting time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess application</td>
<td>16.4 EUR</td>
<td>28.2 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check credit history</td>
<td>4.2 EUR</td>
<td>59.6 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check income sources</td>
<td>8.3 EUR</td>
<td>2.6 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make credit offer</td>
<td>8.4 EUR</td>
<td>21.9 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notify rejection</td>
<td>8.3 EUR</td>
<td>30.1 seconds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Advices

It is recommended to run the simulation multiple times and then take the average of results.

Quantitative analysis in general and simulation in particular are based on simplified models: their reliability depends very much on the quality of inputs (check the sensitivity of the analysis w.r.t. small changes).

Process participants are humans, not robot: they are not all the same, they get distracted, get ill, change the way to handle cases, change job, their performance may vary,…

Cross-check simulation results against reality.
Exercises

1. Run the BIMP simulation of the example by yourselves
2. Change the inter-arrival time to 15’ and re-run the simulation: observe the changes in the results
3. Change the inter-arrival time to 10’ and re-run the simulation: observe the changes in the results
4. Change the number of Clerks and Credit officers to 5 and re-run the simulation: observe the changes in the results
5. Change the branching probabilities to 50% and re-run the simulation: observe the changes in the results