

A workflow cloud management framework with process-oriented case-based reasoning

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Abstract. Workflow execution in the cloud is a novel field for process-oriented case-based reasoning (PO-CBR). In contrast to traditional PO-CBR approaches where the focus is usually on single workflow instances, an entire set of workflow instances is considered that are currently running on cloud resources. While traditional methods such as running a workflow management tool monolithically on cloud resources lead to over- and under-provisioning problems, other concepts include a very deep integration, where the options for changing the involved workflow management tools and clouds are very limited. In this work, we present the architecture of *WFCE*, a connector-based integration framework for workflow management tools and clouds to optimize the resource utilization of cloud resources for workflow by Case-Based Reasoning. Experience reuse contributes to an optimized resource provisioning based on solutions for past resource provisioning problems. The approach is illustrated by a real sample workflow from the music mastering domain.

1 INTRODUCTION

Resource provisioning for workflow execution is a well known issue in workflow management. It has been solved for on-premise systems by load balancing components, for instance. However, in cloud computing, resources are provided on-demand. Thus, workflow management in the cloud has to deal with scalable resources. Standard load balancing approaches are not capable to deal with this. Novel business concepts for workflow execution in the cloud emerge. One of these concepts is *workflow as a Service (WFaaS)* as introduced by [17, 9]. The Workflow Management Coalition [18] defines a *workflow* as “the automation of a business process, in whole or part, during which documents, information or tasks are passed from one participant to another for action, according to a set of procedural rules”. A *task*, also called activity, is defined as “a description of a piece of work that forms one logical step within a process. An activity may be a manual activity, which does not support computer automation, or a workflow (automated) activity. A workflow activity requires human and/or machine resources(s) to support process execution” [18]. The idea of WFaaS is to execute activities within a cloud. A cloud vendor [3] is a company that offers services

in the cloud, for example the execution of a workflow. However, the vendor is not always a cloud provider. Even if renting the required cloud resources by a third party provider, the vendor is responsible for maintaining the service level agreements (SLA) for the own costumers. An SLA defines agreements between the provider and the customer about different aspects of the quality of service. For example, an SLA can be specified for the execution time of the workflow. To prevent an SLA violation, the vendor may rent more resources than required (over-provisioning) but this will reduce the profit. On the other hand, if the vendor rents less resources than required (under-provisioning) this can lead to violations of the SLA. Violations of an SLA create high costs and a loss of reputation [16]. Thus, the optimal management of resources is an important aspect for cloud computing [6] in general and, particularly, for WFaaS vendors. It is challenging to find a good balance between over- and under-provisioning of resources [4]. A straight-forward solution to provide resources is the static way. This means, the system does not adjust itself to a changing situation. Obviously, this will lead to under- or over-provisioning [16]. A more dynamic approach is preferable. Existing approaches range from rather simple, rule-based solutions, such as observing the number of open connections to a cloud resource [14] to sophisticated, algorithmic solutions [15].

Knowledge and experience management methods [7] provide an alternative solution approach focusing on the reuse of experience. In this paper, we investigate *Case-based reasoning (CBR)* as a method for optimizing the provisioning of cloud resources by experience reuse. This work is an extended version of the approach we introduced in ICCBR 2014 [13]. We will introduce the architecture of *WFCF* (Workflow Cloud Framework) a connector-based integration framework for workflow management tools and clouds that aims to optimize the resource utilization of cloud resources for workflows by means of CBR. WFCF follows a shallow integration approach, i.e. it is independent of the chosen workflow management tools and cloud systems. The idea is to have a set of WFCF components that are independent of the workflow management tools and cloud systems. A tool-specific set of connectors interacts with the actually used tools and system. Further, we will present the details how the problem solving component of the architecture is realized by means of PO-CBR. The benefits of using PO-CBR is twofold namely the reduction of costs for the vendor by reducing over-provisioning and SLA violations and, second, a better cost estimation based on experience.

2 WFCF ARCHITECTURE

In this section, we will explain the architecture of WFCF and its components. Starting with the overall architecture, we show the details of the monitoring and management components and how they interact.

2.1 Overall architecture

Figure 1 shows the overall architecture of the WFCF, which we will explain in the following. The architecture can be divided roughly in three parts: the environment, the monitoring component and the management component. The environment are the cloud and the workflow management tool that is used by the customer. Ideally, WFCF will use the already offered information and management methods of the tools, so that additional changes are not necessary. Therefore, WFCF will use offered log files, databases and API's for monitoring the environment and to configure the cloud. *CWorkload* is the monitoring component. It collects information from the environment and combines data across the different layers (the cloud layer and the workflow layer) to one status model of the system. We had done initial tests for the cross layer monitoring aspect of *CWorkload* in [10]. The management component recognizes current or upcoming problems within the system. This could be for example violated SLA's, violated constraints or resource over-provisioning. If a problem occurs, the management component searches for a solution and reconfigures the cloud. We will explain this in more detail in section 2.3.

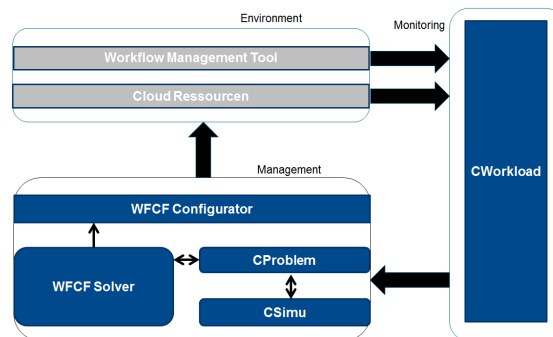


Fig. 1. Architecture of WFCF

2.2 Monitoring

The main components of WFCF work independently from the actually used environment. To work properly, WFCF needs information about the status of the actually running workflow instances and the resource utilization of the cloud. The basic idea is, to connect the used workflow engine and cloud to WFCF with connectors. This allow the usage of different engines and clouds without or just small adaptations. For further details, please have a look at our previous work [12].

2.3 Management

Whereas the monitoring component observes the environment, the management component configures it. This means, the management component starts and stops virtual machines or PaaS container, scales resources and migrates content. Figure 2 shows the management component in more detail. After CWorkload has built the WFCF CloudWF Status, *CProblem* is the part of WFCF which interprets the current status of the environment that is recorded as the WFCF CloudWF Status. Besides the CloudWF status, there is another archive, the *Global SLA // Constraint Archive*, where global constraints and SLA's are stored. The *Global SLA // Constraint Archive* contains SLA's and constraints that are valid for all workflows of a user. There are several different problems that can occur and which CProblem will identify, e.g., violated SLA's. We are planning that CProblem does not only check the current situation, but also do a forecast to identify upcoming problems and over-provisioning. A workflow definition contains all information about the structure of the workflow. For example, the name of the tasks and their order. Via the workflow definitions, for example, CProblem can recognize if a certain web service is going to be used in the future by a currently running workflow instance. If not, WFCF can shut down the VM or container to save money. Another possible scenario could be that currently, there is no violated SLA, but in the near future, several tasks with high resource demand will be started, which can probably lead to a SLA violation, so WFCF should scale up the resources to avoid this problem. Forecasting SLA violations, however, could be a difficult task. To decide if the start of some resource intensive tasks lead to a SLA violation is not as easy as to recognize if a web service has not started yet. A simulation seems a proper way to identify these kind of problems. Therefore, CProblem interacts with *CSimu*. We are planning to use CloudSim [1] as the core of our simulation part. CSimu will simulate the execution of the tasks with the current cloud status and will show if this will lead to a SLA violation. If any problem is unidentified, CProblem extends the CloudWF status with annotations about the problems. This new annotated model is the *WFCF CloudWF Problem*. Such annotations could be, for example, *web service x is not longer needed* or *SLA y is currently violated*. Whereas CWorkload is the core of the monitoring component, the *WFCFSolver* is the core of the management. Similar to CWorkload, the solver has two jobs. First, the solver searches for a new cloud configuration that solves the current problems. Then it finds a reconfiguration path from the current cloud configuration to the new solution. In the last step, the solver sends the reconfiguration steps to the *WFCF Configurator* as shown in Figure 1. The reconfigurator then will do the reconfiguration job. There are several possible approaches to find a new cloud configuration. We will choose *Case-Based Reasoning* (CBR) as our solving strategy.

3 CBR FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

In this section we take a closer look how the *WFCFSolver* will solve the cloud management problems with CBR methods. As mentioned in Section 1, the idea

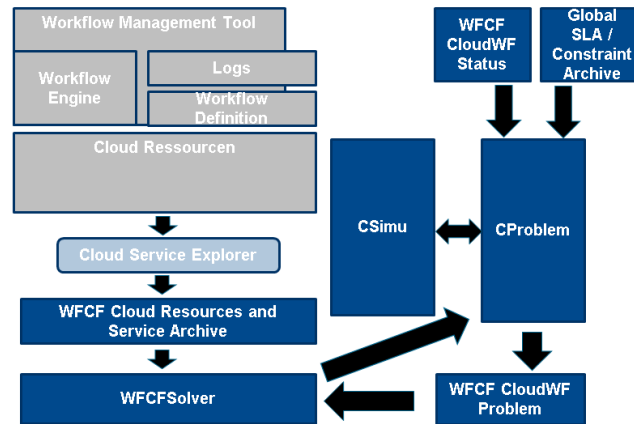


Fig. 2. Management of WFCF

of CBR is that similar problems have similar solutions. If a problem situation occurs the system retrieves experience by searching a similar situation from the past. In our case a problem situation is a cloud configuration with a problem, such as violated SLA's. This is the retrieval step. The key to experience retrieval is a good notion when some kind of experience is relevant for a certain situation. This knowledge is captured in the similarity measure [7]. The reuse step of CBR is to use the solutions from the past for the current problem. In our case, the solution contains re-configuration steps. This for example could be the to start new VM's or to migrate containers to another VM.

A problem situation is recorded as *WFCF CloudWF Problem*. Figure 3 shows an example of a simple CloudWF Problem. This example contains one VM, two containers for the required web services and a bunch of workflow instances currently being executed. The image depicts not the entire workflows but the tasks that are currently active within the instances. Most of the workflow instances are derived from the same workflow definition and are in the same state of execution. At this point, the task *Task 1* uses the web service *web service 1* while *Task 2* uses *web service 2*. In addition, there is another workflow instance (in the bottom right corner). This instance is probably from a different workflow definition, or the instance is in a different state of execution. The current task of this instance is *task 217* and for its proper execution, a web service that has not yet started is required. This example also includes the constraint that the average resource utilization must not extend 75% for reasons of performance. The example CloudWF Problem includes also three problems. The resource utilization of the CPU and memory of VM1 is too high and a new web service must start for Task 217. More complex CloudWF Problems may involve several VM's, containers and workflow instances.

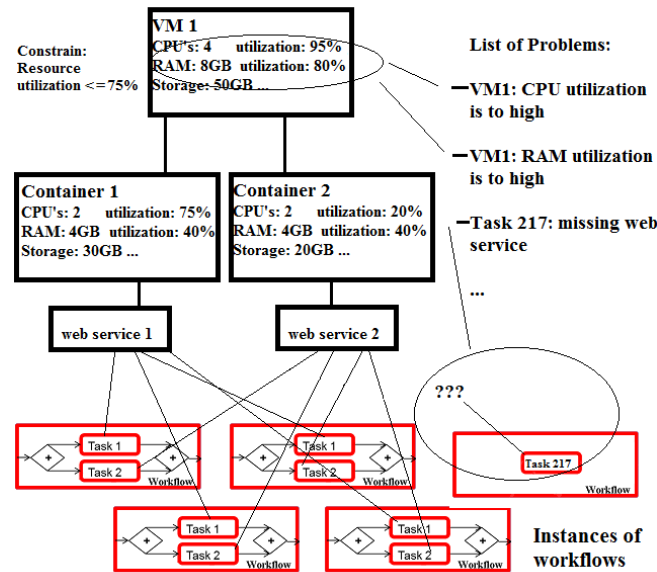


Fig. 3. Example representation of a case

A *case base* is an archive of previous problems and their solutions. The case base is not depicted in Figure 2, because it is part of the solving strategy and not part of WFCF itself. The solver will search the case base for similar problems in the past. In our previous work [11], we have introduced the idea of a similarity function for cloud configurations. For the similarity of a cloud configuration, we consider the following aspects as important.

The provided resources. Two VM's are similar, if they have a similar set of resources available. For example, two VM's with a quad core processor should be more similar than a VM with a dual core processor and a VM with a quad core. The idea is, that VM's with a similar set of resources should handle general workload similar, where VM's with a different set of resources maybe lead to other results, for example you can not migrate a container that requires a quad core, if the VM only have a dual core. The same applies to containers.

The resource utilization. VM's with a similar resource utilization, for example average CPU usage, should be considered as similar. If the utilization differs significantly, a solution that is valid for one case could be invalid for the recent case. For example if the disk space utilization for a VM vm_1 is 20% and for an another vm_2 100%, the system can not migrate a container to vm_2 , because of the lack of free disk space, while a migration to vm_1 is feasible. The same applies to containers.

The assigned SLA's and whether they are violated or not. If two cloud configurations have a similar set of SLA's, the configurations should be consid-

ered as similar. Different SLA's or the violation of different SLA's can lead to a situation, where a problem of the one case is not a problem in another case. For example if a cloud configuration includes an SLA on availability and the other doesn't, the availability can be a problem in the first case while it is not in the second. That leads to the situation, that a solution that mends the availability problem for one case is not applicable for the other case.

The executed workflow instances and their workflow definitions. The number of the started instances and the structure of the workflow definitions can have a high impact on the requirements for resources and for started web services. For example, if an instance of a workflow is started that requires a certain web service, every solution that does not include this web service is not valid. The structure of the workflow definitions also specifies which tasks will be started next.

To determine the similarity of two cases, we use a composite, distance-based similarity function based on the aspects introduced before. The similarity of each aspect in two cases is computed by a particular local similarity function. The local similarity values are aggregated by means of a sum of weighted aspects. For example, the similarity function of the resources provided for a VM is based on a taxonomy, and analog for containers. For the size of the provided resources, we have been inspired by Amazon EC2 instances [5] for nodes and OpenShift [2] for containers. For other aspects, we use mainly standard distance functions. For example to determine the distance between the resource utilization for VMs vm_{util} , we use the Euclidean distance for the resource vectors of CPU, memory, storage, network traffic, and so on. The utilization values are provided in percentage. The distance of the resource utilization vm_{util} is calculated by the

Euclidean distance $vm_{util}(p, q) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (q_i^{vm} - p_i^{vm})^2}$, where p is the vector of n utilization values for the first case and q for the second case. For example, $q_1^{vm} = 50$ is the utilization of the CPU q_1^{vm} with a value of 50%. p_2 is the utilization of the memory and so on.

The similarity function for the workflow aspect of our approach is ongoing work. Each workflow instance has 0 to n active tasks. These are the tasks that are currently executed. We are planning to consider the currently active tasks, as a *bag of tasks* in our similarity function. In addition, another relevant set of tasks can be derived from the workflow definition namely the set of tasks that will be active in the near future. We call this the *bag of tasks approaching next*. We assume, these two bags of task should be an important part within the similarity function. The similarity of two individual tasks will be determined by its service characterization, the size of its input data and the name of the task. Two tasks are similar if they have the same characterization (for example CPU intensive) and if the size of the input data and the name of the task are similar. However, we have not decided yet how to implement the similarity function for bags of tasks finally.

For the reuse step, a solution is a cloud configuration without problems. The solver will search for a similar problem and use the solution for this old problem

or the solution can serve as a starting point for a new solution. Anyways, the solver will send the solution back to *CProblem* to check if the solution comes up with new problems. *CProblem* will check and simulate the solution and give feedback to the solver. This will be repeated until a solution is found or another condition is fulfilled. This could be, for example, a time limit. In this case, the solution with the least significant problem will be chosen. The usage of CBR also opens the opportunity for post-mortem analysis and improvement of the stored solution, while WFCF is otherwise idle. This lazy learning can also be used, if there is no similar solution, or when the case base is empty. In such a case, a simple rule based approach can generate a first placement for the current situation and a post-mortem analysis can improve the result afterward, for the next time, a similar situation approaches. In addition to the case base, there is the *WFCF Cloud Resources and Service Archive*. This archive contains information about the available type of containers, VM's, web services and so on. This archive helps the solver to find valid solutions. Similar to the connectors in the monitoring part, the *Cloud Service Explorer* is a connector to the cloud to discover available sizes and services and store them in the Resources and Service Archive.

4 EXAMPLE

To demonstrate the idea of WFCF, we will give a running example. As our example domain, we chose music workflows to mastering music. The purpose of such a workflow is to transform and process a music file. This includes to normalize and limit the volume of the sound, increase or reduce the sample rate, convert from mono to stereo or reverse and adding special effects like fading and compressing the size of the music file. Figure 4 shows an example workflow. The workflow is modelled in BPMN [8]. To simplify the image, figure 4 does not show the input and output files of the web services. The workflow starts with the *Init Workflow Parameter* tasks to initialize the workflow by a human. The user chooses some parameter for the later mastering. The following two tasks are also human tasks require along with the first one no cloud resources. The following tasks are all based on web services and alter the music file each time. For example, the task *normalize* normalizes the volume of the music file, while the task *fading* adds a fade-out effect to the end of the music. Let us assume that *task choose file* is currently active.

CProblem realizes that, in the near future, the task *normalize* will start. This task requires the web service *normalize web service* that is not available at the moment and this is a problem. *CProblem* prepares the *WFCF CloudWF Problem* and annotates that this web service is required. Because of the simple cloud configuration and because no SLA's are involved, no simulation from *CSimu* is needed. The *WFCFSolver* searches its case base for a case where a web service is required and no container is currently started. Let us assume that the WFCF-Solver finds such a solution and this solution includes to start a container with the needed web service. The solver will send this solution back to *CProblem* to

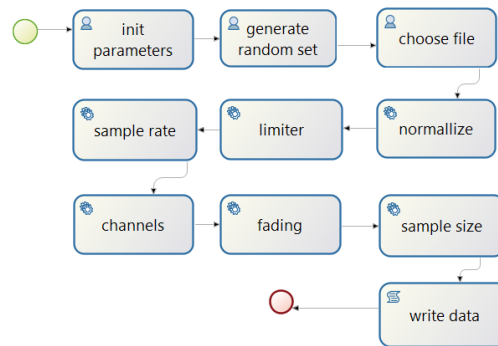


Fig. 4. Sample workflow of mastering music

check if the solution includes new problems. This, however, is not the case. The solver can now start to plan the reconfiguration. After the solver is done, the *WFCF Configurator* starts a container with the web service.

5 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we introduced the architecture of *WFCF*, a connector-based integration framework for workflow management tools and clouds. The goal of *WFCF* is to provide a way to integrate different workflow management tools and clouds, while also optimizing the resource utilization of the used cloud resources by PO-CBR. To achieve this goal, *WFCF* uses multiple concepts. The connector's concept allows in a modular way to integrate workflow tools and clouds by using their usual management and monitoring concepts and without the need for special requirements to the used tools. The monitoring component of *WFCF* analyzes the run time behavior and resource usage of tasks for a better understanding of their needs and also combines information of the workflow management tool and the cloud to a status model for future analysis and forecast of problems. The management component analyzes this status model for problems by using a combination of simulation and static methods. When a problem occurred or can be forecasted, the management component uses CBR to find a similar problem in the past and solve the problem based on the past solution. *WFCF* aims at a shallow integration of cloud and workflow management tools for flexible combination of tools and the optimization of resource usage. We believe that the use of PO-CBR will lead to the reduction of costs for the vendor by reducing over-provisioning and SLA violations and, second, offer the opportunity for a better cost estimation due to experience, while the approach should be less compute intensive and therefore faster as other solutions. Currently, we are working on a prototypical implementation of the of the architecture to evaluate the concept in future. For our future evaluation, we are planing to compare

WFCF with Cloud Socket. An open issue is to design the similarity functions in detail and the *WFCF CloudWF Status* model in a universal way without dependencies of the actually used tools. Another future task is the acquisition of a larger set of problems that should be recognized and solved and also to investigate how strong is the impact of different optimization goals (for example, reduce costs or reduce SLA violations), for different solutions.

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