MultiAgents Systems for Virtual Environment for Training.

Application to fire-fighting

Ronan Querrec, Cedric Buche, Eric Maffre, Pierre Chevaillier
Laboratoire d'Ingénierie Informatique
Ecole Nationale d'Ingénieurs de Brest
Technopole Brest Iroise
29 200 Brest
[querrec, buche, maffre, chevaillier]@enib.fr

Abstract : This study concerns virtual environments for training in operationnal conditions. The principal developed idea is that these environments are heterogeneous and open multiagent systems. The *MASCARET* model is proposed to organize the interactions between agents and to give them reactives, cognitives and socials abilities to simulate the physical and social environment. The physical environment represents, in a realistic way, the phenomena that learners and teachers have to take into account. The social environment is simulated by agents executing collaborative and adaptative tasks. They realize, in team, procedures that they have to adapt to the environment. The users participate to the training environment through their avatar. To validate our model, the *SECUREVI* application for fire-fighters training is developed.

Keywords : Virtual Environment for Training, MultiAgents Systems, Collaborative Work.

1 Introduction.

This study concerns virtual environments for training in operationnal conditions. We want to simulate and immerge the learners in their professional environment. This enables them to manipulate the environment so that they can *"learn while doing"*. This idea is driven by the "constructivism" paradigm defined by Piaget [Pia76] and can find a good implementation in virtual reality technics as presented by [Fuc01, Bur93]. Our definition of Virtual Reality is the one proposed by [Tis01] which proposes to give autonomy to models involving in the virtual environment by giving them the "triple mediation of sens, decision and action". So, the main developed idea is that virtual environment for training are heterogeneous and open multiagent systems. Those MultiAgents Systems (MAS) has been presented by [Dem95] using the *VOWELS* model considering a MAS with four vowels : **A**gent, **E**nvironment, **I**nteraction and **O**rganisation. From our point of view, we consider the user of a virtual environment as other autonomous agents because he can interact with the environment and with other agents or users in the same way. Then, as [Tis01], we propose to add a last vowel, the letter **U** for **U**ser, in the *VOWELS* model.

Our work is to design software to immerge users in operational situation that they cannot have in reality for training because it is too dangerous or inaccesible. The subject of our application is to train fire-fighters officers to operational management and command. This mean that we want to design a software to train to collaborative and procedural work. The our problem is to train to decision making in operational situation and not to technical gesture.

2 The MASCARET model.

Our problem is to train teams to collaborative and procedural work in a physical environment. In this case, we have to simulate in a *realistic* way this physical environment and the *collaborative* and *adaptive* team member's behavior in the social environment. Evolution of those environments result from simulation of autonomous agent's local behavior and their interactions. We propose a model call *MASCARET* where we use multiagents systems to simulate realistics, collaboratives and adaptives environments for training. This model aims at organize the interactions between agents and to give them abilities to evolve in this context.

2.1 The organisational model.

As the users has to be integrated both in the social environment (member of a particular team) and in the physical environment (to undergo a lick of gaz for exemple), we propose, first a generic organisational model allowing to represent the physical and the social environment. The model we propose is founded upon the concepts of `organisation`, `roles`, `behavioral features` and `agents` (Figure 1). [Han99] has already proposed a organisational model for multiagents systems, but this model, dedicated to the collaborative realisation of procedures, is not enougth generic to solve our problem. [Gut99] has also proposed such a model called Agent/Group/Role, but this model seems to be more a pattern for conception than a model which really formalizes the concepts of organisation and roles. In our model, the aim of the `organisation` is to structure interactions between agents ; it enables each agent to know its partners and the role they are playing in the collaboration. The concept of `role` represents the responsabilities (`behavioral features`) played by agents in the organisation. Agents have then an organisational behavior which permit them to play or abandon a role in a organisation. This behavior enable also agents to take into account the existence of other members.

This model is a generic model in the way that all the resulting classes are abstract. This organisational model is then derived to implement two concrets organisations representing physical and social environement that have to be simulated in the virtual environment for training.

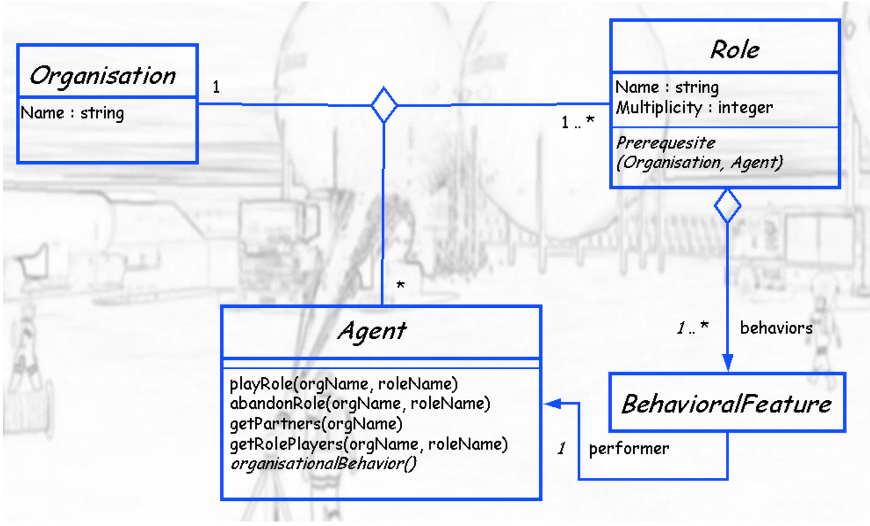

Figure 1 : The organisational model.

2.2 The physical environment.

In a virtual environment for training, the users's (learner and teacher) physical environment must be realistic, interactive and act in "real-time". Then, to reach the constraints of virtual reality, models we use to simulate physical phenomena are obiously simplified. Therefore, the teacher may wants, for pedagogical reasons, inhibates some phenomena. For that, we must propose models which are compatible to a disconnection between the phenomena. Moreover, althought all interactions have potentially effects on the two agent involved, in most cases the effect of one agent is more important. We consider then that the interactions between the agent have a privilieged direction.

Then, the behavior of the reactive agents evolving in physical environment is to percieve situations where there is interactions and to act consequensly. A practical limit of the individual based models is that each agent can potentially percieve all others. The complexity of the algorithm is in this case $O(n^2)$. Then, we have to design rules to organize thoses interactions between reactive agents. For that, we use then the generic organisational model we have proposed before. The organisation is, in this case, a network where agents are connected together when they are in interaction. We call this organisation an interaction network (`InteractionNet`, Figure 2). To represent the concept of privilieged direction in interactions, we define two particular roles called `source` and `target`. The goal of source agents is to give information on their internal states to other agents (targets) so that they can compute the interaction's value and their internal state. The interaction can be detected by the two agents involved, but, for "real-time" computation reasons, it's better if only one agent detect it (one of two agents or another one else). We then define a recruiting role which has the responsability to maintain the knowlege of each agent upon the structure of the organisation. This mean that an agent playing this role have to detect the interactions situations. The internal architecture of reactive agents match the constraint of physical phenomena disconnection presented before, because an agent can have several `reactive behavior`, each one participating in a different interaction network. This elementary behavior consist in the computation of a vector of internal state variables after the evaluation of inputs (from the interactions where the agent is a target) and presents a pertinent internal state to other agents (potentialy targets of an interaction where the former agent is a source).

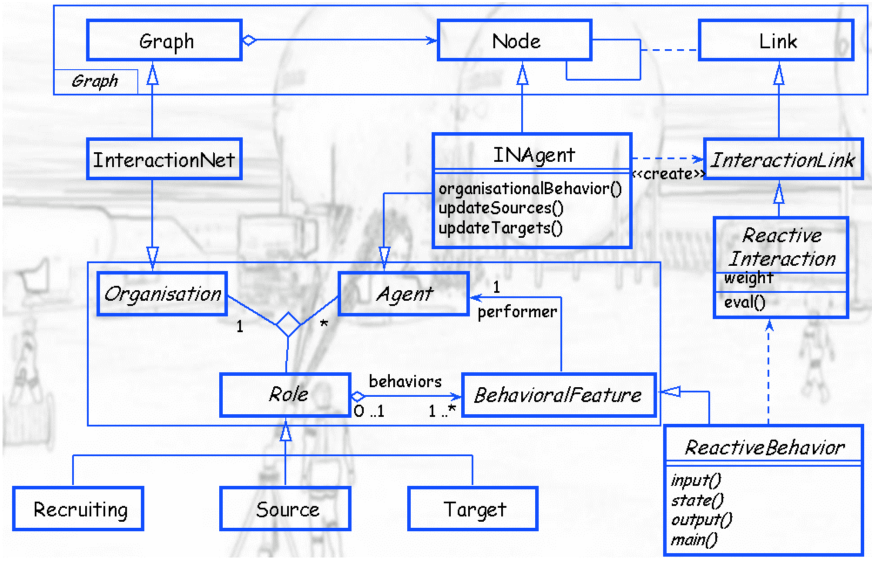

Figure 2 : The Interactions Network.

2.3 *The social environment.*

The physical environment is also populated by more "intelligent" agents. They undergo it and they act on it as reactive agents, but the way they choose their actions is carried out on a higther level of abstraction. Those agents are various humans involving in the formation (learners and teachers) who are played by autonomous agents. In our case, the social environment is structured and each member know its roles and those of its partners. The interactions between the team members are also structured and arranged by the mean of procedure known by all members. We thus derive our generic organisational model to formalize this concept of team. We are interested in the case where the action's coordination between team members are already envisaged and written in procedure. On the other hand, the environment being dynamic, agents can need to adapt the scenario to the environment. The procedure must then have a semantic representation so that agents can reason above. To describe a procedure we use the temporal logic of Allen (logic on the intervals of time).

The reasonning of team members relates on organisation, procedures and actions. We propose a model of agent having local organisational knwoledge. An agent is divided into a decisional part and a part represented by modules of perception of the physical environment, communication and actions (Figure 3). The agent must carry out actions of the procedure and adapt to situations not envisaged. The procedure describes interactions between agents in an optimal case, and leaves to the agent the responsability to build implicit plans (not clarified in the procedure) considered as natural within an applicative situation. Moreover, the procedure organize actions of a semantic level which we call « actions trades » such as « sprinkling a fire » in the case of firemen procedures, whereas the implicit plans arrange actions of a generic semantic level for humans such as « going at a point ».

For that, the agent must be able to reason on actions and we propose a model of goal directed actions having pre-conditions and post-conditions. Thus, before carrying out an action, the agent must make sure that pre-conditions of this one are checked. If it is not the case, it builds itself a plan by back chaining on pre-conditions and post-conditions of actions. When an agent starts or stops actions, it broadcasts a message that enables other members to follow the evolution of the procedure. When this behavior is at fault, the agent calls it's organisational behavior which can help it to find a solution with another team member. Thus, in a hierarchical organisation, when an agent has a problem which it cannot solve, it refers to its superior. Then, the superior has the responsability to find a solution among his subordinates. If it does not find any, it refers to its own superior about it. We represent this mechanism by a method like a *Contract Net Protocol*.

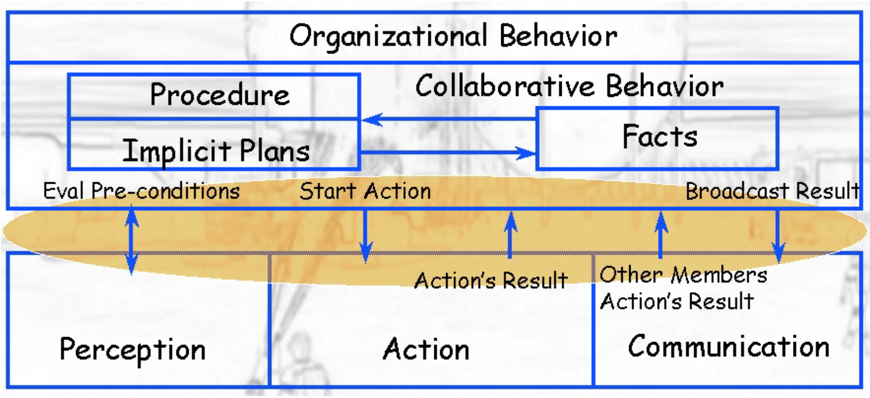

Figure 3 : Architecture of rational agents.

2.4 *The users.*

The avatar is the representation of the user in the environment. The model of avatar we propose is the same as rational agents except for the inhibition of some messages. Indeed, all modules composing the avatar are active and thus remain potentialy usable ; however certain communication are desactiveted. Thus the collaborative behavior does not call any more the organisational behavior (in case of a failure in an action) and the reasoning module does not communicate with the operative part to ask it to execute actions. These decision are from the responsability of the learner. This model enable the avatar to follow the evolution of the procedure and the choice of the users. Having this capacity, the avatar of a learner can explain, advise or show the realization of a task to the user.

3 SécuRéVi.

SECUREVI (Security and Virtual Reality) is an application of *MASCARET* to civil security. It helps with the training of firemen officers for operational management and for commandment. The physical environment is constituted of the site where the exercises take place as well as the physical phenomena (fire, smoked, jets of water...) being able to intervene. The learners play roles of different leaders intervening during the incident. Teachers participate in the simulation to trigger malfunctions and help the learners or play a role in a team. The designer work in *SECUREVI* is essentially to implement elements of physical and social environment by inheriting *MASCARET*. Thus, the designer has to conceive his own agents to simulate a specific phenomenon. This is possible by inheriting INAgent as well as its reactive behavior (inheriting `Reactive Behavior`). Then he defines the networks interactions (`InteractionNet`). The conception of social environment, composed of FTP teams (Fire engine Thunders Pumps) in charge of the incident attack or CMIC team (the Intervention Chemical Movable Cell) follows the same path by inheriting model of social environnement proposed by *MASCARET*. Thus, the designer have to describe new teams and roles as well as actions that agents have to perform. *SECUREVI* is implemented using the platform *AREVI/ORIS* [HAR00].

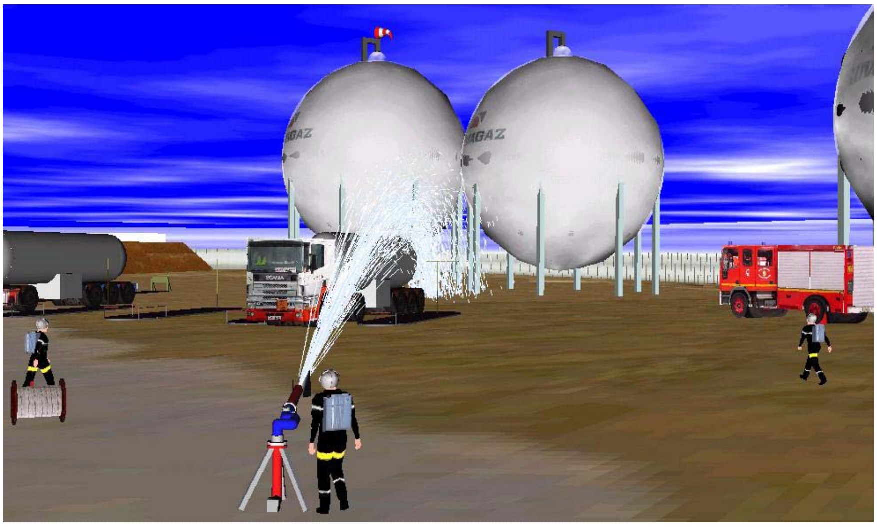

Figure 4 : Picture from *SÉCURÉVI.*

4 Conclusion and futur works.

Our objective is to place learners in operational positions in their simulated physical and social environment. Considering a virtual environment for training as a multi-agents system, we propose the model *MASCARET*. It allows the realization of a realistic, cooperative and adaptative virtual environment for training. The *SECUREVI* application is intended for the training of firemen officers and is based on this model. In *MASCARET*, classical pedagogical functionalities expected in a virtual environment for training have not been formalized. The study of different training environments showed that *MASCARET* allows the implementation of the functions present in existing environments and offers mechanisms allowing them to be improved.

Thus, we wish to integrate the notion of "pedagogical program" proposed by pedagogues [Ric98]. It will be built around three phases: 1) the verbalisation, the learner is able to explain the objectives of the formation, 2) the transfer, the learner is able to abstract concepts present in the training and to transfer them to another context and 3) the reinforcement, the learner effectuates a series of exercices aiming to create automatism on the subject of the training. Our contribution will concern the realization of agent models allowing us to automatically distinguish these three phases in the learner program and to generate adequate exercises.

In order to improve the learner apppropriation of his role in the exercice, we also propose the integration of the notion of *"putting into operation"* and of *"pedagogical scenario"* [Cra99]. That way the learner will feel immersed in the context of the exercice and decides by himself to play a role. In addition, virtual reality and multi-agents systems allow the simulation of different elements (characters, physical phenomena…) allowing to trigger learner emotions, that is an important factor in pedagogy. Thus every exercise of the « program » begins by a phase of putting into operation of a pedagogical context.

We envisage the use, in the continuation of every exercise, different strategies of pedagogical learning. For that, we propose to model pedagogical strategies by means of pedagogical actors. In this framework, we noticed the strategy of the critic, counselor, guardian, companion [Cha00] and troublemaker [Aim00]. We are particularly interested in the co-operative strategy, where the companion is a virtual actor that will cooperate for the realization of tasks, exchange ideas on the problem and share the same goals. We also are interested in the troublemaker strategy where the goal is to disturb the learner by proposing solutions that can sometimes be erroneous. That way, we force the learner to evaluate his self-confidence in his own solutions. We propose to the human teacher, means the human expert, to specify different pedagogical agent behaviors (companion, troublemaker ....). For that, we wish to endow such agents with the capacity of learning by imitation [Gau01] or by the exemple [Bim95]. The human teacher will take control of the pedagogical agents during the preparation phase of the exercice and they will learn a behavior adapted to the situation. If it is considered we are in possession of such different pedagogical agents, an ITS will be multi strategic [Men96]. That will necessitate a selection mechanism of strategy regarding the context (learner level , pedagogical opportunities ….).

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