AutoMAGI - an Autonomic middleware for enabling Mobile Access to Grid Infrastructure

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Abstract

Access to Grid services is currently limited to devices having substantial computing, network and memory resources such as PCs. On the other hand, most of mobile devices do not have enough capabilities to be either direct clients or services in the Grid environment. The existing middleware platforms like Globus do not fully address mobility, yet extending the potential of the Grid to a wider audience promises increase in its flexibility and productivity. Furthermore, the promising approach of autonomic computing holds the key to the self-management of such a multifarious undertaking and provides a way to further build upon this complexity without incurring additional drawbacks. In this paper we present AutoMAGI, an autonomic middleware that can handle the complexity of extending the potential of the Grid to a wider mobile audience, by incorporating the features of context-awareness, self-configuration, self-optimization, self-healing and self-protection in it. We address the issues of job delegation to a Grid service, support for offline processing, secure communication, interaction with heterogeneous mobile devices and presentation of results formatted in accordance with the device limitations.

Keywords: Autonomic computing, middleware, Grid computing, mobile computing

1. Introduction

Grid [1] computing permits participating entities connected via networks to dynamically share their resources. Its increasing usage and popularity in the scientific community and the prospect of seamless integration and interaction with heterogeneous devices and services makes it possible to develop further complex and dynamic applications for the Grid. However, the efficient management of such a large computing platform is a considerably complicated issue and it is a constantly increasing complexity because of increasing numbers of heterogeneous devices and components being added to it. Arguably, the current level of software complexity has reached such a level of complexity that it threatens the future growth and benefits of Information Technology [2]. A promising approach to handle this complexity is the emerging field of autonomic computing [3]. It calls for the design of a system in such a way that it is aware of its constituting components and their details, it can reconfigure itself dynamically according to the change in its environment, optimize its working to achieve its goals and predict or recognize faults and problems in self-managing approach has been taken from the autonomous nervous systems of biological entities and many concerted efforts are underway for the development of this field [4], [5], [6]. The effect of such an autonomous system will be the reduction in the complexity and ease in management of a large system, and what better exemplar case for its application than the Grid and its middlewares. Various ways have been proposed to achieve the fulfillment of this vision, from agent-based [7] to policy-based self-management [8], from autonomic elements control loops [9] to adaptive systems, self-stabilizing systems and many more, but the motivation and ultimate goal of all is the same. We also use guidance from the vision of autonomic computing to further build up on our earlier work on the MAGI[1] middleware effort [10], [11]. In what follows, we first summarize the idea of our adaptive middleware and then discuss the incorporation of autonomic behavior into its architecture.

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The major bottlenecks affecting mobile devices are battery life, storage, memory, bandwidth, processing power and security. Also, the libraries required to interact with the Grid to accomplish a task are resource intensive considering the limitations of mobile devices. Conceiving a distributed system comprising of mobile devices that uses these libraries directly will not be a practical system because of the extent of the resource demands. There is a wide variety of mobile devices available, which also vary from one another in a variety of ways. On one hand, laptops offer relatively powerful CPUs and sufficient primary and secondary storage and on the other hand, devices like cell phones have scarce resources and supplementing these resources is either expensive or impossible altogether. Secondly, in mobile systems, network connections generally have limited bandwidth, high error rate and frequent disconnections. Lastly, mobile clients usually have the ability to interact with various networks, services, and security policies as they move from one place to another.

Also, as the environment of a mobile device changes, the application behavior needs to be adjusted to adapt itself to the changing environment. Hence dynamic reconfiguration is an important building block of such an adaptive system. Furthermore, the interaction approach between the mobile client and the host dictates the effectiveness and efficiency of a mobile system. Asynchronous interaction deals with problems of high latency and disconnected operations that may arise with other interaction models. A client using asynchronous communication can issue a request and continue with its local operations and collect the output later. Hence the client and server modules are not required to execute concurrently to communicate with each other. Such an interaction permits reduction in bandwidth usage, decouples the client and server modules and improves the scalability of a system.

Hence, given the highly variable computing environment of mobile systems, it is mandatory that modern middleware systems are designed that can support the requirements of modern mobile systems such as dynamic reconfiguration and asynchronous communication. The motivation behind the AutoMAGI middleware is to develop an autonomic middleware that provides mobile devices access to Grid infrastructure and also enables autonomous applications to use its platform. It will be beneficial to all kinds of Grid users, form the physicist who wants to run a set of simulations from his PDA to a doctor who wants a Grid medical service to analyze the MRI or CT scans of a patient from his smart phone, so that finally we can promise increase in seamless flexibility and productivity.

In this paper we first discuss the basic structure of autonomic components in the middleware and then present the architecture for the AutoMAGI middleware, which enables heterogeneous mobile devices to access Grid services and also enables autonomous applications to use it as a platform for this purpose. This middleware provides support and management infrastructure for delegation of jobs to the Grid, a light-weight security model, offline processing, adaptation to network connectivity issues and presentation of results to client devices in keeping with their limited resources.

2. Structure of Autonomic Components in AutoMAGI

The AutoMAGI middleware is composed of autonomic components which are responsible for managing their own behavior in keeping with the relevant policies, and also for cooperating with other autonomic components to achieve their objectives. The structure of a typical component is shown in Figure 1.

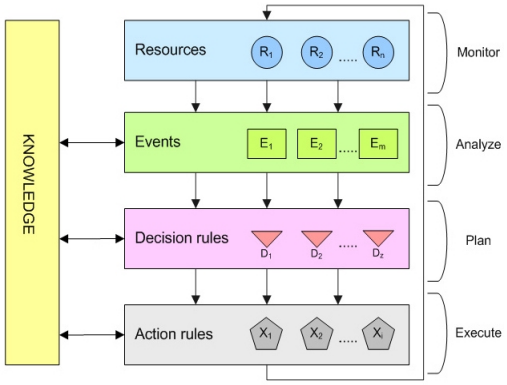

Figure 1: Structure of an autonomic component in AutoMAGI

A resource can be anything, ranging from a CPU, memory etc. to an application or service. An "Event" signifies a change in the state of a resource, which can be either minor or major depending upon the nature and goals of a particular component. The "Decision rules" are used for deducing a problem based on the information receive from various events. The problem can be deduced using a single event or inferring from a group of events, based on a single occurrence or based on a history of occurrences. The component then makes plans to rectify this problem or optimize some functional and/or behavioral aspects, on the basis of policies and internal and external knowledge of the component. The "Action rules" are then used to

execute tasks to bring about these changes in line with the desired goal of the component.

This manner of structure facilitates in building up a kind of a control loop by employing the monitor, analyze, plan and execute circle, which is of key significance for autonomic behavior [25].

3. AutoMAGI Architecture

The AutoMAGI middleware is exposed as a web service to the client application. The components of the middleware (as shown in Figure 2) are discussed briefly as follows.

3.1. Discovery service

The discovery of the middleware by mobile devices is managed by employing a UDDI registry [12], [13]. The composition of the current web services may not give sufficient facilities to depict an autonomic behavior or to integrate them seamlessly with other autonomic components but with the advent of semantic web service technologies like OWL-S [14], it becomes possible to provide a fundamental framework for representing and relating devices and services with their policies and describing, reasoning and inferencing about their functionalities and capabilities.

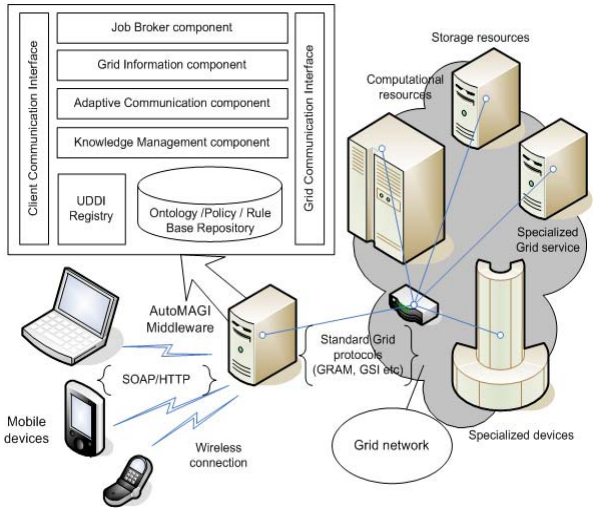

Figure 2: Deployment model and architecture of AutoMAGI

Once the middleware service is deployed and registered, other applications/devices would be able to discover and invoke it using the API in the UDDI specification [13] which is defined in XML, wrapped in a SOAP envelope and sent over HTTP.

3.2. Client Communication interface

The service advertised to the client is the communication interface between the mobile device and the middleware. This layer enables the middleware to operate as a semantic web service [15] and communicate via the SOAP framework [16]. The ontology repository in the middleware also contains the device and user related ontologies and service policies for the devices, users and applications. Due to this service-oriented approach, it is not mandatory for the client application to remain connected to the middleware at all times while the request is being processed.

We focus on providing support for offline processing in the Adaptive Communication component, by considering either of the two kinds of disconnections; intentional disconnection, where the user decides to discontinue the wireless connection himself or doesn't care if there is a connection or not, and unintentional disconnection, which might occur due to variations in bandwidth, noise, lack of power etc. The Adaptive Communication component utilizes a connection monitor for this purpose but the job for facilitating in making such decisions that whether the disconnection was intentional or not is done with the help of decision rules of the component. The action rules of the component take the contributing factors and parameters into account and based on the particular policy, proceed with the course of actions to be undertaken.

During execution, checkpoints are maintained at the client and the middleware, taking into account the policies of the device, user and application, in order to optimize reintegration after disconnection and incorporate fault tolerance.

3.3. Grid Communication interface

The Grid Communication interface provides access to the Grid services by creating wrappers for the API advertised by the Grid. These wrappers include standard Globus protocols such as GRAM [17], MDS [18], GSI [19] etc. which are obligatory for any application trying to communicate with the Grid services. This enables the middleware to communicate with the Grid, in order to accomplish the job assigned by the client. Its working is in close collaboration with the Grid Information component, which also uses Globus and is discussed later in the section.

3.4. Grid Information component

The Grid Information component interacts with the wrapper of the Globus toolkit's API for information services (MDS [18]). It assists the client application by managing the process of determining which services and resources are available in the Grid (the description of the services as well as resource monitoring such as CPU load, free memory etc.). Detailed information about Grid nodes (which is made available by MDS) is also shared on explicit request by the client.

3.5. Job Broker service

The autonomic Job Broker component deals with initiating the job request and steering it on behalf of the client application. After going through the related policy and determining the availability of the Grid service and authorization of the client, it downloads the code (from the mobile device or from a location specified by the client e.g. an FTP/web server). Once the code is available, the Job Broker component submits a "createService" request on the GRAM's Master Managed Job Factory Service (via the wrapper) which is received by the Redirector [17]. The application code (controlled by the application policy) then interacts with the newly created instance of the service to accomplish the task. The rest of the process including creating a Virtual Host Environment (VHE) process and submitting the job to a scheduling system is done by GRAM. Subsequent requests by the client code to the Job Broker component are redirected through the GRAM's Redirector.

The monitoring service of the Job Broker component interacts with GRAM's wrapper to submit FindServiceData requests in order to determine the status of the job. It may then communicate with the Knowledge Management component to store the results, depending on the type of application and all the related policies, as the mobile client may reconnect and ask for the results (intermediate/final) of its job from the Job Broker component.

3.6. Knowledge Management

The knowledge used by different autonomic components is handled by using semantic web technologies in the middleware which provide the mechanisms to present the information as machine-processable semantics and is useful in building intelligent decision-making mechanisms and perform knowledge level transformations on that information. These decisions and transformed information is then passed on to other components within the system or directly to the client or the Grid, which utilize it according to their specific needs.

The autonomic components that constitute the AutoMAGI middleware constantly monitor and gather the data they need to react to or act upon, according to their management tasks and targets. This wide-scoped data is elaborated and organized through the notion of events, which we define more formally in a later section. Events in turn are typically meaningful in a certain context when related with other events. This correlation information can then be used for Data filtering, measuring thresholds and sequencing of actions etc. But for such an autonomic model to work properly, a shared knowledge must be present which includes features context information, system logs, performance metrics and relevant policies. We manage this knowledge base by using the Knowledge Management component.

Due to the autonomic character of the Knowledge Management component, the middleware is able to respond to a problem that happened in the defined problem space (scope of defined problems) and use predictive methods to discover probable problems in advance and so succeed in achieving better results and eliminating problems. But as each autonomic element has its own knowledge model, the problem of data/knowledge integration might result, which is again handled by the Knowledge Management module. Furthermore, some conflict-scenarios may arise due to the conflicting goals pursued by different autonomic components. The optimal solution of such conflicts is also the job of this component.

3.7. Security

The Grid Security Infrastructure is based on public key scheme mainly deployed using the RSA algorithm [20]. However key sizes in the RSA scheme are large and thus computationally heavy on handheld devices such as PDAs, mobile phones, smart phones etc. We propose the use of Elliptic Curve Cryptography (ECC) based public key scheme, which can be used in conjunction with Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) for mobile access to Grid. This provides the same level of security as RSA and yet the key sizes are a lot smaller [21] which means faster computation, low memory and bandwidth and power consumption with high level of security.

Furthermore, as no autonomic element should provide its resources or services to any other component without the permission of its manager, we make use of security policies that govern and constrain their behavioral aspects at a higher level. The security

policies include different characteristics like the level of protection needed to be applied to the various information resources that the component contains or controls, rules that determine how much trust the element places in other elements with which it communicates, cryptographic protocols the element should use in various situations and the circumstances in which the element should apply or accept security-related patches or other updates to its own software, and so on. Each autonomic component also holds various security related tasks and state representations to describe the current status and activities, like level of trust on other communicating entities, notification form other components or human administrators of suspicious circumstances, agreements with other components regarding provision of security-related information, such as log-file analyses or secure time stamping, and a list of trustworthy resource suppliers (used to quickly verify the digital signatures on the resources they provide).

4. Communication between the middleware gateways

In case multiple instances of the AutoMAGI middleware gateways are introduced for improving scalability, some problem scenarios might arise. Consider a mobile device/client C that accesses the Grid network via gateway M_1, but disconnects after submitting the job. If the mobile device later reconnects at gateway M_2 and inquires about its job status, the system would be unable to respond if the middleware is not capable of sharing information with other instances. To manage resources, clients and requests etc. between themselves, the distributed instances of AutoMAGI middleware use an Arbitrator component. So in accordance with high-level guidance from the application/client's policies for the functional environment and the load-balancing policies from the middleware, we attain a guideline for optimal sharing of knowledge between different middleware instances.

The Arbitrator facilitates in communication between any two middleware instances. It maintains the ordered pairs (ID, URI) which are used for the identification of the middleware instance. So for instance, after reintegration of the mobile client at M_2, C sends the ID of the middleware instance, where the job was submitted (i.e. M_1), to the Arbitrator. The Arbitrator determines that the ID is not that of M_2. It then checks the Middleware Directory Listing to find the URI corresponding to the Middleware instance M_1. The Arbitrator then requests (from the client application) the job-ID of the job submitted by C. Upon a successful response the Arbitrator of M_2 (A-M_2) communicates with the Arbitrator of M_1 (A-M_1) using the URI retrieved. After mutual authentication, A-M_2 sends the job-ID along with the clients request for fetching the (intermediate/final) results to A-M_1. If the job is complete, the compiled results are forwarded to client application. In case the job isn't complete yet, the client application continues to interact with A-M_1 (where the job was submitted). Note that A-M_2 acts as a broker for communication between C and M_1. Also, if the C decides to disconnect and later reconnect at a third middleware instance M_3, then A-M_3 will act as a broker and communicate with M_1 on behalf of C. As all the processing of information is done at the middleware where the job was submitted, the other instances would only act as message forwarding agents.

5. Related work

Various efforts have been made to solve the issues regarding a mobile-to-Grid middleware. Signal [22] proposes a mobile proxy-based architecture that can execute jobs submitted to mobile devices, so in-effect making a grid of mobile devices. After the proxy server determines resource availability, the adaptation middleware layer component in the server sends the job request to remote locations. The efforts are more inclined towards QoS issues such as management of allocated resources, support for QoS guarantees at application, middleware and network layer and support of resource and service discoveries based on QoS properties.

In [23] a mobile agent paradigm is used to develop a middleware to allow mobile users' access to the Grid and it focuses on providing this access transparently and keeping the mobile host connected to the service. Though they have to improve upon the system's security, fault-tolerance and QoS, their architecture is sufficiently scalable. GridBlocks [24] builds a Grid application framework with standardized interfaces facilitating the creation of end user services. For security, they are inclined towards the MIDP specification version 2 which includes security features on Transport layer. They advocate the use of propriety communication protocols stating that performance of SOAP on mobile devices is 2-3 times slower as compared to a proprietary protocol. But in our view, proprietary interfaces limit interoperability and extensibility and certainly an autonomic computing system will only be possible if open standards are ensured.

6. Conclusion and future work

In this paper we identified the potential of enabling mobile devices access to the Grid and how we use the emerging autonomic computing paradigm to solve the management complexity. We focused on providing solutions related to distributed computing in wireless environments, particularly when mobile devices intend to interact with Grid services. The architecture of an autonomic middleware, AutoMAGI is presented which facilitates implicit interaction of mobile devices with Grid infrastructure. It handles secure communication between the client and the middleware service, provides support for offline processing, manages the presentation of results to heterogeneous devices (i.e. considering the device specification) and deals with the delegation of job requests from the client to the Grid.

In future we will continue to focus on issues of autonomic security (self-protection) and streamline the Knowledge Management component for self-optimization. Along with a prototype implementation, we intend to continue validating our approach by experimental results.

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