

# Argumentation-based dialogues for deliberation

Yuqing Tang and Simon Parsons

Department of Computer Science

Graduate Center

City University of New York

365 5th Avenue, New York

NY 10016, USA

ytang@gc.cuny.edu, parsons@sci.brooklyn.cuny.edu

## ABSTRACT

This paper presents an argumentation-based approach to deliberation, the process by which two or more agents reach a consensus on a course of action. The kind of deliberation we are interested in combines both the selection of an overall goal, the reduction of this goal into sub-goals, and the formation of a plan to achieve the overall goal. We develop a mechanism for doing this and then proceed to describe how it can be integrated into a system of argumentation to provide a sound and complete deliberation system, before showing how the same process can be achieved through a multi-agent dialogue.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

I.2.11 [Artificial Intelligence]: Distributed Artificial Intelligence—*Coherence and co-ordination; multiagent systems.*

## General Terms

Languages, theory.

## Keywords

Agent communication, dialogue games, argumentation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Multi-agent planning is clearly an important topic for the field of multi-agents systems, and, as one might imagine, has been widely studied and for a long time. As [4] points out, there is a large variety of approaches, from distributed versions of classical AI planning techniques like NOAH [3] and partial planning [6], to techniques that were developed to exploit specific attributes of multi-agent systems like joint intentions [14, 23], or the *intention-that* of SharedPlans [9]. Some of these approaches deal with multi-agent plans holistically [10], while others build plans for individual agents and then merge them [7]. Approaches as disparate as model

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AAMAS'05, July 25-29, 2005, Utrecht, Netherlands.

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checking [24] and auctions [26] have been adapted to generate multiagent plans.

In this paper we bring together aspects of multiagent planning and work in a field that has grown up more recently, argumentation-based dialogue [18]. While there has been much work on argumentation-based dialogue in the last few years—including that of Kraus [13], Maudet [15], McBurney [16], Reed [20], Schroeder *et al.* [21] and Sycara [22]—there is not yet a definitive account of what Walton and Krabbe [25] call *deliberation* dialogues. These are dialogues in which two or more agents converse to formulate a joint course of action.

At the time of writing, we have team formation dialogues Dignum *et al.* [5], dialogues about what should be done [8], dialogues in which one agent proposes a plan and then persuades others to adopt it [17], and even a general purpose framework for deliberation [12]. However, our goal in this paper is to provide a form of dialogue which allows agents to exchange arguments about the details of means-ends planning. This is something we believe is essential if agents are going to rationally discuss what plans to adopt. In particular, we aim to develop a dialogue in which agents not only decide what to do, but create a plan *jointly*, with different sub-plans being suggested by different agents which then merge them to create an overall plan that they all agree on.

## 2. NOTATION

As usual when considering planning, whether the classical planning of STRIPS or the decision theoretic planning of POMDPS [1] we abstract the physical world into states, actions, and state transitions caused by the actions. States and actions are the basic objects in  $L$ , the underlying language used in our approach. The kind of procedure we are interested in will determine how to compose a sequence of actions to achieve a desired state transition, namely to reach a goal from a given state.

In  $L$ , we think of a plan as being a sequence of actions, and we want to determine a plan that gets us from a specified initial state to a specified final state. The basic objects of  $L$  are:

1. A set of states:  $S = \{s_0, s_1, \dots, s_n\}$ .
2. A set of actions:  $A = \{a_0, a_1, \dots, a_m\}$ .
3. A set of pairs of initial state and goal state. We term such a pair a *nisus*<sup>1</sup> and denote a set of nisi:  $N =$

<sup>1</sup>Nisus: a striving towards a goal.

$\{s_0 \hookrightarrow s'_0, s_1 \hookrightarrow s'_1, \dots, s_t \hookrightarrow s'_t\}$  where  $s_i \in S$ ; as an abbreviation,  $N = \{n_0, n_1, \dots, n_t\}$  where  $n_i = s_i \hookrightarrow s'_i$ .  $\hookrightarrow$  denotes state transition.

4. A set of plans:  $P = \{p_0, p_1, \dots, p_s\}$ . A plan  $p$  is a sequence of actions  $p = a_1 \dots a_t$  where  $a_i \in A$ .

Sentences in  $L$  describe the world. In particular we are interested in what actions and plans achieve.

1. The effect of an action is (a) to cause a state transition or (b) to achieve a nisus.  $a \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s')$  where  $s, s' \in S$ ,  $a \in A$  indicates action  $a$  causes a transition from  $s$  to  $s'$ .  $a \rightsquigarrow n$  means action  $a$  achieves nisus  $n$ .

In other words, actions bring about simple state transitions, and some of these state transitions may be distinguished as nisi — transitions between states we identify as start and end points for agents.

2. The effect of a plan can also be thought of in terms of state transitions:  $p \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s')$  where  $p \in P$  means plan  $p$  causes a state transition from  $s$  to  $s'$ . Here  $p$  must satisfy the conditions that (a)  $p = a_1 \dots a_t$  and (b) there exists a sequence of states  $s_0 s_1 \dots s_{t-1} s_t$  such that  $s = s_0$  and  $s' = s_t$ ,  $a_i \rightsquigarrow (s_{i-1} \hookrightarrow s_i)$  for  $(i = 1 \dots t)$ .

Plans are thus specific sequences of actions that, when executed in the right order, will create a path through state space between two specified states.

Our notion of plan is thus very much like the usual notion of a plan in simple AI planning. However, we choose to specify goals not by the usual target state but rather as a pair of initial state and final state (though we also use the conventional notion of goal in places). Why do we do this?

The answer is that the notion of a nisus fits rather better with our approach to deliberation than the usual notion of a goal. Obviously, plans, goals and nisi are all suitable for describing a state-transition graph  $G = (S, A)$  where nodes  $S$  are states, edges  $A$  are assigned by atomic actions, and edges are directed<sup>2</sup>. Planning is essentially a process of finding a path between two given states  $s_0$  and  $s_g$ , and were we to plan in classic means-ends style from initial state to goal state, or vice-versa, the usual notion of goal would suffice. However, we don't. The planning process we describe allows agents to work from start, end, or middle, and in such a situation it is convenient to be able to link start and end point exactly as a nisus does, in order to keep track of where one is in the process.

Our slightly non-standard notation for action,  $a \rightsquigarrow s_1 \hookrightarrow s_2$ , is similarly motivated by the deliberation process. A set of action descriptions of the kind we use can be viewed as the definition of a function  $a : S \rightarrow S$ . By taking an action to be a function on states in this way, we capture explicitly, and in a propositional form, the fact that the same action applied to different initial states will lead to different final states (and it is a short step to capturing non-deterministic actions).

In the rest of the paper we blur the distinction between actions and plans because we take an action  $a$  to be an atomic plan. They share the same effect of creating state transitions.

<sup>2</sup>An action can assign more than one edge between nodes.

### 3. DELIBERATION AND PLANNING

We start by considering the deliberation process that a single agent goes through. The usage that Walton and Krabbe [25] make of the term “deliberation”, which is to denote the whole scope of practical reasoning, differs from that made by Bratman [2], who uses it to denote the process of choosing goals<sup>3</sup> that are then subject to means-ends reasoning. Since we will be considering both types of deliberation, we will denote the first by  $D_{WK}$ , and the second by  $D_B$ . For us the  $D_{WK}$  process starts with an overall nisus  $n_0$ , and uses  $D_B$  to refine the set of sub-nisi in conjunction with a process of means-ends planning.

In more detail, we recursively divide  $D_B$  and the associated planning into *phases* until a plan for  $n_0$  is reached. All the phases share the same top-level nisus  $n_0$ , and each phase has a *deliberation context*. A deliberation context consists of 1) the top-level nisus  $n_0$ , 2) a set of intermediate nisi  $N_{inter}$  and 3) a set of useful plans  $P_{useful}$  (we will describe the way this set is constructed in detail below). Within a context, an agent deliberates in the  $D_B$  sense. Based on the result, the agent then plans. Based on the  $D_B$  and planning, the agent then decides whether or not to recursively call a *child* phase to solve a sub-problem. If this is the case, the next round of  $D_B$  and planning is delayed until the child phase is complete.

To make the procedure precise, we define the following:

1. *Justified*( $n$ ) means that a nisus  $n$  is achievable, namely it is a nisus with a plan  $p$  such that  $p \rightsquigarrow n$ .
2.  $Src(N) = \{n|n \hookrightarrow n' \in N\}$  is the set of source states of a given set of nisi  $N$ .
3.  $Dest(N) = \{s'|s \hookrightarrow s' \in N\}$  is the set of destination states of a given set of nisi  $N$ .
4.  $Src(P) = \{s|p \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s'), p \in P\}$  is the set of source states of a given set of plans  $P$ .
5.  $Dest(P) = \{s'|p \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s'), p \in P\}$  is the set of destination states of a given set of plans  $P$ .

Now, we present our first  $D_{WK}$  procedure, SD (for simple deliberation). This is called with a top-level nisus  $n_0 = s_0 \hookrightarrow s_g$ , initializes its top-level context with context ID  $i = 0$  as  $N_{inter}^i = \phi$  and a set of partial plans that might be adopted  $P_{useful}^i = A$ . ( $A$  is the set of actions.) SD then executes the following steps:

1. Check whether *Justified*( $n_0$ ) holds, that is whether  $n_0$  can be achieved using plans in  $P_{useful}^i$ . If it is, then stop with a plan for  $n_0$ .
2. Carry out  $D_B$ :
  - (a) Create a child context ID  $j$  for its child phase.
  - (b) Choose a set of intermediate nisi  $N_{inter}^j$  for the child phase from:

Nisi of the form  $s \hookrightarrow s'$  where  $s \in Dest(P_{useful}^i)$  and  $s' \in Src(P_{useful}^i)$ . They are all the possible state pairs which connect the end state of the existing plans to the start state of the other existing

<sup>3</sup>To be precise Bratman considers intentions not goals, but for our purposes there is little practical difference.

plans. If there are plans for these nisi output by the planning procedure in the future, then we will have new plans by combining two existing plans with these future plans.

Nisi of the form  $s_0 \hookrightarrow s'$  where  $s' \in \text{Src}(P_{\text{useful}}^i)$ . They are all the possible state pairs which connect initial state of the top-level nisus to the start state of the existent plans.

Nisi of the form  $s \hookrightarrow s_g$  where  $s \in \text{Dest}(P_{\text{useful}}^i)$ . They are all the possible state pairs which connect the end state of the existent plans to the goal state of the top-level nisus.

Based on the candidate nisi given above, heuristics (see below) are used to gather a subset of these nisi to be  $N_{\text{inter}}^j$  which is believed to be important to achieve our top-level nisus  $n_0$ .

Note that the last two sets of nisi are not necessary, but make the process more efficient.

3. Combine plans guided by the result of  $D_B$ . For each intermediate nisus  $s \hookrightarrow s' \in N_{\text{inter}}^j$ , combine plans as follows
  - (a) Extend forward plans that end with initial states of nisi in  $N_{\text{inter}}^j$ : look for plans  $p_1 \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s_i)$  and  $p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \hookrightarrow s_j)$  and combine them to give  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s_j)$  if such  $p_1, s_i, s_j, p_2$  exist.
  - (b) Extend backward plans that start with final states of nisi in  $N_{\text{inter}}^j$ : look for plans  $p_1 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \hookrightarrow s_j)$  and  $p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_j \hookrightarrow s')$  and combine them to give  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \hookrightarrow s')$  if such  $p_1, s_i, s_j, p_2$  exist.

Add these plans into  $P_{\text{useful}}^i$ .

4. Reason about plans. Pick a subset of  $P_{\text{useful}}^i$  to be the set  $P_{\text{useful}}^j$  passed to a child phase which recursively applies the SD procedure with the new context with ID  $j$ . Repeat until all the plans in  $P_{\text{useful}}^i$  have been distributed.
5. Collect plans from child phases and combine all the  $P_{\text{useful}}^j$  into  $P_{\text{useful}}^i$ .
6. Go to the beginning of the procedure. Some termination conditions can be applied here to stop the procedure when the system figures out there is no plan to achieve  $n_0$ .

Step 2(b) is the key step in the planning process — each of the sub-parts of this step are ways in which the plan is constructed. The second and third sub-parts, respectively, capture the notions of backward chaining from the goal state and forward chaining from the initial state. The first step captures the idea that planning can work forwards and backwards simultaneously from some state in the middle of a possible plan.

Although we are describing this process for a single agent at the moment, consider how such a process might take place were several agents to be involved. In such a case different agents would be throwing out different suggestions simultaneously, and at any one time, we might have plans for

achieving many different nisi “on the table”. The heuristics in the fourth sub-part of 2(b), are methods that select the most promising of such a set of nisi (which can equally well be identified by a single agent) for further consideration.

Below we will adapt this procedure first to incorporate argumentation, and then to allow it to be distributed across a pair of agents. Before we do this, we obtain soundness and completeness results:

**PROPOSITION 1 (SOUNDNESS).** *If SD generates a plan  $p$ , then  $p$  is a plan to achieve the top-level nisus  $n_0$  using the atomic actions  $A$ .*

**PROOF.** *Step 3 of the deliberation procedure ensures that only valid plans in  $L$  are composed from actions in  $A$ . Step 1 guarantees that the deliberation procedure succeeds only if there is a plan  $p \rightsquigarrow n_0$ . Therefore  $p$  is a valid plan to achieve  $n_0$  using the atomic actions  $A$ .  $\square$*

Before attempting the completeness result, we need some further notation:

1.  $P_n$  is the set of plans with  $n$  actions in its action sequence.
2.  $\oplus$  is a plan combination operator  $P_i \oplus P_j = \{p_1 p_2 | p_1 \in P_i \wedge p_2 \in P_j\} \cup \{p_2 p_1 | p_1 \in P_i \wedge p_2 \in P_j\}$  where  $p_1 p_2$  and  $p_2 p_1$  must satisfy the valid plan conditions given above. This operator corresponds to step 3.

**PROPOSITION 2 (COMPLETENESS).** *If there is a plan for initial nisus  $n_0$ , then SD will succeed with a plan  $p$  which achieves  $n_0$ .*

**PROOF.** *In step 2,  $P_{\text{useful}}^i$  determines  $N_{\text{inter}}^j$  ( $j$  is a child context of  $i$ ). In step 3,  $N_{\text{inter}}^j$  determines the plans being added into  $P_{\text{useful}}^i$ . Therefore step 2 and 3 together determine the growth of  $P_{\text{useful}}^i$ . The recursive child phase calls in step 5 expedite the discovery of the top-level nisus  $n_0$ ; they don't affect the growth of  $P_{\text{useful}}^i$ . We will show that step 2 and step 3 together will grow  $P_{\text{useful}}^0$  to contain all the plans which can be generated from atomic actions  $A$  so that if there is a plan for  $n_0$  the deliberation procedure will certainly discover it.*

*We divide  $P_{\text{useful}}^0$  into  $n$  disjoint subsets  $P = P_1 \cup P_2 \cup \dots \cup P_n$ , where  $n$  is the number of states (namely length of plans in  $P_n$  is in the range of  $1 \dots n$ )<sup>4</sup>. Initially  $P_1^0 = A$  and  $P_i^0 = \phi$  for  $i = 2 \dots n$ , each time step 2 and step 3 together grow  $P$  in the following way:  $P_t^{k+1} = \cup(P_i^k \oplus P_j^k)$  for all  $i + j = t$ . Therefore if, in step 2 and 3,  $P_i^k$  are fixed for  $i = 1 \dots t - 1$  then  $P_t^{k+1} = P_t^k$ .  $P_1$  is fixed during any iteration; after the first iteration  $P_2$  is fixed since  $P_1$  is fixed; after the second iteration  $P_3$  is fixed since  $P_1, P_2$  are fixed. In this way, after  $n - 1$  iterations,  $P_n$  will be fixed. Since the maximal plan length is  $n$ ,  $P$  will contain all the possible plans after  $n - 1$  iterations. Therefore if there is a valid plan for  $n_0$  then  $P$  will contain it after  $n - 1$  iterations. This ends the proof.  $\square$*

<sup>4</sup>In any plan, we discard any action sequence that includes a cycle  $p = a_1 a_2 \dots a_{i-1} a_i \dots a_i a_{i+1} \dots$ , because the corresponding contracted plan  $p' = a_1 a_2 \dots a_{i-1} a_i a_{i+1} \dots$  is guaranteed to be reached sooner or later by the procedure where we have two plans  $p_1 = p' = a_1 a_2 \dots a_{i-1}$  and  $p_2 = a_i a_{i+1} \dots$ . Doing this effectively makes the Markov assumption, taking the effects of an action to uniquely determine the succeeding state.

## 4. ARGUMENT AND DELIBERATION

To combine  $D_B$  with argumentation, we need to do three things. First, we extend  $L$  with predicates that control the  $D_B$  procedure. Second, we establish logic-based rules for nusus reduction, reasoning about plans, plan combination and information passing through different contexts. (This will enable us to construct plans by STRIPS-like logical reasoning). Third, we add a commitment store [11] to track the course of  $D_B$  and planning.

With a knowledge base expanded using the extended  $L$ , a plan for a nusus is certainly contained in the theorems of a subset of the knowledge base. However, the deliberation problem, to some extent, is to select an efficient way to construct a proof which backs up a plan for a nusus (the proof then becomes the justification that can be provided in a multi-agent  $D_{WK}$ ). The commitment store provides a trace of how such a proof is constructed.

### 4.1 Additional notation

To capture the context of phases, we introduce the following predicates into  $L$

1.  $Ultimate(n)$  denotes  $n \in N$  is the top-level nusus.
2.  $N(contextid, n)$  denotes  $n \in N$  is an intermediate nusus in context with ID  $contextid$ . It is a predicate that determines whether  $n \in n_{inter}^{contextid}$ .
3.  $P(contextid, p)$  denotes  $p \in P$  is a useful plan in context with ID  $contextid$ . It is a predicate that determines whether  $p \in P_{useful}^{contextid}$  or not.
4.  $Justified(contextid, n)$  denotes the existence of a plan for nusus  $n$  in a the context  $contextid$ .
5.  $Parent(id_1, id_2)$  denotes the fact that context  $id_1$  is the parent of context  $id_2$ .

### 4.2 Rules

In order to create arguments that support plans, we need to be able to trace the planning process. To do that we need to introduce the following logical rules.

#### Nusus justification

$$P(i, p) \wedge [p \rightsquigarrow (s' \leftrightarrow s')] \rightarrow Justified(contextid, s \leftrightarrow s')$$

Note that here, as in all these rules,  $\rightarrow$  denotes material implication.

#### Candidate nusus composition

$$Ultimate(n) \rightarrow N(j, n)$$

$$\begin{aligned} &Parent(i, j) \\ &\wedge P(i, p_1) \\ &\wedge P(i, p_2) \\ &\wedge [p_1 \rightsquigarrow (s' \leftrightarrow s_{foo1})] \\ &\wedge [p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_{foo2} \leftrightarrow s)] \rightarrow N_{cand}(j, s \leftrightarrow s') \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} &Parent(i, j) \\ &\wedge P(i, p) \\ &\wedge Ultimate(s_0 \leftrightarrow s_g) \\ &\wedge [p \rightsquigarrow (s \leftrightarrow s_{foo})] \rightarrow N_{cand}(j, s_0 \leftrightarrow s) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} &Parent(i, j) \\ &\wedge P(i, p) \\ &\wedge Ultimate(s_0 \leftrightarrow s_g) \\ &\wedge [p \rightsquigarrow (s_{foo} \leftrightarrow s)] \rightarrow N_{cand}(j, s \leftrightarrow s_g) \end{aligned}$$

We can use heuristics to select  $N(j, n)$  from  $N_{cand}(j, n)$  in order to reduce the search space. Without the heuristics, we will have rule

$$N_{cand}(j, n) \rightarrow N(j, n)$$

so that every candidate nusus is considered.

#### Candidate plan combination

$$\begin{aligned} &[p_1 \rightsquigarrow (s \leftrightarrow s_m)] \\ &\wedge [p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_m \leftrightarrow s')] \rightarrow p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s \leftrightarrow s') \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} &P(i, p_1) \\ &\wedge P(i, p_2) \\ &\wedge N(i, s \leftrightarrow s_{foo}) \\ &\wedge p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s \leftrightarrow s') \rightarrow P(i, p_1 p_2) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} &P(i, p_1) \\ &\wedge P(i, p_2) \\ &\wedge N(i, s_{foo} \leftrightarrow s) \\ &\wedge p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s \leftrightarrow s') \rightarrow P(i, p_1 p_2) \end{aligned}$$

#### Plan selection

$$Parent(i, j) \wedge P(i, p) \rightarrow P_{cand}(j, p)$$

Again we can use heuristics select  $P(j, p)$  from  $P_{cand}(j, p)$ . Without using heuristics, we will have rule

$$P_{cand}(j, p) \rightarrow P(j, p)$$

so that every candidate plan is considered.

#### Plan collection

$$P(j, p) \wedge Parent(i, j) \rightarrow P(i, p)$$

These basic rules provide a backbone to guarantee that our procedure searches the whole space of plans so that if there is a plan to achieve the nusus  $n_0$  then we will reach it sooner or later.

### 4.3 Heuristics

The basic rules give us a no-frills planning procedure. Adding in heuristics like those given here tries to ensure that if there is a plan that can achieve the top-level nusus, the deliberation procedure will reach it as early as possible. We take inspiration from decision-theoretic planning [1], where action choices are made on the basis of their expected cost. Accordingly we introduce the following notions of cost.

1. The *action-state transition cost*  $cost(a, s, s')$  is the cost of taking action  $a$  to transform state from  $s$  to  $s'$ . The value is computed or assigned outside the reasoning system.
2. The *plan-state-transition cost*  $cost(p, s, s')$  is the cost of taking a plan  $p$  to transform state from  $s$  to  $s'$ . The value is computed from  $cost(a, s_i, s'_{i+1})$  for all actions  $a$  in the plan  $p$ .

3. The *overall cost*  $cost(s \hookrightarrow s')$  is an abbreviation of  $cost(s, s')$ , the cost of transforming state  $s$  into  $s'$ . The value is computed from  $cost(p, s, s')$  for all the plans  $p$  and actions  $a$  which can cause state transition from  $s$  to  $s'$ .

The idea is that although we often want to consider  $p \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s')$  as a holistic entity, to do  $D_B$  and planning we need to make comparisons between plans and actions, and we use costs to make these comparisons.

The cost of a plan can be derived from the cost of its actions in the same kind of way as it is done in decision-theoretic planning<sup>5</sup>. Whatever mechanism is adopted, it is outside the logical reasoning that we are studying here. Thus the assignment of costs to overall plans is, so far as the  $D_B$  and planning processes are concerned, carried out by an oracle.

Another useful notion in deciding which nisi to adopt is the *correlated valuation* of one nisi relative to another, denoted  $value(n, n')$ . This captures the value of achieving nisi  $n'$  in order to achieve  $n$ , and can be computed from the costs of all the plans which have the form  $p \rightsquigarrow n$  for which there exists a subplan  $p'$  of  $p$  such that  $p' \rightsquigarrow n'$ . If there is no such a sub plan  $p'$  then  $value(n, n') = 0$ .

With these ideas in place, we can suggest heuristics for plan selection and nisi composition. One possibility for plan selection is to select the lowest cost plan:

$$\begin{aligned} &Parent(i, j) \\ &\wedge P_{cand}(j, p) \\ &\wedge P(i, p) \\ &\wedge P(i, p') \\ &\wedge cost(i, p) < cost(i, p') \rightarrow P(j, p) \end{aligned}$$

A possibility for nisi composition is to only adopt nisi for which the correlated valuation is above some threshold. To do this we can use:

$$\begin{aligned} &N(j, n) \\ &\wedge N_{cand}(j, n') \\ &\wedge value(g, g') > c \rightarrow G(j, g') \end{aligned}$$

Other heuristics can, of course, be adopted.

#### 4.4 Single agent deliberation

We are now in a position to explain how a single agent can use argumentation-based  $D_{WK}$  to figure out what to do. We assume the agent has a knowledge base  $KB$  which contains a description of the physical world (e.g. the set of available actions and their effects). The agent also has a commitment store  $CS$  which it uses to trace the course of deliberation. The idea behind the procedure is to guarantee that all necessary sentences to support an argument are available in the commitment store  $CS$  before such an argument is constructed. The argumentation system used is

$$\mathcal{AS} = \langle \mathcal{A}(KB \cup CS, Undercut, Pref) \rangle$$

in the notation of [19].

The procedure for argumentation-based deliberation, SDA (Simple Deliberation through Argumentation), is given a top-level nisi  $n_0 = s_0 \hookrightarrow s_g$ . It first initializes the context id with  $i = 0$ ,  $CS$  with  $Ultimate(n_0)$  and  $P(i, a)$  for all  $a \in A$ .

<sup>5</sup>Such costs may be assigned by a form of reinforcement learning, for example.

1. Check  $\mathcal{AS}$  to see whether  $Justified(n_0)$  is acceptable. If it is, then stop with a plan for  $n_0$  in  $CS$ .
2. Carry out a  $D_B$ :

- (a) Set a context ID  $j$  for a child phase.
- (b) Using  $KB$  and  $CS$ , use  $\mathcal{AS}$  to check if  $N(j, n)$  is acceptable for nisi of the following three cases:

Nisi such as  $(s \hookrightarrow s')$  for  $s \in Dest(P)$  and  $s' \in Src(P)$ . This captures the idea of extending existent plans forwards and backwards.

Nisi such as  $(s_0 \hookrightarrow s')$  for  $s' \in Src(P)$ . This captures the idea of extending the existent plans forwards from the source of the top-level nisi.

Nisi such as  $(s \hookrightarrow s_g)$  for  $s \in Dest(P)$  to capture the idea of extending the existent plans backwards from the destination of the top-level nisi.

Assert all the acceptable sentences  $N(j, n)$  in  $CS$ . Notice that the above can be achieved only if the rules for nisi composition are used. If the agent exhausts all the possible candidates nisi  $N_{cand}(j, n)$  but no  $G(j, n)$  can be asserted, then the child phase returns to the parent context with no new plans added.

3. Combine plans guided by the results of  $D_B$ . For all the nisi  $n = (s \hookrightarrow s')$  with acceptable arguments for  $N(j, n)$ , combine plans as follows:

Plans from  $s$ . Look for plans  $p_1 \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s_i)$  and  $p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \hookrightarrow s_j)$ , combine them to be  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s_j)$  if such  $p_1, s_i, s_j, p_2$  exist.

Plans to  $s'$ . Look for plans  $p_1 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \hookrightarrow s_j)$  and  $p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_j \hookrightarrow s')$ , combine them to be  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \hookrightarrow s')$  if such  $p_1, s_i, s_j, p_2$  exist.

Check with  $\mathcal{AS}$ , assert all acceptable  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s \hookrightarrow s_j)$ ,  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \hookrightarrow s')$  into  $CS$ .

4. Reason about plans. Using the plan selection rules, identify the candidate useful plans  $p$ , and for each use  $\mathcal{AS}$  to check whether  $P(j, p)$  is acceptable. If it is acceptable, assert it into  $CS$ .
5. Recursively call a child phase to go through SDA with the new context with ID  $j$ .
6. Collect plans from the child phase: Use plan collection rules to identify candidates plans  $p$ . For each  $p$ , check with  $\mathcal{AS}$  whether  $P(i, p)$  is acceptable. If it is acceptable, assert it into  $CS$ .
7. Go to the beginning of the procedure.

Since SDA is based on a process for  $D_B$  and planning which we know is sound and complete, we can easily show that it is sound and complete itself:

**PROPOSITION 3 (SOUNDNESS).** *If plan  $p$  for nisi  $n_0$  is acceptable according to  $\mathcal{AS}$  at the end of the SDA, then  $p$  achieves  $n_0$  using actions from  $A$ .*

**PROOF.** *Step 3 combines plan  $p$  from  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  only if  $\mathcal{AS}$  accepts the combination. Thus  $\mathcal{AS}$  accepts the effects of  $p$ . Step 1 ensures that  $p$  is a plan for  $n_0$ .  $\square$*

PROPOSITION 4 (COMPLETENESS). *If there is a plan  $p$  which achieves nusus  $n_0$  using atomic actions  $A$ , then SDA will generate  $p$ .*

PROOF. *Similar to the proof of Proposition 2, since steps 2 and 3 together will explore all the possible combinations of discovered acceptable plans, the procedure will generate all the plans acceptable by  $\mathcal{AS}$  at the end of the procedure. If there is plan  $p$  which achieves initial nusus  $n_0$  using actions from  $A$ , then such a plan is contained in all the acceptable plans by  $\mathcal{AS}$ .  $\square$*

## 5. DELIBERATION DIALOGUES

We now consider how to extend the  $D_{WK}$  process to become a dialogue. We describe the dialogue process as being between just two agents, but it can easily be extended to a multi-party dialogue.

### 5.1 Basic configuration

The scenario for which our deliberation dialogue was created is as follows:

1. Dialogues take place between two agents,  $A_1$  and  $A_2$ .
2.  $A_1$  has initial knowledge base  $KB_1$  and commitment store  $CS_1$ .
3.  $A_2$  has initial knowledge base:  $KB_2$  and a commitment store  $CS_2$ .
4.  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  share the same rules for planning and deliberation and differ only in the way they evaluate plans and nisi. They may, however, have different set of actions reflecting different capabilities.
5. The context ID,  $id$ , is shared by  $A_1$  and  $A_2$ . Initially,  $id = 0$ .
6.  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  have an mechanism to allocate unique context IDs.
7. Both  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  can access  $CS_1$  and  $CS_2$ , hence the argumentation system of  $A_1$  is

$$\mathcal{AS}_1 = \langle \mathcal{A}(KB_1 \cup CS_1 \cup CS_2), \text{Undercut}, \text{Pref} \rangle$$

and the argumentation system of  $A_2$  is

$$\mathcal{AS}_2 = \langle \mathcal{A}(KB_2 \cup CS_1 \cup CS_2), \text{Undercut}, \text{Pref} \rangle.$$

Within this scenario we need to add the following idea of an auxilliary sub-dialogue.

### 5.2 Auxiliary discussion sub-dialogue

One of the reasons for agents to enagage in deliberation dialogues is to combine both agents' reasoning and planning capabilities. One possible downside, the fact that conflicts may arise between the two agents, can be resolved by the use of argumentation (which, at heart, is a system for resolving conflicts in terms of the acceptability of the arguments which support the conflicting statements in two argumentation systems). To achieve this resolution we need an auxiliary discussion sub-dialogue to render a sentence acceptable to both agents, by which we mean that it is accepted by the argumentation systems  $\mathcal{AS}_1$  and  $\mathcal{AS}_2$ .

A discussion sub-dialogue is started by a dialogue move *discuss*( $p$ ). Assume that  $A_1$  moves first, the discussion sub-dialogue proceeds as follows:

1.  $A_1$  checks with its own argumentation system  $\mathcal{AS}_1$  whether  $p$  is acceptable, if it is, then  $A_1$  makes the locution *discuss*( $p$ ), indicating that  $p$  is open for discussion.
2.  $A_2$  checks with its argumentation system  $\mathcal{AS}_2$  whether  $p$  is acceptable, if it is,  $A_2$  stops and declares that  $p$  is accepted by both agents. Otherwise,  $A_2$  challenges  $p$  indicating that it needs to see the argument for  $p$  (which will be the reason behind  $A_1$ 's suggestion of  $p$ ).
3.  $A_1$  responds to the challenge by asserting the set of support  $S$  for  $p$ .
4. For each sentence  $q' \in S$ ,  $A_2$  checks with  $\mathcal{AS}_2$ . For the unaccepted sentences  $q' \in S$ ,  $A_2$  discusses  $\neg q'$  with  $A_1$ , if any of the  $\neg q'$  are accepted by the discussion then go to next step; otherwise stop and declare  $p$  is accepted by both agents.
5.  $A_1$  replaces  $S$  with another alternative support and goes back to step 3.
6. If  $A_1$  exhausts all the possible supports for  $p$  but the discussion with  $A_2$  accepts none of them, then declare  $p$  is not accepted by the discussion.

With this machinery, we can now set down the deliberation dialogue.

### 5.3 A dialogue for deliberation

Two agents can have two different set of atomic actions. This means they have different capability or different views of the physical world.

We assume that initially  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  agree on a top-level nusus  $n_0 = s_0 \leftrightarrow s_g$  (though they could arrive at this after another dialogue, a negotiation perhaps).  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  initialize the context id with  $i = 0$ .  $A_1$  initializes  $CS_1$  with *Ultimate*( $n_0$ ) and  $P(i, a)$  for all its actions, and  $A_2$  does the same for its commitment store. The simple deliberation dialogue, SDD, then consists of the following steps:

1.  $A_1$  discusses  $A_2$  to check whether *Justified*( $n_0$ ) is acceptable. If it is, then stop with a plan for  $n_0$ .
2. Carry out  $D_B$ :
  - (a) Create a context ID  $j$  for a child phase.
  - (b)  $A_1$  discusses with  $A_2$  to check whether  $N(j, n)$  is acceptable for nusus of the following three cases

Nisi of the form  $s \leftrightarrow s'$  where  $s \in \text{Dest}(P)$  and  $s' \in \text{Src}(P)$ , to capture the ideas of extending existent plans forwards and backwards.

Nisi of the form  $s_0 \leftrightarrow s'$  where  $s' \in \text{Src}(P)$ , to capture the ideas of extending the existent plans forwards from the source of the top-level nusus.

Nisi of the form  $s \leftrightarrow s_g$  where  $s \in \text{Dest}(P)$ , to capture the ideas of extending the existent plans backwards from the destination of the top-level nusus.

Assert all the acceptable sentences  $N(j, n)$  in  $CS_1$ . Notice that the above can be achieved only if nusus composition rules on are used.

- (c)  $A2$  carries out the same step as  $A1$  but asserts results into  $CS_2$ . The bidirectional discussion is to ensure all the sentences that will be needed in the future can be exchanged between  $A1$  and  $A2$ .

After  $A1$  and  $A2$  have exhausted all the nisi  $n$  that satisfy  $N_{cand}(j, n)$ , and no new  $N(j, n)$  are asserted, return to the parent context with no new plans are asserted.

3. Combine plans guided by the results of  $D_B$ .
  - (a) For all the nisi  $n = (s \leftrightarrow s')$  with acceptable arguments for  $N(j, n)$ ,  $A1$  combines plans:
 

Plans from  $s$ : look for plans  $p_1 \rightsquigarrow (s \leftrightarrow s_i)$  and  $p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \leftrightarrow s_j)$ , combine them to be  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s \leftrightarrow s_j)$  if such  $p_1, s_i, s_j, p_2$  exist.

Plans to  $s'$ : look for plans  $p_1 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \leftrightarrow s_j)$  and  $p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_j \leftrightarrow s')$ , combine them to be  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \leftrightarrow s')$  if such  $p_1, s_i, s_j, p_2$  exist.

$A1$  discusses  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s \leftrightarrow s_j)$ ,  $p_1 p_2 \rightsquigarrow (s_i \leftrightarrow s')$ , with  $A2$ , asserting the acceptable plans into  $CS_1$ .
  - (b)  $A2$  does the same as  $A1$  does for (a) but asserts the results into  $CS_2$ .
4. Reason about plans:
  - (a)  $A1$  uses the plan selection rules to identify candidate useful plans  $p$ , and discusses with  $A2$  if  $P(j, p)$  is acceptable. If it is acceptable,  $A1$  asserts it into  $CS_1$ .
  - (b)  $A2$  carries out the analogous process.
5. Recursively call a child phase to go through SDD with the new context with ID  $j$ .
6. Collect plans from the child phase:
  - (a)  $A1$  uses the plan collection rules to figure out the candidates of plans  $p$  should be collected. Then he discusses with  $A2$  to check whether  $P(i, p)$  is acceptable. If it is acceptable, assert it into  $CS_1$ .
  - (b)  $A2$  carries out the analogous process
7. Go to the beginning of the procedure.

Once again we can prove the soundness and completeness of the procedure, showing that reacting it as a dialogue does not detract from it:

**PROPOSITION 5 (SOUNDNESS).** *If plan  $p$  for nisus  $n_0$  is acceptable by both agents at the end of SDD, then  $p$  achieves  $n_0$  using atomic actions that both agents agree upon.*

**PROOF.** *Step 3 combines plan  $p$  from  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  only if  $AS_1$  and  $AS_2$  both accept the combination. Thus both agents agree on the effects of  $p$ . Step 1 ensures that both agents agree that  $p$  is a plan for  $n_0$ .  $\square$*

**PROPOSITION 6 (COMPLETENESS).** *If there is a plan  $p$  which achieves nisus  $n_0$  using a set of atomic actions that both agents agree upon, then SDD will generate  $p$ .*

**PROOF.** *Similar to the proof of Propositions 2 and 4, since steps 2 and 3 together will explore all the possible combinations of discovered plans accepted by both agents, the procedure will generate all the plans acceptable by both  $AS_1$  and  $AS_2$  at the end of the procedure. If, according to the acceptable atomic actions  $A$  agreed by both agents, there is plan  $p$  which achieves initial nisus  $n_0$ , then such a plan is contained in all the acceptable plans by  $AS_1$  and  $AS_2$ .  $\square$*

## 6. DISCUSSION

The full argumentation-based deliberation dialogue successfully composes plans in one of the following ways:

1.  $A1$  composes the whole plan,  $A2$  agrees with it.
2.  $A2$  composes the whole plan,  $A1$  agrees with it.
3.  $A1$  composes some parts of the plan;  $A2$  composes some other parts of the plan;  $A1$  and  $A2$  combine the two parts at the end, and both  $A1$  and  $A2$  agree with the final plan.

Thus we can see that our process combines the “create a plan and then convince others it works” approach of [17] with the “merge different plans” approach of [7]. For a given situation SDD will typically take an approach that is a mixture of the two, involving the creation and merging of separate sub-plans some of which one agent has to persuade the other to adopt. SDD thus achieves the nisus that we set out at the start of the paper.

One thing to note about this work concerns the heuristics used to guide the search for plans during deliberation. These are never specified in any detail, though we give some high-level hints about the possible form that they may take. This does not detract from the formal results, since the results hold even if we have no heuristics (in which case we essentially do an exhaustive search through the full state-space). However, decent heuristics will help to focus the search and thus make it more efficient.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This paper has described a mechanism for carrying out deliberation dialogues in the sense of Walton and Krabbe [25] — that is dialogues in which agents decide what to do. Our approach, which as described is limited to two agents but could easily be generalised, recursively mixes nisus selection and planning, allowing these tasks to be distributed between the agents in a flexible way. The approach makes it possible for agents to combine their knowledge about the environment, and to make use of the planning abilities of both agents (since one can readily imagine that they have complementary expertise, as embodied in the heuristics they can employ).

Two directions of future research are particularly attractive to us. First, as mentioned above, it seems appropriate to allow the agents to learn the values of actions across a number of trials, and this might easily be achieved by techniques from reinforcement learning. Doing so suggests a bridge between the kind of procedure we have developed here and multi-agent decision theoretic planning of the kind considered in [10]. Exploring such connections is the second direction we intend to take.

## Acknowledgements

This work was made possible by funding from NSF #REC-02-19347, NSF #IIS 0329037 and EU FP6-IST 002307 (ASPIC).

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