Artificial Intelligence: Utilization in Advanced Space Missions

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ABSTRACT

The present report summarizes the research activities of the 1980 NASA "Technology Feasibility" Summer Study. The focus was the development of potential NASA programs designed to optimize the utilization of advanced automation. Within the scope of the study was the definition of advanced space missions, identification of R&D requirements, and a feasibility assessment.

Mission definitions included an interactive satellite designed to continuously monitor the terrestrial environment; a permanently orbiting space manufacturing facility; a self-replicating lunar factory; and, a fully autonomous interstellar explorer.

Available AI systems were determined to encompass machine intelligence requirements to some degree. However, a major technological gap was noted, that is a machine capacity for effective hypothesis formation and testing.

INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1980 a NASA sponsored interdisciplinary group met at the University of Santa Clara to discuss the potential uses of advanced automation, specifically artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, in future space missions. The task of the study group was to 1) define mission objectives requiring advanced machine intelligence and 2) ascertain the feasibility of such missions in light of state of the art AI systems.

Four teams defined mission objectives in individual space utilization areas. A Terrestrial Applications group selected an earth orbiting, interactive satellite designed to continuously monitor the terrestrial environment and its resources. The Space Manufacturing team proposed a permanently orbiting space manufacturing facility which would utilize extra-terrestrial materials. A Self-Replication group organized a projected design for a lunar factory consisting of self-replicating and self-maintaining systems. Finally, a Space Exploration team, in which the author participated proposed a autonomous interstellar explorer, to be first demonstrated within the solar system on Saturn's largest moon, Titan.

Each of the mission objectives will be briefly described, and technology drivers will be emphasized. Common machine intelligence requirements for successful mission achievement will also be pointed out and considered in terms of currently available AI technology.

TERRESTRIAL APPLICATIONS

The Terrestrial Applications teams proposed an Intelligence Earth Sensory Information System (IESSIS). What would make such a system unique (as compared to other NASA applications satellites) is its capacity for goal oriented data gathering, based on requested observations and on previously collected information stored in the form of a self-modifying "world model". Also unique is its proposed user-oriented interface which would make it possible for the naive user to retrieve useful information from its data base. Such a system would require a flexible natural language capacity for (efficient) human-satellite communication. Finally, the system would require some moderate decision making and abstraction capacity for appropriate deployment of sensor functions and world model construction and updating, respectively. Interacting satellite functions are presented in Figure 1.

SPACE MANUFACTURING

The focus of the Space Manufacturing group was the development of a permanent general purpose, space manufacturing facility (SMF) in Low Earth
Mission functions may be summarized in two general categories 1) Mission Integrity, and 2) Model Construction. Both categories impose considerable pressure on current AI technology for development in overlapping areas of machine intelligence. These requirements represent research needs in domains of current concern in the AI community as well as research needs in directions which have not yet been systematically undertaken.

Successful missions at the level of mission integrity would require applications of theoretical AI systems in computer perception and pattern recognition for imaging and low level classification of data. This also presupposes the utilization of a variety of remote and near sensing equipment. On-board processing of collected data would serve to coordinate distributed systems and planning activity in terms of reasoning, action synthesis, and manipulation.

With respect to reasoning, automated decision making emerges as an essential subcomponent deserving the attention of applications research. Within this area development might proceed along the lines of current expert systems, with advancements in interacting simulation models and rule based logic. Some research concerns which depart from current trends were also recognized. These concerns are particularly outstanding in the areas of alternative computer logics and in self-construction of knowledge bases in learning expert systems.

With respect to action synthesis, or procedural sequencing, technology application needs have been identified for representing the relationship between predefined goal states and current state, and for reducing the discrepancy between the two through automated implementation of subgoals and tasks. Such a system implies the utilization of a sequential informational feedback loop. A more difficult problem lies in the domain of simultaneous coordination through anticipation, that is prediction of the most appropriately
ate action patterns through experience and implementation of such action before a large discrepancy occurs.

Complementary to the above capability is the capacity for automated construction of un-programmed goal states as the result of environmental feedback. These latter two technology drivers fall under the general heading of automated learning and are not part of the current research activities of the AI community.

The last sub-area of technology requirements within the category of mission integrity is manipulation. It is expected that autonomous systems be capable of self-maintenance and repair, as well as of sample collection for data analysis and utilization in decision processes. The former task presupposes some initial ability for self-diagnosis, while both tasks require a variety of effector capabilities for dealing with a wide range of situational demands, from gross to very refined manipulation. Here advances in robotics with respect to hand-eye coordination and force and proprioceptive feedback informational systems emerge as important.

One final technology driver inherent in the above discussion is the capability for automated planning and coordination of the distributed sub-component described. Figure 4 represents the relationship between the technology drivers outlined above.

The technology drivers identified for the model construction category of mission functions overlap to some degree with the drivers outlined in mission integrity. Automated intelligence planning is perceived as a general requirement in terms of defining scientific goals (both preprogrammed and self-generated) and for the definition of appropriate sub-goals. Advanced decision making is also an essential prerequisite for implementing scientific research and for conducting experiments. Decisions such as whether or not an experiment should be carried out, and where and when it should be conducted, could be accomplished, as for mission integrity, through developments in the application of current theoretical models of expert systems. Reduction of collected sensory information into informal categories is also a significant technology driver. Here a number of requirements emerge. The first is an ability to describe data at the simplest perceptual level. A higher order task is the addition of data descriptions to a knowledge lease for purposes of classification. Classification may be accomplished in terms of given categories of knowledge which requires some low level hypothesis generation and test. A more advanced capacity would be the capability for reorganizing old categories into new schemes or structures as a result of active acquisition of information. Underlying this form of classification activity is again the processes of hypothesis formation and testing. All of the above mentioned tasks require varying levels of applications research and development in order to transform them into freely realized capabilities.

Finally, a requirement exists within the area of communication, that is the reporting of acquired information to human users. This capability also requires reduction but in a different form. Here the emphasis is on an automated selection process, one in which an advanced decision system decides what acquired knowledge and what interesting hypotheses are appropriate to report. In addition to decision capabilities, this area underscores the need for development in Natural Language Interface. Figure 5 represents the relationship of technology requirements for the Scientific investigation aspect of Space Exploration missions.

SUMMARY

Potential NASA missions were defined and described in four areas. Machine intelligence requirements for mission success were summarized and included advanced remote sensing, and imaging techniques, pattern recognition, deductive and inductive logic for decision making, and learning (broadly defined as the capacity to modify output as the result of environmental or internal feedback). State of the Art AI systems were reviewed and determined to encompass all of these processes to some degree. A higher order intelligence requirement, identified as hypotheses formation, or the capacity to form universals associated with patterns present in the environment, presented itself however as a major technological gap between currently available techniques and advanced mission requirements. Other areas of technology feasibility assessment included "world model" based information systems, a natural language man/machine communication interface, and the development of sophisticated teleoperators and robots.
FIGURE 1: AN INTELLIGENT SATELLITE WITH EXPERIENCE, CAPABLE OF ADDITIONAL LEARNING AND DISCOVERY

SATellite SYSTEM processes data to produce:

1. ROUTINE OBSERVATIONS FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS
2. GOAL ORIENTED OBSERVATIONS IN USER FORM
3. DISCOVERY OF NEW EFFECTS BY ANOMALIES
FIGURE 2: A SIMPLE SELF-REPLICATING SYSTEM
FIGURE 3:

SELF-REPLICATING LUNAR FACTORY
FIGURE 4: SYSTEMS REQUIREMENTS FOR MAINTENANCE OF MISSION INTEGRITY

MISSION INTEGRITY

ONBOARD PROCESSING (ORBITER)

SENSORS
- MULTISPECTRAL SENSING
- IMAGING
  - PERCEPTION
  - PATTERN RECOGNITION

CONTROL OF DISTRIBUTED SYSTEMS

PLANNING

ACTION SYNTHESIS

REASONING

DECISION MAKING

- EXPERT SYSTEMS (E.G. GIVEN CERTAIN ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR EQUIPMENT DEPLOYMENT)

LEARNING

{1} LOGIC FUNCTIONS
{2} SELF-CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE-BASE THROUGH EXPERIENCE (SELF-LEARNING EXPERT SYSTEMS)

REQUIREMENTS:

1. REPRESENTATION OF GOAL STATE
2. REPRESENTATION OF PRESENT STATE
3. CAPACITY FOR NOTING DISCREPANCY
4. ACTUATORS FOR MODIFICATION
5. ANTICIPATION: PREDICTION BASED ON EXPERIENCE
6. CAPACITY FOR CONSTRUCTING UNPROGRAMMED GOAL STATES

MANIPULATIONS:

- SELF MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR
- SAMPLE COLLECTION

REQUIREMENTS:

1. HAND-EYE COORDINATION
2. FEEDBACK
- IMAGING
- PROPRIOCEPTION

OUTLINING AND IMPLEMENTATION AND SUBGOALS

PLANNING

- SELF-CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE-BASE THROUGH EXPERIENCE (SELF-LEARNING EXPERT SYSTEMS)
FIGURE 5: ROBOTIC FUNCTIONS IN WORLD MODEL CONSTRUCTION

SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

PLANNING
- ACTION SYNTHESIS
- PROGRAMMED GOALS
- SELF-DIRECTED

DECISION MAKING
- WHETHER OR NOT TO CONDUCT EXPERIMENTS
- WHERE, EXPERIMENTS SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT
- USE OF APPROPRIATE SENSORS AND EXPERIMENTAL APPARATUS

DATA PROCESSING
- REDUCTION OF SENSORY DATA INTO INFORMATION CATEGORIES

REQUIREMENTS:

1. DATA DESCRIPTION
2. ADDING NEW DESCRIPTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE BASE
3. CLASSIFICATION IN TERMS OF GIVEN CATEGORIES OF KNOWLEDGE
4. HYPOTHESIS GENERATION AND TESTING
5. REORGANIZATION OF OLD CATEGORIES INTO NEW ONES WHEN THE OLD ARE NO LONGER SUFFICIENT

COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS
- INFORMATION REDUCTION
- REPORT OF INTERESTING FINDINGS