LODFlow – a Workflow Management System for Linked Data Processing

Sandro Rautenberg
Midwestern State University (UNICENTRO)
Guarapuava, PR, Brazil
srautenberg@unicentro.br

Ivan Ermilov
AKSW/BIS
University of Leipzig
Leipzig, Germany
iermilov@informatik.uni-leipzig.de

Edgard Marx
AKSW/BIS
University of Leipzig
Leipzig, Germany
marx@informatik.uni-leipzig.de

Sören Auer
University of Bonn / Fraunhofer IAIS, Germany
auer@cs.uni-bonn.de

Axel-Cyrille N. Ngomo
AKSW/BIS
University of Leipzig
Leipzig, Germany
ngonga@informatik.uni-leipzig.de

ABSTRACT
The extraction and maintenance of Linked Data datasets is a cumbersome, time-consuming and resource-intensive activity. The cost for producing Linked Data can be reduced by a workflow management system, which describes plans to systematically support the lifecycle of RDF datasets. We present the LODFlow Linked Data Workflow Management System, which provides an environment for planning, executing, reusing, and documenting Linked Data workflows. The LODFlow approach is based on a comprehensive knowledge model for describing the workflows and a workflow execution engine supporting systematic workflow execution, reporting, and exception handling. The environment was evaluated in a large-scale real-world use case. As result, LODFlow supports Linked Data engineers to systematically plan, execute and assess Linked Data production and maintenance workflows, thus improving efficiency, ease-of-use, reproducibility, reusability and provenance.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H.4.1 [Office Automation]: Workflow management

General Terms
Linked Data, Workflow Management, Linked Data Workflow Management System.

1. INTRODUCTION
The creation and maintenance of Linked Data datasets is currently performed by extensive manual workflows or proprietary scripts, which are not portable, reusable, and difficult to maintain. For Linked Data extraction and publication projects such as LinkedGeoData or DBpedia, a long number of activities is required in order to produce a particular version of the datasets. These activities include, for example, downloading and loading dumps of the raw data, running various extraction tools, performing quality analysis and sanity checks, loading the resulting data into a SPARQL endpoint for publication, generating links to other datasets etc. Performing such Linked Data production and maintenance activities requires in-depth knowledge of scripting languages, various RDF serialization and publication technologies, tools such as SILK, LIMES for linking, and standards such as R2RML for relational data mapping. As a result, such processes are cumbersome, time-consuming, and error-prone, requiring substantial skills.

In other domains, planning, executing, and orchestrating activities is supported by workflow management techniques and systems. With the Business Process Execution Language (BPEL), for example, a comprehensive language for the planning, execution, and orchestration of Web Services exists. There is also a large number of products from vendors including SAP, IBM, and Apache supporting BPEL available on the market. In addition, for scientific workflows, a number of languages and tools supporting the workflow design and execution exist. Specialized scientific workflow systems, e.g. Discovery Net [3], Apache Taverna [8] and Kepler [11], provide a visual programming front-end enabling user to construct their applications as a visual graph by connecting nodes together, and tools have been developed to execute such workflows in a platform-independent manner [9].

In this article, we present a comprehensive approach for defining, planning, orchestrating, and executing Linked Data production and maintenance workflows, the Linked Open Data workFlow system (LODFlow). LODFlow is based on defining workflows comprising reusable activities and steps using a comprehensive ontological model, the Linked Data Workflow Project Ontology (LDWPO). We implemented a workflow execution environment, which takes workflows de-
fined in LDWPO ontology as an input, executes the various steps defined in the ontology, and generates detailed reports about the execution and potential errors in machine and human-readable ways. The LODFlow is able to launch a number of specialized tools such as DBpedia DIF or SparqlMap for extraction and mapping, SILK for linking, Luzzu for quality analysis. The LODFlow preserves provenance and adds comprehensive metadata, such as the version, invocation, and configuration of the tool execution in a concrete workflow instantiation.

The benefits of the LODFlow include:

1. **Explicitness** - the declarative description of Linked Data production and maintenance workflows makes the activities and processes explicit and easy to understand for Linked Data engineers in a high level of abstraction.

2. **Reusability** - the fine-grained definition of activities and workflow steps facilitates the reuse across workflows.

3. **Repeatability** - workflows can be easily executed over and over again, thus making them repeatable, facilitating testing and reliability.

4. **Efficiency** - the automatic workflow execution greatly reduces the required manual human intervention and thus improves efficiency.

5. **Ease of use** - the high-level declarative description of workflows and the generation of comprehensive execution reports simplifies the definition, execution and analysis of Linked Data production and maintenance workflows.

As a result, we hope that LODFlow and LDWPO will improve the creation and maintenance of Linked Data.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. We discuss **Linked Data Workflow Management** and its requirements in Section 2. In Section 3 we present the LODFlow. The evaluation of LODFlow is discussed in Section 4 based on a large-scale, real-world use case. In Section 5 we outline related work. Finally, in Section 6 we conclude the paper and outline directions for the future work.

### 2. LINKED DATA WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT

The creation and maintenance of Linked Data datasets require substantial efforts and resources. These efforts should be planned, follow best practices, and be performed in a systematic way. The concept of Linked Data Workflow Management (LDWFM) described in this section provides a formal grounding for the systematic rendering of Linked Data management processes.

The core concept of LDWFM is a **Workflow**. The Workflow concept originated in the business management domain, where it is defined by Workflow Management Coalition as “the automation of a business process, in whole or part, during which documents, information or tasks are passed from one participant to another for action, according to a set of procedural rules” [15]. Essentially, a Workflow orchestrates steps that transform resources in order to reach a desired result. Benefits of systematic workflow management include explicit description of activities, reproducibility, automatization and generally increased efficiency.

According to [2], Workflow Management is a technology supporting the reengineering of business and information processes. The main components of the Workflow Management are a workflow definition and technological infrastructure. The workflow definition describes the aspects for coordination, processing and controlling of the resource lifecycle. The technological infrastructure provides means for efficient design and implementation of workflows. To facilitate Workflow Management, the technological infrastructure should fulfill the following requirements:

- be component-oriented, thus enabling integration and interoperability among loosely-coupled system and service components;
- support the implementation of a workflow, facilitating resource provenance and reproducibility;
- ensure the correctness and reliability of applications in the presence of concurrency and failures;
- support the evolution, replacement, and addition of the workflow steps in a reengineering process.

In a Linked Data environment, the Workflow Management should cover the specification, execution, registration, and control of procedures for producing and maintaining Linked Data datasets. Therefore, in a Linked Data context, we can define the requirements for LDWFM as follows.

**Requirement 1. Linked Data Workflow Planning** – the capability for describing Linked Data datasets production strategy. Achieved by specifying a list of steps, where each step corresponds to a tool, tool configuration, as well as input and output datasets.

**Requirement 2. Linked Data Workflow Execution** – the capability for automating workflows, which involves a controlled environment for a plan execution. Achieved by running tools with tool configurations over input datasets.

**Requirement 3. Linked Data Workflow Reusability** – the capability to reuse the whole or a part of existing workflows.

**Requirement 4. Linked Data Workflow Documentation** – the capability to represent Linked Data Workflow plans and executions in human-readable formats.

**Requirement 5. Linked Data Workflow Repeatability** – the capability for reproducing the same result over time.
3. **LODFLOW - THE LINKED DATA WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

In this section, we describe our Linked Data Workflow Management System (LDWMS), dubbed LODFlow. We understand an LDWMS as an extension of Workflow Management Systems (WMS) in the business management domain. A WMS “defines, creates and manages the execution of workflows through the use of software, running on one or more workflow engines, which is able to interpret the process, interact with workflow participants and, where required, invoke the use of IT tools and applications” [15]. Extending this definition to the Linked Data context and taking the requirements described in Section 2 into consideration, we define LODFlow as a system, consisting of the following components:

1. **Linked Data Workflow Knowledge Model** defines a common vocabulary for modeling, analyzing, executing, and documenting the Linked Data Workflows.

2. **Knowledge Base** records the data about Linked Data Workflows, according to the Linked Data Workflow Knowledge Model.

3. **Linked Data Workflow Maintenance Component** is a subsystem used for registering the Linked Data Plans and Linked Data Executions in the knowledge base.

4. **Linked Data Workflow Execution Engine** is a subsystem used for retrieving a planned workflow from the knowledge base and executing the plan in order to produce or maintain the datasets.

5. **Linked Data Workflow Report Component** is a subsystem used for generating report documents for Linked Data Workflows.

LODFlow is designed in compliance with the Linked Data Lifecycle [2]. Therefore, it supports the orchestration of Linked Data tools for various aspects of the lifecycle [13]. In the following, we discuss LODFlow components in more detail.

3.1 **Linked Data Workflow Knowledge Model and Knowledge Base**

The Linked Data Workflow Knowledge Model is stored in the knowledge base adhering to the Linked Data Workflow Project Ontology (LDWPO). The LDWPO is an effort [1] that standardizes the method, plan, and execution concepts for operationalizing the production of Linked Data datasets. The LDWPO extends the Publishing Workflow Ontology (PWO) [6], the Open Provenance Model Vocabulary (OPMV) [12], and the PROV Ontology (PROV-O) [10] (depicted in Figure 2) in such a way, which allows: i) to model the creation of Linked Data datasets in the context of Linked Data Lifecycle; ii) to plan workflows for Linked Data datasets maintenance, thus enabling provenance extraction and reproducibility over time; and iii) to execute workflows in a (semi-)automatized way using Linked Data Stack technologies.

The main concept of LDWPO is LDWProject. In addition to annotation and metadata properties, an LDWProject is associated with one or several LDWorkflows. An LDWorkflow embodies the plan necessary to produce (upper part of Figure 2) RDF Datasets, encapsulating a sequence of LDWSteps. LDWStep is a concept that represents an atomic and reusable unit of an LDWorkflow. It describes the processing of a set of input Datasets, using a Tool in a specified version with a concrete Tool Configuration, in order to produce a set of output Datasets. An LDWStep can be: i) reused by different LDWorkflows within existing LDWProjects; and ii) executed automatically in a controlled environment on a user request. Those features are discussed in more detail in Section 3 where we present a real-world use case.

Once an LDWorkflow is formulated, it can be reused as a Plan in an Execution at any particular point of time. In LDWPO, the concept describing an instantiation for executing an LDWorkflow is LDWorkflowExecution. LDWorkflowExecution aggregates the sequence of LDWStepExecutions that corresponds to the sequence of LDWSteps of a particular LDWorkflow. During an LDWorkflowExecution run, the corresponding LDWStepExecutions can generate Messages such as D2R logging report and Statues such as successfully finished, unsuccessfully finished, aborted, etc. LDWorkflowExecution holds the information about a particular run of an LDWorkflow at a certain point in time, thus enabling provenance tracing and later verification (bottom part of Figure 2).

3.2 **Linked Data Workflow Maintenance Component**

As the Linked Data Workflow Maintenance Component, we adopted the NeOn Toolkit [1]. It is an open source multi-platform ontology engineering environment, which provides comprehensive support for the ontology engineering lifecycle.

---

**Figure 1:** Linked Data Lifecycle supported by LODFlow.

Sources:

- [http://aksw.org/Projects/LDWPO.html](http://aksw.org/Projects/LDWPO.html)
- [http://neon-toolkit.org/wiki/Main_Page.html](http://neon-toolkit.org/wiki/Main_Page.html)
NeOn facilitates the human-ontology interaction, which is useful for registering LDWProjects, LDWorkflows, LDWSteps, LDWorkflowExecutions, LDWStepExecutions in the knowledge base.

### 3.3 Linked Data Workflow Execution Engine

The **Linked Data Workflow Execution Engine** is the main component for producing Linked Data datasets. It is responsible for retrieving the LDWorkflow from the knowledge base, interpreting the LDWorkflow according to an established Knowledge Model, and managing the pipeline for producing the Linked Data datasets. For performing these tasks and interacting with the other components, we developed a tool for interpreting the resources from LDWPO and invoking other Tools. This tool is dubbed **LODFlow Engine**.

### 3.4 Linked Data Workflow Report Component

The **Linked Data Workflow Report Component** is a component for generating technical reports for LDWProjects, LDWorkflows, and LDWorkflowExecutions. We implemented this component with the **LODFlow Report Tool**. In its current version, LODFlow Report is able to generate reports for a whole LDWProject.

### 4. LODFLOW IN USE

In this section, we describe a comprehensive LODFlow use case for supporting the production and maintenance of a 5-star RDF dataset. The dataset is derived from the Qualis Index, a Brazilian scientometric scoring database for journals worldwide.

Qualis is created and used by the Brazilian Research Community. A typical entry in Qualis consists of ISSN, journal name, related knowledge field, and qualified journal score. As main uses, Qualis data is adopted in bibliometric and scientometric assessments, as well as for ranking post-graduate programs, research proposals, or individual research scholarships.

Although a web interface is publicly available for querying Qualis data, it has several limitations: i) the data is available only as 1 Star Data, i.e., in PDF format; ii) there is no version control, i.e., only the current version of the dataset is available; and iii) the data is not linked to other datasets, which limits its usefulness.

In order to overcome these limitations, we extracted the data of the last nine years from the web interface. The data is converted to a 5-star dataset and interlinked to the DBpedia knowledge base. These efforts are formally described in the QualisBrasil LDWProject (Figure 3), which enables to utilize a single LDWorkflow to convert Qualis data to the 5-star RDF dataset. The workflow can be executed repeatedly, for example, when there is a new version of the dataset published each year. In the following, we present how the QualisBrasil
**LDWFProject** is planned and executed using LODFlow.

**Figure 3:** Utilizing a single workflow to convert Qualis Index data in 2005, ..., and 2014 (LODFlow).

### 4.1 Linked Data Workflow Planning

In order to verify the LODFlow adherence to the Requirement 1, **Linked Data Workflow Planning**, we utilize the NeOn Toolkit and the LDWPO. These components constitute the Linked Data Workflow Maintenance Component and the Linked Data Workflow Knowledge Model, accordingly. Using the NeOn Toolkit and LDWPO, we instantiate the QualisBrasil LDWFProject and the Maintain QualisBrasil LDWorkflow and store them in the knowledge base. Additionally, for the LDWorkflow, we create five LDWSteps as follows:

1. **LDWStep a** includes the tasks for retrieving data from a legacy database and saving it in a CSV format;

2. **LDWStep b** performs the task of converting the CSV data to the Qualis RDFDataset using the RDB2RDF transformation tool Sparqlify;

3. **LDWStep c** loads the generated RDFDataset into a triplestore;

4. **LDWStep d** interlinks the resulting Qualis RDFDataset with DBpedia data using the link discovery tool LIMES and

5. **LDWStep e** loads the acquired links into a triplestore.

In the listing below, we show an excerpt from the whole workflow specification: the LDWorkflow description and LDWStep b as an illustrating example. The LDWStep is instantiated with the following properties: name (line 2); step description (line 3); a command, which defines a specific script or operation for an automatic step processing (line 4); the input and output Datasets (lines 5 and 6); the Tool with its Tool Configuration (lines 7 and 8); and the exception, a property used for registering actions to be taken upon an exception (line 9). Thus the provenance information (e.g. about the particular dataset version and tool configuration) is registered in the knowledge base adhering to the Knowledge Model. In order to define the production strategy for a Linked Data dataset, each LDWStep is declared to be a part of an LDWorkflow (lines 19 to 24). The production strategy can be reused for producing the Linked Data datasets by running the LDWStepExecutions (lines 10 to 13). Therefore, the LODFlow fulfills the Requirement 2.

4.2 **Linked Data Workflow Execution**

To fulfill the Requirement 2—**Linked Data Workflow Execution**, a planned LDWorkflow and its LDWSteps should be executed one or multiple times. In LODFlow, the **LODFlow Engine** is responsible for performing this operation.

In the following listing, we show that the **LODFlow Engine** can be used through its command-line interface to retrieve all information required for an LDWorkflowExecution (such as dataset locations, tool locations, parameters, and configurations). Therefore, the **LODFlow Engine** enables the processing of Linked Data datasets in an automated way. Additionally, for each LDWorkflowExecution, the engine aggregates the log and error messages of the tools, which can be visualized later as a management Report. By using the engine, LODFlow deals with the automation aspects of workflow executions, thus fulfilling the Requirement 2.
4.3 Linked Data Workflow Reusability

The Requirement 3 – Linked Data Workflow Reusability is fulfilled by the system if the whole or a part of existing LDWorkflows can be reused. To demonstrate LODFlow compliance with this requirement, we reused the Maintain QualisBrasil LDWorkflow over ten LDWorkflowExecutions. This resulted in ten corresponding QualisBrasil RDFDatasets, from 2005 to 2014.

In the Table 1, we represent annual LDWorkflowExecutions from 2005 to 2014 for the production of the QualisBrasil RDFDataset. We show the amount of processed data as well as processing time for each LDWStep. The experiment was carried out running Ubuntu 12.04.5 LTS inside a VirtualBox virtual machine with 4GB of RAM and one CPU core. The host machine was Intel Core i7-4702MQ processor, 64GB SSD, 8GB RAM. The experiment shows, that LODFlow fulfills the Requirement 3.

4.4 Linked Data Workflow Documentation

As result of an LDWorkflowExecution, LODFlow generates human-readable reports, which are useful for managing the LDWProjects. LODFlow is able to generate reports for the whole project.

To show that LODFlow fulfills the Requirement 4 – Linked Data Workflow Documentation, we use the LODFlow Report tool to generate a complete report for the QualisBrasil LDWProject. Such reports are essential for collecting statistics. For instance, Table 1 and Table 2 are compiled using the data from the generated report.

4.5 Linked Data Workflow Repeatability

To fulfill the Requirement 5 – Linked Data Workflow Repeatability, LODFlow should be able to reproduce same results over time. Using LODFlow Engine, we performed each annual LDWorkflowExecution five times. In the Table 2, we summarize the average processing time, number of triples for each annual LDWorkflowExecution, and previous results from Table 1. By analyzing the Table 2, we observe that the reproduction of QualisBrasil RDFDatasets using LODFlow is guaranteed. Specifically, we can see that the number of triples remains the same for all LDWorkflowExecution runs, while the processing time standard deviation is small.

5. RELATED WORK

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first work that specifically addresses Workflow Management for Linked Data. Workflow, Workflow Management, and Workflow Management System are concepts long established in the business management domain. For promoting business process automation, enterprises use Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) to manage the workflow executions. To provide business solutions, important players such as SAP, IBM, and Oracle, among others adopt Business Process Execution Language (BPEL) in their technologies as the language to describe web services for workflow executions. In the Semantic Web area, there were quite a number of approaches (e.g., OWL-S, SA-WSDL) developed to enable semantic descriptions of Web Services and Service Oriented Architectures thus facilitating business process and workflow planning and execution.

In another domain, the scientific community coined the term Scientific Workflow as “the automated process that combines data and processes in a structured set of steps to implement computational solutions to a scientific problem”. To facilitate workflows for data and control sequences, Scientific Workflow Management Systems such as Apache Taverna and Kepler were developed. These management systems employ ontologies for modeling the workflows, such as Scufl2 and Kepler ontologies, respectively. At the time of writing, the Scufl2 ontology is not available. Kepler ontologies are the part of the Kepler framework and can be found in the source code. Kepler ontologies do not include human-readable descriptions for concepts, as we show in the following listing. Concept descriptions are required to facilitate the reuse of ontology resources. In our vision, the absence of such descriptions limits the adoption of Kepler ontologies. To leverage the limitations of Scufl2 and Kepler ontologies, we designed LDWPO to support LODFlow.

Table 2: Comparing the reproducibility of Maintaining QualisBrasil LDWorkflowExecutions.
As shown in the use case, LODFlow can tackle one of the most pressing and challenging problems of Linked Data management – the automatization of processing workflows, which are currently cumbersome, resource demanding and inefficient. The benefits of explicitness, reusability, repeatability, efficiency, and ease of use are observed when LODFlow is applied. In particular, with LODFlow is possible to create comprehensive workflow descriptions, preserving provenance information for reproducing the LDWorkflows of an LDWProject.

Moreover, technologically, it is possible to mediate the use of tools, enabling the automatized execution of LDWorkflows in the context of the Linked Data Stack and Linked Data Lifecycle.

As future work, we aim to improve LODFlow, as well as adopt it in further use cases. For instance, as NeOn Toolkit interface cannot be customized, in the next effort, we foresee the development of another Linked Data Workflow Maintenance Component, with an easy-to-use interface for Linked Data engineers. At the moment of writing LODFlow is limited to the processing of sequential workflows. We aim to improve its Linked Data Knowledge Model for supporting branching. Moreover, we plan to incorporate LODFlow into the Linked Data Stack, providing a full-integrated support for the LDWProject modeling and management.

### Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the Brazilian Federal Agency for the Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES/Brazil), under the program Sciences without Borders (Process number - 18228/12-7).

### REFERENCES


