

Process Mining

Wil M.P. van der Aalst

Process Mining

Discovery, Conformance and
Enhancement of Business Processes

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*Thanks to Karin for understanding that
science is more rewarding than running
errands*

*Thanks to all people that contributed to
ProM; the fruits of their efforts demonstrate
that sharing a common goal is more
meaningful than “cashing in the next
publon”¹*

*In remembrance of Gerry Straatman-Beelen
(1932–2010)*

¹publon = smallest publishable unit

Preface

Process mining provides a new means to improve processes in a variety of application domains. There are two main drivers for this new technology. On the one hand, more and more events are being recorded thus providing detailed information about the history of processes. Despite the omnipresence of event data, most organizations diagnose problems based on fiction rather than facts. On the other hand, vendors of Business Process Management (BPM) and Business Intelligence (BI) software have been promising miracles. Although BPM and BI technologies received lots of attention, they did not live up to the expectations raised by academics, consultants, and software vendors.

Process mining is an emerging discipline providing comprehensive sets of tools to provide fact-based insights and to support process improvements. This new discipline builds on process model-driven approaches and data mining. However, process mining is much more than an amalgamation of existing approaches. For example, existing data mining techniques are too data-centric to provide a comprehensive understanding of the end-to-end processes in an organization. BI tools focus on simple dashboards and reporting rather than clear-cut business process insights. BPM suites heavily rely on experts modeling idealized to-be processes and do not help the stakeholders to understand the as-is processes.

This book presents a range of process mining techniques that help organizations to uncover their actual business processes. Process mining is not limited to process discovery. By tightly coupling event data and process models, it is possible to check conformance, detect deviations, predict delays, support decision making, and recommend process redesigns. Process mining breathes life into otherwise static process models and puts today's massive data volumes in a process context. Hence, managements trends related to process improvement (e.g., Six Sigma, TQM, CPI, and CPM) and compliance (SOX, BAM, etc.) can benefit from process mining.

Process mining, as described in this book, emerged in the last decade [102, 106]. However, the roots date back about half a century. For example, Anil Nerode presented an approach to synthesize finite-state machines from example traces in 1958 [71], Carl Adam Petri introduced the first modeling language adequately capturing concurrency in 1962 [73], and Mark Gold was the first to systematically explore

different notions of learnability in 1967 [45]. When data mining started to flourish in the nineties, little attention was given to processes. Moreover, only recently event logs have become omnipresent thus enabling end-to-end process discovery. Since the first survey on process mining in 2003 [102], progress has been spectacular. Process mining techniques have become mature and supported by various tools. Moreover, whereas initially the primary focus was on process discovery, the process mining spectrum has broadened markedly. For instance, conformance checking, multi-perspective process mining, and operational support have become integral parts of ProM, one of the leading process mining tools.

This is the first book on process mining. Therefore, the intended audience is quite broad. The book provides a comprehensive overview of the state-of-the-art in process mining. It is intended as an introduction to the topic for practitioners, students, and academics. On the one hand, the book is accessible for people that are new to the topic. On the other hand, the book does not avoid explaining important concepts on a rigorous manner. The book aims to be self-contained while covering the entire process mining spectrum from process discovery to operational support. Therefore, it also serves as a reference handbook for people dealing with BPM or BI on a day-to-day basis.

The reader can immediately put process mining into practice due to the applicability of the techniques, the availability of (open-source) process mining software, and the abundance of event data in today's information systems. I sincerely hope that you enjoy reading this book and start using some of the amazing process mining techniques available today.

Schleiden, Germany
December 2010

Wil M.P. van der Aalst

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Many individuals and organizations contributed to the techniques and tools described in this book. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge their support, efforts, and contributions.

All of this started in 1999 with a research project named “Process Design by Discovery: Harvesting Workflow Knowledge from Ad-hoc Executions” initiated by Ton Weijters and myself. At that time, I was still working as a visiting professor at the University of Colorado in Boulder. However, the research school BETA had encouraged me to start collaborating with existing staff in my new research group at TU/e (Eindhoven University of Technology). After talking to Ton it was clear that we could benefit from combining his knowledge of machine learning with my knowledge of workflow management and Petri nets. Process mining (at that time we called it workflow mining) was the obvious topic for which we could combine our expertise. This was the start of a very successful collaboration. Thanks Ton!

Since then many PhD students have been working on the topic: Laura Maruster, Ana Karla Alves de Medeiros, Boudewijn van Dongen, Minseok Song, Christian Günther, Anne Rozinat, Carmen Bratosin, R.P. Jagadeesh Chandra (JC) Bose, Ronny Mans, Maja Pesic, Joyce Nakatumba, Helen Schonenberg, Arya Adriansyah, and Joos Buijs. I’m extremely grateful for their efforts.

Ana Karla Alves de Medeiros was the first PhD student to work on the topic under my supervision (genetic process mining). She did a wonderful job; her thesis on genetic process mining was awarded with the prestigious ASML 2007 Promotion Prize and was selected as the best thesis by the KNAW research school BETA. Also Boudewijn van Dongen has been involved in the development of ProM right from the start. As a Master student he already developed the process mining tool EMiT, i.e., the predecessor of ProM. He turned out to be a brilliant PhD student and developed a variety of process mining techniques. Eric Verbeek did a PhD on workflow verification, but over time he got more and more involved in process mining research and the development of ProM. Many people underestimate the importance of a scientific programmer like Eric. Tool development and continuity are essential for scientific progress! Boudewijn and Eric have been the driving force behind

ProM and their contributions have been crucial for process mining research at TU/e. Moreover, they are always willing to help others. Thanks guys!

Christian Günther and Anne Rozinat joined the team in 2005. Their contributions have been of crucial importance for extending the scope of process mining and lifting the ambition level. Christian managed to make ProM look beautiful while significantly improving its performance. Moreover, his Fuzzy miner facilitated dealing with Spaghetti processes. Anne managed to widen the process mining spectrum by adding conformance checking and multi-perspective process mining to ProM. It is great that they succeeded in founding a process mining company (Fluxicon). Another person crucial for the development of ProM is Peter van den Brand. He set up the initial framework and played an important role in the development of the architecture of ProM 6. Based on his experiences with ProM, he set up a process mining company (Futura Process Intelligence). It is great to work with people like Peter, Christian, and Anne; they are essential for turning research results into commercial products. I sincerely hope that Fluxicon and Futura Process Intelligence continue to be successful (not only because of prospective sports cars ...).

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More than 95% of book was written in beautiful Schleiden. Despite my sabbatical, there were many other tasks competing for attention. Thanks to my weekly visits to Schleiden (without Internet access!), it was possible to write this book in a three month period. The excellent coffee of Serafin helped when proofreading the individual chapters, the scenery did the rest.

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Contents

- 1 Introduction 1**
 - 1.1 Data Explosion 1
 - 1.2 Limitations of Modeling 3
 - 1.3 Process Mining 7
 - 1.4 Analyzing an Example Log 11
 - 1.5 Play-in, Play-out, and Replay 18
 - 1.6 Trends 21
 - 1.7 Outlook 23
- Part I Preliminaries**
- 2 Process Modeling and Analysis 29**
 - 2.1 The Art of Modeling 29
 - 2.2 Process Models 31
 - 2.2.1 Transition Systems 31
 - 2.2.2 Petri Nets 33
 - 2.2.3 Workflow Nets 38
 - 2.2.4 YAWL 40
 - 2.2.5 Business Process Modeling Notation (BPMN) 42
 - 2.2.6 Event-Driven Process Chains (EPCs) 44
 - 2.2.7 Causal Nets 46
 - 2.3 Model-Based Process Analysis 52
 - 2.3.1 Verification 52
 - 2.3.2 Performance Analysis 55
 - 2.3.3 Limitations of Model-Based Analysis 57
- 3 Data Mining 59**
 - 3.1 Classification of Data Mining Techniques 59
 - 3.1.1 Data Sets: Instances and Variables 60
 - 3.1.2 Supervised Learning: Classification and Regression 62
 - 3.1.3 Unsupervised Learning: Clustering and Pattern Discovery 64
 - 3.2 Decision Tree Learning 64

3.3	<i>k</i> -Means Clustering	70
3.4	Association Rule Learning	74
3.5	Sequence and Episode Mining	77
3.5.1	Sequence Mining	77
3.5.2	Episode Mining	78
3.5.3	Other Approaches	81
3.6	Quality of Resulting Models	82
3.6.1	Measuring the Performance of a Classifier	83
3.6.2	Cross-Validation	85
3.6.3	Occam's Razor	88

Part II From Event Logs to Process Models

4	Getting the Data	95
4.1	Data Sources	95
4.2	Event Logs	98
4.3	XES	107
4.4	Flattening Reality into Event Logs	114
5	Process Discovery: An Introduction	125
5.1	Problem Statement	125
5.2	A Simple Algorithm for Process Discovery	129
5.2.1	Basic Idea	129
5.2.2	Algorithm	133
5.2.3	Limitations of the α -Algorithm	136
5.2.4	Taking the Transactional Life-Cycle into Account	139
5.3	Rediscovering Process Models	140
5.4	Challenges	144
5.4.1	Representational Bias	145
5.4.2	Noise and Incompleteness	147
5.4.3	Four Competing Quality Criteria	150
5.4.4	Taking the Right 2-D Slice of a 3-D Reality	153
6	Advanced Process Discovery Techniques	157
6.1	Overview	157
6.1.1	Characteristic 1: Representational Bias	159
6.1.2	Characteristic 2: Ability to Deal with Noise	160
6.1.3	Characteristic 3: Completeness Notion Assumed	161
6.1.4	Characteristic 4: Approach Used	161
6.2	Heuristic Mining	163
6.2.1	Causal Nets Revisited	163
6.2.2	Learning the Dependency Graph	164
6.2.3	Learning Splits and Joins	167
6.3	Genetic Process Mining	169
6.4	Region-Based Mining	173
6.4.1	Learning Transition Systems	174
6.4.2	Process Discovery Using State-Based Regions	177

6.4.3	Process Discovery Using Language-Based Regions	180
6.5	Historical Perspective	183

Part III Beyond Process Discovery

7	Conformance Checking	191
7.1	Business Alignment and Auditing	191
7.2	Token Replay	194
7.3	Comparing Footprints	205
7.4	Other Applications of Conformance Checking	209
7.4.1	Repairing Models	209
7.4.2	Evaluating Process Discovery Algorithms	210
7.4.3	Connecting Event Log and Process Model	211
8	Mining Additional Perspectives	215
8.1	Perspectives	215
8.2	Attributes: A Helicopter View	217
8.3	Organizational Mining	221
8.3.1	Social Network Analysis	222
8.3.2	Discovering Organizational Structures	227
8.3.3	Analyzing Resource Behavior	228
8.4	Time and Probabilities	230
8.5	Decision Mining	234
8.6	Bringing It All Together	237
9	Operational Support	241
9.1	Refined Process Mining Framework	241
9.1.1	Cartography	243
9.1.2	Auditing	244
9.1.3	Navigation	245
9.2	Online Process Mining	245
9.3	Detect	247
9.4	Predict	251
9.5	Recommend	256
9.6	Process Mining Spectrum	258

Part IV Putting Process Mining to Work

10	Tool Support	261
10.1	Business Intelligence?	261
10.2	ProM	265
10.3	Other Process Mining Tools	270
10.4	Outlook	274
11	Analyzing “Lasagna Processes”	277
11.1	Characterization of “Lasagna Processes”	277
11.2	Use Cases	281
11.3	Approach	282

11.3.1	Stage 0: Plan and Justify	283
11.3.2	Stage 1: Extract	285
11.3.3	Stage 2: Create Control-Flow Model and Connect Event Log	285
11.3.4	Stage 3: Create Integrated Process Model	286
11.3.5	Stage 4: Operational Support	286
11.4	Applications	286
11.4.1	Process Mining Opportunities per Functional Area	287
11.4.2	Process Mining Opportunities per Sector	288
11.4.3	Two Lasagna Processes	292
12	Analyzing “Spaghetti Processes”	301
12.1	Characterization of “Spaghetti Processes”	301
12.2	Approach	305
12.3	Applications	309
12.3.1	Process Mining Opportunities for Spaghetti Processes	309
12.3.2	Examples of Spaghetti Processes	310
 Part V Reflection		
13	Cartography and Navigation	321
13.1	Business Process Maps	321
13.1.1	Map Quality	322
13.1.2	Aggregation and Abstraction	322
13.1.3	Seamless Zoom	324
13.1.4	Size, Color, and Layout	328
13.1.5	Customization	330
13.2	Process Mining: TomTom for Business Processes?	331
13.2.1	Projecting Dynamic Information on Business Process Maps	331
13.2.2	Arrival Time Prediction	333
13.2.3	Guidance Rather than Control	334
14	Epilogue	337
14.1	Process Mining: A Bridge Between Data Mining and Business Process Management	337
14.2	Challenges	339
14.3	Start Today!	340
References		341
Index		349