

A Declarative Recommender System for Cloud Infrastructure Services Selection

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Abstract. The cloud infrastructure services landscape advances steadily leaving users in the agony of choice. Therefore, we present CloudRecommender, a new declarative approach for selecting Cloud-based infrastructure services. CloudRecommender automates the mapping of users' specified application requirements to cloud service configurations. We formally capture cloud service configurations in ontology and provide its implementation in a structured data model which can be manipulated through both regular expressions and SQL. By exploiting the power of a visual programming language (widgets), CloudRecommender further enables simplified and intuitive cloud service selection. We describe the design and a prototype implementation of CloudRecommender, and demonstrate its effectiveness and scalability through a service configuration selection experiment on most of today's prominent cloud providers including Amazon, Azure, and GoGrid.

1. Introduction

Cloud computing [1,2,3] assembles large networks of virtualized services: infrastructure services (e.g., compute, storage, network, etc.) and software services (e.g., databases, message queuing systems, monitoring systems, load-balancers, etc.). It embraces an elastic paradigm in which applications establish on-demand interactions with services to satisfy required Quality of Service (QoS) including cost, response time and throughput. However, selecting and composing the right services meeting application requirements is a challenging problem.

Consider an example of a medium scale enterprise that would like to move its enterprise applications to cloud. There are multiple providers in the current cloud landscape that offer infrastructure services in multiple heterogeneous configurations. Examples include, Amazon [10], Microsoft Azure [12], GoGrid [13], Rackspace, BitCloud, and Ninefold, among many others. With multiple and heterogeneous options for infrastructure services, enterprises are facing a complex task when trying to select and compose a single service type or a combination of service types. *Here we are concerned with simplifying the selection and comparison of a set of infrastructure service offerings for hosting the enterprise applications and corresponding dataset, while meeting multiple criteria, such as specific configuration and cost, emanating from the enterprise's QoS needs.* This is a challenging problem for the enterprise and needs to be addressed.

Existing approaches in helping a user to compare and select infrastructure services in cloud computing involve manually reading the provider documentation for finding out which services are most suitable for hosting an application. This problem is further aggravated by the use of non-standardized naming terminologies used by cloud providers. For example, Amazon refers to compute services as EC2 Compute Unit, while GoGrid refers to the same as Cloud Servers. Furthermore, cloud providers typically publish their service description, pricing policies and Service-Level-Agreement (SLA) rules on their websites in various formats. The relevant information may be updated without prior notice to the users. Hence, it is not an easy task to manually obtain service configurations from cloud providers' websites and documentations (which are the only sources of information).

In order to address the aforementioned problems, we present a semi-automated, extensible, and simplified approach and system for cloud service selection, called CloudRecommender. We identify and formalize the domain knowledge of multiple configurations of infrastructure services. The core idea in CloudRecommender is to formally capture the domain knowledge of services using a declarative logic-based language, and then implement it in a recommender service on top of a relational data model. Execution procedures in CloudRecommender are transactional and apply well-defined SQL semantics for querying, inserting, and deleting infrastructure services' configurations. The CloudRecommender system proposed in this paper leverages the Web-based widget programming technique that transforms drag and drop operations to low-level SQL transactions. The contributions of this paper can be summarized as follows:

- A unified and formalized domain model capable of fully describing infrastructure services in cloud computing. The model is based and has been successfully validated against the most commonly available infrastructure services including Amazon, Microsoft Azure, GoGrid, etc.
- An implementation of a design support system (CloudRecommender) for the selection of infrastructure cloud service configurations using transactional SQL semantics, procedures and views. The benefits to users of CloudRecommender include, for example, the ability to estimate costs, compute cost savings across multiple providers with possible tradeoffs and aid in the selection of cloud services.
- A user-friendly service interface based on widgets that maps user requirements based on form inputs to available infrastructure services, express configuration selection criteria and view the results.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. A discussion on our formal domain model for cloud infrastructure services and our cloud selection approach using CloudRecommender is presented in Section 2. Due to space limitation, Section 3 only included a simple experimental evaluation of the proposed approach, but more details can be found at [20]. A review of related work is provided in Section 4 before we conclude in Section 5.

2. A System for Cloud Service Selection

We propose an approach and system for cloud service configuration selection, CloudRecommender. The system includes a repository of available infrastructure services from different providers including compute, storage and network services, as shown in figure 1(a). Users can communicate with the system via a Web-based widget interface. The CloudRecommender system architecture consists of three layers: the configuration management layer, the application logic layer and the User interface (widget) layer. Details of each layer will be explained in the following subsections.

Fig 1(b) shows the deployment structure of the CloudRecommender system. For persistence we have chosen MySQL for its agility and popularity, but any other relational database can be plugged in. Furthermore, many APIs provided by cloud providers (such as Amazon) and open source cloud management frameworks (e.g. jclouds) are written in Java. Thus, Java is chosen as the preferred language to implement the application logic layer to ease future integration with external libraries. The widget layer is implemented using a number of JavaScript frameworks including jQuery, ExtJS and YUI. CloudRecommender also exposes RESTful (REpresentational State Transfer) APIs (application programming interface) that help external applications to programmatically compose infrastructure cloud services based on the CloudRecommender selection process.

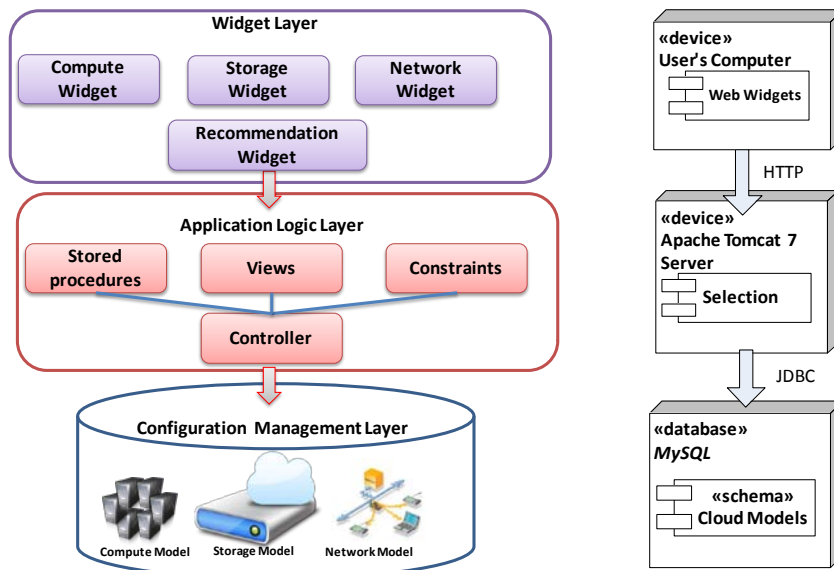


Figure 1. (a) System architecture.

(b) Deployment structure.

2.1 Configuration Management Layer

The configuration layer maintains the basic cloud domain model related to compute, storage, and network services. We defined a Cloud Computing Ontology to facilitate the discovery of services based on their functionality and QoS parameters. The ontology is defined in the Web Ontology Language (OWL) [19] and can be found at: w3c.org.au/cocoon.owl. All common metadata fields in the ontology like Organisation, Author, First Name etc. are referenced through standard Web Ontologies (i.e. FOAF and Dublin Core). To describe specific aspects of cloud computing, established domain classifications have been used as a guiding reference [16, 18]. The resulting ontology consists of two parts, the Cloud Service Ontology and the Cloud QoS Ontology.

Cloud Service Ontology: A *CloudService* (maps to *cloud_service_types* in the relational model in Figure 2) can be of one of the three types, Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS), Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) or Software-as-a-Service (SaaS). For the CloudRecommender system the cloud infrastructure layer (IaaS), providing concepts and relations that are fundamental to the other higher-level layers, is the one currently relevant. Cloud services in the IaaS layer can be categorised into: Compute, Network, and Storage services (see Table I).

Cloud QoS ontology: At the core of the Cloud QoS ontology is a taxonomy of *ConfigurationParameters* and *Metric (Values)*, i.e. two trees formed using the RDF(s) *subClassOf* relation where an *Configuration Parameters*, for example, *PriceStorage*, *PriceCompute*, *PriceDataTransferIn (Out)* etc. and a *Metric*, for example, *ProbabilityOfFailureOnDemand*, *TransactionalThroughput*, are used in combination to define Cloud QoS capabilities (e.g. features, performance, costs, etc.). The resulting ontology is a (complex) directed graph where, for example, the Property *hasMetric* (and its inverse *isMetricOf*) is the basic link between the *ConfigurationParameters* and *Metric* trees. For the metrics part of the QoS, we reference existing QoS ontologies [17] whereas for the *ConfigurationParameters* concepts the ontology defines its independent taxonomy, but refers to external ontologies for existing definitions. Each configuration parameter (see Table I) has a name, and a value (qualitative or quantitative). The type of configuration determines the nature of service by means of setting a minimum, maximum, or capacity limit, or meeting certain value. For example, “RAM capacity” configuration parameter of a compute service can be set to the value 2GB

For our CloudRecommender service we implemented the Cloud Service Ontology in a relational model and the Cloud QoS ontology as configuration information as structured data (entities) (as shown in Figure 2), which can be queried using a SQL-based declarative language. We collected service configuration information from a number of public cloud providers (e.g., Windows Azure, Amazon, GoGrid, RackSpace, Nirvanix, Ninefold, SoftLayer, AT and T Synaptic, Cloud Central, etc.) to demonstrate the generic nature of the domain model with respect to capturing heterogeneous configuration (see Table II) information of infrastructure services. Our model is generic enough to capture all the existing cloud-based infrastructure services. The proposed model is flexible and extensible enough to accommodate new services with minimal changes to our implementation. In future work, we also intend to extend the model with capability to store PaaS and SaaS configurations.

Relationships between concepts representing services are carefully considered and normalized to avoid update anomalies. Services from various providers often have very different configurations and pricing models. Distinct and ambiguous terminologies are often used to describe similar configurations.

Regardless of how providers name their services, we categorize infrastructure services based on their basic functionality. Unit conversions were performed during instantiation of concepts. For example, an Amazon EC2 Micro Instance has 613 MB of memory which is converted to approximately 0.599 GB. Another example is the CPU clock speed. Amazon refers to it as “ECUs”. From their documentation [10]: “One EC2 Compute Unit provides the equivalent COMPUTE capacity of a 1.0-1.2 GHz 2007 Opteron or 2007 Xeon processor. This is also the equivalent to an early-2006 1.7 GHz Xeon processor referenced in our original documentation”. In 2007, AMD and Intel released both dual-core and quad-core models of the Opteron and Xeon chips, respectively. So it is obviously not clear what an Amazon EC2 Compute Unit compares to. To eliminate this ambiguity, we obtained the compute service clock speed by trying out the actual instance under Linux OS and run “more /proc/cpuinfo” on it. We’d like to get those kinds of information automatically in the future through APIs (if available). Table II depicts the configuration ambiguities of compute and storage services of different providers.

Table I. Infrastructure service types and their configurations.

Service	Configurations Parameters	Range/possible values
Compute	cores	≥ 1
	speed	> 0
	RAM capacity	> 0
	local storage capacity	≥ 0
	physical location of cloud	North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia
	cost per hour of usage per month	≥ 0
	per period cost	≥ 0
	period length in days	> 0
	overage cost	≥ 0
	plan type	Pay As You Go, Prepaid
Storage	network storage size min and max range	≥ 0
	cost per GB per Month	≥ 0
	location of host cloud	North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia
	type of requests	put, copy, post, list, get, delete, search
	cost of request	≥ 0
	plan type	Pay As You Go, Reduced Redundancy
Storage	Reduced Redundancy storage cost	≥ 0
Network	data transfer in cost, data transfer out cost	≥ 0

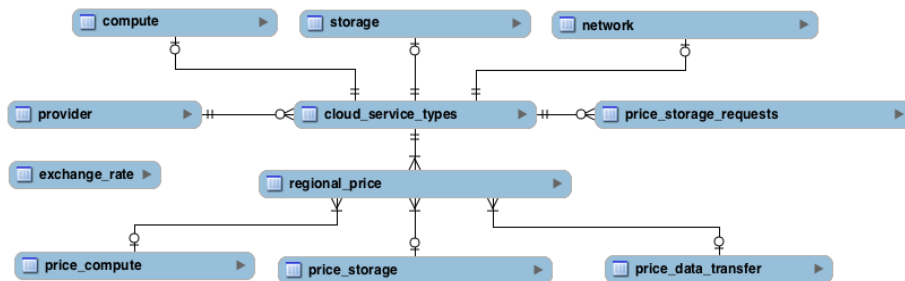


Figure 2. Conceptual data model representing infrastructure service entities and their relationships.

Table II. Depiction of configuration heterogeneities in compute and storage services across providers. (Red) Blank cells in the table mean it is not available. Some providers offer their services under a different pricing scheme than pay-as-you-go. In Table II we refer to these schemes as other plans.

Provider	Compute		Storage	Plans other than Pay As You Go		Trail
	Terminology	Unit		Compute	Storage	
Windows Azure	Virtual Server	/hr	Azure Storage	Commitment Plan, Member Offer		90 day
Amazon	EC2 Instance	/hr	S3	Reserved, Spot, Marketplace	Reduced Redundency	1 year
GoGrid	Cloud Servers	/RAM hr	Cloud Storage	Prepaid (1, 6 or 12 month)		Various from time to time, current value: 100 AUD
RackSpace	Cloud Servers	/RAM hr	Cloud Files	Managed Cloud		
Nirvanix			CSN			
Ninefold	Virtual Server	/hr	Cloud Storage	SimplePlan		50 AUD
SoftLayer	Cloud Servers	/hr	Object Storage	Monthly		1 month
AT and T Synaptic	Compute as a Service	vCPU per hour + /RAM hr	Storage as a Service	Committed Allocation Pool		
Cloudcentral	Cloud Servers	/hr				

Another example of disparity between different Cloud providers is the way in which “on Demand instances” are priced. GoGrid’s plan, for example, although having a similar concept to Amazon’s On Demand and Reserved Instance, gives very little importance to what type or how many of compute services a user is deploying. GoGrid charges users based on what they call RAM hours – 1 GB RAM compute service deployed for 1 hour consumes 1 RAM Hour. A 2 GB RAM compute service deployed for 1 hour consumes 2 RAM Hour. It is worthwhile mentioning that only Azure clearly states that one month is considered to have 31 days. This is important as the key advantage of the fine grained pay-as-you-go price model which, for example, should charge a user the same when they use 2GB for half a month or 1 GB for a whole month. Other vendors merely give a GB-month price without clarifying how short term usage is handled. It is neither reflected in their usage calculator. We chose 31 days as default value in calculation.

Table III. Depiction of configuration heterogeneities in request types across storage services.

Provider	Storage	Requests		
		Upload	Download	Other
Windows Azure	Azure Storage	storage transactions	storage transactions	
Amazon	S3	PUT, COPY, POST, or LIST Requests	GET and all other Requests	Delete
GoGrid	Cloud Storage	Transfer protocols such as SCP, SAMBA/CIFS, and RSYNC		
RackSpace	Cloud Files	PUT, POST, LIST Requests	HEAD, GET, DELETE Requests	
Nirvanix	CSN		Search	
Ninefold	Cloud Storage	GET, PUT, POST, COPY, LIST and all other transactions		
SoftLayer	Object Storage	Not Specified/Unknow		
AT and T Synaptic	Storage as a Service	Not Specified/Unknow		

Regarding storage services, providers charge for every operation that an application program or user undertakes. These operations are effected on storage

services via RESTful or SOAP API. Cloud providers refer to the same set of operations with different names, for example Azure refers to storage service operations as transactions. Nevertheless, the operations are categorized into upload and download categories as shown in Table III. Red means an access fee is charged, green means the service is free, and yellow means it is not specified and usually can be treated as green/free of charge. To facilitate our calculation of similar and equivalent requests across multiple providers, we analyzed and pre-processed the price data, recorded it in our domain model and used a homogenized value in the repository (configuration management layer). For example, Windows Azure Storage charges a flat price per transaction. It is considered as a transaction whenever there is a “touch” operation (a Create, Read, Update, Delete (CRUD) operation over the RESTful service interface) on any component (Blobs, Tables or Queues) of Windows Azure Storage.

For providers that offer different regional prices, we store the location information in the price table. If multiple regions have the same price, we choose to combine them. In our current implementation, any changes to existing configurations (such as updating memory size, storage provision etc.) of services can be done by executing customized update SQL queries. We also use customized crawlers to update provider information’s periodically. However, in future work we will provide a RESTful interface and widget which can be used for automatic configuration updates.

2.2 Application Logic Layer

The request for service selection in CloudRecommender is expressed as SQL queries. The selection process supports an application logic that builds upon the following declarative constructs: criterion, views and stored procedures. The CloudRecommender builds upon SQL queries which are executed on top of the relational data model.

Criterion: Criterion is a quantitative or qualitative bound (minimum, maximum, equal) on the configuration parameters provided by a service. Cloud services’ configuration parameters and their range/values listed in Table I form the basis for expressing selection goal and criteria (e.g., select a cheapest (goal) compute service where (criterion) $0 < \text{Ram} \leq 20$, $0 \leq \text{local storage} \leq 2040$, number of hours to be used per month = 244). An example query is shown below in Fig 3:

```

27 CREATE VIEW `compute_service_price` AS
28 SELECT * FROM `compute_service_price`
29 left join compute_choice_criterias
30 on `Memory(GB)` >= compute_choice_criterias.ram_low
31 and `Memory(GB)` <= compute_choice_criterias.ram_high
32 and `Local Storage(GB)` >= compute_choice_criterias.local_storage_low
33 and `Local Storage(GB)` <= compute_choice_criterias.local_storage_high
34 where if(all_provider_considered, 1, find_in_set(`Provider Name`,provider_LIST))

```

Figure 3: Example query in procedure.

Procedures: We have implemented a number of customized procedures that automate the service selection process. A number of routines are prepared to process a user service selection request. List of inputs are stored in a temporary table to be

passed into the procedures. As such, there is no limit to the size of the input list. Final results are also stored in temporary tables, which are automatically cleared after the expiration of user session.

Table IV: CloudRecommender Model Parameters.

Notations	Meaning
$P = \{p_1, \dots, p_p\}$	Set of p service providers
$R_{p_i} = \{r_{p_i,1}, \dots, r_{p_i,n}\}$	Regions of provider p_i
$CS = \{cs_1, \dots, cs_n\}$	Set of n compute services
$SS = \{ss_1, \dots, ss_m\}$	Set of m storage services
$TS = \{ts_1, \dots, ts_o\}$	Set of o network (data transfer) services
$t_{s_i,j}$	j-th price tier for a cloud service $s_i \in CS \cup SS \cup TS$
$CR_{s_i} = \{cr_{s_i,1}, \dots, cr_{s_i,n}\}$	Set of criteria related to service $s_i \in CS \cup SS \cup TS$
Query	A service selection query
N	Number of rows in a relational entity
M	Number of column in a relational entity

2.3 Computational Complexity of Service Selection Logic

We will discuss the computational complexity of our service selection logic next. For p providers each with cs_i (compute) + ss_i (storage) + ts_i (network) services, the selection logic has to consider $\sum_{i=1}^p cs_i \times ss_i \times ts_i$ choices. We give the detailed discussion of model parameters in Table IV. We can normally reduce the number of options significantly in the early stage if a user has strict requirements. In the worst case scenario, the logic needs to compute a full cross join (cartesian product). The number of choices varies depending on the number of regions (R_{p_i}) with different prices offered by each provider (r_i), and the number of different price tier (t_i) for each service (Price tier example: AWS S3 charges \$0.125 per GB for the first 1 TB / month of usage, \$0.093 for the next 49 TB, etc.). Depending on the estimated usage, the larger the usage, the more price tiers will be involved. Let us assume that each provider offers approximately the same service in each region to simplify the derivation of the computational complexity. As such, the total number of offers can be represented in a more detailed formula:

$$\sum_{i=1}^p (\sum_{l=1}^{cs_i} t_l) \times (\sum_{m=1}^{ss_i} t_m) \times (\sum_{n=1}^{ts_i} t_n) \times r_i$$

The queries of the selection logic work as follows. After filtering out criteria-violating services, resulting services are combined via JOIN operation(s) with final costs calculated. In worst case scenario where a few or no criteria are defined, the combination of the services is a full CROSS JOIN over all existing services. Therefore, the selection queries, to our best knowledge, have the upper bound computational complexity of

$$O_{query} (|cr_{compute}| \sum_{i=1}^p |cs_i| \times |cr_{storage}| \sum_{i=1}^p |ss_i| \times |cr_{network}| \sum_{i=1}^p |ts_i|)$$

where cr are criteria and cs, ss and ts are pre-computed views with a singular effort

to create the views from JOIN statements. However, in case the database system lacks support for cached views in a worst case the effort multiplies with the effort of the views' JOIN. Modern database can use HASH JOIN $O(N + M)$ and MERGE JOIN $O(N \cdot \log(N) + M \cdot \log(M))$ which are faster than $O(N * M)$.

2.4 Widget Layer

This layer features rich set of user-interfaces (see Fig 4) that further simplify the selection of configuration parameters related to cloud services. This layer encapsulates the user interface components in the form of four principle widgets including: Compute, Storage, Network, and Recommendation. The selection of basic configuration parameters related to compute services including their RAM capacity, cores, and location can be facilitated through the Compute widget. It also allows users to search compute services by using regular expressions, sort by a specific column etc. Using the Compute widget, users can choose which columns to display and rearrange their order as well. The Storage widget allows users to define configuration parameters such as storage size and request types (e.g., get, put, post, copy, etc.). Service configuration parameters, such as the size of incoming data transfer and outgoing data transfer can be issued via the Network widget. Users have the option to select single service types as well as bundled (combined search) services driven by use cases. The selection results are displayed and can be browsed via the Recommendation widget (not shown in Fig 4).

Figure 4: Screen shot of compute, storage, and network widgets.

3. Experiments and Evaluation

In this section, we present the experiments and evaluation that we undertook.

In our infrastructure service selection scenario, we revisit the example of a medium scale enterprise we explained earlier. The enterprise wants to migrate its data to the cloud with the aim of storing and sharing it with other branches through public cloud storage (note that security issues are dealt within the enterprise applications). At this

stage, we assume the business analyst of the enterprise has a good estimation of the data storage and transfer (network in/network out) requirements. By using CloudRecommender, the analyst would like to find out which of the public cloud providers would be most cost-effective in regards to data storage and transfer costs. For this selection scenario, the analyst inputs the following anticipated usage information for the storage and network services: (i) Data size of 50 GB, 1000 copy requests and 5000 get requests and (ii) data transfer in size of 10 GB and data transfer out size of 50 GB.

Figure 5: Service selection criteria set by business analyst.

As shown in Fig 5, the analyst specifies service selection criteria via the storage and network widgets. Programmatically, the above request can also be submitted via the RESTful service interface of the CloudRecommender as shown below in Fig 6.

```
Call
localhost/cloud_demo_1_1/api/cost/storage?
media_type=xml&currency=AUD&storage=50&duration=31&data_upload_size=50&data_download_size=10&copy=1000&get=5000
```

Figure 6: An Example REST call.

4. Related Work

Prior to CloudRecommender, there have been a variety of systems that use declarative logic-based techniques for managing resources in distributed computing systems. The focus of the authors in work [4] is to provide a distributed platform that enables cloud providers to automate the process of service orchestration via the use of declarative policy languages. The authors in [5] present an SQL-based decision query language for providing a high-level abstraction for expressing decision guidance problems in an intuitive manner so that database programmers can use mathematical programming technique without prior experience. We draw a lot of inspiration from the work in [6] which proposes a data-centric (declarative) framework to orchestrate infrastructure services. The goal of this work is to improve SLA fulfilment ability of cloud service providers. COOLDAID [7] presents a declarative approach to manage configuration of network devices and adopts a relational data model and Datalog-style query language. NetDB [8] uses a relational database to manage the configurations of

network devices. However, NetDB is a data warehouse, not designed for cloud service selection and composition. Puppet [9] manages the configuration of data-centre resources using a custom and user-friendly declarative language for service configuration specifications. Puppet simplifies the management of data centre resources for providers. Though branded calculators are available from individual cloud providers, such as Amazon [14], Azure [15], and GoGrid, for calculating service leasing cost, it is not easy for users to generalize their requirements to fit different service offers (with various quota and limitations) let alone computing and comparing costs. Some of the recent research such as [11] has focused on cloud storage service (IaaS level) representation based on an XML schema. However, the proposed declarative model is preferable over hard coding the sorting and selection algorithm (as used in [11]) as it allows us to take the advantage of optimized SQL operations (e.g. select and join).

In contrast to the aforementioned systems, CloudRecommender is designed with a different application domain – one that aims to apply declarative (SQL) and widget programming technique for solving the cloud service configuration selection problem. Facing a new challenge of handling heterogeneous service configuration and naming conventions in cloud computing, CloudRecommender also defines and uses a unified domain model.

5. Conclusion and Future Work

In this paper, we proposed a declarative system (CloudRecommender) that transforms the cloud service configuration selection from an ad-hoc process that involves manually reading the provider documentations to a process that is structured, and to a large extent automated. Although we believe that CloudRecommender leaves scope for a range of enhancements, yet provides a practical approach. We have implemented a prototype of CloudRecommender and evaluated it using an example selection scenario. The prototype demonstrates the feasibility of the CloudRecommender design and its practical aspects.

Our future work includes: (1) extending the CloudRecommender to support the selection of more cloud service types such as PaaS services (e.g., database server, web server, etc.) to further validate our hypothesis and explore new opportunities; (ii) exploring integration of cloud service benchmarking databases such as CloudHarmony to CloudRecommender for facilitating run-time selection based on dynamic QoS information including throughput, latency, and utilization; and (iii) deploying and evaluating the CloudRecommender as a REST service so that it can be easily integrated to any existing cloud service orchestration systems.

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