

MODELING UNIT TESTING PROCESSES

A System Dynamics Approach

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Abstract: Software development is a complex activity that often exhibits counter-intuitive behavior, in that outcomes often vary quite radically from the intended results. The production of a high quality software product requires application of both defect prevention and defect detection techniques. A common defect detection strategy is to subject the product to several phases of testing such as unit, integration, and system. These testing phases consume significant project resources and cycle time. As software companies continue to search for ways for reducing cycle time and development costs while increasing quality, software-testing processes emerge as a prime target for investigation. This paper presents a system dynamics (SD) model of software development, better understanding testing processes. Motivation for modeling testing processes is presented along with an executable model of the unit test phase. Some sample model runs are described to illustrate the usefulness of the model.

1 INTRODUCTION

In general, testing is finding out how well something works. In terms of human beings, testing tells what level of knowledge or skill has been acquired. In computer hardware and software development, testing is used at key checkpoints in the overall process to determine whether objectives are being met. For example, in software development, product objectives are sometimes tested by product user representatives. When the design is complete, coding follows and the finished code is then tested at the unit or module level by each programmer; at the component level by the group of programmers involved; and at the system level when all components are combined together. At early or late stages, a product or service may also be tested for usability.

Unit testing is a software development process in which the smallest testable parts of an application called units are individually and independently scrutinized for proper operation. Unit testing is often automated but it can also be done manually. This testing mode is a component of Extreme Programming (XP), a pragmatic method of software development that takes a meticulous approach to building a product by means of continual testing and revision.

Unit testing involves only those characteristics that are vital to the performance of the unit under test. This encourages developers to modify the source code without immediate concerns about how such changes might affect the functioning of other units or the program as a whole. Once all of the units in a program have been found to be working in the most efficient and error-free manner possible, larger components of the program can be evaluated by means of integration testing.

2 SYSTEM DYNAMICS INTRODUCTION

SD is a methodology whereby complex, dynamics and nonlinear interactions in social systems can be understood and analyzed, and new structures and policies can be designed to improve the system behavior. Similarly we can say, SD is a complex scientific and technological activity, for which is epistemological and methodological analysis could suggest some new and interesting perspectives both to practitioners and theorists of SD. The System models to have the most realistic representational content possible (Coyle, 1996). There is a great difference between purely Correlation or Statistical models and SD. The SD models also try to offer

explanation and understanding, not only forecasting and control.

2.1 Stock or Level Variables

These represent the accumulation of basic variables or quantities that change in example in a population model one stock may represent the population of a country.

2.2 Flow Variables

These variables represent the instantaneous flow rates. Unlike in physical systems where the rate variables mostly follow the laws of nature, in industrial and in many social and socio-economic systems, which are man – managed, rate variables often reflect overall policies governing individual decisions(Dutta, 2001).

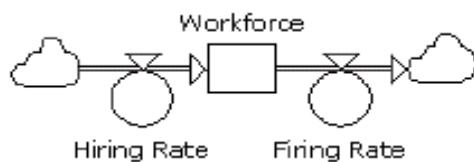


Figure 1: A simple model created in the graphical modeling language.

2.3 Connectors

A flow represents a physical link between stocks. However there are also information or dependency links.

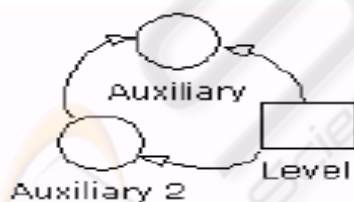


Figure 2: Information links connects various variables.

2.4 Delays

Physical flows quite undergo delays. Examples are, delays in clerical processing of order mailing of orders, filling of orders, shipment, training of unskilled workers, payment of debt and in capacity installation, etc. These delays have the following characteristics:

- 1) A rate variable appearing in a physical flow undergoes a delay. (2) An accumulation takes place during the delay. (3) Outflow rate from a delay

depends on the amount accumulated in the delay and Average time a unit spends inn the delay. (4) During the study state condition (when the int flow rate is constant for a long time resulting in a constant outflow rate), the accumulation in the delay is also constant and is equal to the product of the inflow rate and the average delay time constant Exponential delays have all the above-mentioned characteristics (Forrester, 1961).

3 MODELING THE UNIT TEST PHASE

Our initial research efforts in the testing area focused on modeling the unit test phase. We chose the unit test phase both because it is the best understood of the testing phases as well as one of the most controversial. The controversy in the unit test phase revolves around the amount of unit testing that is performed. Although rigorous unit testing is recommended by many development standards, individual projects have been completed with various levels of unit testing dependent upon the other quality assurance tasks performed and the difficulty of creating a unit test environment. To investigate the impact of these various degrees of unit testing on software development cycle time, we developed a model of the unit test phase. This model assumes that the unit test phase begins after clean compilation and completes when the unit test criteria have been met and all defects have been fixed. It is important to note that we view the unit test phase as including both defect detection and repair. Repair consists of amending the code to remove the detected errors and retesting the code to verify the errors were removed. In order to model the impact of various unit test strategies, we also include a defect seepage cost in our model, which addresses the cost of repairing defects missed by the unit test phase.

The basic inputs to our model are described below:

Table 1: Model Input Variables Description on Unit Test.

Variable Name	Description
Test volume	The volume of the unit test activity measured in lines of code to test
Test care	The care of the testing activity defined as the percentage of defects detected by the testing
Excellency of code	Defined as the number of defects per KLOC which are detectable by the unit testing
Daily work force	The number of developers available for performing unit testing activities
Amendment efficiency	the number of errors fixed per developer-day
Cost to fix later	the number of developer-days needed in a later test phase to fix an error missed by unit testing

The model outputs consist of:

Table 2: Model Output Variables Description on Unit Test.

Variable Name	Description
Total time for unit test	Defined as the total number of days needed to complete the unit test phase
Total cost for unit test	Defined as the total number of developer-days needed to complete the unit test phase
Seepage consequence	Defined as the number of developer-days needed to repair the defects not detected during unit testing

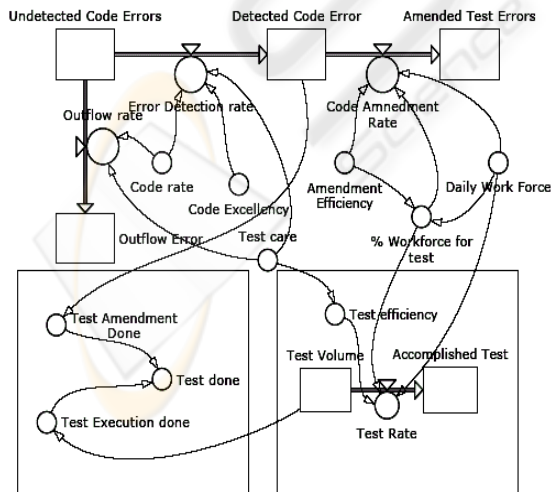


Figure 3: SD Model for Error Detection and Correction for Unit Test.

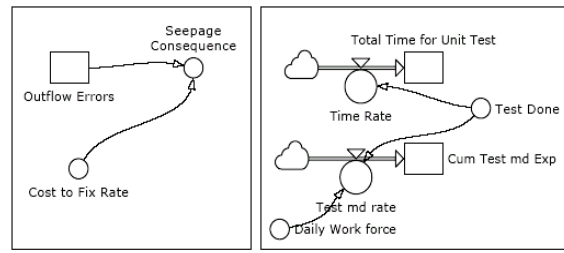


Figure 4: SD cost Model of Unit Test.

A simplified view of our SD model is presented in Figure 3 and 4. The model illustrates code errors being detected based on an error detection rate which is dependent upon the testing rate, the excellency of the code and the care of the testing. The care of the testing in turn affects the time needed to perform the testing. The model also illustrates the rate that detected errors are fixed which is dependent upon the percentage of developer time available for defect repairs, the number of available developers and the amendment efficiency. Defect seepage is also modeled along with the increased cost of repairing in later phases defects, which were not detected by unit testing. To illustrate the kind of information, which can be produced by this model, we extracted unit test data from an engineering organization. Three scenarios were executed with various levels of unit test care. The levels of test care were:

Table 3: Levels of Test Care on Unit Test.

Level	Description
0.1	Corresponding to very minimal unit testing
0.7	Corresponding to a level of test care in which 70% of detectable defects were detected
1.0	Corresponding to an idealized level of care in which all defects were detected.

The results for each of the scenarios are presented in Table 4. To interpret the cost effectiveness of the unit test activity it is necessary to combine the columns for

Total Cost for Unit Test and Seepage Consequence. For this particular organization's project scenario, the results indicate the benefit of reducing the unit testing effort.

1. **Test Volume:** 174,000 assembly equivalent lines of code
2. **Excellency of Code:** .39 defects per KLOC

3. **Daily Work Force:** 5 developers available for performing unit testing activities
 4. **Amendment Efficiency:** 8 errors fixed per developer-day
 5. **Cost to Fix Later:** 0.36 developer-days needed to fix an error missed by unit testing in a later test phase.

The results for each of the scenarios are presented in Table 4. To interpret the cost effectiveness of the unit test activity it is necessary to combine the columns for Total Cost for Unit Test and Seepage Consequence. For this particular organization's project scenario, the results indicate the benefit of reducing the unit testing effort.

This can be explained by the low cost to fix a defect not detected during unit testing as determined by the metrics input to the model. Obviously these results will not apply to all projects since variations of the input parameters will significantly alter the Total Cost for Unit Test and Seepage Consequence. For instance, when the cost to fix a defect not detected during unit testing is 1.0 error per developer-day a test.

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Table 4: Results of varying test care on Unit Test.

Test Care	Total Time For Unit Test	Total Cost For Unit Test	Seepage Consequence
0.1	8.5	42.5	22.3
0.7	12.2	61.2	7.3
1.0	50.0	250.0	0.0

4 CONCLUSIONS

The development of our unit test phase SD model has increased our understanding of unit testing and defect repair activities and their relationships. The model provides a framework for interpreting testing metrics and analysing areas for optimizing testing processes. We are currently in the process of calibrating our testing model with actual industry

metrics in order to provide projects with guidance on selecting their testing strategy. Our future plans are to expand our modeling to include the integration and system test phases. Our testing models will then be integrated with our incremental software development SD model in order to more accurately assess the impact of testing activities in an incremental development environment.

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