DESIGN AS ABSTRACTION

SWE 621
FALL 2020

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IN CLASS EXERCISE

- What is an abstraction?
WHAT IS AN ABSTRACTION?

- The ability to interact with an idea while safely ignoring some of its details.
- A set of operations on shared state that make solving problems easier.

Examples

- Data: String
- Collections: array, list, stack, queue, map, set, ...
- Big data: MapReduce, BigTable, Spanner
- AI: TensorFlow
- Web: HTTP request, HTTP response
- Business: Person, Party, Organization
LOGISTICS

- HW1 due today
- HW2 due in two weeks
ABSTRACTION AS MECHANISM FOR REUSE

- Abstractions serve as a mechanism for reuse of functionality

- Stakeholders in reuse
  - Author: developer implementing the abstraction
  - User: developer that is using the abstraction in their own code

- Often, a developer may be both an author and a user

- May have multiple authors, who may change over time

- For important abstractions, usually many more users than authors
CRAFTING ABSTRACTIONS

- Where do elements come from?
  - Last time: from the domain model
- But... sometimes there are technical implementation considerations that lead to better ways of grouping functionality into elements
- Goal: choose elements that make solving the underlying problem easier
IN-CLASS ACTIVITY

- Write a function to reverse a List
- Available operations on elements in linked list
  - Class ListElem
    - { public ListElem getNext()
      - public void setNext(ListElem e)
    }

IN CLASS ACTIVITY

- Write a function to reverse a list
- Available operations on a list

```java
class List {
    get(i)
    set(i)
    remove(i)
}
```
IN-CLASS ACTIVITY

- Write a function to reverse a List
- Available operations on elements in linked list
  - getNext
  - setNext
  - getPrev
  - setPrev
EXAMPLE: LIST

- State: an ordered set of elements
- Key operations
  - add
  - set
  - get
  - contains
  - remove
  - size

```java
List<Integer> l1 = new ArrayList<Integer>();
l1.add(0, 1);  // adds 1 at 0 index
l1.add(1, 2);  // adds 2 at 1 index
System.out.println(l1);  // [1, 2]
```
EXAMPLE: LIST

- User can be oblivious about how state is stored
  - Could be linked list, could be array, could be stored locally, could be stored on another computer
- Supports a wide range of typical interactions with a list
- Abstraction author has wide range of implementation options
EXAMPLE: MAPREDUCE

- Organize computation into a map function that generates a new list from an old list and a reduce function that generates one (or a few) elements from a whole list

- Operations
  - Map\((k1,v1) \rightarrow \text{list}(k2,v2)\)
  - Reduce\((k2, \text{list}(v2)) \rightarrow \text{list}(v3)\)

EXAMPLE: MAPREDUCE

- Can distribute computation down to elements in the list to separate servers, which can work in parallel.

- Infrastructure
  - marshals distributed servers
  - runs tasks in parallel
  - manages communication
  - provides redundancy and fault tolerance

- Lets abstraction users focus on the computation to be done and let infrastructure worry about how to parallelize it

- Applicable for parallelizing a wide variety of typical computations
EXAMPLE: REACT COMPONENT

https://reactjs.org/

- State: properties (readonly, initialized by parents), state (changes over time)

- Operations
  - render
  - event listeners
  - set state

- Whenever state changes, render function is automatically called.

- Components organized into hierarchical trees. When data changes, generates new child components.

```javascript
class Timer extends React.Component {
  constructor(props) {
    super(props);
    this.state = { seconds: 0 };
  }

  tick() {
    this.setState(state => ({
      seconds: state.seconds + 1
    }));
  }

  componentDidMount() {
    this.interval = setInterval(() =>
    this.tick(), 1000);
  }

  componentWillUnmount() {
    clearInterval(this.interval);
  }

  render() {
    return (<
div>
      Seconds: {this.state.seconds}
    </div>
  );
}

ReactDOM.render(<Timer />, mountNode);
```
EXAMPLE: REACT COMPONENT

- React components do not need to worry about incrementally changing output in response to every event
  - Would be complicated to figure out for every possible state change how to update output
- Instead, simply generate all new output whenever state no longer consistent with output
- Components focus on state and output for single element of interface
  - Can be reused in many contexts because loosely coupled to parent and other ancestors
IN CLASS ACTIVITY

- Form a group of 2
- What's an abstraction you use frequently?
- What state does it have?
- What are the key operations?
- How does the abstraction simplify typical scenarios that occur?
BENEFITS OF GOOD ABSTRACTIONS

▸ Interoperability - can pass common data structures around
  ▸ Really important for library interop

▸ Can think about the problem without having to think about some low level details
  ▸ How is your data stored
  ▸ How computation is distributed to different servers in cluster

▸ Can predict behavior of operations, without reading implementation
  ▸ If common abstraction, that users are likely to be familiar with already
CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD ABSTRACTION

▸ Should do one thing and do it well
  ▸ If hard to name, that's a bad sign

▸ Implementation should not leak into abstraction
  ▸ If there's details that do not need to be exposed, do not

▸ Names matter
  ▸ Be self-explanatory, consistent, regular
CHALLENGES

△ What operations to include? (a.k.a., interface)
  △ Choices of operations has many consequences
△ Not supporting necessary operations with state may make it impossible to use it in desired way, or lead to inefficient client code
△ Supporting fewer operations may cause client code to be repetitive
△ Operation choices may constrain design space of implementations
△ If different users have slightly different needs, how do you balance conflicts?
IN CLASS ACTIVITY

- What's the most annoying abstraction you've ever used?
- What made it so hard to use?
HOW TO DESIGN A GOOD ABSTRACTION

Adapted from How to Design a Good API and Why it Matters, Joshua Bloch
GATHER REQUIREMENTS

- Often get proposed solutions instead
- Your job is to extract true requirements
  - Should exist as scenarios where you abstraction will be used
  - What does user want to accomplish in this scenario?
START WITH SHORT 1 PAGE DRAFT

- Focus on key ideas rather than completeness
- Bounce draft off as many people as possible
- What additional scenarios do they suggest?
- How well does your abstraction support these scenarios?
- How can it support these better?
RULE OF THREES

- Should try out abstraction with at least three scenarios
- Iterate design based on scenarios, ideally before publicly releasing
- How can you make these typical scenarios easier for users?
- How can you enable more efficient implementations?
SUMMARY

- Abstractions shape how you write code and think about a problem.
- Design abstractions that cleanly capture typical operations on element at the right level of detail.
- Good abstractions reduce boilerplate and let you focus on core problems.
- May require refactoring, as you have deeper insight into how to represent key ideas more clearly.
- Important to keep abstractions consistent across team. Having similar but competing abstractions leads to confusion and conversion boilerplate.
IN CLASS ACTIVITY, STEP 1: BUILD ABSTRACTION

- Form groups of 2 or 3
- Build a abstraction(s) for a company org chart.
  - Each employee has a 0 or 1 bosses and 0 to n subordinates
  - Employee may direct one or more operating units, divisions, groups, or teams
  - Operating units contain divisions
  - Divisions contain groups
  - Groups contain teams
- Deliverable: for each element you create, describe member elements in a class implementing this abstraction including
  - State: what member variables does it contain
  - Operations: what methods does it define and what is their signature
STEP 2: USE ABSTRACTION

- Switch abstractions with another group
- Using the other group's abstractions, sketch an algorithm to promote a division to an operating unit. Each group inside division remains a group.
DESIGN ACTIVITY: DISCUSSION

- What did you learn about the practice of design from this activity?