

Property-driven development

H. Baumeister, Alexander Knapp, Martin Wirsing

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Property-Driven Development*

(Extended Abstract)

Hubert Baumeister, Alexander Knapp, and Martin Wirsing
Institut für Informatik
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany
{baumeist, knapp, wirsing}@pst.ifi.lmu.de

Abstract

Early test development and specification enhance the quality and robustness of software as experience with agile software development methods shows. The methods propagate test-first techniques and early prototyping through executable design models. We propose to enhance test-driven development to a more general property-driven development technique: Property-driven development ties together automatic tests, formal specification, and executable UML models by developing these three views together instead of one after the other as is common practice. Scenarios and properties serve as a combined basis for system specification and test cases. By extracting common properties of several scenarios we obtain invariants and pre- and postconditions. The behavior of the system is described UML state machines. For testing we insert invariants and pre- and postconditions as assertions in the code generated from the state machines. For verification, we use model checking. For this we have to restrict the models to finite domains. Therefore we construct suitable abstractions of the scenarios and the system behavior and verify the abstractions using a model checker.

1. Introduction

The two main questions when developing software are: “Are we developing the right software” and “Are we developing the software right”. The first question is about the software meeting the explicit and implicit requirements of the customer and the second question is about the quality and reliability of the software. Does the software indeed perform the way it is intended?

The first problem concerns user requirements elicitation. In most cases the detailed user requirements are not known up front. Instead, they evolve with the feedback from the development process. There are several approaches to provide feedback: One way is to present the customer with several diagrammatic views on the software for inspection and discussion [5]. UML, for example, provides diagrams like use-case diagrams, activity diagrams, and class diagrams for this purpose. Another means are executable models and prototypes which allow one to simulate the behavior of the software. Finally, an excellent means for getting feedback is the running program. This is also the most expensive way to provide feedback.

Building the model right implies that one has to know what the right system is. This requires an independent view on the software which states the properties the software should have and against which the software can be checked. These properties are the formalization of the functional and non-functional requirements of the proposed system. As we have seen above, these requirements are likely to be unknown in all detail before starting the implementation of the software. Thus, we propose to develop the specification of the software together with the software.

This idea is also present in extreme programming [2]. Extreme programming is an agile software development process that emphasizes small iterations with the customer being able to play with the software almost from the beginning. In addition, tests are written before the actual code is written, called test-driven development [3]. This provides a second, more declarative view on the software, enhances the quality of the code, and provides the safety net that allows one to react to changes in requirements resulting from the feedback with the software.

However, extreme programming has two drawbacks. First, tests can only express particular scenarios but not more general properties of the software to be built. Second, with extreme programming already the program code is built. Thus, the power of using more abstract modeling techniques is lost and the programmer is forced to deal

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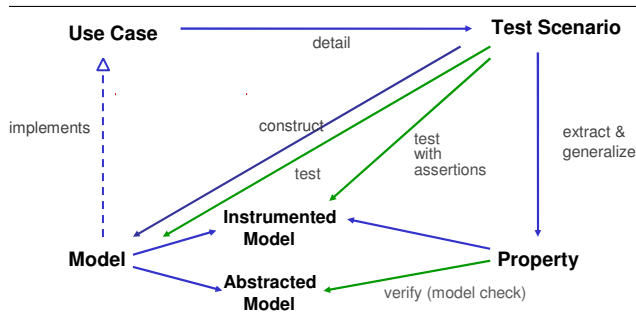


Figure 1. Overview over the process.

with implementation details.

We propose a property-driven approach where an executable model of the software is developed together with its specification and tests. We work on the design level and use abstract executable models instead of directly writing code. Then the resulting code is either obtained manually by refining the model, by generating code from the model, or by transforming the model into other models which are more suitable for code generation, e. g. using techniques from model-driven architecture [13].

In Sect. 2 we introduce the property-driven software development process. Section 3 applies an iteration of the process to the MUD game case study developed in the EU-project AGILE¹. Finally, Sect. 4 contains some concluding remarks.

2. The Process

Property-driven development is an iterative process guided by user stories and use cases (cf. Fig. 1). The steps of the process are the following:

1. Select a use case from the current user story.
2. Define a scenario, either an intended scenario or a scenario which is not permitted, as a UML interaction diagram.
3. Generate tests from the interaction diagram.
4. Extend the current model to cope with the new scenario until all tests succeed.
5. Identify system properties by generalizing the scenario.
6. Depending on the type of properties, either instrument the model with assertions generated from the properties and run the tests again, or use model checking techniques to verify or validate the property.

¹ Architectures for Mobility; www.pst.ifi.lmu.de/projekte/agile.

Step 1 As with extreme programming we capture the functional and non-functional requirements by so-called user stories. Each user story describes an aspect of the behavior of the software system relevant to the customer. Starting from a user story—selected according to the priority given to the user story by the customer—the first step is to identify the use cases involved in that user story. While a user story describes a particular use scenario of the system, a use case describes a functionality of the system. Thus a user story may involve several functionalities from a system, while, in general, several user stories are needed to describe the complete functionality of one use case.

Step 2 After having identified the use cases, a use case is selected and the scenarios of that use case relevant for the current user story are identified. We have two kinds of scenarios, scenarios that describe the intended behavior of the system and scenarios that are not allowed to occur. We use the interaction diagrams of UML 2.0 [12] to model such behaviors as they allow us to model both types of scenarios which is not possible with previous versions of UML.

Step 3 Next we select one of these scenarios and generate JUnit [4] or Fit [7] tests for them from their interaction diagram. JUnit is a unit testing framework developed by Kent Beck and Erich Gamma for Java, and Fit is a similar framework as JUnit but uses HTML tables instead of Java classes for defining the tests and is mainly used for acceptance testing. We are now able to run the tests against the current model of the system. Of course these tests will fail as the current model is not yet extended to cope with the defined scenario. This will be done in the next step.

Step 4 In this step, the current model is extended to cope with the scenarios defined in the previous step. We use UML class diagrams to describe the structure of the model and UML state machines to describe their behavior. The HUGO² tool allows us to generate executable Java code from the state machines. HUGO is a UML model translator that supports UML static structure, UML state machines, and UML interactions. For translating a UML model with HUGO, the UML model has to consist of a set of active classes with their accompanying state machines. Such a UML model can either be given as an XMI 1.0/1.1-file or in a simple textual format called UTE.

Step 5 Running the tests successfully is a pretty good indication that the state machine indeed implements the intended behavior, i. e., that we developed the software right. However, tests are only able to express particular scenarios and not general classes of scenarios. In this step the properties of the system are identified by generalizing from the scenarios. Currently we can handle two types of properties:

² www.pst.ifi.lmu.de/projekte/hugo

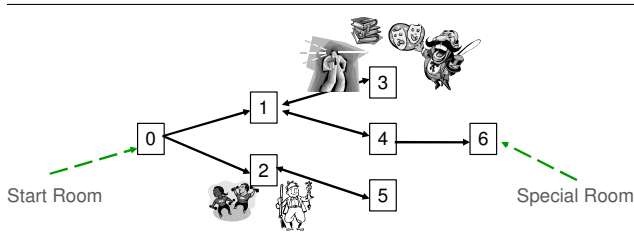


Figure 2. The MUD game.

OCL formulas [15] for class invariants and pre- and post-conditions for methods, and safety and liveness properties expressed in an extension of OCL by path quantifiers and temporal operators as used in CTL.

Step 6 To validate the OCL constraints, we would like to instrument the state machines with the OCL constraints by adding the invariants, pre- and postconditions before and after each method call. Since this is not yet supported by our tools we proceed actually as follows. We use HUGO to translate the state machines into Java code. In a second step we translate the OCL constraints to the Java Modeling Language (JML) [11] and use the assertion generator for JML to instrument the generated code [6]. When running the tests, these assertions will be executed as well. Thus in this step we check the validity of the OCL properties from which assertions were generated. For temporal properties we use HUGO to translate the UML model and the constraints into specifications for the model checkers SPIN [8] and UPPAAL [10] and for the interactive theorem prover KIV [14]. The actual verification is performed by these off-the-shelf tools.

The next iteration starts by looking at the current use case. Are all interesting scenarios defined and dealt with? If this is not the case, the next iteration starts with the next scenario. After finally all interesting scenarios for a use case have been dealt with, we can move on to the next relevant use case in the current user story. Similarly, after all the scenarios and use cases relevant for a user story have been finished, one moves on to the next user story.

3. The MUD Game

To illustrate the property-driven development process, we use a multi-user dungeon game (MUD) played via mobile phones. At the beginning of the game, the player is in the start room of a maze of connected rooms. His task is to find the special room from which he can advance to the start room of the next level or finish the game, if there is no next level (cf. Fig. 2). While moving through the rooms, the player can interact with other players by talking to them,

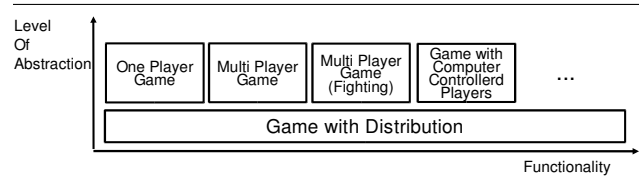


Figure 3. User stories for the MUD game.

trading objects with them, and fighting. These players can be human or computer controlled.

3.1. User Stories, Uses Cases, and Tests

The MUD game is divided into the following user stories (cf. Fig. 3):

1. One player game. Only one player is present in the game and he can move through the rooms of the game.
2. Multi-player game. Now the game contains several human players that move through the game and that interact by talking and trading objects.
3. Multi-player game (fighting). In this user story the players can also interact by fighting each other.
4. Game with computer-controlled players. In this user story, computer controlled players are added to the game.
5. Adding distribution. In the previous user stories distribution did not play a role. In this user story we move to a more concrete level by adding distribution aspects to our model.

While user stories 1 to 4 represent functional requirements, user story 5 adds a requirement on the architecture of the system. The order in which the user stories are defined results in first producing a model for the functional requirements of the game and then adding implementation details, like distribution, to the model.

In the following, we assume that the first user story has already been finished and that we are working on the *multi-player game* user story. The use cases identified for this user story are shown in Fig. 5 and we select the use case *trade objects* to work on. The first scenario of that use case, shown in Fig. 4, is the successful trade scenario. We start with asserting that the first player has a book and the second player has a mask. Then the first user initiates the trade by sending his player object the request to offer the second user the book. For example, he can do this by selecting on his mobile phone the book in his inventory and then selecting the option for trading. The second user receives from his player object the request for a trade, for example, by presenting a dialog on the display of the second player. The second user accepts the trade by offering the mask. Finally,

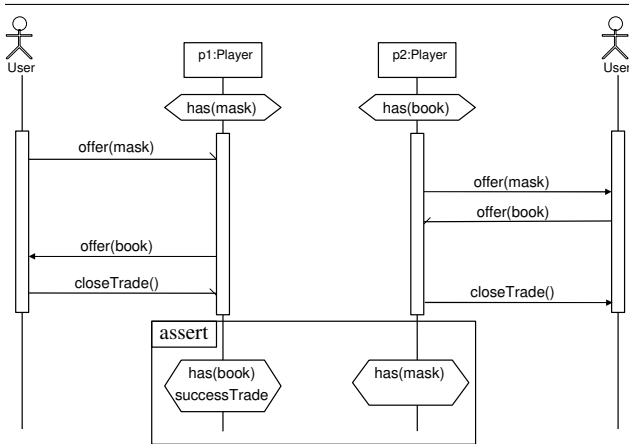


Figure 4. Scenario for a successful trade.

the first player accepts the counter offer by closing the trade which again is displayed on the second user’s screen. We assert that the first player has the mask and the second player has the book. In addition, the first player has set his attribute `successTrade` to true to indicate that a successful trade has taken place.

Note that no interaction is shown between the player object of the first player and the second player object. We are only interested in the interaction between the users and their player objects but not in the interaction between the player objects because we are defining the behavior of the MUD game relevant to the customer and not its implementation.

To generate tests from the interaction, we translate the above scenario to the following Fit table (cf. Fig. 6). The head of the table, `fit.ActionFixture`, is the name

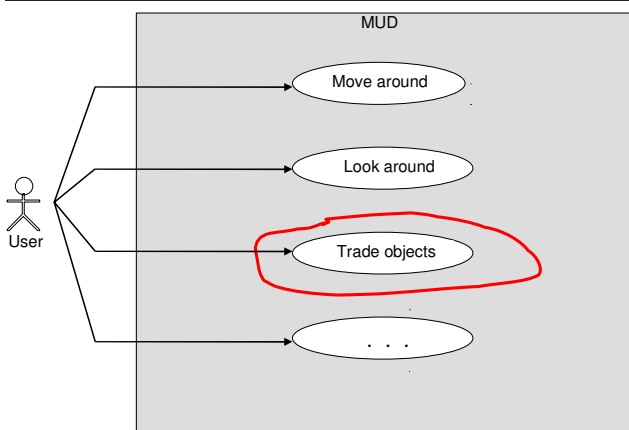


Figure 5. Use cases for the multi-player game user story.

fit.ActionFixture				
start	Trading			
check	has	book	p1	true
check	has	mask	p2	true
action	offer	book	p1	
action	offer	mask	p2	
action	close trade		p1	
check	has	mask	p1	true
check	success trade		p1	true
check	has	book	p2	true

Figure 6. Fit table representing the successful trade scenario.

of a class defining how the following rows are to be interpreted. Start, action, and check are Fit keywords defined by `fit.ActionFixture`; the interpretation of offer, close trade, has, and successTrade have to be provided by the modeler in so-called fixture classes, in this case class `Trading`. Finally, book, mask, and true are parameters to the operations.

3.2. The Model

The next step of property-driven development is to extend the model from the previous iteration in such a way that the tests generated from the scenario in this iteration succeed. The extended class diagram is shown in Fig. 7. Classes `PersonalObject`, and `Offer` are added to the class diagram of the previous iteration and class `Player` is extended by the attribute `successTrade` and methods `has`, `offer`, and `closeTrade`. The class diagram shown in Fig. 7 uses the stereotypes for mobile objects and locations from Baumeister et al. [1].

The behavior of the player class is given by the state machine in Fig. 8. The state machine defines the behavior of the players that is sufficient to satisfy the tests for the successful trade scenario but nothing more. We test that the state machine implements the successful trade scenario by running the generated Fit tests from Fig. 6 against Java code generated by HUGO from the state machine.

3.3. Verification and Validation

By looking at the successful trade scenario we see that it tests that book and mask are exchanged, but what about other objects like sword and shield? To express that we do not care about what objects are being exchanged, as long as they are being exchanged, we cannot use tests alone; instead we have to use more expressive formulas like the post-condition on `closeTrade` in Fig. 7.

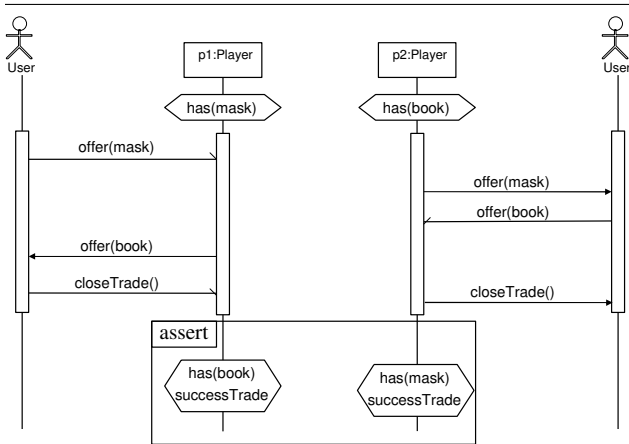


Figure 10. Corrected scenario for a successful trade.

all system can only arise, if either some event queue or the network has overflowed.

Deadlock freedom is easily proved; however, the property that both players agree on the outcome of the trade does not hold. This reveals a bug in the original state machine in Fig. 8 and in our test scenarios. In the original scenario (cf. Fig. 4), we have only tested for the first player that he thinks that the trade was successful but not for the second player. Thus, we have not only to correct the state machine by setting `successTrade` to true in the transition from state `receivedOffer` to state `waiting` triggered by event `_closeTrade` in Fig. 8, but also to correct the test scenario to check for `successTrade` in the assertion of the second player (cf. Fig. 10).

In addition to generating tests to check the validity of scenarios, we can use HUGO to directly verify that the successful trade scenario in Fig. 10 is a possible scenario of the corrected state machine. In UTE, this interaction is rendered as follows:

```

interaction successfulTrade {
  u1 -> p1 : offer();
  p2 -> u2 : offer();
  u2 -> p2 : offer();
  p1 -> u1 : offer();
  u1 -> p1 : closeTrade();
  p2 -> u2 : closeTrade();

  assert p1.successTrade == 1 and
         p2.successTrade == 1;
}
  
```

where `u1` and `u2` are the user objects, and `p1` and `p2` the corresponding player objects. HUGO translates such an interaction into an observer automaton [9] that runs concurrently with all objects of the model and registers all messages that are exchanged between the objects. The observer

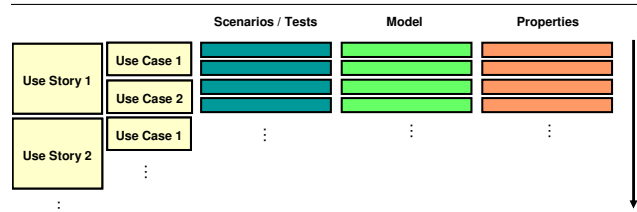


Figure 11. The iterative nature of property-driven development.

automaton validates that the exchanged messages adhere to the order specified in the interaction. However, the observer automaton allows for an arbitrary number of messages between two specified messages and thus can ignore internal message exchanges. For the resulting overall system of timed automata, HUGO produces the requirement that the final state of the observer automaton can be reached, i. e., that a run according to the interaction is indeed possible. Furthermore, if the interaction specification ends with an `assert` statement, a requirement is generated that whenever the final state of the observer automaton is reached the asserted property must hold. For the successful trade example we get the following UPPAAL formulas:

```

E<> observer.ObserverSuccess
A[] observer.ObserverSuccess imply
  (objP1SM.successTrade == 1 and
   objP2SM.successTrade == 1)
  
```

where `objP1SM` and `objP2SM` are the HUGO-generated names for `p1` and `p2`.

3.4. Next Iteration

We have up to now only dealt with the successful trade scenario. A next scenario could consider the situation where the trade is canceled by the second user. This yields another extension of the class diagrams and the state machine. Furthermore, additional constraints are defined, e. g., that after the trade was canceled, the objects proposed for trading remain with their original owner and `successTrade` is false. The properties of deadlock freedom of the trade protocol and that the users agree on the outcome of the trade (successful or canceled) do not change and have to be verified again using the extended state machine of this iteration.

4. Concluding Remarks

With property-driven development the specification, tests, and executable model are developed together

(cf. Fig. 11) which is important to get immediate feedback from the customer. This ensures that the system we are building is the right system, that is, that the system satisfies the needs of the customer. The specification together with the tests increase our confidence that we have built the system right, that is, that the software indeed performs as required by the customer. In addition to raising our confidence in the software, the specification can be used as a documentation for the system.

Property-driven development proceeds in small iterations. Thus the changes to the specification, tests, and model w. r. t. the previous iteration are only small. This makes it easier to keep the three views synchronized. Keeping the views synchronized allows to feed back knowledge gained building one view into the other views. For example, one may be able to simplify the model because making the properties the model should satisfy explicit reveals unnecessary complexity in the model. Or, trying to find a model for the desired properties, one may discover that the properties are not complete, e. g., that some cases are missing or that the specification is not implementable.

Specification and tests provide a safety net for easy refactoring of the model, so that it becomes easy to incorporate the feedback from the customer, which is needed to implement the right system.

Currently we are integrating these techniques into a user-oriented collaborative development environment.

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