SWE 621

SPRING 2021

DESIGN AS ABSTRACTION

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
- 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

```
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) → list(k2,v2)
  - Reduce(k2, list (v2)) → list(v3)

https://storage.googleapis.com/pub-tools-public-publication-data/pdf/16cb30b4b92fd4989b8619a61752a2387c6dd474.pdf

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.

```
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.ka., 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

https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/research.google.com/en//pubs/archive/32713.pdf

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

- Build 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
- Include operations to support common operations that might occur in an organization chart.
- 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

DESIGN ACTIVITY: DISCUSSION

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