

A UML-BASED VARIABILITY SPECIFICATION FOR PRODUCT LINE ARCHITECTURE VIEWS

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Abstract: In this paper we present a rigorous and practical notation for specifying variability in product line architecture views expressed in the Unified Modeling Language (UML). The notation has been used for the explicit representation of variations and their locations in software product line architectures based on a design method already established. The improvement consists in a service orientation of architectural models. The benefit of a more familiar and widely used notation facilitates a broader understanding of the architecture and enables more extensive tool support for manipulating it. The specification notation paves the way for the development of tools.

1 INTRODUCTION

Product line (PL) software development requires a systematic approach from such multiple perspectives as business, organizational, architecture and process. In the PL context, the architecture is used to build a variety of different products. For several years the focus of our research has been product line architecture (PLA) design and analysis. One of our goals was to define a Quality-driven Architecture Design and quality Analysis (QADA) method (Matinlassi et al., 2002) for modeling middleware services architectures. An important issue in our research was to explicitly represent variation and indicate locations for which change is allowed. In this way, the diagrammatic description of the PLA defined by using our method helps in instantiating PLA for a particular product or in its evolution for future use. From the PLA documented diagrammatically, it is easy to detect what kind of modifications, omissions and extensions are permitted, expected or required.

The QADASM method was described by defining and using a framework that consisted of the following ingredients: (1) an underlying model, referring to the kinds of constructs represented, manipulated and analyzed by the model; (2) a

language, which is a concrete means of describing the constructs, considering possible diagrammatic notations; (3) defined steps, and the ordering of these steps; (4) guidance for applying the method; and (5) tools that help in carrying out the method. In order to achieve an optimal method for a certain development effort, these ingredients can be defined or selected more properly. Some of these ingredients may already be available (e.g. from the literature, from tool vendors, etc.), whereas others may have to be specially developed, configured or extended.

The work in this paper puts in practice this idea of method improvement with the purpose of defining the UML extensions for the management of variability in space in the software architectures of PLs. The improvement consists in a service orientation of architectural components. The extensions are described through the viewpoints defined by the QADASM method. The method will benefit a more familiar and widely used notation, therefore facilitating a broader understanding of the architecture and enabling more extensive tool support for manipulating it. Also the service oriented approach of QADA improvement is more practical, easier to follow and benefits of advantages provided by service engineering. Our goal is to describe modeling constructs that manage variability and

represent a part of a profile of the extended or applied UML concepts intended primarily for use in modeling the PLAs. These new constructs have to be used in combination with the other UML modeling concepts and diagrams to provide a comprehensive modeling tool set.

The beginning of this paper is a brief description of the viewpoints of the QADASM method, with the focus on modeling elements and relationships with UML extension mechanisms and notation. The next section examines some of the structural and behavior constructs that model variability, trying to interpret them based on UML concepts. UML extension mechanisms are used if a refinement of the UML metamodel is necessary. The final result of our research is the definition of a UML profile for designing software architectures based on the QADASM method. We think that standardization of the UML profile defined in our study will be of benefit to the software architecture developer community, especially for software PLs where a systematic approach is mostly required.

2 MODELING CONSTRUCTS

The modeling constructs used by the QADASM method for representing software architectures for PL development are partitioned into four groups: structural view, behavioral view, deployment view and development view. Variation in space is an integral part of the first three views. The development view includes technologies and work allocation. There are also two levels of abstraction to be considered in PLA descriptions: the conceptual level and the concrete level. Entities of each view are defined in detail in (Purhonen et al., 2004).

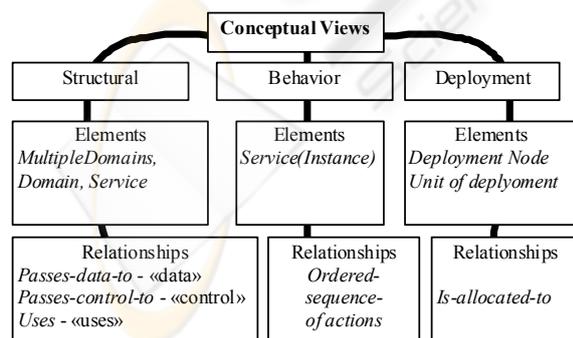


Figure 1: Entities of the conceptual view.

Extended QADA defines a Service as the behaviour of producing some outputs that other services want. Services are identified based on a specific feature

model (Dobrica and Niemela, 2008). A Domain consists of services that are related based on certain factors, such as hardware or architect’s experience. MultipleDomains is required to design architectural views in the context of system-of-systems, where systems of yesterday become components of today.

Figure 1 presents the entities of three major conceptual views that embody variation in space. Variation in time is managed through the conceptual and concrete development views, but that is outside the scope of this paper. On a concrete level there are other architectural elements (i.e. capsules, ports, state diagrams, deployment diagrams, etc.) and relationships between them in each of the views.

To address UML extensions in accordance with the QADASM method we have defined and applied a framework, accompanied by a set of activities and techniques, for identifying differences between the UML standard and the QADASM viewpoint descriptions. The framework is based on the following activities: (1) *Mapping*: Identifies what information is overlapping between the existing QADASM language and UML; (2) *Differentiation*: Identify differences between the UML standard model elements and those defined by QADASM; (3) *Transformation*: By using UML extension mechanisms or other techniques we try to integrate the UML standard with the new required elements.

UML supports the refinement of its specifications through three built-in extension mechanisms (OMG UML, 2003): (1) *constraints* that place semantic restrictions on particular design elements and are defined by using Object Constraint Language (OCL); (2) *tagged values* that allow new attributes to be added to particular elements of the model, and (3) *stereotypes* that allow groups of constraints and tagged values to be given descriptive names and applied to other model elements. The semantic effect of stereotypes is as if the constraints and tagged values were applied directly to those elements. These mechanisms are used to define extended metaclasses in a package that is called UML profile. Tabular forms for specifying the new extensions have been organized (Figure 2). For stereotypes, the tables identify stereotype name, the base class of the stereotype that matches a class or subclass in the UML metamodel, the direct parent of the stereotype being defined (NA if none exists), an informal description with possible explanatory comments and constraints associated with the stereotype. Finally, the notation of the stereotype is specified. For example, based on QADASM, the conceptual structural view is used to record conceptual structural components, conceptual structural

relationships between components and the responsibilities these elements have in the system. Specifically in QADASM, the constructs for modeling this view are summarized in Figure 1.

<p>Tabular form of a Stereotype definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotype: Service • Base Class: Subsystem • Parent: Architectural element • Description: ... • Constraints: None or self.isMandatory=true • Tags: None <p>Notation: A UML package stereotyped as «service»</p>	<p>Tabular form of a Constraint definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constraint: isMandatory • Stereotype: Service • Type: UML::Datatypes::Boolean • Description: Indicates that the Service is Mandatory <p>Tabular form of a Tag definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tag: isDynamic • Stereotype: Capsule • Type: UML::Datatypes::Boolean • Description: Identifies if the associated capsule class may be created and destroyed dynamically.
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Figure 2: Stereotype, constraint and tag definitions.

Typically, UML provides class diagrams for capturing the logical structure of systems. Class diagrams encapsulate universal relationships among classes – those relationships that exist in all contexts. Components of a conceptual structural view are mapped onto the *Subsystem* UML concept. We identified a hierarchical description of components that introduces differences between them and requires transformations using new stereotypes. The stereotypes enhance additional conceptual-specific semantics onto the various aspects that are associated with the UML-based classes. We proceeded with mapping elements and identifying the new required stereotypes.

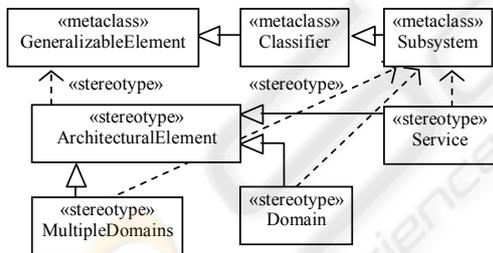


Figure 3: Stereotype in a graphical representation.

A graphical equivalent of the stereotype declarations previously described for tabular form is presented in Figure 3. This shows the relationships among UML meta-classes and the new stereotypes they represent in architectural views. Generalization and predefined «stereotype» dependency are included here.

3 MODELING VIEWS

An important aspect of PLAs is variation among products. UML provide the means to use specific

variation mechanisms (Webber and Goma, 2002) (Jacobson et al., 1997) to describe hierarchical systems (ways to decompose systems into smaller subsystems). However, the UML does not support a description of variation, as QADASM requires.

3.1 Conceptual Structural View

We consider variation in the conceptual structural view to be divided into internal variation (within Service components) and structural variation (between Service/Domain components). To enable variation, we separate components and configurations from each other. Flexible representations are needed to instantiate components and bind them into configurations during product derivation.

3.1.1 Structural Variation

The structural conceptual view has to offer the possibility of preventing automatic selection of all Service components included in a Domain during product derivation. Variability is included in this view by using specific stereotypes for the architectural elements (Figure 4).

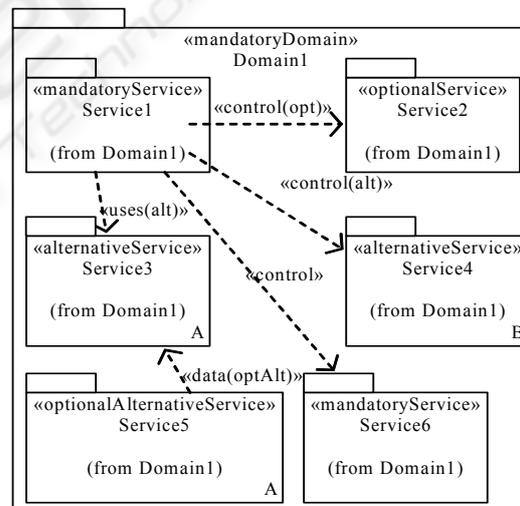


Figure 4: Variation in the conceptual structural view.

Thus we consider that a Service could be further stereotyped in: «mandatoryService» «alternative Service»; «optionalAlternativeService» «optional Service». We recommend that in case of «alternative» or «optionalAlternative» variability of a Service, the inclusion of a letter “A” or “B”, etc., at the bottom of the UML package symbol. The letter anticipates the product identifier that requires that architectural variation.

Variation points included in the conceptual structural view are shown in Figure 4. Domain1 is a «mandatoryDomain» that consists of «mandatoryService» components (Service1 and Service6), «optionalService» component (Service2), «alternativeService» (Service3 of product A and Service4 of product B) «optionalAlternativeService» (Service5 of product A). In this way, variation points identify locations at which the variation will occur.

Some of the constraints that govern variability cannot be expressed by the UML metamodel. They concern the following: (a) If a «mandatory Domain» only consists of «optionalService» components, at least one of them must be selected during the derivation process; otherwise, a «Domain» that only consists of «optionalService» components must be an «optionalDomain». (b) Two «alternativeService» components of different products are exclusive, meaning that only one can be selected for a product. The product is specified at the bottom of the notation. (c) There should be no relationships between *alternative* or *optionalAlternative* components; they belong to different products. The relationships are appropriately stereotyped (Table 1).

Table 1: Stereotypes of relationships for variability.

Stereotype	Represents
«control» «data» «uses»	Control/ Data/ Uses association between two <i>mandatory</i> services (UML).
«control (opt)» «data (opt)» «uses (opt)»	Control/ Data/ Uses association between two services (UML). At least one of them is an <i>optional</i> stereotype.
«control (optAlt)» «data (optAlt)» «uses (optAlt)»	Control/ Data/ Uses association between two services (UML). At least one of them is an <i>optionalAlternative</i> stereotype.

3.1.2 Internal Variation

We define internal variation only for mandatory Service components. A Service component is on the lowest hierarchical level and may perform a required functionality that may vary depending on products.

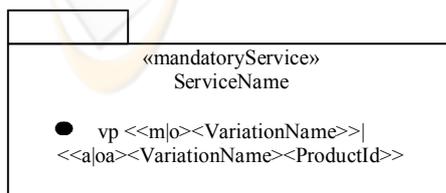


Figure 5: Internal variation of a mandatoryService.

The internal variation of Service components is designated by a ● symbol (Figure 5). Although the symbol is not included in the UML standard, (Jacobson et al., 1997) and later (Webber and Gomaa, 2002) introduced the ● symbol for variation points. The UML tag syntax

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vp <<m|o>>VariationName>> |
<<a|oa>>VariationName>>ProductId>>
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shows the reuser the parts of an internal variation so that the reuser can build a product. Mandatory (m) or optional (o) functionality (*VariationName*) of a Service component is specified in the tag syntax. In the case of alternative (a) or optionalAlternative (oa) the product identifier (*ProductId*) is also specified.

3.2 Conceptual Behavior View

The conceptual behavior view may be mapped directly onto a hierarchy of UML collaboration diagrams. The elements of this view are roles/instances of the Service stereotypes defined in the conceptual structural view.

Variable parts of a collaboration or interaction diagram can be represented with dashed lines. Optional messages between ServiceComponents use dashed lines with solid arrowheads (Figure 6).

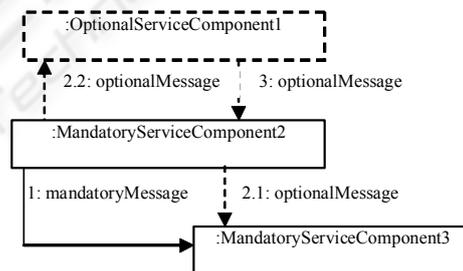


Figure 6: Optional interactions.

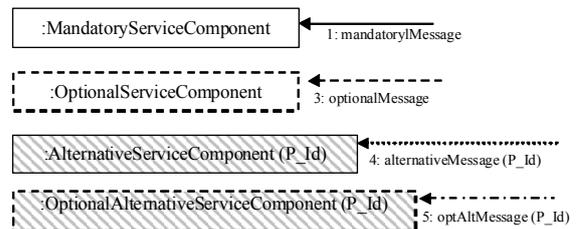


Figure 7: Variability in the conceptual behavior view.

Collaboration diagrams describe each operation that is part of the specification requirements. Similar to the conceptual structural view, *alternative* and *optionalAlternative* Service instances may be represented in this view. An identifier of the specific

product that requires a particular interaction should be introduced and represented in the diagram. The notation used in collaboration diagrams for variability representation is shown in Figure 7. A dashed line is the notation for optional message, a dotted line indicates alternative message and a dash-dotted line is used for optional alternative.

3.3 Conceptual Deployment View

In UML a deployment diagram shows the structure of the nodes on which the components are deployed. The concepts related to a deployment diagram are Node and Component. DeploymentNode in QADASM is a UML Node that represents a processing platform for various services. The notation used for DeploymentNode is a Node stereotyped as «DeploymentNode». UML notation for Node (a 3-dimensional view of a cube) is appropriate for this architectural element.

A DeploymentUnit is composed of one or more conceptual service components. Clustering is done according to a mutual requirement relationship between services. It cannot be split or deployed on more than one node. The stereotype, «deploymentUnit» is a specialization of the ArchitecturalElement stereotype and applies only to Subsystem, which is a subclass of Classifier in the metamodel. The other three stereotypes «mandatory», «optional» and «alternative» are specializations of the DeploymentUnit stereotype and also apply to Subsystem. Figure 8 describes a class diagram that defines alternative deploymentUnits. DeploymentUnitA is alternative to DeploymentUnitB; if there are at least two elements - a ServiceA in DeploymentUnitA, and a ServiceB in DeploymentUnitB - those exclude each other. Exclude is a new stereotype of UML association introduced in this diagram.

consists of four models. The structural, behavioral and functional models constitute the specification models as the Komponent is used in all applications. The decision model contains information about how the models change for the different applications and thus describes the different variants. In PRAISE project that focuses on the design and representation of a PLA with UML (El Kaim et al, 2000), UML package is used to represent a variation point or hot spot with the stereotype «hot spot». Also any collaboration is tagged with a variant with “variation point”. The usage of the package in this method to represent variation points is not clearly stated. A package is already used to designate a common core component and a class that is contained in such a component may also participate in a variation point. Elements in a UML package must be contained in only one package; therefore this did not allow the package to be used to designate a variation point. It is more desirable to use the UML package to model common core components and use the UML tags to identify the variation points that they contain.

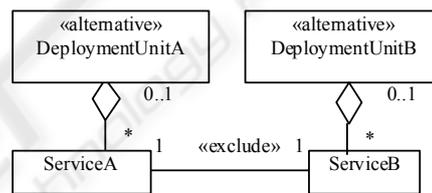


Figure 8: Alternative deploymentUnits.

4 RELATED WORK

Other researchers have tried to use and extend UML notation for variability specification in PLA. The PL developed by FSB (Flight Software Branch) (McComas et al., 2000) is using UML. A special symbol «V» to represent variability is created. Elements that are not tagged by a «V» are interpreted as common. This symbol is applied to operation, attributes, and arguments of operations. In Kobra (Atkinson et al., 2000), each Komponent (Kobra component) in the framework is described by a suite of UML diagrams and its specification

SPLIT (Coriat et al, 2000) considers variation points to have attributes and therefore uses the UML classifier, class, to depict a variation point. The variation point technique is very attractive in the sense that variability is immediately visible in the UML models. The mechanism associated to each variation point defines the transformation to apply when doing the derivation. However, using this technique systematically requires development of specific scripts and programs to manage it, since it is not integrated in UML. By using a class to represent a variation point gives the variation point attributes, but not behavior. The attributes provide information for a reuser to choose a variant. Webber (Webber and Gomaa, 2002) goes a step further and shows a reuser how to build a variant in variation point model (VPM). Her approach provides an excess of information to be managed by the designer in a low-level specification. However, this research inspired us in extending UML notation for our method.

A domain modeling method for software PL with UML is described by (Gomaa and Gianturco, 2002). This allows the explicit modeling of the

similarities and variations among members of the PLs or combinations of PLs. Various views of the UML, in particular the use case view and the static view are extended and used for modeling PLs and a domain of PLs using a view integration approach. The method introduces new stereotypes in modeling the use case view. It also integrates the feature model, which is used for modeling the common and variable requirements in software PLs with the UML. The UML package notation is used to depict use cases that are grouped into the same feature. Classes and class diagrams are used for static modeling for the PL domain. UML stereotypes distinguish between kernel, optional and variant classes. Additionally, the <<alternative>> stereotype is used to represent “1 and only 1” choices for classes in the class diagram. Aggregation and Generalization/Specialization hierarchies are used to represent the static view of the domain model. Variability in multiple-view models of software PL has also been discussed in (Gomaa and Shin, 2003). This paper uses UML notation for functional view, which is represented through use cases, for static model view through a class model and a dynamic model view through collaboration model and statechart model. This is a more general approach. Here we propose UML notation extensions that are applied particularly in modeling PLA for middleware distributed services.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This paper has described how UML standard concepts can be extended to address the challenges of variability management in space of software PLAs at conceptual level. A service based approach has been considered in modelling architectural views. In particular, a new UML profile has been defined to be integrated in a systematic approach, a quality-driven architecture design and quality analysis method. Standard UML extensibility mechanisms can be used to express diagrammatic notations of each view of the architecture modeled using the method. The detailed description of each required extension presented in this paper would allow a possible standardization of this profile. Integrated use of a standard profile and a design method as described here would allow extensive and systematic use, maintenance and evolution of the software PLAs. By using UML notation extensions, our method models the variability, and hence explicitly describes, where in the PLA views software evolution can occur. A variation point

specification is needed in PLA views to communicate to reusers where and how to realize a PL-member-unique variant.

In the area of tool support a feasibility analysis of the implementation of the new UML extensions was also performed. We investigated whether or not concrete CASE tool for software design supports the new UML refinement. In the experiment we have evaluated the Rational Rose RT tool (Rational, 2003). With regard to how the tool can be configured or what other new components it needs, our evaluation showed that the conceptual views are affected by the missing required extension constructs. We believe that with smaller adaptations the required extensions can be made available in a CASE tool.

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