

Lido – Wiki based Living Documentation with Domain Knowledge

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Abstract: There is a gap between code and documentation in many software development projects. This gap usually grows as time goes by, decreasing developers ability to keep product quality high. We describe how documentation based on a common wiki can be enhanced with domain knowledge in ways that ensure better live documentation. This way updated and relevant documentation, i.e., specifications, manuals, models, test scripts, etc. lead ultimately to higher quality software.

1 INTRODUCTION

A software product is composed of source code and compiled executables but also of data and documentation in various forms and formats. Today, wiki (Wikipedia) applications have become a popular means for documenting software and many other areas. Wikipedia.com is a notable popular example.

In software development it is even more common, especially in open source projects, to use wiki for documentation. Actually, the first wiki site, WikiWikiWeb was used for documenting a software project (<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiHistory>).

Using wiki for documentation is in itself a big step towards a documentation that has more chances to be updated and relevant throughout a software project lifecycle, due to its accessibility. But, can we do better?

In previous works (Exman et al., 2014; Yagel, 2011) it was shown how executable specifications (Adzic, 2009) can be augmented with domain concept modifiers in order to (semi-) automatically create parts of the code. Here we lay a plan to broaden the scope to documentation as a whole. By software documentation we mean here all forms of written text and other documents that accompany the software code itself. Documents can range from requirement and design/architecture specifications, modeling diagrams, test scripts, glossaries, technical and user manuals, various logs of formal and informal communication between various project members and stakeholders (even e.g. marketing), down to source code comments.

1.1 The Problem – The Gap between Documentation and Code

The problem is the gaps that often exist between various documentation artifacts and the code. This gap usually grows as software is being development due to lack of continuous updates and changes which are often not reflected back to the documentation – thus making it obsolete.

For example, it is common to draw design diagrams, e.g. in UML (Fowler, 2003), in earlier phases of a project. Let's say this is a class diagram with some domain concepts. Later on when these classes are implemented (sometimes partially generated by a tool), reality comes in and the design changes due to, e.g., new insights gained while developing the system or requirement changes. What happens then to the original diagram? In case we still need it for documenting the design – how do we keep it updated in a maintainable and economic way? Can we provide methods and tools for creating documentation in which developers will be more productive, in contrast to today's general negative attitude to documentation?

1.2 Live Documentation

We roughly define live documentation as a set of documents which are actively synced with changes in software code. The term living documentation is widely discussed in an upcoming book in preliminary edition with this title (Martraire, 2016). Previously, executable specifications were

mentioned as a form of living documentation, e.g. in (Adzic, 2011; Smart, 2014).

The main idea is that the documentation is coupled to the source code by connecting it to the toolchain used to develop the code itself and that it is as accessible as the code.

Going back to the UML class diagram example, it will be considered a living diagram if it can be automatically updated following a corresponding change in code and vice versa.

1.3 Why Wiki?

Using wiki for documentation has several advantages. First it is a proven and acceptable tool for collaboration. Its simplicity and high accessibility, usually through common browsers, makes it an attractive target. It is also based on plain text which makes it also easy to manipulate by programs. It's free from helps and directs the developers/engineers to work in higher level of abstraction, away from the formality and constraints of today's programming languages. Above all, markdown is a simple way to mark and link concepts, models and other various levels of software artifacts. In this work we emphasize wiki as a common base for most of the practices or methods of software documentation.

1.4 Related Work

FitNesse (Adzic, 2008) is a wiki-based web tool for non-developers to write formatted acceptance tests through tabular example/test data.

BDD (Behavior Driven Development) (North, 2006), is an extension of TDD (Test Driven Development/Design) aiming at writing requirements by non-technical stakeholders. Cucumber (Wynne and Hellesoy, 2012) and SpecFlow (SpecFlow) are tools which accept stories written in a somewhat constrained natural language, directly supporting BDD. They are easily integrated with unit testing and user/web automation tools. Here (Yagel, 2011) we reviewed these practices and tools.

DaSpec (DaSpec) is a new tool that uses wiki for writing executable specifications in free form and exercises the system under test for approval/acceptance. BDDfy (BDDfy) is a tool that creates documentation from unit tests written in some disciplined manner, thus reserving the usual order and generating documentation from lower levels.

In the diagramming area, many tools are

generating source code from, e.g., UML diagrams. Some of them use standard formats, e.g. XML files used by ArgoUML (ArgoUML). Some of the tools also support reverse engineering for creating or updating those diagrams, following changes in the code – thus helping keep the documentation updated.

Mapador (Mapador) is a service for automatically extracting documentation from code, which targets writing documentation as part of the development process and not a posteriori.

ATDD (Acceptance Test Driven Development) is an extension of TDD, also known as Agile Acceptance Testing (Adzic, 2008). Further extensions are Story Testing, Specification with examples (Adzic, 2011) or Living/Executable Documentation (Brown, 2011; Smart, 2014).

The mentioned coming book (Martraire, 2016) emphasizes these relevant practices: Living Diagram, Living Glossary, Declarative Automation, Enforced Guidelines, Small-Scale Model and others. For example, the book discusses how using Javadoc's DocLet (documentation generator), one can parse source files for annotations marking main domain concept and then generating a glossary document.

Concerning diagrams, there are libraries and services which accept as input simple text format and can then generate diagram documentation. See for example: yuml.me, diagrammr.com, and structurizr.com. More general legacy tools can be used too, e.g. Graphviz (Graphviz) that uses .dot file format for generating graphs.

Enterprise/ALM tools like IBM's Rational Team Concert (IBM) put emphasis on traceability which is important to link the various documentation and software levels.

More generally, the emphasis on domain analysis follows the Domain Driven Design (DDD) work (Evans, 2003). Even at higher level of abstraction we can make use of ontologies to guide the documentation and development process, as discussed at (Feathers, 2004; Osetinsky and Yagel, 2014).

Wiki Software. It is now common that project management tools, version control systems and services offer built-in wiki support. Github (Github) (a well-known version control cloud service) for example is adding a wiki by default to every new code repository (see: <https://help.github.com/articles/about-github-wikis/>). However, in contrast to our proposal in this paper, this wiki is managed separately from the code (e.g. in terms of security policies and git versioning). It is also a common

practice for a github project (and other similar ones) to have a README file at the source root, which often serves as the main page for all other documentation. There are many (mostly open source) wiki engines, e.g. MediaWiki (MediaWiki) that powers Wikipedia and other wikis.

Semantically Enhanced Wikis are a major step towards better integration of wiki content. A notable example is Semantic MediaWiki (MediaWiki) which is an extension to MediaWiki which allows semantically annotating wiki pages, using structural information, ontology languages, semantic web and alike. In this work we focus more on the usability side of integrating various tools under a wiki, and indeed such semantic tools naturally fit in.

The remaining of this paper is organized as follows: In Section 2 we discuss the general approach, in section 3 we give a preliminary example and then in section 4 we conclude with some remarks and future work.

2 THE SOLUTION – ENHANCED WIKI

2.1 Enhanced Wiki

The main idea is to use wiki as the "center of mass" for software documentation. We want to build on the existing wide wiki engines and tools, especially dedicated parsers and generators (as mentioned above in section 1.4) to keep the documentation and the code in sync. Various documentation tools will be plugged into the wiki ecosystem.

The case study in the next section will use, as a starting point, a new tool that uses a wiki for working with executable specifications. We intend to extend the approach of such a tool into using a non-fixed set of tools and methods (abbreviated Lido for Living Documentation) for producing various kinds of documentation.

In particular, we suggest marking domain concepts in the wiki in such a way the various documentation tools will detect those concepts and help generate more meaningful documentation.

A suggested workflow for working in this way, is as follows:

- Executable Specification* – one writes an executable specification in a wiki (using standard Markup),
- Domain Annotation* – using markup special syntax to mark domain and software related

- entities (e.g. using DDD vocabulary),
- Diagram Generation* – using the entities above, possibly with other added information, e.g. connection between entities, generating diagrams (e.g. in UML),
- Connection of Specifications to Tests* – underneath, step definitions are generated which connect sentences from the specification to tests which exercise the system under test,
- Run Results* – finally the result of this run appear in a web page
- Coding* – implementing in a programming language the missing parts,
- Updating and Iterating* – continuously evolving the code and the documentation up to the point of a successful release.

Other steps are possible too, as will be demonstrated in the next section. Also, the order is not necessary and should be adapted and customized to the development methodology in use.

The main contribution of this paper is gathering various tools under the umbrella of wiki to achieve really live documentation.

3 A CASE STUDY: BLACK-LISTING APPLICATION

We demonstrate here our method by combining the basic techniques of our previous approach to executable specifications (Exman et al., 2014; Yagel, 2011; Yagel et al., 2013) with the approach of the above referred tool DaSpec (DaSpec).

```

Specification Step definitions System under test Result
This specification will be executed when you open the Result tab.
3 > Online harassment is a major issue, and though our product doesn't need to deal with al
4 > we need to at least allow people to prevent abusive and unwanted messages coming into t
5 > useful for future analytics, as it may allow us to capture trends and block abuse accou
6 >
7 > For now, just ensuring that unwanted messages do not come into feeds is enough.
8 >
9 > We should also ensure that we're not removing messages from the feeds of other users.
10
11 Marina has blocked the following senders:
12 * Joe
13 * Tom
14
15 Joe has blocked the following senders:
16 * Tom
17
18
19
20 When Tom sends a message,
21 it will appear in the feeds for:
22 * Tom
23
24
25 When Joe sends a message,
26 it will appear in the feeds for:
27 * Tom
28 * Joe
29
30
31 When Marina sends a message,
32 it will appear in the feeds for:
33 * Tom
34 * Joe
35 * Marina
36
    
```

Figure 1: Executable Specification.

We suggest expanding the idea of using wiki for writing executable specifications into a suite of living documentation techniques.

We extend here an example of a black listing application. Here we demonstrate some of the steps described above. In Figure 1 we see an executable specification – taken from DaSpecs' documentation site (http://daspec.com/examples/basic/checking_for_missing_and_additional_list_items/, the actual purpose is to demonstrate working with list of items).

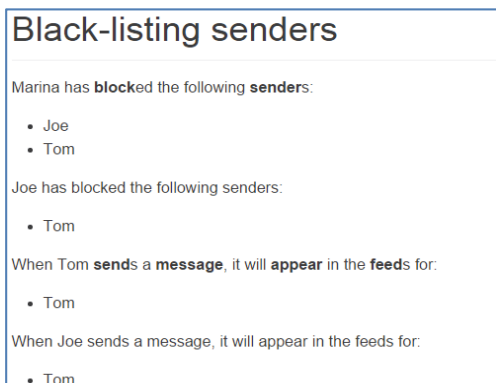


Figure 2: Annotating Domain Concepts.

We can enrich this specification in several ways. We shall give the following methods:

- Mark Domain Concepts* – here we use bold Markdown syntax (**) to mark concepts of the target domain – Figure 2.
- Glossary* – add a glossary part to the wiki which can then be output in different formats – Figure 3.
- Class Diagram* – use text syntax to generate a class diagram – Figure 4.

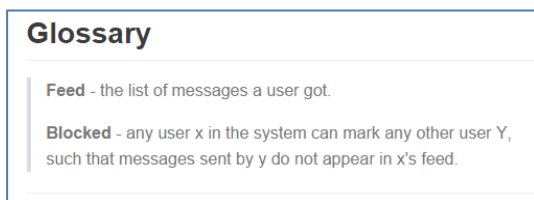


Figure 3: Glossary.

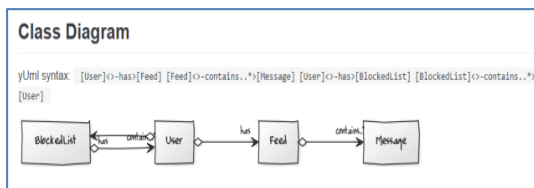


Figure 4: Class Diagram.

See also our previous work (Exman et al., 2014) for a thorough discussion about finding entities in executable specifications.

4 DISCUSSION

We have given preliminary ideas how wiki can serve as a basis for more meaningful documentation. Some documentation types need extra syntax not covered by common Markup, the UML class diagram is an example for that.

Wiki software saves also the history of edits, in order to take advantage of it, custom diffs, e.g. graphic diff, might be needed as well.

We need to be careful not to constrain ourselves to the wiki medium in a way that will harm other useful kinds of documentation. For legacy systems it might be too extensive to convert existing documentation, for example a specification is given in a Doc file format.

Traceability between documents themselves and between the source code is still an open issue that can be further investigated.

In the spirit of this work we believe that documentation wiki should be an integral part of the configuration management of a project, in order to be better integrated and influencing.

4.1 Future Work

We plan to further extend previous work (Exman et al., 2014) and also use mark-up based executable specification augmented by domain annotations, as well as integrating ontology repositories. Then, combining various tools in coherent ways, as much as possible.

We aim for building a framework for better integration of the discussed wiki tools. This will also allow to measure and compare the success and impact of various tools and the whole process.

4.2 Main Contribution

By having better tools we can expect from software developers to create better documentation and work in higher levels of abstraction. Ultimately, this can lead to working only in those higher and more human oriented levels, automating the rest of the work.

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