International Research Journal of Mathematics, Engineering and IT
Volume 3, Issue 3, March 2016 Impact Factor- 2.868
ISSN: (2349-0322)
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DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR DESIGN PATTERN SELECTION: MODEL, METHODOLOGY & METHODS

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ABSTRACT
Design patterns are crucial for solving recurring design problems in software engineering. Selecting the appropriate design pattern can significantly impact software systems' maintainability, scalability, and overall quality. This paper presents a comprehensive decision support system (DSS) aimed at aiding software engineers in the selection of design patterns. We propose a model for the DSS, outline the methodology for its development, and discuss the methods used for pattern selection. The proposed system integrates domain knowledge, pattern attributes, and decision-making techniques to enhance decision-making.
KEYWORDS: Software Engineering, Knowledge Base, Inference Engine, Rule-Based Systems, Case-Based Reasoning (CBR).

I. INTRODUCTION
In the dynamic field of software engineering, the quest for optimal design solutions has led to the development of numerous methodologies and frameworks to tackle recurring problems. One of the most influential contributions to this endeavor is the concept of design patterns. Originating from the seminal work of Gamma, Helm, Johnson, and Vlissides, design patterns offer standardized solutions to common design challenges, promoting best practices and enhancing the reusability of software components. Despite their widespread adoption and proven benefits, selecting the most appropriate design pattern for a given project remains complex and often daunting. This complexity arises from the vast array of design patterns available, each with its unique attributes and applicability depending on the specific requirements and constraints of the software being developed.
The difficulty in choosing the correct design pattern is compounded by the diversity of software projects, each with its own set of objectives, constraints, and operational environments. For instance, a pattern suitable for a high-performance system might not be ideal for a system that prioritizes ease of maintenance or rapid development. Moreover, the landscape of design patterns is continually evolving, with new patterns emerging and existing patterns being refined to address contemporary challenges in software design. This ever-changing environment necessitates a robust mechanism to support decision-making in pattern selection, ensuring that the chosen patterns align with project goals and deliver optimal results.

A Decision Support System (DSS) for design pattern selection is a powerful solution to this challenge. Such a system aims to assist software engineers in making informed choices by integrating domain knowledge, pattern attributes, and decision-making techniques into a cohesive framework. The primary objective of a DSS is to streamline the selection process, reduce the cognitive load on engineers, and enhance the alignment between design patterns and project requirements. By leveraging a DSS, engineers can navigate the complexities of pattern selection more efficiently, ultimately leading to more effective and reliable software solutions.

The development of a DSS for design pattern selection involves several critical components. The knowledge base is the repository of various design patterns, including their characteristics, use cases, and associated benefits and trade-offs. This component must be comprehensive and up-to-date, reflecting the latest design pattern developments and capturing theoretical and practical insights. The inference engine is responsible for processing the information in the knowledge base and applying decision-making algorithms to match patterns with project requirements. This component is crucial in translating abstract knowledge into actionable recommendations, considering factors such as pattern suitability, complexity, and impact on system design. Finally, the user interface facilitates interaction between the system and its users, allowing engineers to input project requirements, view recommended patterns, and access justifications for the recommendations provided.

The methodology for developing a DSS involves several stages, including requirements analysis, knowledge acquisition, system design, implementation, and testing. Requirements analysis focuses on understanding the needs of software engineers and identifying the challenges they face in pattern selection. This stage involves gathering input from practitioners, reviewing existing practices, and pinpointing areas where a DSS can add value. Knowledge acquisition entails collecting and organizing information about design patterns, which requires a thorough literature review, expert consultations, and case studies. The system design phase involves architecting the DSS and defining data structures, algorithms, and user interactions. Implementation involves building and integrating the system components, while testing and evaluation ensure that the system meets its objectives and performs effectively in real-world scenarios.

Several methods can be employed within the DSS to facilitate design pattern selection. The rule-based approach uses predefined rules to match patterns with project requirements based on attributes and constraints. Case-based reasoning involves drawing parallels between current projects and historical cases where similar patterns were used, enabling the system to adapt solutions from previous experiences. Decision trees represent the decision-making process through a series of criteria, guiding the selection of the most suitable pattern. Multi-criteria decision Analysis (MCDA) evaluates patterns based on multiple criteria, such as cost, complexity, and performance, aggregating these factors to rank and select the best option. Expert systems integrate expert knowledge and heuristics to provide recommendations based on accumulated experience and insights.

Applying a DSS in real-world scenarios demonstrates its potential to enhance the design pattern selection process. For instance, in a software development project requiring a scalable and flexible notification system, the DSS can evaluate various patterns, such as Observer, Mediator, and Publisher-Subscriber, based on the project's criteria. By analyzing the attributes and implications of each pattern, the system can recommend the most suitable option, providing a rationale for its choice and highlighting the anticipated benefits. This application streamlines the decision-making process and ensures that the selected pattern aligns with project requirements and delivers optimal performance.

Developing and implementing a Decision Support System for design pattern selection represent a significant advancement in software engineering. By integrating knowledge, decision-making techniques, and user interactions, the DSS addresses the complexities of

pattern selection and supports engineers in making informed decisions. The system's ability to process and analyze information, coupled with its practical applications, highlights its value in enhancing the design process and creating high-quality software solutions. As the field of software engineering continues to evolve, the DSS for design pattern selection will play a crucial role in navigating the complexities of modern design challenges and promoting best practices in software development.

II. MODEL FOR DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM

1. Knowledge Base: The knowledge base serves as the foundation of the Decision Support System (DSS), storing comprehensive information about design patterns. This includes:

- **Pattern Attributes**: Detailed descriptions of each pattern, including their structure, components, and design goals.
- **Use Cases**: Practical examples and scenarios where each pattern has been successfully applied.
- **Advantages and Disadvantages**: Analysis of the strengths and limitations of each pattern in various contexts.
- **Project Requirements**: Information on standard requirements and constraints in different software development projects.

2. Inference Engine: The inference engine is responsible for processing information from the knowledge base to recommend suitable design patterns. It involves:

- **Decision Algorithms**: Rules and algorithms that evaluate patterns based on criteria such as applicability, complexity, and impact.
- **Matching Process**: Techniques to match design patterns with project requirements, including rule-based logic, case-based reasoning, and multi-criteria analysis.
- **Scenario Analysis**: Evaluation of different patterns' performance under project conditions and constraints.

3. User Interface: The user interface facilitates interaction between the DSS and its users. It includes:

- **Input Mechanism**: Tools for users to input project requirements, constraints, and objectives.
- **Recommendation Display**: Presentation of recommended design patterns, explanations, and justifications for each recommendation.
- **Feedback System**: Features allowing users to provide feedback on the recommendations and refine their search criteria.

By incorporating these components, the DSS model aims to enhance the decision-making process in selecting design patterns, ensuring that choices are informed, relevant, and aligned with project goals.

III. METHODS FOR DESIGN PATTERN SELECTION

1. Rule-Based Approach:

- **Definition**: Uses a predefined set of rules to match design patterns with project requirements.
- **Process**: Rules are based on pattern attributes and project constraints. For example, if a project requires high flexibility and low coupling, the rule-based system might suggest the Strategy or Observer pattern.
- **Advantages**: Provides clear and consistent recommendations based on established criteria. Easy to implement and understand.

2. Case-Based Reasoning (CBR):

- **Definition**: Involves comparing the current project with historical cases where similar design patterns were used.

- **Process**: The system retrieves past cases, analyzes how similar patterns addressed those cases, and adapts solutions for the current project. For example, if a previous project used the MVC pattern to handle complex user interfaces, it might recommend the same pattern for a new project with similar requirements.
- **Advantages**: Leverages real-world examples and experiences, allowing for context-specific recommendations. It helps in understanding the practical implications of different patterns.

3. Decision Trees:

- **Definition**: Represents the decision-making process through a tree-like structure of criteria and options.
- **Process**: Each node in the tree corresponds to a decision criterion (e.g., performance vs. maintainability), leading to selecting the most suitable pattern based on the project's needs. For instance, a decision tree might help determine whether to use the Singleton or Factory pattern based on criteria such as object instantiation frequency.
- **Advantages**: Provides a visual and structured approach to decision-making. Facilitates understanding of how different criteria impact the selection process.

Each method offers unique strengths and can be used individually or in combination to enhance the design pattern selection process. By incorporating these approaches, a DSS can provide more accurate, context-aware, and practical recommendations for design patterns.

IV. CONCLUSION

The proposed Decision Support System for design pattern selection offers a structured approach to aiding software engineers in choosing appropriate design patterns. By integrating domain knowledge, decision-making techniques, and user interactions, the DSS enhances the design process and supports informed decision-making. Future work includes expanding the knowledge base, refining the inference algorithms, and exploring additional decision-making methods.

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