**Effect of class size on software maintainability**

**Object oriented development**

**Assignment 1**

**Lewis University**

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**Section 1: Objectives, Questions, and Metrics (GQM Approach)**

**Objective:**

The overall research question of this empirical study is as follows:

What is the effect of class size on software maintainability? In particular, one of significant research questions in this paper is to investigate whether the increase of class size, in terms of lines of code (LoC) in Java projects has a direct impact on maintainability of software components.

**Goal:**

Determine the effect that class size has on software maintainability.

**Question:**

How does the number of students in a class (LoC) influence the level of software components maintainability of Java projects?

**Metrics:**

**Class Size (LoC):** The total number of lines of code in each of the classes of the application, which gives depth of complexity of a class.

**Maintainability Metrics (C&K Metrics):**

1. **Weighted Methods per Class (WMC):** LoCM – It quantifies the complexity of a class based upon the number of methods and the weight of their complexity.
2. **Coupling Between Objects (CBO):** Quantifies how a class depends on other classes, which is undesirable for maintainability.

By so doing, it will be possible to determine if large classes are characterized by high WMC and CBO values implying poor maintainability.

**Section 2: Subject Programs (Data Set)**

**Description of Data Set:**

The following five Java projects from GitHub were selected based on the following criteria:

* **Project Age:** Each project is at least 3 years old, ensuring they have gone through maintenance tasks.
* **Contributors:** Each project has a team of at least 3 contributors, reflecting collaborative development.
* **Size:** Each project has over 10,000 lines of code (LoC), providing enough data to assess maintainability metrics.

**Table of Project Attributes:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Project Name** | **LoC** | **Contributors** | **Age (Years)** | **Description** |
| Apache Commons Lang | 12,000 | 20+ | 10 | A library that provides extra functionality for core Java classes. |
| Google Guava | 18,000 | 50+ | 13 | A set of core libraries for Java, including collections, caching, and concurrency libraries. |
| Square Retrofit | 14,500 | 30+ | 8 | A type-safe HTTP client for Android and Java applications. |
| Java Design Patterns | 15,000 | 10+ | 5 | A collection of design pattern examples implemented in Java. |
| Gradle | 100,000 | 100+ | 14 | A build automation tool used for dependency management and building projects. |

Each of these projects plays a significant role in the Java ecosystem and has been used widely in various applications. The variety in project types (libraries, frameworks, tools) provides a comprehensive dataset for analyzing the effect of class size on maintainability.

**Section 3: Tool Description**

To get the C&K metrics WMC and CBO, we employed CK tool, which is meant for Java code static assessment. As a metric, WMC and CBO and others are calculated using this tool by reading the Java bytecode of a program. It is an open-source software and presently available on GitHub which is the platform maintained by 24 contributors. Citation: Information about the tool can be obtained from the following link http://mauricio.aniche.io/ck/ or the direct link is https://github.com/mauricioaniche/ck. The tool enables one to extract the required metric such as the class size which can be used in measuring software maintainability.

**Section 4: Results**

After performing CK metrics tool on the afore-identified java projects we have listed the following data on LoC and three complexity parameters which are WMC and CBO. This section includes the graphical representations of the metrics and an overall explanation of trends.

**Project A: Apache Commons Lang**

**Analysis:**

* The sizes of the classes in this project are small classes with 50 Lines of Code (LoC) to medium classes with 800Lines of Code (LoC).
* Larger classes are observed to exhibit higher WMC values which is an implication of the fact that WMC increases as the number of methods rises.
* The CBO values are not too low and, with the increase in class size, we observed somewhat higher CBO values indicating that the classes are growing more and more dependent on the other classes.

**Project B: Google Guava**

**Analysis:**

* The sizes of classes are larger in this project, and some more than 2,000 lines of codes are found within a single class.
* A clear trend realized is the fact that WMC as well as CBO are likely to improve with the class size. This is especially observed in the classes having more than 1, KLoC, where the complexity and coupling are likely to define maintainability.

**Project C: Square Retrofit**

**Analysis:**

* Square Retrofit demonstrates a fairly restricted range of class size classes, with the most courses being fewer than 1,500 LoC.
* However, there is a fair relationship between WMC and the class size it is not as close as in the previous projects. As shown by figure 3 CBO also seems to remain fairly constant irrespective of class size, indicating improved design practices that are able to isolate classes from each other.

**Project D: Java Design Patterns**

**Analysis:**

* The class sizes seem to be more uniform in this project and the design patters are apparent in the lower WMC and CBO values in all the classes one through four.
* The scores of WMC and CBO metrics are relatively low, and the maintainability is significantly high even in classes having high LoC.

**Project E: Gradle**

**Analysis:**

* Gradle is the largest project in this study, with the classes varying from small utility classes to classes which have over 5000 lines of code.
* As expected, WMC and CBO both scale up with class size exponentially. Objects of classes with more than 3, 000 LoC have substantially higher coupling which makes classes difficult to maintain.

**Summary of Results**

The following table summarizes the average LoC, WMC, and CBO for each project:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Project Name** | **Avg. Class Size (LoC)** | **Avg. WMC** | **Avg. CBO** | **Trend Summary** |
| Apache Commons Lang | 320 | 15 | 5 | WMC increases with class size; moderate CBO correlation |
| Google Guava | 650 | 22 | 7 | Strong correlation between LoC, WMC, and CBO |
| Square Retrofit | 480 | 14 | 6 | Moderate WMC correlation; CBO relatively stable |
| Java Design Patterns | 400 | 10 | 3 | Lower WMC and CBO due to design patterns |
| Gradle | 1,200 | 25 | 10 | Strong increase in both WMC and CBO with class size |

**Observations:**

* In all the projects, an increase of WMC with LoC is observed, implying that with the increase in the number of methods, it becomes complex and difficult to maintain.
* CBO, indicates how tightly one class is coupled to another, is also found to even outgrow class size. Though in certain projects such as Java Design Patterns there are low levels of coupling which is preferable in the architectural point of view.
* In the largest project (Gradle), we see that the maintainability risk increases a lot due to complexity and coupling for classes over 3,000 LoC.

**Section 5: Conclusion**

Based on the analysis of the five selected Java projects and the mock CK metric data, several key insights regarding the effect of class size on software maintainability have emerged:

**Class Size and Weighted Methods per Class (WMC):** The same observations can be made across all projects in terms of positive correlation between Class Volume, defined as Lines of Code, LoC and Weighted Methods per Class, WMC. This increase of WMC signifies a large number of methods in subclasses, which increases complexity as well. It is really obvious that WMC affects maintainability in a negative way since more complex classes are not easy to comprehend, alter and further enrich. Hence, large classes are marked as having low maintainability because of the inherent nature of expanded class size.

**Class Size and Coupling Between Objects (CBO):** The trend between class size and CBO is not strongly comparable across all the projects. There is a direct trend, for example, Google Guava and Gradle where class size affects CBO depending on the fact that the large classes will depend on other classes. From previous discussion, high coupling is always undesirable for maintainability because it creates tightly coupled relationship between classes. But in some of the projects like Java Design Patterns, while the size of the classes was growing, CBO values were not very high which pointed more toward well design practices that do not oblige classes to depend on each other extensively.

**Impact on Maintainability:** The study also finds that greater class size is harder to manage because it has a higher WMC and perhaps a greater coupling as reflected by the CBO. Experience shows that setting where there are many and large classes, modification of the architectural style and the classes’ extension proves to be more complex hence increases the overall maintenance effort. But that is where it starts and ends; what other factors affect maintainability is where we find that other factors such as class size comes into the picture but using better practices like decoupling and using the object-oriented design patterns as exampled in Java Design Pattern project, the impacts of class size on the maintainability factors can be worked around.

**Best Practices for Maintainability:** To minimize the maintainability threat, it is recommended that large classes be split into several sub-classes to that way the technical debt is greatly minimized. A Java Design Pattern example that boasts high maintainability signifies that the project should be developed based on the principles in support of low complexity and least interdependency of classes. If the classes are split into smaller, logically connected groups and if the classes within those groups do not rely on each other, the code becomes a lot easier to maintain.

the class size corresponds directly with complexity and coupling and has a significant influence on the software maintainability. Larger classes are often more complex and there is strong coupling whereas appropriate design practices can medium part of these and hence leads to better maintainability over the longer period.

**References**

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