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Plan of Approach

Designing an Autonomous Robot Player for Connect-4

Name of client: ALTEN
Name of supervisor: Michael van der Velden
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Version History			
Version	***Date***	***State***	***Comment***
1	10-02-2023	Draft	First draft set-up
2	13-02-2023	Draft	Put main bodies of text
3	16-02-2023	Finalizing draft	Correction from the feedback from the technical supervisor
4			

Acronyms and Abbreviations	
Term	**Explanation**
PoA	Plan of approach
BSP	Board support package
OS	Operating system

Referenced documents				
ID	**Reference**	**Title**	**Date**	**Author**

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1. Background information:

My graduation internship for Fontys Hogeschool will be conducted at the company ALTEN, with my task being to realize an embedded software architecture on an STM32H7 processor, for their 4-in-a-row robot, which was previously designed by another graduation project.

ALTEN is an international Technology and IT consultancy and Engineering company. Originally ALTEN was created in 1988 in France and currently they span over thirty countries with over 54100 employees, having established themselves in all the major sectors: Aeronautics & Space, Defence & Naval, Security, Automotive, Rail, Energy, Life Sciences, Finance, Retail, Telecommunications and Services.

Within the Netherlands, their expertise falls within the following categories: ALTEN IT, Technical Software and Mechatronics. The 4-in-a-row project falls within the Mechatronics department. Where my technical supervisor, Michael van der Velden, is also working as a consultant for ASML. With over 20 years of experience in the electrical engineering industry and weekly progress meetings, he has enough technical knowledge to guide me successfully through the project. Additionally, I have an appointed business manager, Gijs Haans, who is responsible for our personal development within the company and progress as engineers.

ALTEN has in-house projects, which are often used to develop new skills for consultants or the ones of interns. The 4-in-a-row (Connect4, Four Up) robot was developed for demos at trade fairs and open days at universities. The robot game is meant to demonstrate the knowledge of the consultants of ALTEN, and it is therefore developed with industrial components.

The game is simple, there is a seven-by-six rack board, with slots at each spot for two coloured tokens. A red one and a yellow one. The first player to Connect 4 tokens in any direction wins. In our case, one player is a human, the other one is a robot. It is a completely autonomous process. After a token has been placed in the idle robot, the machine can calculate its next move based on a difficulty setting. To be able to execute everything, the 4-in-a-row robot is equipped with ‘X’ and ‘Z’ plane motors, a rotating vacuum gripper, and a routine to clear the board and reset the tokens.

2. Project results:

2.1 Goals of the project:

Implement the previously designed software architecture for the new STM32H755ZIT6U controller. Previously this project and its last iteration, the system was running on a single Cortex-M4 core. Which wasn't powerful enough to provide resources for the software and hardware expansions ALTEN wanted to introduce to it. Therefore, they decided to upgrade the system with a dual-core processor. With this new requirement, a new architecture was designed and partially implemented, but only to demonstrate the functionality of the architecture.

My task will involve designing the modules to make the system reliable and functional to the best of its capacity. That will involve writing code for the needed modules, improving and adapting flowcharts, and other logic, to suit the tasks at hand. Further steps will include the further designing of the BSP and testing on the robot itself. Additionally, the game-logic part (the module where the next decision for the robot is made), as of right now, is developed on a Raspberry Pi. That could be moved to the Cortex-M7 core. Moreover, research on ethernet communication with the robot could also be investigated.

2.2 Problem definition:

Implement the new dual-core architecture by designing the necessary software modules to make the 4-in-a-row robot perform more reliably and research Ethernet communication with the system.

2.3 Description of the project result:

1. Designed software modules from the architecture design.
2. Tested modules on the Connect4 robot.
3. Modified communication between the Raspberry Pi and the STM32H747 primary core.
4. Research on ethernet communication for the system.

2.4 Design model

The V-Model is a useful tool to manage and deliver projects. By using this model, the student can ensure that their project is completed in a systematic and efficient manner, and that the requirements set out at the beginning of the project are met.

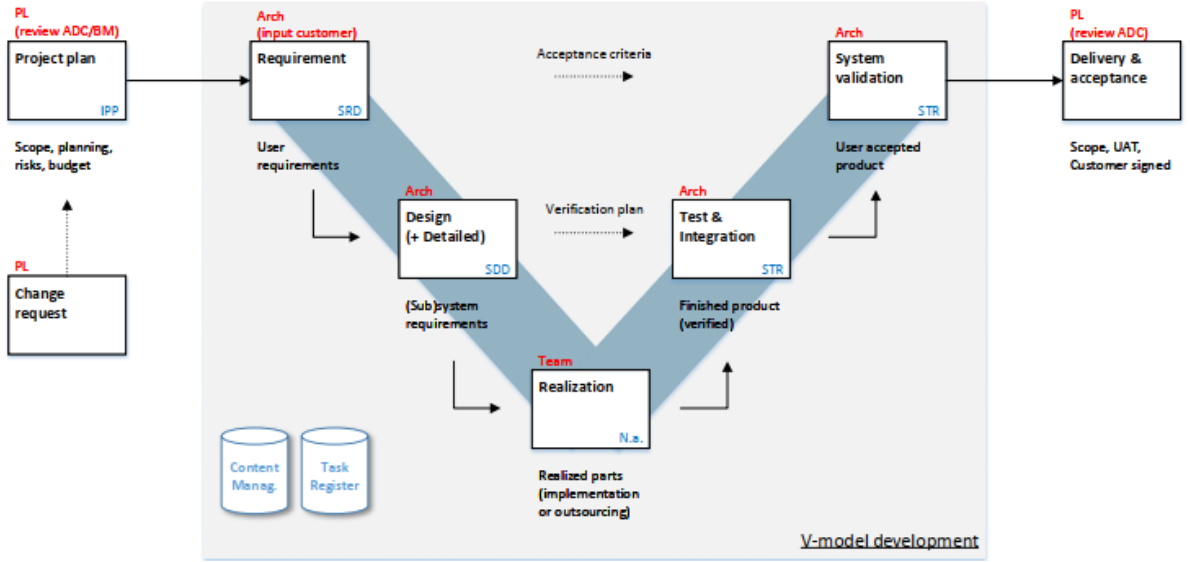

Figure 1: The V-model

3. Project activities:

1. Research key concepts about STM32
    a. Memory, Timers, Interrupts, Communication protocols, etc.
2. Redesigning flowcharts for software modules
3. Programming the STM32H controller
4. Programming modules from the architecture
5. Implementing modules from the architecture on the hardware

4. Project limits:

The project is concerned with the implementation of the previously designed software architecture. The dual-core communication is worked out, but the rest of the modules(blocks) have to be implemented. There are more modules building up the ones seen in the diagrams bellow.

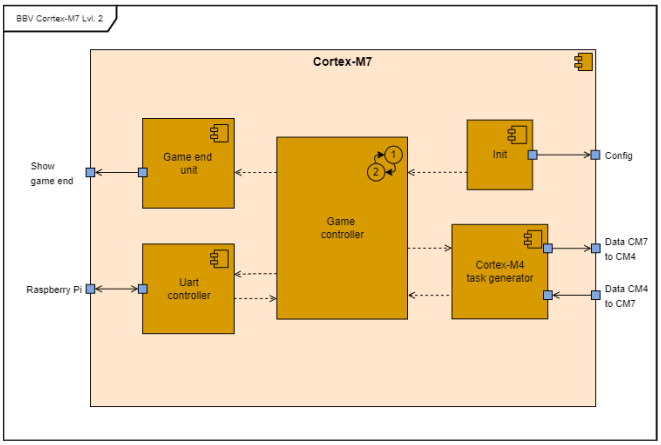

Figure 2: Cortex-M7 block diagram

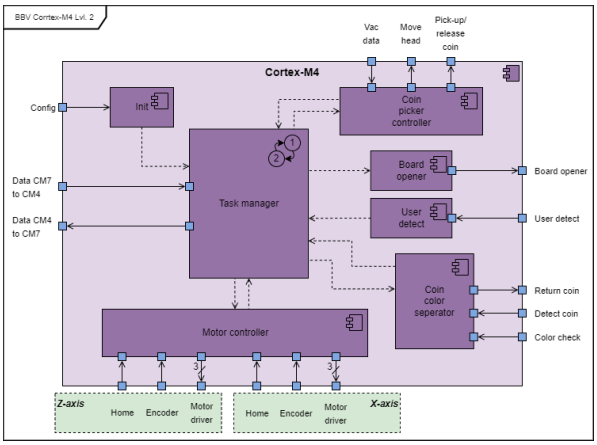

Figure 3: Cortex-M4 block diagram

Table 1: Scope of project

Project Limits	Within Scope ?
Implement software modules	Yes
Redesign software modules	Yes
Research ethernet communication	Yes
Redesign hardware/mechanics	No
Implementing ethernet communication	No
Changes to the gameplay	No

5. Intermediate milestones:

1. System Requirements Document / System Design Document
2. Implementation of modules
3. Test Plan

6. Planning:

Figure 4: Planning of the project

7. Risks:

Risk description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk	Mitigation
Context: Hardware failure Event: Component malfunction	2	3		
Context: Software bugs Event: Software modules not working as expected	2	4		
Context: Integration issues Event: Unresponsive while testing new software modules	4	2		
Context: Time constrain Event: Failure to complete tasks due to poor time management and/or unexpected events	2	2		
Context: Unclear scope of project Event: Unclear user requirements	1	3		
Context: Wrong logic in state machines Event: Wrong behaviour of the system	1	1		

Table 2: Risk list

Likelihood	Consequences of impact			
	1	2	3	4
4	4	8	12	16
3	3	6	9	12
2	2	4	6	8
1	1	2	3	4

Table 3: Qualitative risk analysis matrix