

Enabling photodetection electronics for fluorescent diamond based quantum sensing

Vladislav Serafimov

October 8, 2025

Contents

1 Foreword	2
2 Summary	3
3 Abbreviations and terminology	4
4 Introduction	5
4.1 Background	5
4.2 Purpose of the assignment	5
4.3 Assignment specifications	6
4.4 Scope of work	6
4.4.1 Project boundaries	6
4.4.2 Goals	7
4.4.3 Deliverables	7
4.5 Methodology	8
4.6 Report outline	8
5 Functional design	9
5.1 Background knowledge	9
5.1.1 Spin states	9
5.1.2 Zero-field splitting	9
5.1.3 Zeeman effect	9
5.2 Quantum protocols	9
5.3 CW ODMR	9
5.4 Quantum sensing setup	10
5.5 Photodetection PCB	10
5.6 OLIA implementation	10
6 Technical design	11
6.1 Quantum sensing setup	11
6.2 Photodetection PCB	11
6.3 OLIA implementation	11
7 Testing results	12
7.1 Test goals and performance metrics	12
7.2 Test setup	13
7.3 Results and discussion	13
7.4 Known limitations	13
8 Conclusion	14
9 Recommendations	15
Appendices	16
A Code	16

Chapter 1

Foreword

Chapter 2

Summary

Chapter 3

Abbreviations and terminology

- CW - Constant-Wave
- ECAD - Electronic Computer-Aided Design
- GUI - Graphical User Interface
- MRI - Magnetic Resonance Imaging
- MW - MicroWave
- NV - Nitrogen Vacancy
- ODMR - Optically Detected Magnetic Resonance
- OLIA - Open Lock-In Amplifier
- PCB - Printed Circuit Board

Chapter 4

Introduction

This chapter introduces the assignment and some foundational concepts of quantum sensing.

4.1 Background

Nitrogen-vacancy (NV) centers [1] are imperfections in the atomic structure of diamonds. The two types of NV centers are NV0 and NV-, as seen in Figure 4.1, but the NV- structure is much more commonly used in quantum applications. These imperfections have the useful property of spin-dependent luminescence. This means that the spin of the NV center affects the frequency of the light emitted by the structure¹. Using this quality of the NV structure, different environmental metrics (e.g magnetic fields) can be measured.

The Applied Nanotechnology research group is working on a NV-center-based sensor setup. There exist several quantum protocols, but the one this setup needs to support is called Continuous-Wave Optically Detected Magnetic Resonance (CW ODMR). At its core, ODMR is a set of protocols, which can detect magnetic fields based on the fluctuations in the fluorescence of NV centers [3]. CW ODMR in particular involves exposing the NV center to a MicroWave (MW) sweep while illuminating it with a constant light source. This is in contrast with pulsed ODMR techniques, which use different TTL (transistor-transistor logic) pulse schemes [4] to modulate the MW signal and the light source.

Processing data from the setup requires working with weak signals that are hard to distinguish from the environmental noise. While this is a significant problem, it is also a very common one. Because of this, there is already widely-used system used to isolate signals in such cases: the lock-in amplifier.

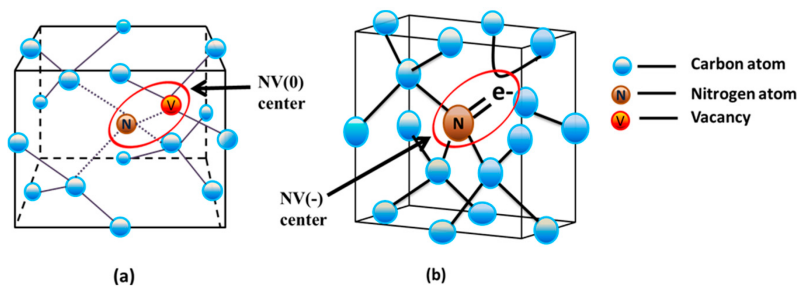


Figure 4.1: NV0 (a) and NV- (b) structures in diamonds (image credit to Haque et al [5])

4.2 Purpose of the assignment

Implementing a lock-in amplifier is the main purpose of the assignment. To create a complete solution, there are several different functionalities and systems that need to be developed.

Before doing anything else, the raw sensor data needs to be extracted and then fed to a lock-in amplifier. This should be done in a standardized manner, in order to facilitate testing with different devices. After establishing connection, a control interface needs to be implemented. It needs to

¹The NV center only emits light after absorbing photons, a phenomenon called photoluminescence [2]

be programmed so that it can control all necessary features of the lock-in amplifier. Following the development of the program, a custom photodetection circuit needs to be designed. The circuit should accommodate the sensors and lock-in amplifier. Lastly, an OLIA² circuit needs to be tested and compared to conventional lock-in systems.

4.3 Assignment specifications

As already explained, the assignment is quite broad and involves both hardware and software, causing the need for a number of different tools.

Most of the hardware tools are already available at the Applied Nanotechnology lab. The lock-in amplifiers which will be used for the tests are the most important pieces of hardware. Zurich Instruments HF2LI is the benchmark lock-in amplifier. The target amplification is at least 10dB. There are also several different photodetectors available and the one which fits the project best will be picked at a later date. Chapter ?? already discussed the basics of the CW ODMR protocol. In order to get an operational CW ODMR setup, an MW generator and a laser will be used. MW sweeping needs to be done in the range of 2,8 - 2,9 GHz and the lab already has a custom-built MW generator that can output these frequencies. The laser is mostly outside the scope of the assignment, as it is almost entirely optical in nature. Setting it up, together with the NV samples, is up to the client. However, it is important to note that the fluorescence wavelength should be in the range of 637 - 800 nm, as it plays an important part in reading the CW ODMR data.

In terms of software, there is more freedom of choice. Interfacing with the HF2LI is done through proprietary software, but this is the only required program. There are various Electronic Computer-Aided Design (ECAD) software suites that offer the same base functionality. KiCad was selected because the client prefers open-source software. The program for retrieving data from the lock-in amplifiers can be written in both Python and MATLAB. Both languages have good integration with the main lock-in amplifier. They also offer Graphical User Interface (GUI) programming capabilities and are good for scientific computing overall.

4.4 Scope of work

4.4.1 Project boundaries

The project boundaries were initially based on the assignment form, but were later discussed with the client and refined further.

Must have

- Hardware platform for photodetection
- Software for signal processing and visualization

Should have

- Tests with different diamond samples

Could have

- Tests with different quantum protocols
- OLIA implementation
- Tests comparing OLIA to market solutions

Will not have

- Laser as a part of the hardware platform
- Driver upgrade

²Open Lock-In Amplifier (OLIA) is an open-source microcontroller-based lock-in amplifier. It uses common components, which makes it easy to build [6]

4.4.2 Goals

Based on the MoSCoW priorities from Chapter 4.4.1, a set of goals was created to further specify all items from each prioritization category. Every goal was designed so that its outcome results in a tangible project milestone (e.g. a deliverable).

Goal 1 : Create a hardware setup, which measures and amplifies photodiode signals

Goal 2 : Develop software to process and visualize lock-in amplifier signals

Goal 3 : Compare the performance of different lock-in amplifiers

While these goals are practical, they are still not specific enough. To eliminate the possibility of confusion, a set of tasks were created. All tasks contribute to one of the three goals.

Task 1.1 : Design a photodiode PCB, which can accommodate different lock-in amplifiers

Task 1.2 : Build an operable OLIA

Task 2.1 : Develop software that acquires signals and is then able to visualize them

Task 3.1 : Use key performance metrics to compare the OLIA implementation to market solutions

Task 3.2 : Measure OLIA performance using different diamond samples and quantum protocols

Task 1.1 involves the design and production of a photodiode PCB. The PCB has to output signals that are not only compatible with lock-in amplifiers that are available on the market, but also with the OLIA. This part of the hardware design has the highest priority, which is why it will be done first.

Task 1.2 is to build an OLIA amplifier, which can be used at Applied Nanotechnology's laboratory. This will be done with the technical specifications and firmware provided by Harvie and de Mello [6]. The necessity for an OLIA is low, because the Applied Nanotechnology research group already has two lock-in amplifiers.

Task 2.1 is to write an application in Python or MATLAB. This can be done on a different setup, but ideally it will use the hardware setup from **goal 1**. Because the OLIA project uses open-source firmware that differs from proprietary solutions, there might need to be two separate applications. This task can only be completed once a measurement setup is built, so its execution will follow the first two tasks.

Task 3.1 requires all previous tasks to be finished. The completed setup needs to be used to measure the performance of lock-in amplifiers available on the market and the OLIA implementation. SNR, bandwidth and stability are the main metrics that need to be compared.

Task 3.2 is similar to **task 3.1**, but it is a much broader exploration of the performance of the lock-in amplifiers. Using different diamond samples and quantum protocols will show how the amplifier performs and how different conditions affect it. Because the task can be used to verify the setup from **goal 1**, it can also be done before **task 3.1**. Tests with varying diamond samples are more important to the client, which is why they will take precedence over tests with different quantum protocols.

4.4.3 Deliverables

The description of the tasks already provided context for the deliverables, but this subsection contains a formalized version of the deliverables.

1. Photodetection PCB
2. OLIA implementation
3. Software application
4. Comparison visualization
5. Technical documentation

The only deliverable, which was not mentioned in Chapter 4.4.2 is the technical documentation. This is because it should contain information about every task.

4.5 Methodology

The V-Model methodology was selected, as it is well-suited for low-level projects. Figure 4.2 shows a diagram of the phases of the V-Model. Unlike some software-oriented models, the V-Model is very sequential. This can sometimes be seen as detrimental, but in this case it helps with structuring the project. Another benefit of this model is that there are multiple testing activities, which underpin the quality assurance. A contentious feature of the V-Model is the heavy reliance on the initial requirements. This need for deliberate project requirements can be hard to meet, especially if the client representative is not technically proficient. However, this is not the case in this project. The requirements were extensively discussed with the client representative, based on which the project boundaries in Chapter 4.4.1 were set up.

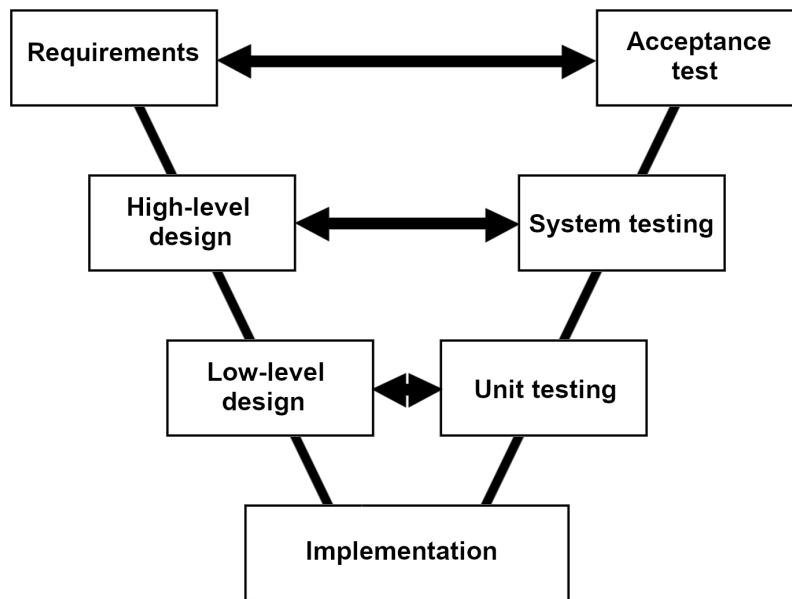


Figure 4.2: V-Model diagram

4.6 Report outline

Chapter 5

Functional design

5.1 Background knowledge

5.1.1 Spin states

Spin, at least in quantum mechanics, is the intrinsic angular momentum of a particle. Importantly, it differs from the angular momentum in classical mechanics, which is extrinsic. Spin characterizes systems of particles, usually electrons, using quantum entanglement. This phenomenon refers to the "entanglement", or spin correlation, of a set of particles.

These foundational concepts make it possible to describe quantum systems using various states. The most simple states, used as descriptors, are the energy states. Ground states refer to the system being in an energy minimum. On the other hand, excited states signify that the system has more energy than at its ground state. Additionally, there can be intermediate states during state transition.

While the aforementioned states describe system energy, they have no bearing on the spin. For the purposes of this project, only two spin states need to be explained. The first one is called singlet state. It occurs when an entangled system has a total spin of 0, caused by the mutual cancellation of spin. For example, for a system of two entangled electrons to be a singlet, the two spins would need to point in opposite directions. The second spin state is called triplet and it has a total spin of 1. Triplets can consist of, for instance, two unpaired electrons with aligned spins that sum up to 1. Singlets and triplets both have distinguishing properties,

5.1.2 Zero-field splitting

5.1.3 Zeeman effect

5.2 Quantum protocols

There are a number of different quantum protocols, which differ in what they can measure, in how precisely they can measure it and in the complexity of the hardware they require to operate. CW ODMR is the main protocol this project is aimed at facilitating. As Saijo et al [7] demonstrate, CW ODMR is relatively simple, while still detecting magnetic field with reasonable sensitivity. Pulsed ODMR does outperform CW ODMR [8], but because of the added complexity working with it is a "Could have" (see Chapter 4.4.1). Before being able to run pulsed ODMR on the setup at the lab, several protocols need to be implemented first [4]. T_1 measurements, which are one of the fundamentals of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), should be conducted first. Afterwards, Rabi oscillations

5.3 CW ODMR

CW ODMR is a quantum protocol that has been used in many

5.4 Quantum sensing setup**5.5 Photodetection PCB****5.6 OLIA implementation**

Chapter 6

Technical design

6.1 Quantum sensing setup

6.2 Photodetection PCB

6.3 OLIA implementation

Chapter 7

Testing results

Number	Task	Status
1.1	Deploy and configure at least one OpenRemote instance	Completed
1.2	Establish communication to the OpenRemote instance using the HTTP and MQTT protocols	Completed
2.1	Simulate IoT devices (smart homes) that send and receive concurrent MQTT data to OpenRemote and measure the latency of the transmissions	Completed
2.2	Create a physical IoT device setup using a platform like ESP32 or Arduino and recreate the tests from Goal 1.2	Completed
2.3	Integrate and test OpenRemote's Prophet project	Not started
2.4	Test performance and create visualizations	Completed
3.1	Document technical progress	Completed
3.2	Reflect on personal and professional development	Completed
3.3	Communicate project results	Ongoing

Table 7.1: Goal completion

7.1 Test goals and performance metrics

Metric	API	Unit(s) of measurement	Explanation
Device provisioning latency	HTTP	seconds (s)	Time between creation request and confirmation
Message loss percentage	MQTT	percent (%)	Percent of MQTT messages which are lost
Resource usage	-	percent (CPU %, RAM %)	CPU and RAM usage when running tests

Table 7.2: Metrics of the OpenRemote scalability tests

7.2 Test setup**7.3 Results and discussion****7.4 Known limitations**

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Chapter 9

Recommendations

Appendix A

Code

Bibliography

- [1] Wikipedia contributors, *Nitrogen-vacancy center* — *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, [Online; accessed 3-September-2025], 2025. [Online]. Available: https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nitrogen-vacancy_center&oldid=1301369588.
- [2] Wikipedia contributors, *Photoluminescence* — *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Photoluminescence&oldid=1309081879>, [Online; accessed 4-September-2025], 2025.
- [3] Wikipedia contributors, *Optically detected magnetic resonance* — *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Optically_detected_magnetic_resonance&oldid=1301371272, [Online; accessed 6-October-2025], 2025.
- [4] V. K. Sewani et al., “Coherent control of nv- centers in diamond in a quantum teaching lab,” *American Journal of Physics*, vol. 88, no. 12, pp. 1156–1169, 2020.
- [5] A. Haque and S. Sumaiya, “An overview on the formation and processing of nitrogen-vacancy photonic centers in diamond by ion implantation,” *Journal of Manufacturing and Materials Processing*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 6, 2017.
- [6] A. J. Harvie and J. C. de Mello, “Olia: An open-source digital lock-in amplifier,” *Frontiers in Sensors*, vol. 4, p. 1102176, 2023.
- [7] S. Saijo et al., “Ac magnetic field sensing using continuous-wave optically detected magnetic resonance of nitrogen-vacancy centers in diamond,” *Applied Physics Letters*, vol. 113, no. 8, 2018.
- [8] Y. Zhang et al., “High-sensitivity dc magnetic field detection with ensemble nv centers by pulsed quantum filtering technology,” *Optics Express*, vol. 28, no. 11, pp. 16191–16201, 2020.