

CG1112 Engineering Principle and Practice

Semester 2 2019/2020

"Alex to the Rescue" Design Report Team: 3-3-1

Table 1: Role Delegation

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Introduction:

This report seeks to relay information regarding the construction of Alex, a robotic search and rescue device. The primary functionality of Alex is to navigate and map out the environment. Navigation will be done through the Master Control Programme (MCP) on the Raspberry Pi (herein referred to as Pi). This will be manually controlled by a user behind a screen. If time permits, we seek to design a user interface, by setting up a web server so as to ensure the ease of transmission of data, and navigation control. The MCP will relay the user input to the Arduino. Alex will be able to map its environment and transmit the data back to the via Simultaneous Localization and Mapping (SLAM).

Alex will carry out the following:

- 1. Mapping of the environment
- 2. Transmit back the relevant data of its current position to the user
- 3. Avoid obstacles and traverse in and out of rooms as quickly as possible
- 4. Being energy efficient in order to last a longer duration

In the subsequent sections of this report, we seek to elaborate on the system functionalities and architecture, as well as the component design of Alex.

Section 1: System Functionalities

Alex and the Operator will be in two different rooms. There needs to be a two-way communication link between Alex and the Operator such that:

- 1. Alex can receive instructions from the Operator
- 2. Operator can see the map of the environment (generated by Alex) and output messages (these are information that will aid the Operator to make better decisions) which include the distance covered by Alex.
- 3. Operator has a set of controls that he can use to control Alex.

This is elaborated in Figures 1, 2 and 3 as shown below.

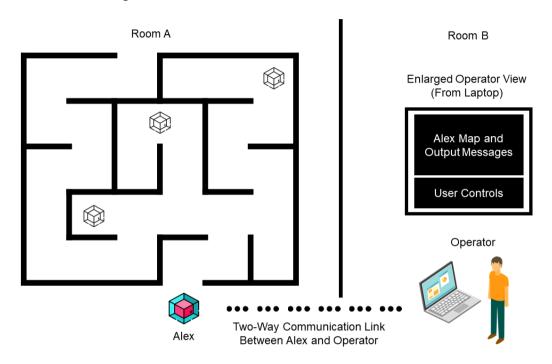
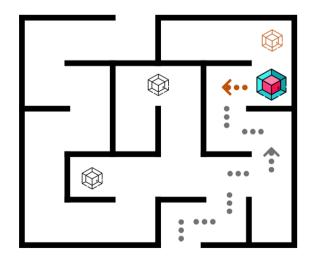


Figure 1: Tele-Operation Source: Adapted from [1] [2]



Alex Encounters Obstacle

- 1. Operator sees obstacle on operator view
- Operator makes decision and provides instruction to via Operator Control
- 3. Alex executes instruction to avoid obstacle (in this case "turn left")
- 4. Alex avoids obstruction

Operator Instruction: "Turn Left"



Figure 2: Overcome Obstacles Source: Adapted from [1] [2]

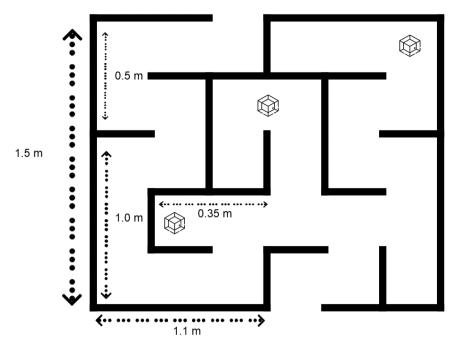


Figure 3: Accurate Environment Mapping Source: Adapted from [1] [2]

The map produced by Alex should be an accurate representation of the environment and show outer wall dimensions.

Movement of Alex:

To move Alex straight, the user will input a certain value for the distance (in cm) and a value to specify the power (as a %). The encoders detect on the falling edge of the cycle when the wheel completes one revolution. This causes an interrupt and increases the ticks. The distance travelled by Alex can be calculated and this will be elaborated on further in section 4. We made Alex turn on a dime and using a formula, we can estimate the number of ticks needed for Alex to turn the angle specified by the user. This is also elaborated on in section 5.

Travelling Speed of Alex:

To be able to select a suitable (and the fastest) speed at which Alex should travel, the presence of latency is taken into consideration. Latency is the delay before the transfer of data begins after an instruction has been sent by the sender. This would mean that there might be several possibilities that obstacles might be sensed by Alex, but the data not being able to reach the receiver in certain short periods of time due to latency issues. Collisions might occur if Alex is travelling at a speed faster than the latency period. Therefore, to obtain a good balance between the accuracy of the sensors and the speed travelled by Alex, test runs will be implemented.

Usage of SLAM and LIDAR:

Simultaneous Localization And Mapping, or SLAM, is a collection of algorithms that enables the construction and mapping of an unknown environment, all while allowing the user to monitor the robot's position. SLAM is always used with several types of sensors. In this case, coupled with the infrared laser signals, the LIDAR emits laser signals in a circular manner around the surroundings. The laser bounces from the various obstacles and objects in the environment and is received back by the LIDAR to go through processing. The data collected goes through a digital signal process (DSP), which produces a graphical representation of the simulated environment. This visualization process provides an accurate depiction of the surrounding environment, making it easier for the user to control Alex that is traversing the terrain while avoiding any collisions.

Acknowledging the perks of SLAM, the SLAM combined with the visualization process consumes approximately 90% of the CPU load. This is clearly a downside as the large energy consumption will cause the battery to drain quickly. The energy inefficiency of Alex is also a big drawback.

Graphical User Interface (Additional Functionalities):

GUI allows easier and more intuitive usage for the user. The user will be able to control the robot's direction, distance travelled as well as the angle of movement. The mapping and processing work will also be offloaded to the user's CPU which will allow for a more efficient energy usage of the Pi's CPU.

Power Savings (Additional Functionalities):

Power consumption is an area of consideration when designing Alex. Arduino has a built-in sleep function that allows the user to stop or turn off any unused modules in the Microcontroller, which in turn significantly reduces the power consumption. Together with interrupts, the function removes the need to continuously poll for instructions, enabling the Arduino to be more efficient in executing tasks.

Section 2: Review of State of the Art

Alex is a tele-operated robot with search and rescue capabilities. The primary aim of Alex is to enter an unknown environment, map out the location and return the data to the user as well as respond to the user (in terms of direction and speed). It is vital to understand how similar robots operate to ensure we devise and develop a successful working prototype of Alex.

Section 2.1: TALON

TALON is an unmanned military robot (refer to Figure A.1 in Appendix A), produced by Foster-Miller [3], and is used in a myriad of situations such as first response, heavy lifting and rescue missions. They are built with high payload-to-weight ratio and a modular design, making them highly customizable with various sensors and components. The TALON robot can be controlled by a two-way radio or fibre-optic link [3], or even via either a laptop control unit or a tactical robotic controller [3].

Strengths

The TALON is simple to use, fast and sturdy [3]. It is customizable and hence suited for multipurpose use in various environments. Sensors can be used to detect gas, chemical, radiation and so on, while a variety of weapons can also be attached [3]. The heavy-duty rotating shoulder is used for heavy-lifting [3]. The TALON can cost less (\$230, 000) than what is normally spent on a soldier (\$850, 000) per year [4].

Weaknesses

TALON relies heavily on constant and stable latency. Any delay due to unstable internet connection could possibly cause it to do wrong things at the wrong time, such as driving into wrong terrain [5]. TALON also uses 2 lead-acid rechargeable batteries which tend to have a lower capacity [6]. These batteries have a lower depth of discharge when compared to lithiumion batteries [6]. These batteries also require frequent maintenance and tend to have lower lifespans, possibly resulting in higher costs in the long run [7].

Section 2.2: SmokeBot

SmokeBot seeks to address limitations that robots have in environments where sensor technologies can be affected due to dust and smoke [8]. The robot is built specifically to to counter low visibility situations to help firefighters in search and rescue missions (refer to Figure A.2 in Appendix A) [8]. The robot thrives in a situation where humans are not able to do so. Using a range of sensors (thermal, radar, gas), the SmokeBot is able to perform in visibility impairing conditions. It is also able to detect harmful gases that can help protect firefighters [8].

Strengths

Using a range of sensors, the SmokeBot is able to perform in visibility impairing conditions [8], and can even detect harmful gases and a possibility of gas explosions that can help protect firefighters [9]. SmokeBot is able to tell if there is a possibility of a gas explosion by using data collected from its sensors [9]. In the case where the SmokeBot loses internet connection, it has the ability to automatically traverse back to the last place where it had a connection [9].

Weaknesses

SmokeBot cannot be used in immediate rescue efforts as it takes about 15-30 minutes to collect information [9]. Although it has the ability to automatically traverse back to the last place it had a connection, some approaches for the algorithms used can be inefficient and can cause the SmokeBot to skip closer safe areas with stable internet connection [10].

Section 3: System Architecture

Referring to Figure 4 below, the ovals represent the software components, the rectangular boxes represent the hardware components. The arrows show the flow of data to and from the various hardware components, while the wires represent the relevant communication tools which will be used to transmit the data.

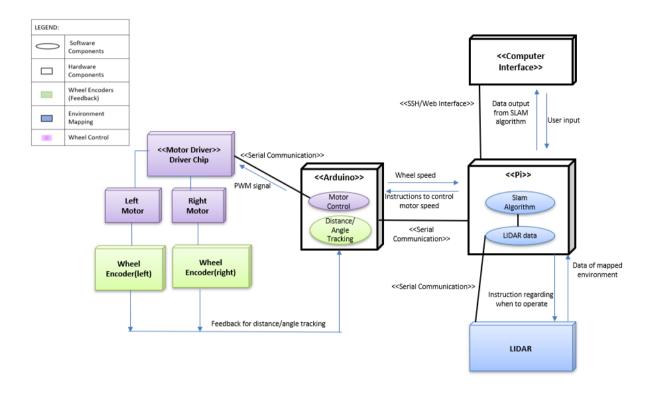


Figure 4: System Architecture

As can be seen from the image, the wheel encoders and magnets are placed on the motors to compute the revolutions and give us the number of ticks. The motor is connected to the Arduino which will communicate the motor data (angle and distance) with the Pi. Through the Pi, the user is able to adjust the speed and direction of Alex and this information will then be relayed to the Arduino.

The LiDAR will be directly linked to the Pi and using the SLAM algorithm, we will be able to obtain data regarding the environment. We then intend on sending this information to a web server and produce a map of the surroundings. This can be done by setting up a topic and subscribing to the topic. Through this we can publish the data of the surroundings on the Pi to the topic and from the user's PC we can view this data. We can use this information to generate our map.

Section 4: Hardware Design

In this section, the hardware design for Alex is being detailed. The considerations and functionality behind the LIDAR and the arrangement of our components (as shown in figure 5) will be laid out.

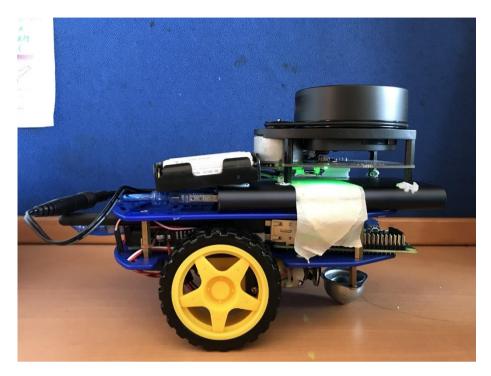


Figure 5: Alex

LIDAR:

The LIDAR unit calculates the distance between itself and obstacles/walls by emitting light pulses. These light pulses reflect off its surroundings and back to its detection unit. The LIDAR rotates 360 degrees at a relatively high speed and returns the coordinates of the obstacles it observes relative to its position. This data is then sent to the pi in and a visualization node is used so we are able to generate a map of the surroundings.

Hardware Design Considerations:

Some limitations are that the LIDAR has to be in a high enough position so that none of our other components may block its field of view. We were forced to rethink our layout for our bot because of this but we eventually managed to fit every component on without extra parts or layers. It also has to be upright and stable so that data recorded is accurate and the map created will be accurate. We decided to put the LIDAR on top of the portable charger, which is safely fixed onto the top layer of the bot. The LIDAR's legs are secured using blue tack.

We decided to put the breadboard at the bottom level of the bot alongside the motors so the wires would be less messy and could go directly to each component like the motors and the Arduino. The Arduino and pi is placed on the middle level above it and some wires are made to go through the holes in the platform so they are easily accessible to the top and bottom layer.

On the top level of the bot, we decided to put all our sources of energy (portable charger and batteries) so that it would be easier for us to remove and insert batteries or charge the portable charger. There are also wires going from the top level to the middle level to power the Arduino and the Pi. The LIDAR unit is placed on the top of the portable charger so as to not be blocked by anything and so we can have accurate results.

Section 5: Firmware design

The Arduino and the Pi are essential components of Alex. The Arduino controls the functions that Alex has, such as the actual movement and turning since it is directly connected to the motors. While the Pi, transmits and receives data. This section explains the thought process behind Alex and outlines how we plan to communicate with Alex using the Pi and the Arduino in synchrony.

Receival of Command Packets

The Pi sends commands over to the Arduino in the form of packets via serial communication.

In order to initialize serial communication, we have a couple steps below.

- 1. Test communication between Pi, Arduino and Laptop
 - 1. Ensure to set the PORT_NAME macro to the port where the Arduino is connected.
 - 2. Proceed to create a serial connection at 9600 bps.
 - 3. Pi creates a packet with the message "Ready?".
 - 4. Pi compiles the message and serializes the Protocol Packet as a structure into a stream of bytes to Arduino.
 - 5. Arduino responds with an ACK package to Pi.
 - 6. The Arduino will then send back a packet to inform the Pi that it is done.
 - 7. The Pi implements Checksum to check that the data received is correct. The Pi will compare the Checksum from the sender side against an attached Checksum. If the data received matches correctly, the Pi will reply to the Arduino with an ACK packet. Else a NAK packet is sent instead.
 - 8. The Pi will deserialize the stream of bytes received by the Arduino back to structures, which is readable by the user.
 - 9. The user will receive an output message from Arduino titled "Yes".
- 2. Test communication between Pi and Laptop (for ROS)
 - 1. Ensure the Pi and the laptop are connected to the same network
 - 2. Start a test program on the Pi that outputs messages to a topic
 - 3. Ensure that we are receiving the right messages on the Laptop's end that is listening for the output messages at the topic.

On the Arduino, we use functions like readPacket and readSerial to descrialize and understand what has been input into the pi. The sendResponse function is used to take a packet, serialize it and sends it out over the serial port back to the pi.

We have functions in the Arduino such as sendBadChecksum, sendBadCommand and sendBadResponse so that we can debug and see if our commands sent to the arduino from the pi are read correctly and whether or not there is an error.

When the packet is received and can be read properly the sendOK function is called to tell the user the message is read successfully. There is also the sendStatus function which tells the user the number of ticks in each direction and each motor and also the forward and backward distance that is travelled.

Section 6: Software design

The following section explains how the software aids in generating the map of the location, and how we intend to control the robot remotely via the user's laptop.

TELEOPERATION

On the Pi, we will create a Graphical User Interface (GUI) for user to input actions (as shown in Figure 6)

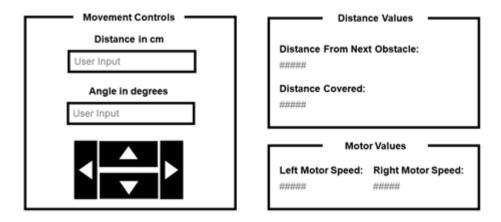


Figure 6: A Possible GUI layout

Using <u>Ros Web Tools</u> and <u>ROSBridge</u> we will be able to generate a webserver and we will use a node for the user interface that will publish actions to a topic and the Pi can listen for actions at that topic and also we can listen to messages from the Pi at specific topics.

Note, we also plan to enable keyboard mapping for the user controls such as forward, left, right and reverse. Apart from that, we will include a keyboard mapping for the "stop" command to stop all motors as a failsafe.

PROCESSING USER INPUT

The User will be able to:

- 1. Move forward by inputting a certain distance and clicking the up-arrow button (refer to Figure 6)
- 2. Reverse by inputting a certain distance and clicking the down arrow button (refer to Figure 6)

We have 2 options that we are thinking of using to facilitate how Alex turns.

Firstly, input a certain angle (let this be x), then pressing the left key once will cause Alex to turn left by the corresponding x degrees. The turning algorithm can be found in Appendix B. A function called computeDeltaTicks is called, which computes an estimate of the number of wheel encoder ticks needed to turn Alex by x. When Alex is moving in a straight line, the distance covered is WHEEL_CIRC cm forward (or backward) in one-wheel revolution. To turn by x degrees, the number of wheel turns is given by the following formula, where AlexCirc is the circumference of the circle made by Alex turning on a dime

$$\frac{ang}{360.0} \times \frac{AlexCIRC}{WHEEL\ CIRC}$$

The number of ticks is given by the following formula, where COUNTS_PER_REV refers to the number of ticks required for 1 full revolution of the wheel.

$$\frac{ang}{360.0} \times \frac{AlexCIRC}{WHEEL_CIRC} \times COUNTS_PER_REV$$

Secondly, press on the left/right key to turn and hold until the desired angle then release so that the bot is facing the direction that we want. However, the problem with this method is that there might be delay when the user clicks or releases the button, we hope to test this out to see if the user can train to work around the delay.

After all this, appropriate movement commands are published on a ROS topic, the Pi listens to the topic and sends the instruction to the Arduino. The Arduino then acknowledges and executes the commands given.

AUTONOMOUS

In order for the Map to be generated based on the LIDAR data, we have decided to use our laptop to offload the SLAM algorithm from the Pi. Through this, we reduce CPU usage on Pi and this also allows for a higher refresh rate. We will also be less reliant on latency stability as we are not transferring images from the Pi to our devices. This will also free up the Pi's CPU usage so that it can process our movement commands quickly and properly.

Below is a list of steps that is taken when we start and update mapping.

For the first instance,

- 1. Pi triggers LiDAR to take the first set of readings.
- 2. The Lidar takes readings and sends it to the Pi
- 3. LiDAR data is transmitted to the laptop using a ROS node
- 4. Laptop runs HECTOR SLAM algorithm to generate the map

For updating the map,

- 1. Pi triggers Lidar to take the readings
- 2. Pi publishes Lidar readings to a Pi topic
- 3. Laptop is running a ROS visualization node that is subscribed to the same topic that the Lidar data points are published to
- 4. Laptop runs HECTOR SLAM algorithm to generate the map for user

Further features of the map include the distances between walls so that it will be easier for the user to gauge how far the bot is from the wall instead of estimation and a zero-degree marker which helps the user know where the robot is facing.

Furthermore, we can process two maps on our laptop, one being the SLAM output and the other will be a graph of LiDAR points to see the environment better and to help us control the bot remotely. The dots will be in red so we can make it stand out and ensure that the points are clear.

As referred to in Section 1, in order for the bot to know that it has travelled the distance we have inputted, it continuously calculates the distance it has travelled and compares it to the value inputted. When the values are equal, the bot stops moving. Here is a step-by-step explanation of how we calculate distance travelled.

- 1. Magnets are attached to the motors. Whenever the wheel completes one revolution, the encoders detects the falling edge of the end of the cycle, and causes an interrupt through the ISR.
- 2. For each revolution of the wheel, the interrupt records the respective direction (left/right) tick to increase by a certain amount.
- 3. Distance covered by one revolution of the wheel is recorded as WHEEL_CIRC cm angular distance.
- 4. When the forward function is called, distance travelled can be calculated using the following formula

 $\frac{(WHEEL_CIRC \times total \ number \ of \ ticks)}{number \ of \ ticks \ for \ one \ wheel \ revolution}$

Section 5: Project Plan

Table 2: Projected Timeline

Week	Milestones		
8	Complete Design Report Assemble Alex		
9	 Ensure all programmes (SSH and Arduino IDE) have been downloaded and tested. Test run the implementation of the code on the various hardware components (Wheels, motor and encoder) to ensure that it is functional. Gauge the proper estimates of the angle turned, distance travelled by Alex based on encoder readings. Confirm that the basic movements of Alex are working (Left/Right turn, forward and reverse); Modify the code wherever needed. Begin implementing our own Graphical User Interface to enhance the user experience 		
	Report Submission (16 March, Monday, 2359)		
10	 Integrate the LIDAR with Alex Conduct test runs of the navigation of the environment with the LIDAR attached to Alex Source for any areas of improvements 		
	CELC 1. Draft 1 Design Report (Submitted on 27 March, Friday, 2359)		
11	 Check accuracy of movement of Alex when it is remotely controlled. Improve and modify the code to ensure that the environment is mapped out accurately by Alex. Accuracy criteria: Ability of Alex to sense walls and objects and reproduce the distance accurately on the Laptop 		
12	 Enhance the performance of Alex by tweaking relevant hardware/software components. Tackle power reduction challenge. Ensure that Alex is power efficient. Finalise written report. 		
	CELC 1. Prepare a draft of Final Report (submit by 10 April, Friday, 2359.) For tutor's feedback.		
13	Final Evaluation (DEMO + Presentation) Demo: 20%; Oral Presentation: 20%		
RW	Submit Final Report (Submitted on 20 April, Monday, 2359)		

References

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APPENDIX A



Figure A.1: TALON and the GUI Source: Adapted from [3]



Figure A.2: SmokeBot Source: Adapted from [8]

Appendix B

```
#include <math.h>
#define ALEX LENGTH valuetobemeasured
#define ALEX BREADTH valuetobemeasured
\#define PI = 3.141592654
// compute & store this once
float AlexDiagonal = 0.0;
// turning circumference to be measured once
float AlexCirc = 0.0;
// Forward & Backward distances traversed
volatile unsigned long forwardDist;
volatile unsigned long reverseDist;
// Keep track if we have moved a commanded distance
unsigned long deltaDist;
unsigned long newDist;
// Keep track of turning angles
unsigned long deltaTicks;
unsigned long targetTicks;
void setup() {
                = sqrt((ALEX LENGTH * ALEX LENGTH) +
   AlexDiagonal
(ALEX BREADTH + ALEX BREADTH));
  AlexCirc = PI * AlexDiagonal;
void forward(float dist, float speed) {
   // Code to tell us how far to move
 if (dist > 0)
    deltaDist = 9999999;
 else
    deltaDist = dist;
 newDist = forwardDist + deltaDist;
void reverse(float dist, float speed) {
   // Code to tell us how far to move
  if (dist > 0)
    deltaDist = 9999999;
 else
    deltaDist = dist;
 newDist = forwardDist + deltaDist;
unsigned long computeDeltaTicks(float ang) {
  unsigned long ticks = (unsigned long)((ang * AlexCirc *
COUNTS_PER REV) / (360.0 * WHEEL CIRC));
  return ticks;
void left(float ang, float speed) {
    int val = pwmVal(speed);
```

```
dir = LEFT;
     if(anq == 0)
       deltaTicks = 9999999;
     else {
     deltaTicks = computeDeltaTicks(ang);
     targetTicks = leftReverseTicksTurns + deltaTicks;
void right(float ang, float speed) {
     int val = pwmVal(speed);
     dir = RIGHT;
     if(ang == 0)
     deltaTicks = 9999999;
     else {
     deltaTicks = computeDeltaTicks(ang);
     targetTicks = rightReverseTicksTurns + deltaTicks;
void loop() {
   if (deltaDist > 0) {
     if (dir==FORWARD) {
          if (forwardDist >= newDist) {
             deltaDist = 0;
          newDist = 0;
          stop();
          }
     else if (dir==BACKWARD) {
          if (reverseDist >= newDist) {
               deltaDist = 0;
               newDist = 0;
               stop();
          }
     else if (dir == STOP) {
          deltaDist = 0;
          newDist = 0;
          stop();
   if (deltaTicks > 0) {
     if (dir==LEFT) {
          if (leftReverseTicksTurns >= targetTicks) {
          deltaTicks = 0;
          targetTicks = 0;
          stop();
          }
     else if (dir==RIGHT) {
          if (rightReverseTicksTurns >= targetTicks) {
```

```
deltaTicks = 0;
    targetTicks = 0;
    stop();
}
else if (dir == STOP) {
    deltaTicks = 0;
    targetTicks = 0;
    stop();
}
```